

Tsukihime the pdf version

Introduction

This is the game Tsukihime converted as an interactive pdf.
With working choices! Just click on the chosen choice and you will jump to the correct page.
Flags don't work of course but who cares.

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Tsukihime DS Edition r21

Translation by Mirror Moon

DS Port by Digital Haze

Go to the Opening chapter	turn to 3
Start the story	turn to 4
Load game	turn to 456
Go to the Eclipse chapter	turn to 455

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Sections like this do not exist in typical books, because you cannot access them. In this example, such a section is only included in order to show you that you are reading the text in a “wrong” way. After section 1, you do not read directly section 2, but you proceed with the section you chose in section 1. This kind of interaction is what makes gamebooks a lot of fun. Now, please choose an option from section 1 above.

3

——Suddenly, I awaken with a start.
 The night is pitch black.
 And no one else is in the house.
 It's scary, being alone in the dark.
 So to find everyone, I head out into the garden.

Our mansion's gardens are vast fields of green.
 Surrounded by a thick, dense forest.
 With the trees blanketing out the light,
 almost like a massive curtain.
 Like a stage in a theater somewhere.
 The curtain of trees opens with a swishing sound.
 Excitement fills me,
 anticipating the beginning of the grand play.
 In the distance, I hear the sound of echoes,
 beyond the black curtain of trees.
 Inside the forest,
 the sounds of everyone happily playing around.
 The curtain doesn't open yet.
 Unable to restrain myself,
 I wander into the darkness of the forest.

Darkness surrounds me..
 A blackness so deep, it's suffocating..
 Not even the calming rays of the moonlight can reach this deep.
 The air is cold..
 A winter's chill so deep,
 my eyes feel like they'll freeze.
 For a brief moment, I thought I heard someone call my name,
 so I walk even deeper into the forest.
 After passing through the veil of trees,
 I find everyone waiting for me in the forest clearing.
 But, something is wrong..
 Everyone is lying on the ground..
 Everyone is lying on the ground.... in pieces..
 The clearing is bathed in red.
 —I don't understand.
 A stranger approaches.
 The look on his face says he wants to rip me apart..
 —I don't understand at all..
 But, someone else, someone I don't know.. steps in front of me,
 and is torn apart in my place.
 —I'm just a kid, so, I really don't understand.

A splash.
Something warm and wet hits my face.
It's red..
A red liquid, red like a tomato.
The person that was torn apart,
that person I called "mom",
never called my name again.
—I really don't understand.
But it is just so cruel..
I wanted to cry, I just felt like crying.

Warm crimson blurs my vision.
Seeping into my eyes.
But it doesn't bother me at all.
The lonely moon floats above me,
bearing witness in the night sky.

It's strange.
Why didn't I realize until now?
—Such a cold, horrible nightmare.
Yes—I didn't realize it.
That tonight..
The moon is so——beautiful——

Go to the Main Menu

turn to **1**

Start the story

turn to **4**

4

@Prologue

When I came to, I was lying on a hospital bed.
The curtain on the nearby window sways gently.
It is a beautiful day outside,
and the dry wind signals the end of summer.

"Hello, Tohno Shiki-kun.

Congratulations on your recovery."

The unfamiliar old man extends his hand for a handshake.

His square-rimmed glasses and warm smile are very befitting.

His tidy-looking white clothes suit him perfectly, too.

"Can you understand what I am saying, Shiki-kun?"

".... No.

Why am I in a hospital?"

"You don't remember, do you?

You were involved in a car accident while you were walking.

Your chest was stabbed by a shard of glass, and it was unlikely that you would survive."

Very unbecfitting of what a doctor would say, yet he says it while still smiling cheerfully.

—Terrible.

I feel terrible.

".... I'm tired.

Can I go to sleep?"

"Yes, you should rest.

You must focus on recuperating, and not push yourself."

The doctor is still smiling.

To be honest, I can't stand that smile anymore..

"Can I ask you something, doctor?"

"What is it, Shiki-kun?"

"Why are there scribbles all over your body?

And there are cracks, all over the walls.. Why are there cracks in the walls?"

The smile vanishes for just a brief moment, then returns to his face immediately.

He turns and walks away.

"—It seems there was some brain damage after all.

Get a hold of Dr. Ashiya in neurology.

I also suspect he may have suffered some damage to his eyes.

Spend the afternoon examining his eyes."

The doctor whispers to the nurse so that I won't hear him.

"..... Weird.

There are scribbles all over everyone's bodies."

The sloppy, zigzagging black lines, running all over the floors, walls, the ceiling..

I don't understand what they mean, but looking at them makes me feel sick.

".... I wonder what it is."

The bed too, is covered in these scribbly lines.
When I touch the line with my finger, my fingertip sinks down into the crack.
"—Oh!"
It seems as if I could reach farther down with something narrower, so I trace the line with a fruit knife that was lying on the bedside table.
I didn't use any strength at all, yet the knife sinks into the bed, all the way up to the hilt.
It was fun, so I drag the knife along the scribbly line.
THUD!
With a heavy sound, the bed snaps cleanly in two.
"Kyaaaah!"
The girl in the bed next to mine screams.
The nurses run over and take the knife away from me.

"How did you break the bed, Shiki-kun?"
The doctors don't ask why, but curiously persist on HOW I did it.
"I traced along that line and it broke.
Hey, just why is this hospital full of cracks?"
"You'd better stop with that, Shiki-kun.
There are no such cracks like that anywhere.
Now tell me, just how did you break the bed?
You can tell me, I promise I won't get mad."
"—I'm telling you, all I did was just trace the line with the knife.."
"... I see.
Okay, we'll continue this conversation tomorrow."
The doctor leaves.
In the end, not a single person believed my story.

As long as I run the knife along the scribbles, I can cleanly cut anything.
I don't have to put any force into it.
It is as easy as cutting paper with scissors.
The bed, the chair, the desk, the walls, the floor.
....I've never tried, but probably.. no, definitely, even people.
But it seems that no one else can see these lines.
The black lines only I can see.
Despite being a kid, I gradually began to understand what the lines were.
They are probably like stitches.
Just like stitches that hold an open wound together after surgery, I think they are weak spots.
After all, there's no way I could cut such a thing with a child's strength alone.
—Yeah, I didn't know until now.
That the world is covered in these lines, these "breaking lines" that bind everything together.
No one else can see them.
That's why they are just fine.
But I can see them.

I'm scared.. so scared, I can't even talk..
It's as if I am the only one who went crazy.
Maybe.. that's why?
Why even after two weeks, no one believes my story.
Even after two weeks, no one has come to see me.
Even after two weeks,
I continue to live alone in a world surrounded by black stitches..

I need to get out.. I don't want to be in this room anymore.
I don't want to stay in a place covered in stitches.
That's why I decided to escape, and run away, to somewhere where no one else would be.
But the wound on my chest still hurts, and I didn't get very far.
That was when I noticed.
I'm standing in the grassy field just outside of town... I really didn't get far at all.
"... *cough*"
My chest hurts.. and I feel so sad.. I collapse to my knees and cough.
cough *cough*
There's nobody here.
Drowning in this ocean of green at the end of summer,
I feel like I'm about to disappear.
But before that.
"Hey you.
It's dangerous to sit down in a place like that."

I hear a woman's voice from behind me.
"Eh.....?"
"What do you mean, 'eh'?"
You're already a runt so I can't see you if you're sitting in the grass.
I was this close to kicking you, so watch out."
She points at me rather grumpily.
.... I get a little angry.
After all, I sit in the fourth row from the front so I don't think I'm that short.
"Kicked?"
By who?"
"Isn't it obvious, stupid?"
You and I are the only ones here, so who else could it be but me?"
She declares this confidently as she folds her arms.
"Well, I suppose it must be fate that we met here, so you want to talk for a little while?
My name is Aozaki Aoko.
What's yours?"
She extends her hand to me with the kind of cheerfulness one would show an old friend.
I see no reason to refuse, so I tell her my name is Tohno Shiki and grasp her

cool hand in return.

Talking to her was a lot of fun.
She didn't ignore what I said just 'cause I was a kid.
Instead, she listened.. she listened to what I had to say, like a friend.
We talked about many, many things.
About my family.
About how it was an old and respected family with very strict, traditional rules,
and my equally strict father.
About my little sister Akiha.. quiet Akiha who always followed me around.
About our big mansion and the vast gardens, and how Akiha and I would play
together with our friends.
—I told her about many things almost feverishly.
"Oh, it's this time already.
Sorry, Shiki.
I've got some business to take care of, so let's stop here."
She gets up to leave.
.... My chest tightens, and I feel sad, thinking that I would be alone again.

"See you tomorrow.
I'll be waiting for you here, okay?
You should go back to your room and listen to your doctor."
"Oh.."
She speaks with such ease, in such a natural way as she makes her way off.
".... See you tomorrow."
Tomorrow, we would be able to talk like we did today.
I'm happy.
It was the first time I truly felt something since I awoke from the accident.

Since that day, going to that grassy field in the afternoons became part of
my daily routine.
She would get angry when I called her "Aoko".
For some reason, it seemed she hated her own name.
After some thought, I decided that she seemed like a very distinguished person,
so I came to call her "Sensei".
Sensei would seriously listen to anything I had to say, and would always dispel
my anxieties with but a single word, without fail.
.... I was depressed from the accident, but slowly, thanks to Sensei, I began to
return to my former self.
Even those scary black scribbles didn't seem quite so scary anymore when talk-
ing to Sensei.
I didn't know who she was or where she was from... perhaps she really was a
teacher.
But I don't care, it doesn't matter at all.
Because, it's fun being with Sensei.
That alone, is all that matters.. and that alone is more than enough.

"Hey, Sensei.
Look what I can do!"
I wanted to surprise her one day, so using the fruit knife I brought from the hospital, I cut down a tree growing in the field.
Like before, I run the knife along the scribble-like line, and cut it cleanly across the base.

"Amazing, isn't it?
I can cut anything easily, as long as it's somewhere where I can see the scribbles.
No one else can do this right?"
"Shiki..!"
She slaps me across the face.

"Sen.. sei?"
"... What you just did was extremely thoughtless."
Sensei gives me a hard, piercing glare.
.... I don't know why,
but I realized I just did something I definitely shouldn't have done.
With Sensei's severe expression and the pain from my cheek where she slapped me,
I felt very, very sad.
"... I'm.. sorry."
Before I knew it, I was crying.
"—Shiki."

Then, a gentle, warm feeling envelops me.
"... There's no need to apologize.
It's true that you did something I should be angry at you for, but it's definitely not your fault."
Sensei squats down and hugs me.
"But you know, if someone doesn't tell you otherwise now, one day you're going to make a mistake you can never take back.
That's why I won't apologize.. you can hate me all you want, if you feel that way."
"... No, I don't hate you, Sensei."
"... Really?"
I'm glad you feel that way.. I guess it was fate that the two of us met here like this."
Sensei began to ask about the scribbles I could see.
As I told her about the lines, the black jagged lines that somehow only I could see, Sensei's embrace tightened.
"... Shiki, what you are seeing is something that should never be seen, by anyone, or anything.
Everything in existence has points where they are most easily broken.
We, who will break down one day, are imperfect for this reason.

Your eyes have the ability to see the fate of all things.. to put it another way, you can see the future."

".... See.... the future?"

"That's right.

You can see death.

.... You don't need to know any more than that.

If someday, you happen to go down that path, the principles will become clear to you as something that is needed."

".... Sensei.

I really don't understand.."

"That's good, it's important that you don't understand now.

All I want you to know is that you must never cut these lines on a whim or as a joke, understand?

—If you do so, your eyes will begin to take the lives of others too lightly, and that is the worst thing that can possibly happen."

".... Okay.

I won't do it if you say so, Sensei.

Besides, it kind of hurts my chest.

.... I'm sorry, Sensei.

I'll never do it again."

".... Good for you, Shiki.

Never forget the feelings that you have experienced here today.

If you stay that way, I'm sure you'll find happiness."

Sensei finally lets go of me.

"But Sensei, I see those lines and get worried.

They'll be cut as soon as I trace them, right?

Then it wouldn't be weird for my surroundings to come apart at any time."

"You're right.

I'll be able to help you with that at least.. It seems as if that's the reason why I'm here."

Sensei sighs, then favors me with a warm smile.

"Shiki, I'll give you a very special present tomorrow.

I'll give you your old life back, the one you were living before your accident."

The next day.

Exactly the seventh day after I met Sensei, She arrives in the grassy field carrying a large trunk in one hand.

"Here.

If you put these on, those strange scribbles won't be visible anymore."

What she gave me was a pair of glasses.

"But my eyes are fine."

"Just put them on.

The lenses don't have any magnification or anything."

Sensei forces them on me.

Suddenly—

"Whoa!
Incredible!
This is amazing, Sensei!
I can't see the scribbles anymore, not at all!"
"Of course.
I had quite a time stealing Mystic Eye Killer from my older sister to make this Aozaki Aoko masterpiece!
So treat them well or there'll be hell to pay, got it?"
"Yup!
I'll take good care of them!
You're incredible, Sensei!
You made all those horrible lines disappear just like that!
It's like magic!"
"Of course, I am a sorceress, after all."
Giving me a proud smile, Sensei puts her trunk down on the ground.
"But know this, Shiki.
Those lines haven't disappeared.
It's just that you can't see them.
Once you take the glasses off, you'll be able to see them again."
"—R-really?"
"Yes.
That's the one thing that cannot be fixed.
Your only choice is to keep living your life and do your best with the eyes you have now."
"..... No.
I don't want these scary eyes.
If I cut those lines again, I'll end up breaking my promise to you."
"Oh, you mean never cutting the lines again?
Silly, you can break that promise whenever you like."
".... Really?
But you said it was something I shouldn't do."
"Yes, it is.
But that is your gift, Shiki.
It's yours to use as you see fit.
No one else but you has the right to judge you.
But out of all the abilities one can have, yours is terribly unique.
If you have such a power, that means there is a meaning behind you having it.
God doesn't give us powers for no reason.
You might say that you were given the 'Mystic Eyes of Death Perception' because one day, a time will come when you will need them.
That's why you must not live in denial of their existence."
Sensei squats down so our eyes would be level.

"But you know, that's why you must never forget.
You are a very kind and honest person, Shiki.
As long as you remain the way you are now, your eyes will never bring forth

any wrong."

"However, I'm not telling you to become a saint.

All I'm saying is live true to yourself, and become a man in the manner that you think is right.

Since you can accept your mistakes and are able to apologize, I know that in ten years, you will become a great man."

That being said,

Sensei stands, and reaches for her trunk.

"Oh, but I must say, unless in exceptional circumstances, you shouldn't take the glasses off.

Special powers attract other special powers.

Only when you decide there is no other way should you take off those glasses, and even then, be mindful of how you use your power.

Power in itself is not evil.

What is evil rests solely in the hearts of the ones wielding such power.

Be it for good or evil, it will be up to you and the choices you make."

She picks up her trunk.

—Sensei doesn't say anything more after that,

but deep down, I knew we would have to part.

"—It's impossible, Sensei.

I can't do it.. I won't understand just by myself.

The truth is, I was so afraid before I met you.

I was only able to return to being me, because you were with me..

.... I can't do it.

Not even with these glasses, if you're gone, I can't do it..!"

"Don't say such things, Shiki.

If you tell lies that even you yourself can't believe, you'll only make whoever hears you sad."

Sensei raises her eyebrows in displeasure and pokes my forehead.

"—You know it yourself, don't you?

You're alright now.

So don't say stupid things and give up on the self that you finally found.

Only you can choose to be you, no one else can do it for you."

Sensei turns around.

"Well, this is goodbye.

Listen, Shiki.

Life is not easy; everyone's life is a hard, long, rocky road, filled with many pitfalls.

You have more power than anyone else to do something about that, so pull yourself together."

Sensei is leaving.

I was sad, but I'm Sensei's friend, so I have to see her off properly.

"Yes.

Goodbye, Sensei."

"Well done.. That's right, Shiki.

Hold onto that confidence, and always live true to yourself.

When you find yourself in trouble, calm down and think things through carefully.

Okay?

A solution will always present itself if you do.

It'll be alright.

You'll manage, even on your own."

Sensei laughs happily.

The wind blows.

The field of grass sways in unison.

Sensei was already gone.

".... Good-bye, Sensei."

After saying that, I really felt that I would not see her again.

All that remained were her many words and these mysterious glasses.

It was only seven days, but she taught me things more valuable than anything else.

As I stand there by myself, I feel tears well up in my eyes.

—Man, I was such a fool.

I could only say goodbye.

I couldn't even say a single word of thanks to her.

I left the hospital soon after that.

Afterwards, I didn't return to the Tohno household, but was taken to live with my relatives instead.

But it's alright.

Tohno Shiki will be just fine, even by himself.

I'll spend a new life with my new family.

And like that, Tohno Shiki's ninth summer ended.

The new autumn arrived, and I think I became more of an adult....

@Chapter X (someone get me this info)

—Autumn.

The last traces of summer are disappearing today, a Thursday halfway through October.

This is the day when I, Tohno Shiki, return home.

It's been eight years since I left.

"Shiki, hurry up.

You're going to be late for school."

I hear Keiko-san's voice floating in from the kitchen.

"Okay, I'm leaving!" I call back.

I place my hands together in the room that was mine at the Arimas up until now.

"I'm going.

Thanks for letting me live with you these last eight years."

Clap Clap.

I fold my hands together in prayer.
Then, grabbing my only bag, I leave the room that had become so familiar.

I walk through the entrance to the Arimas' house, then turn to face it.
"Shiki."
Keiko-san, who had come to the door to see me off, calls my name somberly.
"See you later.
Take care, Mom."
What a strange thing to say.
I won't be coming back.
Never again will I pass through this door as a member of the Arima family.
"Thanks for looking after me.
Please give my regards to Father, too."
Keiko-san simply nods.
Eight years—the eyes of the person who had been my mother look so sad.
I don't think I've ever seen her like that before.
"I'm sure it'll be hard for you at the Tohnos' house.
Please watch yourself.
Your body is weak; you mustn't overdo it."
"I'll be okay.
After eight years, I'm just as healthy as anyone else.
I'm a lot tougher than I look."
"I suppose you're right.
But.. the Tohnos are different from everyone else.
I'm worried they'll be too much for you."
I know what Keiko-san means.
My home from today forth will be a mansion, an uncommon sight in this day
and age.
Not only is the house amazing, but the family itself is highly respected.
It's said they hold significant investments in many corporations.
To top things off, it's my true home.
The Arimas have only been looking after me.
"But, it's already decided."
Yeah, it's something that's decided already.
"Alright, I'll be heading off then.
Thanks for taking care of me."
I repeat those words one last time, and turn my back on the household I had
grown so accustomed to over these past eight years.

.... *sigh*

I leave the Arimas and start walking to school with a heavy heart.
—Eight years ago.
I recovered from a serious injury that normally would have meant death.
Then I was entrusted to the Arimas, a family branching off from the Tohno
family.
I had lived with my real parents at the Tohno mansion up until I was nine, then

I lived with the Arimas for eight years until now, my second year of high school.
I lived a normal life as an adopted son.
From the time I met Sensei—those special circumstances Sensei told me about
as she parted never happened, and the glasses hid the "lines" from me as long
as I wore them.
The life of Tohno Shiki was a peaceful one.
It meandered along gently..
.... until a few days ago.
The day when the head of the Tohno family sent word to me.
"Return to the Tohno Mansion."
The very family that, until now, had shunned me.

sigh

I sigh again.
To be perfectly honest, even before the accident, I had never gotten along with
the Tohno household.
Maybe as a kid I never liked the formality demanded by the family.
Perhaps that's why I said nothing when the old man told me I was going to live
with the Arimas.
I think it turned out well.
I got along well with my adopted parents, Keiko-san and Fumio-san.
It was as if they were my real parents.
I lived a normal life in the loving family of the Arimas like a real son, just like
I had always wished.
I don't regret living there.
.... Except for one thing.
My little sister, one year younger than me, remained behind with the Tohnos.
"Akiha.. I bet she hates me now."
It would only be natural.
She had to live in that mansion all by herself, under the constant supervision
of that hard-headed old man.
I could easily imagine what Akiha thought of me, the one who escaped.
I let out another sigh.
I can't help it.
What's going to happen will happen.
Today, after school, I'll return to my true home.
Lord knows what'll occur.
"But for now, I've got more pressing problems."
My watch shows 7:45.
Homeroom starts at eight o'clock sharp and anyone who isn't in class by eight
is marked as late.
Clutching my bag, I start sprinting towards school.

huff.. *huff*.. *huff*..

I manage to make it to school in less than ten minutes.
I enter from the back gate, accomplishing a feat that would bring the track

scouts running if they knew.

".... Come to think of it, today's also the last day I'll come in through the back gate."

The Arima and Tohno houses are on opposite sides of the school with the Arimas' being behind while the Tohnos' is in front.

Obviously, I'll be coming through the front gate in the future.

"And I quite liked the lonely atmosphere back here, too."

For some reason, the back gate at our school isn't really popular.

Only ten people or so, myself included, actually use it.

It's quiet and pretty devoid of people day or night.

Clang!

Clink, Clink, Clang!

.... Like I said, pretty quiet.

The sound of a hammer mixed with distant birds singing reaches my ears.

"Hammering.. Huh?"

Clang!

Clink!

Clong!

A half-rhythmical ringing comes from one corner of the courtyard.

"....."

What is that?

Homeroom begins in less than ten minutes.

I don't have time to stop and find out, but I am pretty curious.

Right now—

There's only a few minutes until homeroom. I have to head there right away.
turn to **5**

I'm curious, so I'll go take a look.

turn to **6**

5

I arrive in class earlier than usual.
"Phew." I walk to my desk next to the window.
"Good morning, Tohno-kun."
An unfamiliar voice greets me.
"—Eh?"
I turn around, confused.



"Tohno-kun, the teacher was looking for you.
He said he wanted to talk to you about your house."
"Hmm.. My home?
Must be about me moving."
.... I should have finished the formalities yesterday.
Perhaps there's something I forgot to do.
"—"
The girl doesn't move, but stands there looking at me.
"Uh.. Good morning, Yumizuka."
"Yeah.
Good morning, Tohno-kun.
Looks like you remember my name."
Sighing with relief, Yumizuka Satsuki gives a faint smile.
"I can remember the names of my own classmates, you know?
It's just that I haven't spoken to you much."



"Yeah.
I was a little nervous about talking to you."
Yumizuka smiles again.
She seems happy about something.

"...."

Yumizuka continues to stare at me as if she wants to say something else.
.... To be honest, I don't know her that well.
Although we're in the same class, I can count the times we've spoken.
But Yumizuka Satsuki is the center of attention.
She's often the topic of conversation among the boys, and there aren't any bad rumors about her among the girls.
In short, she's your typical class idol.
Naturally, she's always surrounded by a crowd.
She's the complete opposite of a loner like me.
While I might be able to remember the name 'Yumizuka Satsuki', there's no reason for her to remember the name 'Tohno Shiki'.
It seems like some bothersome coincidences are at work today.



"Tohno-kun.
Um.. Can I ask you a question?"
"If I can answer, you can ask as many as you want."
"Um.. um.. Sorry if it's something personal, but.. you said you're moving.. Are you going to move somewhere far away?"
Her voice trails off, as if it's hard for her to ask.

She clasps her hands to stop fidgeting.

"I know it's sudden, but.. will you be transferring somewhere?"

"Ah, no, no.

I'm changing my residence, but not my school.

My new house is still in this town anyway, so it's no big deal."

"Oh.. that's good."

Yumizuka sighs with relief.

"..?"

How odd.

Why would something like me moving cause that kind of reaction?

"But.. are you going to leave the Arimas?"

"Yeah.

I enjoyed living with them, but I can't leech off them forever."

.... Huh?

How does Yumizuka know that?

No one at this school should know I was living with the Arimas, except for a certain guy..

"Wassup, Tohno!"

A carefree loud voice rings out from the classroom doorway.

As if on cue, the guy who's been my friend since middle school appears.



"Hey, if it isn't Yumizuka!

It's not often I see you talkin' to Tohno."

".... Morning, Inui-kun." Yumizuka looks away with an unenthusiastic reply.

.... I guess she isn't the type who'd respond well to a guy like him.

"Tohno's picking up chicks?

What the hell is going on?

I thought you weren't interested in 'em?"

Arihiko exclaims his joke loudly.

"You moron, stop spreading lies.

I'm a normal guy!

Of course I'm interested in girls."



"Is that right?"

Good for you man!

Still, these days, girls find it more amusing if you have a weird sex drive instead.

But they'll only find it amusing and it won't go any farther!"

His bottomless, cheerful laughter echoes throughout the morning classroom.

.... I let out another sigh.

I once again wonder, like I have many times before, how I ended up knowing this person.

His hair dyed orange, ears pierced.

His vicious glare that shouts he will pick a fight with anyone, any time, and his wearing of rebellious clothes.

Inui Arihiko is the only free-spirited outlaw in our university-oriented high school.

"Do you have to be so loud this early in the morning?"

I'm depressed about all sorts of stuff, so stay away from me today, okay?"

I wave my hands to shoo him away.



"Depressed?"

What's wrong, man?

Is it 'that' time of the month?"

".... Wait, I take that back.

Rather than just for today, stay away from me for the rest of my life.

My depression will only get worse with you around."

Ignoring Arihiko, I head back to my own desk.

Dropping my bag and taking a seat, I stretch my back.



"Hey, you can't just ignore other people like that, Tohno. You're gonna hurt people with that careless attitude of yours."
"Oh, that's news to me.
Isn't there some way I can kill them instead?
If you can tell me how, I'll repay you by trying it out on you."



".... That's cold, man.
Aren't you just a little nastier than usual this morning?"
"Didn't I tell you I'm depressed?
Other people aside, I'm certainly not showing any kindness to you."
Arihiko sighs.
".... Why are you only mean to me, Tohno?
You're like a saint to everyone else.
It's not fair."
"What, you just figured that out?
The world's unfair."
".... You really are only mean to me."
Arihiko gives another exaggerated sigh.
I didn't try particularly hard to be cold to Arihiko.
That's just the kind of relationship we have.
"So, Arihiko, what's a chronically-late night owl who never shows up until second period doing here in homeroom?
It's a little.. no, it's very odd."



"Haha.. I was thinking that too.

I guess being at school on time isn't just for when I happen to wake up early."

".... Well, I won't comment on your hobbies, but what I'm asking is why you woke up early."



"Why I woke up early?"

Uhh.. I guess it's because I can't stay out late since all that fuss started, so I actually go to sleep at night now.

You've heard the stories about that serial killer, haven't you?"

".... I see.

Come to think of it, I did hear something like that."

I feel a tinge of regret at needing Akihiko to remind me.

For the past two or three days I had been debating whether or not to return to the Tohno household, so I completely lost touch with the news.

"What was that again?"

They've given it some really nasty name, like the 'Freakish Serial Killings' or something."



"There's more to it.
So far, all the victims have been young girls.
The eighth victim was only two days ago!
And to top it all off, they were all.. wait, what happened to them again?"

Arihiko tilts his head in contemplation.
"...."
I'm an idiot for asking him.



"Yeah, I remember now!
All the victims were cut up into pieces and arranged in a pattern or something!"



".... No, Inui-kun.
Everyone who was killed lost a lot of blood."
"Oh yeah, that was it.

They said it's some kind of modern day vampire or something."

"Hmph.

You sure know a lot about this, Yumizuka-san."

"Not really.

It's happening in this town, so it's in the news.

You'd remember it even if you didn't want to."

.... I see.

I thought it was happening in a neighboring town.. but I guess it moved down here.

"Well, anyway, that's what happened.

Even I wouldn't be going on the streets at night with a killer walkin' around.

That's why I've been waking up at seven lately."

".... What, that's it?

Having a good reason doesn't make a good story.

Where's the fun in that?"



"Man, you're cold.

What, did you collapse from anemia already this morning?"

"I'm alright, thanks for asking.

If I was anemic twenty-four hours a day, I'd be dead by now."

"Yeah, you're right.

If you say you're okay, then I guess you're okay."

—And..

The bell rings, interrupting our conversation.

"Hey, class is about to begin.

Hurry up and get back to your seat."

With a "Yeah", Arihiko goes back to his seat.



"See you later, Tohno-kun."

"Ah.. Yeah.

Sorry for keeping you, Yumizuka-san."

Her light footsteps tap across the floor as she returns to her desk.

Second period is over.

Our homeroom teacher, who's also our math teacher, calls out to me as he leaves.

"Tohno, your documents are missing some details.

Please go visit the office."

It shouldn't take long, so I'll head to the office before the third period starts.

The office is on the first floor.

The second-year classroom is on the third floor, but I could make it back before third period starts if I run.

—I run.

—And run.

—And ru..

..!?

The impact floors me with a thud!

My head hits something, and the world swims before my eyes.

"Ooow.. Owowow.."

I hear a voice nearby.

It's a woman's voice I've never heard before.

It looks like I ran into someone.

"I'm sorry, are you alright?" I still can't see my surroundings too well, but I apologize to the person I hit.

"Yes, I'm alright.. How about you?

Are you okay?"

There's no trace of accusation in that gentle voice.

I don't know who she is, but it seems like she's worried about me.

"Ah.. Yeah, I'm also okay."
I shake my head and stand up.
Finally, I can see clearly.



"Are you really alright?
Your forehead is swelling up."
"Eh..?"
I feel a prickle of pain when I try to touch it with my hand.
.... Just like she said, I'm developing a magnificent lump.



"I am so sorry.
I was not paying attention to where I was going.
Your forehead must really hurt, right?" The female student gazes apologetically
at my face.
From the formal way she spoke, I assumed she was a first-year, but from the
color of her ribbon, I can see she's a third-year.. in other words, my senpai.
"No, it's fine, really.
I'm the one at fault.
I'm sorry for bumping into you, Senpai."
I lower my head in a bow.



"Ah, come to think of it, you're right.
You shouldn't be running down the hallways, you know.
There are people like me spaced out while looking down at the courtyard."
"Yes, I'll be more careful.. Are you alright, Senpai?"



"Yes, I only fell.
It's because you ran into the wall while trying to avoid hitting me, Tohno-kun."
"Really?"
No wonder I'm seeing stars."
I'm lucky to get off with just a bump after running into a wall at that speed.
"Sorry about that, but spacing out in the hallway is also dangerous, Senpai."



"Yes, I'll be more careful."
Senpai smiles and nods.
"...."

It's an honest smile.

"Uh.. excuse me, I'd best be going."

Beating the dust off my pants, I begin walking towards the office.



But the older student continues to watch me through her glasses.

"...."

Wait, just who is she?

I was distracted because I ran into her, but come to think of it, she's beautiful.

If she's this beautiful, the male students would be talking about a "third-year beauty wearing glasses".

"Um.. I'm going now.

You should go back to your classroom too, Senpai.

Ah, if you're in any pain, please come to my classroom.

I'm Tohno from Second Year, Third Class.

I'll take responsibility."

She nods.

.... Even though she's older than me, it's like dealing with someone younger.



"Alright.

If anything happens, I'll come to your classroom at lunchtime.

Remember, Shiki-kun, you mustn't run in the hallways."

"Okay, but you shouldn't space out in hallways either, Senpai."

With that, I wave my hand and leave.

—Wait.

Shiki-kun?

I haven't told her my first name.
Come to think of it.. did she use my name earlier too.?
"... Huh?
Have I met you before, Senpai?"
"Eehh!?"
Senpai cries out in surprise, and mischievously puts on a depressed face.



"You're terrible, Tohno-kun!
You've forgotten about me?"
"—?"
Forgotten?
No, I didn't think so.
If I ever got myself involved with a beautiful woman like her, there'd be no way
I'd forget..
"... Um.."
She looks up at me reproachfully.
Those eyes.. I'm sure I.. remember from somewhere.. don't I?

.... Come to think of it, we exchanged greetings once or twice before.. didn't
we?
"Ciel-senpai.. right?"
I say her name apprehensively.



"Yes, and I'm glad you remember.
You seem the type to space out and forget, Tohno-kun."

.... I don't think I space out, but there's nothing I can do about the fact that I forgot

"Well then, goodbye.

Let's meet again at lunchtime."

Ciel-senpai bows again.

I watch her walk down the hallway.

setvar akiharegard + 1

turn to 8

6

The source of the noise soon becomes apparent as I walk towards the courtyard. A female student is crouching in the middle of the tree-lined path, working with a hammer and nails.

"...."

What is she doing?

There are only a few minutes left until homeroom.

"—Maybe she doesn't have a watch."

At the moment, that's the best I can come up with.

.... Still, to notice and then just ignore her would be somewhat cruel.

I approach her unhurriedly, trying not to surprise her, and speak.

"Hey, homeroom is starting soon."

"Huh?"

The squatting girl raises her face.

The ribbon on her uniform displays the color of a third-year.

"...."

The older student looks at me while holding her hammer.

"Uh.. um.."

Her gaze through those glasses is so direct I feel like I'm being pulled in.

Her serious eyes make me want to apologize for bothering her.

The splint she was facing is rotten beyond use.

.... Come to think of it, our school's rear courtyard is in a terrible state of disrepair.

The splints are neglected, and the flower beds untended.

Apparently, the teachers intend for the students to conduct a big cleanup at the end of the year, so the maintenance men have done nothing since summer.

—I take in the situation with a single glance.

The girl with the hammer is repairing the broken-down splints, paying no mind to the fact that her tidy uniform is being dirtied.

She has sweat on her brow, and it looks like she had been swinging her hammer in a most serious manner.

.... But as far as I know, there is nobody in charge of repairing public property at this school.

"Um.. What is it?"

The older student asks, adjusting her crooked glasses.

"Uh, it's nothing.

I was just wondering what you were doing."

"Ah.. as you can see, I'm in the middle of fixing the splints."

Yeah.

I can see that.

"That's not what I meant.

I was wondering why you are doing something like this.

Won't the maintenance people take care of it anyway?"

"Ahaha.."

The older student laughs to hide her embarrassment.

"I'm the kind of person who can't stand seeing a mess like this.

I just can't leave them alone."

It seems as though she is repairing the splints because she just couldn't let them stay that way.

"...."

What an odd senpai.

"That's why you're fixing it on your own?

If you don't like the mess, why not just avoid coming here?"

"Well, my classroom is over there."

Senpai points at the second floor classroom facing the courtyard.

"My seat is next to the window, so it's easy for me to see the courtyard.. Well, usually I just bear it, but when I took my seat today, I was surprised to see all the splints in this area were broken."

Senpai's face clouded, as if to say, "Isn't that terrible?"

.... Apparently she's upset, although she doesn't look seriously angry.

"You know what they say, 'strike while the iron's hot' and all.

I borrowed the tools from the office, and decided to fix them myself."

And so, the explanation ends.

Making a bow, Senpai returns to hammering the nails.

".... Alright, I understand all that, but how about we leave it here for now?

Homeroom is in less than five minutes, and if it's this bad, won't the school get around to fixing it pretty soon?"

"No way!"

Gripping her hammer, the senpai with glasses shakes her head furiously.

"I won't be able to concentrate with the garden like this, even if I go to class.

It'll just sound like nonsense to me, and then the teacher will say, 'Hey, you!

What are you staring at?' I'll get yelled at for sure!"

Senpai continues to grip the hammer while she emphasizes her point.

".... Well, I suppose the teacher would be upset if you kept looking outside."

"He would, wouldn't he?

That's why I have to do it now."

With that, Senpai begins her repairs once again, clumsily hammering away.

She's obviously not used to using a hammer.

Clank *Clank* rings the hammer as it hits the wood.

.... By the looks of it, there isn't just one or two broken splints.

I can't begin to guess how long it will take her to repair all of them on her own.

The bell begins to ring.

".... Looks like first period's started."

I give up, considering things have gotten to this point.

I sit down silently and begin to help repairing the splints.

Once I began to help, I quickly realize mending them isn't that difficult after all.

Although the older student is not used to making repairs, she is quite skillful anyway.

She has already gotten the hang of it, and work is proceeding at a brisk pace.

Senpai's movements are quick and sharp, and I enjoy watching her.

She really is quite clever.

.... Before I know it, there is only one splint left to repair.

Thirty minutes have passed.

I can't stay here any longer, and only one more would be no problem for Senpai.

"Well, I'll be going."

I stand up and dust off my pants.

The student with the glasses also stands up and begins to stare at me.



"..?"

Come to think of it, just who is she?

I hadn't given it any thought because of what I was doing, but when I stop to consider her I realize she is quite beautiful.

Someone this good looking would be known by every male student.

They'd be talking about a "third-year beauty".

"Um.. I have to go.

Don't work too hard, Senpai."



She gives an obedient nod.

.... Even though she's older than me, it's almost like dealing with someone younger.

"Thank you for helping me.

I'm glad you did."
She makes a quick bow.



"I'll be sure to come say hello during lunch.
Ah, don't forget to wash your hands, Tohno-kun."
"You too, Senpai."
With that, I wave my hand and leave.
.... Wait.
".... Huh?
Have I met you before, Senpai?"
"Eehh!?"
Senpai cries out in surprise, and mischievously puts on a depressed face.



"Tohno-kun, you've forgotten about me?"
"...?"
Forgotten?
No, I don't think so.
If I had ever met a beautiful woman like her, there'd be no way I'd forget..
".... Um.."
She looks up at me reproachfully.
Those eyes.. I'm sure I.. remember from somewhere.. don't I?



.... Come to think of it, we had exchanged greetings once or twice before.. hadn't we?

"Ciel-senpai.. isn't it?"

Apprehensively, I suggest her name.



"Yes, and I'm glad you remember.

You seem the type to space out and forget, Tohno-kun."

.... I don't think I space out, but there's nothing I can do about the fact that I forgot.



"See you later, then.

Sorry for keeping you."

Ciel-senpai bows again.
I watch her go, then start to walk towards the school building.

When I reach my class, it's already the break after first period.
I slip into the room while everyone's busy talking.
My desk is the window seat in the very back row, so I can sneak there without drawing any attention.
And, when attendance is taken in the second period everyone will probably say, "Hey, when did Tohno get here?".
It's a strange quirk in an otherwise dull class.
—But I guess that plan won't work this time.



"Yo, truant boy!
It's totally unlike you to be late."
"..."
I sigh.
It feels like reality is being hammered back into me after the pleasant time I spent with Senpai.



"What's with that sour face of yours?
Being late when I'm actually on time.. what do you think you're doing?"
"... Hey, listen, I'm not coming to school for your sake, you know."
"What!?"
But I'm coming to school for your sake!
That's so unfair!"
"..."
Words fail me.

I wonder, like I have many times before, how I ended up knowing this guy.
His hair dyed orange, his ears pierced.
His vicious glare that screams he will pick a fight with anyone, anytime, and his wearing of rebellious clothes.
Inui Arihiko is the only free-spirited outlaw in our university-oriented high school.



"We've been bitter enemies since middle school, right?
If you make a carefree face like that in front of your rival, you'd better be prepared for trouble!"
In any case, Arihiko is a loud guy.
"Yo!
Morning, Tohno!"
Before I know it, everyone in class is looking my way and greeting me.
"... Shut up, Arihiko.
You're ruining my chance to slip into class unnoticed!
And why am I your 'rival', anyway?
There are plenty of other tough guys around, so stop bothering me."
.... Well, he still owes me close to 10,000 yen from middle school so I guess that does make him my enemy.



"Why are you only mean to me, Tohno?
You're like a saint to everyone else.
It's not fair."
"What, you just figured that out?"

Life's not fair."

".... You really are only mean to me."

I didn't try particularly hard to be cold to Arihiko.

That's just the kind of relationship we have.

"By the way, Arihiko, what's a chronically-late night owl who never shows up until second period doing here in homeroom?"

It's a little.. no, it's very odd."



"Ahaha.. I was thinking that too.

I guess being at school on time isn't just for when I happen to wake up early."

".... Well, I won't comment on your hobbies, but what I'm asking is why you woke up early."

"Why I woke up early?"

Uhh.. I guess it's because I can't stay out late since all that fuss started, so I actually go to sleep at night now.

You've heard the stories about those serial killings, haven't you?"

.... Serial killings..?

".... I see.

Come to think of it, I did hear something like that."

I feel a tinge of regret at needing Arihiko to remind me.

For the past two or three days I had been debating whether or not to return to the Tohno household, so I completely lost touch with the news.

"What was that again?"

They've given it some really nasty name, like the 'Freakish Serial Killings' or something."



"There's more to it.
So far, all the victims have been young girls.
The eighth victim was only two days ago!
And to top it all off, they were all.. wait, what happened to them again?"
Arihiko tilts his head in contemplation.
"...."
I'm an idiot for asking him.

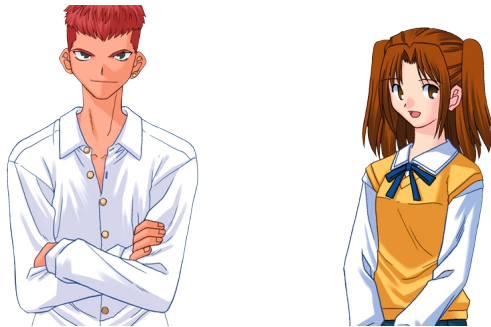


"Yeah, I remember now!
All the victims had cross-shaped slashes on their throats!"



".... No, Inui-kun.
Everyone who was killed lost a lot of blood."
"Oh yeah, that was it.
They said it's some kind of modern day vampire or something."

"Hmph.
You sure know a lot about this, Yumizuka-san."
"Not really.
It's happening in this town, so it's in the news.
You'd remember it even if you didn't want to."
.... I see.
I thought it was happening in a neighboring town.. but I guess it moved down here.



"Well, anyway, that's what happened.
Even I wouldn't be going on the streets at night with a killer walkin' around.
That's why I've been waking up at seven lately."
".... What, that's it?
Having a good reason doesn't make a good story.
Where's the fun in that?"
I sit down while dealing with Arikiko.
"Man, you're cold.
What, did you collapse from anemia already this morning?"
"I'm alright, thanks for asking.
If I was anemic twenty-four hours a day, I'd be dead by now."
"Yeah, you're right.
If you say you're okay, then I guess you're okay."

The bell rings while we're talking.
"Hey, class is about to begin.
Hurry up and get back to your seat."
"Yeah, alright.
Oh, by the way, we'll have lunch today in the cafeteria instead of on the roof.
I've invited a special guest, so look forward to it!"



With a scheming laugh, Arihiko returns to his seat.
"See you later, Tohno-kun."
"Ah.. yeah.
Sorry for keeping you, Yumizuka-san."

Her light footsteps tap across the floor as she returns to her desk.
.... But.
It's still a mystery to me why she joined our conversation.
She's just our classmate.

setvar cielregard + 1
turn to **7**

7

It's lunchtime.

Now then, where should I eat lunch?

Eat lunch in class.

turn to **9**

Go eat in the cafeteria.

turn to **10**

Go out into the hallway to think about it.

turn to **11**

8

It's lunchtime.

Now then, where should I eat lunch?

Go out into the hallway to think about it.

turn to **12**

Go eat in the cafeteria.

turn to **13**

Eat lunch in class.

turn to **14**

9

I stay in the classroom.
My lunch changes every day, according to my mood.
Some days, lunch is made for me.
On others, I might yearn for some udon and switch to the school lunches.
When a meal is simply too much trouble, I go to the store and buy some milk and bread instead.
I didn't ask for a lunch today.
Since I'm not returning home to the Arimas, I turned down the offer this morning.
Consequently, I won't have anything to eat if I stay in the classroom.
I'll have to go to the cafeteria, even if I don't feel like it.
"So that's what it comes down to."
I leave the classroom with some exasperation.

The cafeteria is packed, as usual.
A long line of people waiting for their orders has developed.
I join the line and order chikara-udon.
Looking around the cafeteria, I spot a familiar face at a back table.



"Yo, Tohno!
Over here!"
Arihiko vigorously waves his arm.

"...."
My head hurts.
But there aren't any other empty seats, so I have no choice but to walk over to the table where my friend is sitting.



"Sheesh!
You're late, Tohno!
I told you we have a special guest coming today so you should've got here sooner."
Despite his words, Arihiko is alone.
"So, Arihiko, who is this special guest?"



"Ah.. she dumped me.
She said she was busy with something today.
Said she'd come next time."
"Hmph.. dumped you, huh?
So, is this guest a girl?"



"Yeah, she's a senpai I've been hitting on.
Well, she's popular with everyone, so I guess it can't be helped."

Getting straight to the point, Arihiko slurps at his curry udon.
He seems persistent, yet at the same time, he's not.
That's one of the good things about him.

"So, what was the real reason?"



"Huh?"

"What do you mean?"

"The reason you were early this morning.

You aren't the sort of person who comes to school early just because he gets up early, Arihiko-kun."

I question Arihiko as I sit next to him, eating my chikara-udon.

"Hmm."

Arihiko gives an uncommitted response as he slurps away at his soup.

"Are you going back to your real house today, Tohno?"

"Yeah, I am.. wait, have I told you about that already?"

"Nah.

I just heard it from the teacher."

Arihiko continues to wolf down his curry udon without glancing in my direction.

"I thought, 'Maybe Tohno will get really depressed!' so I decided to check it out."

".... I see.

And your verdict?"

"Pretty disappointing.

It wasn't worth getting up early for."

"You really have too much time on your hands, Arihiko," I conclude, as I bite into the white rice cake in my chikara-udon.

.... That's the kind of person Arihiko is.

Today is the day I return to the house of my real family, returning from the home of the adopted family who raised me.

Arihiko must have heard about it somewhere and came to school early because he was worried about me.

".... Arihiko, I think your appearance does you a disservice.

You're really sentimental underneath."



"Heh, heh.. If it's the always-melancholy Tohno telling me that, then maybe I'm the real thing."
 Arihiko slurps noisily at his noodles.



"So man, what's really going on?"
 "What do you mean?"
 "You've been living with the Arimas since primary school, right?
 It's been eight years already.
 Your dad has basically disinherited you.
 Why is he suddenly calling you back now?"
 "He didn't 'disinherit' me.
 He just kicked me out of the house somehow."
 "Tohno-kun, if there ever was a family that kicked their kid out of their house 'somehow', that's not a tragedy, it's a comedy.
 But it's so boring, it's not even funny."
 Arihiko spreads his arms and shrugs.
 Refusing to ever be serious is one of Arihiko's easy-to-understand traits.
 ".... Yeah, I guess you're right.
 If you get kicked out of the house, laughing is all you really can do."
 "And then he said some cliché line like, 'Never step foot in this house again!' or something, right?
 That's what people would call disinheritance.
 Come to think of it, I've never heard why you were disinherited."
 "...."

.... Who knows?

That's something I'd like to know too.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, you don't have to."

Grabbing his bowl with both hands, Arihiko drains what is left of his hot curry soup.

Lunchtime is short.

Following Arihiko, I decide to quickly finish my chikara-udon.

turn to **15**

10

The cafeteria is packed, as usual.
A long line of people waiting for their orders has developed.
Casting a glance at the students holding their meal tickets, I sit down at Arihiko's table.

"So, Arihiko, who is this special guest?"

"Uhhh.. that's odd.

We arranged to meet here in the cafeteria.

Hold on, I'll go check things out."

Arihiko runs off, leaving his curry udon.

"..."

Chikara-udon is my choice.

I hope he returns before the noodles go stale.



"It's no good.

Looks like Senpai went somewhere."

"Hmm?"

Your guest is a senpai?"

"Yeah, she's a really cool girl.

I've been hitting on her for the last few days, and I finally got her to agree to eat lunch together.

Apparently she has someone she wants to thank today, so she's running around school looking for whoever it is."

sigh

"... It seems like she's a busy person."

"Yeah.

She's kind of like one of those Penny Racers."

With a look of regret, Arihiko splits his chopsticks.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped.

Anyhow, itadakimasu."

"Yes, itadakimasu."

We begin to slurp at our udon.
... Just what the heck are Penny Racers anyway?

"So, what was the real reason?"



"Huh?"

What do you mean?"

"The reason you were early this morning.

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"What do you mean?"
"You've been living with the Arimas since primary school, right?
It's been eight years already.
Your dad has basically disinherited you.
Why is he suddenly calling you back now?"
"He didn't 'disinherit' me.
He just kicked me out of the house somehow."
"Tohno-kun, if there ever was a family that kicked their kid out of their house 'somehow', that's not a tragedy, it's a comedy.
But it's so boring, it's not even funny."
Arihiko spreads his arms and shrugs.
Refusing to be serious, ever, is one of Arihiko's easy-to-understand traits.
".... Yeah, I guess you're right.
If you get kicked out of the house, laughing is all you really can do."
"And then he said some cliché line like, 'Never step foot in this house again!' or something, right?
That's what people would call disinheritance.
Come to think of it, I've never heard why you were disinherited."
"...."
.... Who knows?

That's something I'd like to know too.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, you don't have to."

Grabbing his bowl with both hands, Arihiko drains what is left of his hot curry soup.

Lunchtime is short.

Following Arihiko, I decide to quickly finish my chikara-udon.

turn to **15**

11

During lunchtime the hall is packed.
Students head to the cafeteria or to their favorite places, lunches in hand.
Caught in the flow of people, I contemplate whether I should go to the cafeteria or the store.
"..."
I'm somewhat taken aback at my own leisure.
If I have time to waste, it'd be better to go to the cafeteria where Arihiko is.
I begin walking towards the cafeteria.
On the way there, a familiar face waves and runs up to me.



"Thank goodness!
I've been looking for you, Tohno-kun."
"Oh.. Ciel-senpai.
Hello."
—I feel embarrassed for some reason, and return her unusual greeting.



"Yes, hello.. Well, we've already met once today, so I guess it's not proper to say 'Hello'."
A small smile floats onto Senpai's face, as if she found something amusing.
"Eh.. ah.. Yeah, now that you mention it, I guess you're right."
I avert my eyes and give a lukewarm reply, becoming increasingly embarrassed.
—I wonder.
I should be used to speaking to Senpai like this, but for some reason I'm getting

embarrassed.



".... Tohno-kun?
Do you have some urgent business?
You seem a bit unsettled."
"Eh.. No, nothing like that.."
.... I don't, but for some reason her every move feels unfamiliar.
I can't calm down.
".... It's nothing.
More importantly, Senpai, you said you were looking for me.
Do you need me for something?"



"Well, I wanted to thank you for this morning, so I was looking for you."
"For this morning.. Ah, you mean in the courtyard?"



"Of course.
Sorry to ask, but are you going to have lunch?"
I sigh.
"Well, people usually eat lunch at lunchtime."



"Great!
Then we can eat together.
I'll treat you as thanks for this morning.
Let's go to the cafeteria."
"Eh.. ?"
Senpai smiles.
Grabbing my wrist, she starts to walk.

It's strange enough for a third-year like Senpai to walk down the second-year hall, but this attracts even more attention. The gazes of the students in the hall fall upon Senpai and me and a murmur of conversation starts.

"Wa.. wait just a second!
It's all right, you don't have to..!"
I quickly shake her off my arm.
"I only did what I did this morning on a whim.
There's no need for you to thank me."
I draw back from Senpai, well aware of how flushed my face is.



"There's no need to be so reserved.
Work should be rewarded.
So please, let me treat you."

Senpai grabs a hold of my arm again.
"That's not what I'm talking about.
I mean-"
I just couldn't say that I'm embarrassed to be with her because we stand out
so much.



"Come on, there won't be any seats left if we don't hurry.
I'll listen to the details after we get to the cafeteria."

Senpai starts walking, pulling my arm with a tug.
"...."
Any further questions would bring more stares from the people around us in the
hall.
I don't know what Senpai is planning, but I peacefully accompany her to the
cafeteria.

Almost all the seats in the cafeteria are taken.
I had spent about ten minutes in the hallway, first spaced out, then talking with
Senpai.
So empty cafeteria seats are pretty much nonexistent.



"I'll stand in line, Tohno-kun, so please go get some seats.
Is there any food you don't like?
If there is, now's the time to let me know."
"Uh, nope, there isn't.
I'm not picky with food."



"Very well.
I won't take long."

Senpai lines up with everyone else.
"...."
It seems my only choice is to obediently accept that she'll be treating me.
".... But there aren't any seats left."
I look around the bustling cafeteria.
You can't find even two seats at this hour, let alone two seats together—there.
I sigh.
There, plain as day, is a table with not only two, not three, but four unoccupied seats.
There's only one student sitting at the table, and it seems he noticed me while I was looking around for a seat.
"Yo, Tohno!"
The student vigorously waving his hand is my dear classmate with the dyed orange hair.
"...."
My head hurts.

But there isn't anywhere else to sit; I have no choice but to return the wave and walk towards the table where my friend is sitting.



"You're late.
I told you to hurry because I've invited a special guest today.
What the hell have you been up to?"
Arihiko begins to complain as soon as we are face to face.
"Yeah, come to think of it, you did.
So, who is it?"
"Huh.. about that.. She promised me yesterday she'd come, but she declined this morning.
She said she has someone she wanted to thank or something, so she'd be busy this lunchtime."

Arihiko sighs as he eats his Chikara-udon.
"Someone she wanted to thank?"
Those words catch my attention.
"Arihiko.. that special guest wouldn't happen to be a third-year student, would she?"



"Whoa!?"
Arihiko's body jumps in shock.
"A rather energetic girl wearing glasses?"
"Whoaaa!?"
Arihiko begins quivering.

.... The students at the tables around us stand up as if to make a fast escape.

".... A.. Are you psychic..?"

Arihiko points at me fearfully.

"No, that doesn't mean I'm psychic, it-"



"Sorry to keep you waiting.

Good to see you found a seat, Tohno-kun."

There.

Senpai arrives with a smile, carrying a silver tray.



"...!"

Arihiko's eyes are wide open in surprise.



"Huh?"

Inui-kun?
What a coincidence!"
Still smiling, Senpai takes her seat.
"Ah.. uh.."
Arihiko gives a choked response.
"Here you go, Tohno-kun.
Please, eat until you're full!"
Even after all this time, I still can't shake off her smile.
"Ah.. all right.
In that case, thanks for the food."
.... Taking Arihiko's dumbfounded stare in stride, I sit down.
Senpai sits in front of me while Arihiko sits beside me.
"Itadakimasu."
Putting my hands together with a clap, I look down at the tray Senpai brought.
And on the menu is: Curry Rice, Curry Rice, and Curry Udon.
"...."
I don't get it.
"Err.. Senpai?"
"Yes?
What is it, Tohno-kun?"
"Uh.. about this.. what's going on?"



"What do you mean?
It's lunch, isn't it?
What else does it look like?"
"What else', you say.. but all I see is curry."



"Yes, it's curry."
 Senpai laughs happily.
 The problem is, they all look like curry.
 ".... There's three dishes."



"Of course.
 You're a boy, so you eat a lot.
 I'll have just one, so please take whatever you like."
 "Ah.. Okay.
 In that case, I'll take the curry rice and curry udon."
 The other choice is hell.



"Make sure to finish it, Tohno-kun.
 After all, you aren't picky with food, are you?"
 "...."

There isn't a shred of antagonism in Senpai's smile, nor is this some kind of a joke.

She truly had good intentions.

"... Yes.

Itadakimasu."

I dig into the curry rice with my spoon in despair.

—And then,



"Tohno-kun!"

From beside me came the cry of a dead man being reborn.

"How long are you going to ignore your dear best friend!?"

Arihiko's elbow sinks into the side of my stomach with a thud.



"Eh..?"

Inui-kun, do you know Tohno-kun?"

"Do I know him?"

We've been best friends since middle school!"

My best friend hits the table with a bang for emphasis.

"Really?"

The person who helped me this morning was Tohno-kun."

"Oh yeah?"

If you had told me his name, I would have brought him here.. So, did this guy do something for you?"

"Yes, he helped me fix my splints."



"Huh?
He helped you fix your shin splints?"
Arihiko frowns suspiciously.
.... Well, I guess you would consider helping someone fix their shin splints a bit odd.



"No, fixing splints.
Please don't make me angry when I am eating."
Ciel-senpai gets angry.
She seems to be someone you can never tire of watching.



"Fixing splints..?
Ah, the splints in the courtyard!
You were at it again?
You sure enjoy that kind of thing, Senpai, but you'd be better off if you gave

up.
If you keep doing things like that, the teachers will start expecting you to do them."



"That's all right, I do it because I enjoy it.
You shouldn't talk about the teachers like that though, you know.
They really care about the school."

.... I'm finding it difficult to follow their conversation.
"Senpai, don't tell me that you normally do that sort of thing?"



"Yeah.
Didn't you know, Tohno?
Ciel-senpai is so handy they call her the 'Shadow President' of the student council."
"No, I was asking Senpai.
Wait, never mind.. what on earth is the 'Shadow President'?"
"Is she strong?" I ask with my eyes.
"Yeah," responds Arihiko with an exaggerated nod.



"She's quite something, totally unlike the Student Council, which is the student council in name only.
 She's a third-year who'll solve anything for you if you ask her.
 Even got a fan club among the first years!
 And if something happens, the teachers all rely on her.
 There isn't a single teacher who complains about what Senpai does."
 Arihiko speaks with pride as if he was actually talking about himself.
 "Wow.. Ciel-senpai sure is amazing.
 Even the teachers rely on you."
 I look at Senpai, impressed.



"Ah, yes.
 Uh.. thank you."
 Senpai turns bright red, embarrassed.

Senpai churns her curry rice with her spoon.
 I guess it's to hide her embarrassment, but it reminds me of the enemy I have to face.
 Curry rice by itself is fine, but after that awaits curry udon.
 My doctor warned me not to eat too much, but I don't think there's anything else in this situation that I can do.
 So I start to dig in to the rice.
 munch *munch*
 Having decided to try to finish one dish quickly, I direct all my concentration to the rice.

Meanwhile, Senpai and Arikiko began talking about their own homes for some reason.

I already know that Arikiko doesn't live with his parents, but it seems Senpai is also living by herself.

Apparently, Senpai's apartment is quite close to school.

It's roughly between the main street and the park.



"Hmmm.. So, Tohno-kun, where do you live?"

"Huh?"

I silently eat my food when Senpai, peering at me, asks a completely unrelated question.

"Where..?"

Why do you ask, Senpai?"



"You already heard where I live, right, Tohno-kun?"

I think it's unfair if I don't know where your house is."

"Unfair?"

You worry about the strangest things, Senpai."

"It's not strange.

If I don't know where you live, I can't visit you if something happens, right?"

I stop eating the curry rice.

I have the feeling that something has been said that I should be jubilant about.

"Eh.. Visit?"

You mean you'd come and visit me if I catch a cold or something?"



"No, I wouldn't.
I don't have any plans to visit at the moment."
Smiling, Senpai replies instantly, as if stating the obvious.

"...."

It seems like the euphoria is premature.
Senpai doesn't seem to have any unusual intentions.
I see now.. that's just the way she is.
".... I guess I have to tell you.
Yeah, my house is nearby too, only a forty minute walk.
There's a residential district on top of the hill, right?
Just go a little further and you're there."



"Oh yeah.
You're moving today, right?"
Arihiko strikes his hand on the desk.
Senpai tilts her head slightly.



"Moving?"

Tohno-kun, were you a transfer student?"

"Huh?"

Senpai asks a strange question.

Arihiko meets my gaze.



"Uh, listen.. I've been here since the first year.

We've known each other since then, right?"

Why are you asking if I'm a transfer student now?"



"But Tohno-kun, you moved yesterday, so—"

"Moving doesn't automatically make you a transfer student.

I'm just changing my address, not my school.

Until now, I've been living with some relatives in the neighboring town.

I'm just going back to my real home, that's all."

Senpai, who wears a look of surprise, seems to understand.



"I see, you've only changed your residence.

So, now you live in the outskirts of town."

"Yeah.

It's that colorful place on top of the hill.. I'm moving there today."



"Haah.. could that possibly be the Tohno-san mansion?" Senpai asks with some hesitation.

The western-style house at the top of the hill is probably seen as something special by residents of this town.

I haven't been there for eight years, but even in my memories, the Tohno mansion was ridiculously large.

"Yeah, that's right.

I don't think it's the right place for me either, but it's too late now that I'm done moving."



"Hmm.. You don't seem too happy about it."

"It's neither good nor bad.

I don't quite understand it either."



"Well, even if it is your house, it's been eight years, right?

I can understand if you're feeling strange.

It'll probably feel like someone else's house for a while."

"I wonder if that's so.. I haven't gone back yet, so I don't know.

Well, I'm a bit relaxed, since I've always got a refuge at your place."



"Yeah, right.

My house is no refuge of yours.

When you come over during the holidays, my sister treats you better than me!"

"...."

That's probably only because Arihiko has terrible behavior, but I refrain from

telling him that in the interests of preventing the conversation from getting any worse.

—To be honest, it's not pleasant to have my home raised as a topic of conversation.



"Wow.. You two certainly get along well." Senpai peers at Akihiko and me.



"No way!

Me and Tohno would never help each other, no matter how much trouble we were in.

In other words, we're enemies, mademoiselle."

Akihiko says in a fed-up tone.

I'm getting pretty fed-up myself with his pseudo-foreigner-isms, too.



"But your relationship is so good that Tohno-kun has stayed over at your house

before, right?
Doesn't that mean you get along really well?"



"You're wrong, Senpai.
That damn Tohno is too reserved toward his parents, and he'd come over to my place every vacation.
He's reserved toward them 'cause they're taking care of him.
That's why he comes over to my place, where we conveniently have an empty room.
Since he looks pretty decent, my sister took a liking to him, and he shamelessly comes to stay with us without paying a cent!"
Arihiko's fist trembles, as if to say "unforgivable!"



".... Taking care, Tohno-kun?"



"Ah.."

Arihiko clamps a hand over his mouth.

".... Sorry.

I should've thought before I spoke."

"It's okay.

You didn't say anything bad."

I continue to eat my food without looking at Arihiko.



"Really?"

Yeah, you're right.

If you complained about that, you'll be in for some punishment."

Arihiko nods to himself in agreement.

His overwhelming optimism is something I am truly envious of.



"I'm sorry, Tohno-kun.

Um.. did you not get along with your previous family?"

"No, that's not it.

He has no problem with the Arimas.

Oh, the Arimas were the family who took care of him.

They're really nice people, and from what I could tell, they're a happy family.

Even so, he refused to be their adopted kid, and he escaped to my place every vacation.

Sheesh.. just what were you not satisfied with, anyway?"



"There's nothing I wasn't satisfied about.
It's just that I've received so much from them already, I didn't want to be a further burden on them."

I finish my rice as I reply.
Now, only the curry udon is left..
"It's okay, Senpai.
Sorry for making you listen to something so boring."



"Eh, not at all.
I'm sorry for asking you something so strange."
Senpai forces herself to look cheerful.
The topic might be fine for a long-time friend like Arihiko, but a complex matter like this would only have been troublesome for Senpai.
And to prove my point, Senpai sits there uneasily.



"Ah, Senpai.. sorry, but I've got something private to talk to Tohno about. Would you mind leaving?"
Arihiko has no problems making such an offensive request.
Isn't that phrase an indirect.. no, a direct way of saying 'We don't want you, Senpai, so get lost..'?
"You idio—What do you think you're saying!?
We can discuss those things anywhere!
And Senpai is still finishing her—"
—Lunch.
Despite all the talking with Arihiko, Senpai has finished her rice anyway.



"No, I understand.
Well then, I'll be leaving."



Senpai lowers her head in a quick bow and leaves.

Only Arihiko and I remain at the table.

I sigh.

"Well, it looks like Senpai was having a hard time too, so it was for the best, but you were really pushing it there, Arihiko."



"Hmm.. Well, it's not like I had a choice.

Anyways, I guess I'll take the role of the guy she ends up disliking."

slurp *slurp* *slurp*

Arihiko slurps away at his chikara-udon.

It seems it has gone cold while we were talking to Senpai.

".... Sorry.

You were trying to hit on Senpai, weren't you?"



"Of course.

She's probably the number one girl at our school.

But if she's the type to care about something like that, then she's not worth it.

Oh, yeah, I really do have something to talk to you about in private."

"..?"

Arihiko's voice turns serious.

I split my chopsticks with a snap and begin to eat my udon.

"What's wrong?"

Why so serious all of a sudden?

I'll let you know right now that I don't have any money.

From today onwards, I'm going to be living life as a penniless student."



"It's not that, damn it.
What I want to know is this; what's really going on with you, Tohno?"
"What do you mean?"
"You've been at the Arimas' since primary school, right?
I don't know why, but it's been eight years already.
Your dad has basically disinherited you.
Why is he calling you back all of a sudden?"
.... I see.
In his own strange way, Arihiko is worried about me.
"He didn't 'disinherit' me.
He just kicked me out of the house somehow."



"Tohno-kun, if there ever was a family that kicked their kid out of their house 'somehow', that's not a tragedy, it's a comedy. 'Oh, it's party joke!' But it's so boring, it's not funny."
Arihiko spreads his arms and shrugs.
".... Yeah, I guess you're right.
If you get kicked out of the house, all you can really do is laugh."



"And then he said some cliché line like, 'Never step foot in this house again!' or something, right?"

That's what people would call 'disinheritance.'

Come to think of it, I've never heard why you were disinherited."

"...."

.... Who knows?

That's something I'd like to know too.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, you don't have to."

Grabbing his bowl with both hands, Akihiko drains what is left of his chikara-udon.

Lunchtime is short.

Following Akihiko, I decide to quickly finish my curry-udon.

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turn to **15**

12

The hall during lunchtime is packed.
Students head to the cafeteria or to their favorite places, lunches in hand.
Caught in the flow of people, I contemplate whether I should go to the cafeteria or the store.

"...."

I'm taken aback by my own leisure.
If I have time to waste here, it'd be better if I go to the cafeteria where Arihiko is.

Almost all the seats in the cafeteria are taken.
Because I spaced out in the hallway, empty seats are pretty much non-existent at this point.

"—Aren't there any empty seats?"

I cast my gaze over the crowded cafeteria.

There shouldn't be any spare seats this late, but I decide to check the tables out anyway.

".... Ah."

I'm surprised.... no, I'm astounded.

There, plain as day, is a table with not two, not even three, but four unoccupied seats.

There are two students sitting at the table, and it seems like one of them noticed me during my efforts to locate a seat.



"Yo, Tohno!"

The student vigorously waving his hand is my dear classmate with the dyed orange hair.

"...."

My head hurts.

But there isn't anywhere else to sit, so I have no choice but to return the wave and walk towards the table where my friend is sitting.

An unexpected person is sitting at the table with him.

"Huh, Ciel-senpai?"



"Ah, if it isn't Tohno-kun."
We point at each other simultaneously.



"Yo, Tohno—hey wait.... Senpai, do you know Tohno?"



"Yes, I've met him once today already.
We bumped into each other with a bang today, didn't we, Tohno-kun?"
"Ah.... yes, sorry about that."
I lower my head in apology.



"Not at all.
I'm also sorry for spacing out like that.
You're a serious person, aren't you, Tohno-kun?"
"Serious...?"
No, not really."
Smiling, Senpai gives a satisfied nod.
How should I say this... Senpai has a unique atmosphere around her.



"But it's sure surprising that Tohno-kun and Inui-kun know each other.
Could it be that you two are in the same class?"
"That's right!
Me and Tohno are more than casual acquaintances!
We've been in the same class since our first year, and we've been inseparable
best friends since middle school!"
My best friend strikes the table with a bang for emphasis.
... Is it just me, or is he more hyper than usual?"



"Come on, best friend, sit down!

If you just keep standing there vacantly, your chikara-udon is going to go stale. Hurry up and sit down, and let me hear all about how you got to know Senpai."

Arihiko slaps my back cheerfully.

"...."

While I really have no story like Arihiko might be hoping for, there are no other seats available.

Reluctantly, I take a seat next to him.

It seems Arihiko is close with Senpai.

In contrast with me, who's only met her a few times, he's able to talk to her quite casually.



"By the way, Senpai, you said you ran into Tohno, what happened?"



"Yes, I bumped into Tohno-kun between classes.

I wasn't hurt, but Tohno-kun bumped his head."

"Hmm.... I wouldn't have thought Tohno would do something as clumsy as that.

This guy may look spaced out, but he's actually an unbelievably sharp guy.

He doesn't like to depend on others, and he hates causing trouble for others...."



"Ah, I also got that impression.

He was only concerned about me when we ran into each other, and he apologized to me just now, too."



"See?

That's the kind of guy he is, so he doesn't make those kind of mistakes.

.... Ah, could it be that your anemia was acting up again?"

Arihiko's voice shows his serious concern for my physical health.

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

I was running to the office to deal with some details for me moving.

That's when I ran into Senpai."



"Really?"

Well, I thought you became careless because you're depressed over the move."

Arihiko folds his arms and nods to himself in agreement.

—And then,



"Tohno-kun, are you changing schools!?"

Senpai exclaims almost hysterically.

"I'm not changing schools, Senpai.

I'm just changing my place of residence, so I filed the paperwork for a change-of-address."



"Eh.... So that means you're going to be living alone?"

"No, I'm just going back to my real home.

It's that fancy place on top of the hill.

I still can't quite believe it yet."

"Oh.... Could that possibly be the Tohno-san mansion?"

Senpai asks with some hesitation.

The western-style house on top of the hill is probably seen as something special to the residents of this town.

I haven't been there for eight years, but even in my memories, the Tohno mansion was ridiculously large.

"Yeah, that's right.

I don't think it's the right place for me either, but it's too late now that I'm done moving."



"Hmm.... You don't seem too happy about it."

"It's not a particularly good or bad thing.

I don't really understand it myself."



"Well, even if it is your house, it's been eight years, right?"

I can understand if you're feeling restless.

It'll probably feel like someone else's house for a while."

"I wonder if that's so.... I haven't gone back yet, so I don't know.

Well, I'm a bit relaxed, since I've always got a refuge at your place."



"Hmph.

Listen, you, I'm not impressed with how you come to stay at my house every time something bad happens.

I like your personality trait of not standing out, but I've hated how you're always too reserved for a long time now!"

Arihiko strikes the table with a bang again.

"..."

Well, everything Arihiko said is true, so there's no way to fight back.



"Inui-kun, does Tohno-kun really stay at your house that often?"



"Yeah, he does.

That damn Tohno is too reserved toward his parents and he would come to my place every long vacation.

He's reserved towards them cause they're taking care of him.

That's why he comes over to my place, where we conveniently have an empty room.

Since he looks pretty decent, my sister took a liking to him, and he shamelessly comes to stay with us without paying a cent!"

Arihiko's fist trembles, as if to say 'unforgivable!'



".... Taking care of Tohno-kun?"

"Ah—"

Arihiko clamps a hand over his mouth.



".... Sorry.

I should've thought before I spoke."

"It's okay.

You didn't say anything bad."

I continue to eat my chikara-udon without looking at Arihiko.



"Really?"

Yeah, you're right.

If you complain about that, you'll be in for some punishment."

Arihiko nods to himself in agreement.

His overwhelming optimism is something I am truly envious of.



"Tohno-kun, um.... did you not get along with your previous family?"



"No, that's not it.

This guy had no problem with the Arimas.

Oh, the Arimas were the family who took care of him.

They're really nice people, and from what I could see, they're a happy family.

Even so, he refused to be their adopted child, and he escaped to my place every vacation.

Sheesh.... just what were you not satisfied with, anyway?"

"There's nothing I wasn't satisfied about.
It's just that I've received so much from them already, I didn't want to be a further burden on them."

.... Senpai drops her shoulders and falls silent.
It looks like she's sorry for asking about my family situation.
"It's okay, Senpai.
Sorry for making you listen to something so boring."



"Eh, not at all.
I'm sorry for asking you something so strange, too."
Senpai forces herself to look cheerful.
The topic might be fine for a long-time friend like Arihiko, but a complex matter like this would only have been troublesome for Senpai.
And to prove my point, Senpai sits there uneasily.
"Listen, Senpai—"



"Um, I've finished eating, so I'll be leaving now.
I'm really sorry."

Senpai lowers her head in a quick bow and leaves her seat.
Only me and Arihiko remain at the table.
".... Sorry.
You were finally able to eat with just the two of you, but I got in the way."



"Don't worry about it.
That was my fault for not paying attention.
I thought it was bad for Senpai, actually." *slurp* *slurp* *slurp*
Arihiko slurps away at his udon.
It looks like it's gotten cold while we were talking.
"Well, that was convenient for us, anyway.
I've got something to talk to you about in private, so it was lucky that Senpai left first."
"What's wrong?
Getting all serious all of a sudden.
I'll tell you now, I don't have any money.
From today onwards, I'm going to be living life as a penniless youth."
"It's not that, damn it.
What I want to know is this; what's really going on with you, Tohno?"
"What do you mean?"



"You've been at the Arimas' since primary school, right?
I don't know why, but it's been eight years already.
Your dad has basically disinherited you.
Why is he calling you back all of a sudden?"
.... I see.
In his own way, he is worried about me.
"He didn't 'disinherit' me.
He just kicked me out of the house for some reason."
"Tohno-kun, if there ever is a house that kicks their child out of their house 'for

some reason', that's not a tragedy, it's a comedy. 'Oh, it's party joke!' But it's so boring, it's not funny."

Arihiko spreads his arms and shrugs.

".... Yeah, I guess you're right.

If you get kicked out of the house, all you can really do is laugh."

"And then he said some cliché line like, 'Never step foot in this house again!' or something, right?

That's what people would call 'disinheritance.'

Come to think of it, I've never heard why you were disinherited."

"...."

..... Who knows?

That's something I'd like to know, too.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, you don't have to."

Grabbing his bowl with both hands, Arihiko drains his cold udon soup.

Lunchtime is short.

Following Arihiko, I decide to quickly eat my own chikara-udon.

turn to **15**

13

Almost all the seats in the cafeteria are taken.
Because I spaced out in the hallway, empty seats are pretty much non-existent at this point.
"—Aren't there any empty seats?"
I cast my gaze over the crowded cafeteria.
There shouldn't be any spare seats this late, but I decide to check the tables out anyway.
"... Ah."
I'm surprised... no, I'm astounded.
There, plain as day, is a table with not two, not even three, but four unoccupied seats.
There are two students sitting at the table, and it seems like one of them noticed me during my efforts to locate a seat.



"Yo, Tohno!"
The student vigorously waving his hand is my dear classmate with the dyed orange hair.

"..."
My head hurts.
But there isn't anywhere else to sit, so I have no choice but to return the wave and walk towards the table where my friend is sitting.

An unexpected person is sitting at the table with him.
"Huh, Ciel-senpai?"



"Ah, if it isn't Tohno-kun."
We point at each other simultaneously.



"Yo, Tohno—hey wait.... Senpai, do you know Tohno?"



"Yes, I've met him once today already.
We bumped into each other with a bang today, didn't we, Tohno-kun?"
"Ah... yes, sorry about that."
I lower my head in apology.



"Not at all.
I'm also sorry for spacing out like that.
You're a serious person, aren't you, Tohno-kun?"
"Serious...?"
No, not really."
Smiling, Senpai gives a satisfied nod.
How should I say this.... Senpai has a unique atmosphere around her.



"But it's sure surprising that Tohno-kun and Inui-kun know each other.
Could it be that you two are in the same class?"
"That's right!
Me and Tohno are more than casual acquaintances!
We've been in the same class since our first year, and we've been inseparable
best friends since middle school!"
My best friend strikes the table with a bang for emphasis.
.... Is it just me, or is he more hyper than usual?"



"Come on, best friend, sit down!
If you just keep standing there vacantly, your chikara-udon is going to go stale.
Hurry up and sit down, and let me hear all about how you got to know Senpai."
Arihiko slaps my back cheerfully.
"...."
While I really have no story like Arihiko might be hoping for, there are no other seats available.
Reluctantly, I take a seat next to him.

It seems Arihiko is close with Senpai.
In contrast with me, who's only met her a few times, he's able to talk to her quite casually.



"By the way, Senpai, you said you ran into Tohno, what happened?"



"Yes, I bumped into Tohno-kun between classes.

I wasn't hurt, but Tohno-kun bumped his head."

"Hmm.... I wouldn't have thought Tohno would do something as clumsy as that.

This guy may look spaced out, but he's actually an unbelievably sharp guy.

He doesn't like to depend on others, and he hates causing trouble for others...."



"Ah, I also got that impression.

He was only concerned about me when we ran into each other, and he apologized to me just now, too."



"See?

That's the kind of guy he is, so he doesn't make those kind of mistakes.

.... Ah, could it be that your anemia was acting up again?"

Arihiko's voice shows his serious concern for my physical health.

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

I was running to the office to deal with some details for me moving.

That's when I ran into Senpai."



"Really?"

Well, I thought you became careless because you're depressed over the move."

Arihiko folds his arms and nods to himself in agreement.

—And then,



"Tohno-kun, are you changing schools!?"

Senpai exclaims almost hysterically.

"I'm not changing schools, Senpai.

I'm just changing my place of residence, so I filed the paperwork for a change-of-address."



"Eh.... So that means you're going to be living alone?"

"No, I'm just going back to my real home.

It's that fancy place on top of the hill.

I still can't quite believe it yet."

"Oh.... Could that possibly be the Tohno-san mansion?"

Senpai asks with some hesitation.

The western-style house on top of the hill is probably seen as something special to the residents of this town.

I haven't been there for eight years, but even in my memories, the Tohno mansion was ridiculously large.

"Yeah, that's right.

I don't think it's the right place for me either, but it's too late now that I'm done moving."



"Hmm.... You don't seem too happy about it."

"It's not a particularly good or bad thing.

I don't really understand it myself."



"Well, even if it is your house, it's been eight years, right?"

I can understand if you're feeling restless.

It'll probably feel like someone else's house for a while."

"I wonder if that's so.... I haven't gone back yet, so I don't know.

Well, I'm a bit relaxed, since I've always got a refuge at your place."



"Hmph.

Listen, you, I'm not impressed with how you come to stay at my house every time something bad happens.

I like your personality trait of not standing out, but I've hated how you're always too reserved for a long time now!"

Arihiko strikes the table with a bang again.

"..."

Well, everything Arihiko said is true, so there's no way to fight back.



"Inui-kun, does Tohno-kun really stay at your house that often?"



"Yeah, he does.

That damn Tohno is too reserved toward his parents and he would come to my place every long vacation.

He's reserved towards them cause they're taking care of him.

That's why he comes over to my place, where we conveniently have an empty room.

Since he looks pretty decent, my sister took a liking to him, and he shamelessly comes to stay with us without paying a cent!"

Arihiko's fist trembles, as if to say 'unforgivable!'



".... Taking care of Tohno-kun?"

"Ah—"

Arihiko clamps a hand over his mouth.



".... Sorry.

I should've thought before I spoke."

"It's okay.

You didn't say anything bad."

I continue to eat my chikara-udon without looking at Arihiko.



"Really?"

Yeah, you're right.

If you complain about that, you'll be in for some punishment."

Arihiko nods to himself in agreement.

His overwhelming optimism is something I am truly envious of.



"Tohno-kun, um.... did you not get along with your previous family?"



"No, that's not it.

This guy had no problem with the Arimas.

Oh, the Arimas were the family who took care of him.

They're really nice people, and from what I could see, they're a happy family.

Even so, he refused to be their adopted child, and he escaped to my place every vacation.

Sheesh.... just what were you not satisfied with, anyway?"

"There's nothing I wasn't satisfied with.
It's just that I've received so much from them already, I didn't want to be a further burden on them."

.... Senpai drops her shoulders and falls silent.
It looks like she's sorry for asking about my family situation.
"It's okay, Senpai.
Sorry for making you listen to something so boring."



"Eh, not at all.
I'm sorry for asking you something so strange, too."
Senpai forces herself to look cheerful.
The topic might be fine for a long-time friend like Arihiko, but a complex matter like this would only have been troublesome for Senpai.
And to prove my point, Senpai sits there uneasily.
"Listen, Senpai—"



"Um, I've finished eating, so I'll be leaving now.
I'm really sorry."

Senpai lowers her head in a quick bow and leaves her seat.
Only me and Arihiko remain at the table.
".... Sorry.
You were finally able to eat with just the two of you, but I got in the way."



"Don't worry about it.
 That was my fault for not paying attention.
 I thought it was bad for Senpai, actually." *slurp* *slurp* *slurp*
 Arihiko slurps away at his udon.
 It looks like it's gotten cold while we were talking.
 "Well, that was convenient for us, anyway.
 I've got something to talk to you about in private, so it was lucky that Senpai left first."
 "What's wrong?
 Getting all serious all of a sudden.
 I'll tell you now, I don't have any money.
 From today onwards, I'm going to be living life as a penniless youth."
 "It's not that, damn it.
 What I want to know is this; what's really going on with you, Tohno?"
 "What do you mean?"



"You've been at the Arimas' since primary school, right?
 I don't know why, but it's been eight years already.
 Your dad has basically disinherited you.
 Why is he calling you back all of a sudden?"
 I see.
 In his own way, he is worried about me.
 "He didn't 'disinherit' me.
 He just kicked me out of the house for some reason."
 "Tohno-kun, if there ever is a house that kicks their child out of their house 'for

some reason', that's not a tragedy, it's a comedy. 'Oh, it's party joke!' But it's so boring, it's not funny."

Arihiko spreads his arms and shrugs.

".... Yeah, I guess you're right.

If you get kicked out of the house, all you can really do is laugh."

"And then he said some cliché line like, 'Never step foot in this house again!' or something, right?

That's what people would call 'disinheritance.'

Come to think of it, I've never heard why you were disinherited."

"...."

..... Who knows?

That's something I'd like to know, too.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, you don't have to."

Grabbing his bowl with both hands, Arihiko drains his cold udon soup.

Lunchtime is short.

Following Arihiko, I decide to quickly eat my own chikara-udon.

turn to **15**

It's lunchtime and the classroom starts to liven up. Some guys are dashing off towards the cafeteria, a group of girls are rearranging desks to form a table, and some students are calmly leaving the classroom, boxed lunches in hand. I watch them while I set down the milk and bread I bought.



"Sheesh, not much of an appetite as usual, huh, Tohno?"
This guy in front of me being here is already a part of my daily routine, and I'm not about to start complaining now.
"But man, what's up with us, just the two of us eating lunch together?
What kind of meal goes unaccompanied by a beautiful blossom?"
"If you don't have any 'blossoms', why don't you join that group over there?
I'm not going to stop you."
"Idiot!
When I say 'blossom', I mean a single, beautiful blossom.
Those girls making a group aren't good.
They're poisonous, rather than being beautiful."
... Arihiko's comment would've probably earned him some rocks thrown in his direction if the group of girls had heard him.
Luckily, the girls in our class didn't hear his poisonous words.
".... That's pretty harsh, Arihiko.
I know you were a bad guy before, but haven't you been getting worse lately?
You're surpassing merely 'bad' and getting into 'deviant'."



"I can't help it, can I?"

When there's a truly beautiful blossom at our school, my discerning eye grows more critical."

"Hah.... So, who is this beautiful 'blossom'?"

"That's a secret."

I don't want more competition, now do I?"

Arihiko laughs with an ambitious smile spilling over his face.

As it is something I don't have, I'm a little impressed by his ability to express himself so frankly.

—And then.

The person I just met comes in from the classroom door.

".... Ah."

With a boxed lunch in one hand, there is no way I could mistake her—



"Hello, Tohno-kun."

Mind if I interrupt?"

"Eh—Ah, it's fine, of course—"

Smiling, Ciel-senpai brings over a chair and sits down naturally.

"Um.... Senpai, are you hurt?"

"No, I'm not hurt at all."

Even her smiling reply troubles me.

"You said to come here at lunchtime, so I thought it would be rude if I did not."

"Uh.... It's true that I said that, but...."

What I intended to say was that she could come and I would take responsibility if she ended up being hurt.



"S-s-senpaiiii!"

Arihiko slams the table with a bang as he stands up.



"Ah, Inui-kun.

Could it be that you and Tohno-kun are acquainted?"



"Yeah, we're more than casual acquaintances!
Tohno and I have been friends since we were kids!
Right, Tohno?
You could even say we were best friends!"
"_____"

Arihiko makes a tight fist for emphasis.

There's no room for agreement or disagreement.



"Oh, really?"

It is such a coincidence that you two are friends!"

"It sure is!"

This bastard has such a calm face, I'm wondering just when did he start to get along with Senpai!"

'Hahaha!' Arihiko glares at me while laughing towards Senpai.

Absent-mindedly, I wonder if that's what you'd call being well-rounded.

In the end, Arihiko forcibly convinces Senpai to stay for lunch.
Well... since she brought her lunch, perhaps that's what she had in mind in the first place.



"Oh, Inui-kun, do you live by yourself?"



"Nah, I live with my sister.
 Our parents left us in charge of the house, so we naturally learned how to cook,
 that's all."
 Arihiko seems familiar with Senpai.
 He's able to talk to her more casually than I can.
 I've only met her a few times.
 "By the way, Senpai, you said that you were called here by Tohno.
 Did something happen?"
 "Yes, I ran into Tohno-kun during the break.
 I wasn't hurt, but Tohno-kun hit his head."
 "Hmm.... And you came to see him because you became worried?"
 "Yes, that's about right."

Senpai's voice is brisk and pleasant to listen to.
 Since listening is more interesting than talking, I keep silent.
 That's when Arihiko directs the conversation towards me.



"What's wrong, Tohno?
 Running into someone.... Don't tell me your anemia was acting up again?"
 Arihiko's voice betrays his deep concern about my health.
 ".... No, it's not that.
 I was running to the office to deal with some details for me moving.
 That's when I ran into Senpai."
 "—Really?
 Well, I guess your carelessness was at fault."

Arihiko folds his arms and nods in agreement to himself.



"Tohno-kun, are you changing schools!?"

Senpai suddenly outbursts almost hysterically.

.... Really, why does she think I'm changing schools just because of that?

"I'm not changing schools, Senpai.

I'm just changing my place of residence, so I filed the paperwork for a change of address."



"Um.... so that means you're going to be living alone?"

"No, I'm just going back to my real home.

It's that fancy place on top of the hill.

I still can't quite believe it yet."

"Ohh.... Could that possibly be the Tohno-san mansion?"

Senpai asks with some hesitation.

The western-style house on top of the hill is probably seen as something special to the residents of the town.

I haven't been there for eight years, but even in my memories, the Tohno mansion was ridiculously large.

"Yeah, that's right.

I don't think it's the right place for me either, but it's too late now that I'm done moving."



"Hmm.... You don't seem too happy about it."
"It's not a particularly good or bad thing.
I don't really understand it myself."
"Well, even if it is your house, it's been eight years, right?
I can understand if you're feeling restless.
It'll probably feel like someone else's house for a while."
"I wonder if that's so.... I haven't gone back yet, so I don't know.
Well, I'm a bit relaxed, since I've always got a refuge at your place."



"Hmph.
Listen, you, I'm not impressed with how you come to stay at my house every
time something bad happens.
I like your personality trait of not standing out, but I've hated how you're al-
ways too reserved for a long time now!"
Arihiko strikes the table with a bang again.
"....."
Well, everything Arihiko said is true, so there's no way to fight back.



"Inui-kun, does Tohno-kun really stay at your house that often?"

"Yeah, he does.

That damn Tohno is too reserved toward his parents and he would come to my place every long vacation.

He's reserved toward them cause they're taking care of him."

"That's why he comes over to my place, where we conveniently have an empty room.

Since he looks pretty decent, my sister took a liking to him, and he shamelessly comes to stay with us without paying a cent!"

Arihiko's fist trembles, as if to say 'unforgivable!'



".... Taking care of Tohno-kun?"



"Ah—"

Arihiko clamps a hand over his mouth.



".... Sorry.
I should have thought before I spoke."
"It's okay.
You didn't say anything wrong."
I continue to eat my bread without looking at Arihiko.



"Really?
Yeah, you're right.
If you complain about that, you'll be in for some punishment."
Arihiko nods to himself in agreement.
His overwhelming optimism is something I am truly envious of.



"Tohno-kun, Um.... did you not get along with your previous family?"



"No, that's not it.

This guy had no problem with the Arimas.

Oh, the Arimas were the family who took care of him.

They're really nice people, and from what I could see, they're a happy family.

Even so, he refused to be their adopted child, and he escaped to my place every vacation.

Sheesh... just what were you not satisfied with, anyway?"

"There's nothing I wasn't satisfied with.

It's just that I've received so much from them already, I didn't want to be a further burden on them."

I turn away.

And... all of a sudden, I realize Yumizuka is close by.



"....."

Her eyes look like she wants to say something, but it seems like she can't bring herself to intrude.

"What's wrong, Yumizuka-san?"

I leave Arihiko and Senpai and call out to Yumizuka.



"Ah... uh, I have something to talk to you about.
Is now a good time?"
"Sure.
Can we talk here?"
"... Um..."



Yumizuka's eyes flicker towards Arihiko.
... It seems Yumizuka isn't good at dealing with Arihiko.



"Is it alright if we discuss this in the hallway?"
"I don't mind.
I'm leaving for a while, Arihiko."
waving to Arihiko and Senpai, I exit with Yumizuka into the hallway.

"So, what did you want to ask me?"



"Um, I'm sorry if I'm wrong about this, but have you been walking around at night in the business district lately?"

"Huh—?"

Business district....?

I rarely go there even in the daytime, let alone at night.

Her question is so entirely off that I become interested instead.

"Hmmm.... At night, you say?"

Around what time?"

"From what I've heard, past midnight."

Midnight.... then that rules it out completely.

I occasionally go out to the business district at night to buy something, but I've never been out into the city that late before.

"That's definitely not me.

My household is old-fashioned, so they've got a curfew at seven.

You can't get in after that even if you cry.

Since I don't want to have to camp outside, I try to my death to get home before seven."

I'm upfront in denying Yumizuka's question.

She smiles happily.



"Yeah, I know.

The Arima family is also the head of a style of tea ceremony.

That's right, it must be really strict for you, Tohno-kun."

"Not so much strict as they like to tease me.... eh?"

Yumizuka-san, you seem to know quite a bit?
Are you a student of it?"

"No.

I don't really know that much about tea ceremony.

I have a friend who goes there and she told me it was really strict."

"Oh, but Yumizuka-san, how did you know I lived with the Arimas?
I haven't even told anyone here at our high school."



"You've forgotten that we went to the same middle school together, haven't you?"

Yumizuka giggles as she speaks.

"Eh—?"

.... We went to the same middle school....?

I can't remember, so I can't say anything, but if that's true,
then it wouldn't be odd if she knew I was entrusted to the Arimas.

"Yumizuka-san, maybe, um...."

"It's okay as long as it's not you, Tohno-kun.
Sorry for interrupting your lunch."

Interrupting my words, Yumizuka Satsuki goes back into the classroom after saying this.



"Yo.

Is your conversation over?"

"Yeah... it seems like she just got the wrong person... Hey, Arihiko."

"Yeah.

Yumizuka went to our middle school.

To say more, she was our classmate during our second and third year, and now in the second year of high school, making for three years in total."

"—Huh?"

As if he knew my question, he answers.

"H-how did you know what I was going to ask?"



"Because of that look on your face.

But damn.

I thought you were just ignoring her, but you actually didn't even notice her.

She's really persistent.... or maybe she's just eccentric.

She's had to suffer a lot."

Arihiko makes a difficult face and shrugs.



"Ah, I knew it.

She is Tohno-kun's girlfriend, right?"

"W-what are you saying, Senpai!?"

There's no way that could be!

I've never even had a proper conversation with her!"



"No, no, there's no use hiding it.
You two look like you get along very well.
I'm a little jealous."
What's making her so happy?
Senpai looks at me with an excited expression.
"S-senpai!
Arihiko, you say something to this confused person here, too!"



"About what?
I don't know what you and Yumizuka are up to.
All I know is that you two were having a merry conversation this morning."



"Kyaah!

A secret meeting at school in the morning!

How bold of you, Tohno-kun!"

Senpai is getting more and more worked up in an incomprehensible way...

"....."

.... Well, whatever.

After all, it doesn't matter to me if Senpai misunderstands.



"But you mustn't be so blunt to her, Tohno-kun.

Yumizuka-san looks kind of sad, doesn't she?

You've got to give her more of your attention."

"Senpai, lunch is going to end soon..."



"Yes.

See you later, Tohno-kun, Inui-kun!"



Smiling, Senpai leaves our classroom.
 sigh
 I feel a little exhausted.



"Tohno.
 Don't go after Yumizuka."
 Arihiko mumbles this with a stern face.
 "Don't go after....?
 Why?"
 "Listen, about Yumizuka.... despite her appearance, she's really shy and single-minded.
 She's not compatible at all with someone absent-minded like you.
 That kind of girl is dangerous to get really involved with."
 Arihiko goes back to his own seat.

".... What is he talking about?
 It's not like I'm thinking of doing something with Yumizuka-san."
 I mutter to no one in particular, and sit down in my own seat.

setvar akiharegard + 1
 setvar flgM + 1
 turn to **15**

15

The last class of the day ends.
I don't feel like going to the mansion right away, so I just blankly stare out of the window overlooking the school grounds.
The classroom is dyed orange by the sunset.
It's like red watercolor paint, and it hurts my eyes.
.... I don't like red.
It feels like it soaks deep into the back of my eyes and I want to throw up.

It seems I am weak against things that resemble blood.
No, I should say I am weak against blood itself.
Eight years ago, I had a near-death experience.
I was in an accident where I was injured in the chest and I teetered between life and death for days.
I should've died instantly.
But, miraculously, I survived.
Maybe it's because of the great medical treatment.
However, the injuries were so severe that I don't even remember the accident.
Eight years ago, when I was a child.
I felt a "thud" pass right through the middle of my chest, then I passed out.
When I woke up, I was in a hospital bed.
All I could remember afterwards was the pain and the cold.
I don't remember much of the accident, but even today, the scar on my chest remains.
I guess numerous fragments of glass pierced my chest, leaving burn-like scars there and in my back.
.... Actually, I was quite surprised at being saved.
Ever since then, I frequently collapse from an anemia-like dizziness, and cause a lot of trouble for others.
Maybe that's why my old man believed I was unfit to be heir to the Tohno household and entrusted me to our relatives.

".... The wound on my chest, huh."
The huge scar in the middle of my chest, hidden from view by my uniform.
Now that I think about it, after that accident was when I started to see those "lines".
I am able to forget them, thanks to the glasses that Sensei gave me.
But I think I would have completely gone mad if I never met her.
Keiko-san—the person who had been my mother up until now, said when I left that the Tohno household wasn't "normal".
".... No problem.
I'm not a 'normal' person myself."
Adjusting my crooked glasses, I pick up my bag.
I can't stay in the classroom forever.
Now then—

Get a hold of myself and head back to the mansion. flgM turn to **18**

Get a hold of myself and head back to the mansion. (Akiha cares about you)
turn to **414**

Get a hold of myself and head back to the mansion. turn to **19**

Stay in school for a little longer. turn to **16**

16

As soon as I step out into the hallway, I run into a familiar face.
"Huh?
What's up, Senpai?
Do you have some business here at the second year classrooms?"



"Yes.
Business with a second year student, to be precise."
Ciel-senpai approaches with a smile.
"Listen, I have some nice snacks here, but no one to talk to.
It would be a waste to eat them all by myself, so I came to catch an idle-looking person to talk to."
"Hmm.. Someone to talk to?
But there's no one left in the classroom.
It's the same with all the other classes, too.
You don't usually come to the second year classrooms anyway, do you?
You're on the lower floor, right?"
And if she wanted someone to talk to, aren't there plenty of third year classmates she could talk to?
She really didn't need to come all the way up here.
"Shouldn't you think about asking your third year classmates?
Conversation would probably be better."



"Yes, but today, I'm in the mood to talk to younger guys."

Please don't ask for a reason, it's just on a whim."

"... Well, I won't ask."

I probably wouldn't be able to understand even if she told me.

Senpai's smile disappears as she stares into my face.



"Are you free right now, Tohno-kun?"

"Well—if having nothing to do means I'm free, then I'm definitely free."

Senpai grabs hold of my sleeve.



"Well then, you are now caught.

Let's go have some tea."

Senpai invites me with a smile.

There's no reason for me to decline the offer, and besides, it should be fun talking with Senpai.

"Sure, I'll come along, if it's okay with you."

"Then it's decided.

Alright, let's go!"

Still holding my sleeve, she begins walking down the hall with a light gait.

"Wow.

Our school has a room like this?

Could it be for the Tea Ceremony Club?"



"Yes, it's the Tea Ceremony Club's room for now.
It seems like it hasn't been used up until I came though."

Senpai steps onto the tatami mat and starts preparations with a rattling noise.

"A club room, huh?"

If that's the case, won't the other club members be coming?

It'd be bad for an outsider like me to be here, right, Senpai?"

"It's okay.

It may be the Tea Ceremony Club, but there aren't any other members except for me.

Thanks to that, I can use it freely during break time and after school.... here we go."

Smiling, Senpai begins spreading the cushions.

Tea is tea, but it looks like this is really going to be a serious tea ceremony.

To be honest, I'm a bit overwhelmed.

"Uh, Senpai.... I don't have the slightest clue what to do."

"What are you talking about?"

I only know up to the pouring bit myself."

With that blunt reply, Senpai put the teapot, some cups, and some tea cakes onto a plate.



"We are just going to have a casual conversation, so there's no need to be so formal.

It isn't any fun that way, is it?"

Smiling softly, Senpai pours tea into her own cup.

"... Hmm.

I just don't get you, Senpai."

Mumbling, I pour my own tea.

I slurp some.

Picking up the tea cake and putting it in my mouth, I sip again at the tea.

I was never involved with it, but the Arima family is a prominent tea ceremony family.

Being raised in a household like that, I'm used to drinking tea and doing nothing.

Senpai looks at me with a somewhat troubled expression.

"What's wrong, Senpai?"

You look a bit unhappy."

if cielregard >= 2

turn to **17**

turn to **74**

17



"Eh?"

Ah, um, I was just a little surprised at how calm you were about all of this, Tohno-kun."

"Really?"

Well, my family is a strict one, so I'm used to these kinds of things.

More importantly, Senpai, didn't you have something you wanted to talk to me about?"

"I do.

The continuation of what we were talking about during lunch."

".... What we were talking about during lunch.. you mean about my family?"

Senpai nods to indicate a yes.



"If you don't mind, I would like to hear more about it.

I was curious about it since we stopped halfway."

".... It's not that I mind, but hearing about my family isn't very interesting.

It'd be a waste of time."



"I don't mind if it's not interesting, I just want to hear about it."
"... Hmm, you sure are eccentric, Senpai."
"Maybe I am," Senpai laughs.



"Alright, then.
Let's continue from before.
You said you moved to your home.
What do you mean by that?"
Senpai asks, full of curiosity.
.... Well, the conversation this afternoon must've been pretty fragmented for Senpai, since she didn't know any of the circumstances.
"—Let's see.
Basically, I'm a guy who's been disinherited.
I was seriously injured after getting caught up in a traffic accident when I was nine years old.
The injuries themselves somehow healed, but after that, I easily collapsed from anemia and threw up my food.
That's why I was entrusted to my relatives, the Arimas, while I recuperated."



"Uh, so in other words, the Arimas have been your parents who raised you since you were nine, right?"

"That's right.

I knew my old man hated me for some reason and that once I had been entrusted to the Arimas, I would never go back home.... Go back to the Tohno mansion, that is.

That's why, well, I thought I'd just continue to live as a son of the Arimas forever.

That's what I thought, but my old man kicked the bucket recently.

That's when they told me to return to the mansion, now that my old man is no longer there, and I finally agreed to them."

—And that, pretty much, is my domestic situation.

I end my story like that.

Ciel-senpai gives a little nod silently.

".... May I just ask one thing?"

"Mm?

Sure, if I can answer it.

Go ahead."

".... Alright, then I'll ask.

Did you dislike your previous family?"

My previous family—The Arimas who had raised me as my parents?

My mother and father who weren't my real parents,

and the unfamiliar building which without a doubt was home to strangers.

But completely regardless of that—

"No, I liked them.

They were people who didn't care that I wasn't related to them by blood.

They were so warm to me that I felt bad about being depressed all by myself.

And for them to love me no matter what.... I didn't think it was a bad thing."

—I was loved by these people.

That's why soon, even one day sooner,

I have to truly become family to them—

I had been telling myself those words since I was young.

.... Since a very, very long time ago.

Over and over, I swore, till I would practically pass out.

".... Um, just like Arikiko said, I didn't have a single complaint about the Arima

family.

They treated me well, and I think I responded to their affection, too.

Between us, even though I knew we were just playing at being family, even if it was all just an act, I didn't feel any pain."

No, I was happy instead.

In a way, I had considered the Arima parents and me to be the ideal nuclear family.

"—But it was no good, was it?"

".... Yeah.

Despite everything, there was a line I couldn't cross.

'This isn't your real family....' No matter what I did, I couldn't get those words out of my head.

I knew I should have been ignoring it, but I just couldn't do it.

I don't know if you'd call it a childhood experience, but it had already become like a curse to me.

Somehow, no matter where I was, I felt like a stranger to my family."



Senpai is silent.

Avoiding my gaze, she huddles her shoulders apologetically.

"See?

It was boring after all, right?

That's why I said it would be a waste of time."



"No, that's not true.

It was a very meaningful story."

Senpai forces a smile to try and defuse the situation.



"But it was a little surprising, because I had thought of you as an easy-going person."

"Hmm.... well, I basically am a pretty easy-going person.

It's my personal philosophy to enjoy the present as much as possible.

People are happier enjoying what is to come rather than being concerned about what happened before, right?"

Well actually, that was an opinion I had inherited from Arihiko.



"Enjoy what is to come?"

That sounds nice."

Senpai sips her tea with a very gentle smile.

I follow Senpai's example and place my lips on the cup.

With a slurp, the bitter tea washes down my throat with just a hint of sweetness.

setvar cielregard + 1

turn to **19**

I don't have anything to do, so I hurry up and leave school.
... Come to think of it, I hadn't left the school by the main entrance since the entrance ceremony.
"I guess this'll be the way to and from school from now on since I live in the mansion."

Leaving from the main gate, I come to the intersection that leads to the residential district.
This is the point at which the paths to the city and the residential district, where the mansion is, part—



"Oh, it's Tohno-kun."
Suddenly, I run into Yumizuka.
"Ah.. Hello, Yumizuka-san."
... It may have been because of Ciel-senpai's teasing, but I feel a little embarrassed.
Yumizuka-san looks at me, bewildered.
"Uh.. Yumizuka-san?
Is there something on my face?"
"Um, I was wondering what you were doing here, Tohno-kun.
Isn't your house in the other direction?"
"Ah.. Well, it was until yesterday, but I'm living somewhere else starting today.
From now on, I'll be living at the place on top of the hill at the end of that residential district."



"Ah, so that's what you were talking about this morning."
Yumizuka claps her fist and an open palm together in understanding.
.... Well, all flattery aside, that gesture seems incredibly cute.
".... That's right.
I guess there's no point hiding it from you, since you already know.
I'm leaving my guardians, the Arimas, and going back to my real house today."



"Your real house.. You mean the Tohno-san mansion?"
"Yeah.
I don't think it really suits me, either."



"I see.
You're really a prince on top of a hill after all.
It was a secret only Inui-kun and I knew, but now I guess everyone's going to find out."

With a faint smile, Yumizuka casts her gaze into the distance. She looks out at the horizon, as if looking at the Tohno mansion off in the distance on top of the hill.

"But will you be alright?
Even if it is your house, you've been away for eight years, right?
Aren't you afraid, or worried?"

"Yeah.
I'm actually kind of uneasy.
I never liked that mansion to begin with, and now it's going to feel like someone else's house, too.
But still—"
... I can't lead a carefree life on my own and leave my sister Akiha there all by herself.
No matter how uneasy I am, I have to return to the mansion.
"—In the end, it's still my home.
I think it's only natural for me to go back."
"... I see.
Ah, sorry for stopping you, Tohno-kun.
You must be in a hurry, right?"
"No, not really.
I was just having a stroll on the way home."
"Ah.. I see."

For some reason, Yumizuka looks downcast and falls silent.

"... What's wrong, Yumizuka-san?
Are you feeling sick?"
I break the silence,
but she continues to stare downwards without raising her head.
"... "
I can't just leave her there, so I continue to stand there, looking at her.
—And then.



"U.. um!"
"Yeah, what is it?"
"Um.. uh.. I'm going home along the same way as you, until we reach the hill.."

"Really?"

Then let's go together for part of the way."

".... Eh?"

Yumizuka's eyes widen and she stands there stiffly for a moment.

"Y.. yeah!"

You're right.

We're going back the same way, so it wouldn't be strange for us to go together for part of the way, right!?"



She says this all with an excessively cheerful voice and stands right beside me.

"Just at the right time, too.

I'm not too familiar with the streets around here, so would you mind guiding me?"



"Sure.

Well then, let's go down this street.

It's a back street that leads all the way to the street on the hill."

—I walk home while chatting with Yumizuka.

Talking to Yumizuka isn't anything particularly special, but it is enjoyable in a peaceful kind of way.

.... Despite what Arihiko had said, Yumizuka Satsuki has a gentle air about her, and I feel safe being around her.



"—Huhu."

While we are talking, Yumizuka suddenly laughs as if she had remembered something.

"What is it, all of a sudden?

Did I say something funny?"

"No, that's not it.

It's just that starting tomorrow, I'll be taking the same route to school as you."

She laughs, looking truly happy.

That honest, smiling face is enough to make me happy as I watch her.

.... I didn't realize it up until now.

Even putting her looks and mannerisms aside, Yumizuka Satsuki is kind of cute.

I am slowly beginning to understand why the boys in our class had been so worked up over her for so long now.

Our conversation ceases.

I'm simply fascinated by Yumizuka's smile and the two of us fall silent.

Without saying anything, we walk towards the residential district in the sunset.

Suddenly—

"Hey, do you remember what happened during the winter vacation of our second year of middle school?"

Yumizuka murmurs.

"....?"

I tilt my head to one side.

The winter vacation of the second year of middle school was when I had applied to stay for extra lessons at school because I felt bad about staying at the Arimas. I remember it well enough, but I still don't understand why she asked me about it.

"Just as I thought.

Someone like Tohno-kun would never have remembered."

Disappointed, Yumizuka's shoulders droop.

"There were two sports sheds at our middle school, remember?

One was a new shed used by the big clubs, and the other one was an old one used by the smaller clubs like Badminton.

The old shed had a certain problem where the alignment of the door was bad, so there were often times when it wouldn't open."

Old shed.. That little concrete building at the back of the gymnasium..?

"Ah, that shed.

The one which they stopped using after some students got trapped inside."

"Yeah, that's the one.

The students were second years from the Badminton club."

"—Ah!"

Yeah, something like that did happen.

It was early in the new year, on a cold winter's day.

The first three days of the new year having passed, I had applied for extra lessons and requested to stay behind at school and help out because I felt bad about staying at the Arimas.

But even that was only until five in the evening.

It had become dark, and I was forced out of the the classrooms as all the teachers were going home.

The middle of winter.

Even if it was only five, the surroundings really had darkened.

The weather report had predicted snow for that day, and the cold was extra harsh.

And so, just when I had decided to head straight home for the day, I heard a banging sound from the old shed and I went to check things out.

—Is anyone in there?

I asked, and I heard the voices of several female students in reply from inside the shed.

They had been trapped in there for two hours.

While packing up the club equipment, they had closed the door because of the cold, and now it wouldn't open again.

They couldn't open the door no matter what, and wanted me to call one of the teachers for help.

.... But the teachers had all gone home.

Even if I were to call them now on the phone, it'd at least take another hour.

The cold on that day was truly terrible.

In the kind of cold that should have prompted snow, I thought it would be cruel to leave those girls stuck in the shed wearing only their PE uniforms for another hour.

After some hesitation and confirming that no one else was around, I took off my glasses and cut the "line" on the shed door.

The door opened, and about five female students, eyes red from crying, poured out—

".... Come to think of it, there was something like that.

But I'm surprised you know about it.

The captain of the trapped badminton club told me, 'This has to do with the club's survival, so don't tell anyone else.' It was almost like she was threatening

me."

"Oh, Tohno-kun!

You had no interest in knowing who was trapped inside there, did you?

Listen.

I was one of those badminton club members."

Yumizuka sounds like she's pouting.

Eh.. So in other words..

"—I still remember it well.

When I think about it now, it was only being trapped inside a shed, but at the time, it was cold and dark, and I was really worried.

Everyone thought we were going to freeze to death like that.

My stomach was growling from hunger, too.

I was just about to collapse."

"Hmm.. That must have been rough."

I can't really empathize with her, so I give a half-hearted response.

Unconcerned, Yumizuka continues her recollections, bringing up old events anew.

"And just when everyone was trembling, you came along and asked, 'Is anyone in there?' in your usual unexcited voice.. and then the captain got angry and shouted, 'Can't you tell just by looking!?'.. Do you remember?"

"Yeah, I remember.

There was a loud bang when she threw a bat at the door.

I was really surprised."

"That's right!" Yumizuka says, laughing.

"But when we heard all the teachers had gone home, we really lost all hope.

We couldn't stand being there for even a minute longer, yet we had to face the prospect of being trapped until the next day.

Just when we were thinking about how miserable the world was, you knocked on the door and said, 'I might be able to open the door, if you can keep it a secret.'"

"Yeah.

And then I heard another bang, and someone said, 'If it opened that easily, we wouldn't be suffering in here!'

She was really angry."

"Ahaha.

Yeah, the captain felt responsible for us getting trapped, so she didn't have much patience to spare.

But soon after that, the door opened.

Everyone was happy that the captain's knocking with the bat must have worked and ran outside, but I was watching you aimlessly stand by the door."

Yumizuka looks at me warmly.

.... But that only troubles me.

To me, it meant nothing, so I can't really appreciate her gratitude.

"I was crying really hard at that time.

My eyes just felt like they were swelling up, and they looked terrible.

What do you think you said when you saw me like that?"

"I don't know.

What did I say?"

.... I really don't remember, so I ask, as if it was something someone else had done.

Despite this, Yumizuka still looks at me happily.

"You put your hand on my head and said, 'Hurry up and go home, and eat some Ozouni'.

I was a little embarrassed because I was trembling so much from the cold."

"...."

"Hmm." I knit my brows.

I don't know what I meant back then.

"I think you meant for me to warm up my body by having some Ozouni."

".... I see.

It was right after New Years, after all."

.... That does sound like the stupid kind of thing I would say.

Now that it's put to me like this, I regret not having picked something better to say.

"Back then I thought, there are plenty of reliable people at school, but if I ever really need to be saved, it will be someone like Tohno-kun who saves me."

"You're exaggerating.

Look, it's like how a baby chick thinks the first human it meets is its mother.

I just happened to help you."

"That's not true..!"

Ever since then, I really believed that you'd come and help me no matter what the problem was."

Her expression is quite resolute.

"You're giving me too much credit, Yumizuka-san.
I'm not that reliable of a person."



"It's alright.

That's what I believe, so let me keep believing it."

She pronounced this while staring straight at me, and I am too embarrassed to offer a rebuttal.

"--Well, I guess you can believe what you want."



"Isn't that right?"

"So if I'm ever in a pinch, you'll come and help me, right?"

Yumizuka asks me, smiling.

.... To be honest, that would be kind of troubling.

Despite what she thinks, I'm not the sort of guy who can do everything.

I'm not.. but when she faces me with that smile, I don't want to destroy that faith she has in me.

"Yeah.

"If it's within my power, I'll help you."

"Yep!

Thank you, Tohno-kun.

I know it's a bit late to say this, but I was really happy because of what you said to me back then."

Saying that, Yumizuka suddenly stops.

Naturally, I stop too.



"I've always wanted to talk with you like this, Tohno-kun."

Somewhere in her voice was a hint of wistfulness.

Perhaps it's because of the red light from the sunset, but somehow, Yumizuka looks lonely.

".... What do you mean?"

"You can talk to me anytime."

"No, I can't.

Inui-kun is always around you, and besides.. I can't become someone like you, Tohno-kun."

With that reserved answer, Yumizuka draws away from me.



"Well, my house is this way, so I'll see you at school tomorrow."

"Bye-bye!" Smiling, Yumizuka waves her hand and begins walking down another street.

setvar flg6 + 1
turn to **19**

19

if clearhisui != 0

turn to **187**

if cleared != 0

turn to **20**

I walk along a different path than the one I usually take.
 Passing through unfamiliar streets, I slowly approach the Tohno mansion.
 The surroundings are not completely unfamiliar.
 After all, I had lived here until I was nine years old—eight years ago.
 This is not the first time I have taken this path back to the mansion.
 My feelings are a little complex.
 The path home is nostalgic, yet fresh.
 Up until just now, I had not looked forward to returning to the Tohno household.
 Now, it doesn't seem so bad.

.... The house I lived in until I was nine years old.
 Right now, my sister Akiha is in that utterly un-Japanese western-style mansion.
 Tohno Makihisa—My old man who hated me, and the master of the Tohno household, died a few days ago.
 My mother died from illness after Akiha was born, so the Tohnos had dwindled down to me and my sister.
 Being the eldest son, you would think I would stand to become the Tohno heir.. but I have no such privilege.
 To become the Tohno heir means being bound by a strict upbringing.
 I have lost count of the number of times my father scolded me over my dislike of not being able to live freely.
 That was when I got involved in that accident, and my body became weakened.. My father saw it as a good opportunity to get rid of me.
 His reasoning was something along the lines of "someone who could die any moment can't become the heir, even if he is the eldest son".
 Sadly for my father, I betrayed his expectations by making a recovery, but my sister Akiha was already deemed to be the heir to the Tohno household.
 And so I've heard that Akiha, who was already being raised harshly in order to become a proper daughter of the Tohno household, received an even harsher upbringing since then.
 That was a long time ago—I played together with Akiha in the mansion back before the accident.
 After that, I never saw her again.

turn to **23**

20

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 That was a long time ago—I played together with Akiha in the mansion back before the accident.
 After that, I never saw her again.

.... The life in the mansion I abandoned eight years ago.
 Those eight years were long, and my memories of that time have largely faded.
 But in spite of that, there is one thing that even now continues to burn strongly within my heart, and that is—

About my little sister Akiha.	turn to 21
About the cheerful girl.	turn to 22

21

setvar akiharegard + 1
turn to **23**

22

.... Akiha isn't the only person I haven't seen since then.
I can't remember all the details because it's been eight years, but there were other children at the mansion around the same age as me.
I don't remember their names, but there were two girls who were twins.
Father has once said that they didn't have any relatives, so he took them to work as servants.
".... That's weird.
We played together so often when we were small, but I can't remember their names."
I close my eyes and cast my mind back.

I should be able to remember.
She was a girl who was always cheerful.. so cheerful that you would become cheerful just by looking at her.
A girl with a carefree personality who was loved by everyone at the mansion.
Because she was close to my age, I got along very well with her, and it seemed like everyday we would run around the garden together.
"Let's play together, Shiki-chan."
She would say, and I could remember her taking me out of my room after I secluded myself inside.
She would often laugh and take shy Akiha's hand, trying to make her play with us.
Maybe she was older than the both of us.
She would guide me and Akiha to play together, but once we started playing, she would just watch over us.
Even Akiha's tutor, the harsh butler, would say "I don't mind, as long as ***** is with you guys", and let Akiha out to play, as if there was no helping it.

In contrast to that girl was the other one.

On the second floor.
While we played in the garden, there was always a girl looking down at us every time I turned to look at the mansion.
She was the twin of that cheerful girl, but she would always gaze at us expressionlessly.
That girl would never try to leave the house.
All she would do was watch us with those cold eyes.
—Well, in the end, I only ended up talking a little with her.

"I wonder if those girls are still at the mansion.."
While I think about that, I take a white ribbon out of my bag.
An old white ribbon that the girls gave me at the very end.

—Eight years ago.

After I was involved in the accident.
The day I was entrusted to the Arima family.
Right before I was to leave the mansion, the girl gave me this for some reason.
.... I'm just lending it to you, so be sure to return it.
Saying something along those lines, she ran off.
Afterwards, I was quickly found by one of the servants and taken to the front entrance.
With no one to see me off, I walked out of the gates of that giant mansion while the Arima lady held my hand.
It was my last memory of when I left the Tohno mansion, eight years ago.

sigh

I put the ribbon back in my bag.
"But it's been eight years, after all.."
Not only do I not know if they are still at the mansion, I can't even remember their names.
To make things worse, I can't even remember which girl gave me the ribbon.
".... Still, it's not like it was some important promise or anything."
But I want to keep the promise, as long as I still remember it.
I agreed to return to the mansion because Akiha is now there all by herself.
I left her there for eight years, pushing all responsibility onto her while I selfishly lived freely.
I am going back because I feel guilty for what I did to her.
.... I didn't exactly plan to use this as an opportunity to do so, but if that girl is still at the mansion, I want to properly fulfill the promise from eight years ago.

setvar hisuiregard + 2

turn to **24**

23

Apparently, Akiha tried to visit me a few times when I first was entrusted to the Arimas.

Unfortunately, we were never able to meet because I had to go to the hospital every day.

We completely lost contact after Akiha went to a boarding school.

Unlike Akiha, I am isolated from the main family.

That's why I can live freely like this.

My high school is just an average high school and our chance of contact was pretty much zero.

My old man died and I received word telling me to come back.

To be blunt, I had no intention whatsoever of returning to the Tohno house.

But Akiha is at that house.

When we were children..

Akiha was an obedient child, always looking frightened, as if she were constantly enduring something.

She would always follow close behind, her footsteps pattering behind me.

She was frail, and her long black hair and fancy western clothes made her resemble a French doll.

I am worried about her living all alone in that big mansion, with the old man gone.

But more than anything—I feel guilty, after pushing all the Tohno family responsibilities on her and selfishly living a free life by myself.

Perhaps my acceptance to return to the mansion is like my apology to Akiha.

The Tohno mansion is unnecessarily big.

Surrounded by iron railings, you could say the entire lot is abnormally expansive, being so large that a whole elementary school could fit inside.

The garden, surrounded by trees, is more like a forest.

The mansion is at the heart of that forest, and there are a few other buildings separated from it.

I didn't think anything of it when I was a child, but now that I have lived in an ordinary household for eight years, the excessive size feels almost criminal.

The gates aren't locked.

I push them open, and head towards the mansion doors.

They tower oppressively, bearing down on any visitors.

Beside the iron double doors is an unmatched doorbell.

"... Alright."

Shaking off my nervousness, I press it.

There isn't any affectionate "Ding-dong" chime from the doorbell.

The oppressive silence continues for a few seconds.

Then, the sound of pattering footsteps behind the door indicates someone's presence.

"We have been waiting for you."
 The door opens with a creak.
 Inside lay the lobby I remembered, and a young girl in an apron.



"Thank goodness.
 You're so late I was beginning to worry that you had gotten lost.
 I was thinking about going out to meet you if you hadn't arrived by sunset."
 The girl in the anachronistic apron smiles warmly.
 "Ah, no—that's.. uh.."
 I am so taken aback by her outdated mode of dress that I can't even form a proper sentence.
 Perhaps attributing my hesitance to distrust, the girl tilts her head a little.
 "You're Shiki-sama, aren't you?"
 "Eh—Yeah, but you don't have to call me '-sama'."
 "You are, right?"
 Oh, please don't scare me like that!
 I was beginning to think I had made another mistake back there."
 The girl's mannerisms are like those of a mother scolding her child.
 But in spite of that, there's a smile on her face, and it doesn't break the warm feeling about her.
 She wears an apron over a kimono;
 she comes out to greet guests and addresses someone like me with '-sama'.
 This must mean that she's..
 "Um, uh.. are you one of the maids here, by any chance?"
 The girl answers my question with nothing but a smile.
 "Come; you must be tired.
 Please do come in.
 Akiha-sama is waiting for you in the sitting room."

The girl quickly crosses the lobby and heads towards the sitting room.
 Turning back as if she just remembered something, she makes a bow, a full smile on her face.



"Welcome home, Shiki-sama."

Her greeting is accompanied by her flower-like smile.
I can't think of any reply, so I just follow her hesitatingly.

Guided by the girl, I head to the sitting room.
—It's as if I'm seeing it for the first time.
I don't know if I've forgotten about it in the last eight years or they had it refurbished since then.
Either way, it feels like someone else's house now, and it's unsettling.
As I'm looking around the sitting room, the maid in the apron lowers her head in a quick bow.
"I've brought Shiki-sama with me."
"Well done.
You may return to the kitchen, Kohaku."
"Thank you."
It seems that maid's name is Kohaku.
Kohaku-san gives a small bow, as if to say farewell, and leaves the sitting room.
This leaves me, and—two girls I don't recognize.





"It has been a long time, Nii-san,"
 says the girl with the long black hair and sharp eyes.
 All my thought processes stop at once.
 My mind goes blank, and I can't think of any words of greeting.
 All I can do is nod with a "Yeah."
 I don't think it can be helped.
 This Akiha that I had not seen in eight years is not the Akiha I remember.
 She's completely transformed into a proper young lady of a noble family.
 "Nii-san?"
 The black-haired girl tilts her head slightly.
 "Ah.. um."
 Pathetically, all I can say are dumb-sounding things.
 My mind is turning in somersaults as I try to recognize the girl before me as
 Akiha, but it seems like Akiha already recognizes me as her brother.
 "You do not look well.
 Would you like to rest before we talk?"
 Akiha throws a sharp glance in my direction.
 Is it just my imagination that she looks like she's in a bad mood?
 ".... No, I'm alright.
 I was just surprised at how much you've changed, Akiha."
 "People do change over the course of eight years, Nii-san.
 We are at an age of change—or did you think we would remain as we were for-
 ever?"
 What is this?

.... I can feel the thorns in Akiha's words.
"No, you've definitely changed, Akiha.
You've become more beautiful than before."
That isn't flattery.
It's how I really feel.
—And.
"Indeed.
But you, on the other hand, have not changed much at all."
Akiha answers coldly, her eyes closed.
"...."
.... Well, I came prepared for something like this.
It is as I had thought.
It seems Akiha does not think well of me.
"If you are feeling well, let us finish our conversation.
You have yet to hear the details about why you were called back here, Nii-san?"
"I've heard nothing more than a sudden 'Come back to the mansion', though I found out the old man passed away on the papers."
.... If the head of a major company dies, it definitely makes it on the financial papers.
Word of Tohno Makihisa's death reached his son, Tohno Shiki, via the newspaper after the funeral.
Even though his relatives hadn't told him, this disinherited son could pick up news of his father's death merely by buying a one hundred yen newspaper.
It might be cynical of me to say so, but the world has certainly become a convenient place.



".... I am sorry.
It was my fault that you did not get the news about Father."
Akiha quietly lowers her head.
"It's alright.
Either way, it's not like he would come back from the dead if I went.
It's not something you should be worried about."
".... I am sorry.
It is somewhat comforting to hear you say that."
Akiha's face is serious, but this is not a topic I care much about.

A funeral is a ceremony for those who cannot let go of their feelings for the deceased to achieve such detachment.
For someone like me, who cut off such feelings a long time ago, there is no need.



"Calling you back here was my idea.
It would be odd for the eldest son of the Tohnos to be entrusted to the Arimas forever.



Now that Father has passed away, the only Tohnos by blood are you and I, Nii-san.
I don't know what Father was thinking when he entrusted you to the Arimas, but he's no longer with us, so there's no longer any need for you to live with them.
That is why I had you come back here."
".... That's all well and good, but I'm quite surprised you were able to get our relatives to agree to this.
Wasn't it they who came up with the idea of leaving me with the Arimas in the first place?"
"That may be so, but now I am the head of the Tohno family.
I declined every one of the proposals from our relatives.



I would like you to continue living here, Nii-san, but this is a place with rules. You will avoid living the overly casual lifestyle you've been leading up until now."

"Haha.

I'm afraid that isn't going to happen, Akiha.

There's no way I can go back to being some well-mannered gentleman now.

Not that I want to."



"I will not ask more of you but do try to—or are you saying you are unable to do what I already have?"

Akiha shoots me a cold look.

It feels like she's hitting me with her grudge against me for leaving her here for the last eight years.

"... Alright.

I get it.

I'll try my best."

Akiha just stares at me, as if she doesn't quite believe me.



"You do not need to try, as long as you get the results."

Her pose is dignified, her words merciless.

"Let's get back to the topic.

Right now, you and I are the only ones living here.

I do not care for having too many people around, so I cleared everyone out."

"Eh?"

Hold on a second, Akiha.

You 'cleared everyone out'?"

"You wouldn't want to run into one of our relatives in the mansion, would you, Nii-san?"

I have put off most of the servants, but there are enough for you and I, so there are no problems."

"Wait, 'no problems'?"

You're going to get attacked at our family meeting if you do something like that!"



"Oh, please be quiet.

Rather than have the mansion overflowing with people, wouldn't you feel more relaxed with just the two of us here?"

.... Urgh.

Well, it's true that I would feel relaxed, but..

"But you've only just become head of the family, Akiha.

If you go around abusing your powers like some kind of dictator, our relatives are not going to keep quiet.

Even the old man didn't go against their opinions."



"Indeed.
That's why father entrusted you to the Arimas.
I, on the other hand, have despised them ever since I was a child.
I am not going to put up with their whining any longer."
"Not going to put up with'.. look, Akiha—"

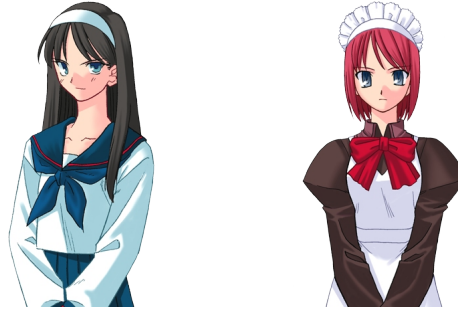


"Ahh, enough!
Just listen!
You don't have to worry about me!
Please, just worry about your own life from now on, Nii-san.
I can see it's going to be difficult for you in many ways."
Akiha says sullenly, looking away a little.
"Now then, if there's anything you don't understand, ask her—Hisui."



She looks at the girl standing by her side.

The girl called Hisui bows expressionlessly.



"This is Hisui.

She will be your personal maid from now on.

Is that acceptable with you?"

—Eh?

"Hold on.. personal maid?

You mean..?"

"In other words, she's your servant."

Akiha declares, as if it were obvious.

.... I can't believe it.

With the western style of the house, the girl in the maid outfit stands there, as if it is natural to do so.

"—Hold on.

I'm not a kid, you know.

I don't need a servant.

I can take care of myself."

"Would that include the cooking and the laundry?"

Urgh.

Akiha is pretty sharp at pointing these things out.



"At any rate, now that you've returned to this house, you will obey my directions.

I don't know how you lived at the Arima house, but you're living at the Tohno house now.

Please accept everything given to you."

"Urgh.."

I can't say anything, and I drift my eyes towards Hisui.

As expected, she simply looks back at me expressionlessly like a doll.

"Well then, Hisui.

Please show Nii-san to his room."

"Yes, my lady."

Hisui approaches me with a shadow-like lack of presence.

"I will guide you to your room, Shiki-sama."

Hisui heads towards the lobby.

Sighing, I head off towards the lobby as well.

We enter the lobby.

This mansion is split into east and west wings, with the lobby in the middle.

The lobby is like the body of a bird whose wings are the halls extending diagonally to the east and west.

Each wing is about the size of a small hospital.

I remember the house is constructed symmetrically, so both the east and west wings have the same floor plan.

"Your room is this way, Shiki-sama."

Hisui climbs up a flight of stairs.

It seems like my room is on the second floor.

.... Come to think of it, the servants' rooms should be on the first floor of the west wing, so that's probably where Hisui and Kohaku-san's rooms are.

Outside, the sun has already set.

The girl in the maid uniform walks down the long, dimly lit hallway without a word.

".... It kind of feels like a wonderland."

Without thinking, I let my thoughts slip out.



"Did you say something, Shiki-sama?"

Hisui stops and looks back at me.

"No, I'm just talking to myself."

Don't worry about it."

"....."

After staring at me, Hisui bows and starts walking again.

"...."

I guess this is what they call being 'at a loss for words'.

The room Hisui led me to is not one made for a mere high school student to live in.

".... Is this my room?"



"Yes.

If you are displeased with it, I can arrange a different one for you."

"No, there's no way I could be displeased with it.

It's—"

It's just a little—no, really too fancy for me.

"Shiki-sama?"

"—It's fine.

I'll gladly use this room."

"Yes.

This room has not been touched since eight years ago, so I do not believe you will find anything unsatisfactory with it."

"_?"

There's something a little odd about the way Hisui said that.

It's as if she was implying this was once my room.

".... Hey.

Is this by any chance my old room?"



"That is what I have been told.
Am I mistaken?"
Hisui inclines her head to the side slightly.

.... I feel relieved.
It seems this girl can express emotion after all.
"... Well, it might be, now that you mention it.
I do remember it faintly, so it must be so."
I can't feel any sense of familiarity about this place at all, but I guess that's
what it's like after you leave a place for eight years.
"I can't get settled here, though.
I was living in a six-and-a-half-mat sized room until this morning.
It's like I'm staying in some high class hotel."



"I understand how you feel, but please try to get used to it.
From today onwards, you are the eldest son of the Tohno house, Shiki-sama."
"You're right.
I've got to do my best so I at least look like it on the outside."
With a thump, I drop my bag on the table and stretch my back.
—I've been feeling a little stressed out with everything that's happened so far,
but I guess I've got no choice but to adjust from today onwards.
"Shiki-sama, all of your luggage has been brought here.
Is there anything more you require?"
"—No, not really.
Why do you ask?"

".... There was very little delivered.
If there is anything you need, I can have it prepared, so please do not hesitate to ask."
".... I see.
No, I don't need anything more for now.
I didn't have much luggage to begin with.
My luggage is just this bag, these glasses, and.."
The textbooks in my bag, and that white ribbon with an unidentified owner.
That's all—
"Anyways, you don't have to worry about the luggage.
This fancy room is more than enough for me."
".... I understand.
Well then, I shall come to call you in an hour's time."
"An hour?
For dinner, you mean?"
"Yes.
Please relax until then."
As expected, Hisui says everything with an expressionless face.
.... But even if she tells me to relax, just how am I supposed to do that here?
The clock says it's six o'clock.
Usually, I'd be watching TV in the sitting room around this time, but I'm having serious doubts as to whether there's any such thing in this mansion.
"Hisui.
I know it's kind of a trivial thing to ask about, but is there a television in this mansion?"
"A television..?"
Hisui's eyes narrows slightly.
.... I know I'm the one who asked, but it really is a stupid question.
I feel there's something wrong with asking about the presence of a TV in a luxurious mansion like this.
Hisui makes a rare troubled face, and stares off into space.



".... There is no television in the sitting room.
Some of the visitors did make use of one, but when they departed, they packed it up with their luggage and took it back with them, so I do not believe there

are any remaining."
"Hold on.
Visitors?
Like who?
For how long?"



"Relatives.
The eldest son of Kugamine-sama from a branch of the family, Touzaki-sama's third daughter and her fiancée, and Kishima-sama's eldest son came to stay for close to three years."
"... Three years, huh?
Hisui, that's what you'd call freeloaders, not visitors."
Hisui does not reply.
No matter what kind of people these freeloaders were, it seems that servants can't say anything bad about them.
Well, at any rate, it seems like those relatives had brought, and taken back, their own luggage with them.
My old man hated the products of modern culture, thinking them all vulgar.
There was no way he would ever watch a TV.
Akiha, who had been educated by him for the last eight years, would probably be the same.
"—Well, it's not like I'll die without one."
Hisui is silent.
.... Like a perfect example for servants, Hisui says nothing unless she is being asked a direct question.
This is, of course, kind of depressing for me.
I want to make that expressionless face break into a smile somehow, but that seems impossible with just any old half-hearted effort.
"Oh, there was a library on the first floor of the west wing, wasn't there?
Maybe I'll go find something to read when I have some free time."
Hisui does not reply.
She just stands there in the doorway.
I can't even tell where she's looking.
"—Hisui?"
Hisui doesn't say a word.

Suddenly, she looks straight at me.

"I believe there is one in Nee-san's room."

"Huh?"

I have no idea what she's talking about.

"... Uh.. there's one of what?"

"A television.

I remember seeing one in Nee-san's room."

Hisui says, as if remembering something from many years ago.

"Hold on.

Nee-san?

Don't tell me you're talking about Kohaku-san?"

"Yes.

Right now, the only people working at this mansion are Nee-san and I."

Now that she mentions it, they do look alike.

I just couldn't connect them as sisters because Kohaku-san is always smiling so warmly, and Hisui is always expressionless.

"I see.

Kohaku-san does look like the type of person who'd watch those variety shows."

But I balk at going to Kohaku-san's room to tell her, "Let me watch your TV."

"Sorry, just forget I ever asked.

After all, I'll be living here from now on, so I've got to follow the rules of the mansion."

God knows what sort of cynical comment I'd be in for from Akiha if I started watching television.

It seems I'll be leading a scholarly student life fit for a member of the Tohno family from now on.

"Alright.

I'll be in my room until dinner, so just come and call me when it's time.

You've got other things to do, don't you, Hisui?"

Hisui nods in assent, and turns around.

Silently opening the door, she leaves the room.

turn to **25**

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"—It's huge."

The words escape my mouth when I reach the gate.

For someone like me, used to living in a normal house, the Tohno mansion seems well out of reality.

".... I wonder if I rushed into this?"

.... No, it's too late to start regretting things now.

The gates aren't locked.

I push them open, and head towards the mansion doors.

They tower oppressively, bearing down on any visitors.

Beside the iron double doors is an unmatching doorbell.

".... Alright."

Shaking off my nervousness, I press it.

There isn't any affectionate "ding-dong" chime from the doorbell.

The oppressive silence continues for a few seconds.

Then, the sound of pattering footsteps behind the door indicates someone's presence.

"We have been waiting for you."

The door opens with a creak.

Inside is the lobby I remembered and a young girl in an apron.



"Thank goodness.

You're so late I was beginning to worry that you had gotten lost.

I was thinking about going out to meet you if you hadn't arrived by sunset."

The girl in the anachronistic apron smiles warmly.

"Ah, no—that's.. uh.."

I am so taken aback by her outdated mode of dress that I can't even form a proper sentence.

Perhaps attributing my hesitation to distrust, the girl tilts her head a little.

"You're Shiki-sama, aren't you?"

"Eh—Yeah, but you don't have to call me '-sama'."

"You are, right?"

Oh, please don't scare me like that!

I was beginning to think I had made another mistake back there."
She gives a good-natured laugh.

I have no basis for this, but she fits the image perfectly.
"Um.. uh.. could it be that you're the girl who played together with us when we were small?"
I inquire tentatively.



She gives a full smile, looking truly happy.
"Come; you must be tired, right?
Please do come in.
Akiha-sama is waiting for you in the sitting room."

The girl quickly crosses the lobby and heads towards the sitting room.
Turning back as if she just remembered something, she makes a bow, a full smile on her face.



"Welcome home, Shiki-sama."
Her greeting is accompanied by her flower-like smile.
I can't think of any reply, so I just follow her hesitantly.

Guided by the girl, I head to the sitting room.
—It's as if I'm seeing it for the first time.
I don't know if I've forgotten about it in the last eight years or if they had it refurbished since then.

Either way, it feels like someone else's house now, and it's unsettling. As I'm looking around the sitting room, the maid in the apron lowers her head in a quick bow.

"I've brought Shiki-sama with me."

"Well done.

You may return to the kitchen, Kohaku."

"Thank you."

It seems that maid's name is Kohaku.

Kohaku-san gives a small bow, as if to say farewell, and leaves the sitting room.

This leaves me, and—two girls I don't recognize.



"It has been a long time, Nii-san,"
says the girl with the long black hair and sharp eyes.

.... All my thought processes stop at once.
My mind goes blank, and I can't think of any words of greeting.
All I can do is nod with a "Yeah."
.... I don't think it can be helped.
This Akiha that I had not seen in eight years is not the Akiha I remember.
She's completely transformed into a proper young lady of a noble family.
"Nii-san?"
The black-haired girl tilts her head slightly.
"Ah.. um."
Pathetically, all I can say are dumb-sounding things.
My mind is turning in somersaults as I try to recognize the girl before me as Akiha, but it seems like Akiha already recognizes me as her brother.
"You do not look well.
Would you like to rest before we talk?"
Akiha throws a sharp glance in my direction.
.... Is it just my imagination that she looks like she's in a bad mood?
".... No, I'm alright.
I was just surprised at how much you've changed, Akiha."
"People do change over the course of eight years, Nii-san.
We are at an age of change—or did you think we'd remain like back then forever?"
.... What is this?
.... I can feel the thorns in Akiha's words.
"No, you've definitely changed, Akiha.
You've become more beautiful than before."
That isn't flattery.
It's how I really feel.
—And.
"Indeed.
But you, on the other hand, have not changed much at all."
Akiha answers coldly, her eyes closed.
"...."
.... Well, I came prepared for something like this.
It is as I had thought.
It seems Akiha does not think well of me.
"If you are feeling well, let us finish our conversation.
You have yet to hear the details about why you were called back here, Nii-san?"
"I've heard nothing more than a sudden 'Come back to the mansion', though I found out in the papers the old man passed away."
.... If the head of a major company dies, it definitely makes it on the financial papers.
Word of Tohno Makihisa's death reached his son, Tohno Shiki, via the newspaper after the funeral.
Even though his relatives hadn't told him, this disinherited son could pick up news of his father's death merely by buying a one hundred yen newspaper.
It might be cynical of me to say so, but the world has certainly become a con-

venient place.



".... I am sorry.

It was my fault that you did not get the news about Father."

Akiha quietly lowers her head.

"It's alright.

Either way, it's not like he would come back from the dead if I went.

It's not something you should be worried about."

".... I am sorry.

It is somewhat comforting to hear you say that."

Akiha's face is serious, but this is not a topic I care much about.

A funeral is a ceremony for those who cannot not detach their feelings for the deceased to achieve such detachment.

For someone like me, who cut off such feelings a long time ago, there is no need.



"Calling you back here was my idea.

It would be odd for the eldest son of the Tohnos to be entrusted to the Arimas forever.



Now that Father has passed away, the only Tohnos by blood are you and I, Nii-san.

I don't know what Father was thinking when he entrusted you to the Arimas, but he's no longer with us, so there's no longer any need for you to live with them.

That is why I had you come back here."

"... That's all well and good, but I'm quite surprised you were able to get our relatives to agree to this.

Wasn't it they who came up with the idea of leaving me with the Arimas in the first place?"

"That may be so, but now I am the head of the Tohno family.

I declined every one of the proposals from our relatives.



I would like you to continue living here, Nii-san, but this is a place with rules. You will avoid living the overly casual lifestyle you've been leading up until now."

"Haha.

I'm afraid that isn't going to happen, Akiha.

There's no way I can go back to being some well-mannered gentleman now.

Not that I want to."



"I will not ask more of you, but do try to—or are you saying you are unable to do what I already have?"

Akiha shoots me a cold look.

It feels like she's hitting me with her grudge against me for leaving her here for the last eight years.

"... Alright.

I get it.

I'll try my best."

Akiha just stares at me, as if she doesn't quite believe me.



"You do not need to try, as long as you get the results."

Her pose is dignified, her words merciless.

"Let's get back to the topic.

Right now, you and I are the only ones living here.

I do not care to have too many people around, so I cleared everyone out."

"Eh?"

Hold on a second, Akiha.

You 'cleared everyone out'?"

"You wouldn't want to run into one of our relatives in the mansion, would you, Nii-san?"

I have put off most of the servants, but there are enough for you and I, so there are no problems."

"Wait, 'no problems'?"

You're going to get attacked at our family meeting if you do something like that!"



"Oh, please be quiet.

Rather than have the mansion overflowing with people, wouldn't you feel more relaxed with just the two of us here?"

.... Urgh.

Well, it's true that I would feel relaxed, but..

"But you've only just become head of the family, Akiha.

If you go around abusing your powers like some kind of dictator, our relatives are not going to keep quiet.

Even the old man didn't go against their opinions."



"Indeed.

That's why father entrusted you to the Arimas.

I, on the other hand, have despised them ever since I was a child.

I am not going to put up with their whining any longer."

"Not going to put up with'.. look, Akiha—"



"Ahh, enough!
Just listen!
You don't have to worry about me!
Please, just worry about your own life from now on, Nii-san.
I can see it's going to be difficult for you in many ways."
Akiha says sullenly, looking away a little.
"Now then, if there's anything you don't understand, ask her—Hisui."

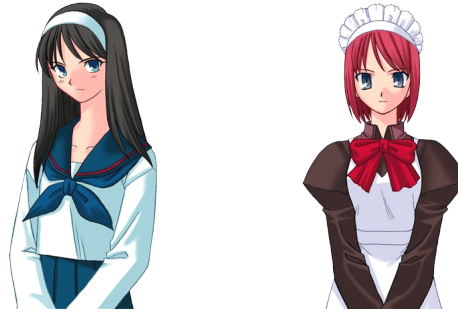


She looks at the girl standing by her side.
The girl called Hisui bows expressionlessly.



"This is Hisui.
She will be your personal maid from now on.
Is that acceptable with you?"
——Eh?

"Wa-personal maid?
 You mean..?"
 "In other words, she's your servant."
 Akiha declares, as if it were obvious.
 I can't believe it.
 tting with the western style of the house, the girl in the maid outfit stands there,
 as if it is natural to do so.
 "-Hold on.
 I'm not a kid, you know.
 I don't need a servant.
 I can take care of myself."
 "Would that include the cooking and the laundry?"
 Urgh.
 Akiha is pretty sharp at pointing these things out.



"At any rate, now that you've returned to this house, you will obey my directions.
 I don't know how you lived at the Arima house, but you're living at the Tohno house now.
 Please accept everything given to you."
 "Urgh.."
 I can't say anything and I drift my eyes towards Hisui.
 As expected, she simply looks back at me expressionlessly like a doll.
 "Well then, Hisui.
 Please show Nii-san to his room."

"Yes, my lady."
 Hisui approaches me with a shadow-like lack of presence.
 "I will guide you to your room, Shiki-sama."
 Hisui heads towards the lobby.
 Sighing, I head off towards the lobby too.

We enter the lobby.
 This mansion is split into east and west wings, with the lobby in the middle.
 The lobby is like the body of a bird whose wings are the halls extending diago-

nally to the east and west.

Each wing is about the size of a small hospital.

I remember the house is constructed symmetrically, so both the east and west wings have the same floor plan.

"Your room is this way, Shiki-sama."

Hisui climbs up a flight of stairs.

It seems like my room is on the second floor.

.... Come to think of it, the servants' rooms should be on the first floor of the west wing, so that's probably where Hisui and Kohaku-san's rooms are.

Outside, the sun has already set.

The girl in the maid uniform walks down the long, dimly lit hallway without a word.

".... It kind of feels like a wonderland."

Without thinking, I let my thoughts slip out.



"Did you say something, Shiki-sama?"

Hisui stops and looks back at me.

"No, I'm just talking to myself.

Don't worry about it."

"....."

After staring at me, Hisui bows and starts walking again.



".... Is this my room?"

"Yes."

If you are displeased with it, I can arrange a different one for you."

"No, there's no way I could be displeased with it.

It's—"

It's just a little—no, really too fancy for me.

"Shiki-sama?"

"—It's fine.

I'll gladly use this room."

"Understood.

This room has not been touched since eight years ago, so I do not believe you will find anything unsatisfactory with it."

"_?"

There's something a little odd about the way Hisui said that.

It's as if she was implying this was once my room.

".... Hey.

Is this by any chance my old room?"



"That is what I have been told.

Am I mistaken?"

Hisui inclines her head to the side slightly.

.... I feel relieved.

It seems this girl can express emotion after all.

".... Well, it might be, now that you mention it.

I do remember it faintly, so it must be so."

I can't feel any sense of familiarity about this place at all, but I guess that's what it's like after you leave a place for eight years.

"I can't get settled here, though.

I was living in a six-and-a-half-mat sized room until this morning.

It's like I'm staying in some high class hotel."



"I understand how you feel, but please try to get used to it.
From today onwards, you are the eldest son of the Tohno house, Shiki-sama."



"You're right.
I've got to do my best so I at least look like it on the outside."
With a thump, I drop my bag on the table and stretch my back.
—I've been feeling a little stressed out with everything that's happened so far,
but I guess I've got no choice but to adjust from today onwards.
"Shiki-sama, all of your luggage has been brought here.
Is there anything more you require?"
"—No, not really.
Why do you ask?"
"... There was very little delivered.
If there is anything you need, I can have it prepared, so please do not hesitate
to ask."
"... I see.
No, I don't need anything more for now.
I didn't have much luggage to begin with.
My luggage is just this bag, these glasses, and.."
The textbooks in my bag, and that white ribbon with an unidentified owner.
That's all—
"Ah."
That's right.
I haven't asked her the important thing yet.
"Can I ask you something, Hisui?"

"Yes.

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Um.. I'm sorry if I'm mistaken about this, but you and Kohaku-san are sisters, right?"



"___"

For an instant, surprise flashes in Hisui's expressionless eyes.



".... Yes.

Kohaku is my older sister."

"Really?"

Great!

Then that means you two must be the girls who once lived here!"

I am so happy that I inadvertently raise my voice.

"....."

In direct contrast to my joy, Hisui does not move.

"Hisui..?"

You and Kohaku-san were the children taken in here, aren't you?

We used to play together.

I wonder if you remember—"

I close my mouth as soon as I speak.

.... No.

The girl I had played together with was the bright and cheerful one.

The one who just gazed at us with those cold eyes has to be—

" Um.. I played together with your sister quite often.

Hisui..?"

"Yes, I know.

Two years before you went to the Arima household, Makihisa-sama took in Neesan and I."

Hisui speaks as if disinterested.

.... It's good that I know Hisui and Kohaku-san are the twins from my memories, but it seems Hisui doesn't think much of it.

".... I see.

I didn't talk to you much, I'm sorry for getting so worked up."



"You have nothing to apologize for, Shiki-sama.

I must also apologize for my rudeness to you when I was younger."

Hisui lowers her head.

"_____"

I feel really uneasy.

I know Hisui doesn't mean to make me feel bad, but I don't know how to respond when a girl the same age as me says that to me.



"Do you have any other requests, Shiki-sama?"

"Ah.. no, nothing in particular."

"Very well.

I shall come to call you in an hour's time.

Please relax until then."

As I expected, Hisui says everything with an expressionless face.

By one hour later, she must mean dinner.

.... But even if she tells me to relax.. how would I do that here?

The clock says it's around six o'clock.

Usually, I'd be watching TV in the sitting room around this time, but I'm having serious doubts as to whether there's any such thing in this mansion.

"Hisui.

I know it's kind of a trivial thing to ask about, but is there a television in this mansion?"

"A television..?"

Hisui's eyes narrows slightly.

.... I know I'm the one who asked, but it really is a stupid question.

I feel there's something wrong with asking about the presence of a TV in a luxurious mansion like this.



Hisui makes a rare troubled face, and stares off into space.

".... There is no television in the sitting room.

Some of the visitors did make use of one, but when they departed, they packed it up with their luggage and took it back with them, so I do not believe there are any remaining."

"Hold on.

Visitors?

Like who?

For how long?"



"Relatives.

The eldest son of Kugamine-sama from a branch of the family, Touzaki-sama's

third daughter and her fiancée, and Kishima-sama's eldest son came to stay for close to three years."

"... Three years, huh?"

Hisui, that's what you'd call freeloaders, not visitors."

Hisui does not reply.

No matter what kind of people these freeloaders were, it seems that servants can't say anything bad about them.

Well, at any rate, it seems like those relatives had brought, and taken back, their own luggage with them.

My old man hated the products of modern culture, thinking them all vulgar.

There was no way he would ever watch a TV.

Akiha, who had been educated by him for the last eight years, would probably be the same.

"—Well, it's not like I'll die without one."

Hisui is silent.

... Like a perfect example for servants, Hisui says nothing unless she is being asked a direct question.

This is, of course, kind of depressing for me.

I want to make that expressionless face break into a smile somehow, but that seems impossible with just any old half-hearted effort.

"Oh, there was a library on the first floor of the west wing, wasn't there?"

Maybe I'll go find something to read when I have some free time."

Hisui does not reply.

She just stands there in the doorway.

I can't even tell where she's looking.

"—Hisui?"

Hisui doesn't say a word.

Suddenly, she looks straight at me.

"I believe there is one in Nee-san's room."

"Huh?"

I have no idea what she's talking about.

"... Uh.. there's one of what?"

"A television.

I remember seeing one in Nee-san's room."

Hisui says, as if remembering something from many years ago.

"I see.

Kohaku-san does look like the type of person who'd watch those variety shows."

But I balk at going to Kohaku-san's room to tell her, "Let me watch your TV."

"Sorry, just forget I ever asked.

After all, I'll be living here from now on, so I've got to follow the rules of the mansion."

God knows what sort of cynical comment I'd be in for from Akiha if I started watching television.

It seems I'll be leading a scholarly student life fit for a member of the Tohno family from now on.

"Alright.

I'll be in my room until dinner, so just come and call me when it's time.
You've got other things to do, don't you, Hisui?"
Hisui nods in assent, and turns around.

Silently opening the door, she leaves the room.

turn to **25**

25

Dinner takes place with Akiha and I being face to face.
I guess it's natural here, as Hisui and Kohaku-san do not eat with us, standing behind us to tend to our needs.

.... I thought it would be natural if all four of us ate together, so you could say I am caught off guard by this inexplicably tense dinner.

I should mention at this point that I've totally forgotten anything related to table manners by now.

Well, I do remember little pieces, so it's not like I'm a complete amateur, but humans tend to pack away unused memories into the corners of the mind.

The tension was actually quite thrilling, with every one of my movements causing Akiha to raise an eyebrow.

.... When I think about how I'll have to go through this every day, though, it's really depressing.

Finishing dinner, I return to my room.
It's still only just past eight at night.
It's too early to sleep, so what should I do?

- Go to the sitting room and talk with Akiha. turn to **26**
- Stay in my own room. turn to **27**
- Go watch TV in Kohaku-san's room. turn to **28**

26

When I get to the sitting room, Akiha is relaxing there alone.
There's no sign of Kohaku-san or Hisui.
There are two teacups on the table, and Akiha is using one of them.



"Oh?
Do you drink tea after meals, too, Nii-san?"
"Ah, no.. nothing like that.
I just thought I'd come and talk to you."
My expression tells her, "I'll go away if I'm bothering you."



"Then, please, sit down.
Is tea alright for you?"
"Ah, sure; I'll have anything that's nice."
I actually prefer Japanese tea, but I'll keep that bit of selfishness to myself.
Akiha takes the teapot and pours transparent red tea into another teacup.
"Thank you."
I sit on the sofa, and raise the teacup to my mouth.
.... Before my eyes is the cool and collected Akiha, and it makes me a bit uneasy.
I came to talk to her, but to be honest, I really don't know what to say now
that she's in front of me.



"Nii-san?

You're very quiet.

Didn't you come to talk to me?"

Akiha stares.

The atmosphere is not so much that of a younger sister, but more like that of an unfamiliar young lady.

It's not one in which I can speak freely.

"Well.. I was just wondering, what you have been doing for the past eight years."



"It goes without saying.

With Nii-san not around, father's attention turned solely to me."

Akiha glares in complaint.

It seems that the last eight years are a taboo subject.



"And what about you?"

What have you been doing for eight years?
I sent many letters, but didn't receive a single reply."
"... Ack."
I choke involuntarily.
Certainly, Akiha sent many letters.
But I never replied.
I was a poor correspondent, but at the bottom of my heart I wanted to sever all links with the Tohno mansion, and that made me reluctant to write to Akiha.



"Well, don't worry about the letters.
Even if you had answered, I'm sure father would never have allowed the replies into the house.
More importantly, how do you feel, returning to the mansion for the first time in eight years?
It has changed very little.. though there was some restoration work done."
"___"
In spite of Akiha's words, the mansion still feels completely unknown to me.
Eight years ago, I was just a child.
Even if I remember the mansion a little, I feel like I'm in someone else's house and it's very unsettling.



"Nii-san?"
"Ah, no, I was just lost in thought for a moment.
Um, you say this mansion's changed very little, but it's pretty unsettling for me.

Though this sitting room and the lobby are kind of familiar, I can't really remember the corridor, nor my room."

"Really.. I guess eight years is a long time."

I guess that's it.

It's like half my life so far.

I can't really expect to have clear memories.

"Well, it's been eight years so it doesn't feel right, but I think I'll get used to it. I'll be thankful if you overlook my poor manners for a while."



"Please, don't be ridiculous.

I can hardly look any more leniently upon Nii-san's manners than I do already."

"Buh..!"

Ugh... That was close.

I almost sprayed the tea I was drinking.

At supper, Akiha's look sent me into a cold sweat after all I did was use the wrong knife.

".... I see.

You were being lenient back then.."



"Yes.

I am making concessions appropriate to your abilities.

Nii-san has been brought up by the Arimas, after all.

As Aunt Keiko comes from a branch family, a certain amount of laissez-faire was permitted, and you were spoiled, Nii-san.

The result is the supper we had a while ago."

"Well, it can't be helped, can it?
We never really thought I'd be returning here."
"... Is that so?
You almost sound like you didn't want to return, Nii-san."
"Don't be stupid, it's not like that.
I may have had my doubts, but I couldn't just leave you alone here, could I?
What kind of brother would I be then?"

Yes.
That's the reason I returned.
If it weren't for Akiha, I would never have returned—
"Since I heard nothing for almost eight years, I always wondered whether you
were alright on your own.
I came back to the mansion because I was worried about you."
Looking a little off to the side, I put my honest feelings into words.



"Ah.. well, then, thank—"
"But I guess I was just worrying over nothing.
In the past eight years, you seem to have grown strong.
I'm relieved, but a little disappointed."
No, a bit is saying too little.
Since I only had the image of the calm Akiha back when she was small, the
sharp Akiha right now seems like a different person.



"—Really?"

I'm sorry I didn't meet Nii-san's expectations."
Akiha's eyes are scary.
.... Crap, I think I may have said too much again.



"Well then, Nii-san.
How was life at the Arima residence?"
Akiha asks, still with the frightening expression.
I feel like I'm under terrible pressure, even though I'm only talking to my younger sister.
"Nii-san?
Did you hear what I said?"
"I heard.
Life at the Arimas, right?
It was normal, there were no real problems.
It seems it was more suited for me living there, too."



"That's not what I meant.
How was your health?
I have heard you collapsed a lot from your chronic anemia."
"Ah, yeah, I did for about a year after I left the hospital, but I'm okay now.
I only have problems occasionally, about once a month.
I'm certainly not frail enough to be worried about."
Bluffing, I strike my chest with its scar.
Akiha nods in serious assent.
"But Nii-san, you've also started wearing glasses."

After going to the hospital, did your eyesight fail, also?"

"...."

.... I see.

Akiha doesn't know I wear glasses or why I wear them.

I can't just explain the lines along which things break, or that they don't appear when I wear these glasses.

"Well, it's nothing.

My eyes became a little strange after the accident.

But it's not like my eyesight's gone bad, so it's not really a serious problem."



"Really.. I was.. well, I was surprised when I saw you a while ago.

I didn't know you had started wearing glasses, Nii-san."

"Really?"

You seemed pretty calm back then."



"Of course.

I was meeting you for the first time in eight years; I couldn't let you see me acting strange."

Akiha's brow creases sullenly.



"Akiha-sama?
The bath is ready; what should I do?"



"Really?
Thank you, Kohaku.
I'll go soon, so go ahead."



"Ah, is that alright?
After all, you're relaxing with Shiki-sama.
Shiki-sama might run away, but the bath won't.
Please relax a little longer."
"It's fine.
We weren't talking about anything important anyways."



Akiha stands, and walks past Kohaku-san into the lobby.

Kohaku-san follows Akiha.

Left alone in the sitting room, I finish the tea.

Akiha and Kohaku-san seem to be heading to the bath, so I guess I'll go back to my room.

".... Hang on.

Akiha and Kohaku-san aren't going to take a bath together, are they..?"

No, I bet they are.

Then maybe Kohaku-san would be washing her back..?

Of course, with another girl, that's no problem, but..



"—Well, you are free to imagine whatever you wish, Nii-san, but.."

"—!"

Akiha returns with amazing timing.



"Don't force Hisui to do stupid things.
Unlike Kohaku, she doesn't really get jokes."
Akiha's looks accusingly as if she sees my thoughts.
I'm surprised..
Maybe this mansion has some listening devices.
".... Wait, what are you doing back here?
Weren't you taking a bath with Kohaku-san?"
"I forgot to tell you something about the bath.
Nii-san, the large bathroom we used a long time ago isn't used anymore.
It would be too much for Hisui and Kohaku to take care of, so it has been closed up."
".... Large bathroom?"
Was there such a place?
I splutter a bit.
Unable to remember, I make a doubtful face.
Akiha's brows knit terribly.
"The bath in the courtyard.
You don't even remember that?"
.... Well, now that she mentions it, I guess there was such a thing.
".... But, this is a European-style mansion.
Isn't such a thing a little out of place?"



"Father half-liked the Japanese-style of architecture.
That is why the detached building is Japanese-style as well.
"Anyway, if you want to have a bath, please use your own; the second bathroom

behind the lobby is yours, Nii-san."
With that, Akiha leaves.

".... Alright."
With Akiha gone, there's no point in staying in the sitting room.
I'll have a bath, too, and return to my room.

"Ah—"
When I return to my room, my bed has been made. I guess Hisui did it when I was gone.
"I'm glad she did, but it's really more than I deserve."
I scratch my cheek.
——Then.

"Are you there, Shiki-sama?"
I can hear Hisui's voice along with a knock at the door.
"Yeah, I'm here."
Come in."



"Excuse me."



"Good evening.
Thanks for making my bed, Hisui."
Hisui quietly nods in acceptance.

".... Urgh."

Just as I thought, I'm not used to this.

".... Uh.. is there anything else you want to tell me?"

"No, nothing from me, but Akiha-sama has instructed me to answer any questions you may have."

".... I see.

There are many things I want to ask, but I'll probably get to know them as I continue to live here...."

Yeah.

What I want to know right now before I sleep is—

"Is it true that the curfew here is seven?"

"Yes.

The main gate is locked at seven, and all the entrances to the mansion are to be locked at eight.

It is also a rule that one must try not to go walking around in the mansion after ten."

"Not even walking around in the mansion?"

.... Well, I've got no complaint with that, but isn't that kind of harsh?

Akiha and I aren't children, so I don't think you have to go that far."

".... Indeed.

It is a rule, however, so please abide by it.

You are aware of the recent disturbances at night, are you not, Shiki-sama?"

.... Yeah, that vampire thing Akihiko was talking about.

Well, as long as something like that is happening, I guess it's better to be safe than sorry.

"What else.. Oh, do you mind if I ask an off-topic question?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I'd like to know what kind of work you and Kohaku-san do around here."

"I am here to serve your needs and my sister Kohaku is to serve the Lady Akiha-sama.

In our spare time, we do the maintenance chores around the mansion.

Is there anything more you would like to know?"

".... To serve.. So that's what it is after all."

My shoulders suddenly feel heavier.

It seemed completely natural to Akiha when she said it, but I'm nothing more than a normal high school student.

I have no interest in having a girl close to my age serving me, at least for now.

".... By serving me, you mean you're a personal servant?"

"Yes.

Please do not hesitate to give me any instructions."

".... Well, I get it.

Going by how Akiha was talking about you, it doesn't seem like I can dismiss you, so I'll just obediently let you serve me.."

"Is there anything in particular you would like?"

"Nothing in particular, but could you stop calling me 'Shiki-sama'?"

To be honest, I get chills down my back when I hear it."

"But Shiki-sama, you are my master."
"That's what I'm saying I hate.
I've been living a normal life up until yesterday.
I have no desire to start living a life where a girl my age addresses me with
'-sama'."
"I see." Hisui's response was less than enthusiastic.
"Just call me Shiki, and in exchange, I'll call you Hisui.
Let's do away with the formalities and be more casual with each other."
Still expressionless, Hisui lowers her eyebrows as if she's being troubled.



"But, you are my employer."
"It's not like I'm hiring you.
You're the one doing the things I can't, so you're the great one."
"I see." Hisui gives another unenthusiastic reply.
.... It looks like I won't be able to talk her into it in just one day.
"—Anyhow, that's how it is.
Don't be so formal towards me.
I'll be grateful if you'd tell that to your sister Kohaku-san, too."



"Very well, as you say, Shiki-sama."
Expressionless, Hisui bows her head.
She completely failed to understand.
"I will be leaving now.
Please rest now for tonight."

Bowing, Hisui puts her hand on the doorknob.
—Oh, I forgot to ask something.
"Ah, hold on for a second."
Running towards the door, I put my hand on Hisui's shoulder before she leaves.

In an instant—Hisui's arm pushes away my arm with incredible momentum.
With a 'whack!', she slaps my hand away and leaps back.



"Eh—?"

It's so sudden, that's the only thing I can say.
Hisui is expressionless, but she glares at me fiercely.
"Eh.. Did I just do something wrong?"



"Ah.."



"... I am very sorry.."
Hisui's voice sounds very nervous.
"... I am not used to being touched.
Please forgive me."
Hisui's shoulders are faintly trembling.
I feel like I just did something really terrible.
"Ah.. Yeah, I'm sorry."
I apologize without thinking.
I don't understand why myself.
I just feel sorry for Hisui and I lower my head.



"——"
Hisui says nothing.
I get the feeling her stare is calm again.



"—You have nothing to apologize for, Shiki-sama.
I am the one to blame."
"No, well, maybe, but I just.."



I scratch my head.

Hisui stares at me, pausing only to blink for a second.

"Um.. What was it you wanted to ask me, Shiki-sama?"

That's right.

I stopped Hisui because I wanted to ask her something.

"Oh, I wanted to ask about Akiha.

Doesn't she go to a boarding school?"

"That was only during middle school, Shiki-sama.

From this year onwards, Akiha-sama has special permission to attend school from home."

"Eh.. You mean she goes to school from here?"

"Yes, but it is uncommon for her to come home before dusk like today.

Akiha-sama has practice up until dinner, so she is always home before seven.

"Practice?—Practice what?"

"Today is Thursday, so she would have had violin practice."

"—Eh?"

"Usually, she is able to return before dinner on weekdays, so if you have anything to say to Akiha-sama, please let Nee-san know after dinner."

Hisui bows to say goodbye, and leaves the room.

"Violin practice.."

What on earth is that?

She's not some upper-class lady or anything, so why should she have to do something as bothersome as—

"... Oh wait, she is an upper-class lady."

Yes.

Come to think of it, my sister, Tohno Akiha, is a natural born upper-class lady. In my memories, she was always the obedient, ever-uneasy sister constantly following me around.

As a child, she was always quiet, never having even the courage to express her own desires.

She was a frail girl who would always live in fear of a scolding from our father.

"—Yeah, people really do change after eight years."

After eight years, I've become the me I am now.

Akiha has become the person she is right now, too.

—Eight years is a long time.

It's half of our lives up until now.

I was absent from this mansion during that vital period where a child becomes an adult.

"... I'm sorry, Akiha."

I think things would have been better if I had been with her during those eight years.

I unknowingly mumble an apology.

```
    setvar akiharegard + 1
if flg6 >= 1
turn to 29
    turn to 30
```

27

"Nnn—"

Stressed from dinner, I loosen my shoulders.
I stretch out as far as I can, and then collapse onto the bed.

"Man, even dinner is hard work."

Well, it's not like the knife and fork are really heavy.
It's just that Akiha's gaze is really severe.

"Are you there, Shiki-sama?"

I can hear Hisui's voice along with a knock at the door.

"Yeah, I'm here.

Come in."

"Excuse me."

Hisui enters with a bow.



"I have come to make the bed.

You may not enjoy watching it, so would you mind relaxing in the sitting room
for a while?"

"No, I don't mind watching.

I'll just behave myself in the corner, so just go ahead and do your job without
minding me."

Bouncing up from the bed, I move into a corner.

"...."

Hisui looks like she wants to say something, but thinks better of it and silently
begins to make the bed.

"—Hisui."

"Yes?"

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Oh, you can keep making the bed.

There's no need for you to stand up so straight."

"...."

Hisui doesn't answer.

It seems like she's had a servant's education drummed into her.

"Please, just talk to me while you work.

I'm beginning to feel bad because it seems like I'm interfering with your work."
 "If you say so, Shiki-sama, then I will comply."

Hisui silently returns to making the bed.
 "Uh.. is it true that the curfew here is seven?"

"Eh—Oh, yes.
 The main gate is locked at seven, and all the entrances to the mansion are to be locked at eight.
 It is also a rule that one must try not to go walking around in the mansion after ten."
 "Not even walking around in the mansion?
 Well, I've got no complaint with that, but isn't that kind of harsh?
 Akiha and I aren't children, so I don't think you have to go that far."
 ".... Indeed.
 It is a rule, however, so please abide by it.
 You are aware of the recent disturbances at night, are you not, Shiki-sama?"
 Yeah, that vampire thing Arihiko was talking about.
 Well, as long as something like that is happening, I guess it's better to be safe than sorry.



"Do you have any other questions?
 Hisui finishes spreading the sheets, and turns around to face me.
 "Eh.. Let's see—"
 I have all sorts of questions, but I know nothing about Hisui and Kohaku-san.
 "Do you mind if I ask an off-topic question?"
 "Yes, what is it?"
 "I'd like to know what kind of work you and Kohaku-san do around here."
 "I am here to serve your needs and my sister Kohaku is to serve the Lady Akiha-sama.
 In our spare time, we do the maintenance chores around the mansion.
 Is there anything more you would like to know?"
 ".... To serve.. So that's what it is after all."
 My shoulders suddenly feel heavier.
 It seemed completely natural to Akiha when she said it, but I'm nothing more

than a normal high school student.

I have no interest in having a girl close to my age serving me, at least for now.

".... By serving me, you mean you're a personal servant?"

"Yes.

Please do not hesitate to ask anything of me."

".... Well, I get it.

Going by how Akiha was talking about you, it doesn't seem like I can dismiss you, so I'll just obediently let you serve me.."

"Is there anything in particular you would like?"

"Nothing in particular, but could you stop calling me 'Shiki-sama'?"

To be honest, I get chills down my back when I hear it."

"But Shiki-sama, you are my master."

"That's what I'm saying I hate.

I've been living a normal life up until yesterday.

I have no desire to start living a life where a girl my age addresses me with '-sama'."

"I see." Hisui's response was less than enthusiastic.

"Just call me Shiki, and in exchange, I'll call you Hisui.

Let's do away with the formalities and be more casual with each other."

Still expressionless, Hisui lowers her eyebrows as if she's being troubled.



"But, you are my employer."

"It's not like I'm hiring you.

You're the one doing the things I can't, so you're the great one."

"I see." Hisui gives another unenthusiastic reply.

.... It looks like I won't be able to talk her into it in just one day.

"—Anyhow, that's how it is.

Don't be so formal towards me.

I'll be grateful if you'd tell that to your sister Kohaku-san, too."



"Very well, as you say, Shiki-sama."
Expressionless, Hisui bows her head.
She completely failed to understand.
"I will be leaving now.
Please rest now for tonight."

Bowing, Hisui puts her hand on the doorknob.
—Oh, I forgot to ask something.
"Ah, hold on for a second."
Running towards the door, I put my hand on Hisui's shoulder before she leaves.

In an instant—Hisui's arm pushes away my arm with incredible momentum.
With a 'whack!', she slaps my hand away and leaps back.



"Eh—?"
It's so sudden, that's the only thing I can say.
Hisui is expressionless, but she glares at me fiercely.
"Eh.. Did I just do something wrong?"



"Ah.."



".... I am very sorry.."
Hisui's voice sounds very nervous.
".... I am not used to being touched.
Please forgive me."
Hisui's shoulders are faintly trembling.
I feel like I just did something really terrible.
"Ah.. Yeah, I'm sorry."
I apologize without thinking.
I don't understand why myself.
I just feel sorry for Hisui and I lower my head.



"_____"

Hisui says nothing.

I get the feeling her stare is calm again.



"—You have nothing to apologize for, Shiki-sama.

I am the one to blame."

"No, well, maybe, but I just.."



I scratch my head.

Hisui stares at me, pausing only to blink for a second.

"Um.. What was it you wanted to ask me, Shiki-sama?"

That's right.

I stopped Hisui because I wanted to ask her something.

"Oh, I wanted to ask about Akiha.

Doesn't she go to a boarding school?"

"That was only during middle school, Shiki-sama.

From this year onwards, Akiha-sama has special permission to attend school from home."

"Eh.. You mean she goes to school from here?"

"Yes, but it is uncommon for her to come home before dusk like today.

Akiha-sama has practice up until dinner, so she is always home before seven.

"Practice?—Practice what?"

"Today is Thursday, so she would have had violin practice."

"—Eh?"

"Usually, she is able to return before dinner on weekdays, so if you have anything to say to Akiha-sama, please let Nee-san know after dinner."

Hisui bows to say goodbye, and leaves the room.
"Violin practice.."
What on earth is that?
She's not some upper-class lady or anything, so why should she have to do something as bothersome as—
"... Oh wait, she is an upper-class lady."
Yes.
Come to think of it, my sister, Tohno Akiha, is a natural born upper-class lady. In my memories, she was always the obedient, ever-uneasy sister constantly following me around.
As a child, she was always quiet, never having even the courage to express her own desires.
She was a frail girl who would always live in fear of a scolding from our father.
"—Yeah, people really do change after eight years."
After eight years, I've become the me I am now.
Akiha has become the person she is right now, too.
—Eight years is a long time.
It's half of our lives up until now.
I was absent from this mansion during that vital period where a child becomes an adult.
"... I'm sorry, Akiha."
I think things would have been better if I had been with her during those eight years.
I unknowingly mumble an apology.

```
setvar hisuiregard + 1
if flg6 >= 1
turn to 29
    turn to 30
```

28

.... Let's see.. Kohaku-san's room is.. here, isn't it?
 Knock knock.
 I knock on her door.
 "Kohaku-san, are you there?"
 "Yes, please hold on for a minute."
 I can hear her cheerful voice from inside the room.
 I wait for about three minutes.
 Kohaku-san opens the door and pokes her head out.



"Oh, it's you, Shiki-sama.
 What are you doing here at this time?"
 "Uh.. well—I was wondering if you'd let me watch your TV.."
 "Eh?"
 Kohaku-san gives me a bewildered look.
 "Ah.. well, there's no TV in this house, is there?
 I've been living in a normal house up until now, so it's become a daily routine
 for me to watch TV after dinner.
 I guess I can't calm down without watching it or something like that, so.."
 The more I say it, the more I realize I'm doing something stupid.
 There is something not right about barging into a lady's room demanding to
 watch her TV.
 Look, even Kohaku-san is just standing there, looking bewildered—wait, no she's
 not.
 "Ahaha, I guess you're right.
 You've been living at the Arima household up until yesterday, after all.
 You must think this mansion to be kind of depressing after moving here all of
 a sudden."
 Kohaku-san gives a cheerful laugh.
 "Eh, let's see.. Have you talked to Akiha-sama and Hisui-chan about this yet?"
 "You mean about coming to your room, Kohaku-san?"
 Kohaku-san nods.
 "No, I haven't talked to anyone about it yet.
 What about it?"
 "No, no, it's nothing.

It's just that I would have to turn you away if you had already talked to them about it."

Smiling while she speaks, Kohaku-san looks up and down the hallway.

"Luckily for us, there isn't anyone else around.

Please hurry up and come in.

It'll be troublesome if we're caught."

"Please, just sit anywhere.

I'll go make some tea."

"...."

Coughing to clear my throat, I take a seat.

There are all sorts of little things in Kohaku-san's room.

It might be thought of as a bit messy for a girl's room.

There aren't really many things you could call cute, and what she does have is a lot of things that don't look very useful.

.... Rather, it has an atmosphere of a room belonging to an orderly, scholarly person.

Buried in the miscellaneous objects, I find the TV.

On top of the table is the remote.. maybe Kohaku-san has been watching the TV until just now.



"Thanks for waiting.

Tea is fine for you, isn't it, Shiki-sama?"

"Ah, thank you.

Please don't mind me too much."

"Oh no, not at all.

I'm sorry I can't do much to treat you."

Kohaku-san says so, smiling warmly.



"So, the TV.

What do you watch at around this time, Shiki-sama?"

"I don't have any set programs in particular, but the news is a pretty basic one. I like to hear new trends, and I like snob stories."

"Is that so?"

You seem like a very laid-back person, so I thought you'd be reading after dinner or something."

"Ahaha, no, I don't have such refined interests.

I don't consider myself laid-back either, but maybe that's the impression I give with my glasses."



"—Ah!

You wear glasses, Shiki-sama.

Akiha-sama didn't say anything about that at all, so I was quite surprised when I saw you at the door."

.... I see.

I haven't met Akiha since I started wearing these glasses.

"These glasses are just for show.

I guess you could say my eyes are bad, but I think my vision is better than that of most people.

It's not because I studied too much and went near-sighted or anything.. Ah, crap.

I had an intellectual image, but did I disappoint you?"



"Not at all.

I enjoy watching TV more than reading, too.

I'm glad that you're an energetic person, just like I thought you were."

"Ah.. yeah, thanks."

I'm a little embarrassed.

Faced directly with Kohaku-san's carefree smile, I can't help but feel a little nervous.



"Ah, I'm sorry.

You came to watch the news, didn't you?"

Kohaku-san switches the TV on.

It's already nine o'clock.

The news, as it usually does, reports the day's events with a little exaggeration.

"Oh dear.

Looks like there's been another one of those serial murders."

Kohaku-san says to herself while sitting next to me, sounding not the least bit concerned.

The news is running a special feature on the serial killings.

The serial murders, which began in the neighboring town, are now beginning to be concentrated within this town.

It's a pretty simple story.

Late at night, he attacks young girls indiscriminately, and in the end, he drains their blood.

It seems like last night's victim is the ninth one so far.

"I wonder what the police are doing about it?"

"Who knows?

It would seem pretty easy to catch a murderer who comes out at night, but maybe he's really careful so they can't trace him."

"You could be right.

The clues about murderers build up as they kill more people, so if they haven't caught him even after nine murders, he must be really carefully prepared for the killings."

"A careful killer, huh?

But aren't these killings spontaneous crimes?

It's quite strange to think of them as being carefully prepared."



"You're right.

If there's no evidence left at all, then maybe he's not a random killer at all. I can only think that he's got it all planned out from the start for execution."

"Ah, I see.

But then what would be the point of killing those nine girls?

Are they friends of his?

Acquaintances?"

"Hmm.. probably not.

If there were connections like that, then I think the police would have realized it by now.

In the end, I suppose it's an incomprehensible case without motive or connections."

.... Kohaku-san says all of this disturbing stuff with a smile.

It seems like she's not really worried about this case.

"These murders are happening right here in this town, Kohaku-san.

You're a young girl and all, so aren't you even a little scared?"

"I'll be fine, since the killer only appears late at night.

If I don't go out at night, I won't run into him."

Kohaku-san really is a clear thinker.

.... It is perhaps a bit of a raw explanation, but I suppose that's how a mere news story should be treated.

"Sorry for intruding on you.

I'll be counting on you again the next time I feel like watching TV."



"Sure, I'll be waiting."
Kohaku-san looks up and down the hallway.



"I'd like to escort you back to your room, but Hisui-chan is waiting there, so I'll have to say goodbye here."
"Okay.
Good night."

"...."

.... I had no idea bedtime at the mansion was at ten.
Apparently, there's some kind of unwritten rule here that one is not to be out of their room after ten.
"It's still so formal here, even with the old man gone."
Well, I guess it's only natural.
I'm also getting tired from my unfamiliarity with this mansion, so I obediently return to my room.

"Ah—"

When I return to my room, my bed has been made.. Did Hisui do it while I was away?
"I'm glad she did, but it's really more than I deserve."
I scratch my cheek.
—Then.

"Are you there, Shiki-sama?"
I can hear Hisui's voice along with a knock at the door.
"Yeah, I'm here.
Come in."



"Excuse me."



"Good evening.
Thanks for making my bed, Hisui."
Hisui quietly nods in acceptance.
".... Urgh."
Just as I thought, I'm not used to this.
".... Uh.. is there anything else you want to tell me?"
"No, nothing from me, but Akiha-sama has instructed me to answer any questions you may have."
".... I see.
There are many things I want to ask, but I'll probably get to know them as I continue to live here...."
Yeah.
What I want to know right now before I sleep is—
"Is it true that the curfew here is seven?"
"Yes.
The main gate is locked at seven, and all the entrances to the mansion are to be locked at eight."

It is also a rule that one must try not to go walking around in the mansion after ten."

"Not even walking around in the mansion?"

.... Well, I've got no complaint with that, but isn't that kind of harsh? Akiha and I aren't children, so I don't think you have to go that far."

".... Indeed.

It is a rule, however, so please abide by it.

You are aware of the recent disturbances at night, are you not, Shiki-sama?"

.... Yeah, that vampire thing Akihiko was talking about.

Well, as long as something like that is happening, I guess it's better to be safe than sorry.

"What else.. Oh, do you mind if I ask an off-topic question?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I'd like to know what kind of work you and Kohaku-san do around here."

"I am here to serve Shiki-sama's needs, and my sister Kohaku to serve Lady Akiha-sama.

In our spare time, we do the maintenance chores around the mansion.

Is there anything more you would like to know?"

".... To serve.. So that's what it is after all."

My shoulders suddenly feel heavier.

It seemed completely natural to Akiha when she said it, but I'm nothing more than a normal high school student.

I have no interest in having a girl around my age serving me, at least not for now.

".... By serving me, you mean you're a personal servant?"

"Yes.

Please do not hesitate to ask anything of me."

".... Well, I get it.

Going by how Akiha was talking about you, it doesn't seem like I can dismiss you, so I'll just obediently let you serve me.."

"Is there anything in particular you would like?"

"Nothing in particular, but could you stop calling me 'Shiki-sama'?"

To be honest, I get chills down my back when I hear it."

"But Shiki-sama, you are my master."

"That's what I'm saying I hate.

I've been living a normal life up until yesterday.

I have no desire to start living a life where a girl my age addresses me with '-sama'."

"I see." Hisui's response was less than enthusiastic.

"Just call me Shiki, and in exchange, I'll call you Hisui.

Let's do away with the formalities and be more casual with each other."

Still expressionless, Hisui lowers her eyebrows as if she's being troubled.



"But, you are my employer."
"It's not like I'm hiring you.
You're the one doing the things I can't, so you're the great one."
"I see." Hisui gives another unenthusiastic reply.
.... It looks like I won't be able to talk her into it in just one day.
"—Anyhow, that's how it is.
Don't be so formal towards me.
I'll be grateful if you'd tell that to your sister Kohaku-san, too."



"Very well, as you say, Shiki-sama."
Expressionless, Hisui bows her head.
She completely failed to understand.
"I will be leaving now.
Please rest now for tonight."

Bowing, Hisui puts her hand on the doorknob.
—Oh, I forgot to ask something.
"Ah, hold on for a second."
Running towards the door, I put my hand on Hisui's shoulder before she leaves.

In an instant—Hisui's arm pushes away my arm with incredible momentum.
With a 'whack!', she slaps my hand away and leaps back.



"Eh—?"

It's so sudden, that's the only thing I can say.
Hisui is expressionless, but she glares at me fiercely.

"Eh.. Did I just do something wrong?"



"Ah.."



".... I am very sorry.."

She sounds very nervous.

".... I am not used to being touched.

Please forgive me."

Hisui's shoulders are faintly trembling.

I feel like I just did something really terrible.

"Ah.. Yeah, I'm sorry."

I apologize without thinking.

I don't understand why myself.
I just feel sorry for Hisui and I lower my head.



"——"

Hisui says nothing.
I get the feeling her stare is calm again.



"—You have nothing to apologize for, Shiki-sama.
I am the one to blame."
"No, well, maybe, but I just.."



I scratch my head.
Hisui stares at me, pausing only to blink for a second.
"Um.. What was it you wanted to ask me, Shiki-sama?"
That's right.

I stopped her because I wanted to ask her something.

"Oh, I wanted to ask about Akiha.

Doesn't she go to a boarding school?"

"That was only during middle school, Shiki-sama.

From this year onwards, Akiha-sama has special permission to attend school from home."

"Eh.. You mean she goes to school from here?"

"Yes, but it is uncommon for her to come home before dusk like today.

Akiha-sama has practice up until dinner, so she is always home before seven.

"Practice?—Practice what?"

"Today is Thursday, so she would have had violin practice."

"—Eh?"

"Usually, she is able to return before dinner on weekdays, so if you have anything to say to Akiha-sama, please let Nee-san know after dinner."

Hisui bows to say goodbye, and leaves the room.

"Violin practice.."

What on earth is that?

She's not some upper-class lady or anything, so why should she have to do something as bothersome as—

".... Oh wait, she is an upper-class lady."

Yes.

Come to think of it, my sister, Tohno Akiha, is a natural born upper-class lady. In my memories, she was always the obedient, ever-uneasy sister who'd always follow me around.

As a child, Akiha was always quiet, never having even the courage to express her own desires.

She was a frail girl who would always live in fear of a scolding from our father.

"—Yeah, people really do change after eight years."

After eight years, I've become the me I am now.

Akiha has become the Akiha right now, too.

—Eight years is a long time.

It's half of our lives up until now.

I was absent from this mansion during that vital period where a child becomes an adult.

".... I'm sorry, Akiha."

I think things would have been better if I had been with her during those eight years.

I unconsciously mumble an apology.

if flg6 >= 1

turn to **29**

turn to **30**

29

Left by myself, I lie on my bed.
 This house from eight years ago..
 My blood relative from eight years ago..
 It feels a little like they belong to someone else.
 sigh
 "... I wonder what's going to happen to me now?"
 Grumbling to no one in particular, I fall asleep.

Awooooo.
 —I hear the wave-like sound of something's voice.
 Awooooo.
 —Something is howling.
 It's too sharp and high-pitched to be a stray dog.
 Awooooo.
 —It echoes in my eardrums.
 Is it howling at the moon?
 Awooooo.
 —This doesn't feel right.
 The beastly howling is beginning to give me a headache.
 Awooooo.
 —It doesn't stop.
 Awooooo.
 Awooooo.
 Awooooooooooooooooooooo—

"... Argh, just shut up already!"
 I wake up.
 I can hear the sound of a dog barking outside the window.
 The clock indicates it is just past eleven.
 This is more than just a neighborhood nuisance.
 "Damn, I can't sleep like this!"
 The dog's howling comes from somewhere near the mansion's fence.
 It doesn't seem like I can go back to sleep at this rate.
 if clearark == 0
 if clearciel == 0
 turn to **31**

Go check it out.	turn to 31
Go to sleep. (Hisui likes you more)	turn to 33
Go to sleep. (Kohaku likes you more)	turn to 189
Go to sleep. (Akiha likes you more)	turn to 32

30

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The dog's howling comes from somewhere near the mansion's fence.
... It doesn't seem like I can go back to sleep at this rate.
turn to **31**

31

Even Akiha and the others wouldn't be able to sleep with a racket like this. Since I'm the only man in the house, I guess I've got no choice but to go investigate.

".... I think it's coming from the right side of the mansion."

I open the curtains and check what's happening outside.

—And,

outside my room is a large tree.

On one of the branches is perched a blue crow.

In the dark night,

I can see nothing but black, and yet it's quite clear to me that the crow is blue.

"....."

I've never seen or even heard of a blue crow before.

It glares at me.

It feels like the eyes of the crow are staring at me, like soulless, mechanical lenses.

Kwaaw!

After a yawn-like cry, it noiselessly flies off.

".... What was that?"

.... I can feel a faint chill on my back.

The howling of the dogs grows louder.

Awoooooooooo.

Awoooooooooo.

Awoooooooooo.

"....."

It's really starting to get on my nerves.

Not only is it noisy, but hearing it causes my heart to start pounding.

I have an almost instinctual distaste for it.

"Shut—up!"

I change out of my pajamas into my uniform, and leave the room.

Awoooooooooo.

The howling echoes through the night.

That sound is definitely coming from the right-hand side of the mansion.

"....."

For some reason, my throat feels dry.

The high walls stretch their way around the mansion.

Clearing my throat, I head towards where the dogs must be gathered.

I arrive at where the howling originates.

".... Huh?"

Awoooooooooo.

The howling doesn't stop.

But there are no signs of any dogs.
All there is—is a person.
Under the light from the streetlight that carves apart the darkness stands a man
in a dark coat.
The howling is coming from right beside him.
—But there are no dogs to be seen anywhere.

The man in the coat is pretty tall.
He has a strongly built body, and his back is facing me.
"————"

My throat.. so dry.
Awoooooooooo.
The voice of the dog resounds in my ears.
The night air coils itself around my skin.
For no apparent reason, I have difficulty breathing and moving, as if I'm at the
bottom of the sea—
Kwaah!
A cry overhead.
With a loud flapping of its wings, the blue crow lands onto the man's shoulder.
—Then,
suddenly, the crow vanishes.
".... Eh?"
Can it be an illusion?
It looked like the crow disappeared into his black coat.
"————"

The man in the black coat turns around.



13 0
Under the white streetlight, he is just like a shadow.
A black lump.
In the middle of that lump, only the weapon-like eyes shine out, burning with
a fiery intelligence.
".... Ah."
I can't breathe.
But fortunately, those eyes seem like they're not even looking at me.

"Not here after all."

The man in the black coat leaves.
 When I can no longer see him, I am finally able to breathe properly again.
 "Hhahh—haah, ah."
 I manage to take a few breaths.
 I realize the dogs' howling has ceased.

I return to my room.
 There is no sign of Akiha or the others being awake.
 I guess I'm the only one who couldn't stand the dogs' howling.
 "——Guh!"
 What's happening?
 My head still hurts.
 "Huh.. ?"
 Why am I trembling?"
 Looking down, my fingers are trembling.
 My entire body is shaking, and my back feels very cold.
 It's almost like.. yes.
 It's like someone ripped out my spine and replaced it with ice.

"——"
 I feel dizzy.
 Is it just the usual anemia?
 I get the feeling of falling towards the floor.
 On the way, I see something unpleasant.

"Wha—!?"
 Even though I'm wearing my glasses, I can still see the "lines".
 "Uuh....!"
 I hadn't seen them at all for a long time, so my reaction is magnified.
 I feel sick.
 With the dizziness from my anemia, I feel like I'm about to throw up the contents of my stomach.
 ".... What's, going on?"
 I don't understand.
 Only that as long as my eyes are open, scribbles fly everywhere across my vision.
 —It's a bad.. dream.
 Somehow, I manage to collapse into bed.
 Yes.
 I should sleep.
 That's the easiest way to deny what I'm seeing.
 My body doesn't move as I want it to.
 All I should do is lie here and fall fast asleep, like a corpse—

setvar arkregard + 3

turn to **34**

32

The howling continues.
 There's no way I can sleep like this.
 I can't sleep, but that's just normal.
 ".... I'm sleepy, so I'll pass."
 Pulling the sheets over me, I stretch out on the bed.
 I can just think of the howling as the sound of something mundane as cars driving by on the street.
 sigh
 Today's been a very long day.
 I'm mentally tired from eating dinner in this unfamiliar mansion and my conversations with Akiha and everyone else.
 After all that, the howling is just background noise.
 I close my eyes and gently fall asleep.

"—Nng."

I think I just heard something.
 Half-awake, I look at the clock.
 It's just past two.
 It's been about two hours since I heard the dogs howling.
 The dogs' howling has already stopped.
 The mansion is so quiet, I can hear the clock ticking in the silence.

"——?"

I hear it again.
 Inside the mansion.. from the lobby?
 "—Could it be a burglar?"
 It's not impossible.
 The mansion's contents are outrageously valuable.
 On top of that, with no one here now except Kohaku-san, Hisui, Akiha and myself, it's very insecure.
 "...."
 Getting out of bed, I slip out of the room quietly.

If it's a burglar, Akiha and everyone will be in danger, so I can't let this one go.
 I'll just look down from the second floor into the lobby; that should be safe enough.

There's nothing wrong there.

".... !"

No, someone's there.
 The figure that enters from the entrance and crosses the lobby with wobbling, uncertain steps, is—



"Aki.. ha?"

She's not going to her own room on the second floor, but to the first floor of the west wing.

The only things there are Kohaku-san's room and my old man's room.

".... What's she doing at this time of night?"

I can murmur all I want, but I won't be getting any answers.

After gazing at the lobby for a while, I decide to return to my room.

.... Well, she probably had something to do, or went to see Kohaku-san.

I feel bad about sneaking around and watching her, and I don't want to just ask her about everything she does.

".... Sleep, sleep.

There's school tomorrow."

I bury myself in bed and close my eyes.

—As I fall asleep,
my thoughts keep returning over and over to Akiha's hollow-eyed figure in the lobby.. and how something seemed wrong.

turn to **190**

33

The howling continues.
 There's no way I can sleep like this.
 I can't sleep, but that's just normal.
 ".... I'm sleepy, so I'll pass."
 Pulling the sheets over me, I stretch out on the bed.
 I can just think of the howling as the sound of something mundane, like cars driving by on the street.
 sigh
 Today's been a very long day.
 I'm mentally tired from eating dinner in this unfamiliar mansion and my conversations with Akiha and everyone else.
 After all that, the howling is just background noise.
 I close my eyes and gently fall asleep.

—I have a nostalgic dream.
 The end of summer eight years ago.
 After I was injured, was taken to that hospital where no one ever visited, and met Sensei.
 Upon returning to the mansion, I heard from my old man that I would be taken in by a family I had never heard of.
 Everything happened so fast.
 Right after the day I left the hospital, I ended up going to the Arima household.
 There was not a single cloud in the blue sky that day.
 The start of autumn.
 I was led away from the Tohno mansion.
 But a little before that..
 That girl had come to see me, sneaking past the eyes of the adults.

"When you are about to leave, please come to the tree in the rear courtyard."
 After being told that, I snuck out from under my old man's eye and out to the rear courtyard.
 The sky was blue.
 Below that deep blue sky that seemed to extend forever, she waited for me.
 As far as I knew, this was the first time she had left the mansion to come outside.
 "Take this."
 Saying that, she undid the ribbon that bound her hair and handed it to me.
 I guess it was her farewell gift to me, but as a child, I didn't even feel happy about it.
 After all, what kind of a nine year old boy would feel happy about receiving a ribbon?
 "That ribbon is my favorite, so give it back to me later, okay?"
 But those were the words that saved me.
 "Give it back," she said.

"Come back," is what I heard from those words.
—Just that was good enough for me.
That last day, with no one to even see me off.
For her, who I had never even spoken to, to say that to me.. it made me happy.
—But I could not say, "I'll definitely return it."
As clever as I was at the time, I realized I would never be able to return to this mansion ever again.
.... Those were the only words we exchanged.
Something about her icy eyes was very sorrowful.
It was time, so I began walking towards the doorway.
The girl just stood there like a doll, watching me leave.
A distant dream of what happened on one fine day.
Under the cloudless blue sky.

turn to **191**

34

Sensei told me.
 My eyes could see the points where things could easily be broken.
 And if that 'thing' were to be a person, then what I would see would be their vital spots.
 Lines which, if cut, could break something apart without any effort.
 With those lines, even things as hard as steel could easily be cut.
 "In other words, everything in existence has its destiny of 'breaking' internalized within it.
 This is something inescapable for anything with a physical form, Shiki."
 That's what Sensei had said.
 I was still a child back then.
 I remember finally understanding what she meant and getting scared.
 In other words, the world is full of cracks, and it could collapse at any instant.
 If there are scribbles all over the ground, then there's a possibility that the earth would start breaking apart if I walk over it.
 —When I realized what she meant, I thanked Sensei from the bottom of my heart for the glasses she gave me.
 I couldn't have gone on living if I had continued to see the lines all the time.
 The points where things could easily be broken.
 There isn't a single advantage to being able to see them—

"—Good morning."
 I hear an unfamiliar voice.
 "It is morning.
 It is time for you to awaken, Shiki-sama."
 Stop calling me Shiki-sama already.
 I told you yesterday, it sends chills down my back—



—I wake up.
 Hisui stands far from the bed, like a statue.
 "...."
 Where am I?
 "Good morning, Shiki-sama."

The girl in a maid uniform bows.
"Ah.. yeah, I came home, right.."
I push myself up, looking around the room.

In that instant—
—I feel sharp pain in my temples.
"Huh—?"
"Are you looking for your glasses?"
Hisui gently hands me my glasses.

"—Phew."
.... I let out a breath.
Last night—Before I went to sleep, I had the feeling I was seeing the lines even
with my glasses on.
Seems like it was just my imagination.
"Sstt...."
Maybe it's because I slept in an unfamiliar room, but my mind is hazy.



"Shiki-sama..?"
Hisui calls out to me.
Shaking my head, I shake away my sleepiness.
"Good morning, Hisui.
Thanks for coming to wake me."
"There is no need to thank me.
It is my duty to come and wake you, Shiki-sama."
Hisui gives a plain and completely expressionless response.
.... Even in an unfavorable light, I think Hisui's features are beautiful.
It should be wonderful for such a girl to wake me every morning, but as Hisui
never smiles, I don't feel that happy about it.
.... What a shame.
If Hisui only had half of Kohaku's brightness, she would be really cute.
"—Do you need something?"
Realizing I am looking at her, Hisui stares straight back at me.
"No, nothing at all.
Waking up with you there makes me feel like I'm really at the Tohno mansion."

Now then.

Getting off the bed, I stretch out both arms.

Suddenly, I realize I'm wearing pajamas.

—Eh, I'm sure that yesterday, I..

"Huh?"

I thought I slept in my uniform last night."

"Yes.

Since it is bad for your health to do so, Nee-san changed your clothes and put you to bed afterwards."

Hisui explains it as if it is something perfectly natural.

I see.

She changed my clothes.

It's true that I could have caught a cold if I had just slept like that.

Just the kind of attentive service you'd expect from a maid—Hey, wait a minute..!

"Wh——!?"

I quickly check my pants and underwear.

My pants are brand new pajama pants.

Even my underwear is new.

"Wh-wh-wh-!?"

I want to say 'What the hell did you do!?', but somehow the words are stuck in my throat.

I've got to calm down and think things over for now.

.... Let's see.

rst of all, half the blame belongs to me.

And the one who changed me wasn't Hisui, it was her sister, Kohaku-san.

It would be wrong to complain to Hisui.

"—Hisui."

"Yes, what is it?"

"You don't have to do anything uncalled for like this from now on.

If you have to, please wake me up.

I can change myself, so I'd like to do so."

My face is a deep red as I say all of this.

Hisui obediently nods in affirmation.

"Your uniform is folded and awaits you over there.

Please come to the sitting room after you have changed."

"....."

Damn it.

How careless could I be.

It was careless of me to begin with when I fell asleep on the bed like that, but to not have woken up while I was being changed is over the top.

"Usually I would have sensed it, but.. maybe I was just really tired."

Complaining to myself isn't going to change anything.

I can't just keep standing here talking to myself like an idiot.

I'd better hurry up and change, then go have breakfast.

My school uniform had been neatly folded, and my shirt has even been ironed.
Passing my wrists through the sleeves feels good.
It's that fresh, brand-new feeling.
"... No, there's nothing wrong with being naked, is there?
Yep."
There was nothing wrong with it, but I couldn't help being embarrassed at the fact that I was being changed by the warmly smiling Kohaku-san.
To top things off, the face in the mirror keeps smiling from time to time despite being bright red.
.... Are you really okay, Tohno Shiki?
I thought you were supposed to be uneasy about staying here, you amateur.

Akiha and Kohaku-san are relaxing in the sitting room.
Akiha is wearing the uniform of the Asagami Ladies' Academy, a famous school for young girls.
They are drinking tea together gracefully, as if breakfast ended a long time ago.
I—

Greet Akiha.	turn to 39
Greet Kohaku-san.	turn to 40
Greet both of them.	turn to 41

35

"Shiki-sama, it is morning.
Please wake up."
.... I hear a familiar voice.
"Shiki-sama.... Please wake up.
If you are late like yesterday, you will break your promise with Akiha-sama."
.... A voice partly tense, partly relaxed.
"Shiki-sama.
Is it okay?
Akiha-sama will end up scolding you again."
.... No, it's not okay at all.
".... I'm up.
I'm up, so hold on."
Still under the sheets, I respond as I slowly open my eyes.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
"Ah, mornin'."
I give a sleepy greeting in response and put on my glasses.
It's past seven in the morning.
Hisui came at her usual time and managed to wake me.
"I will prepare your breakfast.
After changing, please head towards the dining room."

Hisui disappears from the room after a bow.
I give a big yawn.
After a nice stretch, I get up from bed.
I change into my school uniform and cast a glance at my desk.
.... On top is the knife I will not ever use again.
The curtains sway in the wind.
Hisui must have opened the window; the sky is refreshingly clear.
It's just a little cold, though.
I approach the window to close it.

—As it turned out,
I ended up waking in my own room.

It seems Senpai carried me here.
Fortunately, Akiha and the others didn't know I left.
It's been one week since that night.
Tohno Shiki's life hasn't changed a bit from what it was before.
My relationship with Akiha is a bit uneasy at times, but of course we're brother and sister.
Except for that passageway being repaired, the school has not changed at all.
.... No, it did change.
At school, there's no senpai called Ciel anywhere, nor does anyone remember her.
The instances of serial murders haven't occurred once since then.
Since there's been no official arrest, the city streets are still relatively empty at night, but it'll probably return to normal in a month.
As for me,
I carry an unfillable void in my heart, but I continue on as I did before.
.... Or rather, I can bear it all.
At times, I get overwhelmed when I am assailed by memories, but I don't think I'll go insane or anything for now.
Some day.
Will I go crazy after not being able to bear these memories, or will I just return to living normally after getting used to them?
Perhaps it's about a fifty-fifty chance.
—But until then,
even if it is a little girlish, I keep the final promise I made with her everyday.
"—Autumn is drawing to a close, isn't it?"
The blue sky outside is enough to take my breath away.
Taking a large, deep breath, I shut the window.

turn to ??

36

"Shiki-sama, it is morning.
Please wake up."
.... I hear a familiar voice.
"Shiki-sama.... Please wake up.
If you are late like yesterday, you will break your promise with Akiha-sama."
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turn to ??

37

Classes end and the classroom empties, but I won't leave until the sun sets completely.

The red classroom.

The burning sunset spreads outside the window.

The sun flushes red as it sinks deep in the sky.

"——"

I'll always be waiting here.

I'll remember my unforgettable promise; I'll continue waiting here forever.

There's still one promise I haven't been able to fulfill.

"When this is all over—when we're done defeating this vampire.. Before we part, can't we do something like this just once more?"

Back then, she tilted her head to the side in confusion.

"So—I really was wondering, what would happen if we were to meet again without any responsibilities.. if we just met for no particular reason."

.... When I said those words,

I was only thinking about her.

"—If you're too busy, then it's okay.

I only thought of it just now, anyway."

.... Just..

Not as two people cooperating,

but as two friends who got along, not doing anything in particular.

If we could create some normal memories like that,

I knew she would be happy.

Okay—!

When everything's over, let's come here again, Shiki!

It won't have any meaning, but I'm sure it will be really, really fun!

—

After her eyes widened in surprise, she nodded.

In the classroom bathed by the sunset,

Arcueid smiled and made that promise with me.

—I remember that promise.

—I remember that smile.

—I remember everything.

I can't forget.

I won't forget.

I'll always, always remember the promise we made in the room ablaze with the sunset to meet here again—

"....."

The sun sinks further.

These hours until the vermillion fades completely,

the quiet time until the crimson sky disappears.

This eternal, fleeting instant of a world standing still.
Maybe I am already crazy.
Even though I'm waiting for someone who will never come, my heart is horribly calm.
—Clatter.
The sound of something touching a desk.
I look.
A window is open.
I realize that,
painted in red sunlight, she is standing by the window.

She doesn't move at all, but she's there.
She's right in front of me;
she's not an illusion.
But, I feel like there is a distance which can never be spanned between us.
"_____"

I can't speak.
But, I feel so terribly calm now.
"... Geez.
I really was planning on disappearing, Shiki, but you'd just wait forever.
I couldn't just leave you alone like that, so I came here."
She smiles bashfully.
"... Well, you know.
I did say I was never going to break a promise with you again."
"That's true.
Thanks for keeping that promise."
"But, I'm sorry.
It seems this time that I'm the one who won't be able to keep it."
"... Why?"

.... I'm surprised myself.
I ask her this in a truly gentle voice, without any anger at all.
"... Yeah, I never did tell you my reason for pursuing Roa.
Actually, a long time ago, I once drank human blood.
At that time, the human stole some of my powers and became an incredibly strong Dead Apostle.
In the end, he ended up killing all the other True Ancestors except for me."
—Then, that means..
"... You mean, Roa?"
"Yes.
Until that time, I never knew about the vampiric impulse.
The other True Ancestors also believed I did not have it.
But, it was too late.
Until then—I didn't even know I was a vampire.
So—I didn't even know it was something I shouldn't do."
.... I see.
Never having been taught anything extra, she wasn't even taught she was the

same as those she killed.

"Because of just one mistake, I destroyed everyone.

.... So I won't drink human blood again.

But, a True Ancestor that has drank blood once cannot remain sane without doing it again."

"—"

".... I can only be here because you completely "killed" Roa.

Even though I annihilated him so many times, it was only his flesh and not his soul.

But you killed his existence completely, Shiki.

So—the power he stole returned to me and I somehow managed to revive."

"—That—doesn't...."

"But, that's all I can do.

I can no longer resist the vampiric impulse inside of me.

So—"

"—That—doesn't, matter."

".... Shiki, I can't see you again.

Sorry for breaking our promise."

.... That doesn't matter to me.

I just—want you to be by my side, that's all.

".... You can keep your promise."

"Shiki....?"

"Drink my blood.

If you do—you can keep your promise."

Time passes by.

Neither of us says anything.

And after a truly maddening silence..

"—I see.

But, I can't.

I don't need your blood, Shiki."

"Why?

Is my blood not good?

Do you have a reason for not drinking it?"

She nods.

"I like you, so I won't."

She smiles like a flower blooming triumphantly.

"....."

I suck in a large amount of air,
and just try to suppress this feeling.

I want to stop her.

I want to stop her.

I want to stop her.

I want to stop her.

—Even if I have to kill her, I want to stop her.

But, her smile is just too gorgeous.

I can't selfishly bring myself to ruin it.

"—Goodbye.

I really am grateful for everything, Shiki."

"....."

My throat trembles, and no sound comes out.

But still—I have to say goodbye.

"... I'm, a liar."

"Why?"

You kept your promise, Shiki."

"—Just a worthless liar.

I... said I would make you happy."

Yes, I vowed to.

"... No, not at all.

I will sleep from now on, but I will always be dreaming of you.

I enjoyed our time together so much, I will always be dreaming about it."

"——"

"It won't have any meaning, but I'm sure it will be really, really fun.

So Shiki, I really am happy.

You really did make me happy."

"Damn....."

My throat is filled up.

I don't—I don't want such a..

"... You really are kind, Shiki.

Yeah, I knew coming here to say goodbye was a good thing.

I love you, Shiki.

Your honesty, how you are always spaced out, how I'm the only one you yell at, how you always look forward to the future.. I love all of you.

So please, keep living like that, okay?"

For just an instant,

she smiles sadly.

She waves her hand, and as if fading into the sunset itself, she disappears before my very eyes.

"....."

I grit my teeth, trying to hold it in.

She was smiling until the very end, so at least I didn't want to cry.

—The classroom is empty.

"..... I see.

You, really did keep your promise."

In this classroom.

Our promise to meet again in the classroom as the sun set.

She definitely kept it.

.... There are some things I lost, but it is now over.

The curtain has fallen cleanly over the time I knew her, the time I ran through with her.

Come to think of it, a farewell is always there.
 In our case, our farewell was only early.
 Thinking of it that way, this was a really satisfying farewell.
 She was still alive, and she told.. me.. she's.. still.. happy..
 ".... No....!
 Not like this, this isn't---what I wanted....!"
 ---Right.
 More---
 I wanted to be with her more.
 I wanted to talk with her more.
 I wanted to feel the warmth of her body more.
 More---I wanted to see her smile more.
 Always.
 Not like this, but always---I wanted to make her happy.
 But, she..
 Smiling to the end, she left me behind, telling me to live.

".... That stupid.... idiot...."
 That was her final wish.
 With a smile, she told me no matter how hard it is---even if I have to deceive myself right now, until I can finally see it all as simply a memory, to keep looking forward to the future and live.
 "Tch.....!"
 There's no way I can do that.
 I---I don't have the slightest confidence to live like that.
 "____"
 Still, so that she can see a happy dream,
 I have to at least grant her wish.

"..... Ah."
 I realize the sun has long since sank.
 The crimson sky is painted over in a dark blue.
 The dark night sky.
 The spiral wisps of clouds and a bright, white moon.
 ---They are all that's left.
 But, an extremely beautiful memory.
 "____"
 sigh
 I exhale slowly, as if praying.
 She may no longer be here,
 but I have to say what I forgot to say earlier.
 "Goodbye.
 I had a lot of fun too."
 Those extremely late words of farewell echo through the classroom.

Only the glass-like moon hangs in the night sky.

The distant blue moon looking as if it would shatter if touched.
For a long time—until dawn, I keep looking up at it.

gsetvar arknormalcleared + 1
gsetvar clearark + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar cleararktrue + 1
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **429**

No.

turn to **1**

I start walking from the mansion atop the hill towards school.
 Like any other day, the morning is wrapped in tranquility.
 Autumn is almost over and winter is close by.
 Perhaps when this vague season in between the heat of summer and the chill of
 winter changes,
 maybe this transparent feeling will also change.

I see more figures of students in uniforms the closer I get to school.
 Today is Saturday so most of them are smiling as they walk along the road.
 Once I pass this intersection, I'll reach the front gate.
 It will soon be a month since I came back to the Tohno mansion.
 I've already become well used to this route by now.
 The traffic light turns red and I stand in front of the crosswalk.
 "....."
 Every time I stop here, I remember.
 That one time.
 At this intersection, Arcueid was waiting for Tohno Shiki back then as she sat
 on the guardrail, just like she is doing now.
 "—Eh?"
 I say without even thinking.
 Between the cars rushing by, a scene unfolds just like before.

"—Wha...."
 She's there.
 Dressed in white, with golden hair down to her shoulders.
 Long, slender eyebrows over crimson eyes.
 —Her figure I could never mistake for anyone else no matter what.
 This figure that has already vanished long ago.
 "....."
 The light turns green.
 The students around me start moving.
 In the midst of it.
 I am the only one who stands still and she is the only one who notices I am here.

She has her typical smile as she crosses the intersection.
 "....."
 I can't speak.
 I'm so overwhelmed with emotion I don't even know what to do.
 —Even if, this is just some sort of bad illusion,
 I'm so happy just to see her again I could cry.



"Hello.
Are you heading to school, Student-san?"
.... I can't believe it.
The illusion even has her voice down perfectly.



"Shiki?
Hey, why are you so quiet?
Don't tell me you forgot about me?"
Those red eyes looking up at me..
.... There's no way I could forget.
But, at the same time, there's no way she can be here, alive.
"_____"

I can't speak.
She wrinkles her eyebrows together and glares at me like an angry cat.



"Geez, what gives.
 I put up with not going to see you and was waiting here so long.
 Don't tell me, you're angry, Shiki?"
 "U——"
 I just can't believe it.
 This isn't an illusion in front of me.
 It really is——
 ".... Ar.... cueid....?"



"Yes it's me.
 ——Thank goodness.
 I thought you became a vegetable after fighting Roa.
 I really was worried you know."
 "——"
 -Wait a minute.
 Um——I'm so confused, what do I say?
 What should I be happy about?
 Is there something I need to do?
 I——really am just so overwhelmed I don't know.



"Shiki....?
 Hey, you're acting funny.
 Your mouth is wide open, and so are your eyes.
 Well, it's kind of interesting for me so I'll keep watching."
 "——Ar, cueid."

"That's what I mean.
.... Geez, you keep just saying my name.
We finally managed to meet again, so can't you find anything more fitting to say?"
—Yeah, there's no mistake.
There's only one person who could say such ridiculous things.
"... Why?"
"Hm?
I can't hear you, please say it a little louder."
She tells me c'mon, c'mon as she points her ear closer to me.
"—Why are you still alive!?"
I scream and voice my feelings as loud as I can.



"Ow—Not so loud, Shiki."
"You... don't say 'not so loud'!
Why are you alive....!
"I—thought you were gone, that I would never see you, that I would always—
—"
regret it.
But why?
This cheerfully, as if we only said goodbye yesterday, how can she greet me so simply....!?"



"Oh, I see.
I never did tell you, Shiki."

Arcueid drops a fist to her other hand in realization.

"... Yeah, I never did tell you my reason for pursuing Roa.

He stole some of my power.

In order to take it back,I pursued him but you completely destroyed him, right?

And the power that was freed from Roa returned to me and I managed to come back to life."

"Y—you never told me about that!"

"No, I didn't.

It didn't really concern you."

"Y—"

You, why did—

"Anyway, I revived, but I could barely resist the vampiric impulse inside of me.

I probably would have done something terrible if I went to see you, so I slept until I regained my power.

Because of that I was able to return to normal, but it took seven days to suppress my impulse."

"Eh—then, then you're really okay now, Arcueid....?"



"Of course!

If I wasn't, I wouldn't be here."

She flashes me a full smile.

Arcueid takes my hand.



"You know, Shiki.

While I was asleep, I was really looking forward to meeting again like this.

Because once I did, we could go around and do so many things.
I was thinking it would be so nice to get better even just a little quicker."
Arcueid looks at me with a pure, unadulterated smile.
"_____"

I'm speechless.
Not in a bad way—I'm just.. so happy.
Being able to see her smile again, all the things we can do from now on,
how I told Senpai that my wish was never to leave Arcueid alone again..
Not one—not one of them was lost.
"_____"

There's so many things I want to say and tell her right now.
But, right now I'll just speak honestly from the heart.
"—Welcome back.
I've.. been waiting for a long time."
I squeeze her hand in return, and briefly tell her just that.
She looks a little bewildered at first.



".... Yeah."
Saying that, she looks away in embarrassment.
".... Arcueid?"
I call out to her.
After a brief pause, she faces me with a full smile.



"Yes, I'm back.
I'm glad you were still yourself, Shiki."

"_____"

My chest tightens.

If this wasn't right on the way to school, I would embrace and kiss her.

Her smile is just so adorable.



"Alright, let's go Shiki.

You're going to take me to many places, right?"

Arcueid releases my hand and jumps like a rabbit.

.... She's so radiant I can barely look at her directly.

"But, um—where?"



"Anywhere.

Somewhere you think is fun, Shiki."

Smiling, Arcueid replies like it's nothing.

But, that's a little troubling.

".... Um, you know, I do have school."



"Hey.
Can't you at least spend a day with me today?"
Arcueid looks dissatisfied.
"... Uh."
... Evidently, I'm extremely weak against that face of hers.
... Well, even if I went to school like this, I wouldn't be able to concentrate there, and more than anything else—I want to be with Arcueid.
"... Hm, you're right.
Who cares about boring reputation.
Okay, Arcueid.
I will indulge your selfishness for the day, my princess."
"Yay!"

Bump.
She suddenly presses her body up against mine.

"Hey, Shiki.
That night, what you were talking about with Ciel, your feelings haven't changed?"
She looks up imploringly at me as she asks.
"... My feelings that night—what do you mean?"
"About you saying you loved me."
"——!"
I start to splutter.
It's too embarrassing for her to ask me this question when she's this close to me.
"... Oh, I forgot.
You shouldn't eavesdrop, Arcueid."
"I can't help it if I overheard.
Anyway, c'mon, answer me.
Your words that night, they haven't changed?"
—Idiot.
I don't even need to say that.
"... Yeah, they haven't changed.
I can't make any guarantees, but they'll probably never change."
I'm so embarrassed I look up at the sky and answer.

Arcueid wraps her arms around mine.

"Oh.

Then you should prepare yourself, Shiki."

"Prepare?

Prepare for what?"

I can't help but let a tinge of uneasiness creep in my voice.

She holds onto my arms and speaks with a smile.

"Because you promised to be with me forever.

Didn't I say so when we first met?

I'll have you take responsibility for me."

Then she starts to walk, still holding onto my arm.

She's as energetic as a little child urging me to hurry up to get to a playground.

"Oh—I see.

Certainly I would have to prepare."

Speaking to no one in particular, I start to walk with her.

I head towards some random place, going against the flow of students going to school.

Where to?

Well, there's no place we can't go.

The sunlight really suits this princess of the moon accompanying me.

—The weather is a perfect blue sky.

Hand in hand, we walk towards a new beginning for the two of us.

gsetvar clearark + 1

gsetvar cleared + 1

gsetvar cleararkgood + 1

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **430**

No.

turn to **1**

39

"Hey.
Morning, Akiha."



"—Good morning, Nii-san."
In contrast to my hurried entrance, Akiha is perfectly calm.



"Good morning, Shiki-san.
If you're looking for breakfast, it's ready in the dining hall, so please eat up."
Kohaku-san greets me with a warm smile, in contrast to Akiha's coolness.

"Ah, thank you very much.
.... It looks like you're having your after-meal tea.
Have you already finished breakfast, Akiha?"



"Of course.

I don't care to know when you get up, Nii-san, but please at least allow time for breakfast.

Having breakfast after seven is a sign of sloppiness."

"... I think having breakfast at seven is pretty normal.

What time do you get up, Akiha?"

"I get up at five in the morning.

What about it?"

"....."

... Wow.

I don't know why she gets up so early, but it was so perfect a time to get up that I have no room to retort.



"Besides, your school is thirty minutes from here on foot, is it not?

Please don't be late to a school that's so close by.

It would be an embarrassment."

"... Urgh."

Akiha's words are filled with thorns that stab at me.

But as it's the truth, I once again have no room to make any counter-argument.

"Argh, geez!

I couldn't help it.

It was so noisy last night that I couldn't get to sleep."



"Ah, I see.

You must not be used to your room yet, having just returned.. Well, I'll let you off the hook this time."

"No, it's not because I'm not used to the room, but—"

At any rate, those stray dogs last night were really noisy.

It wasn't because of the room, it was because of them.

turn to **42**

40

"Morning, Kohaku-san.
Today is a lovely day."



"Yes.
Good morning, Shiki-san."
Kohaku-san delivers her ordinary morning greeting with a smile on her face.



"Did you sleep well last night?
I was worried that you might be inconvenienced, staying in an unfamiliar mansion and all."
"Ah, no, there were no problems.
I used to live here, after all, and now I've got you to watch over me, Kohaku-san."



"Oh, you're quite good at this, Shiki-san."

"Eh?"

No, I'm just saying what I think.. what is it I'm good at?"

Kohaku-san just looks at me, smiling.

.... Somehow, I feel embarrassed when she looks directly at me, so I shift my gaze to the side.

—And then,



I realize another stare, one which has been on me silently for a while now.

"Ah.. hey there."

I give a light wave to greet her.

Akiha continues to stare at me.. or perhaps, glare would be a better word.

"Well.. um.. good morning, Akiha."



"Oh?
You don't have to force yourself to greet me.
Please, go right ahead and ignore me.
After all, it seems you'd prefer to enjoy the morning with Kohaku."
"Uuh.."
Akiha's words sting.
.... It's not like I had intended to ignore her.
I just said hello to Kohaku-san..



"Please don't tease Shiki-san too much, Akiha-sama.
We don't have much time, and Shiki-san hasn't finished his breakfast yet."



"Well, that's Nii-san's fault for waking up late, isn't it?
He's just getting what he deserves for leaving everything to do in a rush in the morning."

"Hmph!" Akiha sniffs.

.... It seems like my failure to greet her was another point she was unimpressed with, in addition to her objection to my late arrival.

"Um.. Kohaku-san.

Is my breakfast ready?"



"Yes, I've laid it out in the dining hall.
Please, eat up at your leisure."



"That won't do, Kohaku.

Nii-san has no time to eat breakfast at this time."

"Hey, listen, Akiha.

It's only seven, so I've got at least that much.

It's an easy thirty minute walk from here to school, so I can take it easy for at least ten minutes, can't I?"

"Are you saying you're going to finish breakfast in just ten minutes?"

You're not some starving dog, so if you're going to eat breakfast, I'd like you to take your time."

"___"

Akiha's words really do have thorns in them.

"I'm not a dog, Akiha--"

Then I remember.

Speaking of dogs, there is what happened last night.

turn to **42**

41

"Good morning, you two."



"Good morning, Shiki-san."

Wearing a white apron that suits her, Kohaku-san replies with a smile that could not possibly be any larger.

On the other hand, Akiha just casts a glance at me.



"Good morning.

You certainly took your time this morning, Nii-san."

She certainly knows how to put a damper on things.

"Took my time?"

It's barely past seven!

It only takes thirty minutes to get to school from here, so I'm actually up early."



"So you're saying you're going to finish breakfast in just ten minutes?
You're not some starving dog, so if you're going to eat breakfast, I'd like you to
take your time."

"——"

Akiha's words really do have thorns.

"I'm not a dog, Akiha—"

Then I remember.

Speaking of dogs, there is what happened last night.

turn to **42**

42

"Hey, about what happened last night.. does that happen every night?"



"—What?"

Akiha tilts her head slightly in response to my question.

.... It seems the point of my question has completely failed to reach her.

"I'm talking about what happened last night.

That noisy 'woof woof woof woof' racket.

Even you wouldn't have been able to sleep with that going on, right?"

"—Nii-san?

What are you talking about?"

"What?"

I'm talking about last night, of course.

Around eleven at night.

Some stray dogs were barking their heads off."

Akiha and Kohaku-san exchange looks, and then together, they both look back at me.

.... It's like they think I'm some kind of nutcase.

I can't just let this slip by.

"Fine, I'm not asking you anymore, Akiha.

Kohaku-san, it was really noisy last night, wasn't it?"

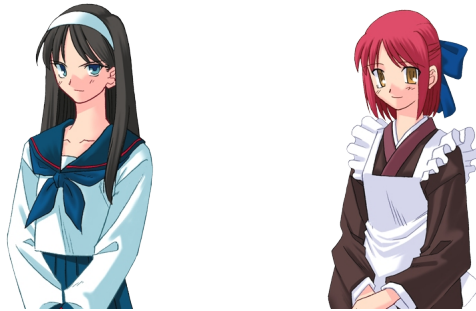


"—Eh.. was it really?"

I did think the wind was quite strong, but.. the only unusual thing I found while looking around late at night was you, sleeping in your uniform on top of your bed."

".... Ah, yes.

I'll be more careful from now on."



"What?"

What happened, Kohaku?"

"Oh, nothing in particular.

Shiki-san just has bad sleeping posture, that's all."

Kohaku-san dodges Akiha's question with a smile.

.... Come to think of it, Kohaku-san is calling me "Shiki-san" now.

It seems like Hisui passed on my message from last night.

".... Are you sure neither of you noticed?"

Those dogs were barking for about thirty minutes straight last night.

'Woof woof woof woof'.

If that isn't noisy, I don't know what is."



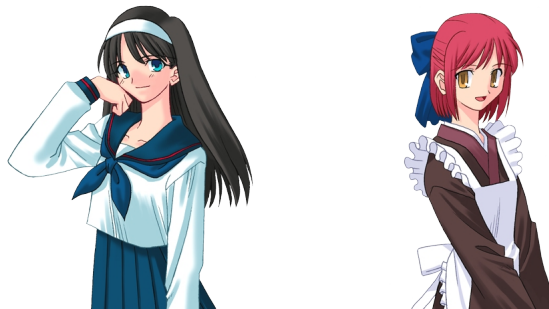
"Haha.. It really was a woof-woof panic, wasn't it?"

.... Somehow, I get the feeling Kohaku-san has missed the point.

".... Well, that's basically how it was."



"Hmmm—I don't remember anything like that.
You don't either, do you, Kohaku?"
"No, I don't.
Sorry, Shiki-san.
There wasn't anything particularly like that last night that I can remember."



"Then it's decided.
The only possibility left I can think of is that Nii-san had a dream about it."
"... Uuh."
Well, now that she mentions it, maybe it was a dream, but..



"—You must have had a nightmare because you aren't used to the mansion yet,
Nii-san.
Oh, I know what.
If that stray dog barks again tonight, perhaps we shall start keeping an extra-

vicious guard dog here."

A malicious giggle comes out from Akiha.

"I am now out of time, so please excuse me, Nii-san.

Please do take care not to get attacked by any dogs on your way to school."

Akiha leaves the sitting room.

Kohaku-san leaves to to escort her to the doorway.

"...."

Now seems like a good time to come to a conclusion.

Given what's happened from last night up until now, it's a no-brainer to work out that for some reason, Akiha really, really hates me.

I leave for the lobby after I eat the breakfast Kohaku-san made for me.

Hisui is in the lobby, waiting with my bag.



"Will there be enough time, Shiki-sama?"

"Yeah, it's not even twenty minutes to school from here if I run.

It's seven-thirty now, so I could make it even if I take the long way."

Satisfied with my explanation, Hisui nods.

"Very well, I will escort you out."

"Eh—Ah, yeah, thanks."

.... It's a terribly embarrassing thing to have a personal servant.

"Ah, Shiki-san!

Please wait!"

With pattering footsteps, Kohaku-san runs down from the second floor.

"....."

Hisui steps back and falls silent as Kohaku-san appears.



"Huh?
Weren't you with Akiha?"
"Lady Akiha goes to school by car.
Since I had something to give you this morning, I stayed behind."
"Something to give me?"
"Yes.
This came from the Arima family yesterday."
Kohaku-san smiles.
"Eh?
But, I have all my luggage already.
The things I used while I was at the Arimas' house all belonged to them, so all
I've got are my own clothes.."
"Really?
But this was sent here, nonetheless."
Kohaku-san hands me a thin wooden box, perhaps twenty centimeters long.
It's not heavy at all.
".... Kohaku-san, I've never seen this before."
"Well.. apparently it was left to you by your departed father.
It was to be given to you in the will."
".... By my old man?"
.... I can't feel anything about that.
What's the old man who expelled me from this mansion eight years ago doing
leaving me things?
"Oh well.
Kohaku-san, please take it to my room for me."



"_____"

Kohaku-san is staring intently at the wooden box.
She seems almost like a child who wants a toy.

Staaaaare.

No, she is a child.

".... I get it.

You want to know what's inside, right?"



"Oh, not at all.

I merely wondered for a moment."

.... Like I said, you do wonder what's inside.

"Alright, let's open it.

One, two.. three!"

With a dry sound, the wooden box opens.

Inside, there is—a ten-centimeter bar of thin iron.

".... It's.. an iron bar."

Undecorated and worn, it has finger marks all over it.

.... The old man must have really hated me to leave me a piece of junk like this.

"No, Shiki-san.

It's a fruit knife."

Kohaku-san takes the iron bar out of the box.

"See, isn't it one of those folding knives?"

One, two.. three!"

With a "pachink!", a ten centimeter blade pops out from the bar.

.... I see, it certainly is a knife.

"It's old, but it seems pretty solid.
The year and the era it was made in is written on the back."
Kohaku-san replaces the blade, and hands over the knife.

Certainly, there's a number written on the grip.
The character 'seven', and under it, the character 'night'.



-2 0

"Nee-san, there is no era by that name.
It just says 'Nanatsu-yoru'."
"!"

Surprised, I turn around.
Hisui, who had been silent until now, was looking at the knife over my shoulder.
"Y, you surprised me.. Hisui, you should say something.
You don't have to look over my shoulder like that, you know.
If you want to see it, I'll show it to you."



-2 0

"Ah—"
Hisui's cheeks suddenly become a little redder.
"P-please excuse me.
Uh—That knife is so beautiful that I could not help myself."
"Beautiful?
You really think it's beautiful?
It looks kind of beat up to me."



-2 0

"—Not at all.

The tempering of the blade is masterful.

I think it is a knife with its own proper history."

"Really?"

It looks to me like a piece of junk.."

But since Hisui seems so convinced, I begin to feel the same thing.

.... Hmm.

In its own way, I guess it's not such a bad inheritance.



-2 0



"Seven nights'..?"

Maybe that's the name of this fruit knife?"

"Maybe.. though, I can't imagine him naming a knife like that."

Whatever the case may be, it's obvious that it's an antique.
"Well, in any case, I believe in taking what's given to me."
I replace the blade, and put the knife in my trouser pocket.



-2 0
"Shiki-sama, have you enough time..?"
"Ah!
I have to get going.
Well, Kohaku-san, thanks for the delivery."
"You're welcome."
Kohaku-san smiles and waves.

Leaving the doorway, I pass through the garden.
As I pass out the mansion gates, I sense a commotion.
"... What's going on?
Sounds like something's happening on the right side of the mansion."



"I heard that someone found bloodstains on the road east of the mansion."
"—Bloodstains..?
You mean leftover blood?"
"Yes.
There was blood on the mansion fence, too.
The police came to inquire about what happened last night while you were sleeping, Shiki-sama."
"... Does that mean someone died..?"

"No, all that has been found are the bloodstains."

"——"

The east side of the mansion—That's around where the man in the black coat was last night.

Bloodstains.. traces of blood.

Bloodstains—traces of red.

Come to think of it..

I get the feeling I saw something red—.



"Shiki-sama?"

"Eh..?"

N-no, it's nothing."

Shaking my head, I shake off the bad images.

"Well, I'll be going now.

Thanks for seeing me off, Hisui."

"Goodbye.

Please take care on the way."

Hisui bows deeply.

.... I'm not sure what to take care about, but she's probably just worried about my health.

"Yeah, thanks.

You take care, too, Hisui."

It's only right to repay good intentions with good intentions.

With an energetic wave of the hand at Hisui, I leave the gates of the mansion behind.

—I walk along the unfamiliar streets.

Up until now, I've been going to school from the Arima house, so it's the first time I've taken this route to school.

It's only the path I'm taking that's different, but I feel like I'm going to a new school.

"—There doesn't seem to be a lot of students from my school around."

Apparently, there are not many who live around here.

Half past seven in the morning.

I can't see anyone running along the streets in a school uniform except me.

The business district is in a rush of activity.
As usual, the scene is one of suited firm employees gearing themselves for today's battle.
No, it isn't quite the same as usual.
For the last few days, the atmosphere has been a little heavier in this town.
It's probably due to the serial killings.
There are less people in the streets in the evenings now, too.
"—You'd better cut down on the hanging out at night, Arihiko."
The face of my bad friend drifts into mind.
He'd be the sort to carry on hanging out at night regardless of the atmosphere in town.
Well, it's not like he's going to listen to a word I say, anyway.

I start to see some people in school uniforms intermingled with the crowd.
There are only about ten minutes until the school gates close.
I dash along the asphalt street so I won't be late.

—I arrive.
It seems like it took twenty minutes rather than thirty from the mansion.
I'll need to leave around seven if I want to go slowly, since I ran several times on the way.

The classroom, just minutes before homeroom, is full of commotion.
Scattered all over the classroom are my classmates, intent on talking until the teacher arrives.
It's like a festival in here, even though there are only a few minutes left.
I ease my way through to my seat next to the window.
—Then,
"Yo!
You're late, Tohno."



In stark contrast to the otherwise pleasant classroom, there is someone waiting with a big grin on his face.

And in addition—

"Ah, good morning, Tohno-kun."



—He is accompanied by someone very unexpected.

"Senpai—why are you in our classroom?"

Dumbfounded, I point to Ciel-senpai like I'm looking at a ghost.

"Huh?"

Is it so unusual?

I was just wondering if you were in class, so I decided to come over to see you, Tohno-kun."

"Unusual?—The seniors never come to the junior classrooms.

There's all sorts of reasons, but the biggest one is that they're just too far apart."

"Oh, I see." Senpai nods with a serious face.



"You don't have to worry about that.

Despite my appearance, I'm a fast runner.

It takes me less than a minute to get to my class downstairs from here."

Senpai emphasizes her point.

"...."

I guess she's just not the kind of person who cares what other people think.

"Quit whining, Tohno.

What's wrong with it, anyway?

Senpai's here because she wants to be."

Arihiko, being Arihiko, plonks himself down on my desk and starts up a merry

conversation with Senpai.

"... I don't mind, but you ought to get back to your class two minutes before homeroom starts, Senpai."

I feel tired for some reason.

Sighing, I sit down.



"... Inui-kun, it seems Tohno-kun is feeling down."

"... Yeah, he's probably feeling irritable because he's not used to his life after moving.

Tohno doesn't mind most things, but he's got a bad habit of throwing a fit when faced with things he doesn't understand."

"... Really?"

Tohno-kun doesn't look like the type to get angry."

"... Nope, that's not true.

Tohno, you see, is usually pretty mature, but when he encounters something he doesn't understand—Kaboom!"

"... Haah.. 'Kaboom', is it?"

"... Yep.

You'll change your opinion once you see him lose it, so you can't just trust him like that, Senpai."

... The two of them whisper to each other.

"... Hey, listen.

If you're going to talk privately, do you mind doing it in the hallway?

I can hear every word you say when you do it on my desk, so there's no real point to it."



"What!?"

You could hear us!?"

Arihiko gives an exaggerated reaction of surprise.

No one could stay angry after being hit with an act like that.

Senpai puts her hands to her mouth, and I can't tell how serious she is.

.... If it's Senpai, she may have actually intended to talk privately.

"That's terrible, Tohno!

Listening in on the lovey-dovey private conversation between Senpai and me!

You've sure got some nasty hobbies!"

Arihiko points at me.

"—Are you trying to pick a fight with me, Arihiko?"

.... Actually, please do.

Right now, I'm more than willing.

Arihiko shakes his head.



"Of course not.

You're my dear friend, right?

I'd exchange fists with even my parents, but I have a policy of not fighting with my friends.

I'm the very model of chivalry."

.... That's amazing.

I guess chivalrous people could punch their parents in the world that's inside his head.

"I see—That's a pretty rotten policy."



"Hahahaha!

You pretended to be depressed, but deep down you're the same Tohno as always!

Damn, I had nothing to worry about after all!"

Arihiko hits me a couple of times in the back.

"... Arihiko, were you worried about me just then?"

"Don't ask me trivial stuff like that, you dumbass!

It's only good if I do it without you noticing!"

Arihiko hits my back some more.

.... We've been friends for a long time, but I still can't get a hold on this guy's personality.



"So, how's your new house?

Pretty heavy and stressful by the looks of it."

"Mmn.

Can't really say.

I had a bad dream last night, and the people at my house gave me the cold shoulder."

"—Mmm, I see.

Sounds rough."

Arihiko nods with a difficult expression.



"....."

—And,

Senpai is silent, staring at us while we have our trivial conversation.

"Senpai?"



"Tohno-kun, you really do get on well with Inui-kun."

"Are you serious, Senpai?"

You must need thicker glasses if that's what you think after seeing what just happened."



"Not at all, Tohno-kun.

You look really relaxed when you're with Inui-kun.

You're really open and trust him a lot."

Senpai smiles happily for some reason.

"?"

Arihiko and I exchange looks and tilt our heads.



"Oh, I'm so envious.
I really admire how your friendship allows such understanding without you getting worried over each other."
Senpai is impressed.



"Really?"
Arihiko and I exchange looks and raise our eyebrows.



"That's right.
It's just that you two don't realize it.
Ah, but maybe it'll end if you do.. Hmm.. In that case, it'd be best if you two just remained as you are.
Yes, truly a miraculous balance."

"Well, I guess you could say our relationship is a miraculous tightrope."

Arihiko nods in agreement.

I guess that's one point we perfectly agree on.

"Ah, it's almost time.

I'll be going now.

Did you watch the news this morning, Tohno-kun?"

"—No, the house I moved to doesn't have a television, so I can't watch the morning news."

"Is that so?"

Well, I'll just ask you straight out then.

There was a big mansion on today's morning news.

Is that where you live?"

"—Eh?"

This morning's news?

.... Now that she mentions it, Hisui said the police had come to talk.

"Yeah, that must be my house.

I heard the police came this morning to ask us questions."

"—Is that so?"

You mustn't be out playing late at night, Tohno-kun."



Senpai leaves quickly.

I watch her silently.

—And,



"Tohno."

"What?
I'm not listening to any more of your trivial garbage."



"It's not trivial.
It's becoming a big problem.
You've become so familiar with Senpai that she even comes here to see you."
Arihiko stares at me gravely.
"Well, I don't know anything about it.
I've only started talking to her recently.
Maybe she just came here on a whim today?
And come to think of it, aren't you pretty familiar with her too?"
"No way, man.
It's taken me seven days to get her to remember my name."
"Oh?
That's unusual.
Wasn't it your policy not to deal with girls you can't pick up in a day because they're too much trouble?"
"That's for normal girls, but Senpai is different.
I've kept it a secret all this time, but actually, I—"

"You like senior girls who look good with glasses on, don't you?"
"Erk!" Arihiko's face turns red.
"You knew all along, my dear friend."
"Yeah, I knew.
We're friends, after all.
We get along and we've got the same interests."
"I see, I see.
You can understand how good Senpai is too, can't you—hey, wait!"
"Yeah, like I said, we've got similar interests, right?
That's why we're into the same type of woman."
Arihiko nods in agreement, and heads back towards his own seat.
"I guess it was a short friendship, Tohno."
"Yeah, exactly right."

I wave Arihiko off.
The teacher comes in at about the same time.

```
    if cielregard >= 3  
turn to 44  
    turn to 43
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43

The morning lessons are over.
It's lunch break, and Arihiko has gone on ahead to the cafeteria.
Now, where should I have my lunch?

In the classroom.

turn to **45**

Go to the cafeteria.

turn to **46**

44

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Now, where should I have my lunch?

In the classroom. turn to **47**

Go to the cafeteria. turn to **48**

Go to the tea ceremony room. turn to **49**

turn to **47**

if selected == 2

turn to **48**

if selected == 3

turn to **49**

45

I decide to go buy some bread and eat it slowly in my classroom.

.... There are still a few guys and that close group of girls in here as well.

".... Huh?"

I just noticed.

Yumizuka Satsuki, usually the most eye-catching of all the girls, is nowhere to be seen.

".... She must be absent."

I must be pretty absent-minded to take until lunchtime to realize one of my own classmates isn't even here.

turn to **50**

46

I decide to eat in the chaotic, student-filled cafeteria as usual.
For some reason, the udon and the soba are better than the meal sets at our school, so naturally I decide to have some udon.
Sitting down at the table, I eat my tanuki udon.
The cafeteria's TV is showing the news.
The TV was set up so students can watch the recorded morning news during lunchtime.
The news is having a special feature on the serial killings.
It's been a whole month since the killings started, but no one yet has any idea who this killer is.
He is an unidentified killer, leaving no trace and acting with no motive.
His identity still remains a mystery, even though there has already been eight killings in our little town alone.
It's certainly very frightening, says the newscaster.

turn to **50**

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turn to **50**

49

.... I guess I'll go take a look in the tea ceremony room.
I'm sure Senpai said something yesterday after class about having lunch there.
If Senpai is there, maybe I can talk with her while having lunch.
—Most importantly,
I enjoy having lunch with Senpai, and I'm also worried about the news story
from this morning.
"—Alright."
Gotta strike while the iron's hot and all.
I head off to the tea ceremony room before Arihiko notices my plan.

I knock on the tea ceremony room door.
After a brief wait, the door creaks open and Senpai pokes out her head.



"Huh?
Tohno-kun?"
Puzzled, Senpai tilts her head.
She doesn't seem annoyed, but it seems like she really doesn't understand why
I came here.
"Would you like to have lunch together, Senpai?"
Holding out the bread I purchased at the cafeteria, I tell her why I am here.



"Lunch?
I'm happy to hear you ask me, but—"

Senpai thinks over it looking troubled.
.... Things don't look good.
It seems Senpai isn't very interested.
I guess I've got no choice.
I decide to employ a little strategy.
"I have curry bread."



"Eh—?"
Senpai's face becomes bright and cheerful.
.... I had a feeling about this from yesterday's lunch, but I am amused at her reaction.
"I'll give you this in thanks for yesterday's lunch, so why don't we eat together?"



"Yes, please!
I've just put the tea on!"

Senpai hastily vanishes inside.
Following her, I enter the tea ceremony room.

"Ah..."
As I enter, it becomes obvious why Senpai was hesitating back then.
On top of the tatami mat is an already empty lunchbox.
It seems like Senpai has long finished eating her lunch.



"Tohno-kun, would you like green or English tea?"

"Eh?"

.... Ah, green tea, please.

More importantly, have you already finished lunch, Senpai?"



"Yes, just a little while ago.

I slept in this morning, so I didn't have any breakfast and I was hungry all morning.

It was terrible!"

".... I see.

Well, you don't have to force yourself to accompany me.

Sorry for intruding on you.

I'll eat in the classroom, so please take your time relaxing."



"Eh—?"

You mean you're not going to give me any bread?"
Senpai's sorrow seems to resound from the bottom of her heart.
"No, I mean—you must be full, right, Senpai?"



"Not at all.
I'm hungry."
.... It doesn't appear she's just saying this to make me feel better.
"Really?"
Well, I'll be intruding then.. Is this really okay with you, Senpai?
The bread from our cafeteria really has volume, you know."



"No need to worry!
If it's food I like, then I can eat limitless amounts of it."
That bashful smile is most probably not from shyness, but from anticipation of
the curry bread.
"....."
.... She is a woman of many mysteries.
Someone who could be so happy over one curry bread in this day and age could
be quite precious..

Senpai eats one while I have two, and we have tea afterwards.
Kneeling on top of the mat, Senpai and I casually sip our tea.
It would have been great if it wasn't during lunchtime at school, but that's life.
"How is your new house, Tohno-kun?"
It seems something terrible happened this morning."

"Hmm.. yeah.

Well, the inside of the house is really fancy, but there are these really noisy stray dogs at night.

I guess it's also bad that there's no TV and no Japanese-style rooms, so there's nowhere to drink tea like this."

"What, a stray dog?

You mean what happened at your house wasn't related to those serial killings?"

"I don't really know.

There's this really high wall all the way around our mansion, and they say they found bloodstains there.

But listen, that's where—"

—I saw the stray dog last night.

I couldn't say it.

".... Hmm.

Well, anyhow, it's got nothing to do with us.

Let's stop talking about unpleasant topics, now that we've finally got an opportunity to relax."

"Not at all!

We're residents of this town, so I think the killings do have something to do with us."

Holding her cup in one hand, Senpai casts a serious gaze towards me.

"Yeah, I guess that's true, but you'll be okay if you don't go walking in the streets late at night, won't you?

There's been eight people killed so far already, right?

With that many victims, the police ought to catch the guy any day now."

"—Geez, Shiki-kun!

You don't have any sense of danger, do you?

The newscasters have been saying the same thing since the third victim was found, but they haven't caught him yet, have they!?"

"Hmm.. Well, that's true.

It's just that I can't really relate to it when they give it such a stupid caption like 'The Modern-Day Vampire'.

I'm sorry, I really did take it too lightly.

We live in this town, so we've got to be careful, right?"

"Yes.

I'm glad you understand."

Senpai smiles in a satisfied manner.

"But Senpai, why are they calling him a vampire anyway?"

"Well, the blood was drained from all the bodies, right?

Isn't that kind of like a vampire?"

".... You really think so?

Isn't it said that you become a vampire yourself once a vampire sucks your blood?

These victims are all dead, with the corpses to prove it, so they don't really have to go calling him a vampire."

Senpai laughs and nods.

"Do you really believe in things like vampires, Tohno-kun?"
"... Hey now, I'm just saying that's how the news is presenting it.
If there really were vampires, there wouldn't be any dead bodies left, just like I said earlier."
"Yes, you're right.
But can't you think of it like this?
The people who were found dead died because they couldn't become vampires.
There are actually people who can and can't become vampires, and those who can become vampires wouldn't show up as dead bodies after being attacked by one.
Because they're still alive somewhere."
"Haha, that's what you'd call a horror story, Senpai."
"Yes, exactly.
I'm sorry to say there's no punch line."
Laughing, Senpai sips from her cup.
While we are having our rambling conversation, lunchtime ends.

setvar cielregard + 1
setvar flg1 + 1
turn to **50**

fth period.

Feeling sleepy at the classics lecture, my gaze drifts outside the window.

—And,

a crow is perched on the classroom veranda.

"__"

Not the blue crow from last night, but just an ordinary black one.

With its black eyes, the crow stares inside the classroom through the glass window.

It's true that it's unusual for a bird to perch there, but it's not like it's some major event.

"Ah—"

Suddenly, it comes at me.

My vision gradually goes white as my sense of balance goes crazy.

"__"

My field of vision sways.

It feels like something is building up in the back of my head, and my brain feels heavy.

".... Crap."

I know this feeling.

It's the precursor to an anemia attack.

The blood that's been building up inside the blood vessels in my brain forms black clots and slushes around inside my head, causing my vision to go black.

If I had to describe it, I would say it feels like darkness is pushing from my brain outwards towards my eyes.

—This is bad.. I don't usually collapse in the middle of class, but..

Fumbling in a world of darkness, I blindly use my desk for support.

Even that becomes useless..

I can't put any strength into my fingers.

All I can do now is fall towards the floor—

"Excuse me, Sensei."

—And,

something hits me roughly on the back.



"Tohno's looking pretty bad, so I'd like to take him to the infirmary."

"—Arihiko."

At some point, Arihiko had come up to me.

"Are you really feeling bad, Tohno?"

I can hear the teacher's voice from his lectern.

"No, I think I'll be fi—"



"Man, he's totally out of it.

Wouldn't it be better for him to leave early?"

.... Arihiko makes this outrageous proclamation loudly.

"I see.

If you say so, Inui, then there's no mistake about it.

I've already heard about Tohno's health from Kunifuji-sensei.

Tohno, if you're not well, you may go rest in the infirmary or leave early."

.... Sheesh.

I don't know what's with him.

It seems the classics teacher has complete trust in what Arihiko says.



"C'mon, you can go now.
Your face is pale and all, but no one's going to know you're feeling bad until you tell them, you know."
Arihiko hits me in the back grumpily.
".... I'll be leaving early then, Sensei."
The classics teacher nods solemnly.
".... Sorry about making you worry needlessly, Arihiko."



"Don't worry about it.
We've been inseparable since middle school; I can tell when you're about to collapse from anemia."

Arihiko heads back towards his own seat.
Expressing my thanks with a look, I drag my leaden body out of class.

—I leave school.
It would have been better to go lie down in the infirmary, but at this hour, it'd be after school by the time I wake up.
That being the case, I decide that I'd better go lie down back at the mansion, even if it means pushing myself.
".... Phew.
I think I'm feeling a little better."
I breathe in the outside air and feel a little rejuvenated.
.... Sheesh.
I'm surprised at my own body.

Eight years ago.
The price of recovering from that near-fatal injury was becoming prone to sudden anemia.
When I first left the hospital, it would happen at least once a day.
Collapsing from dizziness became a daily routine for me.
After some time, probably because my body had grown, the spontaneous dizziness and anemia became rarer.
But from time to time, things still trigger dizzy fits, and I still lose consciousness.
Today I was lucky that Arihiko caught me.
Usually, I wind up passed out on the floor.
sigh
Taking a slow and deep breath, I draw fresh air into my lungs.
I can feel the blood pooled around the center of my head begin to swirl around again, so I head away from the school.

I veer onto the main street.
Once I get through here and leave the residential district, it's a direct path to the Tohno mansion.

"—Agh."
.... Crap.
It looks like I haven't fully recovered yet.
Putting my hand to my forehead, I realize it's hotter than usual.
"...."
I'm not going to do myself any good by pushing myself here until I collapse along the side of the road.
"—I guess there's no helping it."
Disgusted with myself, I lean on the guardrail.
I'll rest for a bit until I manage to calm down.

.... I don't have much to do, so I just stare idly around the street.
It's just past noon on a weekday, but the street is filled with passers-by.
Crowds of walking people.
Nameless people without personalities walk straight ahead, without even casting a glance at the people walking beside them.
Even though there are so many people here together in this crowd, in this same space, they see only one thing.
Everyone is their own main character, so they only live the day from that perspective.
And so, without really interacting with anyone else, they each end the day by themselves.
—In a way, you could say it's a very lonely thing.
"...."
I begin to think melancholy thoughts, perhaps a result of my fever.
"—Guess I'll go home now."

I feel calmer, and all I'm doing here is wasting my time with pointless thoughts. Getting up from the guardrail, I resume heading home to the mansion so I can rest.

—That is, until I see her.

Casually.

All I did was casually cast my gaze into the crowd, but my vision freezes.

—Thump.

Golden hair and red eyes.

Her clothes are white, as if they are a symbol of herself.

—Thump.

My pulse races.

My veins and arteries spring into action.

My nerves split, one after the other.

My spinal cord goes berserk, as if it is about to leap out of my back.

—Thump.

The girl walking in the crowd is just.. beautiful.

"——"

The distant dizziness comes back to me.

My consciousness swims, falling.

—Thump.

I-I can't breathe.

My fingertips tremble.

The blood isn't reaching them.

My whole body feels cold, like I'm freezing to death.

—THUMP.

My heart beats in a rush, urging me to hurry up.

"Ah-ah!"

I can stand it no longer and unintelligible words escape my mouth.

—I can't think.

My brain tells me only one word.

—TH-U-MP.

Just one word repeating in my brain.

Her.

That girl.

I'm going to—

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze*

I feel sick.

I can't breathe.

It hurts to breathe.

For some reason, I can't remember how to breathe properly.

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze*

My throat is burning.
My eyes are about to burst.
My palms are soaked.
I feel so cold—but I'm drenched in sweat.

pant *pant* *pant*

.... I have to follow her.
I have to follow that girl.
Chase her, chase after her, and talk to her.
My frozen feet begin to move.
My breathing is ragged, like that of a beast.
I chase after the girl in white.



pant *pant* *pant*

The girl walks slowly.
She doesn't realize I'm following her.
"Ha—ah."
If I run after her now, I can talk to her.
Talk to her, and ask her name..
"Ha—ahah, ha."
—Ask her name?
Who am I kidding?
I know very well that that's not what I want to do.
.... I know, but I don't know.
It looks like I want to do something else.
But I can't precisely put "what I want to do" in words.
The inside of my head is misted over, like a rain cloud.



"_____"

My throat is.. hot.
 I can't breathe.
 But so what?
 It's only natural, right?
 I've just seen that great woman.. it would be impolite not to get excited,
 wouldn't it?
 Stop her and ask her name?
 Hah!
 Give me a break.
 I'm not a kid, after all.
 I don't fully understand it, but there is only one thing I must do.
 I walk with my hands in my pocket.
 My fingers feel steel.
 "Ku—huhh.
 Hehe."
 How fortunate.
 The tools are all here.
 She walks.
 I leave plenty of room between us.
 So she won't notice.
 So the other people around us won't suspect.
 She and I are complete strangers.
 That's why I have to do my best to make following her look natural.

.... She walks into an apartment building.
 I don't go in yet, but instead watch from outside.
 She takes the elevator up.
 The elevator stops at the sixth floor.
 I check the common mailbox on the first floor.
 There are five mailboxes for the sixth floor.
 I touch one of them and feel a sharp sensation.
 I smell it.
 There's no mistake.
 Her room is the third one on the sixth floor.

I enter the elevator and press six.

I'm excited.
I grip the knife in my pocket tightly while in the small elevator.
She's very close by.
Just a little more, and I can her.
Ah, just thinking about it makes me feel ecstatic—
My whole body feels like a sexual organ just before climax.
I get off the elevator.
The sixth floor corridor is empty.
This is good.
Quickly—quickly!
I want to do it.

—I arrive in front of Room Three.
I am about to press the doorbell when I stop.
These glasses are in my way.
I can't do what I've come to do with them on.
—It's a promise, Shiki.
You should never cut those lines thoughtlessly—
"...."
Long ago, a woman once told me such a thing.
But right now, neither her name nor her face comes to mind.
Slowly, I remove my glasses.

I can see the black lines.
And not just them.
Has something happened to my eyes?
Apart from those abominable lines, I can see 'points', like black holes.
Countless numbers of them.
I don't know myself.
What I'm trying to do.
Why I'm trying to this.
What does Tohno Shiki—want to do with that girl?
I don't know.
Still not knowing, I push the doorbell.

"Yes—?"
I hear the voice behind the door, and the door opens a crack.
In that instant—I slip through it.
"Eh—"
The girl says.
No, she tries to say.
She will never get to finish what she tried to say.
Because I cut her apart before she could.

In that instant, I slip through the door.
Not taking even a second, I draw the knife across the lines running throughout the girl's body.
Stabbing.
Slashing.
Piercing.
Driving.
Splitting into pieces.
Completely and utterly, I 'kill' her.
The black lines that divide her into seventeen pieces.
Through the neck, back of the head, from the right eye to the lips, upper right arm, lower right arm, right ring finger, left elbow, left thumb, left middle finger, left breast, from the rib to the heart, from the stomach to the abdomen in two places, left groin, left thigh, left leg, left toe, all of them.
As I pass by her,
not even taking a second.
Truly, in an instant, entirely.
I "dismantle" her into seventeen pieces of meat.

"—Eh?"

I can hear an incredibly dumb-sounding voice.
It doesn't feel like the voice is coming from my own throat.
Dizziness.
The minced pieces of the girl lie before my eyes.
The red blood is all over the wooden floor, like a overturned bucket of water.
There is the choking scent of blood.
The cuts are very clean, so her insides don't spill out.
Only the color of red goes across the ground.
Strange.
There is nothing in the room.
Nothing but the girl's scattered limbs and me, standing there dumbfounded.
"—What—"
A sea of red blood is spreading over the floor.
In my hands, I grip my knife, the murder weapon.
"She's—dead."
Of course she is.
She wouldn't be human if she was alive.
"Wh—y?"
There's nothing to ask.
I just did it with my own hands.
With my own hands, cleanly and instantly, I cut apart this girl I don't even know.
"I—killed her?"
Yes, there's no mistaking it.
Or am I mistaken?
There's no reason for me to do such a thing.

That's why it's a mistake.
It has to be a mistake.
But I had no reason from the start.
That's why it's a mistake.
It has to be a mistake.

—The red blood flows all over the floor.
Slowly, the dark red stain creeps around my feet.
"..... Ah!"
Surprised, I lift my shoe, but I'm too late.
Like coal tar, her blood makes a thread connecting the pool on the floor and
my foot.
"—————"
It's.. red.. blood..
The color I hate, still flowing even now.
All because I cut her apart.
"—It wasn't me."
Yes.
It has to be a mistake.
A mistake.
A mistake.
Probably a mistake, definitely a mistake.
This is.
This is, This is, This is, This is, This is This is This is This is This is This is—

This is just a bad dream. turn to **51**

This is, without a doubt, reality wrought by my own hands. turn to **52**

51

if cielregard >= 4

turn to **53**

.... This is just a bad dream.

But somehow, this stench of blood smells so horribly real.

".... Wro.. ng.."

Yes.

Wrong wrong wrong wrong.

Wrong wrong wrong wrong.

But.

I killed her.

Is that fact wrong?

I didn't kill her.

Is that fact wrong?

Yes, I—

Tohno Shiki wanted to kill that girl.

That's what I wanted to do back then.

Just that, it was all so muddy inside my head, I didn't put it into words.

"Wro—ng!"

I feel like throwing up from the smell of blood.

"Ah—guh!"

The contents of my stomach rise in my throat.

"Ah—ah!"

The crimson is soaking into my eyeballs.

I feel dizzy.

I fall down on my knees into the red sea of blood.

"Ah—Guh....!"

My gastric juices come up.

I throw everything back up.

My food, my gastric juices, everything, while I cry.

There is nothing left in my stomach.

But my body continues to force me to throw up, as if trying to undo what had occurred and return me to a normal life.

Guuh—burgh!

Pain.

It hurts, like my insides are burning.

The tears won't stop, and my body collapses to the floor like a pile of garbage.

My knees sink into the red puddle spread all over the floor.

Red starts to stain my body.

It's so painful and red; it's like I'm dreaming.

"Ah—Aaah....!"

I keep crying.

The fact that I killed someone is making me sad.

.... No.

That's not right.

I am sad because I killed her without reason, like breaking apart a doll.
—I don't understand.
Why I feel like this,
Why I killed her without reason.
I can't find the reason.
"——It's a lie."
It doesn't feel real.
So this is just one of those dreams I have when I faint.
"——It's a lie."
Besides, how can someone cut apart someone like that with just a knife.
I read it in a book once.
It takes a whole day of strenuous labor to cut someone up, even when using a saw.
That's why there's no way I could have possibly done such a thing with just a knife.
These "lines" never existed in the first place.
Everything was just a delusion I had fallen for—
"——It's a lie."

Guh—ffpt.
Gastric juice drips over my lips.
Passing out of my mouth, dripping down my jaw.
Mixed with the juices is something red.
My throat is probably bleeding because my stomach keeps trying to throw up even when there's nothing left in there.
"O... u—"
It hurts.
That's why this..
This isn't a dream, and I'm just lying to myself.
"—It's all lies."
Yes, actually, I understand everything.
I lusted after her.
Just looking at her aroused me.
When I cut her apart, it was so thrilling I almost ejaculated.
These eyes, too.
If I knew these "lines" could cut things apart like paper being shredded..
I should have understood that even a person could easily be cut apart like I just did to her.
I had lived a normal life without even thinking about something like that.
—If I really am the sort of dangerous person who could easily kill just about anything..
Then I should have put out these eyes or lived a life without seeing anyone.
"... I'm sorry, Sensei."
—I'm so sorry.
Not even such a simple promise.
Was I able to keep—

"Have I—gone insane?"
I don't know.
There isn't even a trace of that impulse left.
The thought of holding back never crossed my mind.
I didn't even consider trying to stop myself.
"Kill this girl."
It had seemed like the obvious thing to do, and I went through with it.
Then the answer is simple.
I must be insane.
I've probably been mad since eight years ago, when I miraculously came back
to life from a fatal accident——

.... I can hear the sound of rain coming from somewhere.
It's raining.
"——"
I'm in a daze.
My throat hurts when I try to breathe.
"Ou.. ch."
I can speak.
"—Shiki-sama?"
Then, I become aware of someone's presence near me—

"My—room."
Somehow, I'm in my own room.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
"Hisui..?"
"Yes.
How are you feeling?"
"....?"
Hisui asks me an odd question.
There's not a single thing wrong with my body, but—

"Wh—y?"

Yes, why?
Why am I asleep in a place like this—
"Even though I—kil—" I was about to say "killed someone", but I stop myself.
My brain tells me I shouldn't say those words.
"What am I—doing here, Hisui?"



"... Do you not remember?
Your school called to say you left early.
However, you did not come back even after dusk, so when my sister went to look for you, she found you resting in the park."
"—Park?—You mean the park near here?"
"Yes, when she found you, you were resting on the park bench.
Then you returned to the mansion on your own feet."
"... You have got to be kidding.
I don't remember any of that."
"I do not believe it is such an odd thing that your memory is unstable, Shiki-sama.
It is difficult for me to say this, but when my sister brought you back, you were in a daze."
"....."
"... I don't remember any of this.
But I have no reason to doubt what Hisui says.
"... Yeah, it's already nine o'clock.. I don't remember anything."
"Yes.
When you returned to the mansion, you said you 'wanted to sleep'.
My sister suggested we call a doctor, but you said 'it happens all the time'.
"—I see.
I guess I do collapse from anemia all the time, but—"
"... This time, it's different.
Because I had killed someone—huh?
"What did I look like, Hisui?"
"—Huh?"
"My clothing, I mean.
Was my uniform.. uh, with the blood—"

It was stained with blood.

"Your uniform was dirty, so I am washing it."

"Washing—you mean those blood-stained clothes..!?"



".... There was certainly mud on it, but nothing like blood."

"Eh..?"

But it was so—"

Even though I was on my knees in a sea of blood, and both my arms and legs had been completely soaked red..?"



"Have you had a nightmare of some sort, Shiki-sama?"

You looked like you were having a bad dream until now, and you do not look fine."

Hisui stares at my face.

"A dream?"

—That, a dream?"

Was it a dream?

That feeling.

That smell of blood.

That hideously beautiful white girl.

"No—maybe you're right.

That's just a bad dream."

Phew.

I breathe out slowly.

—That's right.
That's got to be a bad dream.
There's no way I would break my childhood promise to Sensei needlessly and for no reason.
"Ah—I'm finally awake."



"Yes.
If you are feeling better, I will go prepare dinner now."
"Dinner, huh?"
.... I know it's just a dream, but the color and smell of blood still lingers in my mind.
"—No, it's fine.
I'm just going to sleep like this tonight.
More importantly, Hisui.."
"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"Um.. well.
It seems like I came back after dusk, did Akiha say anything?"
"Akiha-sama was not home yet at the time.
She came back about two hours ago, and was informed of your condition through my sister."
Hisui seems to silently ask "What about it?"
"Oh, it's nothing.
I was just wondering if she was disgusted with me for causing her trouble on just the second day after I've come back."
"... It did seem like Akiha-sama was distressed, but I would not say she was disgusted."
Saying that, Hisui takes a step away from me.
"Well, I will be leaving now.
Please call for me if you need anything."
"Yeah, thanks.
—Oh, one more thing I forgot to ask."
"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"It's raining outside.
When did it start?"
"Before you came back, Shiki-sama."

When my sister found you, you were drenched."

"....."

I see.

I can't even remember that.

It seems like it was a pretty serious case of anemia.

.... If that's the case, I shouldn't have pushed myself and should have just rested at school.

"Good night.

I'm really sorry about today.

Please express my gratitude to Kohaku-san, too."

"I understand.

—Good night."

"—A dream, huh."

It's like I don't even know what I felt.

But if I can't understand what happened or how I feel about it, how do I know it was a dream?

I can hear the sound of the rain outside.

My mind still feels a little heavy.

I glance down at my chest.

.... The old wound from eight years ago is still distinctly there, like a burn scar.

"Ah—"

On top of my desk lies the knife my father left me.

That old blade which had cut that white girl into seventeen pieces.

" —"

.... That was a dream.

Nothing more.

I repeat this over and over again, trying to placate myself until I sleep.

.... But when I was a child,

I think someone once told me, "Don't tell lies that can't even fool yourself."

turn to **54**

52

if cielregard >= 2

turn to **53**

But just what is wrong about it?

I killed her.

Is that fact wrong?

I didn't kill her.

Is that fact wrong?

No, all that's totally wrong—!

Wrong.

Wrong wrong wrong.

So what, am I,

"... Wro.. ng."

What, is

"... Wro.. ng."

That's, because

"I'm saying—it's wrong."

The fact that I didn't kill her is wrong.

"No..!

Wrong!

Wrongwrongwrongwrongwrongwrong..!

I don't even know her!

She's just some stranger I saw walking down the street....!

See!

Isn't that strange to you, Shiki..!?

She's a complete stranger!

Why would I have to kill her..!?"

There is no answer to my screams.

Besides, the reason is clear.

From the moment I saw her, I could only think of one thing.

"I—"

Yes, I—

Tohno Shiki wanted to kill that girl.

That's what I wanted to do back then.

Just that, it was all so muddy inside my head, I didn't put it into words.

"Wro—ng!"

I feel like throwing up.

"Uh, uggg, uh."

The contents of my stomach are coming back up.

"Ah, aaah, ah!"

The crimson soaks into my eyeballs.

"Aaaaaaaaah—!"

I dash out.

I don't think for even a moment about how I might be seen, or to hide the body.

I just want to escape from here.

Half-crazed, I flee from the unfamiliar apartment—

"Guh—burgh!"

My gastric juices rise in my throat.

I throw everything back up.

My food, my gastric juices, everything, while I cry.

pant *wheeze* *gasp* *pant*

There is nothing left in my stomach.

But my body continues to force me to throw up, as if trying to undo what had occurred and return me to a normal life.

pant *wheeze* *gasp* *pant*

Pain.

It hurts, like my insides are burning.

The tears won't stop, and my body collapses to the floor like a pile of garbage.

"Ah, guh—gu, guguh, guh!"

I keep crying.

.... I killed someone.

I killed her without reason, without mercy.

Like breaking apart a doll.

—Why?

Why I felt like that,

why I killed her,

even now, I can't find a reason.

"Guh—ffpt."

Stomach acid drips over my lips.

Passing out of my mouth, dripping down my jaw.

Mixed with the juices is something red.

My throat is probably bleeding because my stomach keeps trying to throw up even when there's nothing left in there.

"O... u—"

It hurts.

That's why this..

This isn't a dream, and I'm just lying to myself.

"—It's all lies."

Yes, actually, I understand everything.

I lusted after her.

Just looking at her aroused me.

When I cut her apart, it was so thrilling I almost ejaculated.

These eyes, too.

If I knew these "lines" could cut things apart like paper being shredded..

I should have understood that even a person could easily be cut apart like I just did to her.

I had lived a normal life without even thinking about something like that.

—If I really am the sort of dangerous person who could easily kill just about anything..

Then I should have put out these eyes or lived a life without seeing anyone.

".... I'm sorry, Sensei."

—I'm so sorry.

Not even such a simple promise,
was I able to keep—

"_____"

But I don't care about myself.

I killed that person.

That person's life up until now.

The people around that person,

the future that person dreamed of,

everything—destroyed by a stranger.

Even if I regret it, I can't be forgiven.

Even if I apologize, I can't be forgiven.

"Have I—gone insane?"

I don't know.

There isn't even a trace of that impulse left.

The thought of holding back never crossed my mind.

I didn't even consider trying to stop myself.

"Kill this girl."

It had seemed like the obvious thing to do, and I went through with it.

Then the answer is simple.

I must be insane.

I've probably been mad since eight years ago, when I miraculously came back
to life from a fatal accident.

.... I can hear the sound of rain coming from somewhere.

It's raining.

"_____"

I'm in a daze.

My throat hurts when I try to breathe.

"Ou.. ch."

I can speak.

"—Shiki-sama?"

Then, I become aware of someone's presence near me—

"My—room."

Somehow, I'm in my own room.



"Have you awakened, Shiki-sama?"

"Hisui..?"

"Yes.

How is your body feeling?"

"....?"

Hisui asks me an odd question.

There's not a single thing wrong with my body, but—

"Wh—y?"

Yes, why?

Why am I asleep in a place like this—

"Even though I—kil—"

I was about to say "killed someone", but I stop myself.

My brain tells me I shouldn't say those words.

"What am I—doing here, Hisui?"



".... Do you not remember, Shiki-sama?" Hisui raises her brow slightly.

"Your school called to say you left early.

However, you did not come back even after dusk, so when my sister went to look for you, she found you resting in the park."

"—Park?—You mean the park near here?"



"Yes, when she found you, you were resting on the park bench. Then you returned to the mansion on your own feet."
"... You have got to be kidding. I don't remember any of that."
"I do not believe it is such an odd thing that your memory is unstable, Shiki-sama. It is difficult for me to say this, but when my sister brought you back, you were in a daze."
"....."
"... I don't remember any of this. But I have no reason to doubt what Hisui says."
"... Yeah, it's already nine o'clock.. I don't remember anything."
"Yes. When you returned to the mansion, you said you 'wanted to sleep'. My sister suggested we call a doctor, but you said 'it happens all the time'.
"—I see. I guess I do collapse from anemia all the time, but—"
"... This time, it's different. Because I had killed someone—huh?
"What did I look like, Hisui?"
"—Huh?"
"My clothing, I mean. Was my uniform.. uh, with the blood—"
It was stained with blood.
"Your uniform was dirty, so I am washing it."
"Washing—you mean those blood-stained clothes..!?"



"... There was certainly mud on it, but nothing like blood."

"Eh..?"

But it was so—"

Even though I was on my knees in a sea of blood, and both my arms and legs had been completely soaked red..?

"Have you had a nightmare of some sort, Shiki-sama?"

You looked like you were having a bad dream until now, and you do not look fine."

Hisui stares at my face.

"A dream?"

—That, a dream?"

Was it a dream?

That feeling.

That smell of blood.

That hideously beautiful white girl.

"No—maybe you're right.

That's just a bad dream."

Phew.

I breathe out slowly.

—That's right.

That's got to be a bad dream.

There's no way I would break my childhood promise to Sensei needlessly and for no reason.

But that..

Is it being a dream too good to be true?

"—!"



"... Shiki-sama?
Are you still not feeling well?"
"—No, I'm alright now.
That—something like that must have been a dream.
That's what I've got to believe."
—If I don't believe so, I just can't be sleeping here.
"Yes.
If you are feeling better, I will go prepare dinner now."
"... Dinner?"
.... No way.
I can't eat when the color and smell of blood still lingers in my mind.
"—No, it's fine.
I'm just going to sleep like this tonight.
More importantly, Hisui.."
"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"Um.. well.
It seems like I came back after dusk, but did Akiha say anything?"
"Akiha-sama was not home yet at the time.
She came back about two hours ago, and was informed of your condition through my sister."
Hisui seems to silently ask, "what about it?"
"Oh, it's nothing.
I was just wondering if she was disgusted with me for causing her trouble on just the second day after I've come back."
"... It did seem like Akiha-sama was distressed, but I would not say she was disgusted."
Saying this, Hisui takes a step away from me.
"Well, I will be leaving now.
Please call for me if you need anything."
"Yeah, thanks.
—Oh, one more thing I forgot to ask."
"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"It's raining outside.
When did it start?"
"Before you came back, Shiki-sama.

When my sister found you, you were drenched."

"....."

I see.

I can't even remember that.

It seems like it was a pretty serious case of anemia.

.... If that's the case, I shouldn't have pushed myself and should have just rested at school.

"Good night.

I'm really sorry about today.

Please express my gratitude to Kohaku-san, too."

"I understand.

—Good night."

"—A dream, huh."

It's like I don't even know what I felt.

But if I can't understand what happened or how I feel about it, how do I know it was a dream?

I can hear the sound of the rain outside.

My mind still feels a little heavy.

I glance down at my chest.

.... The old wound from eight years ago is still distinctly there, like a burn scar.

"Ah—"

On top of my desk lies the knife my father left me.

"—"

.... That was a dream.

Nothing more.

I repeat this over and over again, trying to placate myself until I sleep.

.... But when I was a child,

I think someone once told me, "don't tell lies that you can't even fool yourself with."

turn to **54**

53

But just what is wrong about it?
 Wrong wrong wrong wrong.
 Wrong wrong wrong wrong.
 I killed her.
 Is that fact wrong?
 I didn't kill her.
 Is that fact wrong?
 No, all that's totally wrong—!
 That's wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong,
 wrong, wrong, wrong, wrongwrong,
 wrong, wrong, wrong, wrongwrongwrong,
 wrong, wrong, wrong, wrongwrong wrongwrong,
 wrong wrong wrong , wrong wrong wrong wrong , wrong wrong wrong wrong
 wrong , wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong , wrong wrong wrong wrong
 wrong wrong wrong , wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong ,
 wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong
 wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong
 —
 "... Wr.. ong."
 No, no, that is wrong.
 "I'm saying—it's wrong."
 It can't be.
 It just can't be.
 "Wrong!
 —Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrongwrongwrong..!
 I don't know her!
 She's just some stranger I saw walking down the street....!
 See!
 Isn't that strange to you, Shiki..!?
 She's a complete stranger!
 Why would I have to kill her..!?"
 There is no answer to my screams.
 Besides, the reason is clear.
 From the moment I saw her, I could only think of one thing.
 "I——"
 Yes, I—
 Tohno Shiki wanted to kill that girl.
 That's what I wanted to do back then.
 Just that, it was all so muddy inside my head, I didn't put it in words.
 "Wro—ng!"
 I feel like throwing up.
 "Uh, uggg, uh."
 The contents of my stomach rise.
 "Ah, aaah, ah!"

The crimson is soaking into my eyeballs.
 "Aaaaaaaaah—!"
 I dash out.
 I don't think for even a moment about how I might be seen, or to hide the body.
 I just want to escape from here.
 Half-crazed, I flee from the unfamiliar apartment—

"Guh—burgh!"
 My stomach acid rises in my throat.
 I throw everything back up.
 My food, my gastric juices, everything, while I cry.
 pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*..!
 There is nothing left in my stomach.
 But my body continues to force me to throw up, as if trying to undo what had occurred and return me to the everyday.
 *pant*.. *pant*.. *pant*.. *pant*..
 Pain.
 It hurts, like my insides are burning.
 The tears won't stop, and my body collapses to the floor like a pile of garbage.
 "Ah, guh—gu, guguh, guh!"
 I keep crying.
 I killed someone.
 I killed her without reason, without mercy.
 Like breaking apart a doll.
 —What was it all about?
 Why I felt like that,
 Why I killed her,
 Even now, I can't find a reason.
 "—It's a lie."
 No—it's too odd to be true.
 That thing that just happened might not be real.
 So this is just one of those dreams I have when I faint—
 "—It's a lie."
 Besides, how can someone cut apart someone else like that with just a knife?
 I read it in a book once.
 It takes a whole day of strenuous labor to cut someone up, even when using a saw.
 That's why there's no way I could have possibly done such a thing with just a knife.
 These "lines" never existed in the first place.
 Everything was just a delusion I had fallen for—
 "—It's a lie."

"Guh—ffpt."
 Gastric juice drips over my lips.
 Passing out of my mouth, dripping down my jaw.

Mixed with the juices is something red.
My throat is probably bleeding because my stomach keeps trying to throw up
even when there's nothing left in there.
"O.... u—"
It hurts.
That's why this..
This isn't a dream, and I'm just lying to myself.
Yes, actually, I understand everything.
I lusted after her.
Just looking at her aroused me.
When I cut her apart, it was so thrilling I almost ejaculated.
These eyes, too.
If I knew these "lines" could cut things apart like paper being shredded..
I should have understood that even a person could easily be cut apart like I just
did to her.
I had lived a normal life without even thinking about something like that.
—If I really am the sort of dangerous person who could easily kill just about
anything..
Then I should have put out these eyes or lived a life without seeing anyone.
"... I'm sorry, Sensei."
—I'm so sorry.
Not even such a simple promise,
was I able to keep—
"——"
But I don't care about myself.
I killed that person.
That person's life up until now.
The people around that person,
the future that person dreamed of,
everything—destroyed by a stranger.
Even if I regret it, I cannot be forgiven.
Even if I apologize, I cannot be forgiven.
"Have I—gone insane?"
I don't know.
There isn't even a trace of that impulse left.
But if—that impulse came again, what will happen to me?
The thought of holding back never crossed my mind.
I did not even consider trying to stop myself.
"Kill this girl."
If it had seemed like the obvious thing to do, and I went through with it, then
there's nothing I can do.
Then the answer is simple.
I must be insane.
—I've probably been mad since eight years ago, when I miraculously came back
to life from a fatal accident.

——I'm.. cold.
 The sun has gone down without me noticing.
 ——What time is it now?
 I can't tell.
 My eardrums are filled with noise, like a static TV.
 Static.
 Static.
 Static.
 The sound doesn't stop.
 It's terribly cold.
 If I stay—sitting down on this bench like this, I think I'm going to die.
 Static, static, static
 I don't feel anything.
 I don't care about that repeating noise or the freezing cold.
 My body is shivering.
 It may be due to the cold, or the uneasiness, or the fear, or regret.
 I can't tell which.
 I've killed someone, and I can't explain why I did it without any reason.
 —What a joke.
 There's no reason, so there's no way I can explain it.
 I killed her just because I felt like killing her.
 Such a reason is insanity.
 Yeah, it would be so easy if I was just insane.
 But my heart still remains sane.
 It's only because I'm still sane that I can feel this numbness.
 Staticstaticstatic.
 The knife is still in my hand.
 Resolving this by killing myself, that's pretty easy.
 But I can't do it.
 I'm still sane, so I can't do it.
 My heart fears death,
 And somewhere in my heart, I know that doing so will not settle this—or atone
 for it.
 The noise continues.
 My body temperature continues to plummet.
 —I can't kill myself.
 But if I leave things as they are, I'll disappear.
 Maybe that's for the best.
 Even if a killer like me survives..

If I
 just quickly
 die
 like this..
 "Tohno.. kun?"
 Suddenly, my name is called.

"_____"

I raise my head.

There's Senpai—it feels like decades since I last saw her.



24 0

"What are you doing sitting out here in the rain?"

".... R.. ain."

.... Ah, I see.

That static noise up until now was the sound of rain.

No wonder it's cold.

I can see now that I'm completely soaked and freezing.

"Oh, you don't even have an umbrella.

You're going to catch a cold like that, Tohno-kun."

.... Senpai's voice is so painful.

It was only a few hours ago that I had last heard it, but now—it sounds so distant.

"Tohno-kun?

Can you hear me..?"

"Nn—ah, yeah.

It wouldn't be so bad to catch a cold."

I just reply without thinking.

"That won't do!

You'll catch more than a cold with rain like this, even if it is October—"

Her sentence cuts off as she touches me.

"How long have you been like this, Tohno-kun..!?"

You're so cold!"

Senpai pulls my arm and forces me up from the bench.

"I'll lend you my umbrella, so please hurry and go home, and do something about your body.

It'll really be a matter of life and death if you don't warm up quickly."

".... Ah, yeah.

But I can't go home.

I can't go anywhere ever again."

.... I can't go home after doing something like that.

I don't think there's anywhere left where I can rest anymore.



24 0

"——"

Senpai stares at me.

"—I see.

Then let's go back to my room.

It's closer than your house, so it's perfect."

Senpai pulls me by my arm.

"....."

I can't shake her off.

I can't think about anything at the moment, and—Senpai's warmth is the only certain thing in this world where everything feels numb.

.... Senpai's room is a common one-room apartment in a two-story building. Just one really small, cramped room the size of six tatami mats and one kitchen. As one might expect from Senpai, the room is a neat one. That trivial fact relaxes my numbed nerves just a little.



"Here, please wipe yourself with this."

She hands me a bath towel.

"Sorry, I don't have any clothes that fit you.

Please just bear with this for a while.

I'll go prepare something warm for you to drink right away."

.... Senpai retreats to the kitchen.
I'm left by myself in the neat room.
"_____"
I've never imagined coming into a girl's room like this.
A girl's room.
.... The room of a girl.
A girl's room which I forced myself into and killed a girl in.
"_____"
I feel like throwing up.
What—am I doing here?
In such a place.
I have absolutely no right to receive Senpai's hospitality here.



"Thanks for waiting.
Here you g—, Tohno-kun!"



"You've got to wipe yourself down, quickly!"
Senpai scolds me as she begins to rub my head with the bath towel.



"See, your shirt is all soaked too.
You've got to take it off.
You might catch pneumonia like this!"
A very fierce-looking Senpai undoes the buttons on my shirt.
Suddenly, her fingers stop.



".... Um.. er."
Senpai takes a long hard look at my chest.
".... This is a healed wound, isn't it?"
.... Ah, she must be surprised to see the old wound on my chest.
The burn-like marks are right in the middle of my chest.
She might be surprised at seeing them because she didn't know.
".... Yeah.
They're fine.
It's already been eight years."



"I see.
.... Thank goodness.
If this wound was the reason you're acting funny, I'd have to take you to the hospital right away."
Senpai gives a faint, soft smile.
.... A twinge.
When I see her smiling face, my chest hurts.
".... It's alright.
I can do it by myself, so leave me alone."
"Okay.
I'll bring you some tea then.
Oh, if you take your shirt off, please use that sheet there and warm yourself."

"....."

I wipe my trousers with the bath towel.
But even so, my trousers are still wet.
The sheet is going to get soaked if I cover myself with it.
I take off my shirt, and wrap the top half of my body with the towel.



"Ah, are you finished wiping yourself?
Then let's have some tea."
Senpai sits down, holding a tea set.



"Please sit down too, Tohno-kun.
I can't calm down with you standing up."
"....."
I do as I'm told and sit down.
Senpai pours some English tea and hands it to me.

"....."
"....."
Neither of us say anything.
Senpai drinks her English tea as if she doesn't notice my presence.
Following Senpai's example, I drink some as well.
—It's hot.
So hot that it hurts my tongue.
The warmth puts a pulse into me.
It feels like my heart, brain, and all my other organs that stopped begin to move
a little again.
Senpai says nothing.
It's not long before the teacup is empty.
Senpai naturally refills the cup again with more.
"..... Ah."
I get the feeling that I have to say something.



"Tohno-kun."
".....!"
I recoil in shock.

"I'm going out for a bit.
Can I count on you to look after the house?"
"Ah.. y-yeah.
That's fine."



"Alright, then I'll leave it up to you.
I'll be right back, so don't do anything funny."

I wonder how serious she is.
Smiling as she speaks, Senpai leaves.
—
I'm alone again.
The warm something I'd felt up to a moment ago is quickly cooling down.
.... Senpai didn't ask me anything.
She takes a person like me into her room and looks after me like it's the natural thing to do.
.... Though I didn't notice.
The warmth of the tea, the neatness of the room.
What is many, many times more comforting than those things,
is having someone beside me.
"Kuh....!"
My chest hurts.
A little while ago, I preferred to be alone, feeling nothing.
But now, I become uneasy just by her absence.
I want to scream like I've gone crazy.
.... What arrogance.
I'm a murderer, after all.
I don't have any right to Senpai's kindness.
But I'm selfishly wanting Senpai to quickly, quickly come home—



"I'm home, Tohno-kun.
 Thanks for looking after the place."
 "—Sen.. pai."
 It seems Senpai has bought all sorts of things.
 There are several plastic bags hanging from her hands.
 "Let's see.. please wear this for now.
 It's cheap, but it's better than wet clothing.
 By the way, the bath should be about ready now.
 You should feel a bit better after relaxing in there for a while."

"..... Eh?"

Senpai neatly prepares everything.
 My change of clothes, a bath..
 This person is.
 Even though there is no need to do so, for a person like me.
 ".... It's okay, Senpai.
 I'm going home.
 I can't cause you any more trouble."



"What are you saying, Tohno-kun?
 You said you can't go home, right?
 I've already bought food for two, so please take responsibility!"
 "Responsibility—?
 Senpai?
 "

"Please warm yourself up, eat dinner, and get yourself together before you go home.

If you just go home with a face like that, I'll be so worried I won't be able to sleep."

"_____"

My chest hurts.

Happiness.

I'm so happy I'm about to cry, but on the other hand, I'm in fear of her kindness.

".... Why?"



"Yes?"

What is it, Tohno-kun?"

".... Why do you go so far, Senpai?"

I—don't have any right to be treated kindly by you."

—I killed someone.

I can't have someone taking care of me.

".... I'm hopeless.

I made a very big mistake just then, and I ran away without taking responsibility.

I was even considering just dying—"

—I'm trying to cling onto Senpai.

That sin.

The life I took with my own hands.

I'm trying to make it something that didn't happen in my mind.

".... The mistake I made is unforgivable.. no, I don't think it should be forgiven.

That's why I'm hopeless.

I have no right to be treated well by you here, Senpai."



Senpai sighs.

"... It seems you're convinced that you're a bad person, Tohno-kun," she answers simply.

Senpai grasped the truth lying deep within me.



"But that just shows you have no confidence in your own actions.

You know you made a mistake, but you don't understand whether it's good or bad.

That's why you have no choice but to drive yourself into a corner until things become clear to you."

"—No, that's—"

.... I don't know.

But yeah, I am taking in the fact that I did it, yet I still don't understand why. I've killed someone, and that makes me a bad person.

Maybe I've just been forcing myself into the role of a villain as I try to confirm where my sin lies—



"I don't know what your mistake is, and to put it bluntly, I don't care. You say you have no right to kindness, but that's just your point of view. I'm not being kind to you for your sake, so please don't worry about it."



".... Well, I mean, I'm doing this because I want to. It has nothing to do with your circumstances. It may be a bother to you, but please just think of yourself as having been caught by a mean-spirited senpai and give up."



Saying this, Senpai smiles.
That soft, protective, faint smile.

I can hear the sound of rain.
.... In the end, I couldn't shake off Senpai's kindness after all.
She lets me use the bath and prepares pajamas for me.

She treats me to dinner, and she lends me a bed because it's raining outside, and I'm about to go to sleep like this.

"_____"

My throat feels blocked.

Senpai has taken care of me so much my senses feel numb.

During dinner, she spoke cheerfully like she always does.

She raised all the usual topics, about school, about the many shops in the business district, and so on.

.... And although I couldn't give her even one proper answer, every time I responded, I felt a little bit of myself coming back.

Right now, I'm sleeping in Senpai's bed, and can't stop thinking about Senpai, who's sleeping on the floor.

—What a turn of events.

I killed someone only hours ago and now I'm getting excited like a normal student.

My senses really do feel numb.

I didn't think I could ever be showered in happiness like this ever again.

"....."

I can't sleep, so I just look around.

I don't know what I should do next.

I can hear the sound of the downpour outside.

"You're going to be late tomorrow if you don't hurry up and sleep, Tohno-kun."

"—Senpai, you're awake?"

"Yes, I can't sleep until you do.

I am a girl, after all."

".... I'm sorry.

I'll sleep in the kitchen then."

"Oh, how many times do I have to tell you?

You've got a cold, so you can't sleep in a place like the kitchen.

It's alright, so please just hurry up and forget your unpleasant thoughts so you can go to sleep."

"—Unpleasant thoughts."

.... That's impossible.

That's not something I can forget—it's something I shouldn't forget.

Whatever the reason, I killed someone.

To forget about the person I killed would be a sin deep beyond imagination.

".... No.

I can't just gloss over my sins, Senpai.

I can't forget about them, and I won't try to.

.... But thanks.

You really helped me with all sorts of things today.

I really might have died if I stayed like that."

That would be running away.

If I really think I had made a mistake, I shouldn't deny it.

"Sins, you say?"

It seems like your mistake is something unimaginable for me."

Senpai speaks in a cheerful voice, like she's telling a joke.
"But there's no such thing as a human who doesn't commit sin.
It's not like the world is divided into sinners and the innocent.
As long as you're alive, you'll make mistakes.
.... It's sad, but it's unavoidable.
To live is to be worn down.
We are only beings who influence other things while we fade away ourselves."
".... What?
Then you're saying we're beyond salvation?
I don't like that story about how everyone makes mistakes."
".... Yes, I guess we can't be saved if that were the case.
But you can atone for your sins.
There are only people who can and who cannot atone for their sins.
I think those beyond salvation are those who cannot atone for their sins."
.... For some reason, Senpai's voice sounds very sad.
"But you can atone for your sins, Tohno-kun.
I don't know what kind of mistake you've made, but you are the kind of person
who can atone for your sins.
If you're too worried to sleep, then just think about how you intend to live and
atone for your sins from now on.
It's a really hard thing to come up with, so your brain is sure to tire out, and
you'll fall right asleep."
I don't know how serious she is, as she seems to be throwing jokes into the mix.
".... I can atone for my sins, huh?
But Senpai, my mistake is definitely one that can't be atoned for.
That's something I can say for sure."
"Ahaha, that's right.
No matter what form it takes, sin cannot be atoned for.
If you injure someone, the sin is not gone even if you heal the wound, is it?
No matter how hard you try, you can't erase the mistakes you've made.
I think atoning is not about the results, but about the process.
That's what I mean by those who atone for and those who don't.
That's why you're the kind of person who can atone for your sins."
".... I don't understand.
I'm a terrible person.
I'm not the great person you think I am."
"I can easily see that.
I was really moved just then.
You have a terrible wound on your chest, right?"
"Eh..?
Yes, but what about it?"
"You must have had a serious accident to get a scar like that.. scars tend to
distort your mind.
A wound that size which doesn't disappear is a little out of the ordinary."
"But you're a very natural person.
Anyone with that kind of wound who can lead a normal life can be proud of his

own strength.

You must have had a very proper childhood."

Satisfied, Senpai concludes her musings and falls silent.

I can hear her even breathing if I strain my ears.

"... Are you asleep, Senpai?"

There is no reply.

I can only hear the sound of the rain from outside.

"... Atone for my sins, huh?"

A punishment to fit the sin I had committed.

I guess they'll find the body of the girl I had killed tomorrow, and there'll be a new serial killer story on the news.

I can't even begin to count the things I'll lose when that happens.

It'll be trouble for Akiha for sure, and I'll never be able to talk to Senpai like this again.

"....."

But if that would atone for my sin, then I have no choice but to accept it.

If I can atone for my sin with that—then there might be salvation somewhere.

"Haa—aahhhh."

I feel a little sleepier.

I don't know about tomorrow.

I don't know, but if I can be forgiven..

Until the moment my sin is discovered, until the moment I'm confronted with my sin..

I wish I could keep living this kind of life.

.... Fwoomp.

.... Sssh.

"... Nn."

.... There's a noise coming from nearby.

I don't feel like waking up at all, but I lazily open my eyes in reaction to the noise.

—Senpai is changing.

It's still the middle of the night.

There's no light coming in from the window.

Maybe the rain stopped; it's very quiet now.

Senpai is taking off her clothes.

"....."

What a shame.

If I wasn't in such a deep state of regret over the murder I've committed, or half-asleep, I would be able to fully appreciate how sexy Senpai looks.

Right now, though, my head doesn't seem to function properly.

Senpai's eyes look lifeless.

More importantly, there's something strange.

—What—is that?

"....."

There are odd bruises on her arms.
.... No, those aren't bruises, more like tattoos.
.... There's.. something.. not right.. about this.

"....."

I feel sleepy again.
I think.. a lot of things are cluttered around Senpai's feet.
But that's it.
I fall into a deep sleep.

setvar cielregard + 2
turn to **59**

54

—When I come to, it's morning.
Maybe the rain stopped; I can't hear it anymore.
It seems clouded outside, and the sunlight through the window is dim.
"Ha—ah."
Taking a deep breath, I get out of bed.
.... I didn't sleep well last night.
Over and over, as I was about to fall asleep, that scene would replay in my mind
and keep me awake.
"... A crimson floor and limbs everywhere.."
Reason and memory are liabilities at times like these.
They force me to remember things I only want to forget.
"It's just a dream—why am I so bothered by it?"
.... Yes.
Just a dream.
I should forget it quickly, without a moment's delay.
Knock, knock.
Someone knocks on the door.
It's past six o'clock in the morning.
.... Who could it be this early?



"—Excuse me."



"Shiki—sama, are you awake?"

"Yeah, I've been sleeping since yesterday afternoon, so I'm awake early.
So, what about you, Hisui?
What's happening at this time in the morning?"



"....."

Hisui falls silent.

Actually, now that I look carefully, I notice she has my school uniform in her hands.

"I see.

You brought me a change of clothes."

".... Yes.

I am sorry.

I have shown you something you do not wish to see."

"?"

Hisui keeps silent.

.... What is it I didn't want to see?

I don't get it at all.

".... I don't understand, but thanks anyway.

Just leave the clothes there.

I'll get changed soon and go to the sitting room."

Hisui nods in assent.

"Very well, then.

Please excuse me."

Hisui begins walking silently, only to suddenly turn around.



"Shiki-sama.

.... Um.. if you have the time, I will also prepare a bath for you."

".... A bath?

In the morning?"

"Yes.

You are terribly dirty, Shiki-sama.

Would it not be best for you to wash before you go to school?"

Hisui asks me with her usual lack of expression in a disinterested voice.

.... Now that she mentions it, I am dirty.

I did collapse from anemia in the park yesterday, after all.

So, it's not unnatural.

"—Yeah, would you mind doing that for me?

I'll have time for that before I go to school if it's this early."

"I understand.

Please come to the bathroom in about twenty minutes."

Hisui sets my uniform down and leaves the room.

It's still six o'clock in the morning.

With nothing to do, I spend the twenty minutes in my room staring at the ceiling.

I enter the bath and pour water over my head, which makes me feel a little refreshed.

I take a deep breath as the cold water soaks my hair.

.... What a terrible dream.

There's got to be something wrong with me, having a dream where I kill a beautiful woman like that.

If just one day of living in an unfamiliar mansion is enough to give me dreams like that, I hate to think what the days ahead are going to be like.

sigh

"I've really got to get it together."

I clear my head with another splash of cold water and wash myself.

"Ow...."

I feel a sting as the towel touches my throat.

".... What's this?"

I look at my neck in the mirror.
.... How did this happen?
My throat is red and swollen.
It's almost as if I injured it by repeatedly throwing up.

I return to my room and change into my uniform.
It's barely seven o'clock.
Astounded at how much clearer my head feels after the bath, I pick up my bag
and leave the room.

Kohaku-san has just come out of the sitting room when I go down the stairs.



"Good morning, Shiki-san.
You sure are early today."
Kohaku-san makes a bow while smiling.
"And you look refreshed, too.
Have you just had a bath?"
"Yeah, I just took one.
That's amazing, Kohaku-san.
Can you tell?"



"Aha, I can tell just by looking at you because your hair isn't dry, Shiki-san.
You certainly look cuter after you've had a bath."
I avert my gaze just a little as I am faced with that warm, carefree smile.
It's kind of embarrassing.



"Please hold on for just a minute.
I'm going to prepare some breakfast now."

"Eh—?"
.... Break, fast.
Uh.. I guess she means something to eat.

Such a trivial thing causes me to remember the color of blood.
I don't have much of an appetite at the moment.



"Is a western-style breakfast like yesterday fine with you, Shiki-san?"
"—Ah.. yeah.
I really don't mind. So, breakfast, huh?
That bath felt so good that I almost forgot about it."
"Really?"
You didn't eat last night either, so I was talking to Hisui-chan about how maybe the sound of your stomach might have woken you up."
"Ahaha, no.
Sadly, that's not the case.
I've been a light eater since I was little, so I often skip one or two meals at a time."
"I see.
Now that you mention it, you've got a nice body without any excess meat on you.

Could it be that you're a vegetarian?"

"Hmm, perhaps.

Come to think of it, I get the feeling that all I ate at the Arima house were vegetables."

Kohaku-san busily heads back to the sitting room.

—But I don't feel like eating right now.

"Ah, it's alright, Kohaku-san.

I'll go to school without eating today.

Tell Akiha for me."

"Bye." I head towards the doorway.

Suddenly, my arm is tightly grabbed.



"Shiki-san!"

"—Eh?"

.... I can't believe it.

Kohaku-san is angry.

"What are you saying, Shiki-san!?"

Haven't you looked in the mirror this morning!?"

".... Ah, well, I took a look in the bathroom mirror.."

"You're lying!"

You wouldn't say something like that if you looked even once!"

Kohaku-san is seriously angry.

.... Come to think of it, when I saw my face in the mirror, I think I saw death warmed over.

"I'll be fine.

It's just that I don't have a lot of blood in me, so I look worse than normal people."

"This won't do!

You won't grow without eating breakfast!

If you don't have an appetite, I'll prepare you something easy to eat.

So please, go to the dining room."

Holding on to my arm, she drags me towards the sitting room.

.... I've got no choice.

I really don't feel like going along with this, but I'll have to accept Kohaku-san's

good intentions.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
How do you feel?"
Akiha greets me reservedly.
That firmness about her yesterday is gone.
I guess it's because she's worried about me.
"Ah, good morning.
I'm feeling.. well.. good, in a certain way."

Returning her greeting, I head towards the dining room.



"Ah!
Please wait here, Shiki-san.
I'll call you when it's ready."

Kohaku-san disappears into the dining room by herself, leaving me, the downcast-looking Akiha, and Hisui, who stands emotionlessly by the wall.

"....."

.... This is kind of awkward.

"Nii-san, about last night, is it true that you collapsed in the park?"



"Seems so.
I don't really remember it myself, but if that's what Kohaku-san and Hisui say,
then it must be what happened."



"Oh, stop talking like it's someone else's problem, Nii-san!
You have a weak body, so if you ever feel bad, please contact the mansion.
I will send someone to pick you up right away."
"... Hey, listen, there's no need for that.
I'm not like a primary school kid, I can make it home by myself no matter how
bad I feel."
"Then I guess the fact you could not make it home last night would mean you
are a child."
"—Mmn."
It sucks to admit it, but Akiha is right.
"... Yesterday was different.
That kind of thing is really rare.
Look, just because I have chronic anemia doesn't make my body weak.
There's no reason for you to worry about every little thing, Akiha.
Yesterday was.. you know.. just a terminal case of bad timing.
That's all."
"A terminal case?
Please do not use such inauspicious words, Nii-san!
You have only just come back to the mansion!
What would I do if you died..!"
Akiha is seriously angry.



"Geez.
 you take things too easily, Nii-san.
 Please, take better care of yourself."
 "Even if you tell me that, I don't push myself as it is.
 I'm not in any clubs, and I do everything the doctor says.. You'd have to put
 me in a sanitarium for me to get any better care."



"Yes, I would love to do that if I could."
 Avoiding my gaze, Akiha says something very frightening.

As for Hisui, she's standing by the wall like a statue.
 "....."
 I'm at a loss for conversation.
 There's still some time until we eat, so—

Talk about Akiha.	turn to 55
Talk about Kohaku-san.	turn to 56
Talk about the mansion.	turn to 57

"Ah, Akiha.

If I remember correctly, you go to Asagami Ladies' Academy, right?"



"—That's right.

Asagami Ladies' Academy goes all the way from middle school to university."

Akiha's gaze seems to ask, "What about it?"

"Well, that's a boarding school for ladies, isn't it?

I'm wondering why you're commuting there from home."

"Dear Mr. Asagami and Father were friends, so he indulges my requests.

There is a provision to attend school from one's home under certain circumstances."

Akiha gives a concise response.

"No, that's not what I'm asking about.

You were living in the dormitory up until the old man died, right?

Why are you only starting to commute there now?"

"Eh—"



She holds back her words and looks away.



"Shiki-sama, Akiha-sama has traditionally spent half of every week here. It is nothing extraordinary for her to commute to the Academy from the mansion."

"Ah, really?"

That sounds tough.

Asagami Ladies' Academy is in the next prefecture, right?

Isn't it easier for you to enjoy the dormitory life rather than having to come back to the mansion all the time?"



".... Yes, you may be right.

But it is what Father wanted, so I spend half the week here."

"Hmm.. but the old man isn't here anymore, so you don't have to force yourself, right?"

Dormitory life looks kind of fun, after all."



"Well, I wouldn't be troubled if it were that easy.
But if I were to leave you by yourself, there's no telling what might happen to you, is there?
With things like what happened yesterday, I will still be attending school from the mansion for now.
—One more thing, Nii-san.."



She straightens her posture and looks right at me.
"... Uh.. yeah?"
"The lodgings at Asagami Ladies' Academy are not dormitories.
They are boarding houses.
Please get it right next time."

... Akiha's words are wrapped in thorns.
Actually, I was pricked plenty of times by them my first day back, but this morning there is something sulky about them.
turn to **58**

56

"Akiha.
About Kohaku-san.."



"Yes?
What about Kohaku?"
"She's a really nice person, isn't she?
I was just scolded by her in the hallway.
'You won't grow without eating breakfast!' she said."



"Hmmm.
That sounds like something she would say.
Do you like Kohaku, Nii-san?"
"Eh—No, that's not what I mean.
I was just surprised because I was never scolded like that when I was at the
Arima household.
Thanks to her, it doesn't seem like I'll be able to skip breakfast from now on."
"That's right.
You are anemic after all, so it would not do you good to skip breakfast."
The dizziness isn't really linked to my diet, but I just nod obediently.

turn to **58**

57

"Oh, that's right.
What's happening with our mansion now, Akiha?"



"What do you mean?
If you are talking about ownership of the mansion, I am inheriting it."
"No, not that.
The only people in the mansion right now are you, me, Kohaku-san, and Hisui,
right?
I was wondering what the rooms are being used for, and so on."



"Nothing.
As a general rule, all the rooms except the ones we are using are locked.
Your room is at the back of the second floor of the west wing, and mine is in
the east wing.
Hisui's room is right before the stairs on the west wing, second floor, and Ko-
haku's room is just before the west wing, first floor.
Father's room is next to Kohaku's room.
That's open for now, too."
Incidentally, the sitting room is the first right turn in from the lobby.
In Akiha's words, it would be something like "right before the lobby on the first
floor of the east wing".
"The gaming room and the guest rooms next to the sitting room are closed, but
I will open them if you decide to bring friends here."

The archives are.. well, there are some bad rumors going around about them, so currently they are off limits."

"I see.

Okay, got it."

I get a strange suspicious feeling about those "off limits archives", but for now, they have absolutely nothing to do with me.

turn to **58**

58

"Shiki-san, it's ready!"
I can hear Kohaku-san's voice from the dining room.
"Right, so I'm gonna get some grub."



"Oh, Nii-san!
Please refrain from talking in such an unrefined manner!"
Akiha shoots me a sharp glare.
"Aw, you've finally gone back to normal.
I liked you more when you were calm because you were worried about me."



"I was not worrying about you, Nii-san!"
Akiha quickly looks away.
Looking at her with a faint smile, I go to the dining room.

I'm escorted outside by Hisui.



"Please take care."

Saying the same thing she always does, she continues to stare at me.

"Shiki-sama, what happened to you last night?"

"Last night?"

Nothing in particular.

I was just feeling sick at school, so I left early.

I was on my way back when—"

On my way back?"

"I just collapsed in the park.

Well, I guess I was just being careless like Akiha said.

.... Yeah, I'll be careful from now on."

"I am not placing any blame on you, Shiki-sama, but you look like you are pushing yourself this morning.

Please take care along the way."

Hisui makes a deep bow and sees me out.

As I approach the school, I begin to catch sight of more and more students in uniforms.

It's Saturday, so most of them are smiling while they walk.

It's only a little way to the main gate once I pass this intersection.

It's still only seven-thirty.

Looks like I'll be able to get to school with time to spare today.

The light turns red, and I stop in front of the cross walk.

The school fence is just on the other side.

Since it's a school path, the footpath is protected by a guardrail.

Even now, the students in front of me are heading towards the school gate.

There's no one but students from our school on the other side at this time of day.

.... There should be no one but the students.

But between the cars rushing by, I feel like I catch a glimpse of someone in white.

"—Wha...."

She is there.

Dressed in white, with golden hair down to her shoulders.

Long, slender brows and red eyes.

I've seen her only once before, but there's no way I could mistake her for someone else.

"——"

But that's impossible.

I killed her myself yesterday, cutting her into pieces.

"Wha——"

No.

Even that's a lie.

It's all just a dream.

Hisui told me so——

"——"

No, she didn't say anything of the sort.

It's just that I wanted to believe it was a dream.

Then it really wasn't a dream.

But then..

Why?

Why does she exist, as real as anything——?

The light turns green.

The students around me walk towards the other side.

I'm the only one amongst them who stands there, stunned.

She sits on the guardrail, her legs swinging idly,

as if she is waiting for someone.

I can't tell how long she's been waiting, but her expression isn't a grim one.

—Who is she waiting for?

She fidgets restlessly, as if she were waiting for her lover.

—I have a bad feeling about this.

"Ah——"

The girl in white looks over in my direction.

It's probably nothing more than a coincidence.

She's just a stranger who looks like her.

She must be waiting for someone else.

If not, then this moment must surely be a bad dream, too.

After all, I completely and utterly killed her with my own hands——

But she's looking this way and smiling.

Looking very satisfied at having found the person who killed her, her smile seems to say, "you've finally come——"

Giving a familiar wave and a smile, she hops off the guardrail.

Fluttering her hair, she heads towards me.

"——Don't come."

This.. is a bad dream.

The light turns red.

"——Don't come near me."

She doesn't even look like she cares, walking straight across the street while the cars pass by.

There's only a few meters between us.

".... I'm telling you not to come—-!!!"
 The reality before my eyes does not change even when I scream out.
 Screaming in a voice even I don't understand, I run from the girl in white.

I run.
 I run with all my strength.
 With no regard to embarrassment or shame, I blast through the passersby, running full speed across the asphalt.
 huff *huff* *huff* *huff*
 My breathing is wild, and my heart screams out.
 But still, I run.
 I feel like I'm going to go crazy if I don't.
 I look behind me.
 The girl in white is walking towards me.
 She's definitely following me.
 The girl I've killed is chasing me.
 That's more than enough reason for me to run.

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*
 My heart feels like it's about to explode, but I ignore it and keep running.
 When I look back, the girl is still there.
 With those light footsteps, she follows me as I run away.
 huff *huff* *huff* *huff*
 My head droops down.
 My arms feel heavy.
 My legs feel like they're going to tear off.
 But despite that,
 I'm running with all my strength, and yet, I can't get away from someone just walking after me—!

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*
 My breathing is out of control.
 I think I've already run several kilometers.
 But even so, when I look back, she's always there, walking towards me.
 Naturally, like she's taking a stroll, she follows right behind me.
 huff *huff* "... Haha, hahaha!"
 It's not funny, but I begin to laugh.
 "Haha, hahaha, ahahahahaha!"
 I can't stop laughing.
 But even so, I run.
 My body complains that I'll die if I run any more, but I keep running.
 The reason is simple.
 If she catches me, she'll kill me for sure.
 I ask myself what I base that on, trying to shake it off as mere imagination.
 But even as I try to console myself, I am the one who knows best it's true.
 There's no reason, no basis, no evidence.

I already know it as a fact that if she catches up to me, I will be killed—

"Ah—!"

Pathetically, I collapse to the ground.

I fall forward, not because I tripped, but because I simply can't move my body a single step further.

"Guh—ha, aah."

Lying there, collapsed, I somehow manage to crawl my way to the wall.

"—"

I try to pull myself up against the wall, but it's no good.

My knees lose their strength as I try to rise, and I collapse back down.

My body won't move anymore.

pant *pant* *pant*

I look up as I breathe.

—It hurts.

I don't have enough oxygen.

I can't think properly because of it.

I can't even tell what I'm doing anymore.

I don't know why I'm doing this.

Why?

Why?

I don't even know why the girl I've killed is alive.

Unmistakably, I've utterly and completely killed her in the most final way imaginable.

So why?

How can she be waiting for me in front of my school, smiling—?

".... I'm sure I killed her."

—That's right.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'M SURE I KILLED HER, SO

Why why—!?



"Oh?
Is the chase over already?"
With light footsteps, she comes into the alley, shrugging her shoulders in disappointment.
"Hello.
You really gave me some trouble yesterday."



With a warm smile, she comes into the alley.
—I've got to run away.
Thinking that, I retreat, only to hit my head against a concrete wall.
"The chase is already over, right?"
This is a dead end, after all.
There's no need to worry about anyone coming along or interfering."
She smiles, looking very happy.

Panicking, I look around at my surroundings.
A desolate alley.
I'm disgusted at my stupidity.
Running away here is like asking her to kill me.



"It's been a long time.
Eighteen hours since then, I finally found you."
She takes another step into the alley.

"Y-you—!"

"What?"

"I definitely—"

"Yes.

I'm the girl you killed yesterday.

I'm glad you remember."

"Th—"

That can't be true.

There's no way that can happen..!

"Don't be ridiculous!

Dead people can't be alive!"

"That's true, but there's no need for you to be so surprised.

I just revived, that's all."

With that curt response, she makes another footstep, the sound reaching my ears.

The distance between us is gradually decreasing.

"... Re.. vived?"

Stunned, I repeat her phrase back to her.

Revived.. you mean some doctor saved her with some surgery..?

"—Don't be stupid!

There's no way any human could revive from being cut apart like that—!"

"Yeah.

Then again, I'm not human."

"—Huh?"

Her words are so simple there's no way I could have misinterpreted them.

I'm not human.

That's what the girl in front of me said.

"... You're not human..?"



"Geez, isn't that obvious?

Do you think there's a human being out there who can revive after being cut into pieces?"

"——"

There's no way a human like that could exist.

Something like that is just a monster who looks human.
 Something that revives even when killed.
 Something that death is irrelevant to.
 Something that quickly returns to normal and starts moving even after being cut to pieces isn't something you can call human.
 "No.. way."
 That seems to be the girl right before my eyes.
 I try to laugh, but my throat is so dry, I can't.
 "... What the hell is that?"
 It's not exactly a funny story.
 Besides, there's too many things in this story that aren't funny.
 Because definitely..
 If she's not human, it explains why she's alive even after I've killed her.
 —I start to calm down.
 This is a situation where I've got to observe everything and think it over.
 "... You said you're not human.
 So what are you?"
 "Me?"
 I'm called a vampire.
 To put it in your terms, I'm a monster who lives off human blood."



.... Ah, good.
 "Vampire" is at least something I can easily understand.
 "I see.
 You're a vampire—"
 She smiles in satisfaction to indicate her assent.
 What a crazy reply.
 I've heard that vampires can't walk around during daytime, but I guess that's a trivial matter right now.
 "... So, what does this monster want from me?"
 For some reason, she recoils as if surprised.



After a moment, she puts her hands on her hips and looks at me, irritated.



"Have you forgotten what you did to me yesterday?
Even though you didn't know me, you cut me apart the moment we met.
You've got to be pretty used to this to ask me what I want with you now."
She looks more disgusted than angry.
But right now, that's how I feel, too.
Because someone I've killed is coming to complain to me why I killed her.



"Hey!
Are you listening, murderer?"
"... Yeah, I'm listening.
Sorry, could you shut up for just a minute?
I'm reflecting on how unlucky this is, even for me."

—Sheesh.

I have the worst luck.

There was a girl I wanted to kill for no reason, and I killed her on pure impulse. My memory wasn't clear after that, so I calmed down, thinking it was just a dream.. but it turned out to be real.

What's more, it turns out the person I've killed isn't even human.

turn to **60**

59

"—Nn."

The sunlight streaming through the window wakes me.

.... Maybe the rain stopped; I can't hear it anymore.

It seems the sky outside is cloudy.

The sunlight isn't what you could call bright.

"... Eh?"

I look around.

.... This is obviously not my room.



"Ah, good morning.

Did you sleep well last night, Tohno-kun?"

"Ah——!"

I remember now.

This is Senpai's room.

I had borrowed her bed for the night—

"Ah—yeah, good morning, Senpai."

Becoming extremely embarrassed, I hop off the bed.

"Uh.. sorry about yesterday.

I caused you all sorts of trouble, and—"



"Yes, you owe me one."

Senpai replies with a smile.

.... How do I put this.. She seems very mature.

"A-anyhow, thanks.
I'll be going home now."



"Oh, really?
It's barely six o'clock, Tohno-kun."
"Yes, but I didn't get permission to stay the night away from home yesterday,
so if I don't hurry back to the mansion, there's no telling what Akiha will say."



"Ah, your little sister.
Well, I've already called her, so it should be okay."
Senpai delivers her earth-shattering statement with a casual air.
"Wh—you called my house, Senpai?"



"Yes.
I thought it wouldn't be right if I didn't contact them about you staying over."

Is that a problem?"

"Wh——!"

I'm at a loss for words.

Ciel-senpai calling my house means a girl has called my house saying, "Tohno-kun is staying over at my place."

That's.. well—

"—Yes, it's a problem.

A big problem."

If Akiha had been the one who picked up the phone, she's going to think I'm some kind of playboy.

Given the severity of the Tohno household, I don't even want to imagine what would happen if she found out about that sort of thing.



".... Tohno-kun.. did you really hate staying at my house that much?"

"Ah, no, that's not it.

It's just that.. my house is really strict.

It's definitely not because I don't like you, Senpai—"

Flustered, I try to explain the misunderstanding.

Senpai closes her eyes sadly.

.... Is it because I caused her so much trouble last night?

I feel so bad when I see her make an expression like that.

"I'm telling you, that's not it.

I'm really grateful to you, Senpai.

I'm feeling much better now, and if you hadn't been there for me last night, I don't know what would've happened to me..!"



"—Yes, you're right.
You look like you're back to normal now.
I don't know what happened last night, but I'm glad you're feeling better."
Suddenly, Senpai gives the biggest smile anyone could possibly give.
"—Eh?"



"I was just joking.
Even I wouldn't directly call your house.
I asked Inui-kun to call your house and tell them that you were staying with him last night.
There should be no problem with that, right?"
"... Yeah, that should be no problem.. but that was kind of a mean joke, Senpai.
I thought my heart was going to stop."



"Yes, I'm actually pretty mean.
Pick on the ones you like, right?"
"... Eh?"
—Ones you like?
Then that means—



"But, it's true you should go home early.
Please hold on for a second."

Senpai rummages around in her drawers for something.



"Here you go, Tohno-kun.
It's a little gift for you."
Saying that, Senpai hands me an old-looking ring.
"... A little gift.. what is it, Senpai?"



"It's a protective charm.
You seem to be dangerously spaced out a lot, so please hold on to it."
"Ah.. yeah—I'll take anything that's given to me, but.. alright.
I'll take good care of it."
Accepting the ring, I put it in my pocket.



"Alright.
I'll see you at school."

—Senpai sees me off with a smile.
But that smile is one I might never see again.
The woman I killed might be found already, and police might already be at the mansion.
.... But I can't run away from it.
All I can do is thank Senpai and return to the Tohno mansion.

To say the results first, the mansion is as it always was.



"Ah, welcome home, Shiki-san."
As I enter the lobby, Kohaku-san greets me with a smile.
"Ah.. yeah, I'm home.
Um, Kohaku-san?"
"Ah, do you want breakfast?
I'll have it ready soon, so please wait in the sitting room.
Akiha-sama has just finished hers."

Kohaku-san patters off towards the sitting room.
.... It's too peaceful.
Maybe they haven't found the body yet.
"....."
For now, I head towards my own room to change.

Hisui is in my room when I return.



"—Good morning, Shiki-sama.
It seems you have returned."
"Yeah, just now.
.... Listen, Hisui, do I have a spare uniform?
The one I'm wearing now is soaked from yesterday's rain."
".... I understand.
I will have one prepared immediately."

Hisui bows, and silently leaves the room.
After changing into the uniform Hisui brings me, I head towards the sitting room.

A disappointed-looking Akiha is sitting on the sofa in the sitting room.



"—Oh, good morning, Nii-san.
It seems you have returned."
Akiha's voice contains thorns filled with blame.
"... Yeah, good morning.
You look kind of grumpy this morning, Akiha."



"Yes, I was unaware you spend the night elsewhere quite often.
I am more astounded than angry."
Akiha glares at me.
"... Uhhh."
It's true I spent the night somewhere, so I can't argue.



"Well, I suppose there was no helping it if you weren't feeling well.
The one called Inui-san is your friend from middle school, isn't he?"
"Yeah.. I see, so he was the one who called you."
.... Suddenly, I feel uneasy.
Just what did he say when he called my house....?



"Besides, even if you had to leave school early, you could have just called me
and I would have sent a car to pick you up.
I don't know why you are so reserved, but you are the eldest son of the Tohno
household, Nii-san.
Please use everything at your disposal.... Besides, your body is weaker than
that of a normal person."
"—Ah."
Oh yeah, I left school early yesterday.
"To collapse from anemia just by getting soaked from the rain.. are you not
feeling well, Nii-san?
Shall I have the family doctor examine you and send you to and from school in
a car from now on?"
"....."
I see.
So that was the reason I was supposedly staying at Arihiko's house.
"It's nothing for you to worry about, Akiha.
I go to the hospital once a month like I'm supposed to.
Taking me to school by car is just going to dull my body even further.
There's no need for you to be that sensitive about my body, though I'm glad

you're worried about me."



".... That's not true.
I'm not worried about you at all, Nii-san."
Akiha subtly avoids looking at me.
"Shiki-san, it's ready!"
I can hear Kohaku-san's voice from the dining room.
"Right, so I'm gonna get some grub."



"Oh, Nii-san!
Please refrain from talking in such an unrefined manner!"
Akiha shoots me a sharp glare.
".... Ah, you're acting normally again.
That's how you should be, Akiha.
You don't have to worry about me, so just relax."



"—You are so persistent!
I am not worried about you, Nii-san!"
Akiha quickly looks away.
Looking at her with a faint smile, I go to the dining room.



"Please take care."
Saying the same thing as she always does, she continues to stare at me.
"Shiki-sama, what happened to you last night?"
"... Nothing in particular.
I collapsed from anemia when it started to rain on me.
I'll be careful from now on."
"I am not placing any blame on you, Shiki-sama, but you look like you are pushing yourself this morning.
Please take care along the way."

Hisui makes a deep bow and sees me off.
.... Oh man.
I tried to act as normally as I could, and although I didn't give myself away to Akiha and Kohaku-san, it didn't seem to have worked on Hisui.
"... I wonder if Hisui is worried about me."
It's hard to tell when she looks so disinterested all the time.
Today might be my last day of school anyway.
I'll try to spend it as I always do, so I won't have any regrets—

No matter how I feel, the morning is always the same.

As I approach the school, I begin to catch sight of more and more students in uniform.

It's Saturday, right before the day off.

My footsteps falter as I think about how this may be my last school day ever. But still, as calmly as I can, I walk along the road that has become so familiar to me over the last two years.

It's only a little way to the school once I pass this intersection.

The light turns red, and I stop in front of the crosswalk.

The school fence is on the other side of it.

Since it's a school path, the footpath is protected by a guardrail.

Even now, the students in front of me are heading towards the school gate.

There's no one but students from our school on the other side at this time of day.

.... There should be no one but the students.

But between the cars rushing by, I feel like I catch a glimpse of someone in white.

"—Wha...."

She is there.

Dressed in white, with golden hair down to her shoulders.

Long, slender brows and red eyes.

I've seen her only once before, but there's no way I could mistake her for someone else.

"——"

But that's impossible.

I killed her myself yesterday, cutting her into pieces.

The light turns green.

The students around me walk towards the other side.

I'm the only one amongst them who stands there, stunned.

She sits on the guardrail, her legs swinging idly.

As if she is waiting for someone.

I can't tell how long she's been waiting, but her expression isn't a grim one.

—Who is she waiting for?

She fidgets restlessly, as if she were waiting for her lover.

—I have a bad feeling about this.

"Ah——"

The girl in white looks over in my direction.

It's probably nothing more than a coincidence.

She's just a stranger who looks like her.

She must be waiting for someone else.

If not, then this moment must surely be a bad dream, too.

After all, I have completely and utterly killed her with my own hands—

But she's looking this way and smiling.

Looking very satisfied at having found the person who killed her, her smile seems to say, "you've finally come——"

Giving a familiar wave and a smile, she hops off the guardrail.

Fluttering her hair, she heads towards me.

"——Don't come."

This.. is a bad dream.

The light turns red.

"——Don't come near me."

She doesn't even look like she cares, walking straight across the street while the cars pass by.

There's only a few meters between us.

".... I'm telling you not to come—!!!"

The reality before my eyes does not change even when I scream out.

Screaming in a voice even I don't understand, I run from the girl in white.

I run.

I run with all my strength.

With no regard to embarrassment or shame, I blast through the passersby, running full speed across the asphalt.

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*

My breathing is wild, and my heart screams out.

But still, I run.

I feel like I'm going to go crazy if I don't.

I look behind me.

The girl in white is walking towards me.

She's definitely following me.

The girl I've killed is chasing me.

That's more than enough reason for me to run.

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*

My heart feels like it's about to explode, but I ignore it and keep running.

When I look back, the girl is still there.

With those light footsteps, she follows me as I run away.

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*

My head droops down.

My arms feel heavy.

My legs feel like they're going to tear off.

But despite that,

I'm running with all my strength, and yet, I can't get away from someone just walking after me—!

huff *huff* *huff* *huff*

My breathing is out of control.

I think I've already run several kilometers.

But even so, when I look back, she's always there, walking towards me.

Naturally, like she's taking a stroll, she follows right behind me.

huff *huff* ".... Haha, hahaha!"

It's not funny, but I begin to laugh.

"Haha, hahaha, ahahahahaha!"
 I can't stop laughing.
 But even so, I run.
 My body complains that I'll die if I run any more, but I keep running.
 The reason is simple.
 If she catches me, she'll kill me for sure.
 I ask myself what I base that on, trying to shake it off as mere imagination.
 But even as I try to console myself, I am the one who knows best it's true.
 There's no reason, no basis, no evidence.
 I already know that if she catches up to me, I will be killed—

"Ah!
 —"

Pathetically, I collapse to the ground.
 I fall forwards, not because I tripped, but because I simply can't move my body
 a single step further.

"Guh—ha, aah."

Lying there, collapsed, I somehow manage to crawl my way to the wall.

"—"

I try to pull myself up against the wall, but it's no good.
 My knees lose their strength as I try to rise, and I collapse back down.
 My body won't move anymore.

pant *pant* *pant*

I look up as I breathe.

—It hurts.

I don't have enough oxygen.
 I can't think properly because of it.
 I can't even tell what I'm doing anymore.
 I don't know why I'm doing this.

Why?

Why?

I don't even know why the girl I've killed is alive.
 Unmistakably, I've utterly and completely killed her in the most final way imag-
 inable.

So why?

How can she be waiting for me in front of my school, smiling—?

".... I'm sure I killed her."

—That's right.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'm sure I killed her.

I'M SURE I KILLED HER, SO

Why why why why why why why why why why why why why why why why why why why
 why why why why why why why why why why why why why why—!?



"Oh?

Is the chase over already?"

With light footsteps, she comes into the alley, shrugging her shoulders in disappointment.

"Hello.

You really gave me some trouble yesterday."



With a warm smile, she comes into the alley.

—I've got to run away.

So thinking, I retreat, only to hit my head against a concrete wall.

"The chase is already over, right?"

This is a dead end, after all.

There's no need to worry about anyone coming along or interfering."

She smiles, looking very happy.

Panicking, I look around at my surroundings.

A desolate alley.

I'm disgusted at how stupid I am.

To run away here is like asking her to kill me.



"It's been a long time.
 Eighteen hours since then, I finally found you."
 She takes another step into the alley.
 "Y-you—!"
 "What?"
 "I definitely—"
 "Yes.
 I'm the girl you killed yesterday.
 I'm glad you remember."
 "Th—"
 That's got to be a lie.
 There's no way that can happen..!
 "Don't be ridiculous!
 Dead people can't be alive!"
 "That's true, but there's no need for you to be so surprised.
 I just revived, that's all."
 With that curt response, she makes another footstep, the sound reaching my ears.
 The distance between us is gradually decreasing.
 "... Re.. vived?"
 Stunned, I repeat her phrase back to her.
 Revived.. you mean some doctor saved her with some surgery..?
 "—Don't be stupid!
 There's no way any human could revive from being cut apart like that—!"
 "Yeah.
 Then again, I'm not human."
 "—Huh?"
 Her words are so simple there's no way I could have misinterpreted them.
 I'm not human.
 That's what the girl in front of me said.
 "... You're not human..?"



"Geez, isn't that obvious?
Do you think there's a human being out there who can revive after being cut
up into pieces?"

"——"

There's no way a human like that could exist.
Something like that is just a monster who looks human.
Something that revives even when killed.
Something that death is irrelevant to.
Something that quickly returns to normal and starts moving even after being
cut to pieces isn't something you can call human.
"No.. way."
That seems to be the girl right before my eyes.
I try to laugh, but my throat is so dry, I can't.
"... What the hell is that?"
It's not exactly a funny story.
Besides, there's too many things in this story that aren't funny.
Because definitely..
If she's not human, it explains why she's alive even after I've killed her.
—I start to calm down.
This is a situation where I've got to observe everything and think it over.
"... You said you're not human.
So what are you?"
"Me?"
I'm called a vampire.
To put it in your terms, I'm a monster who lives off human blood."



.... That's good.
"Vampire" is at least something I can easily understand.
"I see.
You're a vampire—"
She smiles in satisfaction to indicate her assent.
.... What a crazy reply.
I've heard that vampires can't walk around during daytime, but I guess that's a trivial matter right now.
".... So, what does this monster want from me?"
For some reason, she recoils as if surprised.



After a moment, she puts her hands on her hips and looks at me, irritated.



"Have you forgotten what you did to me yesterday?
Even though you didn't know me, you cut me apart the moment we met.

You've got to be pretty used to this to ask me what I want with you now."
She looks more disgusted than angry.
But right now, that's how I feel, too.
Because someone I've killed is coming to complain to me why I killed her.



"Hey!
Are you listening, murderer?"
"... Yeah, I'm listening.
Sorry, could you shut up for just a minute?
I'm reflecting on how unlucky this is, even for me."

—Sheesh.

I have the worst luck.
There was a girl I wanted to kill for no reason, and I killed her on pure impulse.
I agonized over it in deep despair.. and even though I firmly decided to atone for
my sins, the one I killed appears out of nowhere and says she isn't even human.
setvar flg2 + 1
turn to **60**

60

"—Ha.. haha.."

I can't help but laugh.

.... But it's not all bad.

If the person I killed has come back to life, then that means I haven't actually killed anyone, right?

Well, I suppose the fact remains that I "killed" someone, but she's still alive.

—And that's something I should honestly be happy about—

Yeah.

With this, I should be able to get back to living my normal life.

A normal school life, just like I did up until now.

.... Well, in exchange, I seem to have been cornered by this strange person, but you might argue that it's a heck of a lot better than becoming a murderer.

".... Okay, I've calmed down.

If you've got something to say, I'll listen: complaints, grudges, whatever.

Talk all you want."

"Yeah, I've got a whole lot of things to say to you.. but you're weird."



"I'm just taking everything in right now.

You could say I've built up a resistance to weird stuff like this."

I don't think it's of much help in this case, though.



"Hmph...."

She stares at me.

It isn't malicious.
.... It's strange.
I'd thought that to get someone back when they got you was one of the common laws of the world.
Then she should be trying to kill me, but—
"—What are you staring at?
You're here to get revenge, right?
Then—"



"Yeah, I guess I'm supposed to kill you back, in theory.
I'll kill you if you really want me to, but otherwise I'll pass for now.
It's not very efficient that way."
She stares at me head on.



"So!
Are you sorry?"
"—Eh?"
I'm stunned for a moment.
The things she says are so.. out of place.
"I'm asking you if you're sorry for killing me.
I'm thinking about forgiving you if you are, you see.
Besides, I get the feeling you're a pretty bad liar for a human."
"Sorry—me?"
"Yep.
If you apologize to me, then I'm fine with that."

—This is unbelievable.
 What's so unbelievable?
 Not that the person I killed is forgiving me, but.. her voice sounds so kind.



"Hey!
 You have to give an answer when people ask you seriously, you know.
 Come on, hurry up and answer.
 We can't get on with things until we make it clear whether or not you're sorry."
 She is angry.

—Am I sorry, she asks?
 That goes without saying—
 "... Yeah, I regret it.
 No matter what the reason is, I did kill someone."
 Without mercy or reason.
 I killed just for myself.
 "... I do regret the fact that I killed someone.
 But more importantly, the person I killed was you, and so—"
 It's a lie that it's alright if she's alive.
 It's a fact that I killed her.
 It's the ultimate violation; the greatest violence possible.
 "So—you can get your revenge on me—I thought it was only natural you'd be
 here to get revenge."
 I hang my head, mumbling, like I'm confessing to someone.



"—I see.

Hmm.

You're not a bad person."

She smiles.

Despite calling herself a vampire, she has a very honest face.



"I've decided.

I'm going to make you help me."

"Eh—?"

Help her?

What is she talking about?

"... Hey.

What do you mean by helping you?"

"It's simple.

I'm going to get you to help me deal with the vampire which took root in this town."

"—?"

.... Hold on, I'm getting more and more confused.

"Dealing with vampires?

But you're a—"

"Oh, no, no.

I am a vampire, but the vampire in this town is a different kind altogether.

You live here, don't you?

Then you should know about the murders that have been occurring lately, right?"

"Yeah, quite a few people have been killed already.. hey, wait."

.... I remember now.

Come to think of it, all of the killer's victims had their blood extracted or something, didn't they?

"Don't tell me that—"

"Exactly.

Even the news is saying stuff like 'the work of a vampire', right?

It's a funny thing; they obviously know what kind of creature is doing it, but no one is going around trying to vanquish it.

That's why I've got no choice but to do it for them."

"Wait, but—vampires don't exist."



"Hmph!"

She lowers her brows in annoyance.

.... Oh, that's right.

There's an unidentified person standing in front of me claiming to be a vampire herself.

"—I don't really understand, but what you're trying to say is that you're here in this town to exterminate vampires, right..?"



"That's right, but before I could, I was attacked and killed by some unknown killer.

Yeah, that really got me.

It was a perfect surprise attack and I was cut into seventeen pieces without a chance to do anything."

"Ugh—"

I see.

She must mean me.



"That's right.
Until I was fully recovered like this, I was really planning to kill you, you know.
That's the first time anyone's embarrassed me like that.
And, it took about eighty percent of my power to fully recover."



"But more importantly, it really, really hurt.
It was so painful I thought I was going to go crazy.
However, the pain was so great, it restored my sanity.
Do you know what it's like experiencing that over and over for a whole night?"
"....."
I don't know.
Actually, I don't want to know.



"So, full of hatred, I went out to look for you.
I was so worked up that I didn't even care about the vampire, the very reason

why I'm here.

I knew you were a student, so that's why I waited over there for you."

".... I don't get it.

If you hated me so much, why are you forgiving me?"

"—Let's see.. to put it simply, I calmed down after a while.



I already used up a lot of power, and I thought that it would be more efficient to use you as a shield than to kill you."

".... Hold on.

You just said something really bad for me."

"Eh?"

Did I say something like that?"

"You said you were going to use me as a shield."



"Of course.

I already did forgive you, but that's just my personal feelings.

You've got to atone for your murder through action, not just emotion, right?"

"—Well, even if you ask me.."



"What's with you?
I can't tell when you're being sincere and when you're not.
Let me repeat it again: you killed me.
You probably can't imagine it, but it takes a lot of energy to regenerate once you've been killed.
Well, actually, it wouldn't be a big deal if you had just killed me, but the way you killed me was something I've never seen before.
I couldn't heal the wounds, so I had no choice but to remake my body parts.
That's why it took so much energy to revive—"
She looks angry.
.... It seems like she's recalling her forgotten anger while she talks.
"Anyhow, I'm weak right now!
I think I'll be able to recover after two nights, but if the enemy attacks before then, I'll be in danger.
That's why for now, I'll have you be my shield."
"You'll have me do it—?
What are you doing, deciding everything by yourself?"
"What?
This is all your fault to begin with, so isn't that much to be expected?"



"Or are you not sorry after all?"

She looks straight at me with honest eyes.
"..... Uhh."
This is unfair.

Sorry or not, using those eyes is unfair.

.... It's unfair she has such pure eyes like that when she claims she's a vampire—

"I'm.. um—"

Stuck for an answer, I lift my gaze.

"... Huh?"

.... What is it?

Something odd is there, in the gap between the buildings.

"Hold on.

What's that?"

I get up and walk.

I walk to the middle of the alley, and I finally realize what it is.

A blue-colored bird.

A crow, to be precise.

.... A blue.. crow.

That inauspicious thing I saw two nights ago—



"—Oh, man.."

The girl murmurs.

The crow just stares at us.

"Geez, thanks to your slowness, he found us."

The girl looks at the entrance to the alley.

"Found us?"

Who?"

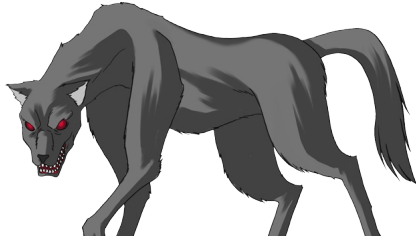
I cast my gaze towards the alley entrance.

—Then.

"—!"

I take a step back in shock.

Before I knew it, a dog had appeared in the narrow path running into the alley.



It has four tough legs and a tense neck like steel frame.
That form, far removed from that of a human, is one made solely for hunting.
.... It doesn't need to resort to verbal intimidation.
Most humans would become nervous just by looking at that kind of "hunting"
beast.
As a fellow life form, it inspires awe by its dishearteningly superior athletic ability.

".... A black.. dog?"

—I start to shake.

.... The black dog looking in our direction isn't small like a stray.

As big as a German Shepherd or a Doberman, it just stands there, menacing us.



"....."

The girl says nothing, but looks at the dog with disinterested eyes.

Then..

Suddenly, the black dog jumps.

No, it's running, but with a speed that makes it seem like it's jumping.

"—Eh?"

I can't do anything.

The black dog jumps straight for my throat.

I can see it.

I can see its black body moving towards me, but I don't even have time to think about dodging it.

Thud!
 I feel a shock on my body.
 "Guh—!"
 I was hit hard from the side.
 It's not the black dog.
 It seems the girl pushed me before it could crush my throat.
 With an easy movement, like someone throwing a ball, she hurls me into the wall using just one hand.

"—!"
 With a terrific "wham!", I fall on my rear.

"Why.. you!
 What in the world are you doing!?"
 "Never mind that, keep your eyes in front!"
 The girl yells.
 I look—Having lost sight of me, its target, the black dog bounds towards the wall.
 Sticking to the wall like a lizard, it jumps again.
 It bounces from the wall towards me.
 The dog's path is like black lightning.



"—!"
 It's too fast; I can't react.
 The black dog opens its mouth, filled with teeth and saliva.
 This time, it clamps down towards my windpipe—
 "Kuh....!"

I close my eyes.
 The dog's teeth sink into my throat.
 But in that instant,
 the dog lets out a yelp and releases me.

"Eh—?"

—That's.. impossible.

The black dog lets out a scream and leaps straight up.

There is nothing there, but nonetheless it flies high into the sky by itself.

Just like that—the black dog, after going several meters into the sky, makes a scream and falls back down onto the concrete.

No, perhaps more accurately, it was hit into the concrete.

"—What was that?"



"Geez, you just made me waste more of my energy."

The girl quietly approaches the black dog.

It is crushed against the concrete like a pressed flower.

"—That's quite a mongrel of a familiar.

.... I suppose it was some kind of scout."

The black dog liquifies into some kind of tar-like substance, and is absorbed into the concrete.



"... It melted.. no, maybe it's just dissolving.

—It can't be, can it?

There's no way Chaos would be in a place like this."

Heaving a long sigh, she approaches me.



"Oh?
 You don't seem to be hurt, so there's no problem."
 She's mumbling something.
 My throat—I can still feel the dog's teeth sinking into it.
 "Hey—what was that thing?"
 "A familiar of an enemy vampire.
 We were discovered because you weren't being clear."
 "Discovered—you mean.. by that enemy vampire you mentioned?"



"Yeah, this isn't good.
 It looks like I really will need you as a shield now."
 She says it so casually, and with a smile.
 "S—stop saying such crazy things, you idiot!
 You saw me!
 What do you think I can do!?
 You're a lot better off by yourself..!"
 "Not really.
 With the power I just used to protect you, I really am empty now."
 "Wha—!?"
 What in the world?
 I'm grateful she helped me just then, but still—
 ".... I can't do it.
 I can't.
 I don't have the power to drive away something like that.
 Sorry, but I can't even be a shield."



"—Liar.
You killed me.
Why would you lie after doing something like that?"
"That was—"
That was something I don't even understand myself.
"—No.
Look, I can't do it.
I'm just a normal human.
I can't help you."



".... Not true.
All you have to do is keep watch while I sleep, that's it.
You can do that much without any problems, right?"
"That's—"

She looks straight at me.
.... Somehow, those eyes are making me weaker.
I—

I'll cooperate.

turn to **61**

No, I won't cooperate.

turn to **62**

Escape somehow.

turn to **63**

61

"I—"

.... For some reason, I can't decline.

I did kill her, after all.

It's my fault she's weak and has to ask others for help.

—It is my responsibility.

Besides, although I've only known her for a little while, she doesn't seem like a bad person.



"So how about it?"

Can't a human like you cooperate with a vampire like me?"

"—Well, that would be the obvious answer, but.."



"—"

Argh, don't look at me with those eyes!

.... Why is it?

It's making me overcome with guilt and be unable to refuse.

"But now that I've gotten myself into this mess, I won't be able to sleep at night if I just deny all responsibility."

—Man, I just know I'm going to regret this.

".... So, yeah.

I think I could probably do it.

The enemy's the serial killer, right?

As a resident of this town, I'd probably be struck with some kind of divine

punishment if I refused to help you."



"Eh-?"

You mean—"

"I'm not going to be your shield, but if it's just being your lookout, I'll do it."

I feel disgusted at how stupid I am as soon as those words are out of my mouth.

I feel disgusted, but—



"——"

There is something about her deeply shocked expression that's—

"Wow!

Are you serious!?"

I'm really a vampire, you know!"

".... Hey, listen.

Why are you saying all this now, after you've threatened me so much?"



"Ah. Hm.
That's true, but—"



"—Well, whatever!
If you're going to cooperate with me, then I should be grateful!"
.... With a very happy expression on her face, she approaches me as I lie there
on my rear, up against the wall.



"Our contract is established."
She extends her hand towards me.



"I guess I can finally introduce myself now.
I'm Arcueid—hmm.. my last name is really long, so just Arcueid is fine for now.
I'm a True Ancestor type vampire.
How about you?"

I heave a heavy sigh at her unprecedented introduction.
.... It's a sigh of resignation, evidence I've decided to accept this nonsensical situation.
"I'm Tohno Shiki.
Sadly, I'm just your everyday student.
.... I've said it before, but I'm really not going to be much use."
Grasping her—Arcueid's hand, I stand up.
She takes a long hard look at me, and then offers me her hand again.



"Nice to meet you, Shiki.
I'll have you take responsibility for killing me."
Arcueid grins as she extends her left hand.

sigh
.... There are all sorts of responsibilities in this world, but this is probably the first and last time someone takes responsibility by helping someone they've killed.
".... Damn it.. this is seriously messed up."
But there's nothing else I can do.
I grudgingly extend my left hand and shake hands with the woman in white

claiming to be a vampire.

```
    setvar arkregard + 1
if flg2 >= 1
turn to 64
    turn to 65
```

62

"I—"

There's no way I can help her.

I was almost killed by just that black dog.

If I go with her, I'll die for sure.

"—I can't do something like that.

It'd be suicide."

I manage to glare at her and reply, trembling.



She looks at me with displeasure.

"Suicide?"

Why?

With your killing abilities, I would think you have nothing to fear."

"That was different.

I'm sorry, but I'm just a normal student, not some kind of monster like a vampire.

A normal student can't cooperate with a person like you."



"Oh?"

Do normal students usually cut up girls they don't even know?"

"—Ah."

I feel weakened by her comment.

".... But that was special.

I've never felt that way before, and I've lived a normal life—"

"Aahh enough, shut up!"



"Eh—"

The pupils in those red eyes open up.
 Immediately, the feeling she exudes changes.
 The chilling feeling is unbelievable.
 I think my heart might stop beating just from her glare alone.
 "Don't get me wrong.
 You killed me.
 I'm saving you and not pulling off your head right now just because you might be useful."

My neck feels numb, like someone is slowly sinking a blade into it.
 "___"

My throat, which had been so hot a moment ago, is rapidly growing colder.
 The air I breathe feels heavy.
 As if the very air around here is freezing. I feel a cramped sensation that almost makes me collapse.

An oppressive feeling full of despair, like the world itself were glaring at me.

All that feeling of weight condenses and hammers into my brain like a bullet.

"Ah—eh?"

Everything goes white.
 A disgusting feeling.
 Pain, like someone opened a hole in my skull and is pouring in alcohol.
 That is the only way to describe this sensation.

"Gah——"

I can't even cry out.
 The sounds leaking from my mouth are no longer human speech.

"A—guh."

My heart is breaking apart.

My memories are crumbling.

She's only glaring at me, but I feel like she's reaching into my skull and kneading my brain with her bare hands.

If this continues, I'm going to be empty—

"Stop—it."

That's all I can say before I lose my sanity.

Suddenly—the invasive feeling inside my head disappears.

"Hha—aghh."

Released from the oppressive aura, I hug myself.

—I'm still alive.

I'm not dead.

I'm still alive and breathing.

—I feel like I'm about to cry.

To feel such deep emotion at such a simple thing is something I hadn't experienced up until now—



"How about it?"

Maybe now you understand your position a little better."

"——"

.... You think I can understand that?

All I can do is look up, tremble, and grit my teeth.



"There's only two choices.
 You cooperate with me, or you don't.
 Simple, isn't it?
 All I'm asking you is whether you want to live or die."
 "H——"
 My voice doesn't work properly.
 Only my basic survival instincts help me to avoid death by nodding in reply.



"Alright.
 Then our contract is established."
 Where did all that anger from just a moment ago disappear to?
 Speaking in a cheerful tone, she extends her hand to me.
 "I guess I can finally introduce myself now.
 I'm Arcueid—hmm... my last name is really long, so just Arcueid is fine for
 now.
 I'm a True Ancestor type vampire.
 How about you?"
 I heave a heavy sigh at her unprecedented introduction.
 It's a sigh of resignation, evidence I've decided to accept this nonsensical
 situation.
 "I'm Tohno Shiki.
 Sadly, I'm just your everyday student.
 I've said it before, but I'm really not going to be much use."
 Grasping her—Arcueid's hand, I stand up.
 She takes a long hard look at me, and then offers me her hand again.



"Nice to meet you, Shiki.

I'll have you take responsibility for killing me."

Arcueid grins as she extends her left hand.

.... There are all sorts of responsibilities in this world, but this is probably the first and last time someone takes responsibility by helping someone they've killed.

".... Damn it!

Do whatever you want."

But there's nothing else I can do.

I grudgingly extend my left hand and shake hands with the woman in white claiming to be a vampire.

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    if flg2 >= 1
turn to 64
    turn to 65
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63

".... Kuhh!"
 It's impossible.
 I was almost killed by just one black dog.
 If I become her lookout, who knows what'll happen next.



"Hey, hurry up and answer.
 I don't think I'm being unreasonable here."
 "...."
 She doesn't understand.
 It's evident she can't see that she's recklessness incarnate.
 If I get involved further with her, she'll drag me past the point of no return.
 I've got to find a chance to escape.
 ".... Alright.
 I'll listen to what you've got to say."
 Putting my hand on the wall, I somehow manage to stand up on my own.
 I've got to pass through that small road if I'm to get to the main street from here.
 Fortunately, it's further away for her than it is for me.
 If I set off while pretending to talk, I can probably make it to the main street.



"Oh yeah.
 We still don't even know each other's names yet.
 I guess it is a bit too fast to ask you to cooperate with me."

She nods in agreement.

"Isn't it?

If you tell me more details, I might agree to help."



"Really?

Then what should I talk about first?

—How about the vampire incident that's got this town in an uproar?

Or maybe I should explain what we'll be doing from now on?"

She makes a serious face while she thinks.

—This is my only chance.

—I run as fast as I can.

I run to the road that leads to the main road in one breath.

"—Huh?"

I can hear her voice from behind me.

But it's too late.

Now I'll definitely be able to escape—!

"—Huh?"

That's strange.

As I take a few steps forward, I fall down hard on the ground.



"Hey.

What are you doing?"

She comes over, giving me a look more filled with amazement than concern.

"... Nothing.

I just wanted to run for a bit."

... It seems she hasn't realized I was trying to escape.

I get up.

But.

"...!"

Ow..!

I feel an incredible pain in the joints of my foot, I can't get up—!



"Ah, I guess I was a bit too hard on you back there, sorry.

If I had softened the blow a bit when I pushed you, you might not have sprained your foot like that."

"Might not—!?"

Listen, you—"

I wanted to complain about her pushing me, but if she hadn't, the black dog would be chewing on my neck by now and that would have been the end of me.

"... It's okay.

I'm grateful."



"Thank you.

But, why did you want to start running?

Weren't we having a conversation?"

"No, um, that's—"

I can't exactly say it was a matter of convenience.



"..... Hmmmn?"

She stares at me.

.... This is bad.

You'd have to be a real idiot not to understand what I was doing.



"Hey, that was an indication you wanted to cooperate with me back then, right?"

"....."

I can't answer.

I said I would listen to her, but not cooperate.

—I don't want to lie.

Answering her question requires a definite "no".



"Just so you know, I know what sort of person you are.

Don't give me a half-hearted response.
If you run away now, I'll just be going to your house next."
"Wh—!?"
That means that she's going to come to the mansion even if I escaped from here!
"..."
She's got me.
If that were to happen, it wouldn't just be my problem.
Akiha, Hisui, and Kohaku-san might be attacked by this crazy person too.
"Cr..!"
What a mess.
It's like I never had a choice in the first place—



"Well, I don't mind either way.
The vampire's familiar has already seen you, so you'll be surely attacked.
If you go around by yourself, you might act as a decoy, too."
"Wh.. hey, don't tell me that.."



"Yes, that familiar recognized you as being on my side."
"_____"
Then that means I'll be attacked by things like that even if I don't help her.



"So, what's it gonna be?
Are you going to keep watch while I sleep, or are you going to drive off those
familiar by yourself?"
.... If the results are going to be the same, I can't do anything but nod.
"—You swindler."
Sighing, I nod to indicate that I will help her.



"Okay, our contract is established."
Where did all that anger from just a moment ago disappear to?
Speaking in a cheerful tone, she extends her hand to me.
"I guess I can finally introduce myself now.
I'm Arcueid—hmm.. my last name is really long, so just Arcueid is fine for now.
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How about you?"
I heave a heavy sigh at her unprecedented introduction.
.... It's a sigh of resignation, evidence I've decided to accept this nonsensical
situation.
"I'm Tohno Shiki.
Sadly, I'm just your everyday student.
.... I've said it before, but I'm really not going to be much use."
Grasping her—Arcueid's hand, I stand up.
She takes a long hard look at me, and then offers me her hand again.



"Nice to meet you, Shiki.
I'll have you take responsibility for killing me."
Arcueid grins as she extends her left hand.
.... There are all sorts of responsibilities in this world, but this is probably
the first and last time someone takes responsibility by helping someone they've
killed.
".... Damn it!
Do whatever you want."
But there's nothing else I can do.
I grudgingly extend my left hand and shake hands with the woman in white
claiming to be a vampire.

```
    if flg2 >= 1  
turn to 64  
    turn to 65
```

64



".... Hmm?"

As we walk out of the back alley, she—Arcueid—knits her eyebrows and gives me a suspicious look.



"Hey, Shiki.

Are you a Christian, by any chance?"

.... I have no idea what she's talking about.

"Chris-chan..?"

What's with that question, all of a sudden?

I don't know any girl who's got a name like that."



"I see.

Then I must have misunderstood."

After seeming to have made a decision, she turns towards the office district.



"Okay, let's go.
We've got to find a safe place for now."
Arcueid begins walking.
"—Okay."
There's no way I can back out now.
Sighing, I follow after her.

turn to **65**

65



"This is a pretty nice room.
I'd have no problems spending the night here."
Arcueid looks around the hotel room.
"___"

I've got nothing to say for now.
"My room has probably already been discovered, so let's hide out here for the night.
Oh, you don't have to worry about money.
I'm rich, so I'll treat you."
Speaking cheerfully, Arcueid closes the curtains.
She also turns off the lights and the room becomes as dark as night.
I sigh.
"... What are you thinking, Arcueid?"



"I'm thinking about all sorts of stuff."
"No, that's not what I mean—"
I'm asking why you've rented a high-class hotel, not a cheap one—and why you rented out the whole top floor.
"....."
I try to say this, but I stop.
Right now, my job is to guard this so-called vampire and nothing more.
I'm not going to ask any useless questions.
"—No, forget it.

Do whatever you like."



"You're weird, Shiki, suddenly getting mad and going silent like that. I just don't get you."
 Arcueid lies on the bed, smiling like she's having fun.
 "I'm going to sleep until the sun sets.
 You'd better rest while you have the chance.
 Vampires don't move about in the daytime, so you'll be on guard for real during the night."
 "... Do you realize you've just said something that completely contradicts your existence?"
 "Oh, it's alright for me—oh, I guess it's almost my limit.
 Good night, Shiki.
 Wake me up when the sun sets."

"H-hey!"
 "——"
 Like a machine whose power is cut off, Arcueid suddenly falls asleep.
 "Ha——"
 She's so.. defenseless.
 "... Right now, I could run away if I wanted to."
 She did force me to come with her, after all.
 I could easily run away now.
 And I don't have that impulse anymore, but..
 "I even killed you once, yet.."
 How is she able to suddenly fall asleep despite that?
 "....."
 I look at Arcueid's face as she sleeps on the bed.
 Her plump chest rises and falls.
 It looks like she's breathing.
 But her body isn't moving at all.
 It's like the air around her has stopped.
 It's so tranquil even I might stop moving.
 —What a peaceful slumber.
 A kind of defenselessness as if she had absolute trust in me, even though we've

only just met.

"—She's so stupid."

.... She is so stupidly honest I might start to worry.

But aside from that, this is a turning point.

This may very well be the point of no return for Tohno Shiki.

I—

I should be escaping after all.

turn to **69**

Still, I can't leave her alone.

turn to **66**

66

".... I did promise, after all."
 No matter what it was I promised, I can't break it.
 Arcueid is sleeping.
 Her face is a pale white, like that of a sick person.
 Arcueid said she was weak.
 She said she was at her limit just a while ago, so I don't think she considered what I could do after she went to sleep.
 The room is quiet.
 We're on the eleventh floor, the top floor.
 Since she rented out the whole floor, there are no other guests here.
 The only sound is Arcueid's breathing.
 When I see her like this—she really looks nightmarishly beautiful.
 That white, smooth skin and that silky, light blonde hair,
 The soft lines of her body and those long eyelashes that look like swift brush-strokes.
 A perfect body—down to even the small details—the like of which I've never seen before.
 No, to be more precise..
 The kind I never would have seen in my entire life.
 "——"
 Vampire or not, Arcueid is a girl.
 I have to take responsibility for the fact she's so weak now that she falls asleep instantly like she just did.
 ".... You have to take responsibility for your own deeds."
 A part of my childhood education makes an appearance in my head.
 Sensei even told me.
 My eyes are strange, so they would in turn attract strange things.
 Then I should be prepared to take responsibility.
 At the very least, I should keep my promise and protect her for tonight—

—White.

The kind you see when you wake up.
 That color calls some nostalgic memories to mind.

A hot summer day.
 A blue sky and large, large columns of summer clouds.
 The scenery slowly wavers in the heat.
 The voice of cicadas.
 The sound of cicadas.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Cicada shells are lying in the clearing.

As if the sun is right by my side,
the clearing is roasting.
A hot midsummer's day.
As if the entire world became a frying pan.
waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.
Akiha is crying.
Akiha, who would always obediently stay close behind me, is brimming forth
with tears.

A child lies collapsed at her feet.
Soaked in blood.
Killed.
The corpse of a child, about my age.
A cast-off cicada shell.
My two hands
Are red
with the blood of that collapsed child.
"SHIKI—!"
The adults are coming.
The fallen child is still dead.
The adults are yelling.
Did you kill him—!?

—That dream.
A dream I had forgotten even in my dreams.
I feel like.. I remember.

"Shiki.
Hey, wake up.
The sun's already set."
Someone is shaking me.
.... A somewhat unfamiliar voice, and the touch of a cold hand on my shoulder.
"—Nn."



"—Huh?"

Arcueid is standing right in front of me.
 She's already woken up, and it's pitch black outside.
 I glance at the clock, and it says it's already eight.
 "—Eh?"



"It's not 'Eh? I told you to wake me up when the sun went down, and you go and fall asleep!"

".... Crap.

Sorry, I was feeling out of it."

.... I don't remember when I fell asleep, but I'm sure it was while I was staring at Arcueid's sleeping face.

"Geez.

You'll lose your qualification as a bodyguard like that.

If the enemy had attacked while we were both sleeping, we could have both died, you know."

"—I said I'm sorry.

Besides, you said it was safe during the daytime."

"I can't say that for sure.

Familiars like the one we saw this morning could have come for us."

Arcueid is angry.

.... Well, she's got a right to be.

I've got no right to talk when I, the bodyguard, dozed off while she was sleeping.



"And besides.
I am a vampire, you know.
How can you just sleep there without feeling any danger?
I don't want you to be afraid for no reason, but it'd be nice if you were at least tense enough not to sleep."
"__"
I take that back.
Arcueid doesn't seem to care that I didn't do my job as a bodyguard.
She just doesn't seem to like the fact I fell asleep.
"I can move my body a little better and wake up, only to find you sleeping there happily.
You looked so vulnerable, I was seriously starting to feel uneasy that I might not have the dignity befitting a vampire."
"....."
Well, I don't think she has much dignity.
"You were just as vulnerable yourself.
I killed you once before, remember?
You can't guarantee I won't do it again, can you?"



"Ah—"
Arcueid gives a surprised look, as if she only just realized it.



"Now that you mention it, you're right.
 —I wonder why I did that?
 I guess I just had complete confidence in you since we spoke in the alley."
 "....."
 Well, saying that doesn't make me feel bad for her..
 "Okay.
 Since you trust me so much, I'll try my best.
 So, should I just keep watch from now on?"



"Yeah, until sunrise tomorrow.
 I can't leave the room, so be on guard if someone comes up to this floor."
 Be on guard, huh.
 Being on guard is going to do me no good if one of those black dogs from this morning comes for us.
 sigh
 I let out a sigh.
 As expected, this is too heavy a role for me.
 ".... Let me ask you something.
 Was the black dog that attacked us this morning something your enemy sent out?"
 "I don't think so, it was probably for surveillance.
 His patrol route happened to pass through where you and I were talking, and it seems my presence was revealed as a result."
 "Revealed?
 To your enemy?"

"That's right.
If I had been in perfect condition, it would actually save me some time.
But right now, it's the opposite.
If I were attacked now, I'd be the one annihilated.
That's why I have to hide out like this for now until my power returns."
.... Arcueid's enemy.
In other words, the serial killer who's been causing the stir in this town—a
vampire.
"... Arcueid.
I want to ask you something.
Will you answer my question?"
"I don't mind talking.
But why are you being so formal all of a sudden?"
"—Yeah, I haven't asked you the most important thing yet.. So, what's your
ultimate objective here?"



"Me?
I'm here to hunt down the vampire.
Killing vampires is my duty."
"Yeah, I do remember you saying something like that before.
But you're a vampire, right?"



"What?
You still don't believe me?"
"Oh, don't worry, I believe you so much it hurts."

I'm asking why would you, a vampire, claim to be doing something as odd as killing other vampires?"

"Oh?"

You don't like the idea of beings from the same species killing each other?"



.... The act of killing doesn't exactly make my list of favorite things, but she is right.

I'm not comfortable with the idea of vampires killing vampires.

"No, it's just that I can't really imagine something like that happening.

Vampires drain the blood of humans, right?

So they should be killing humans, not other vampires."

"Drinking blood and killing are different things.



Well.. Even so, I know what you're trying to say.

You think beings from the same species should help each other out, right?

But vampires can be of the same species and still be different life forms.

That's why they don't really have what you humans call 'camaraderie'."

"....?"

Then you're saying something makes you different from the vampire you're hunting?"



"That's right.

The one I'm after is a human vampire, just like the stereotypical vampire from you humans' folklore.

He kills humans by draining their blood, turning them into The Dead, then uses them to increase his power and influence—that's the sort of vampire I hunt.

The one lurking in this town is that sort of old-style vampire."

—"That sort " of vampire?

It seems like there are different types.

"... Don't tell me you want me to be your shield so you can get this guy."



"—Yeah, that was my original intent.

But after talking to you, I've changed my mind.



You see, at first, I thought you were someone from the Church.

So I thought you might have information about the location of the enemy, but

you turned out to be a perfectly ordinary person.
You didn't even know about vampires, let alone the location of the enemy's coffin."



".... Yeah, come to think of it, there's no way they'd send an exorcist to a Far East secular country like this one—I guess I didn't put enough thought into this." Arcueid thinks aloud.

Her conversation derails, and I'm feeling a little left out.

"I don't follow you at all, Arcueid."

"Ah, hold on for a moment.. let's see.. How should I explain this..?"

With that, Arcueid's gaze begins drifting.

.... She doesn't seem used to holding a conversation.

"Don't worry about it and just explain everything about the current situation. I don't understand any of this, but I might be able to see the general gist of things."



"Really?"

Thanks, Shiki."

"You don't have to thank me.

Just keep talking."

Arcueid nods obediently.

"Basically, the vampire currently in this town is an old-style vampire.

He himself reigns as the lord and releases The Dead he made into the city.

By doing so, he increases his power bit by bit.

He's a typical vampire in that he drains the blood of humans, and those humans

become vampires themselves.

He's not very powerful right now as he doesn't have many Dead serving him, but as the victims increase, so does his power.

It would be best to destroy the main body before that happens, but I haven't found where he sleeps yet.

He's hidden so well right now I can't even feel his presence."



"Even so, it's easy to take care of things once I find it.

But I don't have any clues whatsoever, so I had no choice but to walk around town during the day to investigate.

But then I suddenly got attacked by a passing killer, and now, I'm temporarily weaker than the enemy vampire."

Arcueid shoots me a cold look.

I guess she wants to say something to the "passing killer".

"... I see.

I kind of understand the situation now.

So in other words, some evil monsters are based in this town, and you're here to eliminate them.

Since you didn't know where they were, you went looking for them, and that's when I, uh—killed you.

So now you're weakened and hiding out while you recover.. Is that about right?"



"To put it simply, I think so."

"—Then, next is the main topic.

You casually call yourself a vampire, but I still don't really understand that

term.

.... It's obvious you're not a human, that much I can see, but I don't get the feeling that you're a vampire, either."



"That's true.

I'm a little different from the type of vampire you know about."

"Indeed.

I hadn't considered that vampires even existed at all, let alone a vampire like you.

So, what makes you different?"

Arcueid thinks.

"Yes.. I suppose it might be helpful to teach you a bit about us."



"Alright.

Then the first period's lessons will be Vampires 101."

".... Okay, but.. What's with 'Vampires 101'?"

"You're an amateur at this, so we've got to start with the basics, right?"

That's why I'm going to start teaching from the very beginning."

"—Okay, whatever.

Just keep it short."



"Well.. I'll try my best."

.... It really does seem like she's not used to talking.

Well, we've got lots of time, so for now I guess I'll listen to Arcueid without complaint.



"Although we're typically called simply 'vampires', we're divided into two main categories.

Those who were vampires from the start, and those who become vampires.

The former are called True Ancestors, and the latter are called the Dead Apostles.

The ones you call vampires are the Dead Apostles.

They drain the blood of humans and turn them into their slaves.

They're weak against sunlight, and you can vanquish them with a baptism ritual.

Our enemy is one of these Dead Apostles."

It's gone from "my enemy" to "our enemy".

.... Well, I don't mind.

She's not wrong, considering the situation I'm in now.

".... Hmm.

So you're saying these Dead Apostles aren't vampires from the start?

What do you mean by that?"



"Dead Apostles were once humans.
They've attained immortality through magic, or had their blood sucked by one of the True Ancestors.
Either way, the ones that become vampires become immortal, even though it's imperfect immortality."
"...."

Those who were vampires from the beginning, and humans who became vampires.
.... What is this?
I get the feeling that there's some kind of huge contradiction to all of this.
It feels like some important fundamental is missing somewhere in this theory.



"Hey-Shiki.
How much do you know about vampire folklore?"
"Let's see.. Just the usual stuff.
They suck the blood of virgins, they can bind people just by looking at them, they can turn into mist and wolves.. just the usual stuff you hear about."
"Yeah, that's pretty much all true.
They drain the blood of virgins because one's blood cells are more pure before one has exchanged bodily fluids with others.
That makes virgins most suitable for repairing the vampire's own degenerating genes."



The Dead Apostles—the ones that become vampires have imperfect immortality.

Since they became immortal, they won't die from old age.

However, they need to replenish their energy frequently, or they'll disappear.

All living creatures need nutrients to be able to move, right?

It's the same thing.

It's just that vampires don't die from age as long as they take in the nutrients."

"The Dead Apostles suck blood because they need it to stay alive.

Immortality is a strain on their originally-human bodies.

The genes that compose their bodies are different.. when they become vampires, they begin to degenerate at an incredible rate.

To make up for that, they must drain the blood of others in order to absorb genetic information and stabilize their own bodies.

To a vampire, drinking blood is not like eating, but it's the minimum requirement for them to continue to exist."

"....."

This sounds complex.

And long.

I can't follow the logic, but Arcueid nonetheless continues speaking.

"So, moving on.

The ability to bind someone with just a look is a type of Mystic Eyes.

Eyes and words are both common types of magic circuits, so there are many vampires who have Mystic Eyes.

We usually possess the Mystic Eyes of Enchantment.

We don't enchant people by looking at them, rather, we enchant those who look into our eyes.

A powerful vampire using Mystic Eyes can impose his own will into the brain of another and completely dominate their thoughts, but the Mystic Eyes of a Dead Apostle doesn't have that much power."



"What you call 'turning into mist' is really just making a spare body and controlling it via the will.

Once the part serves its purpose, you cut the mana flow to the offshoot and naturally, it returns to dust."

Wolves—and other animal transformations—are a byproduct of a vampire's repairing its damaged body from its familiars.

For a vampire living a long time, stabilizing their bodies with normal lives is not sufficient.

Humans are not fundamentally powerful animals, so it's more effective to repair one's body by absorbing beasts, as they surpass the human species in this respect.

Vampires who repair their own bodies with beasts can return those beasts to their previous forms and use them as familiars when they need to."

"Hmm.. from what I've heard, there's even a thousand-year old vampire whose body is made up entirely of familiars.

They say he contains 666 beasts within his body, or something like that, anyway."

"—"

I think Arcueid's getting a little too wrapped up in her own speech.

To be honest, I'm not finding this world easy to understand.



"Yeah, that's about it.

It's just an explanation of the very basics, but now do you know what a vampire is?"

"Well.. I suppose."

The reality of Arcueid being a vampire begins to feel harder and harder to accept.



"Now, it's my turn.

Actually, there's something important I've forgotten to ask you too."

"What?"

You're not going to learn anything from me.

I'm not a vampire or anything, just an ordinary student."



"Hmmm.

Then let me ask you this, Shiki.

How exactly did you kill me?"

"Huh?"

"I'm asking about the method you used.

I'm resistant against stuff like Runes and Kabbalah, so those don't work on me.

The only things I'm not resistant against is magic I've yet to experience, which is probably limited to the ancient Shinto in this country and the treasures in South America."



"No, not even those could 'kill' me that much.
 Answer me, Shiki.
 What kind of occult artifact did you use to incapacitate me to that degree?"
 "Occult artifact..?
 What's that?"



"A catalyst which stores ideas and history!
 Geez—You've got sacred treasures in this country too, don't you?
 They're usually something like staves and swords, jewels and masks; Conceptual
 Weapons that can be used against nature itself—Come on, Shiki!
 Are you sure you're not someone from one of those fields?"
 "What field?"
 I told you, I'm just a student.
 I don't know anything."
 "That's a lie!
 There's no way a human who's not even a magus can hurt me.
 Are you hiding something from me, Shiki?"
 Arcueid gives me an angry, cat-like stare.
 But even if she looks at me like that, I'm not hiding anything—oh, wait.
 "Actually, there is one thing.. I'm not sure whether it's relevant, but.."
 Arcueid is still staring at me.
 It doesn't seem like I'll be able to keep quiet about it.
 "Alright, I'll tell you, but.. how should I put this?
 I.. can see these lines that can be used to cut things."



"Eh?"

Oh.

She's stunned.

She should be.

Normally, I don't think anyone would believe a story like this.



".... What do you mean?"

Arcueid asks in a serious tone.

She's not exactly normal.. I should have known she would defy my expectations in a good way.

"I mean, I see these lines where things can be cut.

Living things, the ground, anything touchable.

It's like a black line, and I can cut things clean when I let anything sharp through it.. does that mean anything to you?

It's convenient to be able to cut steel with a knife and all, but it's not like I can cut it anywhere I like.

I can only cut things where I can see the lines, and when I cut you—well, you can cut a girl's skin with just a knife, right?"



"___"

Arcueid's eyes are serious as she glances at me—those wild eyes that I've seen only once before.

A gaze that could stop my breathing.

"—I see.

I thought the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception only existed in fairy tales.

But, I guess there is someone who can use them, a mutated monster like you."

"W—what!?"

I don't think a vampire can call me a monster!"

"A monster is a monster.

There isn't anyone, even amongst us, with Mystic Eyes that can 'see the death of things'."

"..?"

See the death of things..?"

Arcueid nods in affirmation with an inimical gaze.

"A circuit must have opened in your eyes, Shiki.

Were you born with eyes like that?"

"No.

They became like this a long time ago, but I wasn't born with them."

"... Hmm.

Then you must have had at least one near-death experience at some point, right?"

"Wha—"

It's true.

Eight years ago, I got in an accident where I almost died.

"Just as I suspected.

You had the latent ability, but that must have been the trigger.. The Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, huh.

Yes, with those, you could definitely kill even me."

With a small sigh, Arcueid's eyes return to normal.
 "Arcueid.. Do you know something about these lines?"



"Not to the extent you would, but I do have some information.
What you see is the end of all things, the point where things die easily.
To put it simply, the time of death for everything in existence.. that is, death
itself."
"_"

.... I remember now.

That time.

When Sensei gave me these glasses, she had told me something similar to what
Arcueid said.

But there's a subtle difference to what Sensei said and what Arcueid said.

What I'm seeing are only lines, and not something as disturbing as death.

"What are you saying?"

What I see are just the lines where things can be cut."

"I'm telling you, those lines are the 'death' of the object.

Listen, Shiki.

Everything in existence has an end.

There are differences to when, but it's an end nonetheless.

Death does not 'arrive'.

It is already contained within the object at its creation, and it's bound to hap-
pen someday.

This is what is called the principle of causality.

You've heard of that before, right?

As long as something has an origin, it must have an end.

When it will end is determined from its beginning.

That's its so-called 'time of death'.

So, as it already exists from the beginning, it's not impossible for one to see it
with their eyes, given that they can comprehend the concept of a 'time of death'
and they have the appropriate circuit in their brain and eyes.

That's the truth behind those 'lines' you see.

This is nothing more than the general concept, but if I were to theorize, I
would say that they are the weakest parts of the joints between the molecules in
something, or perhaps a pre-designated switch within the genetic makeup that
activates the death of that object."



"Ah, but that doesn't really make sense.
 Hmm.
 I can't see them, so I can't say for sure, but the lines aren't all you can see, are they?
 I would think there would be 'points' more than 'lines'."
 "—Ah."
 That's right.
 When I first saw Arcueid.
 When I wasn't myself.
 When I took off my glasses, I could see the usual scribbles—and black points, where the scribbles seemed to flow from.
 ".... There were.
 It only happened that one time, but—definitely.
 I saw black points.
 There were several on your body, and the black lines flowed between them, joining them up."
 If I had to make an analogy, I would say they were like blood vessels.



".... I see.
 'The lines where things die easily', and 'death itself', huh?
 I'm surprised you've stayed alive up until now like this.
 You must have a very tranquil heart, Shiki."
 Arcueid says this philosophically.
 In my own way, I understand what she is saying, but I don't want to believe any of it.

"—What?

There's no way that sort of thing exists, let alone me being able to see it..!"

"Well, you are seeing it.

Usually, when you cut a living being's neck, they die.

This means it stops because you've cut it.

Conversely, you can say that if you can't cut something's neck, it won't die.

Ah, this is about me, so just consider it an exception."



"But in your case, you can ignore the cause.

Even against that which is immune to all external effects, you kill first.

What is killed then becomes 'dead'.

It's not that it stopped because you cut it, but in your case, you stop the object, and as a result, it is cut.



"See?

What else can I call you but a monster?

You may just call them lines along which something can be cut, but those eyes are more special than those possessed by any other user of supernatural power in history.

You, Shiki, have the eyes that can kill anything, just like death itself."

"——"

I'm.. at a loss for words.

If that really is what I see, just like Arcueid is saying..

Those black lines really are the 'time of death' for all things.

.... Then everything around me..
 is filled with death.
 ".... So, what?
 If it's all as you say, I should be able to kill even you."



".... Really?
 Then let's try it."
 Arcueid opens the curtains.

The lights are off.
 The only illumination is the faint moonlight coming in through the window.
 "Come on, it's alright.
 Try it, seriously.
 Ah, wait, could it be you can't see them with those glasses on?"
 "——Are you sure about this?"
 I take my glasses off.
 Only to see the lines, of course.
 At the same time, the room begins to writhe with the black lines.
 Outside the window, the moon is white.
 They're difficult to see in the daytime due to the strong sunlight, but under the faint moonlight, I can even see the glow coming from the 'lines'.
 Amidst them,
 the lines on Arcueid's body are very thin.
 If I don't concentrate, I lose sight of them altogether.
 "Ah——"
 ".... If I hadn't been killed by you, I don't think you'd be able to see any at all,
 but right now you can probably see them.
 You see, although I have no 'times of death' during the night, some do appear during the day.
 You could kill me because it was during daytime, but you can see my 'time of death' during nighttime now since I've used up a lot of energy to regenerate myself.
 —In other words, I've lost my immortality.
 So, can you cut the lines on my body, Shiki?"
 "——"

.... Let's see.

I think I probably could, since the lines are there, but I don't think I could do it so briskly and without hesitation like that time before.

".... I think it'd be hard.

The lines keep fading in and out, so I probably couldn't do it unless you're sleeping."

"You can't, right?"

That's your biggest weak point.

No matter how many 'deaths' you can see, you need to trace the line with your own hands.

No matter how weak I am right now, my athletic ability isn't so low that I'd be caught by you."

.... I see.

Come to think of it, I can't catch agile animals.

That means I can't touch their bodies.

In other words, even if I can see its lines, I can't kill anything that moves.

"—Ow!"

I feel a stab of pain run through my head.

Looking at the lines gives me a headache, just like it did when I was a child.

I put on my glasses, and the world returns to normal.



"....."

Arcueid is staring intently at me.

".... What?"

Is there something else?"

"No, that's not it.

You can't see the lines if you put those glasses on?"

"Yeah.

I got them from someone a long time ago, when my eyes first became like this.

I'm only using the lenses now, but thanks to them, I can lead a normal life."



"Yes, I see.

No matter how strong a mind you may have, your only choices when faced with death all the time would be to put out your eyes or go mad."

Saying that, Arcueid comes closer.

"Hey.

Can I take a look at them?"

"—No.

These are important to me.

I'm not handing them over to you."

"Come on, I'm not going to break them.

I'm just going to look at them."

Arcueid creeps closer.

I get the feeling she wouldn't be adverse to getting them by force.

I—

setvar arkregard + 1

Fine, but just for a little bit.

turn to **67**

No. I have a bad feeling about it.

turn to **68**

67

Arcueid doesn't look like she's going to give up.

".... Fine.

Give them back as soon as you're done looking."

I hand her my glasses.

Arcueid stares intently at the glasses, and then looks at me with frightening eyes.



"Shiki, is the person who made these glasses in this city right now?"

"I don't think she is.

It's been eight years, and it seems like she was only here for a week."

"-I see.

That's good.

I don't have to deal with more.. well, it's probably safer not to deal with Blue in the first place, anyway."

Arcueid retreats to her thoughts.

"Arcueid, you know Sensei-I mean, the person who made these glasses?"

".... I know her.

A Sorceress, she is one of only four of her kind.

These glasses are truly a masterpiece.

Even I can't break them."

Arcueid's face grows even more serious.

".... Wait-you were going to break them?"



"—Eh?
D-did I say that part out loud?"
"... I knew it.
You were going to break them after all."
I retrieve the glasses from Arcueid.

"Geez.
You're the one who just said I couldn't stay sane without these glasses.
Or do you want me to go crazy?"



"That's not what I meant.
I just didn't like how you treasured them so much."
"—Hey, listen, you.."

.... Geez.
Somebody, please tell me how a mind like hers works.
"It's true my memories of Sensei are precious to me.
But more importantly, I can't live without them.
If I were to see the lines 24 hours a day, I think I'd die from the headache before
I went mad."
setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **73**

68

.... It's suspicious.

There's something very suspicious about how she says "I'm not going to break them".

"-Not even just to look at.

I know about your ridiculous powers, after seeing you in that alley.

What would I do if you crushed them by accident?"



"Hey!

What do you mean 'ridiculous powers'?

Let me tell you, in terms of non-fighting strength, you're stronger than I am.

I won't break things at random."

Saying that, Arcueid extends her hands as if she is about to take them by force.

.... Her attitude is becoming more and more suspicious.

I bounce up off the bed to get away from her.



"Hey, you're running away."

"Of course.

I'll tell you now: I'm not handing over these glasses.

Even if there's only a one in a million chance you'll break them, they're irreplaceable to me.

After all, you're the one who said I wouldn't be able to stay sane without these glasses.

Do you want me to go crazy?"



"Huh?"

N.. no, that's not it at all."

.... Arcueid is obviously trying not to look at me.

"—Come on, Arcueid.

I don't know what you're planning, but if I lose these glasses, I won't be in any position to help you.

If I were to see the lines 24 hours a day, I think I'd die from the headache before I'd go mad."

turn to **73**

69

"——"

I still want to continue living in the proper, respectable world.

.... I do feel responsible for killing Arcueid.

But, I think there's something wrong about being forced to do something I can't do.

.... But again, Arcueid is asleep.

She's trusting me, someone who's killed her once already, and sleeping peacefully.

"..... Damn it.....!"

But even so.. I can't do it.

I quietly start to walk.

.... Turning my back to Arcueid, sleeping with complete faith in me, I leave the hotel room.

.... The corridor is silent.

We're on the eleventh floor, the top floor in the hotel.

Since she rented out the whole floor, there are no other guests here.

"——"

I still feel a tinge of indecisiveness.

But, I shake it off and press the elevator button.

Taking the train from the hotel, I return to town.

.... It's just past noon.

School is about to finish, so I think it's probably okay for me to head back to the mansion.

"....."

All the same, I don't feel like going back to the mansion.

I decide to head to the park to cool my head for a bit.

sigh

Sitting down on the bench, I vacantly stare up into the sky.

The sky is still cloudy, much like the scenery within my own heart.

.... I wonder if she's still sleeping, believing in me?

I've killed her once, and yet she said she would forgive me.

She had forgiven me—and yet.. what am I doing here?

Last night.

After I killed Arcueid, I swore to myself that I would atone for it no matter what.

Was that an oath I could break when my life is in danger?

Was that all it was?

"..... Kuh!"

But I do want to live.

That is a problem that I can't ignore as long as I'm alive.

And it's not something I can easily dismiss as a moment of passion and forget about it.

—That power is yours.

But that is the very reason why you must never forget.

"__"

I recall those precious words from long, long ago.

She.. Sensei.. what did she say to me?

"....."

There's still time.

The sun hasn't set yet.

If I can return to the hotel before the sun sets, I'll probably still make it in time.

"Damn it."

I can't throw away my doubts.

In the end, I—

setvar arkregard - 1

if flg3 >= 1

turn to **71**

I think I'll go back to the mansion.

turn to **71**

I think I'll go back to the hotel.

turn to **72**

70

—As long as Arcueid is unable to move, blindly going outside would be dangerous.

"....."

Gripping the knife with one hand, I hold my breath.

Arcueid is silent too.

She looks like she's being careful of what's around her.

The floor below is being noisy.

Perhaps the shock woke up the guests and maybe they're complaining to the hotel people.

It's still four in the morning, but even so, the noise is as loud as that of a festival.

—Even that falls silent a few minutes later.

The noise disappears.

A sickening silence.

"——!"

The lights go out.

At the same time,

the sound of countless things hitting the door.

"Are you prepared, Shiki?"

Arcueid whispers in the dark.

"... Prepared, for what?"

I don't even have to ask her.

—If remaining in here was a mistake..

Then that question was also a mistake.

I turn towards the door at the sound of it breaking.

"——"

No sound escapes from my mouth.

As I turn around, bright white teeth fill my vision.

Like a giant maw, capable of consuming me whole.

Somehow, I'm able to calmly tell it's the jaws of a shark.

Fresh blood spills everywhere.

With a thump, what remains of my body falls to the floor.

What falls is my head.

Everything below my face has been consumed in one bite.

That is the last scene I ever see.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **421**

No.

turn to **1**

71

—I value my life.

I recall the scene yesterday when I killed Arcueid.

The stench of death and blood.

—I never want to experience something like that again.

If I were to remain with Arcueid, there'd be no question that I would be subjected to that scene again.

If I don't want that, I'll have to go back to the mansion.

"——"

.... I get the feeling that there's some major flaw in my decision.

But right now, everything is a mess in my head and my sense of logic refuses to function properly.

Anyhow, for now, I'll return to my own room for some rest.

I'm sure I'll calm down and think clearer then.

The sun has gone down, and my surroundings have been cast into darkness.

It's probably past seven now.

The curfew for the mansion is eight, so I'd better hurry back if I don't want to be scolded by Akiha.

The streets around the mansion are deserted like always.

The sun's only just gone down, but the silence is like that of midnight.

"Come to think of it, this place is.."

Where I've gone to check out that noisy stray dog the night I first returned to the mansion.

"Huh...?"

I'm beset by a terrible premonition of misfortune.

—Strange.

Suddenly, my surroundings became completely black.

I hear a dripping sound.

.... Where's that sound coming from?

It's coming from nearby.

My body is starting to cool.

It's coming from nearby.

Alarms are going off somewhere in my head.

Drip, drip.

Drip, drip.

The sound..

I think it's coming from right behind my neck.

"Ah——"

I collapse onto the asphalt.

My limbs won't move, and my consciousness dims.



13 0

At the bottom of my thinning consciousness..
all I find out..
is a few black dogs are feeding on my arms and legs.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **420**

No.

turn to **1**

72

—I can't throw away my doubts.
Sensei said,
.... I won't ask you to become a saint.
All you have to do is become an adult and do what you think is right.
I know I'm not thinking straight at the moment, but I can't betray her trust.
Even if Arcueid isn't human, she believes in me.
She has forgiven my unforgivable sin with a smile.
"..... Alright!"
I leap up from the bench and begin running without turning back.

.... I return to the hotel at around the same time the sun goes down.
"....."
Quietly, I sneak back inside.
If Arcueid is still asleep, then there.. should.. be.. no.. problem....



"—Shiki!"
"..... Ah."
She's awake, and pretty angry.
"Oh, where'd you go to!?"
You should tell me before you go outside!"
Arcueid is angry.
But it doesn't seem like she thinks I betrayed her.



"Geez, when I woke up at sunset, you weren't there!
I thought you went to the bathroom, but you wouldn't come out.
Then I thought you went to get some food from the lobby, but you weren't there
when I checked.
Just where did you go?"



"Ah—just outside the hotel for a bit."
"Are you serious..?"
The familiars have found you, so I won't say you're safe.
What were you going to do if one of those black dogs attacked you after you
went outside so recklessly?"
"..... Ah."
—Suddenly, I realize it.
The reason Arcueid is angry isn't because I wasn't here.
She hasn't thought, even for a moment, that I would betray her and run out on
her.
It seems Arcueid is only angry because she's worried about how I went outside
and could've ended up in a dangerous situation.
"____"
.... I'm ashamed.
I was—only a little ways away from treading all over her good intentions.

"Hey, Shiki, are you listening to me?"
".... Yeah, I'm listening.
You're right, it's my fault.
I'm sorry for going out on my own like that."
I lower my head obediently.
And—



"Eh!?"
—H-hey, you don't have to apologize so seriously—



A.. anyhow, you're far too vulnerable.
The enemy is a vampire, so you've got to be more careful."
"You were just as vulnerable yourself.
I killed you once before, remember?
You can't guarantee I won't do it again, can you?"



"Ah—"
Arcueid gives a surprised look, as if she only just realized it.



"Now that you mention it, you're right.
 —I wonder why I did that.
 I guess I just had complete confidence in you since we spoke in the alley."
 "....."
 Well, saying that doesn't make me feel bad for her..
 "Okay.
 Since you trust me so much, I'll try my best.
 So, should I just keep watch from now on?"



"Yeah, until sunrise tomorrow.
 I can't leave the room, so be on guard if someone comes up to this floor."
 Be on guard, huh.
 Being on guard is going to do me no good if one of those black dogs from this morning comes for us.
 sigh
 I let out a sigh.
 As expected, this is too heavy a role for me.
 ".... Let me ask you something.
 Was the black dog that attacked us this morning something your enemy sent out?"
 "I don't think so, it was probably for surveillance.
 His patrol route happened to pass through where you and I were talking, and it seems my presence was revealed as a result."
 "Revealed?
 To your enemy?"

"That's right.
If I had been in perfect condition, it would actually save me some time.
But right now, it's the opposite.
If I were attacked now, I'd be the one annihilated.
That's why I have to hide out like this for now until my power returns."
.... Arcueid's enemy.
In other words, the serial killer who's been causing the stir in this town—a vampire.
".... Arcueid.
I want to ask you something.
Will you answer my question?"
"I don't mind talking.
But why are you being so formal all of a sudden?"
"—Yeah, I haven't asked you the most important thing yet.. So, what's your ultimate objective here?"



"Me?
I'm here to hunt down the vampire.
Killing vampires is my duty."
"Yeah, I do remember you saying something like that before.
But Arcueid, you're a vampire, right?"



"What?
You still don't believe me?"
"Oh, don't worry, I believe you so much it hurts."

I'm asking why would you, a vampire, claim to be doing something as odd as killing other vampires?"

"Oh?

You don't like the idea of beings from the same species killing each other?"



.... The act of killing doesn't exactly make my list of favorite things, but she is right.

I'm not comfortable with the idea of vampires killing vampires.

"No, it's just that I can't really imagine something like that happening.

Vampires drain the blood of humans, right?

So they should be killing humans, not other vampires."



"Drinking blood and killing are different things.

Well.. Even so, I know what you're trying to say.

You think beings from the same species should help each other out, right?

But vampires can be of the same species and still be different life forms.

That's why they don't really have what you humans call 'camaraderie'."

"....?"

Then you're saying something makes you different from the vampire you're hunting?"



"That's right.

The one I'm after is a human vampire, just like the stereotypical vampire from you humans' folklore.

He kills humans by draining their blood, turning them into The Dead, then uses them to increase his power and influence—that's the sort of vampire I hunt.

The one lurking in this town is that sort of old-style vampire."

—"That sort " of vampire?

It seems like there are different types.

"... Don't tell me you want me to be your shield so you can get this guy."



"—Yeah, that was my original intent.

But after talking to you, I've changed my mind.



You see, at first, I thought you were someone from the Church.

So I thought you might have information about the location of the enemy, but

you turned out to be a perfectly ordinary person.
You didn't even know about vampires, let alone the location of the enemy's coffin."



".... Yeah, come to think of it, there's no way they'd send an exorcist to a Far East secular country like this one—I guess I didn't put enough thought into this."
Arcueid thinks aloud.

Her conversation derails, and I'm feeling a little left out.

"I don't follow you at all, Arcueid."

"Ah, hold on for a moment.. let's see.. How should I explain this..?"

With that, Arcueid's gaze begins drifting.

.... She doesn't seem used to holding a conversation.

"Don't worry about it and just explain everything about the current situation.
I don't understand any of this, but I might be able to see the general gist of things."



"Really?"

Thanks, Shiki."

"You don't have to thank me.

Just keep talking."

Arcueid nods obediently.

"Basically, the vampire currently in this town is an old-style vampire.

He himself reigns as the lord and releases The Dead he made into the city.

By doing so, he increases his power bit by bit.

He's a typical vampire in that he drains the blood of humans, and those humans

become vampires themselves.

He's not very powerful right now as he doesn't have many Dead serving him, but as the victims increase, so does his power.

It would be best to destroy the main body before that happens, but I haven't found where he sleeps yet.

He's hidden so well right now I can't even feel his presence."



"Even so, it's easy to take care of things once I find him.

But I don't have any clues whatsoever, so I had no choice but to walk around town during the day to investigate.

But then I suddenly got attacked by a passing killer, and now, I'm temporarily weaker than the enemy vampire."

Arcueid shoots me a cold look.

I guess she wants to say something to the "passing killer".

"... I see.

I kind of understand the situation now.

So in other words, some evil monsters are based in this town, and you're here to eliminate them.

Since you didn't know where they were, you went looking for them, and that's when I, uh-killed you.

So now you're weakened and hiding out while you recover.. Is that about right?"



"To put it simply, I think so."

"-Then next is the main topic.

You casually call yourself a vampire, but I still don't really understand that

term.

.... It's obvious you're not a human, that much I can see, but I don't get the feeling that you're a vampire, either."



"That's true.

I'm a little different from the type of vampire you know about."

"Indeed.

I hadn't considered that vampires even existed at all, let alone a vampire like you.

So, what makes you different?"

Arcueid thinks.

"Yes.. I suppose it might be helpful to teach you a bit about us."



"Alright.

Then the first period's lesson will be Vampires 101."

".... Okay, but.. What's with 'Vampires 101'?"

"You're an amateur at this, so we've got to start with the basics, right?"

That's why I'm going to start teaching from the very beginning."

"-Okay, whatever.

Just keep it short."



"Um.. I'll try my best."

.... It really does seem like she's not used to talking.

Well, we've got lots of time, so for now I guess I'll listen to Arcueid without complaint.



"Although we're typically called simply 'vampires', we're divided into two main categories.

Those who were vampires from the start, and those who become vampires.

The former are called True Ancestors, and the latter are called the Dead Apostles.

The ones you call vampires are the Dead Apostles.

They drain the blood of humans and turn them into their slaves.

They're weak against sunlight, and you can vanquish them with a baptism ritual.

Our enemy is one of these Dead Apostles."

It's gone from "my enemy" to "our enemy".

.... Well, I don't mind.

She's not wrong, considering the situation I'm in now.

".... Hmm.

So you're saying these Dead Apostles aren't vampires from the start?

What do you mean by that?"



"Dead Apostles were once humans.
They've attained immortality through magic, or had their blood sucked by one of the True Ancestors.
Either way, the ones that become vampires become immortal, even though it's imperfect immortality."
"...."

Those who were vampires from the beginning, and humans who became vampires.
.... What is this?
I get the feeling that there's some kind of huge contradiction to all of this.
It feels like some important fundamental is missing somewhere in this theory.



"Hey-Shiki.
How much do you know about vampire folklore?"
"Let's see.. Just the usual stuff.
They suck the blood of virgins, they can bind people just by looking at them, they can turn into mist and wolves.. just the usual stuff you hear about."
"Yeah, that's pretty much all true.
They drain the blood of virgins because one's blood cells are more pure before one has exchanged bodily fluids with others.
That makes virgins most suitable for repairing the vampire's own degenerating genes."



The Dead Apostles—the ones that become vampires have imperfect immortality. Since they became immortal, they won't die from old age. However, they need to replenish their energy frequently, or they'll disappear. All living creatures need nutrients to be able to move, right? It's the same thing. It's just that vampires don't die from age as long as they take in the nutrients." "The Dead Apostles suck blood because they need it to stay alive. Immortality is a strain on their originally-human bodies. The genes that compose their bodies are different.. when they become vampires, they begin to degenerate at an incredible rate. To make up for that, they must drain the blood of others in order to absorb genetic information and stabilize their own bodies. To a vampire, drinking blood is not like eating, but it's the minimum requirement for them to continue to exist." "....." This sounds complex. And long. I can't follow the logic, but Arcueid nonetheless continues speaking. "So, moving on. The ability to bind someone with just a look is a type of Mystic Eyes. Eyes and words are both common types of magic circuits, so there are many vampires who have Mystic Eyes. We usually possess the Mystic Eyes of Enchantment. We don't enchant people by looking at them, rather, we enchant those who look into our eyes. A powerful vampire using Mystic Eyes can impose his own will into the brain of another and completely dominate their thoughts, but the Mystic Eyes of a Dead Apostle don't have that much power."



"What you call 'turning into mist' is really just making a spare body and controlling it via the will.

Once the part serves its purpose, you cut the mana flow to the offshoot and naturally, it returns to dust."

Wolves—and other animal transformations—are a byproduct of a vampire repairing its damaged body using its familiars.

For the long life of vampires, stabilizing their bodies with normal lives is not sufficient.

Humans are not fundamentally powerful animals, so it's more effective to repair one's body by absorbing beasts, as they surpass the human species in this respect.

Vampires who repair their own bodies with beasts can return those beasts to their previous forms and use them as familiars when they need to."

"Hmm.. from what I've heard, there's even a thousand-year old vampire whose body is made up entirely of familiars.

They say he contains 666 beasts within his body, or something like that, anyway."

"—"

I think Arcueid's getting a little too wrapped up in her own speech.

To be honest, I'm not finding this world easy to understand.



"Yeah, that's about it.

It's just an explanation of the very basics, but now do you know what a vampire is?"

"Well.. I suppose."

The reality of Arcueid being a vampire begins to feel harder and harder to accept.



"Now, it's my turn.

Actually, there's something important I've forgotten to ask you too."

"What?"

You're not going to learn anything from me.

I'm not a vampire or anything, just an ordinary student."



"Hmmm.

Then let me ask you this, Shiki.

How exactly did you kill me?"

"Huh?"

"I'm asking about the method you used.

I'm resistant against stuff like Runes and Kabbalah, so those don't work on me. The only thing I'm not resistant against is magic I've yet to experience, which is probably limited to the ancient Shinto in this country and the treasures in South America."



"No, not even those could 'kill' me that much.
 Answer me, Shiki.
 What kind of occult artifact did you use to incapacitate me to that degree?"
 "Occult artifact..?
 What's that?"



"A catalyst which stores ideas and history!
 Geez—You've got sacred treasures in this country too, don't you?
 They're usually something like staves and swords, jewels and masks; Conceptual
 Weapons that can be used against nature itself—Come on, Shiki!
 Are you sure you're not someone from one of those fields?"
 "What field?"
 I told you, I'm just a student.
 I don't know anything."
 "That's a lie!
 There's no way a human who's not even a magus can hurt me.
 Are you hiding something from me, Shiki?"
 Arcueid gives me an angry, cat-like stare.
 But even if she looks at me like that, I'm not hiding anyth—Oh, wait.
 "Actually, there is one thing.. I'm not sure whether it's relevant, but.."
 Arcueid is still staring at me.
 It doesn't seem like I'll be able to keep quiet about it.
 "Alright, I'll tell you, but.. how should I put this?
 I.. can see these lines that can be used to cut things."



"Eh?"

Oh.

She's stunned.

She should be.

Normally, I don't think anyone would believe a story like this.



".... What do you mean?"

Arcueid asks in a serious tone.

She's not exactly normal.. I should have known she would defy my expectations in a good way.

"I mean, I see these lines where things can be cut.

Living things, the ground, anything touchable.

It's like a black line, and I can cut things clean when I let anything sharp through it.. does that mean anything to you?

It's convenient to be able to cut steel with a knife and all, but it's not like I can cut it anywhere I like.

I can only cut things where I can see the lines, and when I cut you—well, you can cut a girl's skin with just a knife, right?"



"___"

Arcueid's eyes are serious as she glances at me—those wild eyes that I've seen only once before.

A gaze that could stop my breathing.

"___I see.

I thought the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception only existed in fairy tales.

But, I guess there is someone who can use them, a mutated monster like you."

"W—what!?"

I don't think a vampire can call me a monster!"

"A monster is a monster.

There isn't anyone, even amongst us, with Mystic Eyes that can 'see the death of things'."

"..?"

See the death of things..?"

Arcueid nods in affirmation with an inimical gaze.

"A circuit must have opened in your eyes, Shiki.

Were you born with eyes like that?"

"No.

They became like this a long time ago, but I wasn't born with them."

"... Hmm.

Then you must have had at least one near-death experience at some point, right?"

"Wha—"

It's true.

Eight years ago, I got in an accident where I almost died.

"Just as I suspected.

You had the latent ability, but that must have been the trigger.. The Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, huh?

Yes, with those, you could definitely kill even me."

With a small sigh, Arcueid's eyes return to normal.
 "Arcueid.. Do you know something about these lines?"



"Not to the extent you would, but I do have some information.
What you see is the end of all things; the point where things die easily.
To put it simply, the time of death for everything in existence.. that is, Death
itself."

"__"

.... I remember now.

That time.

When Sensei gave me these glasses, she had told me something similar to what
Arcueid said.

But there's a subtle difference to what Sensei said and what Arcueid said.

What I'm seeing are only lines, and not something as disturbing as death.

"What are you saying?"

What I see are just the lines where things can be cut."

"I'm telling you, those lines are the 'death' of the object.

Listen, Shiki.

Everything in existence has an end.

There are differences to when, but it's an end nonetheless.

Death does not 'arrive'.

It is already contained within the object at its creation, and it's bound to hap-
pen someday.

This is what is called the principle of causality.

You've heard of that before, right?

As long as something has an origin, it must have an end.

When it will end is determined from its beginning.

That's its so-called 'time of death'.

So, as it already exists from the beginning, it's not impossible for one to see it
with their eyes, given that they can comprehend the concept of a 'time of death'
and they have the appropriate circuit in their brain and eyes.

That's the truth behind those 'lines' you see.

This is nothing more than the general concept, but if I were to theorize, I
would say that they are the weakest parts of the joints between the molecules in
something, or perhaps a pre-designated switch within the genetic makeup that
activates the death of that object."



"Ah, but that doesn't really make sense.

.... Hmm.

I can't see them, so I can't say for sure, but the lines aren't all you can see, are they?

I would think there would be 'points' more than 'lines'."

"-Ah."

That's right.

When I first saw Arcueid.

When I wasn't myself.

When I took off my glasses, I could see the usual scribbles—and black points, where the scribbles seemed to flow from.

".... There were.

It only happened that one time, but—definitely.

I saw black points.

There were several on your body, and the black lines flowed between them, joining them up."

If I had to make an analogy, I would say they were like blood vessels.



".... I see.

'The lines where things die easily', and 'death itself', huh?

I'm surprised you've stayed alive up until now like this.

You must have a very tranquil heart, Shiki."

Arcueid says this philosophically.

In my own way, I understand what she is saying, but I don't want to believe any of it.

"-What?

There's no way that sort of thing exists, let alone me being able to see it..!"

"Well, you are seeing it.

Usually, when you cut a living being's neck, they die.

This means it stops because you've cut it.

Conversely, you can say that if you can't cut something's neck, it won't die.

Ah-This is about me, so just consider it an exception."



"But in your case, you can ignore the cause.

Even against that which is immune to all external effects, you kill first.

What is killed then becomes 'dead'.

It's not that it stopped because you cut it, but in your case, you stop the object, and as a result, it is cut.



"See?

What else can I call you but a monster?

You may just call them lines along which something can be cut, but those eyes are more special than those possessed by any other user of supernatural power in history.

You, Shiki, have the eyes that can kill anything, just like death itself."

"_____"

I'm.. at a loss for words.

If that really is what I see, just like Arcueid is saying..

Those black lines really are the 'time of death' for all things.

.... Then everything around me..
 is filled with death.
 ".... So, what?
 If it's all as you say, I should be able to kill even you."



".... Really?
 Then let's try it."
 Arcueid opens the curtains.

The lights are off.
 The only illumination is the faint moonlight coming in through the window.
 "Come on, it's alright.
 Try it, seriously.
 Ah, wait, could it be you can't see them with those glasses on?"
 "—Are you sure about this?"
 I take my glasses off.
 Only to see the lines, of course.
 At the same time, the room begins to writhe with the black lines.
 Outside the window, the moon is white.
 They're difficult to see in the daytime due to the strong sunlight, but under the faint moonlight, I can even see the glow coming from the 'lines'.
 Amidst them—
 The lines on Arcueid's body are very thin.
 If I don't concentrate, I lose sight of them altogether.
 "Ah—"
 ".... If I hadn't been killed by you, I don't think you'd be able to see any at all, but right now you can probably see them.
 You see, although I have no 'times of death' during the night, some do appear during the day.
 You could kill me because it was during daytime, but you can see my 'time of death' during nighttime now since I've used up a lot of energy to regenerate myself.
 —In other words, I've lost my immortality.
 So, can you cut the lines on my body, Shiki?"
 "—"

.... Let's see.

I think I probably could, since the lines are there, but I don't think I could do it so briskly and without hesitation like that time before.

".... I think it'd be hard.

The lines keep fading in and out, so I probably couldn't do it unless you're sleeping."

"You can't, right?"

That's your biggest weak point.

No matter how many 'deaths' you can see, you need to trace the line with your own hands.

No matter how weak I am right now, my athletic ability isn't so low that I'd be caught by you."

.... I see.

Come to think of it, I can't catch agile animals.

That means I can't touch their bodies.

In other words, even if I can see its lines, I can't kill anything that moves.

"—Ow!"

I feel a stab of pain run through my head.

Looking at the lines gives me a headache, just like it did when I was a child.

I put on my glasses, and the world returns to normal.



"....."

Arcueid is staring intently at me.

".... What?"

Is there something else?"

"No, that's not it.

You can't see the lines if you put those glasses on?"

"Yeah.

I got them from someone a long time ago, when my eyes first became like this.

I'm only using the lenses now, but thanks to them, I can lead a normal life."



"Yes, I see.

No matter how strong a mind you may have, your only choices when faced with death all the time would be to put out your eyes or go mad."

Saying that, Arcueid comes closer.

"Hey.

Can I take a look at them?"

"—No.

These are important to me.

I'm not handing them over to you."

"Come on, I'm not going to break them.

I'm just going to look at them."

Arcueid creeps closer.

I get the feeling she wouldn't be adverse to getting them by force.

.... It's suspicious.

There's something very suspicious about how she says "I'm not going to break them".

"—Not even just to look at.

I know about your ridiculous powers, after seeing you in that alley.

What would I do if you crushed them by accident?"



"Hey!

What do you mean 'ridiculous powers'?

Let me tell you, in terms of non-fighting strength, you're stronger than I am.

I won't break things at random."

Saying that, Arcueid extends her hands as if she is about to take them by force.
.... Her attitude is becoming more and more suspicious.

I bounce up off the bed to get away from her.



"Hey, you're running away."

"Of course.

I'll tell you now; I'm not handing over these glasses.

Even if there's only a one in a million chance you'll break them, they're irreplaceable to me.

After all, you're the one who said I wouldn't be able to stay sane without these glasses.

Do you want me to go crazy?"



"Huh?"

N.. no, that's not it at all."

.... Arcueid is obviously trying not to look at me.

"—Come on, Arcueid.

I don't know what you're planning, but if I lose these glasses, I won't be in any position to help you.

If I were to see the lines 24 hours a day, I think I'd die from the headache before I'd go mad."

turn to **73**

73



"Hmmm.

I suppose there must be a strain on your brain from being able to see 'death'..
Yeah, there's definitely some kind of reason for those eyes of yours, but this is
all I can tell you for now.

If we get the chance later, I'll go over it in a little more detail."

"That's alright.

I'm not into long stories anyway."



"Is that so?

Personally, I enjoy talking to other people."

Arcueid gives a carefree laugh.

It really does seem like she enjoys doing nothing more than talking.

Night descends.

Arcueid sits on the bed and we both stare absent mindedly at the clock.

It's past four in the morning.

About an hour until dawn.

"Just one more hour?"

Nothing out of the ordinary has happened up until now, and Arcueid shows no
signs of tension.

We're surrounded by complete tranquility.

Somehow, I'm beginning to believe that tonight might just end like this.



"Hey, Shiki."
Arcueid calls me again.
"What?
I don't have anything else to talk about."



"Really?
But it's such a waste not to talk, now that we're in a situation like this."
"... Listen, how many hours do you think I've had to put up with your nonsense talking?
Six hours.
That's making me more tired than keeping watch."



Arcueid gives me a dissatisfied glare.
—That's right.
For some reason, Arcueid has been talking to me for six hours straight.

I told her she should sleep if she was feeling weak, but she replied with "It's more fun to talk", so in the end, we ended up facing each other and talking the whole time.

sigh

I just don't know what she's thinking.

—Gruuuuuuu.

To top things off, I'm hungry.

Come to think of it, my last meal was breakfast, so I haven't eaten anything for a whole day.



"Why don't you eat something if you're hungry?"

We're in a fancy hotel, after all, so you can call room service."

"That's okay.

I'd lose my sense of tension if I filled my stomach now.

More importantly, shouldn't you be getting something to eat?"

You're weakened but you aren't sleeping, so you should at least get something to eat."

"If you're not going to eat, then neither am I.

Normal food is meaningful in its own way, but it's boring to eat by myself."

"Normal food?"

There's nothing normal or special about—"

.... Ah, wait.

Arcueid is a vampire.

I suppose to her, "food" would mean drinking someone's blood.

"—Or is there?"

I guess being a vampire, you wouldn't usually consume much except blood."

She doesn't look like it, but Arcueid is a vampire.

She says vampires need the blood of humans to survive.

Then—just how many people has she drained blood from and how many people has she killed before?"

"—"

I sneak a quick glance at her face.

.... I can't imagine.

Even though I know she's a vampire, for some reason, I can't imagine her suck-

ing anyone's blood—



"What?

Is there something on my face?"

"....!"

She meets my gaze, and I quickly look away.

Arcueid continues to stare at me, and then gives a laugh of comprehension.

"Are you curious?"

"A-about what?"

"About how many people I've sucked blood from?"

"Erk—"

.... She's completely read my mind.

Arcueid's smile grows even wider, and I don't like it.

".... Well, of course I'm curious.

I am helping you, so if I don't know, I won't have any idea about when you might have a change of heart and try to attack me."

That would really be a problem.

"I see, I see," Arcueid says.

"Well, then.

Here's a question.

How many people's blood have I sucked so far?"

She bounces lightly up from the bed and walks to the window.

"How many people?

That's—"



Arcueid gives a cheerful smile and silently looks in my direction with an air of delight.

.... Damn it, it's obvious that she's trying to provoke me.

Fine.

I'll answer.

Let's see.. it has to be..

"In the hundreds?"

"Sorry, you're off."



"Then in the thousands?"

"Nope, that's wrong too."

Arcueid laughs like it's so funny.

.... Somehow, this feels really frustrating.

"Damn!"

Then.. well, I doubt it's the case, but.. in the tens?"



"That's wrong too.

Oh, really!

Tens, hundreds, thousands.. do you really see me as that sort of person?

That's so mean, that would make me indiscriminate."

"Am I wrong?

Vampires are indiscriminate, aren't they?

Even humans get hungry merely by being alive, and when it's a matter of life and death for you, you wouldn't be picky either."

"Yes, that's true, but.."



"I haven't tasted blood these last eight hundred years.

Nor have I ever killed an ordinary human."

—Eh?

"Wait—is that true?"

"It's the truth.

After all, I'm afraid of sucking blood."

—Huh?

Afraid of sucking blood?

"You've got to be kidding, right?

A vampire that's afraid of sucking blood?

Why?"

".... I suppose I'm a coward.

That's why I'm a failure as a vampire."

Arcueid grumbles as she looks up at the night sky from the window.

She stays like that for a long time, continuing to look up at the sky.
 Her white back looks vague.. hazed over, as if she was merely an illusion.
 "... I see, a failure."
 I whisper, and I feel relieved.
 Somehow, that makes me happy.
 Of course, it's only natural to be relieved.
 Because now I know the person that's standing before me isn't some kind of
 vicious, evil being.
 For now, if I were to believe what she says, I won't just be killed by her at
 random.
 So, I'm safe.
 I'm safe, but I feel like that's not the only reason I'm relieved.
 —Damn it, what's wrong with me?
 Being relieved over something like this.. how can I be happy over something
 like Arcueid being a failure?

"Ah—"
 Suddenly, I feel a faint dizziness.



"Shiki?
 What's wrong?
 You're sweating an awful lot."
 "No, it's just this twinge of pain in my head—"
 I realize something with a shock as I reply to Arcueid.

The window behind Arcueid.
 Beyond the glass, within the city streets still sunken in the darkness of night.
 A blue crow is looking in my direction.
 "That's—"
 I can do no more than stare at its dim figure through the window.
 Arcueid turns towards the window too.
 "... Nrvnqsr?"
 "INDEED.
 I HAVE FINALLY FOUND YOU, PRINCESS OF THE TRUE ANCESTORS."
 From somewhere,

a force of will flows into the room.
Arcueid's eyes are full of enmity.
Outside the window, the crow gives a loud, high pitched scream.
"THIS IS IT.
I AM HEADING THERE RIGHT NOW."

The blue crow flies off.
All that remains is the dark of night and the white moon.

——Suddenly
Boom!
With a heavy noise, the room shakes violently.
No, to be more precise,
the entire hotel shook from that impact.
"What the hell—!?"
I get up from the bed.



Arcueid is silent, biting her lip with a vexed expression.
"Arcueid, that shaking just now—"
"___"
She doesn't answer.
"... Say something!
That wasn't an earthquake, was it?"
—If I had to guess, it felt more like someone had driven a large dump truck into
the hotel lobby at full speed.
It was that kind of impact.
"... Arcueid!"
She.. doesn't answer.

If I listen closely, I can hear noises from downstairs.
.... Arcueid's face is grave.
She said she was powerless right now.
That's probably why she's not saying anything.
"____"
Only time passes by.

Two minutes.

It's been two minutes after the impact, but the hotel is awfully quiet.

Arcueid remains silent and still.

Just biting her lip, as if withstanding something.

I can see a trail of red blood slowly flowing down from her lip.

"—Arcueid—"

Is she worried?

Frustrated?

She remains still, almost as if she's embracing herself, bearing with something.

She said she wouldn't leave the room.

Then,

what am I here for?

—I should go check out what's happening outside.

turn to **75**

I'll stay inside the room for now and keep watch.

turn to **70**

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"Eh?"

Ah, um.. I was just a little surprised at how calm you were about all of this, Tohno-kun."

"Really?"

Well, my family is a strict one, so I'm used to these kinds of things.

More importantly, Senpai, didn't you have something you wanted to talk to me about?"



"Yes.

I haven't thanked you for this morning yet, so I thought I'd take care of you for a bit like this."

Senpai makes her incredulous statement with a soft smile.

"T-take care of me?"

That's not how you use the phrase 'take care' in Japanese, Senpai."

"Oh, really?"

You mean people don't say 'taking care' when they're showing someone hospitality in order to thank them?"

"—No, they don't.

I don't think it's a mistake, exactly, but it's not quite right either."

"Hmm.

These manners-related phrases sure are difficult, aren't they?"

I suppose I shouldn't try to use them if I'm not familiar with them."

Senpai laughs embarrassedly.

"No, not at all.
They say manners come from the heart, after all.
As long as you have the right feelings, it's just a trivial error."

Senpai's eyes snap in my direction as she stares at me.
.... Her gaze is so serious I feel like I just became some kind of rare animal in a zoo.

"Um.... Senpai?
Did I just say something rude?"



"....."
Senpai continues to stare at me.
"Um..... Senpai?"
For some reason, I feel incredibly embarrassed.
"—It really does suit you well, Tohno-kun.
Being younger yet calmer than me.. you're impertinent."
Senpai glares at me.
.... I don't understand how her mind works at all.
"—I'm sorry.
It was kind of arrogant for me to speak like that."



"Yes, it was so impertinent I was moved."
She lowers her shoulders with a sigh and she sips her tea.



"I've become curious about you, Tohno-kun.
Please, talk to me.
It can be about anything."
Senpai straightens her posture, with an attitude like a teacher looking at her student.
"....."
It doesn't seem like I can refuse.
"... Well, okay, but it's not going to be very interesting if we're just going to talk about me, Senpai."
Senpai responds with a smile.
.... I've got no choice.
It's not like me, but I suppose I'll talk to her about school——

In the end, Senpai was happy to listen no matter what I talked to her about. It was surprising to see her get so worked up when we were talking about middle school. Apparently, Senpai had never been on a school trip.
"That sounds nice, everyone going on a trip together," she said, her eyes twinkling.
It was quite an impressive sight.
At any rate, I held a one-sided conversation for an hour, but it made me rather tired.
With Senpai's permission, I decide to head home.
turn to **19**

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if cielregard > arkregard

turn to **76**

"—Alright."

I've decided what to do from the very beginning.

Taking the knife out of my pocket, I walk up to the door.



"—Shiki?"

"I'm going to go check things out.

Don't leave this room until I come back."

I step out into the hallway, shaking off Arcueid's look that she wants to say something.

No one is in the hallway.

.... I couldn't hear from inside, but the hallway is noisy.

It's not that this floor is noisy.

Rather, the noise is coming from beneath my feet.

There is some kind of ruckus on the floor below, I can hear the noise of many people talking.

I suppose the impact just woke the guests, and they are complaining to the hotel.

"..... Doesn't look strange so far."

I walk down the hallway.

The noise from downstairs is like the sound of ocean waves.

Noisy—and yet so very solitary and inactive.

"——!"

My fingers gripping the knife feel numb.

A chill runs over the back of my neck.

There's something near my temple.

Pain emerges from the back of my eyes.

Enduring it, I walk down the hallway.

"——"

It.. hurts.

My eyes.. hurt.

My head grows heavy, and I feel a drifting sensation, like I'm about to collapse right here.

Yeah, I know what this is.

Without a doubt, this is the feeling I get right before I collapse from anemia.

"Ha-aahh."

It hurts.

It hurts.

Unable to withstand it any longer, I remove my glasses.

I can see the elevator.

A long hallway.

It must be more than ten meters from here to the elevator.

—And then,

With a "ding dong", the elevator comes up to the eleventh floor.

"——"

I can see the "lines" on the elevator door.

No, they are..

They're too dense—they look almost pitch black.

The door opens.

The small, steel box opens.

Inside that box—

Crammed to the point of overflowing, is human flesh.

Inside that steel box called an elevator.

The red meat of humans is ground and pushed in.

Inside, two black dogs are voraciously feasting away on something.

"Wha——"

I stop breathing.

Like my brain which just froze, my lungs stop as well.

I can't breathe.

But that isn't important.

My vision turns crimson.

With a bubbling sound, blood pours out of the elevator.

Amidst the ocean of blood, people, arms, feet, bones, brains, fingers, organs, and other parts.

The two black dogs are the only form of life.

"——"

My very instincts refuse to take in this scene.

Down the hallway, two black dogs are picking at the human corpses.

If I listen carefully, I can still hear sounds coming from downstairs.

If I listen carefully,

They are the sounds of gorging, the chewing of meat, cries for help, and the death screams of people which can't even be called words anymore.

.... What is this?

Though there is no way I can see it, before my eyes is the image of dozens of beasts eating the people in the hotel alive.

A man running down the hallway, trying to escape.

But the panther-like claws descending from the ceiling slice him open from his nose to the back of his head.

A girl locking herself up in a room and crying.

But to the lions, a door is no stronger than paper, and within seconds, they demolish it into an unrecognizable shape.

Striving madly to be the first ones there, people dashing for the elevator.

But within it, the black dogs waiting inside decapitate them the instant the doors open.

At any rate, there is no exception.

Beneath my feet, within this huge box called the hotel..

is a scene from Hell I can feel down to my very bones.

"Guuuuh!"

I feel like throwing up.

But I can't do that.

If I just stand around and do that—I'll become a part of that red sea.

"Haah-ah.

Ha.

Ah.

Ha."

I resume my breathing.

I grit my teeth hard.

The dogs inside the elevator notice me.

All sounds from below have ceased.

"..... Ha."

In other words,

there is no longer anyone alive.

Grrrrr....

The two black dogs begin to run.

Of course, towards me, the last prey.

"Ha—aahh."

The black dog is coming for me.

On their bodies, I can see an infinite number of lines, and on their foreheads, the point of death.

—But even so.

My paralyzed mind does not order my body to fight or run.

The first black dog leaps.

Its speed belies all human comparison.

It doesn't even take two seconds to cover the ten meters down the hallway.



They open their mouths.
Mouths filled with fangs so many times sharper than the knife I have, and they are aimed straight at my throat.
Accurate, and fast.
The instant I realize they are drawing upon me,
the fangs bite into my throat with a crunch.
I die.

But that's not right.
I can't be killed by something like this and I refuse to die.
The deaths of others would not cause me to hesitate.
—A hot summer's day.
It happened long ago, eight years ago.
I've seen something even more terrible—

Thrust.
I thrust my knife into the forehead of the black dog biting into my neck.
My arm moved just before the black dog ripped through my throat.
It was done so perfectly, even for myself.
Like a machine whose sole function is to cut, I plunged the knife into the dog's forehead without any useless and wasted movement.
Because that is where the first dog's "point" was.
Normally, even if the brain is destroyed, the muscles try to execute the commands they have received from the brain.
The black dog would have probably ripped through my throat even if I had simply pierced its head.
Well—normally, that would happen.
But the black dog is "dead".
Death is a complete stoppage.
At the point when I killed it, it lost every form of validity.
The first dog falls onto the ground.
In its place—The second dog is flying straight at my face.



"——"

I thrust the knife right into its open mouth.

But, that was a mistake.

This dog's "point" is not on its face, but on its chest.

Stabbing him through the mouth will kill him immediately.

The knife pierces through the dog's mouth and into the back of his head.

Naturally, the hand holding the knife still remains in the dog's mouth.

"——Ah."

The black dog is still alive.

Its jaw shuts.

The joint between my arm and the hand holding the knife is bitten on, about to be ripped apart.

Proper thought returns with the pain.

"A-ah-!"

—You have to be kidding me!

It—it's as if I'm just letting him chew through my arm by stabbing him in the mouth!

"Why—you...!"

I try to pull my arm out.

The dog's teeth are deep in my arm, it doesn't seem like I can pull it off.

More importantly—this black dog, despite having been pierced in the head, is still filled with life.

Even though I lift it after piercing its head, it shakes and lands on top of me.

"Guh..!"

I fall onto the floor.

I still can't pull my arm out.

The black dog, still pierced in the head, applies more power to its bite.

"——!"

M.. My arm is surely going to be torn off—!

I can't believe this.

No dog ought to be able to bite anything in that state..!

".... Y-you..!"

I feel something wet.

I can see blood spilling from the black dog's mouth.

Is it the black dog's blood, leaking from its knife wound to the head?
Or is the blood coming from my arm, about to be torn off?
—To be honest..
My head is too messed up to be feeling the pain,
so it isn't a big deal which one it is.
"Let-go!"
I try to wrestle away from the black dog, but it is firmly attached to my arm.
I can't escape.
I can't run away.
If I want to escape—I have no choice but to "kill" it.
"—..!"
But how?
The hand it's biting off is the one holding the knife.
I'm on the ground, so even supposing I did pull my hand out, the very next
instant the black dog's mouth will be free to bite through my throat—
"Ha—aaahhh."
—It's okay.
Calm down, Shiki.
rst, you've got to examine the situation well, and then think calmly about it.
That's the kind of thinking you've always kept.
In that case—I can do something..
For example, there's plenty of 'lines' on the back of its head.
And I can see the black 'point' on its chest.
The way to survive is awfully simple.
.... But I have my doubts about executing this plan.
No matter how savage and evil a creature it is..
To do something like kill a panting and gasping creature that's so alive, this
close to me—it's something I'm hesitant to do.
"Guh—!"
The pressure on my arm increases.
My entire arm is shortly going to be ripped off at this rate.
But even so, I just can't seem to do something so cruel—

The red blood drips down onto my face.
Going down my forehead, it drips into my eyes.
—Crimson darkness soaks into the back of my eyes.
"Re—d."
My consciousness sways, and then is gone.

.... But even so, I can't bring myself to kill a living creature.
—What hypocrisy.
You've killed something much bigger than a mere dog.
.... Yes, that's right.
But that time was different.
I wasn't sane when it was Arcueid.
Even when I killed the other black dog, just a moment ago—that was unrelated

to my will.
 But right now, this is very much my own will.
 Didn't Sensei say, Shiki?
 Use this power according to your own will, and no one else's.
 That's why..
 As myself, right now, I could never take a life for granted.
 —That, too, is hypocrisy.
 Because long ago, you..

"Ah——"
 That is a nightmare from my childhood.
 —See, what are you waiting for?
 It was a hot summer's day.
 —Kill or be killed.
 Before my eyes, the blood-soaked shadow of a boy.
 —You've already..
 Hot, hot, red blood on my hands.
 —Haven't you killed someone once before—!

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!!!"
 I thrust.
 I don't pull, but rather thrust deeper into the black dog's head.
 I can hear its yelping right in front of me.
 I think the black dog is crying out.
 With my arm in its mouth, it could not properly cry, but it's crying anyway.
 I'm sure that's how much it must hurt.
 I don't care.
 I plunge the knife in deeper, along with my arm.
 Without a sound, the blade of the knife punctures out the back of the black dog's head.
 It's as if the dog has grown a horn.
 Having split the skull, I easily slash through its skin.
 Blood and brains spray out as the knife completely emerges from the back of the head.
 Also, the hand gripping the knife travels completely through.
 gasp *pant* *pant*
 But even so, the black dog is still alive.
 Then there's only one thing I have to do.
 I reach around with my other hand.
 Peeling the knife from my blood-drenched fingers, I grip the knife with my free hand.
 And just like that, I thrust the 'point' on the black dog's chest.

gasp *pant*
 And with that, the black dog dies.
 The strength drains from its jaws, and I easily pull my arm back out.

"Oh—it wasn't torn off at all."
I look at my blood-covered arm.
There are many teeth marks, but the flesh is almost free of wounds.
The blood must have been from the black dog when I impaled it through the head.
The pain from when I was being bitten was really quite trivial, but my fear must have amplified it many times over.
gasp *pant*
Lying there on the ground, I look up at the ceiling.

My head hurts.
The world becomes a patchwork, and here and there, I can see the black points of death.
My body is freezing, but my mind is burning feverishly.
"—Kuh!"
Right beside me lay the corpses of the two black dogs.
One of my arms is covered in blood, the other clutches a red knife.
.... Also, there are a quite uncountable number of dead bodies downstairs.
"—Ha, haha, hahaha."
All I can do is laugh.
Because this isn't real.
There's no way this can be real.
At what point did I, with my eyes wide open, start seeing a nightmare—?
Ding dong.
"Eh-?"
A terribly out-of-place cheerful sound rings out.
"Damn it, what's with this headache-?"
I stand up, enduring the razor-like pain in my head.
"Ele.. vator..?"
It seems the sound is the other elevator coming up.
The door opens.
Inside stands a man wearing a black coat.



The headache worsens.
"He's—"
Yes, I've seen him before.
I'm sure I've seen that man before.



13 0

"_____"
Silently, he walks towards me.
"You—!"
I ready my knife as I glare at him.
"_____"
But he doesn't react at all as he walks towards me.
It's as if he doesn't notice me at all.
The distance between us shrinks.
Just a little more—when there is barely one meter between us, and the man finally seems to notice me.



13 0

Those bloodshot eyes.
The instant I see those eyes which no human should possess, I lose all freedom to move my body.
"I thought I killed everyone, but it seems like there's still someone left."
The man turns and looks at the corpses of the two black dogs.



13 0

"—You pieces of filth.

If you can't even take care of a scrap of meat, you're unworthy to be a part of my body."

The man voices his displeasure as he raises his hand.

His coat lifts like a mantle.

—Broken.

With a splash, the black dogs' remains liquify and disappear into the man's coat.

"Ah—"

I can't even scream.

Below the man's coat is pure darkness, without even the traces of an outline.

All that exists there is a mud-like darkness.

"Th—"

This is dangerous.

This guy is just too dangerous—

My instincts sound the alarm wildly in my head, but I can't even lift a finger.

The man in the black coat approaches me.

"——!"

It's not good if I just stay here.

The unstoppable headache grows to an unbearable level, telling me this place is dangerous.

Whatever the means, if I don't get out of here soon, I am going to lose my life.

—But it's too late.

The man is right before me.

Those eyes aren't looking at me at all.

"Feed."

He raises one of his arms.

Below it lies a chaotic darkness.

From there, something huge appears.

Whomp.

The sound of wind.

That which has appeared from below the man's coat is a crocodile's mouth,

easily large enough to swallow a man whole.

"Ah——"

I'm going to die.

Right here, in an instant, crunched up like a ball of paper.

Just as I was convinced of this, someone pulls me back.

Clomp.

"Wha-!?"

I.. can't believe it.

Instead of me, the jaws of the crocodile clamp onto the stomach of Arcueid, who just pulled me out of the way.



"Ssstt—!"

Arcueid's face contorts in agony.

She draws back before she is completely devoured by the crocodile's maw.



13 0

"....."

The man silently watches Arcueid.

Arcueid glares back at him with a pained expression, her mid-section stained in red.



"—I can't believe a vampire named Chaos would play such trivial games. It's like a poorly-scripted nightmare, Nrvnqsr Chaos."



13 0

"I feel the same way.

To catch one of the surviving True Ancestors.. I never dreamed I would be a part of such foolish festival.

This is a nightmare for me, too."

The man called Nrvnqsr quietly lowers his arm.

The coat returns to its former position, and the crocodile's mouth disappears underneath.

The man looks only at Arcueid.

It's as if he's not concerned at all about me, standing behind her with my knife raised.



13 0

"But what is going on?

I have heard that the previous executor could not even scratch you.

What kind of a mistake is this?

Right now, your presence is exceedingly weak.

Even weaker than a mere member of The Dead—were you attacked by the church before I arrived, Arcueid Brunestud?"

"....."

Arcueid says nothing.

The man fixes his emotionless stare on her.

"... I don't understand.

There are only a limited number of conceptual weapons capable of harming you.

The only people in possession of those are the Church's assassins, and I don't think the Burial Agency would dispatch anyone this far east."

The man narrows his eyes slightly as he turns around.

"Either way, this is most fortunate for me.

I shall not ask why you have been weakened.

All I am going to do is claim your head while I have a chance of winning."

"Ts....!"

I hold up my knife, preparing for his attack.

—But.

Having openly stated he was going to take her head, the man now disappears towards the elevator.

It seems despite this claim, the man in the black coat is now leaving the hallway for the elevator.

"——Huh?"

Now I've got absolutely no idea what's going on!

About that man, the two dogs who attacked me, the nightmare-like reality of the attack on this hotel—none of it!



"Shi-ki."

Arcueid leans on me.

"Ah——"

It's a terrible wound.

Though her stomach stopped bleeding, her face is scrunched up in pain.

—It happened mere seconds ago.

The wound she got from protecting me from that man.

"Why—did you..?"

".... Yes.

I, underestimated him slightly.

I thought I could help you and then dodge him, but—you did really well, Shiki.

I guess the wound I got from you wasn't so trifling after all."

Arcueid's face, twisted in pain, turns into a small, joking smile.

"You id—"

—I can't watch her any longer.

The wound she got was from protecting me, and the reason she got it was because of me too—there is no place for that stupid smile of hers.

Arcueid leans onto me and lightly closes her eyes.

".... Hold on, don't close your eyes, you idiot!

Get ahold of yourself!

You're a vampire who can't die at night, right..!?"

".... Well, that's true, but it seems like I'm at my limit."

"Wha—!?"

"Sorry, but could you take me back to my room?"

Arcueid's weight falls on me.

"—Hold on!

That's—!"

If she dies, I'll—

"Hey—!"

I call out to Arcueid, who has quietly closed her eyes.

And then,

".... Zzz."

I can hear her happily breathing in her sleep.

"....."

.... *sigh*

I shouldn't have bothered worrying.

Arcueid is only sleeping.

".... Telling me to take her back to her room like that.

How selfish of her—"

It really was selfish of her, but there's no helping it in this situation.

Besides.

If we stay here in this hotel any longer, I have the feeling we'll be in a lot of trouble.

"..... Guh!"

The headache won't stop.

I guess I have to rest too or I'll faint.

".... Arcueid's room?"

—Oh, that place."

I've only been there once, but I definitely remember it.
—In that case, there's no point staying here any longer.
Carrying Arcueid, I decide to quickly leave the hotel.

The city is slightly lit up.
Fortunately, it's too early in the morning for anyone to be awake, so I get to
Arcueid's room without being seen.
"... I see, that's how it is."
Then, I finally realize why that man left.
The streets are beginning to become covered with a faint orange light.
I guess dawn is breaking already—

turn to **79**

76

"—Alright."

I've decided what to do from the very beginning.

Taking the knife out of my pocket, I walk up to the door.



"—Shiki?"

"I'm going to go check things out.

Don't leave this room until I come back."

I step out into the hallway, shaking off Arcueid's look that she wants to say something.

No one is in the hallway.

.... I couldn't hear from inside, but the hallway is noisy.

It's not that this floor is noisy.

Rather, the noise is coming from beneath my feet.

There is some kind of ruckus on the floor below, I can hear the noise of many people talking.

.... That's odd.

It's just past four in the morning.

Even under the assumption some people have woken up early, it's not normal for this many people to be up at this hour.

"..... Doesn't look strange so far."

I walk down the hallway.

The noise from downstairs is like the sound of ocean waves.

Noisy—and yet so very solitary and inactive.

"——!"

My fingers gripping the knife feel numb.

A chill runs over the back of my neck.

There's something near my temple.

Pain emerges from the back of my eyes.

Enduring it, I walk down the hallway.

"——"

It.. hurts.

My eyes.. hurt.

My head grows heavy, and I feel a drifting sensation, like I'm about to collapse

right here.
 Yeah, I know what this is.
 This is the feeling I get right before I collapse from anemia.
 "Ah—gu.....!"
 It hurts.
 It hurts.
 Unable to withstand it any longer, I remove my glasses.

.... There are two elevators.
 One is stopped on the first floor, the other on the fifth.
 "....."
 There is an unpleasant feeling in the air.
 A suffocating, tense sensation.
 I push the button to call the elevator.
 I just want to know what's going on downstairs for now.
 The elevator rises.
 Sixth floor.
 Seventh floor.
 Eighth floor.
 Ninth floor.
 "-Damn it, what's up with it?"
 The elevator is awfully slow.
 Something—a shapeless, shadow-like premonition of something fatally irrevocable clings to me—
 Tenth floor.
 Just one more floor until the elevator reaches this one.
 "——Hurry up."
 My breath catches.
 I realize all the noise I heard from below is now long gone.

With a ridiculous electronic 'ding', the elevator arrives.
 The door opens.
 There is no one inside.
 The interior of the narrow steel box is surprisingly clean and tidy.

"——"
 I enter, and press the button for the tenth floor.
 With a heavy noise, the elevator descends.
 Just one floor down, but it feels awfully far.
 The current floor display shifts to show the tenth floor.
 "Finally—"
 Suddenly—

The world is engulfed in darkness.

".....!?"

Darkness.

Total darkness.

Pitch black, utterly without light.

In that,

all I can see is the faint glimmer of the 'lines' of death.

"Why-?"

My breath freezes in my throat.

From all around, something—some kind of rustling sound, like the sound of insects crawling around—can be heard.

rustle

rustle *rustle*

rustle *rustle* *rustle* *rustle*!

"—!"

I am about to cry out, but I hold back my scream.

"... First, I've got to examine the situation.."

Just like Sensei taught me long ago.

"... And then, think carefully.."

Taking a huge breath, I manage to calm my thoughts.

"... I see.... A blackout."

... But a hotel like this should have a backup generator for occasions like this.

Something must be wrong with the cables, if even that's not working.

rustle *rustle* *rustlllllle*

"...!"

Gripping the knife, I tense up.

The sound of the crawling insects is coming from around the elevator.

It's like..

It feels like there are hundreds of giant cockroaches clinging to the outside of the elevator.

"—There's no point in staying here."

The display stopped when the tenth floor was lit.

Then it means that if I open the door, I should be at the tenth floor.

"—Guess I'll cut it."

I whisper to myself.

Thrusting the knife into the only 'line' I can see, I cut apart the door of the elevator.

"... !?"

The instant the door opens—I am enveloped by a suffocating stench.

The tenth floor is filled with it.

It's so thick just breathing it is enough to clog my airways.

"—"

But even so, if I were to take a step outside, I would be on the tenth floor's hallway.

In the distance, there is the faint glow of the lamp marking the fire escape.

Apart from that, the world is painted over in darkness.

I take a step outside.

".... Is anyone.."
I'm about to say "there", but I stop.
I don't quite know why, but I feel as though it would be a bad idea to raise my voice.
I take another step.
Slowly, I enter the hallway.
The corridor reeks of the terrible smell.
A raw smell.
The smell of beasts.
That, and a grinding sound coming from somewhere.
"....."
There's been a stinging pain in my neck for a while now.
The darkness is frightening.
This silence is frightening.
.... To find out what happened here is more frightening than anything else.
The pain from the back of my neck running to the top of my spine holds back my nervousness.
That throbbing pain,
it's the price of my desperate attempts to repress the urge to just scream and flee.
rustle *rustle* *rustle*
grind *grind* *grind*
scratch *scratch* *scratch*
"Ha..!"
My breathing goes wild.
My body is drenched in sweat.
.... Knife in hand, I am unable to take another step.
I have the feeling that if I were to move even a little, I would see something unimaginably horrible.
pant *pant*
But I'll really be in trouble if I don't get back upstairs.
.... To stay on this floor is worse.
It feels like each second passing is grinding a year off my life.
That's how fast I feel 'death' closing in on me.
My breath comes quicker and heavier.
Fortunately, I can see where the fire escape is, thanks to the lamp.
It's down the end of the hallway.
If I can reach that green emergency light, I can go back upstairs.
Gripping the knife, I set off down the dark hallway.
—*splash*
I can hear something from beneath my feet.
"——"
I guess the hallway is soaked in water.
In addition, my feet keep bumping into things as I walk.
"——"
Even so, I stay silent.

Bearing with the terrible stench smothering me, I head for the emergency light.
Only a few more meters to go.
Then, I see something squirming beneath the emergency light.
"..... Eh?"
I break my silence.
A squishing, lukewarm sound.
A dry, grinding sound.
The wild panting breath of beasts.
"Wh—"
Under the green light of the fire escape..
All sorts of animals are swarming around some human-shaped object.
I can't tell what sorts of animals are eating it.
The hallway is dark, and the emergency light is too weak.
That's why all I can gather is this image.
—Numerous cockroaches are devouring the human corpse while emitting a
laughing buzzing sound.
That's the only way I can make sense of this nightmare.
rustle
There is a noise coming from the direction of the elevator.
"Ha—"
I turn around.
Perhaps it's because my eyes have adjusted to the darkness?
Or maybe it's thanks to light from the fire escape, but I now see exactly what
sort of condition the hallway I just passed through is in.

The hallway is a sea of red.
Lying around within that sea are human arms and legs.
The soaked hallway.
Scraggy, hard objects which I felt on my legs.
It must have been what I was stepping on.
"——"
My mind goes blank.
The hallway is red only on the floor.
Clinging to the ceiling and walls are all sorts of black things.
It's not because there are no lights that they look black.
They are black to begin with.
They don't seem to have any solid shape, sticking to the ceiling and walls like
some sort of liquid.
But I know they are animals from the eyes.
The glinting eyes of the many beast-like forms are trained on me, the only sur-
viving human—
"Hya...."
I manage to suppress my scream.
The beasts are staring at me intently.
They hold their breath, waiting to assault me the moment I scream out.
"Ha—hhh."

I manage to regulate my ragged breathing.
 I can feel it, awfully so, that the moment I cry out, they'll all attack me at once.
 None of the creatures on the wall possess the same eyes.
 It's almost ridiculous to see even shark-like eyes clinging to the wall.
 "....."
 I order my feet to move, but they won't budge an inch.
 —I can't move.
 My feet will not move, after having seen a world like this.
 grind *grind* *gr* *ind*
 The noise from beneath the emergency light grows smaller.
 Those beasts are probably finishing off the corpse.
 "....."
 My breath catches.
 The rustling draws closer.
 It seems—the creatures found their next prey called Tohno Shiki.
 "Ah....."
 But my legs would not move.
 This world is too different, my mind doesn't operate properly.
 —I've made a mistake.
 I shouldn't have come to this floor—

—Then.
 I can hear a terribly familiar sound.
 The very normal sound of human footsteps.
 A completely normal, common-sense sound from the world I lived in until a moment ago.
 "Aaaaaaah—!"
 My numbed mind infuses strength into my paralyzed legs.
 I run.
 Kicking up soaked blood in the hallway, I dash towards the emergency light.
 Run.
 I have to get away from this place as fast as possible..!
 But that was a mistake.
 Reacting to my dash, the black things clinging to the wall and ceilings crash after me like a wave.
 "—!"
 I dash towards the stairs with everything I have.
 But the black wave is so many times faster than I am, and in an instant, my body is—

if flg2 >= 1
 turn to **78**
 turn to **77**

77

—swallowed.

With a splashing sound, I am engulfed in the surging, heaving wave.

An oppressive invasion.

It violates, assaults, and dissolves.

"_____"

Flesh, spirit, soul.. all disappearing.

I am not killed.

It's more accurate to say I've been melted and absorbed as a part of this black wave.

I observe the me that is me disappear in the black wave—

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **422**

No.

turn to **1**

—not consumed.

Squeak.

Squeeeeeee-aaak.

With a cry, the black wave halts before my eyes.

"...?"

I don't get it.

I don't get it, but this probably is my last chance.

I run.

I run towards the stairs.

Instead of running towards me, the beasts beneath the emergency light are heading towards the elevator I was just in—towards the sound of footsteps.

Ahead of the animals, I can hear what sounds like a kitchen knife slicing vegetables.

Something—a human silhouette is slashing the black animals—

"——?"

But I don't have time to discern its identity.

Using my hands and feet, I rush up the fire stairs like a dog.

.... I climb back up to the eleventh floor.

The surroundings are still pitch black.

But here, there is no trace of that stench.

That raw stench of beasts, blood, and entrails.

"Haa—-aah."

I manage to get up, and tracing along the wall, I walk back towards Arcueid's room.

"——"

The lights come back on.

This floor is still as it was before.

The only thing that's different is me—splattered here and there in human blood.

"Ha——"

My pants are completely red, as if they had been crimson to begin with.

Red flecks are all over me.

My arm and chest, even my face.

"Haha——"

So that's how it was.

I should have realized it when I was in front of the elevator, the moment the noises from downstairs ceased.

At that point,

there was no longer anyone else still alive.

"Haha—ha."

What was that?

What was that just now?

A sea of blood.
If the floor below this one was like that, what were the other floors like?
What was that scene of carnage?
What was that scene of hell?
This—and that and this and that.. all of it has been the work of the "enemy"
Arcueid was talking about—!?
"____"
My teeth grind together.
They clench together so tightly it feels like they're going to shatter.
My body is still trembling.
My consciousness is still numb.
But more than all of that—I can't accept that spectacle.
What was that just then?
What, all those incomprehensible animals devoured all the guests staying on
the lower floors?
Had they all been killed and eaten?
One-sidedly, pointlessly killed without a chance to argue, escape, or even call
for help..!?
"You've got to be kiddi—"
You've gotta to be kidding me.
I clench the knife tightly.
And then.
With a cheerful electronic "ding!", the elevator which stopped on the tenth floor
reaches this one.
"____"
I turn back to face the elevator, now about ten meters down the hall.
The door opens.
Within—are two black dogs.

"____"
.... I see.
You guys came after me.
"—Ha."
I grip the knife with both hands.
The black dogs burst out from the elevator.
They break into a run.
Of course, toward me, the last prey.



"Ha—!"

The black dogs are coming for me.

On their bodies, I can see an infinite number of lines, and on their foreheads, the point of death.

—Without hesitating.

rst, I stab the dog that leaps at me in the forehead.

The black dog falls to the floor without even giving a scream.

It melts into a black liquid.

After that,

the other black dog bounds towards me.

It leaps.

Its speed belies all human comparison.

It don't even take two seconds to cover the ten meters down the hallway.

"Kuh—!"

I line up the knife again, but not quickly enough.

The black dog opens his mouth.

That mouth is filled with fangs so many times sharper than the knife I have, and they are aimed straight at my throat.

Accurate, and fast.

The instant I realize they are drawing upon me,

the fangs bite into my throat with a crunch.

I die.

But that's not right.

I can't killed be by something like this and I refuse to die.

This tragedy would not cause me to hesitate.

—A hot summer's day.

It happened long ago, eight years ago.

I've seen something even more terrible—



Thrust.

I thrust my knife into the forehead of the black dog biting into my neck.

My arm moved just before the black dog ripped through my throat.

It was done rather perfectly, even for myself.

Like a machine whose sole function is to cut, I plunged the knife into the dog's forehead without any useless or wasted movement.

Because that is where the first dog's "point" was.

Normally, even if the brain is destroyed, the muscles try to execute the commands they have received from the brain.

The black dog would have probably ripped through my throat even if I had simply pierced its head.

Well—normally, that would happen.

But the black dog is "dead".

Death is a complete stoppage.

At the point when I killed it, it lost every form of validity.

The second black dog also collapses onto the floor.

It becomes a black stain on the hotel's hallway.

"Ha-ah."

I'm tired.

With a thump, I lean my back against the wall and look up at the ceiling.

—My head.. hurts.

The world becomes a patchwork, and here and there, I can see the black points of Death.

My body is freezing, but my mind is burning feverishly.

"—Kuh!"

Right beside me lie the corpses of the two black dogs.

One of my arms is covered in blood, the other clutches a red knife.

.... Also, there are a quite uncountable number of dead bodies downstairs.

"—Ha, haha, hahaha."

All I can do is laugh.

Because this isn't real.

There's no way this can be real.

At what point did I, with my eyes wide open, start seeing a nightmare—?

Ding dong.

"Eh-?"

A terribly out-of-place cheerful sound rings out.

"Damn it, what's with this headache-?"

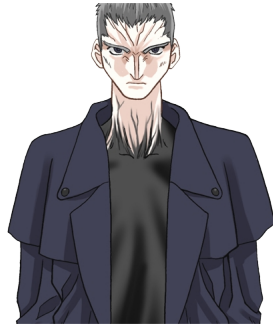
I stand up, enduring the pain in my head and look toward the sound.

"Ele.. vator..?"

It seems the sound is the other elevator coming up.

The door opens.

Inside stands a man wearing a black coat.



13 0

The headache worsens.

"He's—"

Yes, I've seen him before.

I'm sure I've seen that man before.

"——"

Silently, he walks towards me.

"You—!"

I ready my knife as I glare at him.

"——"

But he doesn't react at all as he walks towards me.

It's as if he doesn't notice me at all.

The distance between us shrinks.

Just a little more—when there is barely one meter between us, the man finally seem to notice me.



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Those bloodshot eyes.

The instant I see those eyes which no human should possess, I lose all freedom to move my body.

"I thought I killed everyone, but it seems like there's still someone left."

The man turns and looks at the corpses of the two black dogs.

"—You pieces of filth.

If you can't even take care of a scrap of meat, you're unworthy to be a part of my body."

The man voices his displeasure as he raises his hand.

His coat lifts like a mantle.

—Something's odd.

With a splash, the black dogs' remains liquify and disappear into the man's coat.

"Ah—"

I can't even scream.

Below the man's coat is pure darkness, without even the traces of an outline.

All that exists there is a mud-like darkness.

"Th—"

This is dangerous.

This guy is just too dangerous—

My instincts sound the alarm wildly in my head, but I can't even lift a finger.

The man in the black coat approaches me.

"——!"

It's not good if I just stay here.

The unstoping headache grows to an unbearable level, telling me this place is dangerous.

Whatever the means, if I don't get out of here soon, I am going to lose my life.

—But it's too late.

The man is right before me.

Those eyes aren't looking at me at all.

"Feed."

He raises one of his arms.

Below it lies a chaotic darkness.

From there, something huge appears.
 Whomp.
 The sound of wind.
 That which has appeared from below the man's coat is a crocodile's mouth,
 easily large enough to swallow a man whole.
 "Ah——"
 —My consciousness bursts.
 In panic, I slash at the crocodile's mouth.
 But it's a futile act.
 There is a squishing sound.
 "——-!!!!!!!!!!!"

I fall onto the floor.
 "Haa—hahhh—hhhaaghh."
 My throat is broken.
 I'm not breathing, I'm throwing up blood.
 Blood sprays from my throat in time with the beating of my heart.
 "Gah-ah, aaah, aaah."
 My consciousness/ is splitting.
 The pain is obliterating my thou/ghts.
 Looking,
 I see that the right side of my stomach is basically nonexistent.

"-Shiki!?"
 I can hear a voice.
 But I can't hear it very well.
 "Not very impressive for a guard dog of yours."
 The man's voice.
 "—I can't believe a vampire named Chaos would play such trivial games.
 It's like a poorly-scripted nightmare, Nrvnqsr Chaos."
 Arcueid's voice.
 "I feel the same way.
 To catch one of the surviving True Ancestors.. I never dreamed I would be a
 part of such foolish festival.
 This is a nightmare for me, too."
 The man's.
 deep.
 voice.
 ".... But what is the meaning of this?
 I have heard that the previous executor could not even scratch you.
 What kind of a mistake is this?
 Right now, your presence is exceedingly weak.
 Even weaker than a mere member of The Dead—were you attacked by the church
 before I arrived, Arcueid Brunestud?"
 I can't hear Arcueid's voice—
 ".... It is difficult to understand.

There are only a limited number of conceptual weapons capable of harming you. The only people in possession of those are the Church's assassins, and I don't think the Burial Agency would dispatch anyone this far east.

Either way, this is most fortunate for me.

I shall not ask why you have been weakened.

All I am going to do is claim your head while I have a chance of winning."

.... The sound of footsteps.

It seems despite having said he was going to claim her head, the man in the black coat is now leaving for the elevator.

"..... ?"

I don't, understand.

It's just—so hot.

My consciousness blurs and fades—



"Ah, are you awake?"

".... A.... Arcueid....?"

I open my half-lidded eyes.

Arcueid is there in front of me.

It appears we're in the hotel hallway.

"How do you feel?"

I think I've managed to close the wound, but I suppose it still hurts."

".....?"

Close the wound—?

That's not possible.

The injury I had received from that.. thing wasn't even what you could call a wound.

It took half my torso away with it.

It's odd enough that I'm still alive, but for the wound to have closed.. that would be practically miraculous.

"—Huh?"

.... How come I'm still alive?"

I get up and check my body.

.... There isn't any pain.

The right side of my stomach is back to as it was before.

.... Though it does seem rather black and blubbery.
"Wh-wh-wha-!?"



"What did you say?"

"Wh-what is this..!?"

I point towards the soft blubbery thing on my stomach.

It's true that there's no pain and that I'm feeling a surge of strength there, but I have the feeling that I saw something similar just a moment ago.. I hope it's just my imagination..



"Yeah, that?"

It's a familiar Nrvnqsr was using to reinforce his body.

You killed it when it got you, right?

It was still alive, so I decided to use it to replace your damaged parts."

"—Familiar?"

So, you mean—"

.... The crocodile that came out from that man's coat.



"That's right.
Isn't that great, Shiki?
It's just that part, but you've powered up!"
Arcueid gives a genuinely happy laugh.
For me, of course, this is no laughing matter.
"W-what the heck have you done..!?"
What were you thinking, attaching weird stuff to someone's body like that without even asking..!?"



"What do you mean?
I helped you, didn't I?
I can't heal others, and you would have died if I left you like that.
Or would you have rather died?"
"-Well, I'm thankful you helped me, but-how am I supposed to live with a body like this from now on..!?"



"Ah, don't worry about that.

Once a familiar has been severed from its master, it's just a scrap of flesh.

It's a bit unstable in form at the moment, but in time, it'll begin to imitate the properties of your body, and you'll be back to normal.

Plus, it'll be tougher than your body's ever been up until now, Shiki.

If you study magic, you might even be able to return it to the original crocodile form."

Arcueid says, sounding more envious than happy.



"Aren't you happy, Shiki?"

Now I wish you'd been wounded all over!"

"You idi—there's no way I can be happy with having something like this put onto me..!"



"No way!"

You're not happy, Shiki!?"

"Not one bit!

.... Well, I suppose I can survive thanks to this, but I don't want to survive by this method ever again..!"



".... Hmmmm.

Okay, I'll make do with a different method next time."

Arcueid mumbles a response.

.... Is she repenting?

Or did she not learn anything?

I seriously cannot tell from a line like that.

".... Well, it's alright.

I was just shocked at first because it was so sudden, but you did help me, Arcueid.

That's one thing I'm really thankful for."



"Really?

That's an odd thing to thank me for, Shiki.

I haven't done much."

"—It's okay.

I'm thankful, so be thanked.

You don't have to feel bad about it."

".... Yeah.

You're right, I suppose."

Arcueid seems lost in thought for some reason.



"—Okay.
Anyhow, let's get out of here right now.
With all the fuss that's been raised, it's going to get inconvenient if we stay
here any longer."
"All the fuss—?"

—Ah, that's right.
.... None of the people in this hotel are alive anymore.
"....."
I get up.
My stomach doesn't hurt, but—it feels as if my body belongs to someone else—
and my mind swims.



"We'll head to my room for now, but—Shiki?"

—My mind.. sways.
Arcueid is saying something, but I can't hear a thing.
As if I'm falling into an abyss, I lose consciousness, this time for real—

turn to **83**

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Arcueid's room isn't what you would expect for a vampire.
.... Back then, I was only worried about Arcueid so I didn't really notice it, but looking at it now, her room is completely ordinary.
"... She even has a newspaper subscription.
What's that all about?"
I grumble as I put the sleeping Arcueid on her bed.
"Hwaa—ahhhhh."
I take a deep breath as I sit on the floor.
It's almost six o'clock in the morning.
The sky outside the window is brightening but heavily laden with clouds.
"... Right.
I should close the curtains."
I spur my tired body to stand up.
I close the curtains and sit back down again.
Thud.
As I lower myself the strength drains from my knees and I collapse on the floor.
"—Man, it seems like I'm exhausted too."
It's pitiful but I can't even stand.
Come to think of it, I spent all last night talking with Arcueid and I didn't eat for more than a day.
In addition—even though I put my glasses on, I still have a headache.
My brain is ringing with this headache.
"... Arcueid.... I wonder if her wound is alright...."
Her bleeding has stopped, and she is someone who regenerates after being sliced apart.. so maybe I don't have to worry.
"... I wonder why."
Right now I'm so exhausted I could collapse.
Yet I'm more worried about Arcueid than myself—

"Investigators believe the cause of Takada Youichi's motorcycle accident was a malfunction in the brake pedal which occurred while he was descending a steep hill.
Fortunately, no one was killed in the accident."
.... I wake up to a man's generic, uninflected voice.
"Nng—Did I fall asleep?"
When I come to, I find myself lying on the floor under a sheet.
It's about past noon.
Arcueid is no longer on the bed and uninteresting news fills the room from the television.
"... Where did Arcueid go?"
And, I sense someone in the kitchen.
"That idiot, moving around with such a wound."
I get out from under the sheet and stand up.
I have to go to the kitchen and check up on her wound.

"Next on the news.
A massive number of people went missing in the early morning hours at a hotel in southern Minamiyashirogi city."
"____"
I stop dead in my tracks.
My eyes become glued to the newscaster on the television set.
"One hundred and three people staying at the hotel are still unaccounted for. Furthermore, bloodstains can be seen within the hotel and the police are beginning to suspect that they were involved in some kind of a crime."
"What—are you saying?
Bloodstains?
It wasn't—something that small and cute."
The newscaster reads off the script with a disinterested tone.
The screen switches to the scene of the hotel I stayed at earlier and then lists the names of the 103 missing people.
—Of course neither my nor Arcueid's name are on the list.
"Furthermore, a large amount of wild animal hair was found within the hotel. It is presumed that the hair is connected with the suspect in some way. Some of the confirmed hair samples appear to be from a large breed of dog, wolves, and there was also evidence of a bear.
There were numerous different hair samples found on the scene.
Ridiculously, what appeared to be shark bites were also reported from the scene—"
Click.
I switch off the television set.
"____"
A hundred people.
About a hundred people back then.
In just half an hour, they were all brutally killed.
Blood stains—?
Unaccounted for—?
How can you say that when you have that much information.
I understand completely.
Everyone staying in the hotel was killed by those incomprehensible beasts and devoured without a trace.
"Ugh—"
I resist the urge to throw up.
I can't allow myself to vomit when I recall each and every event which occurred last night.
Such a petty sympathy would set me lower than a filthy pig.
For me, the only one who escaped death in that hotel, I won't allow anything else other than hatred for the one behind it all.
A hundred people.
A hundred people.. killed without even leaving their bodies behind, only blood.
The face of the man in the black coat surfaces in my memory.
I don't know who he is.

But it is no mistake to think he's behind everything that happened.
—Is my heart still numb?
Right now, hatred wins out over fear and disgust.
Or maybe—even the feelings whirling inside my chest are just another kind of fear.
"That's just—ridiculous."
I grit my teeth.
I don't know if it is regret or fear, or maybe an unpleasant revulsion.
But just recalling the face of the man in the black coat makes me want to break something, and irritates me—



"You're awake Shiki?"
Arcueid pokes her head out of the kitchen.
"—Oh."
"What is it?
Making such a scary face, did something happen?"
Arcueid speaks lightly as if nothing happened at all.
"....."
The feelings which were welling forth inside me until just now disappear.
"Arcueid—is.. your wound okay?"
"Yes, for now."
She laughs confidently.
She seems exactly like before, probably better than I am.
".... Oh.
Then.. that's good—"
At least.
At least the person near me is safe.
".... Hm?"
Hey, wait a minute.
Arcueid isn't human.
Forgetting such an important thing.. I'm really spaced out.
".... Anyway, I'm happy your wound wasn't serious."
"Oh?
What's wrong, Shiki?
And just a little earlier you were calling me a monster."

"Idiot, I still think you are.
But, that's something else.
I just wanted to thank you for helping me."



"Eh?
I helped you, Shiki?"
Arcueid's eyes widen in surprise.
It seems she wasn't even aware of it.
"Yeah, you helped me.
So it's a little late, but thanks for protecting me.
If you hadn't pulled me out of the way, I would've joined that list of 103 names."



"Thanks—It wasn't really anything.
I'm the reason you met Nrvnqsr, so you don't have to feel like you owe me."
"Maybe, but the truth is that you saved me.
Since you did, I want to thank you."
"—But if I didn't make you watch over me, you never would have been involved
in all that.
I'm the one messing up your everyday life.
So wouldn't it be more appropriate for you to hate me rather than be indebted
to me?"
"... Well, certainly I do think you're a big bother.
But you know, in the end I think I have to take responsibility for my actions.
... A long, long time ago someone taught me this.
She said whatever happens around me, I have to stick with things I started to

the very end.

While it seems quite natural, I am a supporter of that idea."

Which is why I don't hate Arcueid.

I just feel like I'm involved in something pretty bothersome.



"—Oh.

Now that you mention it, I did say I needed a shield because you killed me.

So I guess I don't have to apologize for involving you in such things."

"Right.

The situation I'm in is my own fault."



"Your fault, huh.

Hm, I think you have bad luck, Shiki.

If only you killed some other girl than me, things never would have ended up like this."

".... Hey."

In the first place, you can't just assume I would kill someone other than you, Arcueid.

I've only felt like that, stalked and killed only once, only Arcueid.

.... Or I want to think she would be the only one.

"—Ah."



"Hm?

Did you remember something you forgot?"

"No, that's not it.

... I never really thought about it before, but I just wondered why I wanted to kill you."



Arcueid frowns as she looks at me.

... Well, it's a natural reaction.

I, the one who killed Arcueid, is saying that he doesn't know why he killed her.



"There's no reason at all, right?

Because you're just a born killer Shiki."

"—Eh?"

Hold on.

What, did, this, woman, just say about me—? "

"You seemed really used to it when you attacked me.
You rang the doorbell, put your hand through the door as it opened, and entered.



"While I was still off guard with surprise, you killed me with your first strike, and just finished off by slicing me into pieces—Yeah, your surprise attack was perfect.

How perfect was it?

A painting of you from that time would have been an unparalleled masterpiece, that's how perfect it was."

"Th—"



"But no matter how superb a killer, no matter how excellent your technique, the victim this time was a poor choice.

I don't know how many people you killed until now, but I think it was time for you to be caught when you chose me as your prey."

"Th, th—"



"Th-th-th'?"

What's with that scary face all of a sudden.

If you want to say something it's better just to say it.

We've never held anything back between us, right?"

—That may be true.

I nod and motion her to come near me with my hand.



"Hm?"

A secret?"

Arcueid approaches excitedly.

I bring my mouth close to her ear and clearly state what I want to say.

"... You know, Arcueid.."

"Yeah, what?"

Okay, ready.

"THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL, YOU IDIOT—!!!"

Idiot, diot, iot, ot.....

My shout echoes through the room.

I strike her eardrums with full power, not holding back one bit.

"Ow.... owie....."

Arcueid exaggeratingly covers her ears.



"I'm ticked off now!

What are you doing all of a sudden Shiki!?"

"I'm the one who should be angry!

I was wondering why you were asking me all those impossible things, but now I understand!"



"Eh—?"

Understand what....?"

"About you asking me to be a shield against a monster and watching over you because you think I'm some crazed killer!

.... Geez, you're unbelievably mistaken.

You thought so highly of me because of that.

Look, I'll tell you right now.

I'm not a killer or a homicidal maniac.

You—you were the first person I killed."



Arcueid's mouth hangs open.
 Damn it, she really does seem totally surprised.
 "—No way.
 It was your first time yet you were that skilled....!?"
 ".... Yeah.
 Certainly I do have the strange eyes but I still lived an honest life.
 I never even thought once of using these "lines" to kill people."
 "But—then why did you kill me?
 You never even saw me before."
 "I don't know why either.
 I just became so fixated when I saw you on the street—when I came to, I had
 already, sliced you into pieces—"

In this room.
 Without reason, without purpose.
 "—I see."
 Yeah, I see.
 I don't have any right to be angry at Arcueid.
 Even if she's alive right now and isn't human.
 The truth is, I killed her with my own hands.



"Why are you all quiet again?
 What do you mean Shiki?"
 "..... I, I'm sorry.... I have to.. apologize...."
 Why—did I conveniently forget such an important thing?

"—Sorry.
I'm sorry, Arcueid.
I, Tohno Shiki killed you.
More than anything else.. I should have apologized for that from the very
beginning—"
.... There really is something wrong with me.
It's only natural she mistook me for a killer.
Because, I don't even understand that impulse myself.
So, maybe..
Tohno Shiki
might be a real killer——.
"—The reality is, I killed you.
So—I have to accept my sin and punishment.
A killer like me, can't mix in with the rest of society."
—Not realizing such an important thing until now is just too cowardly.
No matter what Arcueid is—I am someone who kills for no reason.



"—I see.
Then you really don't understand why yourself, Shiki."
.... I nod silently.
"Then you didn't feel any enjoyment either?"
.... Yes, certainly there are those killers for whom killing is like breathing, but
you are really normal Shiki."
".... That's right.
At least I try to be."
"No, you are incredibly normal.
Then I was the only one you wanted to kill?"
".... Yeah.
Other than you, I never felt like that before."



"I see, then there's no problem.
You're not a killer, Shiki."
She says this lightly, almost dismissingly.
"I don't think you have to receive any punishment.
By chance, I was the one you wanted to kill and worse, you were equipped with
this unparalleled killing technique.
But luckily I am a vampire so no one died, right?
So you don't need to be troubled so much.
I don't think you have to worry about those morals of human society."
"... I know.
But still, I killed someone.
A dangerous person like me can't be allowed loose."



"That doesn't matter.
Right now, the only ones who can condemn you are me, the victim, and you,
yourself."
"—That may be so, but it doesn't change the fact I killed you."
Right.
Even if there is no punishment, the sin will never disappear.



"Of course.
Even now I still resent it, so it would be troubling if you just forgot.
But you know, Shiki.
If you feel that way and will always regret it, then I don't think there will be a problem."
—But, that's just sugar-coating it.



"Shiki.
There really are people who will not sell their souls to the devil even if they hated the world.
Like.. someone so honest they could apologize to a vampire.



So I think it's alright.
No matter what people say and no matter how much you say you're not—you can still stay in the world you want to live in."

"Wha—"

.... I'm speechless.

How can you—how can you smile and say that to the person who killed you?

"Ar.... cueid—"



"Come on, we have a much more troublesome problem to worry about.

Now that you are up Shiki, I want to talk about now on—"

As she speaks, Arcueid collapses on the floor.

"Arcueid—!?"

I rush over to her.

Sweat glistens on her forehead and she is breathing painfully.

".... Aw man, it seems I still can't do much."

I look down.

Her white top is soaked red near her stomach.

"You, that wound—"

"Ah, this?"

The effects of your attack are still lingering and I can't even heal my wounds.

I closed off the wound at least but it seems it didn't work too well."

Her tone is very cheerful.

But I notice it has a hint of pain.

"Close off the wound?"

With what, Arcueid....!?"

"Ummmm, that."

Arcueid points to something on the floor.

It's brown.

At first glance, it looks like a doughnut or a baumkuchen, but it just turns out to be a roll of packing tape.

"—Y, you idiot!"

Who the hell uses packing tape to close off a wound....!"

".... Hey, you shouldn't call people idiots all the time.

I really might start thinking I am one after a while."

"Shut up and let me see your wound..!"

I reach out for her cloth.

But she runs away by rolling across the floor.

"Don't be ridiculous, what're you going to do if it opens up again!?"

"It's fine, just leave it alone.

You should stop acting stupid too.

Trying to rip off a girl's clothes like this, you're worse than Nrvnqsr."

"—Look.

I don't see you as a human, so guy or girl it doesn't matter.

Calm down okay?

If you die from an injury you got protecting me, I'll be feeling guilty about it forever....!"

Arcueid looks at me in displeasure, and this time, rolls towards me.



"....."

Arcueid closes her mouth tightly.

.... It seems she's a bit sulky, but I guess it's okay to look at the wound.



I lift up her shirt and expose her stomach.

Packing tape is wrapped all around her.

It really is badly done and taking a good look, I can see blood seeping through.

"__"

I'm disgusted.

More than that, I'm pissed off.

I lower her shirt back and pick Arcueid up.

"Hey—what are you doing, Shiki!?"

"I'm putting you to bed.

I'd take you to the hospital but it's not like I can do that."

As carefully as possible, I place her on the bed.

"Look.

Until I come back, don't move around.

If you walk around like before, I'll just forget all about you, so be prepared for the consequences."

I look around the room.

As I thought, there's nothing like a first aid kit around at all.

"Arcueid, you said you were rich."



"Eh-?"

Y, yeah.. Money's not a concern for me, but what about it?"

"Hand it over.

I'm going to buy some things I'll need to treat you.

.... I don't know if it will work on you, but I have to treat you the same way I would treat an injured person."

"Fine, but it might be useless."

"—Even if it's useless I'll do it.

I can't leave it alone like that."

".... I see.

My body is made the same way as yours, so it might have some meaning."

"Hurry up and give me the money.

Just be quiet and stay there.

Oh, but don't sleep.

You can lie around, but stay up."



"Wha.... Shiki, that's a really absurd order."
 "It's absurd but do it.
 I've heard your bodily functions weaken when you sleep.
 I think if you sleep with open wounds, your immune system will get weak and
 your wound will get even worse.
 Sleeping will only help your tiredness, not heal your wound.
 So for now, at least don't sleep until I get back."



"—Really?
 Okay, I'll do that Shiki."
 Arcueid smiles happily.
 As expected, Arcueid's thought process is completely a mystery.
 "... Um, why are you smiling?"
 "Because you're reliable, Shiki."
 "___"
 I say nothing and hold out my hand.
 Arcueid pulls her wallet out of her skirt and hands it to me.
 "—I'll be right back."
 I turn away from Arcueid and head out of the room.

As I go outside I notice something in the kitchen.
 "—Food."
 On the table is something less than a meal and more like food.. something less
 like food and more like ingredients, you might say it's something "which appears
 edible".

.... I guess this is why she was in the kitchen.
"..... Idiot."
Arcueid said she doesn't eat regular food.
So I don't even have to think who this food was for.
"Damn it—what's with her?"
I'm getting very irritated.
I'm getting so irritated, so I decide to hurry up and get something to treat her as fast as possible.

Although I say first-aid, the only things which come to mind are things like restraining bandages or painkillers.
But it's still better than nothing.
Even if it's a small thing, if it's something, then it's not zero.
Believing that, I buy whatever I can think of.

"Hey, that tickles."
"....."
I ignore Arcueid's voice and fasten the gauze as carefully as I can.
The wound on her stomach wasn't really large.
Arcueid said herself most of it is healed on the outside.
But there are still four golf ball-sized black holes from the fangs of the crocodile.
It might actually be bad for a wound this big, but considering the possible infection, I apply some disinfectant.
I put gauze over the wound after that and carefully wrap it around in bandages.
"Ahahaha, quit it.
You're too good."
Arcueid is laughing cheerfully.
"....."
I ignore her and pin off her bandages.
In order to stop the blood flow, I press a little to tighten the bandages around the wound.
"—Ow.
Sheesh, I'm taking points off for that one Shiki."
"....."
Whew.
For now, I've done all I can.
"—Well then.
I at least made it look good, but how is it?
Can you move alright Arcueid?"



"Yeah, it doesn't seem like it will get in the way.
My insides are still pretty messed up, so I can't move fully anyway."
"I see.
Well, the rest is up to you.
My specialty is slicing apart, not healing."
I step away from Arcueid and sit against the wall.
"You can sleep now.
Sleep will bring your strength back and you'll heal soon right?
I'll keep watch so just relax and sleep."
"No, sleeping won't really help me regain my strength.
You said yourself sleeping only gets rid of tiredness.
For me, regaining strength is only a matter of time.
By tomorrow I'm sure I will be able to move normally."
"—Just go to sleep already.
You look like you're having trouble even talking."
"Yes, but since you're up Shiki, it seems like a waste if I sleep now."

Arcueid sits up in bed and talks cheerfully.
"—Geez."
Oh well.
There are some things I want to ask as well, so I guess it's alright to keep Arcueid company.
"Arcueid.
Can I ask about the hotel from yesterday?"



".... That's right.

I guess that's going to be our topic, considering us."

"Yeah.

I just have one question.

The guy last night—the one you called Nrvnqsr.. just what the hell is he?

I'm being serious here, so please don't say something like he's a magician who can make crocodiles appear from his body."



"I won't say that.

I think you know this already but he is also a vampire.

We call him Nrvnqsr and he is quite an exception.

.... To tell the truth, he isn't someone you could talk to so casually like this."

"....."

So he was a vampire after all.

But, for some reason—like Arcueid sitting in front of me, he doesn't match my image of a vampire either.

"So, this Nrvnqsr.. what kind of guy is he?

You seem to know him or something."



"Of course not.

I don't have any vampire acquaintances.

Knowing them means I'm going to kill them the next instant.

This is the first time I ever met a vampire without killing it."

"But you guys were talking about a lot of things."

"It would be hasty to call him an acquaintance because of that. Nrvnqsr is a famous vampire so no introductions were necessary when we met, that's all. Isn't it natural to know the name of vampires with unusual power and a long history? Among those, Nrvnqsr stands out even more. Despite being one of the oldest vampires, he has neither a castle nor territory and is an eccentric wanderer. The Church has given him a second name, Chaos."
"... Chaos?"
"What's that?"
"Literally squirming, squelching chaos. Like various things mixed together in a primordial earth with no one knowing what will fly out.... a meaning I'm guessing from last night."
"Not knowing what will fly out....?"



"Geez. You saw his body too, Shiki. We spoke of it earlier but aged vampires cannot easily regenerate damage to their bodies. To restore the body after centuries of existence, the weak life of a human isn't enough. So using the simply more superior life forms, wild animals and magic beasts, as raw material, they compose their body. As one of the oldest vampires, Nrvnqsr probably is in a league of his own regarding the sheer amount of beasts he has caught and used for his body."
"A league of his own—Things like those black dogs are a part of his body then?"



"Exactly.

But there is a limit to a human's capacity.

Probably only about thirty beasts can be controlled at once.

Having more than one illusionary beast such as a magical or phantom beast would overload one's capacity.

Putting that into consideration, all of Nrvnqsr's familiars are probably real animals.

.... Yeah, that may be fortunate."

.... I don't quite get the last part but that means there's thirty of those black dogs.

".... No, that can't be right.

Black dogs weren't the only things rampaging in the hotel.

I think there were things like lions and leopards too."



"Right.

.... To be able to bring together thirty animals of the same type is one thing, but for Nrvnqsr to have different beasts in his body truly places the strength of his willpower apart from others.



.... Well, it does seem odd that if he has that sort of power he would only use wild animals.

I would have thought he would employ more magical beasts with his sort of willpower—"

Hmmm.

Arcueid descends deep into thought.



"Whatever.

Anyway, we at least know his weapons are twenty or thirty familiars.

.... So now we can understand why he's called Chaos."

"Eh....?"

His name really isn't Chaos?"

"Yeah, most long-lived Dead Apostles don't use their names from their human lives.

But they don't make up a new name themselves, the Church assigns them one. They add on names as they find new, special characteristics of the vampire so some of them have names as long as spells."

".... And, I guess the Church must really have hated him to name him Chaos.

It would have been enough for one lion to hunt the entire hotel, right?

But he let loose all of his beasts to feed, meaning he seems to enjoy such excesses."

"....."

.... Thirty beasts inside the vampire Nrvnqsr.

Just with that, he killed and ate without trace a hundred people at the hotel in

thirty minutes.
 "—I can't believe it.
 He's a complete monster."



"Yes.
 He really is the worst opponent I could have at the moment.
 He's one of those you never want to meet.
 But what's worse is that such a guy knows where we are.
 Even now I'm sure his familiars are watching us."
 "Wha—"
 "Isn't it obvious?
 We were saved earlier because the sun rose, but we can't count on that tonight.
 He knows of this place so he will certainly come to kill us at the height of his
 power at midnight."
 "Come to kill us, tonight....?"



"Yes, he said so himself."

—What is this?
 He—that man in the black coat is coming tonight?
 "——"
 I.. don't know what I should say.
 I should escape.
 I know that's the wisest decision.
 But Arcueid is in this condition.

Even if she ran away, I don't think she can get away from that monster.
No, less about her and more about me.
If I stay here—if I stay involved with Arcueid, there's no mistaking the fact I'll face him.
He is.. dangerous.
Clearly put, he isn't sane.
More than his body which houses those animals, his eyes are like a machine's.
Devoid of even a single emotion.
The true eyes of a killer which does whatever it is assigned to do.
As one who has experienced his attack, I am sure that without a doubt, he is to be avoided.
"_____"

But, does that mean I should just leave Arcueid here and run away?
No matter who she is, she can't move because she protected me.
And I can tell her good luck and go home——?
"Arcueid, I—"



"But it's alright.
Even Nrvnqsr isn't a problem for you.
No matter who it is, you can kill anyone with a single blow."
"——Huh?"
Arcueid says.. something outrageous,
as if it was completely ordinary.
"Hey—what in the world are you saying?"



"What am I saying?
You're going to fight with me, right?"
Arcueid looks directly at me.
Her eyes place all trust in me.
But this isn't a joke.
I——

I'd like to refuse, but—

turn to **80**

No, there's no way I could take on a monster like that.

turn to **81**

80

—I refuse.
I know I have to refuse.
No matter how much I think about it, I can't do anything.
"—Arcueid.
Sorry, but I—"
Am I going to abandon her?
It's my fault.
Because of Tohno Shiki, she can't move as she needs to.
"—I—"
Am I running away?
From that—monster who mercilessly, cruelly, one-sidedly slaughtered all those people?
Run away and pretend like I never saw it?
After being the only one to survive, I'm just going to run away without any pangs of guilt?
"——"
The lines of death only I can see.
Didn't that important person once tell me that I have this power because there would be a time when I would need it—?



"—Shiki?"
"... Yeah, I know.
I can't run away by myself."

I look up at the ceiling and take a deep breath.
Fortunately, that prepares me just a bit for what is to come.
"Alright—I'll help you, Arcueid.
I think it's my duty to do so as the only one who survived in that hotel."

setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **82**

81

—I refuse.

I can't stand up to that monster.

She told me to be her shield and watch over her while she sleeps, but I couldn't even do that well.

Even if I were to fight with her, I would probably just get in the way.

"Arcueid.

Sorry, but I can't.

He's too different.

Even if I fought him, I wouldn't even be able to scratch him."



"What?

Really..?"

.... I'm not sure where she gets that from, but she tilts her head as if doubting me.

".... I'm glad you think so highly of me, but I can't do it.

Our promise was just for me to watch over you for one night.

I don't want to have anything more to do with that monster."



"Hmm, it may be too late.

Nrvnqsr met you.

Even if you were no longer with me, I don't think he would leave you alone."

She speaks lightly as if discussing some third party.

"Wha——"

I blurt out, and then I understand.
That vampire Nrvnqsr is the one killing people in this town.
There's no reason for him to leave me alone once I saw his face.



"But I am faster than Nrvnqsr.
He cannot move during the day, and you're right in front of me, so it's over-
whelmingly in my favor."
".... What do you mean?"



"Oh, nothing.
I was just thinking if you are going to run away, I would just kill you here."
Arcueid smiles as she jokes around, but she also seems serious.
"U....., gh."
Her smile doesn't fade.
.... She really seems intent on coercing me.

"..... You devil."
.... I'm trapped.
If I'm going to be attacked either way, then there's no other choice but to help
Arcueid.
I look up at the ceiling and take a deep breath.
Fortunately, that prepares me just a bit for what is to come.
"Okay, I'm ready."
.... Come to think of it, there was no running away from the time I met you.
Coming this far, I guess I have no choice but go all the way."

turn to **82**

82



"Then, it's decided.

It's alright, Shiki.

With your skills, you'll have no problem killing him."

Arcueid states this outrageous thing with a straight face.

.... Well, I'm not as optimistic as she is, but I've got no choice.

"The question is how I'll act to do that.

I froze as soon as I looked into his eyes at the hotel, so I think all I can do is to approach him from behind so he won't notice me and then get him somehow."

"Oh, that.

That was just because your will is weak, Shiki.

Nrvnqsr's Mystic Eyes are nothing special, so if you just discard your doubts, you should be able to deflect his gaze even if you look right into his eyes."

"....."

Arcueid casually mentions it, but I'm still nervous.

".... No, I'd better not plan on doing something I've never done.

I'm going to approach him from behind and cut the 'lines' on his limbs.

That ought to take away his freedom of movement, and—"

"—If you do that, Shiki, you will die."



"Eh-?"

"You say the question is how you'll act.

That's not right.

The real question is how you'll kill."
"—That's true, but.."
"Shiki, you are about to fight a monster called a vampire, so throw away your human morality, even if it's just for tonight.
They'll only weigh you down in the crucial moments."
"—I understand that much.
He's a monster, so that's why I wanted to help you stop him."
"No, you don't understand.
Cut off his limbs?
Don't do something so suicidal.
If you've got the time to cut off his limbs, first cut off his life.
Nobody else can but you.
Listen to me and don't give Nrvnqsr the chance to retaliate.
The difference in your offensive abilities is just too great; if you miss your first strike, you've got no chance of winning whatsoever."
Arcueid's eyes are unforgiving of any denial.
—It's true.
It's exactly as she says.
If I take my time cutting his limbs off first, I might find my head being eaten by the mouth of an crocodile as I do so—
"Shiki.
Nrvnqsr will come at midnight tonight.
That's when we'll—no, when you and I will kill him until he can be killed no further.
Not how to act.
But how to kill, think only about that."
Arcueid's savage eyes are staring straight at me.
She is—really angry.
Angry that I still hold such naive notions.
"—I understand.
I won't hesitate.
I'll take out his 'point of death' in a single strike.
That's what I should do, right, Arcueid?"



"....."

Arcueid doesn't answer.
I suppose her silence indicates agreement.
"—But where should we wait?
Bystanders are going to get killed like back at the hotel if we wait here in these apartments.
Shouldn't we change our location?"
"—Yes.
I think the park will be suitable.
No one's there late at night—and if anyone happens to pass by, it's their own bad luck."



Saying that, Arcueid turns her back to me.
"What's wrong?
If you've got something to say, then say it.
I've decided to help you, so I'm willing to take risks."
"... It's useless.
You haven't used the word 'kill' even once.
At this rate, you'll just hesitate at the last moment and be killed."
"—That's not true.
He's a monster who's eaten over a hundred people.
There's no way I'd hesitate to kill him."
"_____"
Arcueid gives a small sigh.
"—If I controlled you, I could make sure you killed Nrvnqsr.
I've felt that I wanted to do so for the first time, but I also felt that I didn't want to for the first time.
It's kind of like a big contradiction."
.... Arcueid turns to face me, mumbling something I didn't really understand.



"I trust you, Shiki.
 Let's get Nrvnqsr together."
 A smile comes over Arcueid's face.
 But her smile looks really uneasy.

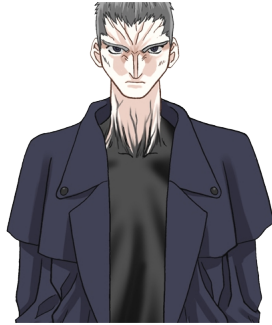
The plan itself is unbelievably simple.
 Just a little before midnight, Arcueid leaves the room and heads towards the park first.
 Nrvnqsr's familiar—that blue crow, according to Arcueid—should follow her, so I leave the room and go to the park just a bit after she does.
 Then, I'll hide in a bush where I can see Arcueid, and wait for Nrvnqsr to arrive.
 While Arcueid keeps his attention, I approach him from behind and cut his 'line of death'—

—Arcueid stands absent-mindedly in the middle of the park.
 I hide in a bush about twenty meters away.
 "....."
 The park is empty.
 It's ten minutes before midnight.
 Arcueid has her head tilted up, watching the blue moon above her.
 "....."
 I grip the knife tightly.
 Arcueid said that Nrvnqsr will definitely come.
 So all I have to do is get behind him, approach him without making too much noise, and then cut his 'line' in one breath.
 "Haa—ahh."
 I try taking a deep breath.
 My body is moving just fine.
 Except my fingers gripping the knife.
 They are tight and immobile, as if not part of my body.
 "____"
 Maybe I'm nervous.
 That the vampire called Nrvnqsr will come again.
 That I'll have to confront that monster again.
 "____"

Or,
that I have to kill him soon.
pant
My breathing speeds up.
My heart pounds, as if it's not a part of my body.
"Calm down—he isn't even here yet."
That's right.
The target has yet to arrive.
I'm beginning to worry I won't even be able to move my feet by the time Nrvn-
qsr arrives at this rate.
"Arcueid.. aren't you scared?"
I stare at the white girl vacantly looking up at the moon.
She doesn't look uneasy at all.
Her face looking up at the moon comes down.
At the same time—
"—It seems I have kept you waiting, Princess of the True Ancestors."
A heavy voice, like rusted iron.
"——!"
That's why Arcueid looked down.
More than five meters away from her, and more than ten meters away from me,
a man in a black coat appears like a ghost—



"Yes.
I've been waiting for quite some time, Nrvnqsr Chaos.
Or would you prefer I call you Fabro Rowan?
Sounds classier."
Arcueid's voice reaches me through the wind.



13 0

"—Impressive.

I would never have dreamed anyone would call me by the name I went by while I was still a human.

Just what one would expect of our Executioner.

I suppose you have long found out all there is to know about the current Twenty-Seven Ancestors of the Dead Apostles."

I can hear Nrvnqsr's reply clearly as well.

"—Hahh."

My breathing grows louder.

Arcueid is drawing Nrvnqsr's attention.

This is my only chance.

I take my glasses off through sheer willpower.

"——!"

I hold the knife in my right hand, pressing it against my chest.

.... A white weapon.

Now, with this,

I'm going to "dismantle" that man-eating monster—

Dash towards Nrvnqsr.

turn to **86**

No, it's still too early.

turn to **84**

83

—Thump.

Right next to me, I feel someone's heartbeat.

My eyes and ears don't seem to be working, but I know quickly that it is Arcueid.

..... Thump.

My own heartbeat.

Maybe it's because of the terror I've never felt before combined with being on the verge of death.

Black.

I feel like this thick blood which was hiding somewhere is now surging through my body.

—Thump.

Even though Arcueid's body is cool to the touch, she has the definite warmth of a living being.

Just being held like this calms my once raging heart.

..... Thump.

My heart beats stronger.

Blood containing a strong will that seems to not be mine circulates through my body.

But that's odd.

How can blood that's not mine stay hidden within me for so long—?

"Investigators believe the cause of Takada Youichi's motorcycle accident was a malfunction in the brake pedal which occurred while he was descending a steep hill.

Fortunately, no one was killed in the accident."

—A news caster's voice flows from the speaker.

.... That voice wakes me from my slumber.

"Where—am I?"

A large room I don't recognize.

".... Huh, this is—"

I take that back.

I do recognize this place.

I've been in this room once before.

"It's Arcueid's room."

I am lying in bed covered by sheets.

It's about past noon.

Arcueid doesn't seem to be anywhere in the room and uninteresting news fills the air.

".... Where did Arcueid go?"

And, I sense someone's presence in the kitchen.

"In the kitchen?"

I get out of bed

Curious, I check my stomach for wounds but it's perfectly healed.

"....."

I touch it timidly.

If I itch it, I feel the scratch.

If I pinch it, it hurts.

It looks like that black blubbery thing has really become part of my body.

".... Well."

For now, I can't comment much on it.

More importantly, I have to ask Arcueid about what happened in the hotel.

"Hey, Arcu.."

"Next on the news.

A massive number of people went missing in the early morning hours at a hotel in southern Minamiyashirogi city."

"——"

I stop dead in my tracks.

My eyes become glued to the newscaster on the television set.

"One hundred and three people staying at the hotel are still unaccounted for.

Furthermore, bloodstains can be seen within the hotel and the police are beginning to suspect that they were involved in some kind of a crime."

"What—are you saying?

Bloodstains?

It wasn't—something that small and cute."

The newscaster reads off the script with a disinterested tone.

The screen switches to the scene of the hotel I stayed at earlier and then a listing of the names of the 103 missing people.

—Of course neither my nor Arcueid's name are on the list.

"Furthermore, a large amount of wild animal hair was found within the hotel.

It is presumed that the hair is connected with the suspect in some way.

Some of the confirmed hair samples appear to be from a large breed of dog, wolves, and there was also evidence of a bear.

There were numerous different hair samples found on the scene.

Ridiculously, what appeared to be shark bites were also reported from the scene——"

Click.

I switch off the television set.

"——"

A hundred people.

About a hundred people back then.

In just half an hour, they were all brutally killed.

Blood stains——?

Unaccounted for——?

How can you say that when you have that much information.

I understand completely.

Everyone staying in the hotel was killed by those incomprehensible beasts and devoured without a trace.

"Ugh——"

I resist the urge to throw up.

I can't allow myself to vomit when I recall each and every event which occurred last night.
Such a petty sympathy would set me lower than a filthy pig.
For me, the only one who escaped death in that hotel, I won't allow anything else other than hatred for the one behind it all.
A hundred people.
A hundred people.. killed without even leaving their bodies behind, only blood.
The face of the man in the black coat surfaces in my memory.
I don't know who he is.
But it is no mistake to think he's behind everything that happened.
—Is my heart still numb?
Right now, hatred wins out over fear and disgust.
Or maybe—even the feelings whirling inside my chest are just another kind of fear.
"That's just—ridiculous."
I grit my teeth.
I don't know if it is regret or fear, or maybe an unpleasant revulsion.
But just recalling the face of the man in the black coat makes me want to break something, and irritates me—



"You're awake Shiki?"
Arcueid pokes her head out of the kitchen.
"—Oh."
"What is it?
Making such a scary face, did something happen?"
Arcueid speaks lightly as if nothing happened at all.
"....."
The feelings which were welling forth inside me until just now disappear.
"Arcueid, you—shouldn't you be asleep right now?
It's the middle of the day."



"That's true, but there's no way I could sleep while your condition wasn't stable.

.... And I was thinking I slept yesterday so it's your turn today."

"A—yeah.

Thanks."

For some reason, I feel embarrassed and look away.

.... Even though she's not human, she is really attractive.

"A-Anyway, Arcueid.

Why did I sleep in your room?

That man in the black coat you called Nrvnqsr.. What exactly is he?"



"You're here because I brought you here.

Shiki, you lost consciousness in that hotel hallway."

"—I remember that vaguely.

But, why did that Nrvnqsr guy leave?

He seemed to be saying something terrible."

"That's because the sun was rising.

By the time you and I had left the hotel, it was above the horizon.

You remember that vampires lose their power in sunlight, right?"

She speaks like she's talking about a third party, but she's a vampire herself.

"Arcueid, you say that.. but doesn't that go for you too?

That is—you said after I killed you, you became weak right?

Did your body recover a little?"



"Yes, thanks to you.
I'm feeling better than I was yesterday.
I'm finally able to move my arms and legs around too."
—?
Finally able to move her arms and legs around.. Don't tell me—
"Wait a second, Arcueid.
You mean, you weren't able to move around fully before....!?"



"Huh, I didn't mention it?
Most of my nerves weren't connected yet, so I was moving them using my
willpower rather than physically."

"....."

She didn't say.
I—I never thought about or even noticed her precarious state.
.... I remember how Arcueid bit her lip regretfully when that blue crow arrived.
I think at that time she—really must have been frustrated she couldn't move
no matter how much she wanted.
That's why she just stood there, even though she wanted to.
".... I.. see.
So how much have you recovered now?"



"Lets see.. I can at least move my body.
My body will be fine by tonight.
But I'm not able to gain back the power I used when I regenerated myself so it
doesn't change my weakened state."
Her face is expressionless as she speaks these words.
".... I see.
Even if it's only little by little, I'm glad you're getting better."
I sigh from heart-felt relief.



"Oh?
What's wrong, Shiki?
And just a little earlier you were calling me a monster."
"Idiot, I still think you are.
But, that's something else.
I just wanted to thank you for helping me."



"Eh?

I saved you, Shiki?"

Arcueid's eyes widen in surprise.

It seems she wasn't even aware of it.

".... Yeah.

I have a few problems with your method, but you did save me.

So it's a little late but thanks.

If you weren't there, I would've joined that list of 103 names."



"Thanks—It wasn't really anything.

I'm the reason you met Nrvnqsr, so you don't have to feel like you owe me."

"Maybe, but the truth is that you saved me.

Since you did, I want to thank you."



"—But if I didn't make you watch over me, you never would have been involved

in all that.
I'm the one messing up your everyday life.
So wouldn't it be more appropriate for you to hate me rather than be indebted to me?"
"... Well, certainly I do think you're a big bother.
But you know, in the end I think I have to take responsibility for my actions.
... A long, long time ago someone taught me this.
She said whatever happens around me, I have to stick with things I started to the very end.
While it seems quite natural, I am a supporter of that idea."
Which is why I don't hate Arcueid.
I just feel like I'm involved in something pretty bothersome.



"—Oh.
Now that you mention it, I did say I needed a shield because you killed me.
So I guess I don't have to apologize for involving you in such things."
"Right.
The situation I'm in is my own fault."



"Your fault, huh.
Hm, I think you have bad luck, Shiki.
If only you killed some other girl than me, things never would have ended up like this."
"... Hey."
In the first place, you can't just assume I would kill someone other than you,

Arcueid.

I've only felt like that, stalked and killed only once, only Arcueid.

.... Or I want to think she would be the only one.

"—Ah."

"Hm?"

Did you remember something you forgot?"

"No, that's not it.

.... I never really thought about it before, but I just wondered why I wanted to kill you."



Arcueid frowns as she looks at me.

.... Well, it's a natural reaction.

I, the one who killed Arcueid, is saying that he doesn't know why he killed her.



"There's no reason at all, right?"

Because you're just a born killer Shiki."

"—Eh?"

Hold on.

What, did, this, woman, just say about me—?"

"You seemed really used to it when you attacked me.

You rang the doorbell, put your hand through the door as it opened, and entered.



"While I was still off guard with surprise, you killed me with your first strike, and just finished off by slicing me into pieces—Yeah, your surprise attack was perfect.

How perfect was it?

A painting of you from that time would have been an unparalleled masterpiece, that's how perfect it was."

"Th—"

"But no matter how superb a killer, no matter how excellent your technique, the victim this time was a poor choice.

I don't know how many people you killed until now, but I think it was time for you to be caught when you chose me as your prey."

"Th, th-"



"Th-th-th'?"

What's with that scary face all of a sudden?

If you want to say something it's better just to say it.

We've never held anything back between us, right?"

—That may be true.

I nod and motion her to come near me with my hand.



"Hm?

A secret?"

Arcueid approaches excitedly.

I bring my mouth close to her ear and clearly state what I want to say.

"... You know, Arcueid.."

"Yeah, what?"

Okay, ready..

"THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL, YOU IDIOT—!!"

Idiot, diot, iot, ot.....

My shout echoes through the room.

I strike her eardrums with full power, not holding back one bit.

"Ow.... owie....."

Arcueid exaggeratingly covers her ears.



"I'm ticked off now!

What are you doing all of a sudden Shiki!?"

"I'm the one who should be angry!

I was wondering why you were asking me all those impossible things, but now I understand!"



"Eh—?"

Understand what....?"

"About you asking me to be a shield against a monster and watching over you because you think I'm some crazed killer!

.... Geez, you're unbelievably mistaken.

You thought so highly of me because of that.

Look, I'll tell you right now.

I'm not a killer or a homicidal maniac.

You—you were the first person I killed."

Arcueid's mouth hangs open.

.... Damn it, she really does seem totally surprised.



"—No way.

It was your first time yet you were that skilled....!?"

".... Yeah.

Certainly I do have the strange eyes but I still lived an honest life.

I never even thought once of using these "lines" to kill people."



"But—then why did you kill me?
You never even saw me before."
"I don't know why either.
I just became so fixated when I saw you on the street—when I came to, I had
already, sliced you into pieces—"

In this room.
Without reason, without purpose.
"—I see."
.... Yeah, I see.
I don't have any right to be angry at Arcueid.
Even if she's alive right now and isn't human.
The truth is, I killed her with my own hands.



"Why are you all quiet again?
What do you mean Shiki?"
"..... I, I'm sorry.... I have to.. apologize...."

Why—did I conveniently forget such an important thing?
"—Sorry.
I'm sorry, Arcueid.
I, Tohno Shiki killed you.
More than anything else.. I should have apologized for that from the very
beginning—"
.... There really is something wrong with me.

It's only natural she mistook me for a killer.
Because, I don't even understand that impulse myself.
So, maybe,
Tohno Shiki
might be a real killer——.
"—The reality is I killed you.
So—I have to accept my sin and punishment.
A killer like me, can't mix in with the rest of society."
—Not realizing such an important thing until now is just too cowardly.
No matter what Arcueid is—I am someone who kills for no reason.



"—I see.
Then you really don't understand why yourself, Shiki."
.... I nod silently.
"Then you didn't feel any enjoyment either?
.... Yes, certainly there are those killers for whom killing is like breathing, but
you are really normal Shiki."
".... That's right.
At least I try to be."





"No, you are incredibly normal.
Then I was the only one you wanted to kill?"
"... Yeah.
Other than you, I never felt like that before."



"I see, then there's no problem.
You're not a killer, Shiki."
She says this lightly, almost dismissively.
"I don't think you have to receive any punishment.
By chance, I was the one you wanted to kill and worse, you were equipped with
this unparalleled killing technique.
But luckily I am a vampire so no one died, right?
So you don't need to be troubled so much.
I don't think you have to worry about those morals of human society."
"Right now, the only ones who can condemn you are me, the victim, and you,
yourself."
"—That may be so, but it doesn't change the fact I killed you."
Right.
Even if there is no punishment, the sin will never disappear.



"Of course.
Even now I still resent it, so it would be troubling if you just forgot.
But you know, Shiki.
If you feel that way and will always regret it, then I don't think there will be a problem."
—But, that's just sugar-coating it.



"Shiki.
There really are people who will not sell their souls to the devil even if they hated the world.
Like.. someone so honest they could apologize to a vampire.



So I think it's alright.
No matter what people say and no matter how much you say you're not—you can still stay in the world you want to live in."

"_____"

.... I'm speechless.

How can you—how can you smile and say that to the person who killed you?

"Ar.... cueid—"



"Come on, we have a much more troublesome problem to worry about.

Now that you are up Shiki, I want to continue our conversation from before."

.... That's right.

More important than my own situation, I have to know about Arcueid and—
what happened at that hotel.

".... That's right.

Arcueid.

Can I ask about the hotel from yesterday?"



"Fine, but we don't have to stay standing.

Shiki, if your body isn't quite fully adjusted, maybe you should lie down."

"Idiot.

You're the one who should be lying down.

Isn't daytime hard for you?

Don't worry about me, lie down and we can talk."



"It's okay.. I finally have a chance to talk to you so it would be a waste if it wasn't face-to-face."

.... Arcueid smiles faintly, and looks directly at me.

".... Well, if you say you're fine then I don't care either way."

After briefly looking away, I sit on the bed.

Arcueid imitates me and sits on a sofa.

"Well, I'll ask then.

The guy last night—the one you called Nrvnqsr.. just what the hell is he?

I'm being serious here, so please don't say something like he's a magician who can make crocodiles appear from his body."



"I won't say that.

I think you know this already but he is also a vampire.

We call him Nrvnqsr and he is quite an exception.

.... To tell the truth, he isn't someone you could talk to so casually like this."

"....."

So he was a vampire after all.

But, for some reason—like Arcueid sitting in front of me, he doesn't match my image of a vampire either.

"So, this Nrvnqsr.. what kind of guy is he?

You seem to know him or something."

"Of course not.

I don't have any vampire acquaintances.

Knowing them means I'm going to kill them the next instant.
This is the first time I ever met a vampire without killing it."
"But you guys were talking about a lot of things."
"It would be hasty to call him an acquaintance because of that.
Nrvnqsr is a famous vampire so no introductions were necessary when we met,
that's all.
Isn't it natural to know the name of vampires with unusual power and a long
history?
Among those, Nrvnqsr stands out even more.
Despite being one of the oldest vampires, he has neither a castle nor territory
and is an eccentric wanderer.
The Church has given him a second name, Chaos."
"... Chaos?
What's that?"
"Literally squirming, squelching chaos.
Like various things mixed together in a primordial earth with no one knowing
what will fly out.... a meaning I'm guessing from last night."
"Not knowing what will fly out....?"



"Geez.
You saw his body too, Shiki.
We spoke of it earlier but aged vampires cannot easily regenerate damage to
their bodies.
To restore the body after centuries of existence, the weak life of a human isn't
enough.
So using the simply more superior life forms, wild animals and magic beasts, as
raw material, they compose their body.
.... As one of the oldest vampires, Nrvnqsr probably is in a league of his own
regarding the sheer amount of beasts he has caught and used for his body."
"A league of his own—Things like those black dogs are a part of his body then?"



"Exactly.

But there is a limit to a human's capacity.

Probably only about thirty beasts can be controlled at once.

Having more than one illusionary beast such as a magical or phantom beast would overload one's capacity.

Putting that into consideration, all of Nrvnqsr's familiars are probably real animals.

.... Yeah, that may be fortunate."

.... I don't quite get the last part but that means there's thirty of those black dogs.

".... No, that can't be right.

Black dogs weren't the only things rampaging in the hotel.

I think there were things like lions and leopards too."



"Right.

.... To be able to bring together thirty animals of the same type is one thing, but for Nrvnqsr to have different beasts in his body truly places the strength of his willpower apart from others.



.... Well, it does seem odd that if he has that sort of power he would only use wild animals.

I would have thought he would employ more magical beasts with his sort of willpower—"

Hmmm.

Arcueid descends deep into thought.



"Whatever.

Anyway, we at least know his weapons are twenty or thirty familiars.

.... So now we can understand why he's called Chaos."

"Eh....?"

His name really isn't Chaos?"

"Yeah, most long-lived Dead Apostles don't use their names from their human lives.

But they don't make up a new name themselves, the Church assigns them one. They add on names as they find new, special characteristics of the vampire so some of them have names as long as spells."

".... And, I guess the Church must really have hated him to name him Chaos.

It would have been enough for one lion to hunt the entire hotel, right?

But he let loose all of his beasts to feed, meaning he seems to enjoy such excesses."

"....."

.... Thirty beasts inside the vampire Nrvnqsr.

Just with that, he killed and ate without trace a hundred people at the hotel in

thirty minutes.
 "—I can't believe it.
 He's a complete monster."



"Yes.
 He really is the worst opponent I could have at the moment.
 He's one of those you never want to meet.
 But what's worse is that such a guy knows where we are.
 Even now I'm sure his familiars are watching us."
 "Wha—"
 "Isn't it obvious?
 We were saved earlier because the sun rose, but we can't count on that tonight.
 He knows of this place so he will certainly come to kill us at the height of his
 power at midnight."
 "Come to kill us, tonight....?"



"Yes, he said so himself."

—What is this?
 He—that man in the black coat is coming tonight?
 "—"
 I.. don't know what I should say.
 I should escape.
 I know that's the wisest decision.
 But Arcueid is in this condition.

Even if she ran away, I don't think she can get away from that monster.
No, less about her and more about me.
If I stay here—if I stay involved with Arcueid, there's no mistaking the fact I'll face him.
He is.. dangerous.
Clearly put, he isn't sane.
More than his body which houses those animals, his eyes are like a machine's.
Devoid of even a single emotion.
The true eyes of a killer which does whatever it is assigned to do.
As one who has experienced his attack, I am sure that without a doubt, he is to be avoided.
"_____"

But, does that mean I should just leave Arcueid here and run away?
No matter who she is, she can't move because she protected me.
And I can tell her good luck and go home——?
"Arcueid, I—"



"But it's alright.
Even Nrvnqsr isn't a problem for you.
No matter who it is, you can kill anyone with a single blow."
"——Huh?"
Arcueid says.. something outrageous,
as if it was completely ordinary.
"Hey——what in the world are you saying?"



"What am I saying?
You're going to fight with me, right?"
Arcueid looks directly at me.
Her eyes place all trust in me.
But this isn't a joke.
I——

I'd like to refuse, but—

turn to **80**

No, there's no way I could take on a monster like that.

turn to **81**

84

.... No, it's too early.
Nrvnqsr just arrived.
A little more—until his attention is focused more on Arcueid, I can't launch a surprise attack.



"Don't get it wrong, Nrvnqsr.
The Dead Apostles are not a group of twenty-seven, but of twenty-eight.
You do not recognize 'The Serpent' as one of your own?"



13 0

"Of course.
His ideals differ from ours.
He is a vampire, but he does not hold to the meaning of being a vampire.
Consequently, we do not accept him as one of us."



13 0

"—But, we are old friends.
I believe I understand him more than the other Dead Apostles."



".... I see.
Come to think of it, you are like 'The Serpent' as well, as you are unlike the
other vampires too.
Since you are both heretics, you must share common interests."



13 0

"Wrong.
Heresy is isolated therefore it is heresy.
Just because we both are separated from the flock doesn't mean we comprehend
one another."



"Really?
Coming as far as this country to pursue me, I think you guys are similar."



13 0

"Do not be ridiculous.
You are the one capricious one.
Your purpose is to execute Dead Apostles, so why do you persistently pursue
the Serpent of Akasha.
The 'Serpent's' poison is not something the Princess of the True Ancestors
should be persistent about."

.... Nrvnqsr's voice gets slightly louder.
Arcueid's taunting must be working.
Nrvnqsr is looking only at his enemy Arcueid.
—What do I do now?

Dash towards Nrvnqsr.

turn to **86**

It's still too early.

turn to **85**

85

.... Still, still too early.
 There's about ten meters in between me and Nrvnqsr.
 I need a more definite opening before I can draw close without him realizing me.
 "——"

I gulp.
 A little more—a little more, something—
 ".... I do not understand."
 Muttering.
 As if speaking to the moon above, Nrvnqsr mutters aloud.
 "It is displeasing to be faced by such unsightly enmity, but I cannot think this is one of the Princess's familiars.
 Is that just trash?"
 "——!"
 Shiki, run away!"
 Arcueid's composed voice.
 "..... Eh?"
 But, I can't understand in time.

My legs start to sink in something.
 The firm ground beneath me is like quicksand.
 "Ah——"
 The ground is full of something pitch-black.
 My body collapses.
 My ankles which sunk into the black puddle are attached to nothing.
 "——"
 I fall with a splash into the puddle.
 There's no bottom.
 This black puddle transforms into a mouth of a large animal and compresses my body—

!
 Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes. turn to **423**

No. turn to **1**

86

Nrvnqsr is looking only at Arcueid.
 My chance is only during this instant.
 Gripping my knife, I crouch down.
 With everything I have, I run towards Nrvnqsr.

All his senses are directed toward Arcueid.
 Even I, who is not in this conversation, can tell Nrvnqsr is only looking forward.
 His back looks defenseless, not knowing I will dismantle it in a few seconds.
 —I can do it.

I feel it.
 Without a doubt, I can kill him.
 "—"

I run.
 Only a matter of steps before I can reach his back with my knife.
 His back.
 His defenseless back.
 There's no mistake; he does not sense me.
 "—"

One more step.
 Then it's all over.

"——Eh?"

I stop.
 What?
 What.. is his body——!?

"No——where."
 Nowhere.
 Nowhere, nowhere, nowherenowherenowherenowhere....!
 There's not a single "line" anywhere!
 Impossible, no such "life" is possible—

—Thro, b.
 Headache.
 My fingers gripping the knife tremble.
 After a stab of pain in my brain,
 I see a single black "point" on Nrvnqsr's back.

"——!"
 —There.
 That should be where his fatal flaw is.
 There's something wrong with it being a point rather than a line, but
 anyway—I'll stab him there!
 I take a lunging step.

The knife in my right hand races towards his "point".
 "——Eh?"

Right before my hit connects,
 the points along his back multiply rapidly.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

ve, Eight, Nine, Ten, Twenty——

Eighty, One Hundred, Two Hundred, Three Hundred, Four Hundred——!
 "——!?"

.... This.. isn't right.

This doesn't feel like his "death".

These are more like heterogeneous aggregation.

His——His body, what the hell is it——?

"——Shiki!"

.... Arcueid's voice.

No, I don't have time to think now.

His back is right there.

Right now, I can just pick any one of his "points" and it will be over.

"——There!"

I bring my knife down as I yell.

However, before then,

Nrvnqsr's back rises up like a balloon.

Pop.

A black dog appears from his back as if emerging from a black sea.

"Wha——!?"

The black dog shoots forth like a missile.

"——!"

I slice its "line" with my knife.

But, it's just a "line".

Only the dog's legs are cut off.

Its trajectory does not stop.

"Gah——!"

Whud!

The black dog rams its head into my stomach.

"——Ggh!"

What strength.

I fly back several meters and get pushed down on the ground.

The black dog then tries to bite into my neck.

"Ha.... aa——!"

I pierce the dog's right abdomen with my knife.

My knife enters the black dog's "Point of Death" as easily as going through air.

The black dog's movements stop.
In that instant—its body becomes a black fluid and pours over me.

"—!?"

Covered in the black fluid, I can't stand up.

"Why—you!"

I can't get it off.

As if sewn to the ground, I can't move.

"—Hmph.

It seems something has happened behind me."

I hear Nrvnqsr's voice.

Stretched out against the ground, I look towards Nrvnqsr and Arcueid.



13 0

"Your familiar?"

But, how unfortunate.

Those who enter my domain will be recognized and attacked by one of us even if I do not notice.

There can be no surprise attacks against me."



".... It seems so.

You weren't even looking at anything but me, yet you still reacted to the danger behind you.

That is the strength of a collective, is it not, Nrvnqsr Chaos?"

Arcueid narrows her eyes slightly and walks toward Nrvnqsr.



13 0

"—Interesting.

Your are so weak you cannot even use your Marble Phantasm, yet you still challenge me?"

"There's no need.

It can't be helped, even if I am fighting a Dead Apostle.

For someone like you—these claws will be enough, Nrvnqsr Chaos."

A short laugh comes up.

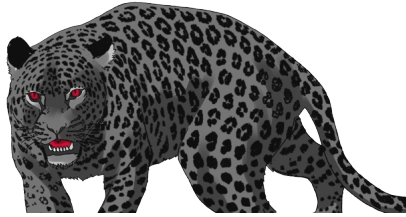


13 0

"—Fool.

Realize your folly, Arcueid Brunestud—!"

Nrvnqsr raises an arm.
His coat ruffles like a cape and countless animals fly forth.



Grrrrrrrr.

With a thunderous roar, three beasts run towards Arcueid like bullets.
Not anything like black dogs,
but three giant leopards larger than Nrvnqsr himself, like large demonic silhouettes.

"——"

Arcueid can't move.

Three leopards run, cracking the bricks under them just by running.

They're far faster than Arcueid, who is trying to run away.

—The three beasts pounce towards Arcueid.

It's over quickly.

In an instant,
the three leopards' bodies are cut in half and fall to the ground.

"—What?"

Nrvnqsr's voice booms.

Arcueid is silent.

From there, she moves to attack him.

"—!"

Beasts emerge from Nrvnqsr's body.

The instant it emerges, the lion's head is grabbed and torn apart from its body.

The leopard is killed the instant it attacks Arcueid by getting pierced by her punch through its head.

The tiger is torn apart like clay.

Everything following them suffers the same fate.

The same with the flying eagle and the giant grizzly bear.

The same with the shark swimming in the ground.

The same with the ridiculously large elephant.

In the end, they can't even stop her, and turn back into a black, sticky fluid.

"—Wha.."

Nrvnqsr tries to escape.

Arcueid swings her claws.

—After the sound of ripping flesh,

Nrvnqsr's body is split in two from the neck down.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!"

Roaring in pain, Nrvnqsr leaps away from Arcueid.

Split from the neck to the waist, he's lost over half his body.

Splat.

The rest of his body falls at Arcueid's feet.

"——"

This isn't a fight.

... What about Arcueid saying she was only able to move?

The beasts Nrvnqsr let out weren't weak.

Those lions and tigers, just one of them can tear a car into scraps.

And that grizzly bear could have torn a tank apart with its uncontrolled violence.

But such beasts were torn apart by Arcueid, and Nrvnqsr himself is half dead.

"Ha——"

It almost seems like a joke.

If it was this easy, maybe it would have been better if I wasn't here from the start—

"GA.... AH, aaaaa....!"

Nrvnqsr keeps retreating as if to escape.



She might be tired.. Arcueid walks towards Nrvnqsr slowly.

Panting.

I can hear heavy breathing.

.... It belongs to Arcueid.

Ragged, painful breathing.

Why is that?

Arcueid's breathing sounds more painful than Nrvnqsr's, who is torn in half.



13 0

"—It is quite unbelievable.

Weakened as you are, you still have that much power.

As expected from the executioner prepared by the True Ancestors.

.... Do not face the white vampire princess—It seems the warnings of others were correct."

Nrvnqsr's voice isn't dimmed at all.

—I feel,

a horribly sinking sense of despair.

Arcueid tries to catch her breath as she slowly draws near Nrvnqsr.



13 0

"But, I never expected to defeat you with only ten or twenty of myself in the first place."



"—Enough boasting.
You can't kill me with any amount of such familiars, and I have cut off half your
body.
No matter what, you have no chance of winning."



13 0
"Hah—My familiars have all been killed, but you seem to be mistaken."
"—?"
"I do not carry familiars, nor do I use them.
All those things you fought were truly me.
.... It is quite unpleasant to be considered similar to the other mongrels who
capture other living things to repair their damaged flesh."



13 0
"You should have been able to tell with a glance if you had not been weakened."

Use your golden Mystic Eyes and see.
Can you see it?
The chaos of the 666 "beasts" inside my body—"

Splash.
Something moves quickly at the edge of my vision.
"A—"
Behind Arcueid.
The half of Nrvnqsr's body which was cut off by Arcueid is shaking.
It rises up in a large clot and shoots toward Arcueid—.
"Arcueid, behind you—!"



"Shiki—?"
Arcueid turns around.
But, she doesn't make it.
The half of Nrvnqsr's body lying on the ground becomes countless large serpents which attack Arcueid from behind.

"Cr—"
The large serpents wrap around Arcueid and return to a black fluid.
Arcueid is pinned to the ground like me, but the pressure is hundreds of times worse.
"Wh, what—no way....!?"
As she is pushed down, Arcueid tries to escape.



13 0

"It is useless.

You should understand what that is, Princess of the True Ancestors."

".....!"

Arcueid's face lights up in pain and surprise.

The remaining half of Nrvnqsr raises its voice almost as if howling.

"—Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666—Haha, are you pleased with the chaos within my body, Arcueid Brunestud?"

"Are you sane....!?"

A human body.. having more than three hundred factors compressed in something as small and closed-in as a human shape, this is just like—"

"Indeed, no different from the Primordial Sea.

I am not making my body up with other animals.

I merely use the factors called 'animals' as my body, mixing them like mud."

"I have no such things as familiars.

What exists are 666 beasts—and lives equal to that number.

Ripping my body in half or crushing my head is meaningless.

I am one and 666.

If you wish to destroy me, you need to destroy 666 lives at once."

".... This can't be.... this is what Chaos means....!?"



13 0

"Of course.

—So my alter selves have no concrete existence.

When released from this body which is my territory, they will take form as some kind of 'species' for the first time.

They have no form of their own from the beginning.

You can kill them outside of me, but once they return, they regenerate as a part of my chaos.

.... Though, even I cannot predict what they will become once they emerge.

Understanding and controlling this disordered dendrogram is my eternal thesis."

The vampire with only half a body gives a boasting, muffled laugh.

"That's impossible....!"

To take in souls—if you encapsulate uncolored conceptualized existences, you

yourself will disappear....!"

"Indeed.

That is why this is not a single person here.

The personality of Nrvnqsr already does not exist.

We are not a single body, but closer to a limitless collective.

.... Certainly, there is no meaning of existence in such a life.

There are already life forms in the deep ocean which can be termed eternal systems.

This body will lose its intelligence and become a mere 'specimen' just like them someday."

"But, do you not find it magnificent?

There are things which swirl inside me, and you do not know what form they will take.

This small world is like that of our world in its primal stages.

A chaotic space where what will be born is unpredictable.

The darkness of chaos just like this planet's dendrogram, while still having the possibility of dramatic change.

I wish to know what lies at its culmination before I disappear."

"This is why the Church gave me this name.

—Nrvnqsr Chaos.

Equipped with 666 beasts, no longer a vampire but a space which has become chaos, a heretic who broke the taboo."

"——!"

Arcueid's voice is held off.

The black fluid squirms all around her.

Even Arcueid's face is already half-covered——.



13 0

".... That's all.

Under such a prison, even you cannot escape.

It is a union of five hundred of my parts, the 'Soil of Genesis'.

Even were you to be at full strength, you could not hope to destroy it.

—It is equivalent to destroying a whole continent."

Nrvnqsr's remaining half approaches Arcueid slowly.

"Many of our brethren have been killed by you.

Many have sought to destroy you, only to be destroyed in turn.

—But, that is all over.

I, Nrvnqsr Chaos, will accomplish a great achievement none could perform until now."

"—Nrvnqsr.

This Reality Marble, who—"

"It should be easy to tell.

Your nemesis "The Serpent" came to me to teach me, but not the current one from this generation.

Before you killed him, he bequeathed upon me the method of making this 'cage'."

"_____"

I can't hear Arcueid's voice anymore.

Looking, her mouth is covered in the black fluid.

"But 'The Serpent' is also a tragedy.

What was once a priest of the Church can't live on just because a Goddess of Death like yourself is chasing after him.

If he had lived, he may have devised a means to control the chaos in my body.

.... It certainly must have been regretful not being able to fully utilize such a clear heresy before getting destroyed."



13 0

"I was a sworn friend of 'The Serpent'.

Why you persistently pursue him without tiring, I am very curious—but, it seems you can no longer speak."

The black fluid starts to pin down Arcueid's body.

By now, it is no longer Arcueid's collapsed feminine figure, but only a formless mud.

"—I will make you a part of me, Arcueid Brunestud.

Absorbing your amount of will may require great effort, but it will make me the highest rank of vampire.

A little pain is like a celebration for the new creation.

When that happens—even the professional killers of the abominable Burial Agency will be nothing to fear.

I will eradicate all members of that moldy Church."

Arcueid's face sinks completely with a sucking sound.
Even the lines of her body which I could barely see before have disappeared.
—At this rate,
if I leave Arcueid alone, she'll be absorbed into the black fluid—
"Why—you!"
I "look" at the black fluid covering me.
The black lines of death definitely do exist.
"Gaahh—!"
Resisting the throbbing pain in my head, I run my knife along them.

The black fluid becomes like mere water as I slice the lines.

"Alright....!"
I breathe heavily as I stand up.
—I have to save her.
I have to save Arcueid from that monster.
But, how?
I can't even get close to Nrvnqsr.
Even Arcueid—as terrific as she was, she wasn't able to take him.
Then if I stand and face him, wouldn't I be killed instantly?
I only barely managed to kill one dog; I wouldn't last a second against those
other beasts like the lions or leopards.
Furthermore,
I can see hundreds of "points" on his back.
I couldn't fully understand the conversation between Nrvnqsr and Arcueid, but
it seems that each one of those beasts are him.
Then,
if I want to defeat the vampire Nrvnqsr, I will have to kill all the beasts having
that "point"—
"Agh—"
I can't step forward.
No matter what—A human can't step forward toward a monster like that.
"Damn—it."
In the end,
once more, I'm trying to save my life and do nothing about someone getting
killed—



13 0

"—Oh?"

I hear a voice.

Nrvnqsr's voice is full of contained amusement.

No.

It's not his voice.

I can hear something like the sound of footsteps.

"This—can't be."

The sound is far away.

But without a doubt, the sound of light, skipping footsteps is drawing closer.

—Arcueid said earlier.

The park is empty of people at night—and if people pass by, then they are simply out of luck.

Far away, I see a small human shape.

Some girl I do not know about my own age.

"—"

This isn't good.

For her to come here, it means—

"Run away !!"

I scream.

I scream, forgetting that Nrvnqsr wasn't even paying attention to me or that he might attack me.

Yet, the passerby does not stop.

Not knowing anything, she casually heads for this place.

Half of the vampire in the black coat breathes out in content.



13 0

".... My body has just been torn apart.
I need more sustenance."
His half of a coat squirms like a living thing.
"Fortunately, it seems sustenance has arrived."



A black beast flies from Nrvnqsr's body.
"Sto——!"
My voice doesn't reach her.
The beast runs like a black wind towards the far-away figure.

It's over in an instant.
A short scream, the sound of a body hitting the ground.
The smell of blood wafting on the air.
The black tiger retrieves the human in its mouth.
.... the girl's face is.. is no more.
Most likely gouged out by the tiger's claws.
—Too.. ruthless.
A repulsive, one-sided violence.

"Gah——!"
My head hurts.
My throat is starting to dry.
My mind starts to compress, and I can only see the enemy in front of me—

The tiger slithers like a snake into Nrvnqsr's body.
It's strange.
The corpse of the girl in the tiger's mouth disappears.
Yet.
—Munch.
Crunch.
Grind.

She's not there, yet I still hear the sound.
—Rip.
Gorge.
Gulp.

The sounds are coming from inside the man called Nrvnqsr.
The sound of dissolving flesh, shattering bones, the slow chewing of a human—



13 0

"Y—"
No mistake.
Inside his body, he's eating that person.



13 0
Nrvnqsr's lips twist in a smile.
—With that,

a switch goes off in my brain.
"You fucking bastard——!!!!"
I can't think.
I just run towards Nrvnqsr.

—My vision soaks in red.
"—Feed."
A black leopard flies from Nrvnqsr's body.
How many times greater than the black dogs are its speed and ferocity?
"——"
But, I don't care about that.
It's a living thing.
If it lives, then it's nothing against me.

"You're in my way."
I stop and say so to the corpse by my feet.
The black leopard is lying in four pieces.



13 0
"—I see.
You are the one who attacked me from behind earlier."
It seems he finally has realized I am here.
Emotionless eyes look toward me.
—Yeah, just like Arcueid said.
As long as I don't allow myself to get lost, being stared by him doesn't change anything.
"... Let Arcueid go, monster."
"——"
"I said, let her go.
I'm your opponent.
You're nothing with that half body of yours."
"——"
Without a word.
Without a word, the vampire with the black coat looks both Arcueid and I over.
"You say you can be my opponent?"

"Yes.
 So I'm saying release her and then hurry up and return your body to normal."
 "—, —, —"
 His neck moves up and down.
 It seems.. like.. he's laughing.



13 0
 "You have taken away the fun.
 Receive your punishment, human."
 Nrvnqsr doesn't change.
 He seems like he will leave Arcueid with half of his body and remain as he is.
 "I promise you.
 I will slowly chew you apart alive."
 Flutter.
 His remaining arm is lifted.
 "—Such an inferior mental circuit.
 The price of your arrogance thinking you can face me will be your certain death."
 Whoosh.
 A warm wind blows.
 Scores of beasts emerge from Nrvnqsr's half body.

"—"
 The number of beasts emerging isn't ten or twenty.
 Even if each is not a strong beast, it is close to a hundred of them against a single human like me, and they swarm like ants gathering around a sugar cube.
 "Wha—"
 I stick my knife into the neck of the black dog before me.

The black dog dies as it's 'death' is cut.
 Instantly, the sound of birds' wings overhead.

With a grating sound, the meat of my forehead is taken to the bone.
 "Ach—!"
 I don't have time to react in pain.
 At the same time, several black dogs bite my arms and torso from both sides.

"You, junk—!"

Slice.

Slice.

I stab the "death" of the two dogs in my line of vision.

But, it isn't enough.

For each one I kill, ten more beasts take its place to rip into my body.

"Ah—Ah.."

I can't see.

I can't see anything.

Everything is pitch black.

There isn't anything wrong with my eyes.

All around me—the black beasts envelop me in darkness.

"——!!!!!"

Things can't keep going this way.

I will die.

I won't last five more seconds.

My ankles are bit.

Blood flows.

My body feels like it will fall.

If I collapse, it will all be over.

They will ravenously feast on my body if I hit the ground.

"No—"

No.

That is more fearful than painful.

—Everything is pitch black.

I can't see anything.

I can't do anything.

But, that's why I have to think.

I'll bear with it for now and wait for my chance.

turn to **87**

I have to destroy the main body.

turn to **88**

87

.... I will bear it for now....!
Even if I recklessly attacked Nrvnqsr, these beasts would get in the way.
For now I have to bear them and wait for an opening to—

"Gah——!"

I get struck in the back from behind.
Did one of the black dogs just ram me with its head?
Anyhow, my spine creaks—and I can't.. breathe.

"Ah——"

Both of my thighs are punctured by canine teeth.
"Ha—ahhh....!"
I pierce their foreheads audibly with my knife.
The two dogs dissolve like mud, leaving only burning pain behind in my legs.
—The beasts are not uncontrolled.
Even though they could pick me apart in a single instant if they wanted to, they
circle themselves around me and come to "feed" one at a time.
There,
is no opening at all.

"Ah..... h."

My body collapses.
Not even being able to breathe properly, not even being able to stand from the
pain in my legs,
I fall flat on my back.
"I am quite the fastidious person.
Rest assured, there will not even be one of your cells left."
I hear a voice.
At the same time, a black dome arches over me.
turn to **89**

88

"——"

.... The main source.

If I can do something to Nrvnqsr's main body manipulating the beasts, I might be able to save at least Arcueid—

"AAAAAAAAAAH!"

I blindly swing my knife.

I force my faltering body and run forward.

If he hasn't moved as he toys with me,

then, he should be standing with his half body ahead of here—



13 0

"—!"

Nrvnqsr—!

"Stop your noisemaking, it is unpleasant."

His coat wavers.

From there,

a white horn comes straight at me.



"Eh—?"

Something like antlers.. sticks.. into my torso.

Thud.

It's so sharp, it doesn't really hurt.

"_____"

I fall flat on my back.

"I am quite the fastidious person.

Rest assured, there will not even be one of your cells left."

I hear a voice.

At the same time, a black dome arches over me.

turn to **89**

89

"Ah——"

A ceiling overhead like a black umbrella.
And all around, the glowing eyes of the beasts.

Rip.

My skin is being ripped.

—Die.

Rip.

My flesh is being eaten.

—Die.

Grit.

My bones are being scraped.

—Die.

My mind can no longer think of anything.

Only, to frantically use my arms to protect my face.

My right hand tightens, keeping a firm grip on my knife.

—Die.

I'm being eaten.

Strange—being attacked by this many beasts, they should be able to eat me completely in just one minute, yet they take their time.

—Die.

I'm bleeding too much.

My blood and their saliva coat my body.

It feels—terrible.

—Die.

I can't see anything outside.

Just, complete blackness.

—Die.

Those countless pairs of eyes say it.

They say it as they truly eat me only bit by bit.

They can't talk, so they speak with their blazing eyes.

—Die.

Hurry up and die.

The black dome of beasts chants in unison.

"——!"

A scream leaks out.

But no one is going to help me.

—I'll be killed.

Like that person before, I'll be devoured alive.

"Ah—a, ah.."

—No.

I don't want that.

I don't want to die this way.

I don't want to be eaten while being conscious.

I don't want to be killed like this.
 Scary.
 That's scary.
 Very scary.
 Scary, scary, frightening, frightening,
 frighteningscary scaryscaryscary scary—
 "I'll-be killed."
 Yes, I'll be killed.
 There's nowhere to run.
 "I'll be killed.. like.. this."
 I'll be torn apart and become a meal for all of them.
 There's nothing I can do.
 With my eyes painted vermillion, I start at myself empty.
 "Ha.
 Hahaha, ha."
 I start to laugh.
 Because, I don't even know why I'm being killed.
 But—still, Tohno Shiki will be killed like this.
 "You are stubborn.
 If you break down, it will be easier for you."
 Ha, haha, ha.
 He laughs in the distance.
 Slowly eating me and laughing.
 Ah—it's like my whole body.. is dissolving.
 "_____"
 Horrible.
 Too horrible.
 This is too horrible.
 My wounds hurt.
 They hurt.
 Hurt a lot.
 Death is frightening.
 It's frightening.
 Very frightening.
 He's laughing in the distance.
 Watching me die and laughing.
 If I strain my ears,
 I can still hear chewing and the smashing of bones coming from within.
 Not only did he devour all those people yesterday.
 And not only did he eat that unknown person.
 He's trying to eat and kill even me—

 "Gah—"
 Something like claws digs into my chest.
 It's where the scar from my old wound is.
 A really painful, frightening, only hateful place.

—Eight years ago—that summer day.
Yeah, it really was hateful.
There wasn't any room for pain or fear.

Yes.
I just.. hated.
Then what is to be done is already decided.
—If you are going to kill me, then..
My whole body is already numb.
All that remains is the sensation of the knife I refused to drop in my right hand.
Be killed—be killed?
Who?
By what?
"Haha, ha———"
I laugh out.
Right, that's exactly how it is.
Running away is absolutely impossible.
Escape is absolutely impossible.
There's only one thing to be done.
Be killed.
Be killed.
Definitely, without a doubt, be killed.
By nothing else,
and by no one else.
—He will be killed by me.

"Ahahahahahahahahaha!"
In place of a yell, I start to laugh like an idiot.
Strange.
Strangely, I can't stop laughing.
Slice.
Slice.
Slice.
Slice.
Slice.
With each sound, another beast dies.
My brain is in agony.
All throughout my body: my nerves, my blood vessels, my cells, my blood;
everything has gone abnormal.
—The black dome disappears.
I just killed about seventy beasts which were eating my body.
"Wh—at?"
I can hear Nrvnqsr's voice.
Alright—I have to stand, or I won't be able to kill any more.

I stand up.

"__"

There's no problem.

There's not a single place where I'm not wounded, but I can still move around for a while.



13 0

"What—did you—"

"—Yeah, I understand how you feel, vampire."

My brain is on fire.

It's similar—just like when I killed Arcueid, I can't even breathe properly.

Along with the headache and heat which almost drives me insane,

almost enough to make me puke,

the world is saturated with death—

"So you want to kill me, monster?"

Then, we have something in common.

"Fine.

—Let's fight to the death, Nrvnqsr Chaos....!"

With that, my stiff right hand moves freely.

Switching to a reverse grip on my knife, I run towards Nrvnqsr.



A bigger beast appears from his body.

Finally, he's letting out the big stuff he used for Arcueid.

"____"

But, they don't last long.
No matter how large, fast or brutal they are, they basically cannot kill me unless they touch me.
If they try to touch me,
I slice whatever part that tries.
In the end, it made no difference whether it's a black dog, a lion or a tiger.

Two of the large ones collapse and change into black water.
To get to Nrvnqsr—there's still some distance left to close in.



13 0

"—How can this be?

Those of us even the princess could not eliminate—are returning to nothingness."

He's.. saying something.

"—I do not understand.

What did you do?"

I fix my gaze on Nrvnqsr's body.



13 0

Countless points.

—If I want to live.

If I want to kill him, I have to kill each and every one of them.

"....."

It's probably not possible.

Still—I can't finish like this.
 Arcueid, who was swallowed by the black liquid.
 All of those hundreds of people that were killed.
 —And, this body being almost killed.
 ".....!"
 I grit my teeth.
 There's no time to speak words of hatred.
 Unfortunately, moving takes all of my power.
 I don't have any extra energy to answer Nrvnqsr.
 —No.
 If I do have that sort of energy, as quickly as possible—
 "—Very well.
 I now recognize you as an obstacle to me."
 —killing this beast-smelling monster would be far better.

His black coat opens wide.
 The vile stench of beasts.
 The sense of danger before was nothing compared to what it is now.
 From inside his coat, things come out which I've seen at least once when I was
 a child.
 Like this horse with a horn on its forehead, or this huge, winged lizard.
 Those are troublesome.
 It's not simple to kill them,
 because they have very few "parts vulnerable to death".
 So—I get more serious.
 Is it because I said "kill"?
 The pulsing of my blood is painful.
 My nerves are grinding together.
 Everything in my body links together to remove that which gets in my way.
 I slice in half the horned horse along with its horn.
 I slice the lizard from its back to its lower-right abdomen.
 "—Impossible."
 I hear that obstacle's voice.
 Unfortunately, I can't even see properly now.
 All I can see are those black points and lines.
 "Scum—why must I attack a mere human with my full force—!?"
 With a squishy, fleshy sound,
 Nrvnqsr's half-body returns to its previous human shape.
 —It seems he finally put back the half of his body binding Arcueid.



13 0

"—I will kill you.

You will find out that existence far superior to yours exists within me—"

His arms tear into his own chest.

As if ripping apart darkness,

he rips into his own chest.

From the hole in Nrvnqsr,

something bizarre emerges—

If I have to describe it simply, it's a crab-like spider.

A bit bigger than the giant elephant which Arcueid killed.

"_____"

My vision has gone red; I can't see very well.

All I can see are their bizarre silhouettes and their "death".

My fingers are cold.

Maybe I've lost too much blood.

My whole body is frigid.

But still—my body isn't screaming.

It orders me forward, saying that if I have enough strength to scream, use that energy to kill Nrvnqsr even faster.

—My spine hurts.

My body is cold.

My fingers are frozen.

Yet, my brain burns with fire.

These crab-spider beasts keep crawling out from Nrvnqsr.

Nrvnqsr is only a little bit away.

These things are in the way of me getting to him.

For now, these three.

I completely kill those emerged obstacles.



13 0

"—Impossible."

As if dizzy, Nrvnqsr moves back.

"—There is no way someone can destroy all my killing beasts.

Such a fact is impossible....!

We are immortal.

As long as I live, the immortal beasts return to chaos and are reborn—so then, why do they return to the original nothingness after only being stabbed by you—!?"

I walk towards my screaming enemy.



13 0

Nrvnqsr tries to pull back in retreat, but stops himself.

"—Unsightly."

His previously machine-like eyes finally start to burn with crimson hatred.

I understand how he feels.

—Probably,

the killer in Nrvnqsr is ordering himself to retreat.

But, the vampire in him does not allow defeat from a mere human.

He doesn't understand.

He doesn't even let himself withdraw.

So, he does not allow himself to even take a single step back.

His mind stubbornly doesn't allow him to realize his powerlessness.

Another step forward.

From here, I can jump and slice his body with my knife.

"—No, never—!
My name is Nrvnqsr, the immortal called Chaos of the undecaying vampire race!
It is not possible for me to look this unsightly....!"

—His body starts to form a shape.
The body which was only darkness begins to transform.
"This body is immortal.
I have surpassed death long ago—!"
His body leaps forward.
Not his beasts.
Condensing all his remaining beasts to the limit, he transforms himself into the best Beast and moves in to kill me.

His speed is as fast as Arcueid's.
He reaches out with arms which would pulverize my neck if he contacted me.

Dodging that, I cut the 'line' on his arm.

As if unable to control his speed, he rushes past me without stopping.
—The distance between us grows once again.

—I feel dizzy.
I can't stop shaking.



13 0

"—What is this?"
Nrvnqsr stares at his severed arm in astonishment.
"What is this—!?"
Why—why does this severed part not regenerate!?
How can such a ridiculous thing be occurring....!?
He isn't a magus or a Burier, so how can he destroy me just by cutting me—
!?"
"—How stupid.
If you get too concerned over appearances like that, you'll get killed, Nrvnqsr
Chaos."

I hear a familiar voice near Nrvnqsr.

"You—!"

With bloodshot eyes, Nrvnqsr stares at Arcueid standing elegantly to the side.

—Oh, I see.

When he ceased being only half a body, she became free.



"Oh, don't worry about me.

Shiki will take care of you.

Right now, he would even kill me if I got in the way."

A giggling voice.

"It's your fault for thinking you should kill him painfully.

You should kill your enemy quickly without allowing the opportunity for a counterstrike, right?

That was your mistake."



13 0

"—Silence.

I do not make mistakes.

I still have 560 lives remaining.

.... Just wait.

Once I kill him, I will get you once more."



"Really?
It won't happen, but I'll be waiting."

Arcueid doesn't go near him.
Nrvnqsr is only looking at me.
—He's coming.
I brace my right hand with my left as I grip my knife.
Nrvnqsr crouches.
It's the action of a predator preparing to pounce on his prey.
"Oh, I forget to tell you one more thing, Nrvnqsr."
Her voice flows like the wind before that.
"It may be a little late, but he's killed me once before."
"Wh—at?"
This time, it's for real.
In his astonishment, Nrvnqsr loses sight of his identity.
For a moment,
his entranced thoughts flow into my mind like a curse.

—Is this a nightmare?
Kill Arcueid Brunestud?
This monster, for whom even the words immortality isn't enough to describe,
was killed by that human?
No, that cannot be true.
But, wait.
Hypothetically, if it is true..

—Then,
just which one of us was the pretentious one?

"Exactly.
It seems the pretentious one is you, Nrvnqsr Chaos."
"Ku—huhu, hahahahahahaha!"
At the end of hatred and chaos.
Nrvnqsr laughs with pleasure from the bottom of his heart.
—I can't wait any longer.

I start running towards my unmoving target.

"I see.

You are going to kill me, human—!"

—The Beast roars.

With one arm,

he dashes forth to pierce my heart.

His speed is so fast, you can't ask for any more.

A simple,

efficient,

motion to kill me.

A motion too beautiful.

"——"

I slice his outstretched arm.

Hundreds of "points of death" are on his body.

But, more than that,

deep inside of him, in his very center, I can see his "Ultimate Point".

—It doesn't matter how many lives he has.

I am only going to kill the "existence" of Nrvnqsr Chaos.

So, it isn't killing Nrvnqsr,

but the chaos which is him.

I am going to kill one world——-

I attack him head-on.

A light sound of impact.

—The knife pierces into his center.

Twisting his lips in a grin, the vampire laughs voicelessly.

"This can't be."

Numbly,

The Black Beast starts to crumble from his fingertips.

"——You.. are my death?"

His body temperature rapidly dwindles.

The end is instantaneous like a dropping curtain.

With this one attack,

along with the remaining 560 beasts, Nrvnqsr Chaos is annihilated.

if flg2 >= 1

turn to **91**

turn to **90**

90

"I'm—exhausted.."
I collapse onto the ground.
I fall on my rear and try to keep my body up with my hands.
"—Cold."
I'm cold.
The pain is numbed; it feels almost comfortable.
My body is ripped with canine bite marks and beak marks.
—Well, there's no mistake that I'll probably die like this.
"___"
I let out a deep breath.
I raise my chin and look up at the sky.
"—The moon."
Only the pretty moon is in the night sky.
.... What is it?
It seems awfully familiar.. like I saw a dream like this before.



"Shiki, are you okay?"
Arcueid walks toward me as if nothing happened just now.
".... You.. stupid idiot.... If I was okay.. I wouldn't be human."
I speak and breath haltingly.
Even talking is painful, so maybe I shouldn't have responded.
"Kk—ah."

My consciousness starts to fade.
And then,

Whack!
Arcueid hits me on the head and forcefully returns me to consciousness.
".... What.. was that for?"



"That won't do.
 If you sleep with those wounds, you'll definitely end up dying.
 You can't sleep until we close them."
 —Her argument is perfectly just.
 It's so just, it makes me angry.
 "... Arcueid.
 Can I say what I've always thought from before?"



"Hm, what?"
 "—Don't say such unreasonable things, you idiot."
 I crash onto the ground.

—My consciousness starts to fade.
 Arcueid is raising a racket, but I don't have any strength to hold my eyes open
 any longer.
 It's terribly—cold.
 "Hey, Shiki.
 You really will die....!"
 I told you, I'm sleepy.
 I'll sleep before I die, so I'll wake up in the morning.
 "Shiki, you mustn't sleep—!
 We have to at least close your wounds and stop the bleeding, otherwise you
 won't wake up....!"
 —Man, she's loud.
 I'm going to sleep, so just do whatever you want.

"Eh, it's okay if I heal you?
Why didn't you say that earlier?"
After she says this cheerfully,
I feel cold fingers, colder than even my body, touch my skin as if in sympathy.
"Well, I'm not too happy about using someone else's familiars, but in these
circumstances, it can't be helped."
.... I feel like something is being plastered to me.
I don't know why,
but it feels awfully pleasant—
"As to be expected from the vampire called the primordial sea.
Even after the destruction of the source, Nrvnqsr, the familiars still have their
regenerative ability.... hm, in this case, all I have to do is give it a little hand.
rst, let it live on me—once it's back to normal I'll put it back on you, Shiki—"
The fingers pull away.
"I guess this'll do.
How is it?
It's a non-polar life, so it can adapt itself easily to your body, right?
Hey, are you sleeping Shiki—?"
—Yeah, I'm asleep.
"Oh well.
Your house is the mansion on top of the hill, right, Shiki?
I'll make sure you get home."
—I look up only at the white moon as I sleep.
"... You really did well, Shiki.
And thanks.
You really saved me tonight."
.... She thanks me without the slightest hint of heaviness in her words.
.... I can't hear her voice anymore.
I fall into a deep sleep without anyone interrupting me this time.

turn to **93**

91

"I'm—exhausted."
 I collapse onto the ground.
 I fall on my rear and try to keep my body up with my hands.
 My right hand finally lets go of my knife.
 "—Cold."
 I'm cold.
 The pain is numbed; it feels almost comfortable.
 My body is ripped with canine bite marks and beak marks.
 —Well, there's no mistake that I'll probably die like this.
 "—Shiki!"
 Arcueid's voice.
 "—Run, you're getting targeted!"
 Arcueid shouts as she dashes towards me.
 "..... Eh?"
 I stare up at the night sky as I sit.
 There,
 I see the white moon,

and the figure of a blue crow.
 It screams as it falls straight towards me.
 It drops down to pierce my brain with its sharp beak.

"—!"
 I try and stand up to escape.
 But, my body is at its limit.
 I try to stand but only end up collapsing on the ground.
 Because I fell on my back, I get a disturbingly clear view of the crow.

It dives just like a bullet towards my face—and with the sound of sliced flesh, it dies right before my eyes.

The blue crow was impaled by a flying nail which looks like a large sword.
 It had to have come from somewhere above.
 "....."
 I look up at the night sky.

There, is the white moon.

And, there's someone dressed in black, priest-like garments.
 "—"
 The figure stands on a streetlight and stares down at me.
 Despite just being almost killed, I vacantly think those high-laced boots look really cool.
 The figure doesn't say anything.

The emotionless eyes resemble the sharp moonlight.
Resembles..
The figure—really resembles Senpai.
"....."
My mind swims.
Caaaaaaawww.
The crow's death cry.
And, I close my eyes quietly.

.... I keep bleeding.
In my g.oggy state,
I can hear Arcueid and someone else arguing.
"I cannot leave it to you.
I will heal him."
A horribly hostile voice.
"Don't do anything you shouldn't.
This is mine, so it doesn't concern you."
Arcueid sounds the same too.
.... She sounds the same, but I wish she wouldn't selfishly make me her object.
"Yes, this certainly does not concern me right now.
However, I do not think you can heal such wounds.
All you can do is watch him die.
Or—do you intend on making this young man one of your subordinates, Arcueid Brunestud?"
".... Do you think I would do such a thing?"
.... I can hear more than hostility in their voices.
There's so much tension I expect another fight to the death to start.
"Then please be quiet.
With those wounds, he cannot last long."
"—I really hate you.
You should just disappear before I kill you."
"I really hate you as well.
You don't need to tell me anything; I plan on leaving once his wounds are healed.
You yourself should disappear before I kill you.
I can't stand seeing you around."
.... A conversation full of tension and hostility.
My mind goes totally blank—

"—Har.. d."
Yeah, it's hard.
I feel something hard against my back, and it causes me to wake with a start.



"....."

"Huh?—Arcueid?"

I look around.

I'm in the park lying on a bench.

I look at the park's clock, and it's past one in the morning.

I guess it hasn't even been an hour since then.

"....."

Arcueid looks at me wordlessly.

.... Or maybe it's more like a glare.

"Ar.... cueid....?"



"....."

Arcueid doesn't respond.

I don't know why, but she seems really angry.

".... There."

For now, I stand up.

"Oh—my wound's healed."

I was so bloody and cut up, but there isn't a single scar anywhere.

There isn't any pain either, as if my fight with Nrvnqsr was all a dream.

—But, that was no dream.

Then, this—must be..

"Arcueid.

Don't tell me you used another part of Nrvnqsr's body again....?"



"No, unfortunately not.
It would've been a quick fix and you would've gotten stronger with it too.
But since you 'killed' Nrvnqsr completely, we can no longer use his body."
"Really?"
I guess you healed me in another way then.
.... Wow, I really am back to normal.
I don't feel pain or dizziness.
Just how in the world did you do it, Arcueid?"
"I don't know.
I wasn't the one who healed you."

She exclaims and looks away, displeased.
".....?"
It seems that's the reason.
But.. if she wasn't the one to heal me, then just who did—?

"—Ah."
There was.
There was another person.
Someone who helped me.
.... That woman in black garments who resembled Senpai far too much.
"Arcueid.. where is that person from before!?"



"....."
Still looking displeased, she looks away and ignores me.

"Hey, Arcueid!
 I'm asking you what happened to that person from before!"
 "I don't know.
 I didn't see anyone."
 She turns away and pretends not to know anything.
 "Hey—you just said you weren't the one who helped me.
 If it wasn't you, then who else could've done it?"



"Oh, enough already, I said I don't know, so I don't know!"
 Oh.
 It seems she's taking it out on me.
 "In the first place, why are you so interested in that person?
 It doesn't have anything to do with you, right?"
 "Idi—there is something.
 It was dark; I couldn't really tell, but that person looked like someone I
 know."



"—That's just a coincidence.
 Just forget about that person.
 If you talk about it again in front of me, I'll really get mad."

Ending quickly, she looks away.
 ".... Why are you so angry?"
 I should be the one getting angry.
 I just want to know who that person from before was, that's all.

".... Fine, I got it.
I won't ask anymore.
Besides, our partnership ends here anyway."



"Eh—?"
"Isn't it obvious?
We defeated the vampire who did as he pleased in this town, so my responsibility's gone now.
I have to get back home soon, or Akiha will yell at me.
I think it's about time to cut it off, Arcueid."



"Hm—you're right.
Now that you mention it, it's already this late, too."
Arcueid nods.

"Alright."
I also nod in understanding.
.... I nodded out of understanding, but..
there's still something lingering.
As if I regret parting with her.
"___"
That's ridiculous.
She's a vampire, and I'm a normal human.
If I associated with her anymore.... something will happen that I can't take back.

"... Bye, Arcueid."

Raising a hand, I step away.

"Um.

There were a lot of horrible things that happened, but it was pretty fun, too.
So—um, take care of yourself."



"Yeah.

It is late, and you have to get back home."



"Good night.

Till next time, Shiki!"

"....."

.... I think she just said something odd.

I try to say, "This is the last time, idiot," but I stop myself.

"... Well, there are a lot of problems, but she is quite an interesting person."

I speak as if trying to convince myself.

But, it's the truth.

So, even if it is just once in a while..

I feel like—if by some chance we got to meet again—it wouldn't be a bad thing.

I return to the mansion.

It's about two in the morning, and there's not a single light on in the mansion.

"... I have to sneak in."

I climb over the fence and enter the garden.

Fortunately, the door is open and I am able to enter inside without waking anyone.

sigh

I get back to my room and take a deep breath.

It's over.

I truly feel all the events these past three days, all the strange things, are actually finished.

"Well then—time for bed."

I sink my tired body into bed and fall asleep.

—Or at least, I intended to.

"....."

But, I just can't sleep.

My mind and body are tired, but I can't stop thinking about that figure and I can't sleep.

"... It couldn't... have been Senpai, but..."

But, she resembles Senpai so much.

I couldn't get a good look at her face, so I can't say for sure.

So—I think it's just my mistake.

"... Tomorrow... I'll ask her... at school."

Yeah—that's right.

I can see her at school any time, so I'll ask her then.

Then, she can just say, "That wasn't me," and it'll all be alright.

"—Alright, that's what I'll do."

It's decided.

Now, then—if I just read a boring book, I'll probably fall asleep.

"Immortality".

If those words are to be a grand reality, it would be one of the things which would define eternity.

But in reality, nothing in existence has reached that level.

For example, those vampires occasionally spoken of in legends are not immortal.

After all, they are defective because they require stealing from others to exist.

Furthermore, the fact that their supplemental parts have to be of the same species—in this case, generally referring to humans—means that they are not versatile at all.

They call themselves the transcendent race, but that is not evolution, it is degeneration.

That which cannot function independently in perpetuity cannot be called eternal.

It is presumptuous to call something immortal if it depends on others to halt its aging.

There already exists something close to perfection which can function independently in perpetuity.

It feeds on itself and multiplies.

It has no such thing as a lifespan.
 Old cells become food as nutrients and new cells are produced from it.
 Such as a jellyfish.
 However, it is perpetual only because it has no intelligence.
 If having no intelligence is fine, then it is no different from gaining eternity by death.
 If you want to be eternal living as a human, it is impossible by the method of immortality.
 Long years destroy the body and wear away flexibility of the mind.
 Immortality or eternity.
 I have no attachment to stained immortality.
 Persistently maintaining individuality makes eternity unattainable.
 Instead of gaining immortality as a single human,
 I chose the infinity in which I continue to exist eternally.

.... I see; certainly a different approach than I.
 However, with your method, will you not lose eternity at the extinction of the human race?
 Your method always requires an unborn child other than yourself.
 Yes, that is true.
 But if no other humans existed, I would not be able to confirm my own self.
 So—if humans become extinct, then continuing to live would be worthless.
 At that point, my immortality would end.
 I do not understand your theory.
 That is far from the thesis of eternity, Serpent.
 No, it is eternity.
 When a time comes to perish, everything should perish.
 If observers cease to exist, then that means everything is unchanging.
 The eternity I embody is temporary until that time occurs.
 I cannot turn everything into nothingness.
 Therefore, I will continue living until it happens.
 Although, I have found yet another amusement.
 Is that why you called me?
 Yes.
 I will show you a mystic method which allows you to slightly shape what is inside of you.
 There is someone I wish for you to catch using this achievement from the age of the gods, Chaos.

turn to **186**

92

In my dream, I'm staring at the moon.
I can't remember where I am or why I'm looking up at it.
Maybe I looked up into the night sky not wanting to see anything, and the moon happened to be there.
My back creaks.
Coursing through my veins is an image of coldness.
A solitary darkness that makes me dizzy.
A radiant moon that sickens my heart.
.... Strange.
The overwhelming coldness feels more like a sense of nostalgia.

"—Shiki-sama."

.... I can hear Hisui's voice mingling with the morning light.

"—Shiki-sama, it is time.

Please wake up."

Her inflectionless voice awakens me.

"——"

As soon as I wake up, terrible things enter my vision.

I get a headache like I was just shot in the head.

"Ah——"

I almost lose my just awakened consciousness.

Before I fade away completely, I quickly grab my glasses.



"Shiki-sama....?"

Are you not feeling well?"

".... No, I'm just a little tired from yesterday.

I'll be alright, so don't worry."

Lightly shaking my head, I clear my head of what I was seeing.

.... Last night, I forced myself to keep my promise with Arcueid, so my body isn't back to normal yet.

"Good morning, Hisui.

Thanks for coming to wake me up, as always."

Sitting up in bed, I do my best to smile naturally.



"No, this is my duty.
 There is no need for you to thank me, Shiki-sama."
 "Really, but I am grateful.
 You are infinitely better than an alarm clock."
 I stand up.
 It's not yet seven o'clock—about ten minutes earlier than I usually get up.
 "... Hmm, breakfast?
 I'll be there soon, so please go ahead of me."
 "Yes, I will wait for you in the sitting room."

Giving a bow, Hisui exits the room.
 —Well then.
 I'm still feeling a little sluggish, but it's not too bad to skip school.
 I'm sure after I eat the breakfast Kohaku-san prepared, I'll feel a lot better.

As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, and Hisui is waiting by the wall.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
 Did you sleep well last night?"
 Akiha greets me calmly as I enter the room.
 She doesn't know I left last night.
 Since she was so worried, I feel guilty for sneaking out.
 "... Yeah, good morning Akiha.
 You're up early today, too."



"No, I'm like always.... Nii-san?"
As if reading my mind, she looks directly at me.
"Um—Is there something on my face, Akiha?"



"No, that isn't it.... Nii-san, are you really alright?
You still do not look well, so if you are still sick, maybe it is better if you just
rest today—"
—Oh, that's it.
I relax, realizing she did not find out about last night.
"No, I'm really okay.
I'll be better sooner or later, so please don't look so worried."



".... Okay.
If you say so, Nii-san, then I will not say anything."

She goes quiet, still looking worried.
 "Hm, it's quite rare for you to be convinced this quickly.
 It's not like you."



"Hey, I'm always sensible.
 I only warn you because you're the one with the problems.
 So please do not blame me for your imperfections."
 She glares at me.
 "Oh, that's more like it.
 Hey, Hisui, doesn't it not feel like morning unless Akiha gets harsh?"



"....."

Is it because I suddenly called out to her or because she doesn't know what to say?

Hisui neither confirms nor denies my statement.

"See?

Look, Akiha, Hisui thinks so, too."

"Don't be foolish.

Hisui doesn't say anything because she is surprised."

Wrinkling her forehead in a frown, Akiha glares again.



"Also, I've always wanted to say this, but you rely on Hisui too much. You have been sleeping since yesterday, so it would have been fine if you woke up earlier. But you always wake up late. Are you slacking off because Hisui does not say anything?"
"Wha—You make it sound like I'm causing her trouble!"



"Not 'like', you are causing her trouble. Hey, don't you think so, Hisui?"
"....."
Hisui still doesn't say anything and stands there quietly.



"See?
Hisui says she thinks so, too."
"No way!"

She didn't say anything!"



"....."

Hisui is silent.

But, her silence feels like she's agreeing more with Akiha.

"..... Oogh."

I feel like it's now two against one.

"Shiki-san.

Breakfast is ready "

With great timing, Kohaku-san's voice echoes through the room.

"Um, I'm gonna go eat."

I quickly head towards the dining room.



"....."

I feel the silent pressure of the two behind me drilling into my back.

After breakfast, I head back to the sitting room.
Akiha isn't there, and Hisui is the only one standing.
"Huh?
Akiha left for school already?"



"Yes.
It is also time for you to go to school as well, Shiki-sama."
"Ah, it's already twenty after?
I guess I should get going soon."
.... To be honest, I still don't feel too good, but I'm sure I'll return to normal soon.
"Sorry, Hisui, but can you get my bag from my room?
I'm going to wash my face."
"As you wish."

After getting all my preparations done, I leave the mansion.
Holding my bag, Hisui sees me off at the entrance.
"I'll be going.
I'm not sure when I'll be back, but probably by dinner."



"Yes, I will be waiting."
She gives a silent bow.
.... There's a trace of uneasiness in her face.

"Hisui?
 Are you feeling sick?"
 "No—it is not me, but you do not appear well.
 I am unsure if it is a good idea to let you go."
 She speaks hesitantly.
 "I'm alright.
 I don't feel great, but just a little heavy.
 Geez, both you and Akiha like to worry a lot."
 "... Is that so?
 If it is just us, then that will be fine, but.."
 "... Geez.
 I'll come back early today and rest, so that should be good, right?
 I won't overdo anything, so don't look like that."
 "..... Yes.
 Forgive me, Shiki-sama."
 She still looks very worried.
 "I'm off.
 I'll be better by the time I get back, so please relax."



"Ah—Shiki-sama—"

I ignore her and leave the mansion.
 The image of Hisui watching me uneasily remains in my head.

I head towards school.
 My feet are heavy and it feels like I'm in another person's body as I head down the hill.
 It's probably just the weariness from last night.
 Even though I thought I would recover right away, the sluggishness doesn't fade.

It's ten minutes until eight.
 The school gate is flooded with arriving students.
 "—Ah."
 By the gate, I see a familiar figure.
 "... Ciel.. Senpai."

It's a completely normal, morning scene.
But, what I saw that time—

If it wasn't for that, it would be a normal morning.
"_____"

Not even knowing what I plan on doing, I chase after Senpai.

"Senpai!"
I call after her.



"Oh, good morning, Tohno-kun.
It's strange meeting you out here."
"... Yeah, I saw your figure from behind, so I ran after you, Senpai.
Um... there was something I wanted to ask."
I sneak a look at her face.
"Yes, what is it?"
She faces me with her usual, gentle smile.
"... Uh Senpai.
Two nights ago, were you near my house?
In a black coat and a skirt flowing in the wind."



"....?"
What are you talking about?"
"Um....!
well—yeah, the high-laced boots suited you."

I was kind of fascinated, you looked, really cool."



..."Huh?" Senpai tilts her head.
She frowns like she doesn't understand my words completely, and then denies it.



"Um, I don't quite understand, but you're saying that I was near your house two nights ago, looking like that?"

"Yeah.
Senpai, that was you, right?"



"No way.
Tohno-kun, are you saying I look like I really have that much free time?"
—Senpai is really angry.
She can't be playing dumb or lying.
"Ah—No, that's not it, but I just.... saw someone that looked like you in park

last night, so—"
 Senpai gives a sigh.



"Tohno-kun, that wasn't me.
 I don't have that kind of hobby."
 "Ah—Yeah, I know.
 I just wanted to ask."
 Certainly after having her say that, she is right.
 Ciel-senpai and the person that night aren't related at all.
 In the first place, Senpai's just a normal person, and if she was actually there—
 she had to have seen me fight that bandaged guy with my knife.
 If she saw such a gruesome scene, there'd be no way she could talk with me
 normally like this.
 "... Sorry, please forget about it.
 I guess it was just someone else."



"That's fine, but.... did that person really look like me?
 That weird person?"
 "Well, I'm not too sure.
 It was dark, and far away..... huh?"
 Yeah, it was far and I couldn't make out her face.
 So why did I think it looked like Senpai....?
 "... Hmm.. Maybe there is something wrong with me."
 I cross my arms and think.

Then, the ten minute bell rings.
"—Crap, we'll be late.
Bye, Senpai, see you later!"

I dash into my classroom.
It's still five minutes before class, so it's very noisy inside.
"Arihiko, isn't here."
Knowing him, he'll probably come in around second period.

Lunch time.
It looks like Arihiko's not coming.
.... Inui Arihiko and Yumizuka Satsuki are the two people absent today.
Yumizuka Satsuki has caught a cold or something and she will be absent for a while.
".... Senpai doesn't seem to be coming too, so I guess I'll eat by myself."
I say that, but I'm not hungry.

.... What is it?
I didn't feel so good to begin with, but after coming to school, I feel a lot worse.
It's not just my body feeling heavy.
The scar on my chest is irritating; it's an annoying sensation.
".... Maybe I shouldn't have come to school."
.... For a brief moment, I see the worrying faces of Hisui and Akiha in my mind.
Maybe the fact that I ignored Akiha's wishes for me to rest last night and instead went to see Arcueid might've caused this.
Being worn out by just sitting, I start to feel a strange uneasiness.

turn to ??

I feel the morning sunlight.
I keep my eyes closed as I try to fall asleep again, but the gentle sunlight keeps urging me to open my eyes.
—Slowly, I start to awaken.
A quiet atmosphere.
The air is comfortably cold, and yet it feels gentle.
I guess the weather will be great today.
—Then, I should get up and go to school.
That's right, I have to go to school.
The past three days, my life was in chaos and it made me forget I was a student.

"...."

I wake up.
I'm lying on my bed, and my glasses are on the bedside.
I put on my glasses and look around.

The sunlight streams so strongly through the window, I almost expect to hear it pouring through.

"—"

I take a quiet breath.
I fill my lungs with fresh air, and it feels like my chest is purified.
I hear the clock ticking.
Small birds chirp in the woods outside.
I stay on my warm bed, aimlessly feeling the relaxed passage of time.
—Ahh, I'm back.
Even though there's nothing special about this morning,
Right now—I feel like there's something almost holy about it.
"—Thank goodness."
It really is good.
Not the fact that I'm alive, nor that I was able to do something about that black vampire.
But that even though I was in such a world, I was able to return to my normal days and feel happy about this morning.
—And then.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"Uwaaaa!"

I jump up in my bed.

Now that I look, Hisui is standing quietly at the side of my bed.

"Hi-HiHi-Hisui—"

"... Please excuse me, Shiki-sama, but since you did not notice, I spoke."

"Ah—well, I mean, I'm sorry, too."

Hisui respectfully bows to me.

—Sh-she surprised me.

My heart is still pounding rapidly.

"—Huh?"

But it's still before seven o'clock, Hisui."

"Yes.

It is a bit earlier than your usual waking time, Shiki-sama."

"Well, yes—then why are you here, Hisui?"

"I came to wake you up.

Akiha-sama wants to know what have you been doing these last two days so she wanted me to bring you no matter what."

"—Ah."

.... I forgot.

Come to think of it, I skipped school last Saturday and was with Arcueid through all of Sunday.

"... Don't tell me, Akiha's angry..?"

"I do not know.

Please confirm for yourself, Shiki-sama."

—Hisui's voice sounds very cold.

"... Wait a minute.

Before that, why am I sleeping in my room....?"

"Shiki-sama, you returned around two o'clock in the morning.

Nee-san found you sleeping in the doorway and carried you up to your room."

"Wha——"

.... My mouth hangs open.

That's bad—Not contacting anyone for two days, returning in the middle of the night, and sleeping by the doorway.

I'm acting like a drunk!

"—That woman—treating me like some sort of cat—"

Arcueid's face flashes in my mind.

.... But, maybe I do have to be thankful for her carrying me as far as the entrance.

"—Alright.

I'll head down immediately.

Umm.. and, if possible, I'd be happy if you tried to calm her down as much as possible."



"—I refuse."

She answers.

.... Maybe Hisui might be also angry at me.

"—"

Ugh, one problem after another?

The owner of this mansion is Akiha, so does this mean that if Akiha's angry, no one is there to defend me?

Well, time to get up.

I can't do anything staying in bed.

"Ts.....!"

O—ow.

As soon as I stand, pain shoots throughout my entire body.

"—Last night's—wounds?"

.... Oh yeah.

If there's anything to be surprised about, it's the fact I'm still alive.

Even though I was that wounded and bloody, I still managed to wake up normally.

It just isn't natural.



"Shiki-sama, those are—"

.... That's rare.

Hisui widens her eyes and looks at me.

"What, is there something wro—"

I look down at my body.

And—

"Wha, what is this....!?"

A pattern of red spots covers my pajamas everywhere.

Of course this design wasn't ever here; it's my blood soaking through everywhere.

"___"

Hisui suppresses her words.

—I'm thankful.

It lets me calm down.

.... The reason for the bleeding is clear.

But since I can't tell her why, I have to lie to make her not worry.

"Shiki-sama, your body—"

".... I'm fine, nothing hurts.

See, didn't I come back late at night?

Truth is, I was in a fight, and that's why I came home late.

These wounds are from that fight, and they're just scratches, so don't worry about them."

"___"

Hisui's eyes implore me, saying, "Please do not tell lies."

But from her standpoint, she probably can't ask me any further.

.... I feel sorry, but I'll have to stick with my lie.

"Um, so could you please not tell Akiha about this?

She would get really mad if she heard about me getting in fights."



"—Yes, I understand.
Definitely, Akiha-sama will not find out."
Hisui nods.
"Thanks.
Ah, I have another request.
Do you have any disinfectant?
I have a lot of scrapes all over my body so I want to take care of them."



"Ah—Yes, I will bring some right away."

"....?"
What is it?
She looks really uncomfortable all of a sudden.
In any case, I'm glad she went to get me some disinfectant.
Once she brings it here, I can take care of it by myself.
It's only slight pain, so anything that hides the blood is good.



"Thanks for waiting "

The one who opens the door and walks in isn't Hisui, but Kohaku-san.
In her hand, she carries a box with a red cross on it.

"Huh, Kohaku-san—?"



"Yes, I heard the situation from Hisui-chan.
Shiki-san, you went out and got in a fight?"

"Ah... no, not really, I—"

I can't come up with any other explanation.



"Geez, you shouldn't be doing those things.

It's okay to be naughty, but you shouldn't be violent.

It's just painful for the one doing it and the one receiving it."

Painful for the one hitting and the one getting hit, huh.

Kohaku-san's words hit me pretty heavily.

"... Yeah.
That's.. right.
Hitting.. is only painful."



"Isn't it?
I am disappointed you have those wounds.
No matter what the situation was.. I will be disappointed in you if you keep on
doing these kinds of things, Shiki-san."
Her words penetrate sharply into my chest.
—Deep inside my heart, I want to apologize.
Sorry, Kohaku-san.
I probably—did numerous things to make her disappointed in me.
"—Yeah, I'm an idiot and I regret it.
I won't ever do it again."
"As long as you understand, then that is fine.
I'm going to examine your wounds, so please take off your clothes."

"—Eh?"
Kohaku-san pads over and grabs my shirt.
She's telling me to get naked here.
"W-Wait!
You don't have to go that far.
I just wanted to put a little disinfectant on a few scrapes, that's all!"



"What are you saying?"

Even if you say you only have a few scratches, they don't look that minor."

"No, I'm fine.

I can do it by myself."

"That won't do.

The ones on your back—"

Seeing the wounds on my back, Kohaku-san gasps.



"—How terrible.

Did you get into a fight with a Doberman, Shiki-san?"

".... Yeah.

Well, something like that."

"——"

Kohaku-san sighs in amazement.

"Geez, now I really can't let you handle it, Shiki-san.

Come on, please hurry up and take off your clothes.

With your clothing on, I can't take care of you!"

"No, I said I can do it myself!

They aren't a big deal, I don't need to be naked....!"



"—I see.

You must be embarrassed, Shiki-san."

With a smile, she goes ahead and tries to remove my pajamas anyway.

"I am already used to seeing your body, Shiki-san.

Please just take off your clothing."

".... 'Used to', Kohaku-san?"

"I have already changed your clothing once so I know every detail of your body."

"W-W-Wha?"

"Let's go, we haven't much time.

If you take too long, Akiha-sama will notice."

—Ugh.

I can't argue with that.

But, to get naked in front of Kohaku-san, it's....



".... I guess it can't be helped.

Then, I will only examine your upper body.

This way, there isn't anything to be embarrassed about, right?"

Even that's embarrassing, but I guess that's the best compromise.

"..... I guess so.

Then, please do."

I sit down on my bed and take off my shirt.

Kohaku-san expertly tends to my wounds.

She carefully tends the wounds on my arms, shoulders and back.

The disinfectant sinks into the wounds.

They sink in, but compared to my occasional dizziness or the pain from my old scar, it's nothing.

While applying the disinfectant,



"Wow, you really are a boy."

Kohaku-san says happily, so it probably helped me to put up with all the pain.



"Now we have to stick on this compress patch.
It may rub off, so let's bandage it."
She puts a compress over my bruised chest and wraps a bandage around it.



"All finished.
Are you sure you don't want me to do your legs?"
"Yeah, I can do the rest.
.... Thanks, Kohaku-san.
I know you're busy and all."
"No, no.
Please do not worry about it.
Then I'll be going back to the kitchen.
When you are finished, please come to the dining room, okay?"

Kohaku-san walks to the door.
"Ah, Kohaku-san."



"Yes?"

"Um—sorry.

Like you said, fighting is just stupid.

It's just a big bother, and nothing good ever comes from it."

"——"

Kohaku-san looks at me in amazement and then suddenly starts to laugh happily.



"I understand.

I will let it go this time, okay?"

She happily says that and exits the room quietly.

—Alright, I'm here.

Now only a door separates me from the sitting room where Akiha awaits.

No matter what the circumstance was, there's no excuse for skipping school and not coming home for two days.

Now—

I can't explain the circumstances, so I'll at least apologize. turn to **94**

I can't explain the circumstances, so I'll somehow lie about it. turn to **95**

No, I should tell the truth. turn to **96**

94

".... That's right.
I think that's the best choice."
I don't think Akiha will understand about non-humans like Arcueid and Nrvn-
qsr, and since I can't tell the truth, I should at least sincerely apologize.
"—Alright, let's go."
Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Good morning, Nii-san."
Her gaze is telling me, "I am angry."
"Um, uh.... Morning, Akiha."
"Let's dispense with greetings.
Please sit there.
I wish to speak with you, Nii-san."

"___"

Her words are so forceful, I can't say no.
I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from her.



"Nii-san.
This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"
"—Ugh."

Despite her polite language, Akiha's words are unmistakably a threat.

But, her Onii-chan cannot tell her such a story.

"About that, Akiha."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you."

Crash.

The teacup that Akiha was holding falls to the table.

Rather, I think she dropped it intentionally.



-2 0

"Akiha-sama—"



-2 0



"Oh, I'm sorry, Hisui."

Would you please clean it up?"

Hisui silently cleans up the spilled tea and the shards of the (very expensive-looking) teacup.

I uneasily watch her do so while Akiha is glaring at me.

Once done cleaning, Hisui goes to the kitchen.



"—Then, Nii-san."

".... Yes?"

"Could I ask you again?"

Akiha doesn't give up.

I can feel her drive to get the story out of me no matter what.

But still, I don't think I can tell her about it.

Of course not just for my sake, but hers as well.

".... No.

No matter how many times you ask me, I can't tell you.

I feel sorry that I made you worry, but I can't tell you about it."



"—Even though you are sorry, you can't tell me, Nii-san."

"That's right.

I'm sorry I haven't contacted you and for not being able to talk about it.

But I haven't done anything wrong the past two days.

.... I don't even want to think that was a wrong thing to do."

—That's right.

Even these past two days were simply kill or be killed—I want to believe it was the right thing to do.

I did it to help Arcueid, but most of all.. I do not regret killing that cannibalistic monster.

At least, there will be no more victims killed by having their blood drained.

"—I'm sorry, Akiha.

I'm sorry to make you worry, but please don't ask me anymore."



"___"

Akiha stares at my eyes.

For a while, she stays like that.

"... I understand.

Thinking about it, you must have your reasons, so I won't press you on this anymore, Nii-san."

"... I'm sorry.

Thanks for understanding."



"___"

turn to **97**

Well, I just have to deceive her somehow.
 I don't think Akiha will understand about non-humans like Arcueid and Nrvn-
 qsr, so I'll have to minimize my lying without telling the truth.
 "—Alright, let's go."
 Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Good morning, Nii-san."
 Her gaze is telling me, "I am angry."
 "Um, uh.... Morning, Akiha."
 "Let's dispense with greetings.
 Please sit there.
 I wish to speak with you, Nii-san."
 "——"
 Her words are so forceful, I can't say no.
 I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from Akiha.
 "Nii-san.
 This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"
 "—Ugh."
 Despite her polite language, Akiha's words are unmistakably a threat.
 But, her Onii-chan cannot tell her such a story.
 "About that, Akiha."



"Yes, what is it?"

"The truth is, I ran into a minor acquaintance of mine and I showed that person around the city."



"Oh?"

A minor acquaintance?"

"Yeah, I got to know the person just recently, and we met just outside of school. I was asked to keep this acquaintance company until Sunday, so—"

"So you skipped school and stayed away from home without even notifying me or asking permission."

.... Akiha's gaze is extremely frigid.

She seems even more shocked than angry.

"....."

"....."

I remain quiet as Akiha stares at me wordlessly.



"And, who was it?"
"Eh?"



"I asked who this acquaintance of yours is."
She looks at me directly in the eye.
I can feel her thinking, "I will not be deceived".
"-Well, I-"
"If you can't tell me, that means you feel guilty about it, Nii-san."
Her gaze shoots right through me.
I get the feeling she'll attack me more if I look away, so I stare back at her.
.... Well, this is totally random, but..
She does not remind me of the Akiha from back then.
Her stretched back, her perfect posture, her unwavering eyes.
Perhaps this is imprudent, but I honestly think she has become very beautiful.
"You know, Akiha."



"What?"

"Your eyebrows are pretty thick."



"——!?"

Bam!

Akiha's leg smacks the table as she jumps up.

"..... Ah."

How do I say this—she's surprisingly surprised?

".... I don't get you at all.

That wasn't something to be surprised about."

"——"

With a deep breath, Akiha slumps her shoulders.



"Nii-san, it seems like you do not wish to answer me seriously."

".... That's not right.

Honestly, I won't lie to you.
It's just that I have a lot of things I can't say to you."



"Geez.
Really, ever since we were small I was never able to tell if you were an honest
or dishonest person, Nii-san."
"... Really?
I don't really remember how I was when I was small."



"You don't have to remember.
But, I haven't changed either.
Pressing you like this even when I know how it will turn out.. maybe I haven't
grown up at all."

turn to **97**

96

—I'll try telling the truth.

I don't want to lie to Akiha, and if I explain everything sincerely, Akiha may understand.

.... Well, the possibility of that is like winning a lottery.

"—Alright, let's go."

Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Good morning, Nii-san."

Her gaze is telling me, "I am angry."

"Yo, morning, Akiha."

A defiant person is strong.

I give a cheerful greeting to Akiha's bullying gaze.



"—"

She might be confused with my cheerfulness, as she just stares at me.



"Nii-san, let's dispense with the greetings.
Please sit here; I wish to speak with you."
"Sure.
Let's keep it short though."
I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from Akiha.



"Well then, Nii-san.
This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"
"—Hm."
.... I knew it.
Since I left the house for two days, there's no excuse.
Time to honestly tell her all about Arcueid and these past two days.
"About that, Akiha."
"Yes, what is it, Nii-san?"
"These past two days, I was hunting a vampire.
You know about the recent killings, right?
They were the work of a vampire, so I helped the 'good vampire' I met recently,
and I fought with the 'bad vampire'."
—Like that, I explain concisely.



"Wha——"

Akiha is taken completely by surprise.

.... Well, I guess it is a natural reaction.

In her head, she's probably thinking I'm making a fool of her, and anytime in the next instant,



"Are you making a fool out of me, Nii-san!!!!???"

She'll shout something like that to me—



"....."

..... Huh?

She seems upset, but she doesn't say anything.

"Um.... Akiha?"



"... Nii-san, is this some sort of a bad joke?"

"—Uh.."

Akiha looks at me quietly, like she was seeing directly into my heart.

"No... well, how should I put this.."



"A joke, right?"

"... Well, I know it sounds like one, but.."



"—No, it has to be a joke.

So please do not say such things in the future, even if it is a joke."

She stares at me, more uneasy than angry.

Since her stare looks so serious,

"..... Yeah."

I can only nod to her.

turn to **97**



"I understand.

Then, I will no longer ask about this.

But, please refrain from doing anything like this ever again.

Nii-san, you are the eldest son of the Tohno family; if you do not understand your position better, it will be very troubling."

"—Hey, that has nothing to do with this.

Besides, you're the successor to the Tohno family, so it doesn't really matter what I do.

If you're so worried about the future of the Tohno family, you should go find a husband appropriate for the Tohno household."



"___"

....?

For some reason, Akiha descends into silence.

"What's wrong?"

Are you feeling alright, Akiha?"



"—It's nothing.

If you have enough time to worry about me, please pay more attention to yourself.

You have your chronic anemia to worry about, Nii-san."

"..... Hmph."

.... Well, it is true that I frequently collapse from anemia.

"Anyway, please do not leave the mansion by yourself often.

Even without that, the city is dangerous recently.

Someone like you, who meanders about in a daze is just asking to be attacked by that serial killer."

"Serial killer?—Oh, those serial killings."

Those serial killings where nine victims have been found.

Their bodies were all drained of blood, so they call it the modern day vampire, but—

"Oh, that's okay.

Those incidents, they won't ever happen again."



"—Huh?"

"It means the vampire isn't around anymore.

That killer—is caught already."

"Is that so....?"

Nii-san, how do you know about that?"

"Well, I just happened to see it, but for sure, such things will not happen again."

.... Yeah, at least there won't be any more people killed by Nrvnqsr.

These past two days spent with Arcueid.. so many things happened I really can't say just what is right and what is wrong.
But, the simple truth remains—I can say it was all for the best.



"Nii-san—?
What happened?
You suddenly seem very happy."
Akiha looks strangely at my face.
"It's nothing.
I just feel that it's finally, finally over."
A smile unconsciously creeps over my lips as I answer.

It's half past seven.
Akiha left twenty minutes earlier than me, by car!
After eating Kohaku-san's delicious breakfast, I decide to head for school.

Hisui walks with me to the gate, carrying my bag.
"Well, I'll be going.
Thanks for seeing me off, Hisui."
Hisui wordlessly hands me my bag.



"Shiki-sama, around what time will you be returning?"
"You don't trust me either?"
It's okay.
I'll definitely be back in the afternoon."

"—I understand.
Then please be careful on your way."
Hisui bows deeply.
Feeling a bit embarrassed about it, I leave the mansion's gate.

At the intersection there are only the figures of my fellow high school students.
No young woman sitting on the guardrail like that one time.
"—Well, of course."
I probably won't ever see her again.
First of all, her goal was to execute the vampire, and with Nrvnqsr gone, there's no reason for her to stay around here any longer.
—Just a little bit, in my chest.
Things like regret.. and lingering affection.
It is true she only brought trouble, but even still... it was fun being with her.
"... What, am I stupid?"
I almost got killed.. What part of that would make me feel lingering affection?
The wounds from last night still hurt.
.... Remember back to when you almost became Nrvnqsr's food.
You certainly don't want something like that to ever happen again.

The school bell rings.
"—Crap, I'll be late."
Shaking off my idle thoughts, I run to the school gate.

I fly into my classroom.
It's still five minutes before class, so it's very noisy inside.
"—Whew."
I take a breath and head to my seat.
With this much time left, I didn't even need to run at all.
"Yo, Duke of Delinquency."
"....."
From behind, I hear the voice I never look forward to.



"What's going on, Tohno?"

I never heard you were skipping class.
 It's a lot of trouble.
 You have to tell me when you skip school and go play!"
 Arihiko says those preposterous words with an unbelievably happy expression.
 "... Why should I have to tell you when I don't go to school?"



"Isn't it obvious?
 When you don't show, neither does Senpai, so it's bad unless I think of something ahead of time."
 What's bad for this guy?
 "But seriously—What happened?
 Since middle school, you've had anemia, but never skipped school.
 Well, you did that cool trick several times, leaving as soon as you arrived."
 "It's kind of like that.
 I made it to the intersection and felt bad, so I went back home."
 "Hmmm.. Both you and Yumizuka seem to be acting like bad students lately."
 "—Well, I'm guilty as charged, but.... is something wrong with Yumizuka-san?"
 "Her?
 She's been absent lately.
 She was always such an honor student, so I think she might have been stressed out.
 But I bet she can't call a raise 'cause she has a bad hand."
 "....."
 Arihiko's words are always.. very unique.

The homeroom chime rings out.
 "Well, I'm off.
 Since you skipped Saturday, make sure you study hard today."
 Arihiko leaves the room quickly.
 In other words, he's going to skip class today.

Morning classes end.
 With the bell announcing lunchtime, half the people in the classroom clear out.
 "... Well then, what should I do?"
 Arihiko isn't here, so I should take my time and eat lunch.



"Oh?
Tohno-kun, you're by yourself?"
"Yeah—Senpai, did you come here to eat?"



"Yes, I thought I would eat with everyone so I hurried over here, but—"
She stares.
Without any warning, she looks at my face intently.

I don't know what she's thinking, but she suddenly draws close to me.
"Hey—Se, Senpai...?"
She's right next to me.
Almost embracing distance.
Something would be wrong with my heart if it wasn't beating quickly.



"_____"

Senpai doesn't say anything.
She only stands right next to me—and sniffs.

"—Huh?"

.... What is she doing?
Senpai then gets away.

".... Um, Senpai?"



"Tohno-kun, did something happen?"
She asks me with a serious look.
To be blunt, I don't know what's going on.
"Something.... uh, like what?"



"I don't know.
I don't know, that's why I'm asking."
She looks up at me as if she was angry.
"Nothing—I'm just as always.
Do.. do I seem strange today?"



"Hmmm, I'm not sure either.
I just thought so, so perhaps I was just imagining things."
".....?"
I tilt my head in confusion.



"Well, shall we get lunch?
You are eating at the cafeteria today, right Tohno-kun?
If we don't hurry, the seats will all be taken."
"Ah, yeah.
You're eating at the cafeteria too, Senpai?"
"Yes, I want to eat something good today."
She grins and pulls me by the hand as she starts walking.

In the end, I talk with Senpai about the athletic festival in two weeks and the culture festival shortly thereafter over lunch.
.... To tell the truth, Senpai saying, "I want to eat something good," and ordering curry leaves more of an impression in my mind than what we talked about.

Classes end and school is over.
Well, what should I do now?—

Go into the city and look for her.	turn to 98
Space out in the classroom.	turn to 99
Just return to the mansion and rest.	turn to 100

98

I go out in town aimlessly.
Why the heck am I walking around here for no reason?



"—Ah."

It's just a mistake.
There's no way she'll still be around, and it's not like I have any reason to talk to her.
So why did I think it was her?
Why—am I walking around town pointlessly like this?
".... I have to go back to the mansion."
I shake my head as if trying to clear my head of drunkenness and turn away from the nonexistent illusion of Arcueid.

setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **101**

99

..... *sigh*

I don't feel like going back to the mansion, so I kill time spacing out in the classroom.

Outside, the sun is setting.

I can hear the voices of those practicing in athletic clubs; I'm quite comfortable with sitting at my desk peacefully.

It's probably because yesterday and the day before were out of some extraordinary world.

—And then,



"Good.

I see you're still here, Tohno-kun."

Senpai's face suddenly comes into view.

"Hm?

Senpai....?

What makes you come down to a second year classroom?

Is there something special you had in mind?"



"Yes, I was wondering if you were still here, so I came to take a look."

Senpai says something that makes me happy.

"Yes, I'm here.. What is it?"

"There is something I forgot to say during lunch.

I was thinking of waiting until tomorrow, but I thought I should just say it as

soon as possible."
"... Hm.
Something you forgot to say?"



"Yes.
Tohno-kun, you seem to be going out at night lately, so I wanted to warn you.
There have been a lot of dangerous things going on, so you shouldn't stay out
too late."
"Ah—um, well...."
....?
How does Senpai know that?
Do I look pale from a lack of sleep?
Or, maybe she saw me walking around at night....?
"Well Tohno-kun, I let you know.
You shouldn't involve yourself in dangerous things."

As quickly as she arrived, Senpai disappears like a gust of wind.

After spending an hour doing nothing in the classroom, I decide to go home.
It's past five o'clock.
If I'm too late, Hisui will worry, so I should head back soon—

turn to **101**

100

.... Yeah.

I would feel bad if I kept causing trouble for Hisui and Kohaku-san.

Since I wasn't able to go home for the past few days, I should at least go straight home today.

turn to **101**

101

I head up the road and draw near the mansion.
 After a little more walking, I see Hisui standing by herself at the front gate.
 "....?"
 I wonder what Hisui is doing?"
 Tilting my head to the side, I head for the front gate.
 Hisui realizes I'm here and bows her head.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
 "—Ah, yeah—thanks, Hisui."
 I can barely reply since I'm bewildered by the respectfulness of it all.
 "Um—were you waiting for me to come home?"
 "Yes.
 Greeting the master is a servant's duty."
 Answering very matter-of-factly, she doesn't even bat an eyelash.
 "Um, Hisui, I'm truly happy you waited to greet me, but there's really no need to wait outside.
 I'll come back on my own, so you can just greet me whenever you realize I'm back."



"—"
 Hisui's face clouds slightly.
 Oh, maybe..
 Maybe she was waiting for me to return like this on Saturday and Sunday.

"—Hisui, um—"



"I understand.

Starting from tomorrow, I will await your return in the lobby."

Hisui gives a quick bow and opens the mansion gate.

Hisui turns around as she does so.

..... *sigh*

For some reason, the atmosphere isn't exactly conducive to conversation.

Hisui closes the gate after I pass through, then she silently walks to the entrance to open the door and leads me into the lobby.

I get to my room.

Akiha isn't back yet from her lessons, Kohaku-san is preparing dinner, and Hisui is cleaning the mansion.

"—Geez, there's nothing to do."

Well, there's quite a mountain of studying, reviewing, and memorizing a student like me has to do.

But, I just don't feel like doing anything.

Suddenly, Arcueid's face flashes in my mind.

Whether good or bad, it's probably just a reaction to the crazy two days I just had.

Perhaps spacing out here in my room will be good, giving my mind and heart a break.

After eating dinner by myself in the large dining room, Kohaku-san treats my wounds and I go back to my room.

Akiha didn't make it back in time for dinner.

Her lesson was apparently going to last a while, so she was going to eat away from home.

It's past ten at night now.

It's a bit too early, but since I'm exhausted, I should sleep early tonight—
turn to **102**

102

..... My body is exhausted.
 But, I can't fall into a deep sleep.
 The wounds all around my body sting and wake up my mind as it tries to sleep.
 I look at the clock as I lie in bed.
 It's past three o'clock in the morning—already five hours of unsatisfactory rest.
 "..... Damn it, I can't sleep."
 Not being able to sleep when I want to.. it's like torture.
 Tick, tick, tick.
 The sound of the clock's second hand gets on my nerves.
 Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, creak, tick, tick, tick, tick—
 "Eh-?"
 I think I heard something mixed in with the ticking.
 It sounded like the door opening, but who would be coming at this hour?
 Tap, tap, tap.
 No, there's no mistake.
 Someone came into the room and is coming near me.
 "___"
 Who is it?
 If someone was to come this late at night, it would be—
 if cleared != 0
 turn to **103**

It might be Arcueid. turn to **104**

It might be Ciel-Senpai. turn to **105**

It might be Akiha. turn to **106**

103

It might be Arcueid.	turn to 104
It might be Ciel-Senpai.	turn to 105
It might be Akiha.	turn to 106
It might be Hisui.	turn to 107
It might be Kohaku-san.	turn to 108

104

"Hey—Shiki, wake up."
 I hear a voice by my ear.
 Last night—the voice I heard until right before I slept.. the voice I can't forget.

"Ar.... cueid—?"
 I sit up in bed and look around the unlit room.



"Good evening.
 I'm glad you seem well."
 Arcueid greets me with smiling eyes.
 "Er, good evening—?"
 —Why did you come here?
 "Is it strange for me to be here?"
 "Strange?"
 Of course it—"
 —Well, maybe not..
 Come to think of it, the night is her time, so I guess it isn't strange for her to be anywhere.
 "Aren't you the one acting strange, Shiki?
 I came all the way here to see you, and you're just lying there."
 "—Yeah, hold—on."
 I get out of bed and stand up.



—But,
my body starts to tilt, and I fall back down on the bed.
"Huh—?"
Something is strange.
Blood wells in the back of my head and my vision blurs.
Something's wrong—
"Goodness, Shiki."
Arcueid draws closer.

She stands before me, and her red eyes..
"You can't do anything like that, right?
Come on, stand up and touch me.
I want to feel your fingers on my body."
.... I can hear her voice right by my ear.
—What's going on with me?
She's right in front of me, but I can't stare at her face.
Something is wrong.
Though I try to look at her face, my eyes won't move.
Her well-shaped, soft-looking breasts.
Her delicately curved, embraceable hips.
Her luscious red lips.
It all lets me feel her feminine nature, and as a man, I am transfixed.
"Hey—"
I get dizzy.
Something is—-weird.
I can hardly breathe; my mind is blank.
It feels as if my heart has stopped.
"—I see.
You can't move by yourself, huh?"
I can hear her voice by my ear.
Casually,
Arcueid wraps both arms around me as I sit frozen on the bed.
"Wha—-"
Thump.
Even though my heart feels like it stopped, a beating resonates deep inside my chest.
"Your heart is pounding like it's going to break, Shiki."
Her voice pulls at my eardrums.
No, in reality—her luscious lips are nibbling on my ear.
"Ah.....!"
She's just nibbling on my ear.
That's all she's doing,
but a shockwave runs through me.
"Ar.... cueid...."
I try to move my arms to push her away.
.... but I can't even lift a single finger.

"Ah... gu—"

My body won't move.

The instant I realize this, my breathing quickens.

I can't understand why my body won't move.

Just the fact that my body won't move in this situation seems so indecent—
that it takes my reasoning and sets it on fire.

"Oh?—I see.

Shiki, you want me."

Arcueid giggles.

The voice moves from my ear to the side of my neck.

Her light breathing moves along my throat.

With a small, rasping sound, she licks my neck.

—As if to taste me.

"Erh.....!"

Thump.

My heart is shattering.

My pulsing blood and my blank mind.

The coolness of Arcueid's hands on my back.

The soft pressure of her breasts pressing against my chest.

Her freezing tongue tracing the lines of my throat.

All of it destroys what reason I have left.

"... Don't.. be stupid.. why would I—I be turned on by you?"

"Mmm.. liar.

You're so excited."

Her breathing moves from my neck and travels down to my chest.

—My breathing is heavy.

I want to get away.

But, more than that, I want to take her.

Golden hair.

Red eyes.

White Skin.

Slender fingers.

Soft arms.

What—a lustful body.

My mind is screaming that I want to taste her from the top of her head all the
way down to her toes.

"G....."

What is this?

I can still think rationally, but—my mind is assailed by animalistic excitement—
-

"Ha... gh...!"

I put all of my concentration into lifting my arm.

But it doesn't move.

My body is reacting to her breathing, and I can't move it.

—I can't believe it.

More than being bound by something I can see,

Just the fact that her breathing is binding me gets me so excited, it practically makes me come.

"—Stop.... if you keep doing this.. it'll be.. bad—"

"That's funny, Shiki.

Your body doesn't agree with what your lips are saying.

You've gotten so stiff down here—we better do something about it."

Her hands move away from my back.

And then,

her lovely white fingers descend below my waist.

Finding my already erect shaft.

"Sto—"

"You're in pain, right?

It's okay, you don't have to hold back.

I'll calm it down—"

Her breath hits my hard shaft.

Her slender fingers wrap themselves around me.

"Ga—!"

Just that causes my body to jump.

My back arches and I fall back on the bed.

"I-Idiot!

What are you thinking...!?"

I manage to shout as I lie on my back.

"———"

Arcueid looks down on me without saying anything.

.... And then, she quietly removes the last of her clothes.

Staring at me with her unfocused red eyes, a soft,

"Shiki, you look delicious,"

escapes her lips.

"——!"

I strain with all my might to rise from the bed.

But I still can't move a finger.

She climbs onto the bed and her lush, naked body slowly eases down to press against mine.

Thump.

My blood stirs harder.

Just like when I get dizzy, I can't think clearly.

But this time,

I don't lose consciousness.

"Amazing—I didn't know you could get this hard."

.... Her fingers teasingly caress me.

It's more like touching than gripping, until the sensations strengthen—urging me to hurry, hurry, hurry!

"Can you feel it—?"

You're dripping so much down here, Shiki, it's almost as if you're crying."

"How cute," she says, smiling.
 Her lips move down to plant a warm, soft kiss directly on the head.
 "—!"
 I frantically hold back the cry threatening to escape my lips.
 Arcueid looks up at me, her eyes dancing with unbridled glee.
 "Can't you just be honest?
 If you're going to be like this, Shiki, I'll have to tease you a little more."
 "Wha—what are you—m....!"
 I stifle my voice once again.
 Just the touch of her fingertips overloads my senses.
 Then.. the wet sensation of her tongue.
 Sliding along my length.
 As if to drench my parched shaft, a line of saliva runs from her mouth.
 Her golden hair sways, partially concealing her face.
 All I feel is guilt and hesitation.. and the pleasure which starts to eclipse it.
 "K—!"
 I start to soar even higher.
 My grotesque shaft has hardened into an offensive, glistening pillar.
 Her white fingers grip it.
 Embrace it.
 Gliding noisily up and down, driving me crazy.
 "Ha, ah.....!"
 "Hehe.... your voice is very hot.
 I was always thinking that this part of you looked delicious."
 With that, she pulls her mouth away.
 Her white fingers, such beautiful works of art, crawl up my shaft.
 "Nn—....!"
 She compresses it from below as if trying to squeeze the very life out of me.
 As she moves her fingers—something rockets up from the base of my body.
 All I can do is to frantically resist this feeling.
 While her four slender fingers move up my hardness like separate living things,
 her thumb forcefully rubs my tip—back and forth, up and down, over and over.
 "Amazing... Dripping this much and more coming?
 You really are excited aren't you, Shiki?"
 "Idio—of.. course—not."
 "Hey now, I'm doing what you want.
 You should just be.. honest!"

 "Ah—!"
 Her thumb spreads the opening on top of my shaft.
 From the lower half of my body, pain and pleasure mix together like an electric
 shock.
 "Ha, ah—haa—ha, ah—"
 I can only.. breathe.. in fragments.
 Squish.
 My heartbeat, my breathing, everything has fallen into perfect synchronization

with the movement of her slender fingers.

"—Hm, I guess you're almost ready."

Releasing my swollen organ, she looks up at my face.

"How was it?"

It felt good, didn't it, Shiki?"

"....."

.... I can't say anything.

My mind screams in denial, but my body has succumbed to Arcueid's voice.

My mind is still my own—but my body is waiting for Arcueid to continue.

"Ar—cuei.. d—tha.. t's, enou.. gh."

With the last of my will, I manage to somehow form those words.

Arcueid simply chuckles.

"Now Shiki—I think I'll get serious."

Her white fingers grab my base.

My locked-down member swells as if trying to get away from her tight grip.

I'm almost exploding.

From the side, as if playing a flute, Arcueid takes me into her mouth.

"Gh—!"

My spine feels like it could break in half at any moment.

Arcueid's tongue plays along what is now the most sensitive part of my body.

This naked feeling—this attacking sensation of pure pleasure consumes me.

Just this causes my mind to feel like it will fly away, but her tongue does not stop.

Her lips wrapping around me glide higher and higher.

Engulfing my tip.

She drinks it in like the fluid oozing from the end.

".....!"

This sensation.

I can't believe how good the inside of her mouth feels.

A lukewarm feeling.

The slippery texture of saliva.

Inside her narrow mouth, my twitching manhood and the movement of Arcueid's tongue trying to hold me down—

"Mm.... Shiki, it's so cute."

Saying that, her fingers once again move lower.

Pushing against where my rod sprouts from my body, only her tongue moves up and down—licking from bottom to top.

"Ha.... n...."

Her hot, pleased breathing.

The soft flesh of her tongue pushes strongly along my entire length.

"N.... n, mm.... ah, mm—"

Her breathing flows into my nerves like liquid pleasure.

The wet, sticky movement of her tongue.

The mingling of her soft, forceful tongue licking my hardened shaft.

"N—ha, ah...., mm....!"

Heavy breathing.

As her halting breaths puff against my hardness—another sensation rises up within me.

"A—Ar, cuei, d—"

I desperately swallow my words.

I know if I speak out, my mind will lose completely to this pleasure.

I know this, but—

"Mm... Shiki, this is so hot....!"

"——!"

Her white teeth press down onto my naked rod and I—just don't care about anything—

"Ha... kk... ah.."

Warm saliva seeps from the corners of her mouth.

Just thinking of that, from somewhere deep inside of me.. a ball of heat starts to rise up.

"Haa... haa... ha... ah.."

I desperately try to hold it back.

Here—I can't do it here, ever.

If I did—I would probably.. to Arcueid—

Slosh.

Slide.

The fluids of her mouth and my own mix together noisily.

Dirty, wrong—primitive lust.

"Ha—rgh....!"

I bite my tongue to hold back.

But it's useless.

Her fingers grab me tightly.

Not the gentle, mild touch of a playful lover, like before.

She just slides it quickly up and down, forcing me to the edge.

I'm past my limit.

"Ah——!"

Thump.

Burning heat travels through my shaft.

Thump.

It bursts forth into her mouth.

"Ha—ah!"

This irresistible pleasure travels to my brain, battering my mind into submission—

-

.... Arcueid's caresses cease.

She takes everything I offer and gulps it down without hesitation.

"——Ah."

Her pure white, porcelain throat moves up and down as she swallows.

Her beautiful lips pull away from my grotesque member.

Between the two, a thin line of saliva hangs like obscene spider silk.

She wears an almost dazed expression.

Her golden hair shimmers as a blush creeps up her cheeks and she looks up into my eyes.

"Ah——"

Anything resembling reason or restraint is long gone from my mind.

My body is already able to move.

Breathing wildly, like an animal, I push Arcueid down onto the bed—
setvar arkregard + 3

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.... Ciel-senpai, perhaps?
".... That's dumb.
It could never be Senpai—"



"Good evening, Tohno-kun."
"Ehh—!?"
I jump up in bed.

"S-S-Senpai.....!?"



"Yes.
I wanted to see you, so I came."
Senpai says this with a smile as if it was the most natural thing in the world.
"You came to see me—no way."



"But it's happening.
In reality, I'm here right now."
"That's why I'm saying this isn't real....!"
It's already this late!
This is my room too, so it's not a place where you can just come in....!"



"It's all possible.
Because, this is a dream."
"—Eh?"
A dream?
Huh?
"A dream—Senpai?"
"Yes, this is a dream you are seeing.
Let's think of it that way."
Senpai smiles.
.... Senpai is her usual self.
But, I feel there's something—incredibly wrong with her.
Her eyes normally full of kindness now look like they are planning on something.
Her polite words are rather making me uneasy.
—No, what is the most strange is this situation where Senpai is in my room.
I steal a glance at the clock.
It's still past three o'clock in the morning.
Such a thing—
"No, there can't be such a realistic dream....!"
I get up from bed.

I try to walk towards Senpai who is in the middle of my room.

"H..... uh?"

My legs.

My legs won't move at all....!?



"That won't do, moving on your own like that.

Please stay there, Tohno-kun."

".... Please stay here?—hold on, Senpai.

My legs, why won't they move....?"



"It's obviously because this is a dream.

Tohno-kun, do you still not believe me?"

As if shocked, she raises her shoulders.

But, I'm the one who's shocked.

"A dream?—please stop fooling around.

Why in the world are you in my room at this hour, Senpai!?"



"Do you need to ask?
 There is only one reason for a girl to come to a boy's room you know."
 Blushing, she gives a smile loaded with meaning.
 "Eh.... only one.... um, Senpai?"
 Uh, um, ah—that's not to make some delicious food, or to play a card game, so—



"Yes.
 Let's do something dirty."
 With her normal carefree tone,
 Senpai says something outrageous.
 "H—Hey, what are you saying, Senpai....!?"
 Wh-wh-why are you thinking that, all of a sudden....!"
 I wildly wave my hands in the air as I blush furiously.
 I don't know how this situation came about, but there's something definitely
 wrong with what Senpai is saying.
 First of all, she is my Senpai,
 Um, we're not lovers or anything,
 We're more like friends, and..
 um, I really am happy for her to say that, but I'm mad at myself for thinking
 that way, and—
 "Oh enough already.
 Isn't this strange?
 Why would you say such a thing to me....!?"



".... "

Senpai sighs.

"I understand, you don't want to do it because it's me."

"Ah—no, that's not it.... w-w-well, I mean that's it!

But, isn't this odd?

To me, you are an important confidant, and I thought our friendship had nothing to do with love, and I was thinking it would be great if all three of us including Arihiko could have fun together.

so—Even.... if this a dream, there's something wrong with this."



"Oh, I see.

I understand what you mean."

Senpai looks away from me.

"Ah....."

My legs that could not move before can move.

I don't know why they weren't moving earlier, but I can now get Senpai out of the house—.

"Tohno-kun."

Senpai's voice is sharp, and unthinkably strict.

"Eh—y, yes?"



"I have decided.
I will be more mean."
She grins.
Senpai takes a step towards me.

"Hey—Senpai, stop fooling around."
"I'm not fooling around.
Isn't this what fooling around would be?"
She snaps her fingers.
—At that instant.
"—!?"
I suddenly fall back on my bed.
"Wha—!"
Wha, what's going on!?
Both my hands are behind my back.
Something—like a leather belt ties them together.
Both my ankles are also tied with a belt and I can't move at all.
"Wh, why, is this happening, all of a sudden....!?"



"Yes, this is a dream, so doing that is a piece of cake."
"Wha—"

I strain my arms trying to break free.
The belt groans under the stress, but it doesn't even seem like it'll come off.
"..... What are these, chains?"

These facts are suddenly weighing down on me.
 It looks like my hands and feet cannot be freed.
 The Ciel-senpai before me is not like her usual self.
 I don't feel like I'm in any danger—but I feel really uneasy.
 Let's do something, dirty.
 Senpai said that.
 To have her say that in a room at night with the two of us, it's more strange
 not to be excited
 In reality, my heart is pounding so hard it feels like it will explode.
 But—there's still something wrong.
 It feels there's something wrong to do such a thing with Senpai—
 "_____"
 I don't care about anything now.
 My mouth isn't gagged, so if I shout, Hisui would probably come—!



"That won't do.
 If you shout, won't someone come here?
 And if they do, what would you tell them?"

Senpai gets on the bed.
 The bed creaks under the weight of two people.
 And then,
 the sound of a ribbon being untied.
 "Wha—"
 Without time to stop her,
 ... No, my thought to stop her was probably beat by my desire to see it.
 And then,

I can only hold my breath as Senpai takes off her clothing and even her
 underwear.
 "... S-Senpai—"
 "See, it's already over.
 If someone came now, you would be the one in trouble."
 With a wicked smile, she mounts the bed, crawling towards me like a cat.
 "_____"

My throat is hot.
My head is swimming like I'm drunk, and I can't think of anything to say, or what I should do, or what I was doing before now—
"..... Ah."
I swallow hard.
Before me is Senpai, who isn't wearing so much as a stitch of clothing.
What I should do right now is look away and try not to see her naked body—but my body doesn't listen to my mind's recommendation.
.... Her well-developed, soft-looking breasts.
Her bare, white skin entices me.
I can almost smell its lasciviousness.
My heart explodes with excitement.
I know I shouldn't look—but her voluptuous body captivates both my mind and my eyes.
"Hm, what should I do now?
I could just rape you now, but that's kind of boring, don't you think?"
With a strange smile on her lips, she slowly crawls closer.
.... It's different.
I said she looked like a cat earlier, but it's different.
What creeps towards me isn't a cat, but a panther stalking its prey.
"S-Senpai...!
Stop fooling around.
Please put your clothes back on...!"
I manage to resist my desires long enough to push these words out.
"..... Geez, Tohno-kun.
It seems that you don't understand your situation yet."
She makes a disappointed sound and looks at me.
"Right now, there's only a few places you can move.
And when you say things like that, it makes me want to tease you more."

"Eh—Senpai!?"
Suddenly, she disappears.
There's no one on the bed.
I can't see her anywhere, and all I can feel is someone's presence in the room—
"Whew."
"Uwaaaaaaa!?"
—Suddenly,
from behind me, she blows into my ear.
"Se, Sese, Senpai...!?"
"Did I surprise you?
I didn't mean to, but you must be sensitive, so I guess I surprised you, Tohno-kun."
Saying that,
she presses her body up against my back.

"—!!!!!"

"You shouldn't make so much noise.
In the middle of the night like this, someone just might come check on you."
.... I hear her voice directly behind me.
Her fingers slide along the back of my neck.
"Nn—.....!"
A shiver runs through me.
My heart pounds desperately in my chest.
Thump.
As if acting in concert with my pulse, my mind floods with lust.
".... Stop.... hey, Senpai....!"
"Goodness, do you hate me that much, Tohno-kun?"
—That.
That's not.. it.. at all.
From my neck to my back.
From my back, as if to embrace me, her fingers come to my chest.
A soft sensation.
From behind me, I can feel the sensation of her soft breasts pressing against my back.
"Tss.....!"
This isn't good.
I have no intention of doing anything—but I AM a guy, so—
"That's why I came here like this.
Even if you're stubborn, I thought you would be honest in your dreams."
She whispers in my ear.
Her lips are so close that her breath plays along my skin.
".... A dream.... really....?"
"Yes.
If this wasn't a dream, we couldn't be doing this."
".... Hey.... then even if I do shout.... no one would come, then."
Trying to resist the growing pressure in my groin, I speak haltingly.
Senpai chuckles by my ear.
"They will come.
If you shout, your sister will get suspicious and check on you.
This is THAT kind of dream."
—That is,
maybe a reality that cannot truly be called a dream?
Her fingers glide down my chest.
One by one, her fingers, like the legs of a spider, teasingly make their way downwards.
My pulse is racing.
Before I realize it, I am completely naked and already fully erect.
Slowly and lightly.
Her fingers continue their descent.
"Now then, the teasing will begin.
Please prepare yourself, Tohno-kun."
Her fingers touch my bared shaft.

I feel a hand other than mine surround me.
Just that by itself is embarrassing enough, but since it's Senpai's fingers—I feel so embarrassed I want to die.
"—Wow, you're really hard already, Tohno-kun.
In that case, I can be a bit more forceful."
Her voice is filled with delight.
Her fingers—teasing up until now—wrap themselves around me.
She squeezes so hard it feels like she'll tear it off.

"Nn.....!"
I let out a gasp.
A shock rushes from my groin to my brain.
"Oh, did I surprise you?
Sorry, you're not even wet yet, Tohno-kun.
Don't worry, I'll be more gentle."
Her palm pulls back.
This time her fingers delicately hold my shaft.
"Ah—,—"!
The sensation takes my breath away.
"No—Senpai, that's.. not—"
I.. just want.. her.. to stop.
I try to move my arms.
—But I can't.
I have no freedom.
With glittering eyes, Senpai watches my struggles and vain attempts to stifle my voice—
"Hee hee, I'm looking forward to this.
I wonder how long you can resist, Tohno-kun."
Speaking seductively, she slips her red tongue into my ear.
"..... Nn!"
I shut my eyes.
.... Below, a far more direct torture is taking place.
"—Sto.. p—"
Three of her fingers slide slowly across the length of my shaft.
Up.
Down.
Sliding.
The sound of dry flesh slowly becomes slick.
Rubbing.
Squeezing.
And pulling.
"... Mm, you're getting very dirty Tohno-kun.
Hey, your eyes are free, right?
Why don't you take a look at yourself."
"Wha—"
Her voice embarrasses me even more.

The sound of her rubbing me fills the silence.
 Over and over again, my manhood swells even larger as she caresses it.
 The harder it gets—just watching is making me go crazy.
 Her fingers cycle in an endless caress.
 "—K, ha—"

Try as I might, I can't hold my voice back.
 I clench my teeth, telling myself I'm not feeling it—but my body doesn't listen
 to what I tell it.
 My shaft is fully erect and I feel like I am going to explode at any moment.
 Just her touching me makes me lose all rational thought—but the movement of
 her fingers is much more destructive.
 Just by sliding her fingers up and down,
 I almost explode, releasing all of the burning heat welling inside of me.
 "Ha—k,—"
 As I rein in my voice,
 I attempt to breathe quietly.
 Every time I do so,
 Senpai laughs.
 "I feel kind of excited.
 Your voice is so full of passion, Tohno-kun."
 "Don't be ridi—"

Before I can finish, her fingers move once again.
 The movement of her fingers.
 My body is being controlled by less than an inch's worth of movement.
 I can't resist her.
 Bound as I am, and being teased like this.
 Breathing wildly, I try to resist the pleasure.
 But.. I can't.
 Normally, it would make me mad.
 But—now, it's only making my conscience go numb.
 "Senpai—let's stop.
 This... is.. wrong..."
 Yeah, it's wrong.
 This isn't right at all.
 I don't love her, so I shouldn't be doing this.
 I don't love her....?
 Is that true?
 If this really is my dream, it would mean this is what Tohno Shiki desires.
 "Hhaahhh....hhaahhh.... haaggghhh.... —"
 No, I can't think.. clearly.
 It feels—too good.
 Why am I so horny?
 It's not like this is the first time I've had fingers slid along my shaft.
 But this is way different than when I do it myself
 I can't hold back like this.
 That's why I want it to stop.. but since they aren't my fingers, they won't listen

to what I say.
MY shaft is already dripping wet.
I'm oozing so much pre-come that it covers my whole shaft.
"Ha.. gah...."
But my remaining sanity is keeping me from crossing the edge.
"... Goodness, you really are stubborn.
Your body is honest, why is your mind so.. so stubborn!?"
In time with her voice,
her gentle fingers suddenly dig into me.

"——!!"
—Aah!
My back arches in response.
The longing welling up inside me suddenly switches to a desire to get away.
A collision of pleasure and pain.
This sensation shoots from my groin to my brain.
My arms struggle against the chains.
I strain against them as hard as I can, trying to break free.
But they don't move at all.
"Ah—a, a—!"
Her nails are still digging into me.
She tortures my manhood as if to stop what I was about to release.
"S-Sen.. pai.....!"
"Oh, you should stop struggling Tohno-kun.
Those chains won't come off, so if you push yourself too hard, you'll only hurt yourself."
"No—not that, your.. nails—!"
"Oh?
Tohno-kun, are my fingers making you feel good?"
I can't believe she can say such unbelievable things with such a mean voice.
".....!"
I grit my teeth and bear the pain.
Her fingers pull back.
The nail marks remain.
Thanks to that, it seems my urge to come has gone away.
"... Senpai, please stop.... if you.. keep this.. up.. I'm going to get pissed—"
"Yes, I know.
I won't do anything more if you don't feel like it."
With eyes that seem to stare into my heart, she starts moving her fingers again.
"....!
You don't get it, stupid!"
Senpai doesn't answer.
She simply starts rubbing me once more.
Slowly.
From my base to my top.
Slowly.

Gently.
Making little wet sounds.
Over and over.
Ever so slowly—so slow that I want her to move faster and just end it all.
"..... Ah."
My breathing is getting calmer.
Getting used to her fingers, it finally settles.
But it's too late.
It's so slow, and it feels so good, but I can't quite reach the edge.
I'm oozing as much fluid as a woman.
But I haven't even come once.
".... Ah....."
With her slow movements.
Only my pre-come seeps out.
"Ah..... gah."
I want to let go, but I can't.
I am ready to come, but I'm so used to this soft sensation, I can't reach the end.
I want to come.
But I can't.
I want to climax.
But I can't.
Her slow moving fingers,
she's moving so slow—not fast enough to get me off.. why?
She went this far, too.
Why won't she squeeze me like earlier and make me come?
—Hurry.
Hurry, or else I'll go insane.
What's welling up inside me is so heavy and painful that if I don't let it outside soon—
this pleasure will go on forever and drive me crazy....!
".... Damn.... it."
My brain is about to shut down.
Hurry—I don't care now.
I don't care about Senpai or my conscience, those are all meaningless things.
I'm not being stubborn about it, so hurry—
"Hey Tohno-kun.
Are you going to come soon?"
From my side, Senpai speaks in a quiet voice.
It isn't full of pleasure like before, but completely serious.
"Wha—no.
I don't.. feel anything—so all this is useless."
.... But my words clearly are not what I feel.
Senpai gives a sigh.
"Fine, I lose.
Since I can't beat you, I'll stop, Tohno-kun."

"—Eh?"

Her fingers pull away.
The slow caress ceases.

"See, you must feel better now, right Tohno-kun?"

"—Ah."

This—can't be happening.
Her slow moving, smooth fingers are gone, and I'm harder than ever.
It's so hard.
My shaft is so swollen, it's still dripping.
But, I can't come.
Her fingers got me so worked up I'm right on the edge of coming.
But I'm still bound, and her fingers are gone.

"..... Don.."

"Yes?"

What is it, Tohno-kun?"

"Don't....."

"Didn't I stop already?"

Or is there something else you wanted?"

Senpai's voice is full of glee.

"What do you want?"

If you don't tell me, I won't know, Tohno-kun."

"....."

I can't say it.

I can't say it, no matter what.

But if I don't, I really will go crazy—.

"... Don't.... stop...."

"I can't hear you, please speak louder."

Her voice shoots towards me, loaded with pleasure.

.... I didn't know.

I didn't know Senpai was so mean.

"... Please, don't stop.

I want.... you to continue, Senpai...."

I say it haltingly.

From right beside me,

I can hear her laughing voice once more.

"I understand.

Then.. here is your reward for being honest, Tohno-kun."

Her body pulls away.

A light thud.

Ciel-senpai kneels in front of me.

"Se—Senpai.....!?"

I pull my hips back in surprise.

Because Senpai got down on her knees in front of me, and—and dropped a light

kiss on my shaft.

"Mm... that's an amazing amount of fluid.

Tohno-kun, it's because you were so stubborn."

Holding onto my sticky member, she takes a small sniff.

She is putting her face so close to my—

—Thump.

"... Ha..."

She hasn't even done anything, but my rod twitches.

I don't know if the pleasure is physical or mental, but just the fact that Senpai has her face so close to me brings back the burning sensations that had started to fade—

... Senpai's face is flushed as well.

I thought I was the one being teased, here.

But, has she—was her face like that the whole time?

—Thump.

Now more,

my emotions well up in my throat.

"... Senpai, I... can't hold on."

"... I know.

But this is amazing—Tohno-kun, you're burning up."

She almost sounds admiring.

Then, Senpai takes her tongue.. and slowly licks my tip.

"H—!"

The sensation is completely different from her fingers.

Her tongue feels so soft, yet solid.

"Haa—ah, ah."

Her tongue noisily plays along my skin.

"—N!"

Just that was already threatening to overwhelm me, but then her fingers begin to move.

She grabs my shaft with her fingers and starts to rub me up and down.

Veins stand out on my hot flesh, and my rod reflects the light as it covers itself in sticky fluids.

But she continues stroking that grotesque thing.

She moves as if trying to squeeze out what's welling up inside me.

Her thumb rises up to my tip and presses into the hole at the top.

"Senpa—I'm—going to—"

I can barely sound out the words.

I can hardly breathe.

She doesn't move away.

Her tongue and her fingers continue their movement, ignoring my warning.

"I can't—hold.. back—!"

No matter what—I can't.. in her face.

I strain as hard as I can to hold back.

My arms.

If my arms were free, I would be able to push Senpai away—!

"Tohno-kun, why are you holding back?"
Not knowing how I feel, she asks me that.
"... I... I can't... let it out on your face..."
I say through clenched teeth.
But—I can't hold on.
"... Hehe, you are so cute, Tohno-kun."
Senpai chuckles and..
"So—I will tease you even more."
Using her other hand, she pushes at an area below my shaft—right at the base of my balls.
"—!?"
My body shakes uncontrollably.
It feels like someone drilled a hole in my skull.
"You know, if you push this spot, a man won't be able to ejaculate."
"Ah—eh?"
My shaft twitches.
But what should come out normally isn't there, and it only convulses.
"Hmm, if I keep caressing you like this, you might break."
Lick.
With her tongue still painted with my fluids, she licks her lips.
"But, you told me you wanted me to make you go crazy.
So—"
"Ah... Sen, pai...?"
"—So, now I'll break you, Tohno-kun."
So saying,
Senpai takes the tip of her tongue and sticks it into the narrow opening at the top of my shaft.
"Ha—ah!"
Down—down there...!
Into a place no one should touch.
I'm going to go crazy from the feeling of her tongue forcing its way in.
Getting attacked by the greatest sensation by far, my rod tries its hardest to ejaculate.
But it can't.
Senpai's finger is blocking the way, not allowing me to come.
"Ha—ah, ah, ah—!"
I flail on the bed.
The sound of rattling chains echo in the room.
I don't—care who might wake up and come see what's wrong.
If I even think about something like that, I'll go crazy.
Sl.. ur.. p—
The sensation changes.
The tongue invading me recedes.
And Senpai's lips suck me in.
Even though she knows I can't release anything, she sucks as if trying to draw it out.

It feels like she's sucking my entire body dry.

"Ga—!!"

It feels like someone's poured alcohol into that hole in my skull.

My mind goes as blank as a clean slate.

Her finger pulls back.

The digit holding my semen back lets go, and what has been contained for so long finally explodes.

Thump.

Thump, Thump, Thump, Thum.. p.

As if taking out my whole consciousness and my memory with it, the white fluid squirts out of me.

—My dazed mind can't even make out Senpai's face anymore.

I collapse onto my bed.

The chains holding me down disappear as if they never existed.

"Ha—"

.... I can still feel her mouth on me.

Senpai keeps sucking, drinking up the last of the semen inside of me.

"—Ah."

But that finished me off.

It seems the last little bit of consciousness I had left was completely swallowed by Senpai—

setvar cielregard + 3

turn to **112**

106

.... If someone is coming to my room, it either has to be Kohaku-san, Hisui or Akiha.

Hisui and Kohaku-san would probably knock so that leaves only Akiha....

"..... Akiha?"

I sit up in bed and call out.

The moonlight only dimly illuminates the room, so I can hardly see.

I look around, but I don't see anyone's silhouette.

"... Must be my imagination...."

My mind must be a little dull from lack of sleep.

I let out a breath and roll over onto my side.

The light on my nightstand comes on.

"—Eh?"

My heart skips a beat.

"... That's strange.

I don't remember turning that on...."

I turn off the light.

I have school tomorrow, so I need to get some sleep.

"That won't do, Nii-san.

We'll need the lights on for this."

Suddenly,

from behind me, a calm voice calls out.

"—!"

I turn around.

There, I see—



Akiha,



and Kohaku-san.

"Akiha...?
What are you doing here at this hour?
And why is Kohaku-san with you?
Did something happen?"
I slip out of bed as I speak.
After exchanging glances, they laugh.



"Geez Shiki-san, you're too out of it.
Akiha-sama and I are here because there is something."
Kohaku-san giggles.

"...?"
I don't understand what's so funny.



"Kohaku, laughing like that is rude to Nii-san.
I understand how you feel, but you shouldn't surprise him too much.
We have to save the fun for later, right?"



"Oh, forgive me Akiha-sama.
He's just so cute when he doesn't understand simple things like this, so I couldn't help it."



".... That's true.
Certainly Nii-san is a bit dense.
I mean, not even realizing why the two of us would come here this late at night,
not even knowing his own position.
Yes, he's just like an innocent little puppy.
Cute, but clueless."

With a cold smile, Akiha looks my way.
 "Aki, ha.....?"
 Seeing her eyes finally makes me understand that there's something wrong with the way they are acting.
 How should I say it.
 I don't sense any hostility, but it feels like they are up to something.
 "Akiha, if you have something to say, I'll listen, so can't you just go ahead?
 We have school tomorrow, so we should go to bed early."
 I tell her this as coolly as I can.



"....."
 She stares at me without saying a word; she's not happy with something.
 No, more than that..
 Akiha sighs.
 "... I thought Nii-san would be a little more flustered, but I'm a bit shocked that he's not getting in the mood."
 She's talking as if I'm not even here.
 "—?"
 Um, Akiha.
 I still don't know what you are trying to say, but...."



"Geez, Nii-san.
 Just what kind of upbringing did you have at the Arima household?
 Look, someone of the opposite sex is in your room at night.
 A gentleman of your age should be excited just by that, but you're acting like

normal.

It's just natural for a woman like me to be shocked by that."

She glares at me.

"... Wait a minute, Akiha.

I would notice if girls were in my room, but you guys are different.

We're brother and sister, so this isn't a big deal, and Kohaku-san comes to check around every night."

Yeah, that's why this isn't surprising.

Akiha is my little sister, and Kohaku-san is a servant.

It isn't a big deal for them to come here, day or night, so I really don't—



"In other words, Nii-san, you see us more as family than you do as women?

..... I see.

It might be good for you if that was really true."

She looks me over again with that strange smile.

That quiet look that seems to look into my mind.

"——"

Thump.

My heartbeat starts to quicken.

.... There's something, odd.

Being looked at like that by Akiha, I start to feel more and more uneasy.

.... For example,

Like my true feelings of not being able to accept Akiha as my sister yet since she's changed so much since I last saw her.

Like my true feelings of me starting to feel more for Hisui and Kohaku-san than I should to just servants.

It feels like she is staring into my hidden feelings and I feel guilty.

"Oh?

What's wrong, Nii-san?

Suddenly looking away like that.. you look like you're hiding something."

"Wha——"

I realize my cheeks are getting red.

"O-of course not....!"

Just tell me what you want.

If we don't get some sleep soon, tomorrow will be difficult."

Not to be defeated, I match her stare.
 And then,
 For some reason, Akiha gives a bored sigh.



"How disappointing.
 I was looking forward to seeing your confused face, Nii-san.
 But this is boring.
 Well, we'll watch you be embarrassed further, so I guess it will be okay."
 "Huh——?"
 I climb out of bed.
 Wait a minute.
 I think she just said something terrible——
 "Akiha, what are——"



"Oh?
 Is it okay for you to stand up with your body?
 You have anemia, so you should be calm during the night.
 You seem to be lacking sleep even now, and you were tired for the past few days,
 right?
 Please pay more attention to your health, Nii-san.
 Your body is very weak.
 So, won't you collapse if you keep pushing yourself like this?"
 "Wha——"

——Thump.

Her words seem to affect me.

"—What are you saying?

I'm fine—"

"Oh?

Funny, you're looking a little strained to me.

As if... yes, your breathing is going to get wilder, your blood will feel sluggish in your veins, and see, your hands and feet are going to start feeling cold."

—Thump.

"Hey—Stop, it.

If you say that—"

I really.. will feel.. dizzy—



"No, it isn't just your imagination.

Your body was strange from when we came in, but you just never realized it, Nii-san.

See?

Kohaku was laughing earlier because you didn't even notice it yourself.

You're so weak that you might collapse at any time, but you don't ever think of your condition, Nii-san."



"You are like a scarecrow, you being the only one not noticing that.

Wearing old clothes, bamboo for arms and legs.

From far away he looks human.. but once you look close, it's just something made up to take human form."

"Wha—"

Why did she suddenly start talking about all this nonsense?—



"Really, you still don't understand?

Your face is pale and your mind is numb.

You really are like a scarecrow, that you don't even want to admit to that.

Don't you think so too, Kohaku?

That Nii-san is like an ornament that could break at any time."

"Stu.... That, can't—"

be true.

It can't, but..

Why—why am I really feeling dizzy—



"See, you're already at your limit.

Stop pushing yourself and lie down.

But you will stay awake.

You won't be able to move your arms and legs, but you will still be conscious."

"Stu—sto..... p—"

My body collapses.

I'm falling towards the bed, just like Akiha said—

"—"

No.

My body isn't strange.

Because, I didn't have any symptoms of anemia earlier—



"I told you, it does not matter.
 Your body is always under constraint.
 So, you have no control tonight either.
 —Because.
 You've always been my puppet, Nii-san."
 "Wha—"

I fall onto the bed.
 In the end, Akiha was right.
 Just like whenever I have an anemic spell, I lose consciousness—

"Hu—h?"
 No, this time it's different.
 My entire body is numb, but I'm still conscious.
 I can't really concentrate, but I'm awake.
 "Different, than my, usual, anemia...."
 I stare blankly at the ceiling.
 "Akiha-sama?"
 Um, did we overdo it....?
 He looks like he really has anemia...."
 Kohaku-san's, voice.
 "What are you talking about, Kohaku?"
 You're the one who put some drugs into his dinner, so he will be a little dazed.
 I only wanted him to sleep a bit.
 I could have done that myself."
 Akiha sounds dissatisfied.
 ".... Hey, you two."
 I call out to them, still lying down.
 My arms and legs won't work, but I somehow manage to turn my neck and look
 at both of them.
 "Shiki-san is very pure, so I guess suggestion seems to work easily on him.
 I suppose that's a good trait about him too."
 It seems they are ignoring me.
 "Yes, but Kohaku, when they are too pure.. don't they make you want to dom-
 inate them?"

.... She looks over at me.

"—"

As soon as our eyes meet, I feel a chill run up my spine.
Coldness sinks into my skin, burrowing under my flesh and into my very core.
I feel as if my brain is becoming numb.
My body feels tied up as she looks at me with those eyes, as if time has stopped
and the whole area has frozen up.

"A—Aki, ha?"

"....."

She doesn't say a word.

.... Thump.

My heart beats loudly.

Her face is entirely devoid of expression, but her eyes—her eyes glow like a
predator stalking her prey—

"Domination, huh?"

Well, I like seeing his troubled face as much as his happy face, so I understand
what you mean, Akiha-sama."

.... Next to Akiha, Kohaku-san tilts her head.

Akiha doesn't look at Kohaku-san, but she gives a small nod.

"Let's see, it's like a painting.

Hey Kohaku, let's say there's a painting that is well done, but not magnificent.
Because it's well done, you don't have any complaints, but you can't like it
because it's just well done and doesn't have anything interesting about it.

In that case, do you know how to make it special for you, Kohaku?"

"Umm, let's see.... I don't know, Akiha-sama."

"It's simple.

You just have to paint over the painting and make it worthless.

As a result, that good painting will turn into trash.

But the process, breaking what is "good" for you, isn't it wonderful?

"—Isn't it beautiful just thinking about it?"

I feel love and regret for that painting.

The pain as the painting gets ruined, anger at myself for ruining it, frustration
because it's beyond repair, and more than anything else, the fact that I am the
only one who can break it is absolute.

I think it is the happiness of owning it.

Because it is the only one, and because the wounds on it are put on there by
me, you feel more attached to it.

Because the more marks you put on it, the more it becomes yours."

—Without any motion.

Like a machine, Akiha laughs.

"Hey, Kohaku.

Don't you want to break that?"

I think it will be.. enjoyable."

"Wha—-Hey, Akiha.....!"
 I shout.
 But Akiha doesn't respond, and Kohaku-san with her smile,
 "Yes.
 I understand, Akiha-sama,"
 responds like that.
 "Erggh!"
 I rally all of the strength in my body.
 I strain as hard I can and order my lifeless limbs to stand.
 "Tss,n!!!!!"
 I strain.
 I gradually feel my ability to move my arms and legs starting to return—



"That is enough, don't do that, Shiki-san.
 You are anemic, so you shouldn't strain your body too much."
 With her usual smile, Kohaku-san crouches beside the bed.

"Kohaku-san, what are—"
 "What does it look like?
 I am tying you down so you won't struggle.
 It's okay, I'll only tie your wrists and ankles so it won't hurt that much."
 "Tie?
 What are you thinking—owww....!" I clench my jaw at the sudden pain.
 As if she had a lot of practice, Kohaku-san expertly binds my hands and feet to
 the bed.

"Tss.....!"
 I feel a tinge in the back of my head.
 I don't know what those two are thinking.
 But being bound hand and foot on my bed, just imagining what I look like
 makes me go crazy.
 Having them see me like that, I'm so embarrassed I want to die—
 "Kohaku-san....!
 Please stop fooling around....!"



"Oh, Shiki-san, you're blushing.
To scream so much, it must be your first time being tied down."
".....!"
Of, Of course it is!
Look, just untie me!"



"Akiha-sama, Shiki-san is saying all these things.
He doesn't seem to realize his position, so isn't it alright to treat him more roughly?"

"Eh—Kohaku, san?"
Still smiling, she gazes down at me tied down.
Her look is far more frightening than Akiha's sharp gaze.
Is it like the cruelty of young kids?
Kohaku-san seems to be enjoying this far more than Akiha.
"This won't do Kohaku.
If Nii-san wanted you himself, you could do whatever you want, but this time is different, isn't it?
For tonight, the ownership of him belongs to me.
Your duty is just to serve him."
"I understand.
Then, excuse me, Shiki-san."
So saying,
Kohaku-san begins to take off my clothes.
She straddles me as she begins her work.

In that position, she slowly undoes the buttons of my shirt, one by one.
With this task complete, her fingers move down to my pants.
"Wha, wha, wha.....!"
I try to flail around, but it's no use.
I hear a dry, metallic sound.
Kohaku-san slowly begins to slide my zipper down.
"—Wha, what, are you, do.....!"
I can barely speak.
I can't understand how or why all this is happening.
I can't grasp how I came to be tied to my bed, or why Kohaku-san is taking off my clothes.
"Shiki-san?
I haven't done anything yet.. does it really feel that good already...?"
With these outrageous words, Kohaku-san places her hand lightly on the front of my underwear.
"Th.. that's not it, but, Kohaku-san—!"
"Oh really?
Then you won't mind if I see all of you, Shiki-san."
"Tssss!"
She pulls my underwear down.
"———"
My mind goes entirely blank.
She's exposed my lower body.
My limp member is unveiled for all to see.
"Aha!
Shiki-san, you're so small and you look so cute!"
Kohaku-san speaks happily from somewhere near my pelvis.
Being bound and stared at by Akiha's cool gaze makes me shrivel even more.
"———!"
The rope creaks as I strain against it.
Embarrassed, I wanted to cover myself with both hands.
But bound as I am, I can't even do that.
"....."
Akiha continues to stare at me without speaking.
Blood rushes to my head.
"Ah—ck."
I grit my teeth.
"It's okay, Shiki-san.
I'll help you perk up, so don't worry.."
With no regard for what I want, Kohaku-san's fingers reach out to me.
"N———!"
My back arches in response.
Her fingers crawl up my thigh like an unhurried spider, her ultimate destination all too obvious.
One by one, they continue to advance with insidious slowness.
So slowly.

The feeling of being touched by someone else.
 And the sensation that it is nearing my most personal space, throws my brain headlong into chaos.
 "Mm—Shiki-san, for you to be this excited already.. what a naughty boy you are."
 Tap.
 As if playing a keyboard, Kohaku-san feels along my inner thigh.
 "—, h.....!"
 I try to hold my breath.
 I close my eyes to avoid seeing her face, but I can still feel a piercing gaze boring into me.
 It goes without saying.
 It is Akiha's stare.
 As long as that's there—I can't let anything out of my mouth.
 Kohaku-san keeps going.
 The delicate fingers creeping up my thigh—finally arrive at their destination.
 "—, —!"
 A jolt rushes through me.
 With just her finger, so softly they barely make contact, Kohaku-sa-Kohaku plays around.. my whole.. shaft.
 "Ha—, gh—"
 —I don't.. understand.
 Does it feel this good to be touched by someone else, or are her fingers special?
 My blood starts pounding as her hand takes me in a light embrace.
 Thump.
 Thump.
 In spite of my conscience, I find myself starting to get hard.
 "Mm... Shiki-san, you have to speak up—"

 "—,m—!?"
 The bed creaks.
 Just now—I felt something slippery glide along the length of my scrotum.
 "Hey—Kohaku.. san—!"
 I lift my head and look down at her.

 "What—"
 Even though I expected it,
 looking at the scene enchants my already confused brain.

 "Kohaku, san—what, are you—"
 "What am I doing?
 I am servicing you, of course."
 She answers as if what she's doing is perfectly natural.
 But, that—to lick me there—
 "Y, you can't....!
 Don't you think there's something wrong with doing something that dirty....!?"

"No, I don't.
Because these are Akiha-sama's orders, there's no room for me to think."
Akiha's orders?
That's ridiculous.
"A, Ah, Akiha.....!!!!"
"Yes?
Why are you screaming like that, Nii-san?"
"Why am I!?!
.... What are you thinking....!?
Do you know what I'll do to you later for this....!?"
".... Goodness.
You still don't seem to realize your position Nii-san.
If you keep resisting us like this, we can't be nice to you."
Narrowing her eyes in disappointment, Akiha glares at me.
.... Is it because she was left alone in the Tohno mansion these past eight years?
Her gaze is as sharp as a blade, and unspeakably commanding.
"A—Aki, ha.... What, are you thinking—"
My questioning voice starts to fade away.
Akiha gives a brief snort and looks at me as I lay tied to the bed.
"What am I thinking?
Does it need to be said?
I'm just paying you back, Nii-san."
"?
Paying me back....?"
Not understanding, I dumbly echo her words.
—And then,
Akiha laughs like it was so funny.
"Yes, payback.
You who left me all alone and ran away from the Tohno house, I have to pay
you back for many things.
These past eight years—I want you to know how much I've suffered."
"A——"
.... When she puts it like that, there's nothing I can say back.
It's true I left Akiha alone to go live with the Arimas.
It's also true that I became Arima's child and tried to forget about the Tohno
family.
".... I understand that.
It's natural for you to hate me.
But, how does that relate to this....!?"
"Oh, you don't understand?
You don't have the education as the member of the Tohno family, right?
So I thought I'll teach you like this.
By the time our father was your age, it seems that he'd known about many
things, and it would be a problem for you unless you know a bit about women.
"Wha—education?
What kind of education is this, you idiot!?"

Are you saying since you were with that old man so long, you started to think like him!?"

It pisses me off and I try to stand up.

But, my bound hands do not move, and the ropes only dig deeper into my skin.

"I see, so you're going to take me lightly.

.... Too bad.

I was going to go easy on you, but I've changed my mind."

Her eyes narrow.

.... It's probably a glare, but for just an instant, it seemed like it contained enjoyment.

"Stupid Nii-san.

You are no different from a fish on my plate.

How I bring you to my mouth is my choice, but you never realized it until the very end."

After saying that,

Akiha licks her lips as if she really had just eaten.

"—Okay Kohaku.

Show Nii-san just how much of a beast he is."

"Yes, I understand.

.... But Akiha-sama, is it really okay for me to service him?"

There is no emotion in Kohaku-san's voice.

After a brief silence,

"—Of course.

We're siblings.

There is no affection between us even if we pretend, and besides, I certainly can't touch him.

.... I don't really like Nii-san anyway."

She looks away from me.

"——"

.... My chest hurts for some reason.

I should be getting mad at Akiha for doing this to me, so why—do her words weigh down on me so much?

".... Let's stop, Akiha.

I don't know how I can make up for what I did, but I'll apologize for what's happened until now.

So stop doing this.

If you think about it, this really isn't normal.

I don't know how you think of me, but you're my sister.

So——"

"Sister?"

Her whisper sounds mad.

"I don't want to hear that word out of you.

And Nii-san, no matter what you say, your body is enjoying my discipline.

It's been pleading for more all this time."

"Eh——"

Having said that, my whole body becomes hot.

Just like she said, my manhood has hardened from Kohaku-san's teasing. Even though I deny it with my words, my body seems to have a mind of its own.

"Now do you understand?"

This is what you've wanted in the first place, Nii-san.

There's no escaping it."

"Th...."

That's, not, true.

"—Kohaku, please continue."

The instant I try to deny it, Kohaku-san touches my shaft with her fingers.

That fully erect, expanded piece of meat.

Kohaku-sa.. n.. takes her delicate fingers and wraps them around it.

"—A, gg.....!"

More than just her touch, the simple fact that it's Kohaku's fingers causes my mind to white out.

Kohaku's fingers.

Their soft touch make me more excited.

"Oh.. Shiki-san, you're becoming more like a man.

You're so lively.

Amazing."

Her voice is getting heated.

"But there is still a long way to go.

See—Akiha-sama is watching, so you should make it a little bigger."

Suddenly,

her fingers start to move.

Sliding sensually up and down my entire length.

"Ts—, ah.....!"

I let out a weak gasp.

Unprepared for this sudden attack, my back arches in surprise.

"Hm.... You really are excited.

I can't believe you're getting bigger."

Kohaku sounds as if she really is impressed, using three fingers to stroke me like she is playing with a new toy.

"Ah—, Kohaku, s.. to—"

It almost feels as if she's squeezing me rather than stroking me.

She grins like she is truly enjoying this.

"Now, now, Shiki-san.

Akiha-sama is watching you, so you have to make sure she can hear you."

Kohaku-san moves her fingers as if she's enjoying this.

My swollen organ is already rock hard—but Kohaku-san's fingers manipulate it as if it were as soft as clay.

"Ah—, gg—"

It really does feel like clay.

Kohaku-san's delicate fingers swirl around the surface like a master craftsman

working an old, familiar potter's wheel.

Twisting.

Pushing.

Squeezing.

Stretching.

Her fingers dart playfully here and there like a school of icefish.

Totally disconnected from my mind, my shaft is shaped according to Kohaku-san's will.

"—, Ah.....!!!!"

What a technique.

All ten of her fingers have transformed into an obscene, fine-tuned machine and taken control of my shaft—

"... Mm, Shiki-san, you're gritting your teeth too much.

Now now, if you make that sort of face, it makes me want to service you more."

"—Kohaku.. san—"

"That won't do.

You shouldn't be calling my name, Shiki-san.

You belong to Akiha-sama, so please call her name.

Isn't that right, Akiha-sama?"

... Kohaku calls over to where Akiha is leaning against the wall.

"..... Yes.

... Nii-san.. is mine.. after all—"

Her voice is very soft, almost inaudible.

"Heh, that's how it is.

Do you understand Shiki-san?

No matter what happens, you must only think of Akiha-sama, okay?"

Saying that,

the gentle movement of her fingers changes.

For just an instant,

she grabs my shaft with one hand, and pushes at the tip with her thumb—

"Ha, ah—,.....!"

A weak groan sneaks past my lips, despite my attempts to stifle it.

Kohaku's fingers return to their gentle caressing.

"Ohh.

You can't keep it in, can you, Shiki-san?

Does it really feel that good?

Even though I'm doing this to you against your will, and Akiha-sama is watching, it really feels so good that you can't even hold back?"

"Ts—"

Kohaku's teasing voice.

"You're wrong—"

"It's not wrong.

Even though Akiha-sama is watching you, you let your voice out because it felt good.

Shiki-san, you are her Onii-san, but you couldn't even hold yourself back in front of Akiha-sama."

"_____"

In the midst of my mingling embarrassment and resentment, these sensations force their way through, and I start to bulge out against her delicate fingers.

"Kya—!"

Kohaku's small voice cries out.

Momentarily freed, my completely swollen shaft sways back and forth.

"Wow.... Shiki-san, amazing...."

Kohaku-san sounds impressed.

"....., a....."

I hear the half-hidden sounds of breathing coming from near the wall.

"Going back and forth like this and twitching so much.. how dirty."

"Wha—"

Kohaku san's words are so embarrassing I look away.

Finn..... ah....., ha.....

—What is it?

From just beyond the edge of my vision,

comes the sound of suppressed exhalation—

"Hehe—but even though you're this dirty, it's still very pretty.

Your skin is stretched tight, and it has no weird spots.

Most men look very ugly down here, but yours is very different Shiki-san."

She says this happily, then purses her lip together and blows against me.

Her soft, hot breath swirls around my throbbing tool.

"Tss—"

I can't stand it, so I close my eyes.

I can't even deny Kohaku's words.

No matter what I say, I'm still bound hand and foot, erect in front of Akiha.

It—is too embarrassing.

I can't look them in the eyes.

"Don't you think so too, Akiha-sama?

Right here, Shiki-san is hard and erect—like the antlers of a stag."

"Eh..... ah, y.... yes.... I can't believe.... that is Nii-san."

Her faltering voice is mixed with what sounds like heavy breathing.

"Akiha-sama?

Is this the first time you've seen a man?"

"Of.... of course it is...!"

I. I've never.... seen, something like this—"

"Is that so?

Oh, then please don't be mistaken.

Shiki-san really is pretty down here.

Other men look much uglier in comparison."

"Eh....?"

R-really?

.... Um, Nii-san's.. is special...?"

"Yes, it's well-shaped and bigger than most people.

But that doesn't really matter.
 Can you see Akiha-sama?
 The most important thing is that it is Shiki-san."
 "Yes.... That's.... Nii.. san—" "
 "No, Shiki-san is still holding back.
 So as you have ordered Akiha-sama, I will make him into a dirty beast."
 "Sorry, Shiki-san."
 Speaking without a hint of apology in her voice, Kohaku brings her face between my legs.
 At that instant—an incandescent shock of lighting races through my back.

I feel something.. wet.
 My hot, burning manhood suddenly comes into contact with something very wet—
 "Eh—eh—!?"
 I throw my head up, and in that instant, lose all the remaining reason I have left.
 Kohaku's tongue is licking me.
 Ah.....
 "Mm.... Shiki-san, so.. hot."
 "Tss....., tss....."
 Kohaku's.. sweet breath swirling around me.. is making me crazy.
 I feel my entire being focus on that one point.
 ha.....
 "... mm... n, mhm, ah... n..."
 Her fingers hold me.. and as I swell, she licks me with her delicate pink tongue.
 "Ah—mm.... Shiki.. san—" "
 Her movements.. are very careful and enthusiastic.
 Hwa..... nn..... Nii-san, how.... dirty....
 The back of her tongue.
 The tip of it as it slides around me.
 The lips that embrace my tip.
 She licks me as if trying to taste everything.
 Her small tongue laps diligently at my tip.
 This sensation.
 It's so much better than her fingers alone.
 Why—with just her tongue, can she make my heart pound like this?
 Ah..... N, nn.....
 "Shiki-san.... hey, Shiki-san, does.. it.. feel good....?"
 She looks at me with glittering, upturned eyes.
 But she still doesn't stop caressing me.
 ah,..... nn.
 aah—!
 "It feels good, doesn't it....?"
 Since you're feeling good, I also.. feel—" "
 "A—, ha, gh—.....!"

Resisting the heat rising inside of me, I grip the bed sheets.
 mm..... nn, haah, ah——
 Her dainty, delicate fingers continue to embrace me.
 Indecent slurping noises.
 From my testicles to my tip, her fingers stroke me with wet slopping noises.
 "See Shiki-san, if I do this, you will—!"
 She slides her fingers even harder.
 "—, ah—!"
 mm, ah.....!
 I'm not the only one experiencing this pleasure.
 "Eh—Aki.. ha.....?"
 I shift my blank stare.
 I hear the sounds of heavy breathing.
 But they don't belong to me—

Ah.... nn, Nii, san.....!

—Akiha is also panting quietly.
 "Wha....."
 My mind is blank and I can't quite understand what's happening.
 All I can see is Akiha's indecent state.
 Her white legs are positioned unabashedly on the chair, spread apart as if they were ready to receive a man.
 "Haa.... ah.... Nii-san, how—"
 I hear the sounds of fabric on moist flesh.
 Her pure white panties were wet and stuck directly to her.
 "Aah, mm.... dirty.... Nii-san.... making that kind of a face—!"
 Her fingers rub her panties over her swollen folds.
 Her long middle finger, like a well-crafted work of art, slides up and down along the crevice formed in her panties.
 "Ah—haa, ah—ah.....!!"
 Breathing heavily and appearing as if she can't see anything, Akiha continues moving her fingers.
 As her essence drips onto the chair, she goes from one finger to two.
 "Ah...., nn.....!
 Ha, no—Nii-san, more, har.. der——!"
 Her body starts to tremble softly.
 Her panties, the chair, and her fingers are coated with dripping juices as Akiha continues to pleasure herself.
 "Ah, ha.... a, Nii, san—Shiki-Niisan, you—just don't.. know—!"
 Akiha breathes heavily, as if trying to expel something hot from inside her.
 I realize her passionate breathing is strangely—matching itself to the rhythm of my own.
 "A—Aki, ha—"
 "Hwaa, haa.... ha, I love you so much—so why.....!"
 Her face contorts in pain.

.... She bites down on her pinky finger, as if trying to bring herself out of her trance—

"Now, now, you shouldn't do that, Shiki-san.

I have to punish you for looking away."

—Kohaku's voice.

As she speaks, I feel a sensation like a blade flowing along my shaft.

"—, Ah, ha.....!"

I don't even know what she's doing anymore.

My body bound by Kohaku, my mind bound by Akiha.. I don't even know where I am.

"Ts—ha, kk.....!"

Thump.

A sensation rises from my hips.

.... Am I climaxing even without me knowing about it?

What I've held back for so long is already released.

But I'm still erect as Kohaku continues to play with me.

—No, am I wrong?

"Mm—Nii-san, louder—so I can hear, Shi.. ki—!"

Akiha moans so wildly I think she might break herself.

The sight of her writhing figure soaks my brain.

"Ah—Hwaa, ah, ah—Nii-san.... Nii-san, Nii-san Nii-san Nii-san....!!

Even though I love you so much Nii-san,—!"

Akiha frantically calls my name.

Ashamed, but unable to stop herself, she asks for me with her fingers.

A deep breath.

Her sighs are so hot they might burn me if they touch my skin.

".... A.... Aki.. ha... this—"

".... Ha, haaa—ah.... kk, mm....!!"

Akiha's back arches.

.... She doesn't see me or even hear my voice.

Well, for that matter,

her voice and image don't reach me either.

"Akiha—I. you—"

"Nii.. san—more, more—"

My mind is melting.

I don't even know who is caressing me right now.

It's Kohaku's mouth.

But in reality, only Akiha's voice matters.

"Akiha—me too—"

"Naah....!

Ah, n, Nii, san—!"

.... I can hear her voice.

Akiha seems to have reached her limit.

The sound of our wild breathing synchronizes in perfect harmony.

From that, I feel like Akiha and I are making love, and I go mad.

Any taboo, or common sense, or the me that was embarrassed.. none of that

matters now.

"Ah—A, Aki, ha—"

"Yes—come, please come, Nii-san.....!!"

A broken pulse.

A final scream issues from my splattering shaft, its limit reached long before.

"Nn—Shiki, my.. Shiki.....!!"

With my impulse comes that voice.

"A—kiha."

My body is drained of energy.

Spurt.

Spurt.

My pent up emotions spray all over the bed, dirtying the sheets.

.....

I can't hear her voice anymore.

"Ha—ah, ah—"

My raging heart gradually begins to calm.

Calm.

With that, everything that I had tried so hard to resist, and the person that was the brother of Akiha.. crumbles away—

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"—Hisui, perhaps?"

.... Maybe she is just checking to see if I am sleeping soundly during her night-time patrol.

It wouldn't be strange if Akiha told her to check up on me since I've been spending the night somewhere else....

"....., Zzzz "

Well, I should just pretend I'm fast asleep to make Hisui feel better if that's the case.

.... The footsteps don't stop.

The noisy footsteps don't sound like Hisui.

She is always trying to politely hide her presence, so this is very strange.

.... I sense her draw near.

It seems she is just standing by my bed.

"..... Zzzz "

It might not be Hisui.

I open my eyes slightly so as not to give myself away.



"..... Zzzz "

Without a doubt, it's Hisui.

But I'm certain that she appears to be acting strange.

"....."

"..... Zzzz "

Hisui stares at me silently.

"—Ah."

She tries to speak, but stops herself.

.... Hisui repeats herself and remains in place.

....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....
 It's gotten very tense.
 I don't know what she wants to say, but to leave her like that seems pitiful.
 First of all, I can't sleep like this.
 "..... Zzzz "
 But the instant I decide to stop pretending I'm asleep and ask her,
 "..... Are you awake, Shiki-sama....?"
 I hear her hesitant voice.
 "..... Hisui?"
 As naturally as I can, I pretend to wake up.
 As soon as I sit up, there—



—I see Hisui acting strangely.
 "What is it Hisui?
 This late at night.. did something happen?"
 ".... Yes, I have come to complete my nighttime duty, Shiki-sama."
 Hisui says something I can't quite understand in a fading voice.
 "....?"
 A nighttime, duty?
 What's that?"
 Tilting my head, I look at Hisui directly.
 "..... "
 Hisui doesn't answer but just averts her gaze.
 "..... "
 "..... "
 "..... "
 "..... "
 "..... "
 —Another long, uncomfortable silence ensues.
 "Hisui.
 Um, unless you explain a bit clearer, I won't understand what you mean."
 I say this to break the silence.
 And then,



"A nighttime duty is a nighttime duty.
It is what you desired, so such words are very troublesome."
She almost looks like she is sulking.
"_____"

I don't understand what she is getting at.
But, more than that.... tonight, she seems different from her usual self.
.... Not so much her words, but she seems so cute, I suddenly want to tease her.
".... Hisui?
Sorry, but I still don't get it.
What is this nighttime duty?"



".... Um, do you really not understand, Shiki-sama?"
"Isn't that what I'm saying?
If I can help, I'll help, so tell me what you need."
"....."
Hisui goes quiet again.
But this time, it isn't for very long.



"I am here to be your nighttime partner, Shiki-sama."

Hisui blushes furiously as she says this.

"Oh, I see.

My nighttime partner.

That's what it is."

After I understand,

"—EeeeEEEEh!?"

I pull back so quickly I almost fall out of bed.

"....."

Still looking down, Hisui doesn't say anything.

"—Wha—"

I try to say something, but I can't speak.

.... Um, in other words,

it seems Hisui came here to sleep with me.

"..... I'm dreaming."

I pinch myself to check.

.... It hurts, and Hisui doesn't disappear.

"W-why?"

All I manage to blurt out is that single word.



"....."

Clutching her hands together, Hisui barely meets my gaze.

"..... Because, I am yours, Shiki-sama."

Her voice is full of warmth.

"Mine?"

Hisui—"

Thump.

My pulse quickens.

"I don't think of you like that—"

I don't want to think about it, but.



"_____"

If she makes that expression,

my dizziness gets worse.

"—Hisui, you can't be serious.

I don't.. really."

I never thought about having sex with Hisui or anything like that—

".... Shiki-sama, are you saying you hate me?"

She looks like she's scared I might say yes.

There's no man in this world who could resist those eyes.

"N-no way....!

Hisui, I—"

.... In the very depths of my dreams,

did I think I want Hisui?

.... My pulse races.

.... My reasoning is fading.

.... There's something wrong.

.... I just confirmed this wasn't a dream.

But it seems like I'm in a dream and my thoughts are inconsistent, and I really

am thinking that I want Hisui—



"Shiki-sama.... am I no good?"
"Stupid—That's not it.
Hisui, I like you."



Hisui relaxes visibly.
"... But, this is something different.
Even if you are my servant, this isn't something you have to do.... I can't do
anything you don't want to do."
Thump, Thump.
I manage to gather up enough reason to point this out.



"——Shiki.. sama."
She clenches her hands even tighter.
"... I am not against it.
I am completely yours.

.... So is it wrong for me to wish for you to love me too?"
 She speaks in bits and pieces.
 As it reaches my ears, the last traces of rational thought disappear.
 "Hisui, but—"
 I take my eyes away from Hisui as I speak.
 But, even that,



"Please.... take a look, Shiki-sama."
 Once I glimpse her fingers grasping her skirt, I can no longer look away.

That instant, my breath catches in my throat.
 "....."
 Her upraised skirt.
 The delicate, graceful legs of a young girl.
 And between those legs, that which would normally be covered is plainly visible.
 "....."
 I can hear her trembling as she breathes.
 Her delicately curved, trembling white body.
 Her exposed slit is a perfect match for the rest of her beautiful body.
 The lips around it are so small, they really do seem like flower petals.
 "..... Ah....."
 Those petals quiver slightly.
 Being seen must be extremely embarrassing for her.
 "....."
 But she still doesn't move.
 Skirt raised and completely exposed, she closes her eyes and blushes, waiting for me.
 "Hi—sui."
 It's all I can say.
 There is no smell coming from her.
 Yet I am completely intoxicated from the aroma.
 Her figure isn't full of womanly curves, but I still feel my heart racing.
 It feels like the warmth from underneath her skirt has somehow filled the entire room.
 My head, my throat, even my fingertips are all held in thrall.

—Hisui.

Hisui, who is shyly closing her eyes..

Even though I know I should stop her, I keep on thinking the opposite—

"....."

Hisui trembles in silence.

Her delicate trembling.

It was only her fingers at first, but then her legs, and her thighs too.

She's shaking.

She brings her legs closer together, as if to hide the glorious treasure between them.

"....."

Hisui's breathing becomes harder.

.... I thought she would speak up.

No, that's not it, I just simply—

"—Hisui."

wanted to hear her voice.

I reach out.

And bring Hisui's trembling body into my embrace.

"..... Ah."

Her body jerks.

"Hisui, I—"

I don't know what I should say.

When I snatch her violently into my arms, she looks up at me with moistened eyes.

"... Yes.

Please, take good care of me, Shiki-sama."

"....."

Her words have a strange magic.

My raging heart suddenly calms.

"... I understand.

That makes me very happy, Hisui."

I sit her down on the bed.

"Then, don't move until I tell you to.

And don't speak unless I ask you."

Hisui nods.

My fingers moves under her upraised skirt.

"....."

She watches my finger, unable to do anything.

Pretending not to notice, I reach out with my middle finger and lightly stroke her slit.

"Ah....."

Hisui's whole body quivers.

I tried to be as gentle as I could, but she seems to have felt it strongly.

"... Mm.... you're so soft here, Hisui."

I put my middle and index fingers together and continue stroking her.

As gently as I can, I stroke the entire area.

"Ha..... ah....."
 Her breathing becomes louder.
 A soft caress.
 I continue my soft massage, taking my finger up and down her slit.
 "—, Nn.....!"
 "Hm....?"
 Hisui, did you say something?"
 "Ah... No, it is... nothing, Shiki.. sama."
 "I see, that's good.
 I thought you forgot I told you not to speak."
 Saying that,
 I suddenly slip a finger inside her.
 "—Nha.....!"
 Her back arches in response.
 I haven't even put more than the tip of my finger in yet, so I don't know what will happen if I go farther.
 "... Wow, this is how it always is?
 It's moist all over and it's really wet."
 "Ah....."
 Hisui swallows her words and blushes to the tips of her ears.
 Probably to obey my order not to speak.
 "You really are dirty.
 I haven't even done anything, and you're already wet, Hisui."
 "——"
 Hisui stands there in embarrassment.
 "No, I'm sorry.
 If that's how it is, I should have hurried up and done.. this!"
 I plunge my finger deeper.
 "Kgh..., mm.....!"
 Hisui throws her head back.
 I feel her body squeeze me lightly in response.
 "... Man, it's only one finger.
 You must be sensitive, Hisui."
 I slide my finger in deeper and slowly twist it around inside of her.
 "——"
 Tss,... a."
 Her lips shake uncontrollably.
 But still, she continues to follow my command.
 Desperately trying to keep from crying out and breaking the rule I've set for her.
 "... You're pretty persistent, Hisui.
 But, well—it doesn't seem like you can hold out much longer."
 "Eh... Shiki.. sama....?"
 "Because you're already really wet inside.
 Being wet from just one finger, there's something wrong with that."
 "——"

Hisui's face turns even redder.

"... No, Shiki-sama—it is because you're the one touching me, I—"

"Hey, don't speak.

I didn't ask you about that."

"Ah——!"

I move my finger again.

It slides along her inner walls.

"—Ah—ngah, mm.....!"

I can feel the warmth of her breath.

"... Hisui, did you say something?"

"... Ah..... no, noth.. ing——"

She clenches her teeth.

But she can't keep her breathing from growing louder.

"... That's good, but.. I don't think this finger will be enough for you."

I pull my finger out with a wet sound.

Coated in her juice, a wet line connects my finger to her.

"Ah——"

Hisui looks down in amazement.

"Then I'll do this next.... Hisui, make sure you remember what I told you."

"Ah..... Ye.. s."

Hisui nods.

At the same time, I thrust two fingers inside of her.

"Hya, nn——!"

Her back arches once more and she tightens inside.

"Ah.... oh.... ahn——"

Her escaping breath is so hot it's almost burning me.

To make it even hotter, I slide both of my fingers up and down.

"Nn.... nn——"

Her whole body shakes in response.

No matter how she tries, she can't seem to resist the pleasure seeping through her whole body.

Her movement betrays her passion even as she tries to stifle her cries.

"Hisui, even if you moan this much, I can't hear it.

You're making too much noise down here."

I move my fingers hard, and the sound of wet flesh on flesh gets louder.

"No——no.... Shiki-sama."

She looks away, blushing furiously.

Her face is so cute—I just want to tease her even more.

"You have to want this.

You're leaking so much you're making my carpet dirty.

It's pretty obvious that you're a dirty girl."

"Ah.... nhaa.....,....."

I continue to work my fingers as I speak.

While moving my finger inside her, I curl my middle finger.

"—Ha.....!?"

Her body instantly jerks.

My bent finger slides along her inner wall.
 "Aahh—nghaa, hwah—!"
 She must be really sensitive there; she can't stifle her cries.
 "Hisui, didn't I tell you not to say anything?"
 "A—Yes, Shiki.. sama—"
 Hisui is panting heavily.
 But I still don't stop rubbing inside her.
 "Nn.... haa, ah—Ah."
 She's breathing hard, as if she has a high fever.
 "... Hm.... You've even gotten bigger down here."
 I lean forward and lick her swollen clit.
 "Nahh—!?"
 Hisui tries to arch back.
 "Hisui.
 I didn't say you could move."
 "... Ye... yes... Shiki.. sa... ma."
 Her voice is barely audible.
 I caress her, inside and out.
 Even though I'm barely doing anything, her body seems to be at its limit already.
 "... Hisui.
 Is this, your first time?"
 "A—n, Ah.... Ye.. s....
 Because, Shiki-sama, you are.. my only master—"
 She answers me with a quivering voice.
 "... I see.
 Then, here is your reward."
 I lick her once more.
 Using the tip of my tongue, I pull her hood back and lick her clit.
 "Eh—ah, oh.....!!!"
 It's her loudest cry so far.
 Ignoring that, I lick even harder.
 "Ah, haa, ah—Shiki-sa.. ma—!"
 It isn't just licking.
 I lick as if I was trying to flatten her clit.
 "Ah.... ngah.... N, no—Shiki-sama, please—please stop it—Haa, ahn, ah...
 Shiki.. sama....!"
 She convulses with pleasure.
 Her face rises up to heaven as she breathes wildly.
 The knuckles of the fingers grasping her skirt turn white.
 "Ha—This is.. too much—!
 Ahh.... Shiki.. sama, please.... please forgive me, Shiki.. sa.. maaa—!"
 She gives a crumbling, weak cry.
 Her knees give out and she falls onto the bed.

.... The sound of labored breathing echoes throughout the room.

Hisui lays exhausted on the bed.
Since I am sitting on the bed, Hisui naturally falls into my arms.
"..... Hisui?"
I whisper into her ear as I hold her.
"——"

There's no response.
All I can hear is her heavy breathing.
She does not seem capable of answering me.
.... Just,
the warmth of her arms grabbing me tells me she is conscious.
"....."

Time passes by with the two of us like that.
Just holding her warm body in my arms feels so nice—and more than that, I'm
thrilled by the feeling of Hisui grabbing onto me like a child.
"——Mm."

I can feel her heartbeat.
.... Really, what came over me earlier?
Hisui was entrusting herself to me so honestly, and I treated her like that.
I feel so guilty I want to die.
".... If Akiha finds out, she'll kill me..."
.... Yeah, there's no denying that.
"....."

Hisui finally catches her breath.
"..... Shiki.. sama...?"
Still in my arms, she looks up at me.
".... Oh, I'm sorry, Hisui.
I guess I overdid it."
"....."

She looks directly at me with vacant eyes.
".... No, I am fine.
Shiki-sama, if you are satisfied, then I am happy."
Blushing, she speaks with her usual serious expression.
.... That face.. is just too cute.
Thanks to that, something that was calm starts to re-awaken inside of me.
"——!"

I quickly pull away from Hisui.
.... Because if we stayed in that position, my hardened shaft would poke into
her stomach.
".... Shiki-sama...?"
Hisui looks at me in confusion.
"Is something wrong?
Um... was I.. unsatisfactory after all...?"
She sounds uneasy.
Like she's worried that I might hate her.
"——No.
It's not like that at all.

There's nothing unsatisfactory about you.
 See, it's just that my mind is satisfied, but my body isn't...."
 I don't say it exactly right.
 —And then,
 Hisui blushes and looks down.
 "... Hisui?"
 "... Please forgive me for making you say that, Shiki-sama."
 She speaks hesitantly.
 "Ah—"
 Looking down, I realize that I am standing fully erect in front of her....
 It would be strange if she didn't notice, really.
 "Ah, no, that—that's fine, really!
 I'll calm down soon, so don't worry about it!"
 My frantic stammering seems to have the opposite effect.
 "... Shiki-sama.
 I have not yet serviced you."
 She looks directly at me.
 "Please relax.
 I am not used to this, but I will do my best to serve you."
 I don't even have time to stop her.
 She takes off her clothes and slowly brings her face towards my crotch.

.... Her movements really are innocent.
 Lowering my zipper, she exposes my swelling member.
 She doesn't show so much as a hint of distaste at seeing this large, grotesque thing, but touches me with hands that seem to be doing this for the first time.
 ".... Ah...."
 She touches it and lets out a gasp, probably out of surprise at how hot it is.
 Slowly and hesitantly, she grasps my shaft, moving as if handling something fragile.
 "... Hisui, if it's your first time, you don't have to force yourself."
 "....."
 Hisui shakes her head.
 Without hesitating, almost as if she is kissing it, she touches me with her lips.
 "_____"
 I swell in response to that soft sensation.
 The feeling of another's lips.... the feeling of Hisui's lips causes my blood to burn.
 "Shiki-sama...?
 Does it.. hurt?"
 "Oh, no.
 Your lips just felt so good."
 "... So, it doesn't hurt....?"
 "Of course not," I say with a smile, trying to reassure her as she looks at me full of worry.
 Clearly relieved, she uses more pressure than before.

"N——"

Heat boils deep in my loins.
Her caress really is light.
She might not know how to do it, because she only holds me with her fingers
and sucks my tip gently.
.... But, that doesn't mean it doesn't feel good.
".... Ah... mm... Shiki-sama, is this.. good....?"
Even though she is inexperienced, she does her best to please me.
The delightful sensation of her lips as they embrace me.
Not even fully in her mouth, but just between her lips.
".... Oh... you're starting to drip."
A line of pre-come drizzles out.
Not minding it the least bit, she uses her tongue to lap it up.
"—, Ah—"

My hips rise in response to the sensation.
".... Mm... Shiki-sama, it's so hot."
Hisui tightens her grip, trying to stop my shaft from moving around.
"..... Hisui."
.... I could have told her what to do to make it feel even better.
But, I don't need it.
Just having her trying her best to please me is enough.
".... Shiki.. sama....?"
".... Yeah, it feels good, Hisui."
I let my fingers wander through her hair.
I love her right now more than I want her.
Her red hair, her flushed cheeks.... Trying so hard, even though it's her first
time.
"Ah... Yes, I am very happy, Shiki-sa, ma—"
She continues to work on me with even more enthusiasm.
Her fingers squeeze me hungrily.
Her tongue, her mouth, they caress me almost non-stop.
"—Ah."

The heat within me rises higher.
.... As if she started to figure out what to do, she starts to kiss not only my tip,
but my whole shaft.
"Mm... ahmm... Shiki-sama, is this good....?"
"——"

Not answering, I resist the urge welling up within me.
".... Ah... nm, mmh——"
Her lips lower themselves around my shaft.
In between them, her tongue plays back and forth.
"Hey—Hisui, you should get back."
I say this, but I don't even try to make her get away.
"Ah—Shiki-sama, it is.. so—"
Big, she probably means to say.
On the verge of release, I'm swelling even larger.

"Hi.. sui—I'm going to come, so you should.. get back."

"Yes.... please come, Shiki.. sama...."

As she says this, her hot breath billows all around me.

.... She knows.

She knows what's coming next, and embraces my manhood firmly with her lips.

"Ahh—,—"!

With that, I explode.

"Ah, mmp—!?"

I can hear Hisui's muffled voice.

I release all of my pent up desire.

With her small lips, she diligently swallows it.

"—Hi, sui."

Intoxicated by the feeling of release, I look at Hisui's throat.

She's swallowing every drop.

Her blue eyes like glass, brimming with tears.

—With that, I suddenly think.

Hisui is so dedicated, but clumsy.

.... It really is sad.

If this is reality and not a dream, I wouldn't make the mistake of thinking of her as being like a doll—

.....
 "—Mor—ning?"

I dazedly open my eyes.

Sunshine pours in from the window, and the room is enveloped in a warm atmosphere.

"——"

I stare down at my hands.

My hands are a little sweaty.

My body is drenched in sweat as well, as if I was in an incredibly hot night.

My body is sluggish.

It isn't uncomfortable, rather it is more the feeling of completion.

"——?"

I shake out my shoulders.

.... My body seems just fine.

But Hisui is not in front of me.

Her fingers and breath that were caressing me until now have disappeared like they were never there.

"Huh——?"

Hisui's fingers, and breath....?

"AAH——!"

I jump out of bed.

Thinking back to that dream, I'm suddenly assailed by regret.

"I don't, believe it——"

.... Just what kind of dream was I having?
I imagined Hisui coming here and telling me she's here to do her nighttime duty.... I really have to question my taste.
"Haa—ahhh."
Stretching my back, I take in a deep breath.
.... I try to forget about my dream, but it won't fade that easily.
"..... Hisui."
I know it had to be a dream—but it felt too real.
It makes me think it might have actually happened.
.... All the same, it had to have been a dream.
I could say that it was good at least on that note.
".... But she sure was cute."
—As I remember the dream, my feelings are mixed.
The real Hisui is never that open about her feelings.
She is always calm and expressionless, and she rarely blushes.
"....."
.... So I still can't help but to feel regret on that part.
I know it's wrong, but I think back to the honest Hisui in my dream.
And, then,



"Shiki-sama."
"Uwaaaaaaa!"
—Hisui appears with her usual expression.
"AAAhHHHhh Hisui!"
Scramble, scramble, roll, thud.
The shock causes me to roll out of the bed and plaster the nearby wall.
Thankfully, the sheets were still wrapped around my waists.



"... Shiki-sama.
Do you have something against me?"
She looks angry.
... Well, suddenly spinning around like that and calling her name, she probably has a right to feel I'm acting strange.
"... N-no, it's nothing... uh, anyway, how long, were you here?"
... Still in disarray, I blurt the first thing to come to mind.



"Before you awoke, Shiki-sama, why do you ask?"
She looks at me with a dissatisfied expression.
"Uh....."
Seeing her eyes like that, I feel like I am the lowest form of life on earth.

"... Oh.
Before I, woke up..."
—Eh.
That means,
Hisui saw my face when I was having that dream?—
"Hisu, Hisui, um—"
Still lying on the floor tangled in the sheets and unable to stand, I look up at Hisui's face.
Hisui just stands there expressionless as usual and makes no attempt to speak.
"Um... Did I look, strange...?"



"I do not wish to describe it."
"Ah—oh."
... I knew it.
I must have looked really weird.



"But, if you insist, Shiki-sama, I can describe as accurately as I can."
"... No, you don't.. have to do that...."
My face still flushed, I speak in a fading voice.
"Um, Hisui-san?"
"What is it, Shiki-sama?"
"Um, I'm going to change, so could you please go outside?"
—Or rather, I'm so embarrassed, I just want her to leave.
"... I understand.
Please excuse me."

She gives a bow and goes to leave.
I take a deep breath,
and relax.



".... By the way, Shiki-sama."

She turns around with a fearsome expression.

"Could you please tell me what kind of dream you were having?"

She looks at me.

.... This isn't good.

I might have said something really bad in my sleep.

".... Um, it isn't much to talk about.

I may have spoke something in my sleep, but it would be great if you think it has nothing to do with me at all...."



".... That is fine.

But from now on, please refrain from sleeping while talking about the smallness of someone's chest, or the wideness of their foreheads, or other characteristics of their body.

It makes my duty to wake you up a little more difficult."

"Please excuse me," Hisui says as she leaves the room.

After calming down enough, I head to the sitting room.
As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, elegantly sipping tea.



"Oh, good morning Nii-san.
You are certainly up early this morning."
She must be happy I woke up early because she greets me with a smile.

"Yeah, good morning.
There were, well, a lot of things going on this morning."
"?"
A lot of things?
What do you mean by that?"
"Um, well—"
—And then,
I suddenly recall my dream about Hisui.
"Ugh—"
This isn't good.
I can tell my face is blushing beyond my control.
"Nii-san—?"
A brief clamor.



"What's wrong?
Your face is red, do you have a fever?"
"—!"
Rushing over to me, she looks up at me from below.
But, that angle,
Looking up at me like that, it resembles too much of the dream last night—



Akiha sighs.

"You do seem to have a fever.

Kohaku, come quickly.

Nii-san doesn't seem to be well."

Akiha calls out to the dining room.

Kohaku-san has to be preparing my breakfast in the kitchen.

"I'm fine—!

It's just a minor cold, so don't worry!"



"If it is a cold, then I can't let it go by.

For you, a trivial illness is a big deal.

The strength of your immune system is much lower than most people's."

Akiha seems to be fed up and puts her hand on my forehead.

The sensation of her cool, delicate hand.

Her white, delicate fingers.

Completely different from a man's, those slender, pretty, white fingers——

"Ah!"

This isn't good.

This isn't good at all, so I break loose and run out to the lobby.

The sound of my footsteps trail behind me.



"Shiki-sama?
Have you finished your breakfast already?"
"No, that's not it, but—um, where's my bag?"
"I have your bag here.
Are you already going to school?"
Nodding, I snatch my bag from Hisui.
"I'm going.
Don't worry about seeing me off!"



"Nii-san, you've been acting strange.
What are you doing with that fever?"
"Geez, I told you it's nothing!
Since it's nothing, I'm going to school!
I'll have breakfast later, so leave me alone!"
"Leave you alone—hey, Nii-san!?"
The sound of my running footsteps are my only response.

sigh

Even if it is Akiha, she wouldn't chase me this far.
Since we're not kids anymore, she won't stop me from going to school.
"—Whew."
I take a deep breath and calm down.
"..... What am I running away for?"
Once I calm down, I can think clearly.
I didn't do anything wrong, so there was no need for me to run away like that.

"—I don't believe it.

I look like a complete idiot."

But, to go back to the mansion to eat breakfast sounds more dumb.

"—School, then?"

Letting out a sigh, I go downhill along the residential street.

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.... If someone is coming to my room, it either has to be Kohaku-san, Hisui or Akiha.

Hisui and Kohaku-san would probably knock so that leaves only Akiha....

"..... Akiha?"

I sit up in bed and call out.

The moonlight only dimly illuminates the room, so I can hardly see.

I look around, but I don't see anyone's silhouette.

"... Must be my imagination...."

My mind must be a little dull from lack of sleep.

I let out a breath and roll over onto my side.

The light on my nightstand comes on.

"—Eh?"

My heart skips a beat.

"... That's strange.

I don't remember turning that on...."

I turn off the light.

I have school tomorrow, so I need to get some sleep.

"That won't do, Nii-san.

We'll need the lights on for this."

Suddenly,

from behind me, a calm voice calls out.

"—!"

I turn around.

There, I see—



Akiha,



and Kohaku-san.

"Akiha...?
What are you doing here at this hour?
And why is Kohaku-san with you?
Did something happen?"
I slip out of bed as I speak.
After exchanging glances, they laugh.



"Geez Shiki-san, you're too out of it.
Akiha-sama and I are here because there is something."
Kohaku-san giggles.

"...?"
I don't understand what's so funny.



"Kohaku, laughing like that is rude to Nii-san.
I understand how you feel, but you shouldn't surprise him too much.
We have to save the fun for later, right?"



"Oh, forgive me Akiha-sama.
He's just so cute when he doesn't understand simple things like this, so I couldn't help it."



".... That's true.
Certainly Nii-san is a bit dense.
I mean, not even realizing why the two of us would come here this late at night,
not even knowing his own position.
Yes, he's just like an innocent little puppy.
Cute, but clueless."

With a cold smile, Akiha looks my way.
 "Aki, ha.....?"
 Seeing her eyes finally makes me understand that there's something wrong with the way they are acting.
 How should I say it.
 I don't sense any hostility, but it feels like they are up to something.
 "Akiha, if you have something to say, I'll listen, so just go ahead.
 We have school tomorrow, so we should go to bed early."
 I tell her this as coolly as I can.



"....."
 She stares at me without saying a word; she's not happy with something.
 No, more than that..
 Akiha sighs.
 "... I thought Nii-san would be a little more flustered, but I'm a bit shocked that he's not getting in the mood."
 She's talking as if I'm not even here.
 "—?"
 Um, Akiha.
 I still don't know what you are trying to say, but...."



"Geez, Nii-san.
 Just what kind of upbringing did you have at the Arima household?
 Look, someone of the opposite sex is in your room at night.
 A gentleman of your age should be excited just by that, but you're acting like

normal.

It's just natural for a woman like me to be shocked by that."

She glares at me.

"... Wait a minute, Akiha.

I would notice if girls were in my room, but you guys are different.

We're brother and sister, so this isn't a big deal, and Kohaku-san comes to check around every night."

Yeah, that's why this isn't surprising.

Akiha is my little sister, and Kohaku-san is a servant.

It isn't a big deal for them to come here, day or night, so I really don't—



"In other words, Nii-san, you see us more as family than you do as women?

..... I see.

It might be good for you if that was really true."

She looks me over again with that strange smile.

That quiet look that seems to look into my mind.

"——"

Thump.

My heartbeat starts to quicken.

.... There's something, odd.

Being looked at like that by Akiha, I start to feel more and more uneasy.

.... For example,

Like my true feelings of not being able to accept Akiha as my sister yet since she's changed so much since I last saw her.

Like my true feelings of me starting to feel more for Hisui and Kohaku-san than I should to just servants.

It feels like she is staring into my hidden feelings and I feel guilty.

"Oh?

What's wrong, Nii-san?

Suddenly looking away like that.. you look like you're hiding something."

"Wha——"

I realize my cheeks are getting red.

"O-of course not....!"

Just tell me what you want.

If we don't get some sleep soon, tomorrow will be difficult."

Not to be defeated, I match her stare.
 And then,
 For some reason, Akiha gives a bored sigh.



"How disappointing.
 I was looking forward to seeing your confused face, Nii-san.
 But this is boring.
 Well, we'll watch you be embarrassed further, so I guess it will be okay."
 "Huh——?"
 I climb out of bed.
 Wait a minute.
 I think she just said something terrible——
 "Akiha, what are——"



"Oh?
 Is it okay for you to stand up with your body?
 You have anemia, so you should be calm during the night.
 You seem to be lacking sleep even now, and you were tired for the past few days,
 right?
 Please pay more attention to your health, Nii-san.
 Your body is very weak.
 So, won't you collapse if you keep pushing yourself like this?"
 "Wha——"

——Thump.

Her words seem to affect me.

"—What are you saying?

I'm fine—"

"Oh?

Funny, you're looking a little strained to me.

As if... yes, your breathing is going to get wilder, your blood will feel sluggish in your veins, and see, your hands and feet are going to start feeling cold."

—Thump.

"Hey—Stop, it.

If you say that—"

I really.. will feel.. dizzy—



"No, it isn't just your imagination.

Your body was strange from when we came in, but you just never realized it, Nii-san.

See?

Kohaku was laughing earlier because you didn't even notice it yourself.

You're so weak that you might collapse at any time, but you don't ever think of your condition, Nii-san."



"You are like a scarecrow, you being the only one not noticing that.

Wearing old clothes, bamboo for arms and legs.

From far away he looks human.. but once you look close, it's just something made up to take human form."

"Wha—"

Why did she suddenly start talking about all this nonsense?—



"Really, you still don't understand?

Your face is pale and your mind is numb.

You really are like a scarecrow, that you don't even want to admit to that.

Don't you think so too, Kohaku?

That Nii-san is like an ornament that could break at any time."

"Stu.... That, can't—"

be true.

It can't, but..

Why—why am I really feeling dizzy—



"See, you're already at your limit.

Stop pushing yourself and lie down.

But you will stay awake.

You won't be able to move your arms and legs, but you will still be conscious."

"Stu—sto..... p—"

My body collapses.

I'm falling towards the bed, just like Akiha said—

"—"

No.

My body isn't strange.

Because, I didn't have any symptoms of anemia earlier—



"I told you, it does not matter.
 Your body is always under constraint.
 So, you have no control tonight either.
 —Because.
 You've always been my puppet, Nii-san."
 "Wha—"

I fall onto the bed.
 In the end, Akiha was right.
 Just like whenever I have an anemic spell, I lose consciousness—

"Hu—h?"
 No, this time it's different.
 My entire body is numb, but I'm still conscious.
 I can't really concentrate, but I'm awake.
 "Different, than my, usual, anemia...."
 I stare blankly at the ceiling.
 "Akiha-sama?"
 Um, did we overdo it....?
 He looks like he really has anemia...."
 Kohaku-san's, voice.
 "What are you talking about, Kohaku?"
 You're the one who put some drugs into his dinner, so he will be a little dazed.
 I only wanted him to sleep a bit.
 I could have done that myself."
 Akiha sounds dissatisfied.
 ".... Hey, you two."
 I call out to them, still lying down.
 My arms and legs won't work, but I somehow manage to turn my neck and look
 at both of them.
 "Shiki-san is very pure, so I guess suggestion seems to work easily on him.
 I suppose that's a good trait about him too."
 It seems they are ignoring me.
 "Yes, but Kohaku, when they are too pure.. don't they make you want to dom-
 inate them?"

.... She looks over at me.

"—"

As soon as our eyes meet, I feel a chill run up my spine.
Coldness sinks into my skin, burrowing under my flesh and into my very core.
I feel as if my brain is becoming numb.
My body feels tied up as she looks at me with those eyes, as if time has stopped
and the whole area has frozen up.

"A—Aki, ha?"

"....."

She doesn't say a word.

.... Thump.

My heart beats loudly.

Her face is entirely devoid of expression, but her eyes—her eyes glow like a
predator stalking her prey—

"Domination, huh?"

Well, I like seeing his troubled face as much as his happy face, so I understand
what you mean, Akiha-sama."

.... Next to Akiha, Kohaku-san tilts her head.

Akiha doesn't look at Kohaku-san, but she gives a small nod.

"Let's see, it's like a painting.

Hey Kohaku, let's say there's a painting that is well done, but not magnificent.
Because it's well done, you don't have any complaints, but you can't like it
because it's just well done and doesn't have anything interesting about it.

In that case, do you know how to make it special for you, Kohaku?"

"Umm, let's see.... I don't know, Akiha-sama."

"It's simple.

You just have to paint over the painting and make it worthless.

As a result, that good painting will turn into trash.

But the process, breaking what is "good" for you, isn't it wonderful?

"—Isn't it beautiful just thinking about it?"

I feel love and regret for that painting.

The pain as the painting gets ruined, anger at myself for ruining it, frustration
because it's beyond repair, and more than anything else, the fact that I am the
only one who can break it is absolute.

I think it is the happiness of owning it.

Because it is the only one, and because the wounds on it are put on there by
me, you feel more attached to it.

Because the more marks you put on it, the more it becomes yours."

—Without any motion.

Like a machine, Akiha laughs.

"Hey, Kohaku.

Don't you want to break that?"

I think it will be.. enjoyable."

"Wha—-Hey, Akiha.....!"
I shout.
But Akiha doesn't respond, and Kohaku-san with her smile,
"Yes.
I understand, Akiha-sama,"
responds like that.
"Erggh!"
I rally all of the strength in my body.
I strain as hard I can and order my lifeless limbs to stand.
"Tss,n!!!!!"
I strain.
I gradually feel my ability to move my arms and legs starting to return—



"That is enough, don't do that, Shiki-san.
You are anemic, so you shouldn't strain your body too much."
With her usual smile, Kohaku-san crouches beside the bed.

"Kohaku-san, what are—"
"What does it look like?
I am tying you down so you won't struggle.
It's okay, I'll only tie your wrists and ankles so it won't hurt that much."
"Tie?
What are you thinking—owww....!" I clench my jaw at the sudden pain.
As if she had a lot of practice, Kohaku-san expertly binds my hands and feet to
the bed.

"Tss.....!"
I feel a tinge in the back of my head.
I don't know what those two are thinking.
But being bound hand and foot on my bed, just imagining what I look like
makes me go crazy.
Having them see me like that, I'm so embarrassed I want to die—
"Kohaku-san....!
Please stop fooling around....!"



"Oh, Shiki-san, you're blushing.
To scream so much, it must be your first time being tied down."
".....!"
Of, Of course it is!
Look, just untie me!"



"Akiha-sama, Shiki-san is saying all these things.
He doesn't seem to realize his position, so isn't it alright to treat him more roughly?"

"Eh—Kohaku, san?"
Still smiling, she gazes down at me tied down.
Her look is far more frightening than Akiha's sharp gaze.
Is it like the cruelty of young kids?
Kohaku-san seems to be enjoying this far more than Akiha.
".... I suppose.
Nii-san wanted you, so I'll leave the manner of lovemaking to you, Kohaku.
But, don't overdo it though.
Even if he does seem like a doll, Nii-san cannot be fixed once he's broken."
"That's true.
I'll try to be gentle, then."
So saying,
Kohaku-san begins to take off my clothes.
She straddles me as she begins her work.
In that position, she slowly undoes the buttons of my shirt, one by one.

With this task complete, her fingers move down to my pants.
"Wha, wha, wha.....!"
I try to flail around, but it's no use.
I hear a dry, metallic sound.
Kohaku-san slowly begins to slide my zipper down.
"—Wha, what, are you, do.....!"
I can barely speak.
I can't understand how or why all this is happening.
I can't grasp how I came to be tied to my bed, or why Kohaku-san is taking off my clothes.
"Shiki-san?
I haven't done anything yet.. does it really feel that good already...?"
With those outrageous words, Kohaku-san places her hand lightly on the front of my underwear.
"Th.. that's not it, but, Kohaku-san—!"
"Oh really?
Then you won't mind if I see all of you, Shiki-san."
"Tssss!"
She pulls my underwear down.
"———"
My mind goes entirely blank.
She's exposed my lower body.
My limp member is unveiled for all to see.
"Aha!
Shiki-san, you're so small and you look so cute!"
Kohaku-san speaks happily from somewhere near my pelvis.
Being bound and stared at by Akiha's cool gaze makes me shrivel even more.
"———!"
The rope creaks as I strain against it.
Embarrassed, I wanted to cover myself with both hands.
But bound as I am, I can't even do that.
"....."
Akiha continues to stare at me without speaking.
Blood rushes to my head.
"Ah—ck."
I grit my teeth.
"It's okay, Shiki-san.
I'll help you perk up, so don't worry.."
With no regard for what I want, Kohaku-san's fingers reach out to me.
"N———!"
My back arches in response.
Her fingers crawl up my thigh like an unhurried spider, her ultimate destination all too obvious.
One by one, they continue to advance with insidious slowness.
So slowly.
The feeling of being touched by someone else.

.... And the sensation that it is nearing my most personal space, throws my brain headlong into chaos.

"Hm..... What a bad boy, Shiki-san.

Getting this excited already?"

Tap.

As if playing a keyboard, Kohaku-san feels along my inner thigh.

"—, h.....!"

I try to hold my breath.

I close my eyes to avoid seeing her face, but I can still feel a piercing gaze boring into me.

.... It goes without saying.

It is Akiha's stare.

As long as that's there—I can't let anything out of my mouth.

.... Kohaku-san keeps going.

The delicate fingers creeping up my thigh—finally arrive at their destination.

"—, —!"

A jolt rushes through me.

With just her finger, so softly they barely make contact, Kohaku-sa-Kohaku plays around.. my whole.. shaft.

"A—, gg—"

—I don't.. understand.

Does it feel this good to be touched by someone else, or are her fingers special?

My blood starts pounding as her hand takes me in a light embrace.

Thump.

Thump.

In spite of my conscience, I find myself starting to get hard.

"Mm... Shiki-san, you have to speak up—"

"—,m—!?"

The bed creaks.

Just now—I felt something slippery glide along the length of my scrotum.

"Hey—Kohaku.. san—!"

I lift my head and look down at her.

"What—"

Even though I expected it,

looking at the scene enchants my already confused brain.

"Kohaku, san—what, are you—"

"What am I doing?"

I am servicing you, of course."

She answers as if what she's doing is perfectly natural.

But, that—to lick me there—

"Y, you can't....!"

Don't you think there's something wrong with doing something that dirty....!?"

"No, I don't.

Because these are Akiha-sama's orders, there's no room for me to think."

Akiha's orders?

That's ridiculous.

"A, Ah, Akiha.....!!!!"

"What is it, Nii-san?"

I'm right here.

There's no need to shout."

"Stop fooling around....!"

What are you thinking!?"

This is wrong....!"

Why are you.. making Kohaku-san do this....!?"

"Oh, just because I want to see it."

—Simple.

She declares this as if I'm some sort of idiot making a big deal out of nothing.

".... H, hey.

Y, you want to see it, Akiha....?"

"Is that a problem?"

I am the head of the Tohno household.

When you returned here, you became mine.

You must have known that when you came back."

"Wha—"

Is she kidding?

.... Certainly, I knew since she's the heiress for the Tohno family, I'm just a hanger-on, but—

"You understand, don't you?"

Tohno Shiki can only live in the Tohno household.

You have nowhere else to go, and you cannot separate yourself from me.

Tohno Shiki is owned by the Tohno family, and I am the head of that family, so you can't disobey me."

—Why is it?

Akiha's words.. just listening to them makes me believe that it's the truth—

"See?"

You're my possession, so I can do whatever I want with you, Nii-san.

I just wanted to see your dirty, indecent body.

I'm not interested in anything else, and I don't want to hear anything you have to say."

Akiha's voice sounds terribly disinterested.

She—she made Kohaku-san do such a dirty thing, but it seems like she's getting disappointed.

"Damn it!"

Really, what are you thinking, Akiha....!?"

If you don't stop this now, I'll really get angry....!"

"Is that so?"

Funny, your body seems to like it just fine."

"Wha—"

Having said that, my whole body becomes hot.
 Just like she said, my manhood has hardened from Kohaku-san's teasing.
 Even though I deny it with my words, my body seems to have a mind of its own.

"Now do you understand?"

This is what you wanted in the first place, Nii-san.

There's no escaping it."

"Th——"

That's, not.. true.

The instant I try to deny it, Kohaku-san touches my shaft with her fingers.

That fully erect, expanded piece of meat.

Kohaku-sa.. n.. takes her delicate fingers and wraps them around it.

"——A, gg.....!"

More than just her touch, the simple fact that it's Kohaku's fingers causes my mind to white out.

"Damn——it."

I close my eyes and grit my teeth, desperately trying to rid my mind of these perverted thoughts.

—But, it's just wasted effort.

Kohaku's fingers.

Their soft touch make me more excited.

"Heh.. that's wonderful Shiki-san.

You're so lively.

Amazing."

Her voice is getting heated.

"But there is still a long way to go.

See—Akiha-sama is watching, so you should make it a little bigger."

Suddenly,

her fingers start to move.

Sliding sensually up and down my entire length.

"Ts—, ah.....!"

I let out a weak gasp.

Unprepared for this sudden attack, my back arches in surprise.

"Hm.... You really are excited.

I can't believe you're getting bigger."

Kohaku sounds as if she really is impressed, using three fingers to stroke me like she is playing with a new toy.

"Ah—, Kohaku, s.. to—"

It almost feels as if she's squeezing me rather than stroking me.

She grins like she is truly enjoying this.

"Ha, ah—,.....!"

A weak groan sneaks past my lips, despite my attempts to stifle it.

"Ohh.

You can't keep it in, can you, Shiki-san?"

Does it really feel that good?
 Even though I'm doing this to you against your will, and Akiha-sama is watching, it really feels so good that you can't even hold back?"
 "Ts——"
 Kohaku's teasing voice.
 Makes me remember.
 Akiha.
 She's right there, and watching me—
 In the midst of my mingling embarrassment and resentment, these sensations force their way through.
 I start to bulge out against Kohaku's delicate fingers.
 "Kya—!"
 Kohaku's small voice cries out.

"——"
 I can feel Akiha's gaze pierce my skin.
 "—Hmm.
 Nii-san, you've finally decided to be honest with yourself, it seems."
 Akiha looks cool and composed.. the exact opposite of me at this moment.
 "Okay Kohaku.
 Please begin."
 Her voice is like ice.
 Kohaku gives a quick affirmative.. and a sudden flash runs through me.

I feel something.. wet.
 My hot, burning manhood suddenly comes into contact with something very wet—
 "Ah—Ah—!?"

I throw my head up, and in that instant, lose all the remaining reason I have left.
 Kohaku's tongue is licking me.
 "Mm.... Shiki-san, it's so.. hot."
 "Tss....., tss....."
 Kohaku's.. sweet breath swirling around me.. is making me crazy.
 I feel my entire being focus on that one point.
 "... Ah... mmph... mm,... ah..."
 Her fingers hold me.. and as I swell, she licks me with her delicate pink tongue.
 "Ah—mm.... Shiki.. san—"
 Her movements.. are very careful and enthusiastic.
 The back of her tongue.
 The tip of it as it slides around me.
 The lips that embrace my tip.
 She licks me as if trying to taste everything.
 Her small tongue laps diligently at my tip.
 This sensation.

It's so much better than her fingers alone.
 Why—with just her tongue, can she make my heart pound like this?
 "Shiki-san... hey, Shiki-san, does.. it.. feel good....?"
 She looks at me with glittering, upturned eyes.
 But she still doesn't stop caressing me.
 "A—, ha, gh—.....!"
 Resisting the heat rising inside of me, I grip the bed sheets.
 Her dainty, delicate fingers continue to embrace me.
 Indecent slurping noises.
 From my testicles to my tip, her fingers stroke me with wet slopping noises.
 "—, nn—!"
 —The pleasure almost makes me go mad.
 As if studying it all, Akiha watches the two of us—
 "Mm... Shiki-san, moan louder."
 This time, she targets the very tip of my shaft with her tongue.
 The sensation feels even better than before—
 "—, H—"
 I twist the sheets as I try resist these sensations.
 Her hot tongue seems to suck at me just by making contact.
 She seems to be sucking the very life out of me.
 "Ah... mm, mha, ah,..... mmh."
 Her wet, sticky tongue.
 From the very base of my shaft around my testicles, I start to feel a light pain.
 Viscous fluid starts to dribble forth.
 "... Heh, Shiki-san, how indecent."
 I want to look away from her.
 —But.
 If I do that, I'll have to look at Akiha.

 "....."
 Akiha doesn't say a word.
 She simply watches our exchange in silence.
 Even when our eyes meet, she just brushes her hair away from her eyes and acts
 like she doesn't care—
 "Ga..."
 That makes my heart pound even faster.
 Akiha is watching me.
 My sister is watching me, and I can't stop it.
 I'm horny like a beast, and I can't resist Kohaku's caress—

 "Hey.
 Shiki-san, don't look away."
 "—"

Kohaku pulls me back to reality.
 Her stroking fingers are now coated with sticky fluid.
 Not just her saliva.

But from me as well.
.... Is it.. dirty?
Kohaku licks my wet member and starts to stroke it with her fingers.
Wet sounds fill the air.
Her actions are wilder than before, her movements making loud noises.
"—,gah—!"
It starts to fill up at the back of the shaft.
Her tongue is enough to make me explode, but her wet fingers increase the sensation.
"Ko.. haku—that's, enough—stop."
I try to hide my gasping as I manage to speak.
Kohaku.. just giggles and looks back at me.
"No, I can't do that Shiki-san.
Akiha-sama wants to see you finish.
So there's a lot left to do."
"What—See me finish.. what.. do you.."
"Isn't it obvious?
She wants to see you come.
Over and over again, until you break and completely forget what happened here tonight."
Saying that,
Her lips close around my tip.

"Ah——!"
Thump.
Numbness spreads from my back up to my head.
All I have felt up to now was her licking, so doing this so suddenly is more like pain than pleasure.
"N... mm, mmh..."
She rolls me gently inside of her mouth.
It's hot.
I was already burning up, but the sweet moisture inside her mouth is like lava.
"————"
She attacks the tip of my shaft again.
Sucking, pushing, rolling with her tongue.
Kohaku continues her teasing.
"Mm—ah."
But, I'm already at my limit.
The heat rising within me threatens to explode.
"Ah——.....!!"
I'm going to come.
I can't hold back.
Inside of Kohaku's mouth, I—

—I can't.
Akiha is watching.

Full of interest.
 No, she has no interest in me.
 She is taking pleasure in this situation.
 No, as if thinking lowly of me by seeing me like this.
 "Ga—hh.....!"
 I clench my teeth as I try to resist.
 I can't.
 I can't let go in front of her.
 That would be the last straw.
 If that happened, I really would break—
 "Aha, Shiki-san, you really are persistent."
 Kohaku-san sounds happy.
 "But it's useless to resist.
 I've developed a liking for you Shiki-san, so I'll play around with you a bit more."
 Her voice.. seems far away.
 Right now—Akiha's gaze is many times more painful.
 "Heehee, Akiha-sama gave me permission, so I'm going to get serious now.
 Please prepare yourself, Shiki-san.
 I'm actually pretty rough, when I want to be."
 She is still distant.
 And then, I'm suddenly assailed by a new sensation.

"——Ah.....!!!!"

It's such a shock that it causes my hips to shoot upwards.
 The lips that were only enclosing my tip now take my whole shaft—
 "M, mm, mmp—"
 Her lips slide all the way to my base.
 "Ko—koha.. ku....!"
 It's useless to resist.
 My back is arching, my hips floating, like a dog in heat.
 "Mm... a, haa... Shiki-san, don't be so.. wild—"
 Her fingers grasp me tightly.
 Once again, she takes me almost into her throat.
 Her hot mouth.
 Her tongue flicks all around with a life of its own.
 She sucks on me.
 Her tongue moves back and forth as she holds me in her mouth.
 "Nn, nn, nnnn.....!"
 Her neck shifts, and as she does—I feel like I'm about to rip apart.
 "K—sto.. Kohaku.. stop.. it—"
 "Mm... You shouldn't, Shiki-san.
 Don't ask for things that won't happen."
 She smiles mischievously.
 Ever so softly, she bites down with the tips of her teeth.
 "——!?"

This catapults me even higher than before.

"Ah, Ah, g——!"

I try to move my arms, and the ropes digs into my skin.

.... That pain helps me hold back.

"Huh?"

That's strange.. I really thought you'd come that time."

"Kohaku.. why.. are,....!"

"It's alright.

I told you earlier, this is all according to Akiha-sama's orders."

Kohaku-san.. doesn't sound guilty at all.

She's enjoying these orders.

"Akiha, you——"

I look to where Akiha is sitting.

She is silent.

She doesn't even twitch when I glare at her.

She just stares as if possessed by something.

—Huh.... as if, possessed....?

Is it my imagination?

She doesn't look any different, but.... why does she seem to be eagerly watching us—?

"Then I guess I'll play around here."

"Eh—Ah, wait, I said stop....!"

"Hm—how cute, Shiki-san."

"N, not, there——"

My body falls back on the bed.

A different sensation runs up my back and into my brain.

A sucking sensation.

Kohaku-san isn't sucking my shaft.... but my testicles.

Licking all along my scrotum.

While her fingers stroke my manhood, she uses her index finger and thumb to caress me down there.

—It isn't even as strong as when she was licking me.

But I'm already so close to my limit, touching me softly like that makes it even worse.

"Ah....., tss.....!"

I stifle a cry.

Maybe if I cry out, I might be able to resist this pleasure.

But, I don't want to do that.

Akiha is still watching.

Even my rough breathing, my stifled voice.

My hands clenching the sheets, my erect shaft, she's watching everything.

"....."

.... I start to lose track of what's going on.

Am I about to explode from Kohaku's touching?

Or does that have nothing to do with it, and I'm going crazy from having Akiha look at me?

"A.... Aki.... ha....."

Thump.

Kohaku's fingers travel even lower.

There is my ass, wet with her saliva.

"Ah.... ha, haa, ah...."

Even though I knew what was going to happen, I couldn't do anything.

Because even if I did resist, I wouldn't be able to stop her, and more than that—I'm captivated by Akiha's eyes and I don't care about Kohaku.

"Shiki-san, you have to lift your hips.

You have to show Akiha-sama when you let it out."

I feel a sliding sensation.

In my ass.

Into that hole where nothing should ever enter, Kohaku sticks her slender finger.

"——!!!!!"

There's only pain.

My hips jump in response.

The muscles squeeze as if trying to push out the foreign object.

"Ow—!"

What are you doing, Shiki-san!?"

Taking advantage of my position, she adds another finger.

She starts to wiggle them around inside me.

"Ga——!!!!!"

The sensation is only pain.

My body protests in agony.

Kohaku's fingers.

With just those little things, my body screams in agony.

"Ah—ii,——!"

Despite this, my shaft now stands harder and taller than before.

Has this pain become pleasure?

My twitching manhood swells further, pulsing with blood.

"Hmm—t looks like this is it.

But Akiha-sama, don't you think it's a little embarrassing for him to come because his ass was violated?"

"Wha——"

I blush furiously.

Akiha still doesn't speak.

She just stares at me like that and—

"Haa.... ah, haa, ha, a——"

I can't.. breathe.

Kohaku's fingers attack me inside.

.... I know I can't resist.

But I feel something is wrong.

I'm certainly being caressed by Kohaku.

But more than that, I feel like Akiha's gaze is violating me and crawling deep

into my skin—

"This is it.

You can come now, Shiki-san."

Saying that, Kohaku slips a third finger into me.

That really was it.

"A, a——-!!!!"

Thump.

My blood pounds in my ears.

My rod, that resisted for so long, finally starts to go wild.

"A—Aki, ha—!"

I let go in a fury of heat and liquid.

It wasn't just that I could no longer resist what Kohaku was doing.

I almost explode with the strength of my release.

My pent up emotions spray all over the bed, dirtying the sheets.

"Ha—ah, ah—"

My raging heart gradually begins to calm.

With that, everything that I had tried so hard to resist, and the person that was the brother of Akiha.. crumbles away—

turn to **113**

109

"Morning, Kohaku-san.
Today is a lovely day."



"Yes.
Good morning, Shiki-san."
Kohaku-san delivers her ordinary morning greeting with a smile on her face.



"Did you sleep well last night?
I was worried that you might be inconvenienced, staying in an unfamiliar man-
sion and all."
"Ah, no, there were no problems.
I used to live here, after all, and now I've got you to watch over me, Kohaku-san."



"Oh, you're quite good at this, Shiki-san."

"Eh?"

No, I'm just saying what I think.. what is it I'm good at?"

Kohaku-san just looks at me, smiling.

.... Somehow, I feel embarrassed when she looks directly at me, so I shift my gaze to the side.

—And then.



—I realize another stare, one which has been on me silently for a while now.

"Ah.. hey there."

I give a light wave to greet her.

Akiha continues to stare at me.. or perhaps, glare would be a better word.

"Well.. um.. good morning, Akiha."



"Oh?
You don't have to force yourself to greet me.
Please, go right ahead and ignore me.
After all, it seems you'd prefer to enjoy the morning with Kohaku."
"Uuh.."
Akiha's words sting.
.... It's not like I had intended to ignore her.
I just said hello to Kohaku-san..



"Please don't tease Shiki-san too much, Akiha-sama.
We don't have much time, and Shiki-san hasn't finished his breakfast yet."



"Well, that's Nii-san's fault for waking up late, isn't it?
He's just getting what he deserves for leaving everything to do in a rush in the morning."

"Hmph!" Akiha sniffs.

.... It seems like my failure to greet her was another point she was unimpressed with, in addition to her objection to my late arrival.

"Um.. Kohaku-san.

Is my breakfast ready?"



"Yes, I've laid it out in the dining hall.
Please, eat up at your leisure."



"That won't do, Kohaku.

Nii-san has no time to eat breakfast at this time."

"Hey, listen, Akiha.

It's only seven, so I've got at least that much.

It's an easy thirty minute walk from here to school, so I can take it easy for at least ten minutes, can't I?"

"Are you saying you're going to finish breakfast in just ten minutes?"

You're not some starving dog, so if you're going to eat breakfast, I'd like you to take your time."

"___"

Akiha's words really do have thorns in them.

setvar kohakuregard + 1

turn to **192**

110

"Good morning, you two."



"Good morning, Shiki-san."

Wearing a white apron that suits her, Kohaku-san replies with a smile that could not possibly be any larger.

On the other hand, Akiha just casts a glance at me.



"Good morning.

You certainly took your time this morning, Nii-san."

She certainly knows how to put a damper on things.

"Took my time?"

It's barely past seven!

It only takes thirty minutes to get to school from here, so I'm actually up early."



"So you're saying you're going to finish breakfast in just ten minutes?
You're not some starving dog, so if you're going to eat breakfast, I'd like you to
take your time."

"_____"

Akiha's words really do have thorns.
turn to **192**

111

"Wait !!"
 Whoosh!
 I get up forcefully from bed.
 pant—*pant*—*pant*
 My breathing is out of control and my mind is still numbed with the feel of Arcueid.
 No, hold on Shiki.
 Try to be calm, it can't hurt.
 —First, this is my room.
 Check.
 That's good.
 —Second, I'm on my bed.
 Check.
 Seems that way.
 —And, it's now morning, and I was having sex with Arcueid until now.
 Check.
 That's good—that's not good!
 Never, not even slightly, not one bit.....!
 The sound of my panting fills the air.
 I manage to catch my breath.
 My hands gripping the sheets are drenched in sweat.
 There is a lingering warmth as if I really was sleeping with Arcueid until just now.
 But it definitely was a dream.
 I can't tell if that's something I should be happy or disappointed about.
 "—Why—"
 did I see such a dream?
 Does that mean I'm so interested in her that I see her in my dreams?
 Does that mean—I want her so bad I do those things with her in my dream?
 "—Uu"
 As I remember, the sensation of her skin forces itself into my brain.
 I feel my arms to make sure this is real.
 Yeah, it's real.
 Her skin was so fundamentally different from a guy's skin.. so soft, so warm.
 "Yeah... So hot I wanted to go wild."
 Just thinking about it makes my breath go wild.
 Well.
 Whatever happened, it's true that it felt exceedingly good.
 I should feel a bit guilty dreaming about doing that to Arcueid, but I recall the dream and just sit there thinking about it.



"Shiki-sama."

"Uwaaaaaa!"

I flail around off my bed as if trying to escape.

No—in fact I was trying to escape, but it just ended up with me landing on the floor with the sheets.

"Hi, Hihi, Hisui... !?"

H, how long have you been there!?"

"Since before you awoke, Shiki-sama."

She speaks with her usual lack of expression.

Still lying on the floor tangled in the sheets and unable to stand, I look up at Hisui's face.

"... Before I. woke up..."

—Then, that means..

Hisui saw my face when I was having that dream?

My face turns deep red.

Hisui just stands there, expressionless as usual, and makes no attempt to speak.

"Um.... did I look.. strange....?"



"I do not wish to describe it."

"Ah-h"

.... I knew it.

I must have looked really weird.



"But, if you insist, Shiki-sama, I can describe as accurately as I can."
 "... No, you don't have to do that..."
 My face still flushed, I speak in a fading voice.
 "Um, Hisui-san?"
 I give a cough to clear the silence.
 Adding "san" to her name is a clear sign of my vulnerability.
 "What is it, Shiki-sama?"
 "Um.... I'm going to change, so would you mind waiting outside?"
 —Or rather, I'm so embarrassed I just want her to leave.
 But Hisui doesn't obey today of all days.
 "Once I can confirm you are awake, I will leave the room, Shiki-sama."
 "....!"
 Huh?
 Is, is is she joking!?
 Why does she think I'm covering myself up in these sheets!?
 It's to hide something that's still standing!
 "I, I'm fine, so please leave."
 I can get up, and I won't go back to sleep.
 I'll change and go to the sitting room as soon as you leave."
 "Shiki-sama—Are you hurt and unable to stand....?"

Hisui approaches me out of worry.
 "No, that's not it.
 I'm standing—I mean I can stand, so don't worry about it."
 I crawl pulling my sheets like a slug, and gain some distance from her.
 Using the bed as a barrier, I get far enough away.



".... Then, please excuse me.
I will prepare your breakfast, so please come after you change."

She has got to be suspicious, but she bows and leaves the room.

sigh

I was so surprised.

The contents of my dream were surprising enough, but knowing Hisui saw me while I was dreaming is very troubling.

.... It's all Arcueid's fault for doing something like that.

"Even now she's being bothersome, really—"

Really—really what?

I can't finish.

".....?"

What did I want to say just now?

Not even able to confirm my own feelings, I decide to change and head to the sitting room with a vague feeling in my chest.

After calming down sufficiently, I head to the sitting room.

As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, elegantly sipping tea.



"Good morning, Nii-san.

You are certainly up early this morning."

She must be happy I woke up because she greets me with a smile.

"Yeah, good morning.

There were, well, a lot of things going on this morning."
As soon as I say that—I suddenly recall the memory of Arcueid's skin.
"Uh—"
This isn't good.
I can tell my face is blushing beyond my control.
"Nii-san—?"
A brief clamor.



"What's wrong?
Your face is red, do you have a fever?"
"—!"
Rushing over to me, she looks up at me from below.
But—in doing so, from this angle, um—



Akiha sighs.
"You do seem to have a fever.
Kohaku, come quickly.
Nii-san doesn't seem to be well."
Akiha calls out to the dining room.
Kohaku-san has to be preparing my breakfast in the kitchen.
"I'm fine—!
It's just a minor cold, so don't worry!"



"If it is a cold, then I can't let it go by.
For you, a trivial illness is a big deal.
The strength of your immune system is much lower than most people's."

Akiha seems to be fed up and puts her hand on my forehead.
The sensation of her cool, delicate hand—
"!!!!!!!"
This isn't good.
This isn't good at all, so I break loose and run out to the lobby.

Footsteps echo as I dash off.



"Shiki-sama?
Have you finished your breakfast already?"
"No, that's not it, but—Um, where's my bag?"
"I have your bag here.
Are you already going to school?"
Nodding, I snatch my bag from Hisui.
"I'm going.
Don't worry about seeing me off!"



"Nii-san, you've been acting strange.
 What are you doing with that fever?"
 "Geez, I told you it's nothing!
 Since it's nothing, I'm going to school!
 I'll have breakfast later, so leave me alone!"
 "Leave you alone—hey, Nii-san!?"
 The sound of my fleeing footsteps is my only response.

"Sigh—"
 Even if it is Akiha, she wouldn't chase me this far.
 Since we're not kids anymore, she won't stop me from going to school.
 "—Whew."
 I take a deep breath and am finally able to calm down.
 "..... What am I running away for?"
 Once I calm down, I can think clearly.
 I didn't do anything wrong, so there was no need for me to run away like that.
 "—I don't believe it.
 I look like a complete idiot."
 But, to go back to the mansion to eat breakfast sounds more dumb.
 "—To school, then?"
 Letting out a sigh, I go downhill along the residential street.

setvar flg4 + 1
 turn to **115**

112

.....,,

"-Mor-ning?"

I dazedly open my eyes.

Sunshine pours in from the window, enveloping the room with a warm atmosphere.

"....."

I stare down at my hands.

They are a little sweaty.

My body is drenched in sweat as well, as if last night was incredibly hot.

What's more, I'm panting heavily.

"..... Um."

.... Alright, I need to calm down.

rst, I catch my breath and then close my eyes.

This is my room.

It is before seven in the morning.

I am the only one here, and of course Senpai is nowhere to be found.

Just as she said,

it was all a dream.

"....."

Yeah, I know.

I know it was a dream.

Now that I'm calm, I know she wouldn't ever do anything like that.

Then that means.. what happened last night was not real.

"Hhaa-ahhhh."

I let out a deep breath.

.... All the same, I definitely still feel vestiges of her touch lingering on my body.

Like the sensation of her breasts as she embraced me from behind in her underwear, and her dancing fingers on my penis.

I know it was a dream—but it felt too real; it makes me think it was real.

.... All the same, it has got to be a dream.

I can't tell if that's something I should be happy or disappointed about, but it's just all my imagination anyway.

But,

"-Why-"

Why did I see that kind of dream?

I know Senpai is my important friend; but does having a dream like that mean I see her as a woman too?

"—Uh."

Just thinking of it, the overly real memory of her skin rushes back.

To make sure I'm not still dreaming, I hug myself.

.... Yeah, this is definitely real.

Her skin was so fundamentally different from a guy's skin like this.. so soft, so warm.

".... And she was really mean."

-Just thinking about it makes my breath go wild.
.... Well, maybe I went through a lot of bad things, but it's true that it did feel exceedingly good.
I should feel a bit guilty dreaming about doing that to Senpai, but I recall the dream and just sit there thinking about it.
But then,



"Shiki-sama."
"Uwaaaaa!"
I flail around off my bed as if trying to escape.
No—in fact I was trying to escape, but it just ended up with me landing on the floor with the sheets.
"Hi, Hihi, Hisui.... !?"
H, how long have you been there!?"
"Since before you awoke, Shiki-sama."
She speaks with her usual lack of expression.
Still lying on the floor tangled in the sheets and unable to stand, I look up at Hisui's face.
".... Before I.. woke up...."
-Then, that means..
Hisui saw my face when I was having that dream?
My face turns deep red.
Hisui just stands there, expressionless as usual, and makes no attempt to speak.
"Um.... did I look.. strange....?"



"I do not wish to describe it."
 "Ah-h"
 I knew it.
 I must have looked really weird.



"But, if you insist, Shiki-sama, I can describe as accurately as I can."
 ".... No, you don't have to do that...."
 My face still flushed, I speak in a fading voice.
 "Um, Hisui-san?"
 I give a cough to clear the silence.
 Adding "san" to her name is a clear sign of my vulnerability.
 "What is it, Shiki-sama?"
 "Um.... I'm going to change, so would you mind waiting outside?"
 -Or rather, I'm so embarrassed I just want her to leave.
 But Hisui doesn't obey today of all days.
 "Once I can confirm you are awake, I will leave the room, Shiki-sama."
 "....!"
 Huh?
 Is, is is she joking!?
 Why does she think I'm covering myself up in these sheets!?
 It's to hide something that's still standing!
 "I, I'm fine, so please leave.
 I can get up, and I won't go back to sleep.
 I'll change and go to the sitting room as soon as you leave."
 "Shiki-sama-Are you hurt and unable to stand....?"

Hisui approaches me out of worry.

"No, that's not it.
I'm standing—I mean I can stand, so don't worry about it."
I crawl pulling my sheets like a slug, and gain some distance from her.
Using the bed as a barrier, I get far enough away.



".... Then, please excuse me.
I will prepare your breakfast, so please come after you change."

She has got to be suspicious, but she bows and leaves the room.
sigh
I was so surprised.
The contents of my dream were surprising enough, but knowing Hisui saw me while I was dreaming is very troubling.
.... Or is it my own fault for having that kind of dream about Senpai?
".... I guess it is my fault.
With a good person like Senpai—why did I have a dream like that?"
I give a sigh of self-loathing.
But, I can tell that I won't forget that dream any time soon.

After calming down sufficiently, I head to the sitting room.
As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, elegantly sipping tea.



"Good morning, Nii-san.

You are certainly up early this morning."
She must be happy I woke up because she greets me with a smile.

"Yeah, good morning.
There were, well, a lot of things going on this morning."
As soon as I say that—I suddenly recall the memory of Senpai's tongue.
"Uh—"
This isn't good.
I can tell my face is blushing beyond my control.
"Nii-san—?"
A brief clamor.



"What's wrong?
Your face is red, do you have a fever?"
"—!"
Rushing over to me, she looks up at me from below.
But—in doing so, from this angle, um—



Akiha sighs.
"You do seem to have a fever.
Kohaku, come quickly.
Nii-san doesn't seem to be well."
Akiha calls out to the dining room.
Kohaku-san has to be preparing my breakfast in the kitchen.
"I'm fine—!"

It's just a minor cold, so don't worry!"



"If it is a cold, then I can't let it go by.
For you, a trivial illness is a big deal.
The strength of your immune system is much lower than most people's."

Akiha seems to be fed up and puts her hand on my forehead.
The sensation of her cool, delicate hand—
"!!!!!!!"

This isn't good.
This isn't good at all, so I break loose and run out to the lobby.

Footsteps echo as I dash off.



"Shiki-sama?
Have you finished your breakfast already?"
"No, that's not it, but—Um, where's my bag?"
"I have your bag here.
Are you already going to school?"
Nodding, I snatch my bag from Hisui.
"I'm going.
Don't worry about seeing me off!"



"Nii-san, you've been acting strange.
What are you doing with that fever?"
"Geez, I told you it's nothing!
Since it's nothing, I'm going to school!
I'll have breakfast later, so leave me alone!"
"Leave you alone—hey, Nii-san!?"
The sound of my fleeing footsteps is my only response.

"Sigh—"
Even if it is Akiha, she wouldn't chase me this far.
Since we're not kids anymore, she won't stop me from going to school.
"—Whew."
I take a deep breath and am finally able to calm down.
"..... What am I running away for?"
Once I calm down, I can think clearly.
I didn't do anything wrong, so there was no need for me to run away like that.
"—I don't believe it.
I look like a complete idiot."
But, to go back to the mansion to eat breakfast sounds more dumb.
"—To school, then?"
Letting out a sigh, I go downhill along the residential street.

setvar flg5 + 1
turn to **115**

113

.....,,

"-Mor-ning?"

I dazedly open my eyes.

Sunshine pours in from the window, enveloping the room with a warm atmosphere.

"_____"

I stare down at my hands.

They are a little sweaty.

My body is drenched in sweat as well, as if last night was incredibly hot.

What's more, I'm panting heavily.

"Ah——"

I shake both my hands.

".... I can.. move...."

There isn't any mark left on my wrist from the ropes.

The bed is clean, and neither the chair Akiha was sitting on nor Kohaku-san are anywhere to be seen.

"H——uh?"

Akiha, and Kohaku-san....?

"Ko——Kohaku-san?"

I look around wildly.

I see—

"..... There's.. no one....."

Right, no one's here.

The bed doesn't look rumpled—and Kohaku-san who was acting like a mischievous devil isn't here.

"A——dream?"

As soon as I realize it, I heave a sigh of relief.

I shut my eyes and catch my breath.

This is my room.

It is before seven in the morning.

I am the only one here, and of course Kohaku-san and Akiha are nowhere to be seen.

"Ha..... a."

Yeah, I know.

I know it was a dream.

Now that I'm calm, I know she wouldn't ever do anything like that.

In that instance, what happened last night was not real.

"Ha-ah."

I let out a deep breath.

.... All the same, I definitely still remember what happened last night.

I know it was a dream—but it felt too real; it makes me think it was real.

.... All the same, it has got to be a dream.

But I guess that is good in a way.

"But, why—"

Why did I see that dream?
.... Well, I really do think Kohaku-san is cute.
She seems to be the most free one here, and for some reason, whenever I see her, I feel more lively.
But, that's different.
I think of her as my family, certainly—not as a woman.
"—Uh."
All the same, I keep remembering her mischievous eyes.
"Damn—what the hell am I thinking?"
I shake my head to clear out the remnants of the dream.
But then,



"Shiki-sama."
"Uwaaaaa!"
I flail around off my bed as if trying to escape.
No—in fact I was trying to escape, but it just ended up with me landing on the floor with the sheets.
"Hi, Hihi, Hisui.... !?"
H, how long have you been there!?"
"Since before you awoke, Shiki-sama."
She speaks with her usual lack of expression.
Still lying on the floor tangled in the sheets and unable to stand, I look up at Hisui's face.
"... Before I.. woke up...."
—Then, that means..
Hisui saw my face when I was having that dream?
My face turns deep red.
Hisui just stands there, expressionless as usual, and makes no attempt to speak.
"Um.... did I look.. strange....?"



"I do not wish to describe it."
 "Ah-h"
 I knew it.
 I must've looked really weird.



"But, if you insist, Shiki-sama, I can describe as accurately as I can."
 ".... No, you don't have to do that...."
 My face still flushed, I speak in a fading voice.
 "Um, Hisui-san?"
 I give a cough to clear the silence.
 Adding "san" to her name is a clear sign of my vulnerability.
 "What is it, Shiki-sama?"
 "Um.... I'm going to change, so would you mind waiting outside?"
 -Or rather, I'm so embarrassed I just want her to leave.
 But Hisui doesn't obey today of all days.
 "Once I can confirm you are awake, I will leave the room, Shiki-sama."
 "....!"
 Huh?
 Is, is is she joking!?
 Why does she think I'm covering myself up in these sheets!?
 It's to hide something that's still standing!
 "I, I'm fine, so please leave.
 I can get up, and I won't go back to sleep.
 I'll change and go to the sitting room as soon as you leave."
 "Shiki-sama-Are you hurt and unable to stand....?"

Hisui approaches me out of worry.
"No, that's not it.
I'm standing—I mean I can stand, so don't worry about it."
I crawl pulling my sheets like a slug, and gain some distance from her.
Using the bed as a barrier, I get far enough away.



".... Then, please excuse me.
I will prepare your breakfast, so please come after you change."

She has got to be suspicious, but she bows and leaves the room.
sigh
I was so surprised.
The contents of my dream were surprising enough, but knowing Hisui saw me while I was dreaming is very troubling.
.... Or is it my own fault for having that kind of dream about Kohaku-san?
".... I guess it is my fault.
Just what was I thinking?
Having that kind of dream about Kohaku-san..?"
I give a sigh of self-loathing.
To feel relaxed around Kohaku-san again, I should just forget about this dream as soon as possible.

After calming down enough, I head to the sitting room.
As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, elegantly sipping tea.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
 You are certainly up early this morning."
 She must be happy I woke up because she greets me with a smile.

"Yeah, good morning.
 There were, well, a lot of things going on this morning."
 As soon as I say that—I remember that cold stare from last night.
 "Uh—"
 This isn't good.
 I can tell my face is blushing beyond my control.
 I acted foolishly in front of Akiha.
 Akiha, watching it all.
 "Nii-san—?"
 A brief clamor.



"What's wrong?
 Your face is red, do you have a fever?"
 "—!"
 Rushing over to me, she looks up at me from below.
 So, if you stare at me that seriously, I—



Akiha sighs.

"You do seem to have a fever.

Kohaku, come quickly.

Nii-san doesn't seem to be well."

Akiha calls out to the dining room.

"Ko—Kohaku-san?

That's bad."

If I see Kohaku-san now, I might faint from being too embarrassed.

"I-I'm fine—!

It's just a minor cold, so don't worry!"



"If it is a cold, then I can't let it go by.

For you, a trivial illness is a big deal.

The strength of your immune system is much lower than most people's."

Akiha seems to be fed up and puts her hand on my forehead.

The sensation of her cool, delicate hand.

White, slender fingers.

White, beautiful, fine fingers that men's fingers doesn't even come close to—

"!!!!!!!"

This isn't good.

This isn't good at all, so I break loose and run out to the lobby.

Footsteps echo as I dash off.



"Shiki-sama?
 Have you finished your breakfast already?"
 "No, that's not it, but—Um, where's my bag?"
 "I have your bag here.
 Are you already going to school?"
 Nodding, I snatch my bag from Hisui.
 "I'm going.
 Don't worry about seeing me off!"



"Nii-san, you've been acting strange.
 What are you doing with that fever?"
 "Geez, I told you it's nothing!
 Since it's nothing, I'm going to school!
 I'll have breakfast later, so leave me alone!"
 "Leave you alone—hey, Nii-san!?"
 The sound of my fleeing footsteps is my only response.

"Sigh—"
 Even if it is Akiha, she wouldn't chase me this far.
 Since we're not kids anymore, she won't stop me from going to school.
 "—Whew."
 I take a deep breath and am finally able to calm down.
 "..... What am I running away for?"
 Once I calm down, I can think clearly.
 I didn't do anything wrong, so there was no need for me to run away like that.

"-I don't believe it.

I look like a complete idiot."

But, to go back to the mansion to eat breakfast sounds more dumb.

"-To school, then?"

Letting out a sigh, I go downhill along the residential street.

turn to **115**

.....,,

"-Mor-ning?"

I dazedly open my eyes.

Sunshine pours in from the window, enveloping the room with a warm atmosphere.

"....."

I stare down at my hands.

They are a little sweaty.

My body is drenched in sweat as well, as if last night was incredibly hot.

What's more, I'm panting heavily.

"Ah——"

I shake both my hands.

".... I can.. move...."

There isn't any mark left on my wrist from the ropes.

The bed is clean, and neither the chair Akiha was sitting on nor Kohaku-san are anywhere to be seen.

"H——uh?"

Akiha, and Kohaku-san....?

"A—Akiha!"

I jump out of bed.

I wildly look around the room.

I see—

"..... There's.. no one....."

Right, no one's here.

The bed doesn't look ruffled—and that cold Akiha isn't there either.

"A—dream?"

As soon as I realize it, I heave a sigh of relief.

I shut my eyes and catch my breath.

This is my room.

It is before seven in the morning.

I am the only one here, and of course Kohaku-san and Akiha are nowhere to be seen.

"Ha..... a."

Yeah, I knew.

I know it was a dream.

Now that I'm calm, I know she wouldn't ever do anything like that.

In that instance, what happened last night was not real.

"Ha-ah."

I let out a deep breath.

.... All the same, I definitely still remember what happened last night.

I know it was a dream—but it felt too real; it makes me think it was real.

.... But, it was without a doubt a dream.

That has to be true.

"-Why—"

Why did I see that dream?

.... Well, certainly Akiha is strict, and she is the head of the Tohno household, so it makes her the most powerful person here.

But she wouldn't do that.

She is my dear sister, but seeing that dream—Does that mean I'm seeing her as a woman?

"—Uh."

I remember her cold stare, like ice.

I hug myself to make sure this is real.

"Damn—what the hell am I thinking?"

Lusting after my sister, there really is something wrong.

.... Well, she is different after eight years, like a completely different person.

She seems more like a refined young lady I've never met.

But still—

".... But.... she was.. really cute."

—I blush furiously as I remember.

Maybe it was only a dream within a dream, but I remember Akiha feeling herself while wildly calling my name.

I know it truly is forbidden, but I recall the dream and just sit there thinking about it.

And then,



"Shiki-sama."

"Uwaaaaaa!"

I flail around off my bed as if trying to escape.

No—in fact I was trying to escape, but it just ended up with me landing on the floor with the sheets.

"Hi, Hihi, Hisui.... !?"

H, how long have you been there!?"

"Since before you awoke, Shiki-sama."

She speaks with her usual lack of expression.

Still lying on the floor tangled in the sheets and unable to stand, I look up at Hisui's face.

".... Before I.. woke up...."

—Then, that means..

Hisui saw my face when I was having that dream?
My face turns deep red.
Hisui just stands there, expressionless as usual, and makes no attempt to speak.
"Um.... did I look.. strange....?"



"I do not wish to describe it."
"Ah-h"
.... I knew it.
I must've looked really weird.



"But, if you insist, Shiki-sama, I can describe as accurately as I can."
".... No, you don't have to do that...."
My face still flushed, I speak in a fading voice.
"Um, Hisui-san?"
I give a cough to clear the silence.
.... Adding "san" to her name is a clear sign of my vulnerability.



"What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Um... I'm going to change, so would you mind waiting outside?"

—Or rather, I'm so embarrassed I just want her to leave.

But Hisui doesn't obey today of all days.

"Once I can confirm you are awake, I will leave the room, Shiki-sama."

"...!"

Huh?

Is, is is is she joking!?

Why does she think I'm covering myself up in these sheets!?

It's to hide something that's still standing!

"I, I'm fine, so please leave.

I can get up, and I won't go back to sleep.

I'll change and go to the sitting room as soon as you leave."

"Shiki-sama—Are you hurt and unable to stand...?"

Hisui approaches me out of worry.

"No, that's not it.

I'm standing—I mean I can stand, so don't worry about it."

I crawl pulling my sheets like a slug, and gain some distance from her.

Using the bed as a barrier, I get far enough away.



"... Then, please excuse me.

I will prepare your breakfast, so please come after you change."

She has got to be suspicious, but she bows and leaves the room.

sigh

I was so surprised.

The contents of my dream were surprising enough, but knowing Hisui saw me while I was dreaming is very troubling.

.... Or is it my own fault for having that kind of dream about Akiha?

".... I guess it is my fault.

Having a dream like that about my own sister."

I give a sigh of self-loathing.

For my sake and for Akiha's reputation, I should just forget about it as soon as possible.

After calming down enough, I head to the sitting room.
As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa, elegantly sipping tea.



"Oh?

Good morning Nii-san.

You're up early today."

She must be happy I woke up because she greets me with a smile.

"Yeah, good morning.

There were, well, a lot of things going on this morning."

As soon as I say that—I remember that cold stare from last night.

"Uh—"

This isn't good.

I can tell my face is blushing beyond my control.

.... Myself being made a complete fool.

And Akiha, who was always watching.

"Nii-san—?"

A brief clamor.



"What's wrong?
Your face is red, do you have a fever?"
"___!"
Rushing over to me, she looks up at me from below.
But, if she looks at me that seriously, I—



Akiha sighs.
"You do seem to have a fever.
Kohaku, come quickly.
Nii-san doesn't seem to be well."
Akiha calls out to the dining room.
Kohaku-san has to be preparing my breakfast in the kitchen.
"I'm fine—!
It's just a minor cold, so don't worry!"



"If it is a cold, then I can't let it go by.
For you, a trivial illness is a big deal.
The strength of your immune system is much lower than most people's."

Akiha seems to be fed up and puts her hand on my forehead.
The sensation of her cool, delicate hand.
White, slender fingers.
So different from those of a man.
Delicate, beautiful, white fingers——
"!!!!!"
This isn't good.
This isn't good at all, so I break loose and run out to the lobby.

Footsteps echo as I dash off.



"Shiki-sama?
Have you finished your breakfast already?"
"No, that's not it, but—Um, where's my bag?"
"I have your bag here.
Are you already going to school?"
Nodding, I snatch my bag from Hisui.
"I'm going.
Don't worry about seeing me off!"



"Nii-san, you've been acting strange.

What are you doing with that fever?"
"Geez, I told you it's nothing!
Since it's nothing, I'm going to school!
I'll have breakfast later, so leave me alone!"
"Leave you alone—hey, Nii-san!?"
The sound of my fleeing footsteps is my only response.

"Sigh—"
Even if it is Akiha, she wouldn't chase me this far.
Since we're not kids anymore, she won't stop me from going to school.
"—Whew."
I take a deep breath and am finally able to calm down.
"..... What am I running away for?"
Once I calm down, I can think clearly.
I didn't do anything wrong, so there was no need for me to run away like that.
"—I don't believe it.
I look like a complete idiot."
But, to go back to the mansion to eat breakfast sounds more dumb.
"—To school, then?"
Letting out a sigh, I go downhill along the residential street.

turn to **115**

115

—I arrive thirty minutes earlier than usual.
The figures of students around the school gate are sparse.
It seems I'm the only one who's arrived at this odd time.

On the school grounds, the athletic clubs are holding their practices.
... I'm not in any clubs right now, but truthfully, I like to move around a lot.
I know that I have some athletic ability, at least enough to be proud of.
But, I can't join any clubs.
My body always has this recurring anemia so I would just be a bother—and
my doctor has told me that I should not exercise frequently.
Since middle school, I've been asked more than a few times to join a club.
But I always have to say "it's not my thing" and refuse.
Every time I refused—I felt a sense of separation.
That might have been..
a subconscious wall that told me I will never be able to mix in with the people
on the other side.
"....."
Ah, that's enough.
This really isn't my thing.
I'll stop thinking such thoughts and hurry on to the classroom.

"Huh—?"
I thought I was the first one, but it seems like some of my classmates are already
here.
"Yo, you're early Tohno."
"Morning.
This class seems to have a lot of people with spare time."
"Nah.
Our practice just got over with.
Those that come here this early who aren't in clubs are usually only those with
daily duties."
I see.
That does makes sense, now that he mentions it.
Greeting those around me, I take my seat.
It's half an hour before homeroom.
It's not a bad idea to just watch my classmates arrive.

The classroom starts to get busy around seven fifty.
"—Huh?"
I think I saw Senpai in the hallway.
"She's down at the first year hallway again—what is she doing?"
Maybe she came to see me?
Then—

I'll go into the hallway and talk to her. turn to **116**

No, it probably doesn't concern me so I'll just watch from here.turn to **117**

An opening! I'll surprise her from behind! turn to **118**

116

Well, if she's walking around my classroom like that, maybe she does want to see me for something.

"... I wonder.

She normally just walks in without hesitating."

Or did she finally realize it's strange for a third-year to come to a second-year's classroom?

"-No.

That definitely can't be it."

Nodding to myself, I go to the hallway.

"Senpai."



"Huh-Tohno-kun?"

Senpai seems rather surprised I called her and stands there with her mouth open.

"What are you doing?

Class is about to start, so why are you still hanging around here?"

"___"

Senpai looks at me in amazement, then looks away.



"What am I doing?

That is not any of your business, Tohno-kun."

"No-Well.. maybe it isn't."

"-No, I was lying.
It is, a little."

I thought she was looking away, but she starts sniffing me.
"... Um-Senpai...?"
turn to **119**

Is she looking for someone in the hallway?
Senpai paces back and forth.
... Looking at it calmly, she looks like she doesn't have anything to do with my classroom.
"... As usual, I don't understand her at all.
What the heck is she doing?"
I sit down in my chair and watch her.
Senpai crosses her arms as if thinking about something, and stares at the students passing by.
"Maybe she dropped something."
... It sounds weird for a third-year student to drop something in the second-year hallway, but this is the ever-roaming Senpai we're talking about.
—Huh?
Senpai suddenly enters into my classroom.
She strides directly to me.



"Tohno-kun!"
"!"
And she suddenly yells at me.
"Wh, what is it, Senpai?
I haven't done anything bad to make you angry."
"No excuses.
Just come over here, please."

She pulls my arm and drags me out into the hallway.
"H, hey, Senpai, what are you doing all of a sudden?
Weren't you looking for something!?"



"It's fine, just stay right there!"

"...."

Under Senpai's intensity, I quickly snap to attention.
And like yesterday, Senpai starts to sniff me.

".... Um, Senpai....?"

turn to **119**

118

.... Senpai is glancing all around the hallway.
I don't know if she's looking for something or someone, but she looks really suspicious.
"..... He-hehe, he."
I get this sudden irresistible urge.
Senpai's always taking everything at her own pace; I think I can respond sometimes to balance things out.

Senpai is seriously searching for something.
I sneak up behind her.
.... Luckily, Senpai doesn't sense me at all.
Here goes,
"Boo!"
"—!"
I grab her from behind, but—



.... before I know it, I'm lying on the ground.

"Oh—Tohno.. kun?"
Senpai sounds worried.
"Yeah—it's me, Senpai."



"Geez, don't surprise me like that!"

I reflexively got away, but are you alright?"

"Eh?"

I'm fine.

I just tripped."

I stand up.

.... I guess the strange looks from all the other students in the hallway are to be expected.

"Ooowowow.... Man, I think I hit my hip.

Guess I shouldn't pull pranks like that."

Regret.

"Exactly.

I think I overdid it, but since it was your fault I will not apologize."

"Ah, I know, I know.

Sorry Senpai, I interrupted your search.

Well, this mischievous boy will now go back to his classroom."

Rubbing my butt, I start to head to class.



"Oh, wait Tohno-kun.

Can you stand there as a punishment?"

"?"

Stand here as a punishment?

As usual, she says something strange.

"Sure.... What is it?"

"Just don't move, please."

Like yesterday, she starts sniffing me again.

".... Um, Senpai....?"

turn to **119**

119

if flg5 >= 1
turn to 120



"Tohno-kun, did you sleep well last night?"

"Eh?"

She looks directly into my eyes as she asks.

.... Sleep well?

That goes without saying.

I couldn't get to sleep easily last night, and also—

"Uh..."

I blush as the memories resurface.

With a piercing gaze, Senpai looks up at me.

"Senpai, um—"



"Tohno-kun, you pervert."

"Huh?"

With a look indicating she wants to say more, Senpai quickly walks away.

turn to 121

120



"—Ah."

Having her stare right at me like this—makes me remember my dream.

"Tohno-kun?"

What's wrong?

Your face is turning red."

"I, it's nothing.

Just, I had a bad dream.

I don't feel very well."

I think I'm honest as I don't say I don't feel bad at all.

"..... Tohno-kun?"

She looks at me with a very serious expression.

".... Senpai....?"

I'm perplexed.

I feel as if Senpai is reading my mind, and I remember more and more of last night's dream.



"Tohno-kun, you said you had a bad dream.

What does that mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything, and it's none of your business.

Don't worry about it, and I'm asking you what you're doing."



"It is my business!
Tohno-kun, you didn't sleep well last night, did you?"
"—Eh?"
Well—she is right but.
"... Senpai, how do you know about that?"



"Because your face is all red.
I don't know if you are sick, but you don't look well, Tohno-kun."
"Oh—I see."
I was surprised for a moment there.
She guessed right about last night, so I thought—



"About this dream, Tohno-kun.
Please tell me what kind of dream it was."
... Senpai asks me again, as she hasn't given up.

".... Fine.
It's not a big deal really.
Just.... Um, you were in it a little."
I answer reluctantly.
All of a sudden,



"I, I was in it!?"
Senpai gets mad.
"Um.... Senpai?"



"....."
Senpai quickly takes a step away and stares at me.
"....."

Senpai looks like she wants to say something more, but she just gives a quick bow and runs away.

".....?"

I tilt my head in confusion.

Then, the homeroom bell echoes through the hallway.

turn to **121**

121

if flgE >= 1
 turn to 230

At lunch break, that guy who didn't even show up for a single class arrives.



"Yo Tohno!
 Food, let's get some food!"
 He's happy about something, being even more energetic than usual.
 "Of course, food.
 But you seem to be in a great mood.
 Did something happen, Arihiko?"
 "Yup.
 I just asked Senpai if she wanted to eat lunch together, and she refused."
 "....."
 That's odd.
 "Senpai" must be referring to Ciel-senpai, but this guy seems to get happy when
 his offer is refused.
 "Hey, Arihiko, you have that sort of taste?"



"No, no, I'm not finished.
 So I asked Senpai why not, and she said 'If Tohno-kun is there, then I don't
 want to come'!!
 Uwahahahahahahahaha!
 Isn't that great, Tohno!?"

"....."

That's odd.

Why have I been friends with this guy since middle school?

"Oh man, she really hates you Tohno!

A rival's loss is my gain, so I'll treat you to lunch today!"

Arihiko happily slaps my back.

".... I see.

Senpai's still mad at me about this morning."

I have no idea why she's angry at me, but she definitely is angry.



"Hey, let's go Tohno.

There's only seats enough for half the people using the cafeteria."

Arihiko takes me by the arm and drags me off.

I sit next to Arihiko and eat my lunch.

My school's cafeteria has a television, and for better or worse for our education, they play back the morning news they recorded this morning.

At any rate, the news they are playing back is talking about a drunk customer stabbing to death a convenience store employee, something that makes me not want to go to a convenience store for a few days at least.



"What a dangerous world we live in.

Indiscriminate serial killers, drunken people stabbing people.

A man can't even feel safe playing around at night anymore."

Arihiko seems like he is seriously watching the news.

".... Well, certainly it is dangerous.
But at least those serial killings won't happen anymore, so things should be like usual."
"Oh really?
Did they catch the serial killer?"
"No, they haven't caught him."
—But Nrvnqsr is no longer in this world.
So the stupid title of the modern day vampire killings shouldn't be showing up in the news anymore and there will be no more of those meaningless killings.
"Anyway, those terrible incidents won't happen anymore.
There won't be any more victims, and the streets will be back to normal."



"No—I think there'll actually be another victim, Tohno."
"—What?
How can you be so sure, Arihiko?"
"Well look for yourself.
The news says they've found the tenth dead body."
—Eh?
"Aw really.... that's right behind the movie theater I always go to."
"Hey—hey, wait."
I push Arihiko and look at the TV.
What I see is without a doubt,
the news reporting that the tenth victim of the serial killings was found last night.
"That—can't be."
He, Nrvnqsr, is dead.
So why—is there another dead body with most of its blood drained?"



"Hmm, this modern vampire guy.
 I don't know anything about the person, but if it's like a sexy chick, I maybe
 wouldn't mind getting my blood sucked."
 "—"

If it's like a sexy chick, he maybe wouldn't mind getting his blood sucked?
 His stupid talk—might be right.
 "—No way."
 I don't want to think about it, but..
 Even with Nrvnqsr gone, there's still one more vampire left, Shiki—

Classes end and school is over.
 Actually, it's more like at some point, school was over.
 Wrapped up in my bad thoughts, I look up and suddenly find myself alone.
 "—The serial killings are still happening."
 I don't know what that means.
 The only one who knows the answer is probably Arcueid.
 I don't know.
 I'm not involved in any of those incidents anymore.
 Once I settled things with Nrvnqsr, I came back to the ordinary world.
 Then—I can only be insane to want to go back to that abnormal world once
 again.
 "I shouldn't—be involved."
 I understand even if I don't say it.
 That's probably my second most correct choice.
 But a long, long time ago, someone taught me the most correct choice.
 —Listen, Shiki.
 Every person's life is filled with pitfalls.
 You have more power to do something about it than most people, so you've got
 to get it together—
 "—"
 So I just can't pretend I didn't see it.
 This incident isn't over yet.
 It seems once I got involved in this incident, I have to see this out to the very
 end—

I leave school.
rst, let's go to Arcueid's place.

Her room is still the same, but Arcueid isn't there.
.... Well, I didn't think I'd find her this easy.
Looks like I have to go out into the city and look for her.

The sun sinks and the city is really starting to get dark.
I looked around the major places in the city, but I didn't even catch a glimpse of her.
"—Damn it.
She was around when it didn't matter, so why can't I find her when I do need her?"
.... What should I do?
The night is just beginning, so—

Search for Arcueid aimlessly. turn to **124**

Return to the mansion. turn to **122**

122

It's quiet at the mansion gate.
The time is seven o'clock at night.
Akiha should be back, probably having tea in the sitting room.
..... *sigh*
I don't really feel like leisurely eating dinner at all, but if I don't go back, Akiha
and the others will probably worry about me again.
Looking for Arcueid will have to wait until after dinner.
I'll leave when Akiha and everyone else go to sleep.

—Dinner with Akiha is over and I head back to my room.
I had some tea after dinner with Kohaku-san and the others, but I don't even
remember what went on.
"—Where the heck is she?"
My head is only filled with thoughts of that golden-haired vampire.

At ten o'clock, the lights in the mansion are turned off.
At bedtime, everyone goes back to their rooms, so I slip out of the mansion
undetected.
"... She's, probably in the city?"
.... I don't want to think about it, but most of the victims are usually found in
alleys.
If I want to find Arcueid—if I want to find the vampire killer who's continuing
to murder, then I have to search the streets.

—*sigh*
I sit down on the guard rail.
It's been several hours already.
I looked around aimlessly, and I didn't even catch a single glimpse of Arcueid.
"..... Damn it."
It's so, frustrating.
Of course, I knew it isn't easy to just randomly find someone in town, but I still
felt optimistic I would find her.
"Where did she go....?"
.... Why?
I just wanted to ask her about the serial killings, but once I find out I can't see
her, I—
"Ah, stop.
Stop.
I should just stop."
I stand up from the guardrail and start walking.
It'll be midnight soon.
Searching for Arcueid any longer really is just useless.
"....."
But, if I've gone this far, I can do just a little more.

There's one last place I need to check.
If she's not there, then I'll go back to the mansion.

.... The deserted park.
I arrive at the place where I cooperated with Arcueid and defeated Nrvnqsr.
Having only looked in town, I've yet to search here.
".... Well, not that I'll find anything...."
Grumbling to myself, I enter the park.

Midnight.
As expected, there's no one here this late at night.
With this much silence, it rather feels refreshing.
".... That's right.
It's not like I can conveniently find her."
I let out a sigh and slump my shoulders.
".... How stupid.
Why am I so disappointed?"
I don't understand it myself.
Just, once more—I think maybe I wanted to see her smile.



"Ah, there you are.
Good evening, Shiki."
.... Yeah, just like this.
Her face that's so cheerful and carefree you can't believe it belongs to a vampire—
-
"A, Arcueid—!?"
Without even thinking, I grab both of her shoulders.



"Eh—?"

Arcueid flinches in surprise.

Her shoulders are indeed real, and I quickly pull my arms back.

"Y, you, why—"

Even though the one I've been searching for so long is right before me, I can't do anything but stumble over my words.



"Why?"

That's odd.

I was looking for you, so I don't think it's coincidence we met here."

"Eh—You, were looking for me?"

Why?"



"Why?—Oh, no reason."

She says straight out that she has no reason to be looking for.

"....."

.... I forgot.

She really is kind of like a cat this way.

"... Well, I guess it works out.

To be honest, I wanted to see you too.

So meeting here, um—"

I was about to say it makes me really happy, but I frantically choke those words off.

"—Anyway, I want to have a serious talk.

I want to talk about it somewhere else since I feel uneasy here, so is that okay?"

"Sure—but talk about what?"

"You'll see.

.... Let's go more to the back of the park."

Telling her to come on, I start walking.

Tilting her head in curiosity, she follows me obediently.

setvar flg8 + 1

turn to **125**

123

It's quiet at the mansion gate.
The time is seven o'clock at night.
Akiha should be back, probably having tea in the sitting room.

....?

I'm not sure what's going on, but I hear voices coming from the sitting room.
It's almost time for dinner, so it's strange for people to be just talking at this time.
Kohaku-san should be in the kitchen, and I think a conversation between Hisui and Akiha would be out of character.
"... Kohaku-san and Akiha are drinking tea, perhaps." Well, I guess that's most likely.
First thing's first.
I open the mansion's front door.



Hisui is standing in the lobby.
"I'm a little late, but I'm back."
"....."
Hisui silently greets me devoid of any expression.
She does not say her usual "Welcome back", and looks like she's in a bad mood.
"Did something happen?"
I might be imagining it, but you seem a little angry."



".... There is a guest for you, Shiki-sama.
She has been waiting in the sitting room, so please hurry there."
"A guest for me?"
Hisui nods.
"I wonder who.
There isn't anyone who would come visit me—"
Oh, wait.
I have this terrible, terrible feeling.
"Hisui.
What, kind of person is it....?"
"A pretty woman with golden hair."
Hisui's response is straightforward.
I wordlessly dash towards the sitting room.

—Too late.
It seems the current state of affairs is already at a level I can't escape from.

"—Welcome home, Nii-san."
"Oh, you're finally back."
They both greet me in completely opposite manners.
"....."
What, is this?
Arcueid and Akiha seem to be confronting each other.
They are both sitting down calmly.
But while Arcueid's calmness is natural, Akiha's calmness is from her hostility toward Arcueid.
Akiha takes a look at me.
"What is the matter, Nii-san?
You do not have to stand there, please have a seat here."
Uh, I feel like I'll get stabbed if I go over there.
"Uh, I'm fine.
Anyway, Akiha, this person is, well—"
Hmm—how should I explain this?
Akiha would not believe me if I say she's a classmate of mine, and telling her I met her in town would be like throwing oil on a fire.
"Well?
What is it?"
"Um, that's, uh—"
Now that we're in this situation, I think it doesn't matter what I say, but I have to make a good excuse and get out of it.
That's what I have to do, but—why did Arcueid come here in the first place?
"Um—did she say why she came here?"
I point to Arcueid in a desperate suicide gamble.
"Hm?"
She tilts her head, confused.
".... Isn't she one of your friends, Nii-san?"

That is what she told me."

"Well—yeah, you can say she's a friend."

"I see.

I really would like for her to be introduced to me.

If she is your friend, Nii-san, I can't push her out of our house."

"Ah—well, Akiha-san."

I start to stammer again.

Then Arcueid, unable to sit quietly during our sibling conversation, joins in without my permission.

"Please don't worry about it.

I just came here to get Shiki, so we'll be on our way.

Isn't that right, Shiki?"

.... My whole world jolts.

—This is bad.

If I let her keep talking, she'll lead me to an early grave.

"Huhu, ahahahaha!"

Laughing desperately, I run to Arcueid and grab her arm.



-28 0

"Hey, Shiki, what are you doing all of a sudden?"

There's no time to listen to her complaints.

I pull on her arm and dash out of the sitting room, leaving a stunned Akiha behind.



Hisui is in the lobby.

She looks at me with somewhat colder eyes than usual as I run with Arcueid.

"Are you leaving, Shiki-sama?"

"—Yeah, I'll be back late.

I really am sorry, but can you leave the gate open?"

"—Yes, as you wish."

I dash past Hisui's courteously bowing figure and escape the mansion.



"Ow.

Just what in the world were you thinking, taking me outside so quickly like that?"

"That's my line....!"

What in the world were you thinking!?

Coming into my house like that is just insane!

Are you trying to destroy my life, you idiot....!"

I grit my teeth as I glare at Arcueid.



"I—idiot!?"

Are you calling me an idiot!?"

"I'm calling an idiot an idiot, so what else is there, idiot!

If you want to argue, I'm listening!"

"Eh—ah, huh?"

I'm completely infuriated.

It's been a while since I've been this mad, and once I'm mad, I have to say everything I want to the person I'm mad at, no matter who it is.



"Hey, I just came to see you.
I didn't do anything to make you mad!"
"... Wait.
Are you serious, Arcueid?
You only came to see me?"



"I didn't even say anything weird.
I didn't say anything to your sister about your eyes or about me or anything."
"Of course.
If you did, we wouldn't be talking like this.
I would not have hesitated and thrown you out if you did."



".... I don't get it.
Then why are you so mad?"

"That's because you don't ever think!
Look, you already stand out just being here.
I'll say it now, but you should realize that just by being here you cause trouble....!"
For the time being, I said it all.
Getting it all out of my system calms me down, but obviously Arcueid isn't so calm.
Looking like a cat, she stares at me ill-temperedly.



"—What, saying things like that.. What do you mean I stand out?
Don't I look like any other human?"
"No, beautiful women always stand out.
It doesn't have anything to do with being human."
I answer directly.

I answer so flatly that Arcueid understands flatly, too.
"—Well, I said too much.
It was the first time that's happened to me, so I kind of panicked."



".... That's okay.
It seems like I was the one to blame."
Arcueid nods meekly.
I feel a little guilty because I think there's something more to it than that.
.... In the first place, why did she come to my house....?
"Anyway, why did you come over?"

.... Well, I wanted to talk to you, too, so I guess it's a good thing."



"Really?"

I was just.. wondering how you were doing, so I swung by to see you."

".... I see.

Next time, please do so in a different place.

And as stealthily as possible, too."

.... I'm worn out.

"—Anyway, I want to have a serious talk.

I want to talk about it somewhere else since I feel uneasy here, so is that okay?"



"Sure—but talk about what?"

"You'll see.

.... There'll be less people around, so let's go more towards the middle of the park."

Telling her to come on, I start walking.

Tilting her head in curiosity, she follows me obediently.

setvar arkregard + 1

turn to **125**

124

—The night has just begun.

No, to be more exact, if Arcueid would be walking around, it would most likely be during the night rather than during the day.

".... I guess it would be more efficient to search around town."

.... I don't want to think about it, but most of the victims are usually found in alleys.

If I want to find Arcueid—if I want to find the vampire killer who's continuing to murder, then I have to stick to searching the streets.

"—Damn it.

What am I doing!?"

Not understanding my own feelings, I curse and start to run around aimlessly.

——*sigh*

I sit down on the guard rail.

It's been several hours already.

I looked around aimlessly, and I didn't even catch a single glimpse of Arcueid.

"..... Damn it."

It's so, frustrating.

Of course, I knew it isn't easy to just randomly find someone in town, but I still felt optimistic I would find her.

"Where did she go....?"

.... Why?

I just wanted to ask her about the serial killings, but once I find out I can't see her, I—

"Ah, stop.

Stop.

I should just stop."

I stand up from the guardrail and start walking.

It'll be midnight soon.

Searching for Arcueid any longer really is just useless.

"....."

But, if I've gone this far, I can do just a little more.

There's one last place I need to check.

If she's not there, then I'll go back to the mansion.

.... The deserted park.

I arrive at the place where I cooperated with Arcueid and defeated Nrvnqsr.

Having only looked in town, I've yet to search here.

".... Well, not that I'll find anything...."

Grumbling to myself, I enter the park.

Midnight.

As expected, there's no one here this late at night.

With this much silence, it rather feels refreshing.

".... That's right.
It's not like I can conveniently find her."
I breath out a sigh and slump my shoulders.
".... How stupid.
Why am I so disappointed?"
I don't understand it myself.
Just, once more—I think maybe I wanted to see her smile.



"Ah, there you are.
Good evening, Shiki."
.... Yeah, just like this.
Her face that's so cheerful and carefree you can't believe it belongs to a vampire—
-
"A, Arcueid—!?"
Without even thinking, I grab both of her shoulders.



"Eh—?"
Arcueid flinches in surprise.
Arcueid's shoulders are indeed real, and I quickly pull my arms back.

"Y, you, why—"
Even though the one I've been searching for so long is right before me, I can't do anything but stumble over my words.



"Why?
That's odd.
I was looking for you, so I don't think it's coincidence we met here."
"Eh—You, were looking for me?
Why?"



"Why?
—Oh, no reason."
She says straight out that she has no reason to be looking for me.
"....."
.... I forgot.
She really is kind of like a cat this way.
".... Well, I guess it works out.
To be honest, I wanted to see you too.
So meeting here, um—"
I was about to say it makes me really happy, but I frantically choke those words off.
"—Anyway, I want to have a serious talk.
I want to talk about it somewhere else since I feel uneasy here, so is that okay?"
"Sure—but talk about what?"
"You'll see.
.... Let's go more to the back of the park."
Telling her to come on, I start walking.

Tilting her head in curiosity, she follows me obediently.

setvar flg7 + 1
turn to **125**

125



"What did you want to talk about, Shiki?"
"About vampires.
You said it before.
That the recent serial killings were the work of a vampire."
Arcueid nods.
"Then do you know the morning news said another victim was found?
She was killed last night and drained of blood."



"___"
.... Arcueid's eyes narrow.
Something..
Something like a freezing tension races down my spine.



"Oh?

And?"

"And?—you..."

I swallow hard.

She stares right at me.

Almost—a stare which says she will attack me immediately if I move even the slightest bit.

"Is— isn't it strange, Arcueid?

Nrvnqsr is dead.

So why are these incidents still happening?

Don't tell me, that, you—"



"That's not it at all.

That's not me, but another vampire."

Arcueid responds immediately, loosening the tension.

But I'm not satisfied.

"What do you mean?

The work of another vampire?

So they just keep coming?"



"Of course not.

The serial killings were always the work of just one vampire from the very beginning.

So no new vampires will come, and Nrvnqsr was unrelated to those incidents."

—Eh?

Nrvnqsr was, unrelated...?

"Wha—what do you mean?"

"It's just like I said.

.... You're normally pretty sharp, but you're lost at some points.

Think back, Shiki.

Nrvnqsr was a vampire, but did he ever suck human blood?"

"Suck blood?

He ate humans and—oh."

I see.

Why didn't I notice such a simple mistake?

The victims of the serial killings are found with their bodies drained of blood.

But Nrvnqsr was different.

He didn't leave any dead bodies behind.

He not only drank the blood, but also ate the meat, leaving no trace.

To prove it, the people eaten by him in the hotel were treated as missing people, not killed people.

So—that means, it is something completely different.

"Wait.

Then what is the serial killing going on right now?

Just who is doing it?"



"That's a different vampire than Nrvnqsr.
To be more specific, that vampire is why I came here, and Nrvnqsr came here following me.
It's that sort of correlation."
"—Wha.. So the one you're after wasn't Nrvnqsr after all....!?"



"Yes, I didn't ever say he was my initial target.
I was his target, but he was never my target; my target is the one called the 'serial killer' in this city."



"... Shiki.
I don't quite believe it, but don't tell me you made such a simple mistake?"

"Wha—"
I gasp in shock.

But—it really is just as she says.
She said her purpose is to kill vampires, so I just thought it was Nrvnqsr she was after—
"... So what is it?
Killing Nrvnqsr that night, was pointless.....!?"



"It wasn't pointless, you fought in my place.
Well, if you didn't kill me, you probably wouldn't have had to in the first place."
"___"
I feel a little dizzy.
"... In other words, those vampire killings had nothing at all to do with Nrvnqsr and it was the work of another vampire...?"
"Yeah, that's right.
But, that's my problem so you don't have to worry about it.
But more than that, hey."

With an extremely happy smile, Arcueid looks up at me as I still stand there in surprise.

"How was last night?
Who came?"
if flg4 >= 1
turn to **126**
turn to **127**

126

"Huh?"

What does she mean by last night?

I don't understand what she's talking about.

After all, I'm the idiot who mistook Arcueid's words and made such a stupid mistake, so of course I don't understand what she is saying, and—huh?

Did Arcueid ask me who came last night—?

"... Arcueid.

What do you mean by 'last night'?"



"Hm?"

That's strange, I know I sent you a dream familiar."

"Wait, what's that dream familiar thing?"



"Um, it's like a familiar that lets you see a dream about what you desire the most.

You're a male, so I sent you a succubus.

Wasn't it a good dream?"

"I—"

A good dream?

That was..

I remember the realistic dream I had and my face turns red.

"You, that was your doing—!"

Arcueid grins even more.

—Crap.

If I stayed quiet this conversation would have been over, but since I reacted so strongly—



"Ah, so you did get it.

So, who came?

I know, it was your sister, right?"

"N, n, not Akiha—!"

What kind of a guy do you think I am!

I'm not crazy to do that to a sister!"

"Hmm.

If it wasn't your sister, then was it the maids at the mansion?"

Arcueid looks up at me full of amusement.

"Uh—"

She's acting like the Arcueid from last night's dream.

"It doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."

I look away from her and refuse.

But Arcueid keeps saying "Come on, come on," over and over.



"Come on, tell me.

You can at least tell me who you dreamed about."

She asks like a curious kid.

Every time I turn away she keeps jumping in front of me, saying "Come on, come on."

.... This is pure torture.

She's as mischievous as last night's dream.

I bury my face in my hands.



"Hey Shiki, don't be quiet and tell me."

Arcueid keeps looking at me with those upturned eyes.

—I can't, God.

This is my limit.

".... You."

I hesitatingly let it out in a quiet voice.

"—Eh?"

What about me?"

"Don't make me say it again.

I'm saying that it was you who came!"

I shout angrily as I look away.

Arcueid's eyes widen in surprise.



"M, me...?"

"Yeah, it's not a joke.

You came, and—"

There's no way I can finish.



"Ah—"

Now Arcueid looks away from me, looking very uncomfortable.

"....."

"....."

Neither of us know what to say.

The uncomfortable silence continues.

....

.....

.....

.....

..... *ahem*

I can't bear the silence any longer and force out that cough.

"... In the first place, why did you send me that dream familiar thing?"

Are you still angry at me for killing you?"



"That's not it at all.

I sent it as thanks for defeating Nrvnqsr.

I really am grateful to you, I thought you'd be extremely happy."

"As thanks?—I'll pass on that kind of thanks.

Having that kind of poor taste, just what are vampires thinking?"

I slump my shoulders.

I don't know what she's mad about, but she looks at me with a dissatisfied expression.



"What's that all about, you meanie?
I know I'm not human."

She turns away, then starts walking off.

"Hey, hold on.

Where are you going?"

"It has nothing to do with you.

Don't follow me!"

Is she really that angry?

Arcueid walks away without even turning around.

"....."

Where does she plan on going anyway?

"....."

Maybe I did say too much.

No matter what the results were or the methods used, she really thanked me with good intentions.

I start to feel intense regret and think that maybe I should have just accepted her gift happily.

"___"

Damn it.

Why is it that I just can't leave Arcueid alone....!?

"Aw—Hey, I said wait!"

turn to **128**

127



—I'd die before I'd say it.
 "Arcueid, it doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."
 I look away from her and refuse.
 But Arcueid keeps saying "Come on, come on," over and over.
 "Come on, tell me.
 You can at least tell me who you dreamed about."
 She asks like a curious kid.
 Every time I turn away she keeps jumping in front of me, saying "Come on, come on."

".... Please, just let it go.
 There was something wrong with that dream.
 Even now, that—"
 I don't know why I saw that dream.
 Arcueid says it's my greatest desire, but I don't want to think that's what it was.



"Oh, maybe it turned into a nightmare?
 She does tend to write the story to her liking when fond of her target.
 She's only a novice, so I guess it couldn't be helped."
 Arcueid mumbles to herself.
 "....?
 Writes the story to her liking?
 What do you mean?"

"I'm saying she interprets your desire in her own way.
That dream familiar I sent you is just a child, so she likes to play pranks."
"—I see."
.... That's a relief.
That's right, that dream—it couldn't have been what I wanted.
I let out a sigh of relief.
With this, my innocence has been proved but—
"Arcueid.
Why did you send me such a thing?
That's too much even for harassment."



"Hmph.
I wouldn't harass you.
I sent you the dream familiar to thank you for defeating Nrvnqsr.
I really am grateful to you, so I thought it'll be great if it made you happy."
"Thank me?—Well, I'm happy you were grateful, but.."
But no matter what, I'll pass on that sort of thanks.



"Oh come on.
Are you saying you can't accept a person's goodwill?"
".... Hey, you're not a person, you're a vampire, Arcueid."



".... That's.... true but."

Arcueid slumps her shoulders.

.... How do I say this.. Arcueid is very open in expressing her emotions. Being happy, being angry, she changes her expressions so quickly—It's actually kind of charming.

.... I said she was a vampire, but, she really does seem like a human, enough to even make me forget that fact.

".... In the first place, why did you send me that dream familiar thing? Are you still angry at me for killing you?"



"That's not it at all.

I sent it as thanks for defeating Nrvnqsr.

I really am grateful to you, I thought you'd be extremely happy."

"As thanks?—I'll pass on that kind of thanks.

Having that kind of poor taste, just what are vampires thinking?"

I slump my shoulders.

I don't know what she's mad about, but she looks at me with a dissatisfied expression.



"What's that all about, you meanie?
I know I'm not human."

She turns away, then starts walking off.

"Hey, hold on.

Where are you going?"

"It has nothing to do with you.

Don't follow me!"

Is she really that angry?

Arcueid walks away without even turning around.

"....."

Where does she plan on going anyway?

"....."

Maybe I did say too much.

No matter what the results were or the methods used, she really thanked me with good intentions.

I start to feel intense regret and think that maybe I should have just accepted her gift happily.

"___"

Damn it.

Why is it that I just can't leave Arcueid alone....!?

"Aw—Hey, I said wait!"

turn to **128**

128

Surrounded by the night, Arcueid walks down the street.
She looks straight ahead, her white figure with golden hair fluttering.
It bears a horrible resemblance to the first time I saw her.
No, or perhaps..
Perhaps it's like the time she faced off with Nrvnqsr.
.... For some reason I have a bad feeling about this.
"Hey, Arcueid!"



"___"

Arcueid continues to walk without turning around.
"I want to talk to you.
You can at least tell me what you're going to do."
"___"

Of course, Arcueid just continues walking without turning around.
.... It'd be miserable if I left it like this.
I decide to follow her silently for now.

The footsteps echo through the night air.
—And then,
Arcueid suddenly stops and turns around.



"Don't follow me.
Don't you understand it's troubling for a normal person like you to follow me

around?"

"—So tell me what you're going to do and I'll go back."



"... It doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."
Arcueid strides off once more.

.... Crap.
It seems like our wordless wandering is going to continue.

When we approach the main street, Arcueid freezes.



"—Found it."
"Eh..... ?"
Her voice is cold, like a totally different person's.
"—Ah."
.... A chill runs up my spine.
Even from behind, I can feel the hostility manifesting itself in her.
"Arcueid—What, are you—"
I can't even finish.
It's clear what she intends to do without saying anything.
Without a doubt, there is nothing but the pure, unadulterated intent to kill.
"Hey—What are you, thinking....!?"
"—"
Arcueid doesn't answer.

Her eyes are fixed solely on a man in a business suit walking by.



"Shiki.
Take off your glasses and look at that person."
"That person—you mean that business man?"
"Hurry.
If you want to know what I'm doing, then leave the questions for later."
"—Alright.
I don't like to look while in town, but—"

I take off my glasses.
"... Gah."
Instantly a light headache springs forth.
In exchange for the pain, I can see "lines" running all along the walls and the ground.



"Another question, Shiki.
You only see "points" on living things, right?"
"Eh—?
Yeah, that seems to be true.
Things like buildings only have lines."
"... I saw them back during the time in that hotel, but at the cost of a headache that almost caused me to pass out.
"Right, since you are a living being, you can't comprehend the death of inanimate objects.

So in order to "see" the death of inanimate objects, you must first connect to a circuit of the same orientation as them.

To "see", you have to "comprehend" them first.



"Then another question.
Shiki, how does that person look to you?"

"—?"

It'll just be the same as always—



47 0

"—!?"

Without thinking, I step backwards.

.... What is that?

Certainly, all humans have "lines" on them.

But they only have countable amounts and they also look like geometric patterns.

But—what is that?

There are "lines" running all through him.

Those "lines" are all over him like blood vessels.. so much that I can't even make out his appearance.

"—Gah."

I want to puke.

Those, black "lines"—scribbles making a human shape.. everywhere throughout it, I can see "black points" that look like they are flowing blood—



"Shiki, how does it look?

I was hoping it would look normal to you."

"——"

I can't answer.

Right now—it takes all my strength just not to vomit.

"—I see.

How unfortunate that you can even see death on that thing."

"Yeah... it's not, normal, but.... I can, still see, the lines...."



"I knew it—you can even kill The Dead.

The fact that they don't have any life has no meaning for you.

Something that moves, something that breaks, you can stop it completely without exception—You're more of a monster, Shiki."

"Eh——"



"As you saw, you can't call that thing human anymore.
 It's a vampire that deceives death by sucking the blood of other people."
 Arcueid quickens her steps.
 She walks straight towards the man.
 "Hey, Arcueid—"
 "Stay there Shiki!"
 Did that young man realize Arcueid was there?
 He starts running towards a back alley.
 Arcueid strides silently.
 Underneath the moonlight, she disappears into that alley.

—Thump.
 The sound of my heartbeat is awfully close.
 It's not even real late at night.
 Even though I'm in the midst of a bustling shopping district, I can't sense anyone besides myself.
 —THUMP.
 My glasses—I have to put on my glasses.
 If I don't do that, I'll see terrible things.
 I'll see something so terrible that everything I've seen so far would be nothing in comparison to it.
 —Th, u, mp.
 But my body won't move.
 My eyes that can see this patchwork world look towards that alley in fascination.
 "——"

Suddenly, sounds vanish.
 And the presence of other people,
 the sound of the wind,
 and the smell of the dirt.
 All of it freezes.
 —GI
 Under the frozen moon.
 A bizarre noise sounds from the other side of the wall.

—GO.

No way I can see it,
I can't hear anything.

—A sickening sound
But I can see it.

My eyes definitely see the sound of death and death crashing.

"Gah—"

My vision turns crimson.

Why—do my eyes see "death", something that shouldn't be able to be seen?

"—"

My glasses.

I have to put on my glasses or I'll go insane.

I hold back the rising gorge in my throat and use my shaking hand to put on my glasses.

Sound and light return.

Now that I'm calm, I glance around and see nothing out of the ordinary in the shopping district.

The bustling of many people passing by.

The brightness of a store's decorated show window and the sound of rushing car engines.

I'm panting excessively.

I can hardly breathe.

Even though I put my glasses back on, I can still feel a lingering remnant of that "death" and it makes me sick.



"Ar—cueid....?"

Arcueid walks out from the alley with faltering steps, breathing even harder than I am.

"—Shiki.... I see, you were, still here."

Shoulders heaving up and down, she passes by me.

Her body sways back and forth, and she walks weakly as if she was sick.

—To be honest, I still feel nauseous.

But, seeing Arcueid in pain like that makes me bear it.
 "Wait, what in the world....!"



"I'm fine, just a little tired so don't worry.
 —It really doesn't concern you Shiki."
 "Idiot, if you're tired then rest!
 With such a pale face, you can't be fine!"
 Even as I breathe shallowly for air, I grab Arcueid's arm.
 "... Hey now.
 You say that, but you look like you'll collapse too."
 "It's just my anemia.
 If you have time to worry about me, worry about your health."
 "—It's fine.
 There's no point in worrying about it anyway."

Her breathing really is weak.
 "Don't tell me—that wound from that time—"
 It hasn't healed?
 But I can't bring myself to finish.
 It's because she got it saving me.
 "—"
 She doesn't answer and looks down.
 That is affirmation rather than disagreement.
 "Stu—What are you doing in your condition!?
 You have to take it easy until you're fully healed!"
 "I do think I'm, taking it, easy."
 "No you're not!
 Even if you are at a level beyond humans, what in the world were you doing
 earlier in your condition—"
 I just can't leave her be.
 I knew it.
 I just can't leave this person who's always getting into trouble alone.
 "Don't be silent and answer me.
 Until you tell me, I won't go away....!"
 I grasp both of her shoulders.

Still looking down, she gives a slight nod.
 "... Geez, you really are persistent.
 Fine, let's go somewhere else to talk."
 Releasing herself, she waveringly starts to walk away.

We come to the park.
 As if walking restored her strength, her face looks as cheerful as always.



"Well, as you wish, Shiki, I'll talk about whatever you want."
 I don't know where her previous weakness went, but she looks really haughty all of a sudden.
 "Then I'll ask, but just what was that guy earlier?
 You said he was a vampire, was he what you were after?"
 "No, he certainly is part of my target, but putting The Dead back into the grave isn't my goal.
 I only got him because he was a minion of my 'enemy'.
 If I left him alone, he would kill more people to increase his power."
 "... Arcueid.
 Um, could you explain it so I can understand?
 I don't even know if that guy was even human or not."



"Oh.
 I guess I never really did explain to you in detail about vampires.
 Rvnqsr was sort of an aberration amongst the vampire race, so I didn't really

need to explain it at that time."

"....?"

"What is a normal vampire then?"



"What I mean is what you all think of vampires.

Immortal, never aging, sucking human blood, turning that human into a vampire, being destroyed by sunlight, all of that.

My 'enemy' is that old type of vampire."

".... Um, so you mean this 'enemy' of yours is the one behind all the recent serial killings?"



".... I suppose.

But the killing of all those people by sucking their blood might be the work of "The Dead" like the one you saw earlier.

Shiki, you remember how Nrvnqsr's body was made of all those familiars, right?"

"—Yeah, that's not exactly something I can easily forget."

"The Dead are like that.

When humans have their blood sucked by a vampire, they can also receive some of the vampire's blood.

They die, but remain in this world as a servant of the vampire.

They are called The Dead and they are like the vampire's familiars.

Ah, maybe it's easier to understand if I use the word zombie.

It's closer to the voodoo belief in Haiti where the white serpent-god Damballah is invoked to control a dead body, but let's just say a dead body that moves is a zombie, okay?"

—Yeah, I can visualize it better that way.

"I get it, so that man was killed by a vampire, who uses him as a zombie?"



"Yes, yes," Arcueid nods happily.

"—I'm still confused though.

Why would a vampire do that?

Killing people—not letting them die but controlling them, what bad taste."

"You're right, those vampires do have bad taste.

But that's something only the Dead Apostles do.

Those that were always vampires from the very beginning do not do such things."

"—?"

Always vampires from the very beginning?

"—I remember.

You said there's two types of vampires, those who were vampires originally, and those who were humans.

.... When I heard that before, it kind of stuck in my head, I thought it was a little odd.

So what exactly do you mean by those who weren't originally vampires?"

"Simple, I'm just saying that Dead Apostles used to be humans.

They either gained immortality through magic or became servants of the True Ancestors that sucked their blood.

.... Shiki, you said it was bad taste to use killed humans, but that's just the least of it.

There are other vampires who think up of worse games."

"—A game—what is that?

You guys kill for fun, and use their dead bodies as toys....!?"



"... I won't deny that.
For vampires, "amusement" is the same as breathing.
For those who were once human but gain imperfect immortality, their greatest enemy is boredom.
They didn't have a reason to become immortal to start with, so once they gained immortality, they lost all kinds of greed.
Their goal was immortality itself, so I guess that's just the way things are."
"—They're bored so they want to play?
Don't be ridiculous.
Isn't it enough that they won't age or die?
Do they really need anything else?"



"That's what I said, they got everything they wanted.
After that, there is no meaning to existence.
As soon as someone realizes they have no value—that their life is stopped, then their meaning of existence disappears too.
Immortality is also another word for death.
So they started to wear down and they started to create their own amusement, as if to tell themselves they could have fun as long as they lived.
—That's their beginning.



"They copy humans and see themselves in a game as lords of a castle expanding their territory.

I guess you could call it a country of The Dead.

It seems they got more enjoyment out of that than they expected."

.... She speaks as if she was talking of other people.

Arcueid should be one of those, but she certainly doesn't seem like she has that sort of hobby.



"Well, we'll change the topic, but the Dead Apostles were originally human.

There are a few cases where they became vampires through their own magical research, but the majority of them were humans who had their blood sucked.

They are immortal, but they can't last forever.

They can only be immortal if they drink the blood of others.

Didn't I say their immortality was imperfect?

If they can't feed on humans then their immortality is gone."

".... Wait a minute, isn't that odd?

In order to become immortal they drink the blood of humans, but doesn't that mean new Dead Apostles will be born every time they do that?"



"That's true, but things get complex from here.
The people who have their blood sucked die.
But at that time, if the Dead Apostles place a little of their blood inside the corpse, the body cannot die.
Those bodies that were unable to die stay a number of years in the grave and when the brain decays and the soul is "fixated" in the body, they become a flesh-eating corpse (ghoul).



Only one out of every hundred people have this potential, so not everyone gets to 'stay'.
.... Well, there are those that have a natural ability to 'step up' this progress and become a vampire immediately, but this is so rare it's out of the question.
"So, the dead bodies that became ghouls eat the flesh of other corpses in order to sustain their decayed body parts.
After restoring their body fully, they can become zombies.... members of the class of living corpses (The Living Dead)."
"—Hm.
So these Living Dead, is that the "The Dead" from before?"



"Not at all.

"The Dead" are just puppets.

The Living Dead are much weaker than The Dead, but they are members of the vampire race with a will of their own.

They are on a different level than those manipulated "Dead"."



"And after many years, once a Living Dead is able to restore its intelligence, it becomes a vampire.

There's probably about only one out of every ten thousand who have this ability.

I said it before, but the more potential you have, the higher the success rate to stay.

We call the Dead Apostles the ones that make all these kinds of vampires."

".... That's still odd.

If this game goes on, then won't the world be overflowing with vampires eventually?"

"Not necessarily.

The Dead Apostles usually get killed by the new vampires they created.

Didn't I say it before?

They act like humans.

For their own enjoyment, they place their own blood inside the humans they preyed upon.

These corpses go through the one out of tens of thousands rate to become vampires and eventually kill their parent vampires, becoming a new Dead Apostle themselves.

"Like knights becoming lords through strength of arms, and killing the king— they can only survive by playing those sorts of games.



.... Yeah, I don't really understand why, but I guess that stops them from dying of boredom.

The whims of an existence close to a devil, I suppose.

Even if they are immortal, if they can't hold onto their meaning for existence, it is an empty immortality."

Arcueid remarks how silly it is as she slumps her shoulders.

".... I see.

Then, that Dead that you killed earlier.... that was something like a soldier of the Dead Apostles?"



"Not so much a soldier as a puppet.

The Dead Apostles control the dead bodies by skipping the process of becoming a vampire.

The Dead are completely connected to their parent vampire.

In order for them to survive, they attack others to eat their flesh, but more than half of that energy goes to their master.

Like a queen bee nourished by the worker bees, the Dead Apostles can use The Dead to increase their power while they sleep."

".... My 'enemy' can't be found easily because he's using a lot of The Dead.

He only dirties his hands once.

After that, he simply controls The Dead while he sleeps and expands his territory.

—They say many bodies are found in the recent supposed serial killings, but those are actually just failures.
To tell the truth, there are over a hundred victims in this city.
But only a small amount, the ones discovered, are the victims in the news."

"Wha—"

Over a hundred—?
There are that many that had their blood sucked?
And all those people suck the blood of others to make them into monsters like themselves, like that wandering, lifeless thing earlier—
"..... That's ridiculous."
Three days ago.
I remember how all those people in the hotel were killed for no reason.
I was there but I didn't see it, so I can only visualize and can't really tell what kind of violence it was.
It's still the same.
I can't fathom the existence of vampires that suck human blood, just to increase their own territory.
—Just,
without reason, without even recognition, if someone close to me died liked that, how would I act?
I don't want to imagine it, but just a bit.
I imagine Akiha being drained of blood and discarded like trash.
"K—"
What makes me mad—is that this worst case scenario could happen at any minute in this town and I didn't even have a clue about it before.



"I knew you would be angry, Shiki.
... I didn't want to talk about it, because for the prey—for you guys, this is an inexcusable evil.
For people like you, the actions of the vampires are inexcusable."
".... That's right.
That's just all so ridiculous.
Even if it's people I don't know about, they have their past and even the dreams they hoped for.

Even I—don't want to be killed just for the fun of it.
That's just too regretful.
It's too meaningless.
That's all just so—so regretful, isn't it?"

—That's right.
All those people were killed by Nrvnqsr in the midst of fear and chaos.
Weren't their last thoughts full of regretful sadness?
That night at the park.
That girl who was killed by Nrvnqsr when she passed by the park by sheer coincidence.
She didn't even realize when she died.
That meaninglessness.
The abruptness of its ending.
A death no one else even knows about.
When it happened, I was broken apart by the complete irrationality of it all.
My fear of Nrvnqsr disappeared and more than anything else, I hated him.
"... I can't accept it.
No matter what the reason, I can't accept it."
I grit my teeth.



"Shiki, there is no reason.
For them, it's just a game."
"—That's why it's ridiculous.
It's just a game to you all....!?
Nrvnqsr and this other guy, what do they think human life is....!?"



"They come up with such games because they think it's nothing. Even I can't understand how they think, nor do I intend do. But, if you ask who is at fault here, it's the weaker one, right? In the end, those that are killed are at fault. It's all the will of nature that those who are unable to protect themselves are killed."
"Wha—"



"But, Shiki. If you talk about it that way, your human species is really strong. The ability to make up for their weakness as a species with other things, that makes them the strongest in a way. Probably, the only ones that can kill the greatest creature called the 'world' are you humans."



"But even though they are strong as a species, they are weak as individuals. They can't live without sacrificing the lives of those not of their race, which is the ultimate 'evil', is it not?
It doesn't matter if they have intelligence or not, for you guys, everything is fair game for food, is it not?
So—the ones doing the killings are always right.
If there is a sin, then it is you guys not being able to protect yourself under that rule."
"That—that's just the argument of the strong.
Humans aren't as strong like you all.
Because we can't protect ourselves fully, that's why we have to live together, to help each other—I don't know what to do if somebody like you guys came in and—"



"That's true.
That is your defense mechanism.
Since you can't protect yourself when those kinds of species enter your group, you guys make rules to ensure they are unable to enter.
.... Yes, it's just like you say, Shiki.
So usually, this town's case doesn't happen.
"You may not know it, but your human race is really strong.
You have erected a defense mechanism against those races which far exceed yours.
If it was functioning properly, this city would not have had a vampire these last eight years."
"Defense.... mechanism?"
"Yes.
The reason vampires hide the bodies of their victims and stay out of sight isn't because they don't want to be known to humans.
To protect their own lives, they conceal their identity and expand their territory. They don't want it to be known that vampires exist at all.
If they moved freely about, the defense mechanism would arrive.
Well, they probably haven't arrived even though that "Modern Day Vampire" news is going on because this is an atheist country."
".....?"

Her word choice is too unique and I can't really grasp what she's saying.



"But you can relax, Shiki.
 Even if their avowed enemies are not in this country, I'm here right now.
 Didn't I say earlier my purpose was to execute vampires?"
 I don't know where that heavy atmosphere went because Arcueid instantly becomes cheerful.
 "Yeah, I remember.
 But, you're a vampire too, right?
 Why do you side with us humans?"



"I'm not really siding with you humans, but I'm doing it because I don't have anything else to do."
 "—?"
 She doesn't have anything else to do?
 I still don't understand her.
 "Well, doing that does bring the Dead Apostles after me, but you beat Nrvnqsr who was pursuing me, didn't you Shiki?"



"So now I can go back to the original plan and defeat my 'enemy'.
You can go back to living your normal life now, and you don't have to associate
with me anymore."
She smiles as if she is happy about something.

"Ah—yeah.
That makes me happy, but—"
But—are you okay by yourself?
Those words float in the back of my head.
.... There's something wrong with me. Feeling guilty about letting her face
danger all by herself.
There really has to be something wrong with me.
"....."



"Shiki?
Why are you making that troubled face again?"
"Because I'm troubled.
This is something that involves the city I live in."
"I said you shouldn't worry.
In two or three days it'll all be over, and there won't be any more victims."

Yeah, honestly, I don't want to be involved.
—But, saying that line..
Shouldn't I, the one actually living in this city, say that line instead of Arcueid?
".... Arcueid.

Um, can I ask a question?
This 'enemy' you speak of, is he strong?"



"Well, he should be many times superior than The Dead earlier.
I haven't met him this time, but he has been latent for eight years so maybe he's a Class Five by now."
"—You're saying he's stronger than The Dead before?"
Looking like she was in so much pain from fighting just him, isn't she taking him a little lightly?
".... Class Five?
I don't get it, but does that mean he's stronger than Nrvnqsr?"
"Not a chance.
Nrvnqsr was special.
He was a pure, supreme vampire that would be difficult to defeat even with my full power.
Compared to him, this enemy is pretty weak."
"—Oh.
Then there's no way you'll be defeated."
I breathe out in relief.



"Hm, who knows?
A few days earlier and he wouldn't be a problem, but now I'm just recovering.
The possibility that he has more power is actually high."
".... Recovering?
Are you sick or something, Arcueid?"

"Yeah, I still have the effects from when you killed me and I don't think I'll be fine for at least a few more days."

"—Ah."

That's right—the reason why Arcueid is weak.. it isn't anyone's fault but mine.

Arcueid lightly touches her side.



"It seems the wounds don't heal like usual.
I could manage the outside, but I can't seem to heal the inside."
—That wound as well.

The one she received to save me.

"U—"

I'm at a loss for words.

It's completely my fault she's in that position.

So why?

Why doesn't she hold it against me?

Why does she just give that innocent smile—?

"... You need to stop.

Until you heal up, you should just rest.

If you take a day or two off, things won't be that bad, so—"



"That's no good.

Thanks to Nrvnqsr coming, 'the enemy' knows I'm here.

If I rest, that's like telling him I'm weakened."

"So you're saying you're going to keep on going like this?"

"Yes.

Since I don't know where 'the enemy's' lair is, I have to keep destroying his blood supply.

If I cut that off, it will force him to come out."

"—Arcueid.

What if that's tomorrow?

Wouldn't you be killed instead...!?

Then—"

I want to tell her to stop, but I halt mid-sentence.

Like Arcueid says—if 'the enemy' sees that weakness, Arcueid might be killed.

More than anything else, I learned from the past four days.

Arcueid isn't someone to stop half-way once she's decided to do something, no matter how much it hurts.

"Damn—"

Arcueid won't stop.

If I leave her alone—she probably won't even be able to talk like this anymore.

It makes me mad, but she's not even afraid of her own death.

".... Is that so?"

.... Why does she smile like that?

If she doesn't smile like that—If she acted more like a real vampire, I wouldn't have to feel like this.



"What's wrong, Shiki?

Your body is shaking, do you need to go to the bathroom?"

"—You, why are you—"

Why are you so relaxed?

".... Damn..... it."

.... I don't want to lose her.

I don't know what this feeling is.

But these past four days are not something I can just forget about.

So—to part here, with the possibility she may die tomorrow, the regret would be completely, utterly, unbearably—difficult.

".... Give me a break.
My eyes are already broken, but my heart's going to break as well."
Arcueid is a vampire, and I don't want to be involved in something like that again.
I remember the fight with Nrvnqsr.
Just thinking about it sends chills down my spine.
The fear of being one step away from death still remains.
This is the same.
Definitely, the opponent this time isn't normal.
There's really no need for me to be involved.
Since Arcueid is saying she'll handle it, I can rely on her.
But even knowing all of that.
.... I can't, I just can't leave her alone.
"—Damn, what the hell is wrong with me!?"
I kick the ground.
I'm angry at myself for not accepting any reasoning or excuses.



"Wh, what?
What's wrong, Shiki?
Getting so angry like that all of a sudden."
"Yeah, I'm just angry at my stupidity.
Why I want to say this after all that which happened to me!"
I feel more mad now that I actually say it.
Being this stupid—I know if I could see myself in a mirror I'd break it to pieces.



"Hey, really what's wrong, Shiki—?
You're not acting normal."
"Yeah, I'm not!
If I was acting normal, I really wouldn't say this....!"
I spit.
I really don't want to admit it, but it's already a done deal.
Because my mouth has already confirmed it for me.



"Oh I just can't understand it Shiki!
What is it!?
You keep saying you're going to say something, but what is it!?"
"Stupid, isn't it obvious!?
Until your body heals I'll help you.
That's what the stupid fool Tohno Shiki wants to say!"



"—Eh?"
Arcueid looks at me in total surprise.
As for me, finally saying it kind of calms me down.
"Shiki.
Is that, for real?"
"....."
I groan.



"I didn't hear it.
Please, can you say it again?"
"....."
I groan more.
No matter how much I regret it, it's done.
The instant I formed my feelings into words—I can't lie to myself any longer.



"Hurry.
I want to hear those words again."
Arcueid asks softly.
Looking off in the distance, I try to sound reluctant.
"... I guess it can't be helped.
It's my fault that you are weakened now and I can't leave the monster roaming
the streets alone either.
I can't rely on you taking care of it by yourself, so if you let me, I want to help
you.. that's what I said."
"Shiki—!"
Arcueid's eyes are suddenly alight.
She grabs my hand and happily shakes it up and down.
"... Well, I may not be that helpful, but it has to be better than nothing."



"Yeah...!
If you are helping me, there's nothing to be afraid of!"
She keeps shaking my hand up and down.

.... How do I say this?
She really does seem happy.

"But, what do we do now?
Do you want to search for more of The Dead like before?"



"Yeah, I think that's all we can do for now.
The one before was the twelfth, so I don't think there's much more.
The parent vampire will have to come out once they all are destroyed, so we
have to hunt the remaining ones for now.
Is that still okay?", she asks.
"Anything is fine, I'm just with you.
If you lead, then I'll follow.
-well, shall we start again?"



"Ah, no, that's good for tonight. They usually follow a fixed route, and the other Dead will probably not be out tonight. Since they are fewer in number, I don't think he'll let them all come out at once."
"—Oh really?
But, doesn't that mean this 'enemy' will try to hide The Dead from you, Arcueid?"



"Basically.
But since this 'enemy' is a vampire, he needs to steal the blood and energy of others. So, even though he knows I'm searching for them, he has to send The Dead out to get the minimal blood he needs."
—*sigh*
Then, the minimal Dead he sent out was that man from before, huh.
"So, searching further tonight will be useless, I think."
"... Well, I don't mind.
But it is tedious though."
"Yeah, hunting vampires is tedious work.
We have to find the coffin of this 'enemy' somewhere in this city, so it won't be easy."

Arcueid lets go of my hand and jumps back softly.
"Arcueid....?"



"Let's say goodbye for tonight.
We'll meet tomorrow.
With her dance-like steps, she watches me as she gets farther away.

"Tomorrow—wait, where should we meet....!?"
"Here's fine.
The time—yeah, around ten o'clock should be fine."
With a smile, she makes that promise.
"Good night, Shiki.
I'll see you here tomorrow!"
And,
waving her hand, Arcueid disappears.

—I get back to the mansion.
As it is very late, the mansion is completely dark.
"..... This can't be good."
I put my hand on the mansion gate.
Ka-chang.
A sturdy chain holds it closed.
"—Dang.
I shouldn't cut this."
I think a bit.
Then, I decide to climb over the gate.

.... I'm exhausted.
After sneaking over the wall like a thief, I quietly make my way to the doorway.
The gate was locked, but the door isn't.
"... It must have been Hisui."
I give a sigh of thanks.
So as not to wake Akiha, Kohaku-san or Hisui, I sneak my way through the mansion.

"—Whew."
Letting out a breath, I lay down on my bed.

"....."

My promise to Arcueid.

Maybe it's fate, but you've gotten yourself tangled up in trouble again, Tohno Shiki.

"—Could I help it?

I just can't leave her alone."

Or maybe I didn't want to leave her alone?

"Well.... I do think she is pretty."

I don't understand my feelings right now.

Right now, I'm not too sure what is right and what is wrong.

At any rate, it looks like I'll be helping Arcueid once again starting tomorrow.

So for now, I shouldn't think of anything else but getting a good night's sleep—

turn to **129**

129

if flg7 >= 1

turn to **130**

if flg8 >= 1

turn to **131**

Back then, the whole mansion was like a giant playground.
 The garden, a deep forest.
 The house, a tall castle.
 We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.
 Every day was fun.
 No one thought about ever growing up,
 and we believed that days and nights would always be the same.
 It was just a childhood spent playing like puppies.
 We got along wonderfully, and were the best of playmates.
 Whenever I turned back, Akiha would be there, waving her hands and hiding shyly.
 Yes, always the same.
 At that time, the mansion was a giant playground.
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 We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.

I slowly awaken and open my eyes.
 The morning light wraps around me and my sleepiness starts to lift.
 As the last vestiges clear,
 I sense that I had a very nostalgic dream.

"——"

As soon as I open my eyes, I start to see those terrible things jump into my vision.
 My head stabs with pain.
 "Gg——"
 I scramble for the glasses by my pillow and put them on.

I take in some air.
 After taking a few deep breaths, I manage to calm down.
 "Why did I—so early.."
 See those lines so clearly this early in the morning?
 It's difficult to see the lines of death in buildings.
 It's usually hard to see them, and seeing them so clearly like I just did now is rare.
 "....."
 What's more, I even saw those "points".
 I think my headache is getting worse too.
 Sensei said these eyes would attract things that weren't good.

I think Arcueid and these vampires are certainly not good.
So, maybe it's all affecting my eyes and making them stronger.
"—Can't be."
I'm probably just tired.
"Huh—?"
Come to think of it, Hisui isn't here.
It's already past seven.
Normally she would have already come in and woke me up.
"... Maybe Hisui slept in."
But I see my freshly prepared uniform on my desk.
"What's this?"
Maybe she had some other duties."
I'm a little curious, but I guess it doesn't concern me.
I don't have time this morning, so I should just hurry up, change and go to the sitting room.

"——Ah."

As I go from the lobby towards the sitting room, I realize I forgot something terribly important.
I open the door and stand there, without taking a single step forward.



Akiha is in the sitting room.
Kohaku-san is nearby and the two of them are drinking tea silently.

Normally she would say,
"Good morning, Nii-san,"
no matter how angry she might be, but she doesn't even look at me this morning.
"Ah..... uh."
It goes without saying.
Arcueid's coming here last night has some very lasting repercussions.
Akiha's irritation is permeating the air.
You could practically cut the tension with a knife.



"Good morning, Shiki-san."

.... Well, it seems like she's remained unaffected, at least.

"Ah.. yeah, good morning Kohaku-san."

Raising a hand to Kohaku-san, I enter the sitting room.



Akiha glares at me as I shuffle into the sitting room.

—Ugh, I'm not going to succumb to this silent pressure!

I should smooth things over with a cheerful greeting.

turn to **132**

I won't do something stupid, so just greet her normally.

turn to **133**

No, no

turn to **134**

130

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"....."

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I think my headache is getting worse too.
Sensei said these eyes would attract things that weren't good.
I think Arcueid and these vampires are certainly not good.
So, maybe it's all affecting my eyes and making them stronger.
"—Can't be."
I'm probably just tired.

"Please excuse me."



Hisui enters and greets me with a bow.

"Ah, morning Hisui."

"Yes, good morning Shiki-sama."

.... Hisui brings my uniform as usual.

But, I can tell she is a bit angry.

.... The reason doesn't need to be said.

She must be angry over yesterday because I didn't get back until very late, worked my way into my room and slept.

"Hisui, last night, um...."



"Shiki-sama, there is no need to give me any excuses."

Answering quickly, she starts walking towards the door.



"Then please excuse me.
Nee-san has prepared your breakfast, so please hurry to the sitting room."
"Yeah, I planned on doing so...."



"And Shiki-sama,
Akiha-sama would like to talk to you about your late return last night.
So please hurry to the sitting room."

She shuts the door emotionlessly.
"U—"
... Well, come to think of it, this is a perfectly natural result.

Akiha is the only one in the sitting room.
Kohaku-san is in the kitchen, humming away.



"....."

Akiha doesn't say anything when she sees me and sips her tea quietly.

"Hey.

Good morning, Akiha."

I try to greet her as naturally as I can.

Akiha's eyebrow twitches as she places her teacup down and slowly looks at me.



"Good morning Nii-san.

It was quite late when you came home last night, wasn't it?"

"... No, not really.

It was at most a little past one o'clock, quite normal for a healthy young man in high school to be up, right?"

"I see.

My bedtime is also past midnight so I was up at that time.

But I would come home much earlier than that."

"Ah... well, there were some pressing circumstances and I couldn't get back.

But I did return, so—"



"Yes, very late at night and you went back to your room.

Without saying anything or without making a noise.

... Goodness, you acted like you were out doing something you felt guilty over."

"Uh....."

Her stare is pure ice.

... This is the second time, and I'm sure even though Akiha looks calm, she is quite angry.

"—Nii-san.

I don't know what went on at the Arima house, but here the curfew is eight o'clock.

It is a rule that must not be broken.

The gate will be locked after that, so please don't climb in like a robber."

"Oh—You knew?"

"... The surveillance camera showed me quite clearly.

It is a good thing Kohaku realized it was you and turned off the alarm system because otherwise you would probably be detained right now."

"... Oh.

I should thank Kohaku-san then.

And, um, Akiha, I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have kept quiet about it."

"... If you understand, then it is fine.

Please make sure you observe your curfew from now on.

I will overlook it this time."

"... About that, Akiha."

"What is it?"

"... This is a little hard to say.

I. have something to do tonight too.

I don't know when I will be back, but I'm not going to do anything bad—"

"_____"

Akiha's gaze tightens.

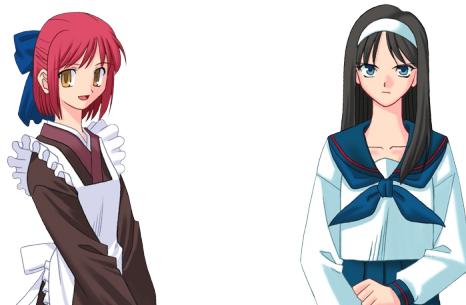
"Kohaku!"

She suddenly stands up.

Kohaku-san comes in from the kitchen.



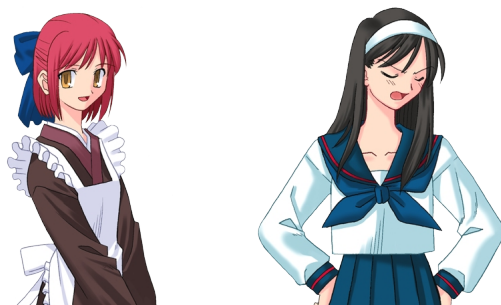
"Yes, what is it Akiha-sama?"



"I will be going to school, get the preparations ready."

"Huh?"

But I have not yet made Shiki-san's breakfast."



"You can leave this person alone.

It seems he can do everything by himself."



Akiha strides towards the lobby.



Kohaku-san sighs.

"... Shiki-san, you should not make Akiha-sama so upset. You are her big brother, so please treat her better okay?"
Saying that, she walks after Akiha.

The teacup sits, still steaming.
"—Well, in short.."
I'm left by myself to calmly consider my situation.
"Guess I'm skipping breakfast today."
Yeah, no doubt.
... I should stop by a convenience store on the way and buy some bread.

turn to **135**

131

Back then, the whole mansion was like a giant playground.
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 The house, a tall castle.
 We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.
 Every day was fun.
 No one thought about ever growing up,
 and we believed that days and nights would always be the same.
 It was just a childhood spent playing like puppies.
 We got along wonderfully, and were the best of playmates.
 Whenever I turned back, Akiha would be there, waving her hands and hiding shyly.
 Yes, always the same.
 At that time, the mansion was a giant playground.
 The garden, a deep forest.
 The house, a tall castle.
 We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.

I slowly awaken and open my eyes.
 The morning light wraps around me and my sleepiness starts to lift.
 As the last vestiges clear,
 I sense that I had a very nostalgic dream.

"——"

As soon as I open my eyes, I start to see those terrible things jump into my vision.

My head stabs with pain.

"Gg——"

I scramble for the glasses by my pillow and put them on.

I take in some air.
 After taking a few deep breaths, I manage to calm down.
 "Why did I—so early.."
 See those lines so clearly this early in the morning?
 It's difficult to see the lines of death in buildings.
 It's usually hard to see them, and seeing them so clearly like I just did now is rare.

"....."

What's more, I even saw those "points".
 I think my headache is getting worse too.
 Sensei said these eyes would attract things that weren't good.
 I think Arcueid and these vampires are certainly not good.
 So, maybe it's all affecting my eyes and making them stronger.
 "——Can't be."
 I'm probably just tired.

"Please excuse me."



Hisui enters, greeting me with a bow.

"Ah, morning Hisui."

"Yes, good morning Shiki-sama."

.... Hisui brings my uniform as usual.

But what is it?

I think she is a bit angry.

"Hisui, did something happen this morning?

You seem, to be in a bad mood."



"....."

Hisui looks at me as though she wants to say something, and then walks silently to the door.



"Then please excuse me.
I will tell Nee-san to prepare your breakfast, so please hurry to the sitting room."
"Yeah, I planned on doing so...."
I am a bit curious why Hisui is mad.



" I forgot to say one thing.
Akiha-sama would like to talk to you about your sneaking out last night.
So please hurry to the sitting room."

She shuts the door emotionlessly.
"Cr——"
Crap.
They know about me sneaking out last night.
".... Go to the sitting room means Akiha is waiting there....?"
Man.... Why can't bad things be just kept a secret?

Akiha is the only one in the sitting room.
Kohaku-san is in the kitchen, humming away.



"....."

Akiha doesn't say anything when she sees me and sips her tea quietly.

"Hey.

Good morning, Akiha."

I try to greet her as naturally as I can.

Akiha's eyebrow twitches as she places her teacup down and slowly looks at me.



"Good morning Nii-san.

It was quite late when you came home last night, wasn't it?"

".... No, not really.

It was at most a little past one o'clock, quite normal for a healthy young man in high school to be up, right?"

"I see.

My bedtime is also past midnight so I was up at that time.

But I would come home much earlier than that."

"Yeah, even I was home earlier, wasn't I?"

.... I just had something to do, so I was out for a little bit—"



"Without permission?"

You acted like you were out doing something you felt guilty over."

"Uh..."

Her stare is pure ice.

.... This is the second time, and I'm sure even though Akiha looks calm, she is quite angry.

"—Nii-san.

I don't know what went on at the Arima house, but here the curfew is eight o'clock.

It is a rule that must not be broken.

The gate will be locked after that, so please don't climb in like a robber."

"Oh—You knew?"

".... The surveillance camera showed me quite clearly.

It is a good thing Kohaku-san realized it was you and turned off the alarm system because otherwise you would probably be detained right now, Tohno Shiki."

".... Oh.

I should thank Kohaku-san then.

And, um, Akiha, I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have kept quiet about it."

".... If you understand, then it is fine.

Please make sure you observe your curfew from now on.

I will overlook it this time."

".... About that, Akiha."

"What is it?"

".... This is a little hard to say.

I.. have something to do tonight too.

I don't know when I will be back, but I'm not going to do anything bad—"

"_____"

Akiha's gaze tightens.

"Kohaku!"

She suddenly stands up.

Kohaku-san comes in from the kitchen.



"Yes, what is it Akiha-sama?"



"I will be going to school, get the preparations ready."

"Huh?"

But I have not yet made Shiki-san's breakfast."



"You can leave this person alone.

It seems he can do everything by himself."



Akiha strides towards the lobby.



Kohaku-san sighs.

"... Shiki-san, you should not make Akiha-sama so upset.
You are her big brother, so please treat her better okay?"
Saying that, she walks after Akiha.

The teacup sits, still steaming.
"—Well, in short.."
I'm left by myself to calmly consider my situation.
"I guess I'm skipping breakfast today."
Yeah, no doubt.
... I should stop by a convenience store on the way and buy some bread.

turn to **135**

132

rst of all, I have to change the mood.
It seems like I'll lose to her silent pressure if I act normally, so I'll have to switch my approach.
"Good morning," I say to her in English.
What a great morning, isn't it Akiha?"
Hahaha.
I greet her frankly.



"....."
I think she's staring at me harder.
.... Ouch.
If I keep receiving her silent pressure, without a doubt she'll bore a hole right through me.
"... Um, I'm going to get some breakfast so I'm off to the dining room."
Yup.
I should retreat to the dining room.



"—Nii-san."
Her voice stops me dead in my tracks.
.... Well, of course she wouldn't let me go like that.
"What?
Did you need anything from me?"
I try and play dumb.

She doesn't even bat an eyelash.



"I have something to discuss with you before breakfast.
Please, sit there on the sofa."
"... Got it.
Please keep it as short as possible."
I plop down on the sofa across from her.
Kohaku-san brings me a teacup.
Her smile seems to say "Hang in there, okay?" and I'm able to gather up at least a little courage.
I drink a mouthful of tea and meet her gaze.
"So, what'd you want to talk about, Akiha?"
"That woman last night, just what is she to you?"
—Guh!
That was close.
Akiha's normally so roundabout, but this time she asks straight on.
I'm taken so much by surprise I almost sprayed tea everywhere.



"Nii-san, did you hear me?"
"Yeah, I hear you.
Loud and clear."
"Then please answer.
That woman from last night, just what is she to you, Nii-san?"
"..... Um, that is a troubling question, um, she's a friend, a person I agreed to help—"

"A friend so important you had to leave in the middle of the night?
Yes, I don't intend to have to approve of all the relationships you have, but you are in school now, correct?"



The eldest son of the Tohno-family, going to places with some strange woman in the middle of the night.. please stop doing such shameless things."

As she speaks, her cheeks flush and she looks away.
—I see, Akiha thinks my relationship with Arcueid is like that.
"Wait, Akiha.
There's really nothing between us.
I'm just helping her find something.
After that, we won't even see each other again."



"Oh really?
You certainly seem very close.
That must be my imagination, right Nii-san?"
Her gaze is cold.
.... If I lie with something like "That's not it," things will be much easier, but—
more than the fact that I don't want to lie to Akiha, I really don't want to say
that we aren't close.
"—That, may not.... be your imagination, maybe."



"Right.

You were panicking like I've never seen you before.

You were never serious about anything and now you show all this emotion, just what's gotten into you?"

"That's not it.

I was just totally caught off guard that she'd actually come here."



"That woman calmly waited for you the whole time, Nii-san."

She casts a sideways glare at me.

She really seems convinced that Arcueid and I are dating.

"Look, Akiha.

You're getting it completely wrong.

In the first place, we first met—"

by me killing her, but I swallow the rest of those words.

.... It'll be too stupid to tell the truth.

But I can't even think of a good excuse, and I can only stammer.



"If you cannot answer then let's change the question.
You've been calling that woman "her" this whole time, what is her name?"
"... Um, Arcueid."
"I see.
So you did not meet at school.
There are no foreign exchange students at your high school."
"... Uh."
Like Akiha says, there's no one from overseas at my school.
It's right, but why does she know that much?



"So Nii-san, just where in the world did you meet a person like that?"
"In the city.
Just, a coincidence."
"Oh, a coincidence?
Then Arcueid must have talked to you?"
"Ah—No, I was the one, who talked to her...."
Well, not quite talked, but I was the one that initiated our contact.
"Why did you talk to her?
I thought Arcueid-san was nothing to you.
Or did you only intend it like that from the beginning?"
Her questions are right on the mark.
Step by step, she draws closer to my secret.
Like a snake staring at a frog, she ignores all my excuses and is trying to drive me into a corner.
I can now only use force to end this conversation.

"That's enough.
I said she's nothing to me!
Besides, whatever I do doesn't concern you.
You don't have any right to complain about who I date, anyway."
I point at her directly.

After giving an angered face—she stands up without a sound.
"___?"
.... That's odd.
I thought she would yell back at me, but instead she appears very uncomfortable
and looks away.



".... Even I, didn't want to say this.
But it's just, I get a bad feeling from her.
If it was anyone else, I would just be resigned to it.
But, for you to be ensnared by her, doesn't that make me just a big fool?"
.... I don't know why.
But she regretfully bites her lip as she says these words.
"That's why I'm saying she's nothing special.
What's wrong Akiha, you seem a little strange."



"That's enough.
If you want to do as you please, then feel free, Nii-san....!"

Akiha storms noisily out the lobby.

".....?"

I don't understand anything at all.



"Oh, Shiki-san, that was horrible of you."

Kohaku-san gives a disappointed sigh and starts walking after her.

"Poor Akiha-sama.

If you are going to bring your lover, please bring someone more normal.

If you did that, Akiha-sama would have understood."

Kohaku-san disappears towards the lobby after Akiha.

turn to **135**

133

.... I say that, but her pressure is now on a completely different level than before.

If I say anything wrong in the face of this frozen heat, she will give a devastating counter.

I'll show a calm, reflective manner.

"—Good morning, Akiha.

You're up early as usual."

I say this quietly and as gently as possible.



"Yes.

Thanks to what happened last night, I was unable to sleep at all."

She says something so outrageous while still smiling sweetly.

.... This, really isn't good.

She can't be sane, being so angry yet smiling like that.

".... Oh.

Well, I hope you feel a little better, or something."

I should stay away from danger.

I have to say something and then escape from here.

"Um, then I'll be off to have some breakfast in the dining room."

Yup.

I should retreat to the dining room.



"—Nii-san."

Her voice stops me dead in my tracks.
.... Well, of course she wouldn't let me go like that.
".... Yes.
What is it, Akiha-san?"
By the way, adding "san" to her name means waving my white flag.
She doesn't even bat an eyelash.



"I have something to discuss with you before breakfast.
Please, sit there on the sofa."
".... Got it.
Please keep it as short as possible."
I plop down on the sofa across from her.
Kohaku-san brings me a teacup.
Her smile seems to say "Hang in there, okay?" and I'm able to gather up at
least a little courage.
I drink a mouthful of tea and meet her gaze.
"So, what'd you want to talk about, Akiha?"
"That woman last night, just what is she to you?"
—Guh!
That was close.
Akiha's normally so roundabout, but this time she asks straight on.
I'm taken so much by surprise I almost sprayed tea everywhere.



"Nii-san, did you hear me?"
"Yeah, I hear you.

Loud and clear."

"Then please answer.

That woman from last night, just what is she to you, Nii-san?"

"..... Um, that is a troubling question, um, she's a friend, a person I agreed to help—"

"A friend so important you had to leave in the middle of the night?"

Yes, I don't intend to have to approve of all the relationships you have, but you are in school now, correct?"



The eldest son of the Tohno-family, going to places with some strange woman in the middle of the night.. please stop doing such shameless things."

As she speaks, her cheeks flush and she looks away.

—I see, Akiha thinks my relationship with Arcueid is like that.

"Wait Akiha.

There's really nothing between us.

I'm just helping her find something.

After that, we won't even see each other again."



"Oh really?"

You certainly seem very close.

That must be my imagination, right Nii-san?"

Her gaze is cold.

.... If I lie with something like "That's not it," things will be much easier, but—more than the fact that I don't want to lie to Akiha, I really don't want to say

that we aren't close.

"—That, may not.... be your imagination, maybe."



"Right.

You were panicking like I've never seen you before.

You were never serious about anything and now you show all this emotion, just what's gotten into you?"

"That's not it.

I was just totally caught off guard that she'd actually come here."



"That woman calmly waited for you the whole time, Nii-san."

She casts a sideways glare at me.

She really seems convinced that Arcueid and I are dating.

"Look, Akiha.

You're getting it completely wrong.

In the first place, we first met—"

by me killing her, but I swallow the rest of those words.

.... It'll be too stupid to tell the truth.

But I can't even think of a good excuse, and I can only stammer.



"If you cannot answer then let's change the question.
 You've been calling that woman "her" this whole time, what is her name?"
 "... Um, Arcueid."
 "I see.
 So you did not meet at school.
 There are no foreign exchange students at your high school."
 "... Uh."
 Like Akiha says, there's no one from overseas at my school.
 It's right, but why does she know that much?



"So Nii-san, just where in the world did you meet a person like that?"
 "In the city.
 Just, a coincidence."
 "Oh, a coincidence?
 Then Arcueid must have talked to you?"
 "Ah—No, I was the one, who talked to her...."
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"That's enough.
I said she's nothing to me!
Besides, whatever I do doesn't concern you.
You don't have any right to complain about who I date, anyway."
I point at her directly.

After giving an angered face—she stands up without a sound.
"___?"
.... That's odd.
I thought she would yell back at me, but instead she appears very uncomfortable
and looks away.



".... Even I, didn't want to say this.
But it's just, I get a bad feeling from her.
If it was anyone else, I would just be resigned to it.
But, for you to be ensnared by her, doesn't that make me just a big fool?"
.... I don't know why.
But she regretfully bites her lip as she says these words.
"That's why I'm saying she's nothing special.
What's wrong Akiha, you seem a little strange."



"That's enough.
If you want to do as you please, then feel free, Nii-san....!"

Akiha storms noisily out the lobby.

".....?"

I don't understand anything at all.



"Oh, Shiki-san, that was horrible of you."

Kohaku-san gives a disappointed sigh and starts walking after her.

"Poor Akiha-sama.

If you are going to bring your lover, please bring someone more normal.

If you did that, Akiha-sama would have understood."

Kohaku-san disappears towards the lobby after Akiha.

turn to **135**

134

No matter what, I can't talk myself out of what happened last night.
The only method I have left is to apologize before Akiha can do anything.
"Akiha, about last night, that—"



"Nii-san, can I warn you about something?"
—And then,
before I can apologize, Akiha speaks those words in a frightening voice.
"You are the eldest son of the Tohno family, so it is better if you do not apologize for wayward actions.
Apologizing is admitting you did something wrong.
In that situation, the eldest son has to receive a proper punishment, yes?"
"—Um, Akiha, well.."



"Nii-san, I don't want to have to do that to you.
So Nii-san, I'm waiting for a wonderful excuse."
"_____"

.... A devil.
I see a devil.

"Akiha, before that, I'd like to eat some breakfast in the dining room.
Is that okay?"
I retreat to the dining room.



"—Nii-san."

Her voice stops me dead in my tracks.

Uh-oh... whatever happens, it seems like she won't let me get away.



"I have something to discuss with you before breakfast.

Please, sit there on the sofa."

".... Got it.

Please keep it as short as possible."

I plop down on the sofa across from her.

Kohaku-san brings me a teacup.

Her smile seems to say "Hang in there, okay?" and I'm able to gather up at least a little courage.

I drink a mouthful of tea and meet her gaze.

"So, what'd you want to talk about, Akiha?"

"That woman last night, just what is she to you?"

—Guh!!

That was close.

Akiha's normally so roundabout, but this time she asks straight on.

I'm taken so much by surprise I almost sprayed tea everywhere.



"Nii-san, did you hear me?"

"Yeah, I hear you.

Loud and clear."

"Then please answer.

That woman from last night, just what is she to you, Nii-san?"

"..... Um, that is a troubling question, um, she's a friend, a person I agreed to help—"

"A friend so important you had to leave in the middle of the night?"

Yes, I don't intend to have to approve of all the relationships you have, but you are in school now, correct?"



The eldest son of the Tohno-family, going to places with some strange woman in the middle of the night.. please stop doing such shameless things."

As she speaks, her cheeks flush and she looks away.

—I see, Akiha thinks my relationship with Arcueid is like that.

"Wait Akiha.

There's really nothing between us.

I'm just helping her find something.

After that, we won't even see each other again."



"Oh really?

You certainly seem very close.

That must be my imagination, right Nii-san?"

Her gaze is cold.

.... If I lie with something like "That's not it," things will be much easier, but—more than the fact that I don't want to lie to Akiha, I really don't want to say that we aren't close.

"—That, may not.... be your imagination, maybe."



"Right.

You were panicking like I've never seen you before.

You were never serious about anything and now you show all this emotion, just what's gotten into you?"

"That's not it.

I was just totally caught off guard that she'd actually come here."



"That woman calmly waited for you the whole time, Nii-san."
She casts a sideways glare at me.
She really seems convinced that Arcueid and I are dating.
"Look, Akiha.
You're getting it completely wrong.
In the first place, we first met—"
by me killing her, but I swallow the rest of those words.
.... It'll be too stupid to tell the truth.
But I can't even think of a good excuse, and I can only stammer.



"If you cannot answer then let's change the question.
You've been calling that woman "her" this whole time, what is her name?"
".... Um, Arcueid."
"I see.
So you did not meet at school.
There are no foreign exchange students at your high school."
".... Uh."
Like Akiha says, there's no one from overseas at my school.
It's right, but why does she know that much?



"So Nii-san, just where in the world did you meet a person like that?"

"In the city.

Just, a coincidence."

"Oh, a coincidence?

Then Arcueid must have talked to you?"

"Ah—No, I was the one, who talked to her...."

Well, not quite talked, but I was the one that initiated our contact.

"Why did you talk to her?

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After giving an angered face—she stands up without a sound.

"—?"

.... That's odd.

I thought she would yell back at me, but instead she appears very uncomfortable and looks away.



".... Even I, didn't want to say this.
But it's just, I get a bad feeling from her.
If it was anyone else, I would just be resigned to it.
But, for you to be ensnared by her, doesn't that make me just a big fool?"
.... I don't know why.
But she regretfully bites her lip as she says these words.
"That's why I'm saying she's nothing special.
What's wrong Akiha, you seem a little strange."



"That's enough.
If you want to do as you please, then feel free, Nii-san....!"

Akiha storms noisily out the lobby.
".....?"
I don't understand anything at all.



"Oh, Shiki-san, that was horrible of you."

Kohaku-san gives a disappointed sigh and starts walking after her.

"Poor Akiha-sama.

If you are going to bring your lover, please bring someone more normal.

If you did that, Akiha-sama would have understood."

Kohaku-san disappears towards the lobby after Akiha.

turn to **135**

135

Fourth period class is about modern society.
The mood in the classroom is somewhat lighter than usual before lunch.
Today is Wednesday, so there's one less hour of classes than usual.
After lunch, there's homeroom and an hour of deciding what to do for the Culture Festival.
What's more, tomorrow is a school holiday, so after this fourth period is over, it's practically vacation already.
It's only natural for everyone to be waiting for the end-of-class bell to ring.
"—Sleepy."
I give a big yawn.
The class is completely unchanged, the whole day progresses with nothing out of the ordinary.
Come to think of it, I've been through so many strange experiences, I almost feel odd just sitting in class.
And after classes are over and night falls, I'll have to go out once more with Arcueid.
Thinking of that, I really don't have the time to be fooling around here.
I look at my reflection in the window glass.
Tohno Shiki's face seems to be happy for some reason.
"—Grr."
I tighten my expression.
It's not like roaming the streets with Arcueid is fun, so why am I acting like this?

"... Arcueid..."
There's really, something wrong.
Looking out the window and into the rear courtyard, I can see an illusion of her waving her hand at me and saying "Hey".
—Hey, wait a minute....!

"Wha, wha, wha—"
I push myself onto the window and look down.
I can only see the very edge of the rear courtyard,
but without a doubt,
Arcueid, in her usual manner, is at my school.
"!!!!!"
I look around the classroom.
—Fortunately, there's no one who noticed the strange foreigner waving to me.
"What is she thinking....!?"
I moan to myself as I clutch my head.
But, complaining does me no good.
.... There's about twenty minutes till lunch.
What are you going to do Shiki?
If you leave her alone, who knows what she'll do....!?

Go to the courtyard now.

turn to **136**

Pray she doesn't do anything until classes are over.

turn to **137**

I don't care

turn to **138**

136

—That's right.

Preventable disasters should be stopped before they happen.

Before she can start any "interesting" trouble, I have to take her off the school grounds.

"Sensei, I feel my anemia coming, so I need to leave!"

I raise my hand, and after getting permission from the teacher, fly out of the classroom.



"Ah, you're here.

That was a pretty fast sprint!

You're looking pretty lively this morning, Shiki."

"__"

.... My jaw hangs wide open.

As I sprint into the courtyard, Arcueid greets me with her usual radiance.

"It's smaller than I expected.

I thought a 'school' would be much bigger than this—kyaa!"

I grab Arcueid's arm.

"—You, come with me."

Dragging Arcueid behind me, I dash to a place where people won't see us.



"Hey!

What are you doing, taking me here all of a sudden?"

This place is no fun at all."

Arcueid seems to be disappointed in this place, but it's not like school is a really interesting place to begin with.

"—'What are you doing?' That's my line, Arcueid."

I let go of her arm and thrust my index finger towards her face.



"Eh?"

What do you mean?"

"I'm asking why you're walking around during daytime, and why you came to my school.

You haven't even healed yet, so why can't you just settle down and rest....!"



"But, since you said you would help me, I thought I would look for clues during the day.

I didn't want to.. make you do any extra work—"

"Don't worry about that!

Since I said I'd help, any extra work we'll do together, so just forget about it.

.... Geez.

You're weakest during the middle of the day yet you still leave.

Do you just enjoy making me worry?"

"Ah—I'm, sorry."

"No, as long as you understand, it's okay—uh, Arcueid?"



"I'm sorry, for making you worry."

"No.... actually, thanks."

I think my heart beats loudly.

Arcueid apologizing like this—is a bit out of ordinary, or—I think, terribly cute.



"But you're at fault too, Shiki.

I was watching for the longest time from the courtyard, but you never noticed me.

I didn't know how to get inside, so I was thinking about dashing up to where you were."

"Dash up?"

You mean to my classroom on the third floor?"



"Yes, footing wouldn't be difficult on the veranda, and it's really easy to jump up there."

"_____"

I take it all back.
As usual, she completely lacks any common sense.
"... Good.
That wouldn't have been pretty if you did that."
I breathe a sigh of relief.
I don't think many people noticed her.
In the first place, there's only a few desks that can look out into the courtyard.
"—And?
So why the heck did you come to my school?
You said you were looking for clues."



"I just felt something from around here.
Then I picked up your scent and realized it was your school."
"... So you weren't thinking and you just came for no reason?"
I give a frown.
Is she a dog or something?



"Well excuse me!
I came here for a reason.
There's hardly any traces of The Dead here, so I wanted to see it for myself."
"Really?
But if there's no traces of The Dead here, then shouldn't this place be unimportant?"

There's no one at school at night, so if The Dead wanted some prey, they would go downtown, not to a school."



"... Well, that does make sense."
"There's nothing strange here.
I can't really sense The Dead, but since my eyes see death, I can tell without taking off my glasses."



"I see.
If you say so, Shiki, then there's nothing strange about this place, perhaps."
"Not 'perhaps', definitely."
Arcueid looks like she doesn't believe me.

—And then,
the chime rings announcing the end of fourth period.
"—Oh no, is it lunch already?"
Even though most people don't stay by this grove, since it's lunchtime, there'll be lots of people walking by.
"Anyway, if we stay here any longer, people will see us.
I'll keep my promise for sure, so just go home and rest.
We may see the 'enemy' tonight."



"Oh?
 You sound like you want me out of here, Shiki?"
 She starts to look angry again.
 "Ah, that's just your imagination, so hurry on back.
 Otherwise things might get a little hairy."
 Go, go.
 I push her from behind.
 "....."

Though her eyes indicate she wants to say something, she just leaves silently.

After watching Arcueid leave, I return to the courtyard.
 "—Hm?"
 What is it?
 Someone is looking this way.



"Sen.... pai?"
 No mistake, it's Ciel-senpai.
 But—why is she making that expression?
 She has a fearsome expression that almost makes me doubt it's actually her.

"—Senpai!"
 I call out to her as I run.
 Senpai simply stands there, watching me.
 "What are you doing here?"



"The same for you, Tohno-kun.
What were you doing there?
Lunch has just began, so for you to be back here you must have skipped fourth
period class."
"Of course not.
I just flew out of the classroom, that's all."
"Oh," Senpai answers without any enthusiasm.
It's her normal smile, but it seems like she's glaring at me.
"More than that, did you eat lunch yet?
If not, would you like to eat with me?"
I try and play it all off casually.



"I'm sorry, I already have someone else.
Please ask me some other time."

For an instant, she looks incredibly down as she says that.
"... Senpai?
What's wrong?
You don't look too well."



"No, that isn't it.
It's just that.. it's true that fun things end rather quickly, Tohno-kun."

She gives a brilliant smile in contrast to before.
With that, she walks inside by herself.

setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **139**

137

—But I can't just leave in the middle of class.

"..... Please."

I bring my hands together and pray silently that she won't start any "interesting" trouble for twenty minutes.

Class ends.

I dash out of the classroom engulfed in the lunchtime commotion.

I bolt down through the hallway.

.... Arcueid is out back.

Because it's lunchtime, there may be one or two students going there.

Before that, I have to send her away from school....!

I pant with exertion.

I exit the hallway and out into the courtyard.

Fortunately, no one else has gone outside.

All that's left is to grab Arcueid, but..

".... The worst."

Entering the back of the school, I unthinkingly voice my thoughts.

In the back,



-28 0

I can see a very hostile Arcueid and..



-28 0



through the worst twist of fate, Ciel-senpai is also present.
As if facing an invader, Senpai is staring at Arcueid.
"Arcueid....!"
Both of them turn around.



-28 0



"Shiki."



-28 0



"_____"

.... Thank goodness.
Arcueid's hostility seems to fade.
After looking back at Arcueid, Senpai leaves in another direction.
"Ah.... Senpai."
She must've been offended by being glared at by Arcueid.
For Senpai to just disappear like that without saying anything must mean something.
"Arcueid, you....!"
I run over to her.



"Shiki you slowpoke!"
She yells at me as I get to her.
"Hey... slow?
Hey now."
"But weren't you?
I know you saw me, but you never came down.
If you came earlier, I wouldn't have been seen by that person!"
.... "That person" must mean Senpai.
"It couldn't be helped, I have my circumstances.
I'm different from you, I'm just a normal student.
In the first place, why the heck did you come here?"



"I just felt something from around here.
Then I picked up your scent and realized it was your school."
".... So you weren't thinking and you just came for no reason?"
I give a frown.
Is she a dog or something?



"Well excuse me!
I came here for a reason.
There's hardly any traces of The Dead here, so I wanted to see it for myself."
"Really?
But if there's no traces of The Dead here, then shouldn't this place be unimportant?
There's no one at school at night, so if The Dead wanted some prey, they would go downtown, not to a school."



".... Well, that does make sense."
"There's nothing strange here.
I can't really sense The Dead, but since my eyes see death, I can tell without taking off my glasses."



"I see."

If you say so, Shiki, then there's nothing strange about this place, perhaps."
"Not 'perhaps', definitely."
Arcueid looks like she doesn't believe me.
"Anyway, if we stay here any longer, people will see us.
I'll keep my promise for sure, so just go home and rest.
We may see the 'enemy' tonight."



"Oh?
You sound like you want me out of here, Shiki?"
She starts to look angry again.
"Ah, that's just your imagination, so hurry on back.
Otherwise things might get a little hairy."
Go, go.
I push her from behind.
"....."

Though her eyes indicate she wants to say something, she just leaves silently.
"... Man.
If I see Senpai, I have to apologize to her about Arcueid."
Thinking aloud, I go back.

turn to **139**

138

—I'll ignore her.

If I just run down to her and people see me, it'll be a problem.

No matter what she does, if I act like a stranger, it won't hurt me.

.... Well, tonight she'll probably say "Why did you ignore me?" But, it can't be helped.

All I want is for the school to remain peaceful and not do anything.

It's lunchtime.

I'm not in the mood for bread for lunch, so I'll go to the cafeteria.

".... Huh?"

I feel like I forgot something, but, whatever.

The cafeteria is in chaos as usual.

Most of the tables are filled, so if I don't hurry, I won't have a seat.

"Ah, Senpai."

I see Ciel-senpai sitting in a group.

Are those her friends from class?

While talking with a group of girls, she's seriously eating curry udon.

.... Come to think of it, she's always eating a "curry-something".

"She, really likes curry, I guess."

I'll have to ask her about it.

"....."

But, something pulls at me.

I feel like I've forgot something important.

Something, dangerous if left alone.

".... Well, if I don't remember, it can't be that important."

Even though it seems really important, I just turn all my attention to my lunch for now.

turn to **139**

139

.... As expected, the debate over what to do for the Culture Festival is a stormy one.

Since everyone's opinions are different, the decision gets postponed till next week.

By the time it's over, it's late in the afternoon.

Everyone gets up tiredly from their chairs and leaves the classroom.

"—Well then."

There's nothing to do in the classroom.

I should get ready for tonight and go back to the mansion—

I don't swing by anywhere else and head right back to the mansion.

The sun hasn't quite set so Akiha probably isn't back yet.

"That Akiha.

I wonder if she's still mad like this morning..."

.... Well, that can't be helped either.

I can't tell her the truth, so I'll probably just continue to be hated as a terrible older brother.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."

Hisui bows as I enter the mansion.

".... Yeah, I'm back.

Thanks for greeting me, Hisui."

—It's been a week since I've come back, but I'm not used to this yet.

"Um, Akiha isn't back yet?"

"No.

She told me to tell you she would be back especially late tonight so please eat dinner on your own, Shiki-sama."

.... I knew she'd still be angry from this morning.

"—Sigh."

I slump my shoulders as I start to walk to my room.

—And then,



"Shiki-sama."

Hisui looks around the lobby before she speaks again.

"Forgive me for asking an awkward question, but will you be leaving tonight again, Shiki-sama?"

"Eh—?"

She fixates her emotionless eyes on me.

I think she simply wants to know what time I'll be back because she's so dedicated of a servant, but letting her know means Akiha would know.

I should—

Still, I'll tell Hisui the truth.

turn to **140**

No, I can't let anyone know.

turn to **141**

140

-That's right.

No matter how hard I try, I can't hide it from Hisui and Kohaku-san who are in charge of maintaining the mansion.

So, the least I can do is let them know when I'll be gone every night in the following days.

".... Yeah, to tell the truth, I'll probably leave for a number of nights starting now.

I swear I'm not just playing around or doing anything bad.

Akiha will probably end up hating me, but I can't stop now."

Yeah.

The vampire is still somewhere in town preying on victims.

As a person who lives here, I just can't pretend like I didn't see it.

"—I know it's a burden to you, Hisui, but please overlook it.

I don't know what time I'll be back, so please just leave the gate unlocked."

"Shiki-sama, are you saying you will not tell us why?"

".... Yeah, sorry Hisui.

You can think I'm totally irresponsible, but please don't ask.

I, don't want to have to lie."

".... No.

You are my master.

A servant does not despise her master like that."

She speaks plainly and without any expression.

The conversation ends and I go up to return to my room.

"Please wait."



".... Forgive, my impertinence, but.."

After cutting off, she tightens both of her hands as she looks over at me.



"If you would like me to, Shiki-sama, I can keep your leaving a secret from Akiha-sama."

"Eh?"

You mean, you're not—going to tell?"

"—Yes.

After dinner, it is extremely rare for Akiha-sama to leave her room.

Nee-san and I are responsible for conducting a patrol right before she sleeps, so if I do not tell the truth, she will not know."

"Yeah, that helps.

It helps, but.... is that okay?

Isn't she your employer?"



"I told you you are my master, Shiki-sama."

—uh.... I'm, kind of happy.

I always have to tell her to stop adding "sama", but at times like this, I think I'm incredibly lucky.

How can I help but be happy?

"Yeah—that helps, so if you can, please do so."



"Then please use the rear entrance tonight.
The front entrance will be locked, but if you have the key and use the servant's entrance, you can come and leave undetected."
"Oh?
There's a servant's entrance?
No wonder I never saw you leave through the gate."
"No, the only one who uses that is Nee-san.
She has the key, so I will get it to you later."

"Well then", she says, after which she bows and disappears.
"—Alright!"
Help just came from an unexpected source.
With this, it seems I can keep my promise with Arcueid without worrying Akiha.

After dinner, I go back to my room.
It's almost ten o'clock.
While I was eating, Hisui placed the key on my desk.
"Now then—shall I go?"
Placing my knife in my pocket, I leave my room as quietly as I can.

turn to **142**

141

—I feel bad doing this to Hisui, but I can't let her know.
I have to keep Arcueid a secret, and it's not like I can let Hisui or Kohaku-san,
or Akiha know that I'm looking for the serial killer.
"No, I don't have any reason to go out.
Akiha scolded me today, so I'll stay put for a while."



"I understand.
Then I will close the gate at the normal time."
She speaks plainly, without any expression.
The conversation ends and I go up to return to my room.

After dinner, I go back to my room.
It's almost ten o'clock.
So as not to be discovered, I should go outside as discreetly as possible.
"Now then—shall I go?"
Placing my knife in my pocket, I leave my room as quietly as I can.

setvar flg9 + 1
turn to **142**

142

It's probably because of all the recent murders, but it's only ten o'clock and there's no one in the park.
The empty night hangs overhead.
There, a white figure stands.



"Shiki!"

As soon as she sees me, Arcueid angrily yells at me.

"Hey, what time do you think it is?"

"You're twenty minutes late!"

"....."

It seems she came here right on time.

"Yeah, sorry.

I left before ten o'clock, but it took some time trying to leave the mansion without Akiha noticing.

I'll definitely be on time the next time, so please forgive me."



"—Geez.

You don't seem to realize we are going to go killing."

Arcueid practically pouts.

Don't tell me, she was waiting long before the promised time?

"Arcueid.

Since what time were you waiting for me?"

"Me?"

I came here as soon as I woke up, so—"

"Hmm," Arcueid thinks this over.



"—Probably since seven o'clock."

"Seven?"

You were waiting for more than three hours?"

What in the world was she thinking, coming three hours early?

"It seems I'm strange."

As if truly amazed, Arcueid mumbles to herself.

"—Well, I'm partly to blame because I was late, but don't you have some issues too?"

If you come before the agreed time, then of course you'll have to wait."



"Hey—that's something entirely different.

The fact you were late doesn't change."

"... Well, that is true.

But, why did you wait three hours?

If you had that much time, couldn't you have just gone back to your room?"



"I. don't know why either.
It somehow was fun and while I was thinking it was nice waiting for you, it was
already ten o'clock."
"?
Fun?
Why?"



"Who knows.
Didn't I say I didn't understand it myself?
.... Maybe because you killed me.
At that time, something broke that couldn't be healed.
I think it's strange myself, but I can't understand what's broken inside me."
"..... Uh."
Having her say that is very troubling.
Having sliced her into seventeen pieces, if she says there's something wrong, all
I can do is to apologize.
"—It's okay.
We don't have much time, so we can't waste time talking about pointless things,
Shiki."
Yeah, saying that really helps me out.



"But, if you're ever late again, I'll just have to go to your house and pick you up.

You're the one who couldn't keep the promise, so you have no complaints, right?"

"Stu—no way!

I'll keep it, but random unfortunate circumstances like today could happen at any time.

If I'm late, that'd be the last thing you should do!

Look, don't come to my house even if it's a mistake.

—What's more, Akiha doesn't know about all this, so please don't make things more complicated than it is!"



"Hmm?

.... Akiha?

Your sister that doesn't look at all like you?"

"You've said a little too much, but yes."

"I see.

You're that scared of your little sister?"

"—Shut up.

I just don't want to worry her.

.... At the very best, I'm a bother to her, so I don't want to tire her out even further."

"Hmm.

You really are sweet to your sister, Shiki."

"I'm basically nice to everyone.

Well, recently there's been an exception to that."



"Ahaha, that's me!"

".... You're always dense.

That was an insult, not a compliment."

"Not at all.

To you, I'm an exception, right?

How could I not like that?"

She smiles again.

A child's smile, bright and carefree.

"....."

If I keep seeing that, I'll lose all my venom.

"—I'm tired all of a sudden.

Let's start looking for the vampire, Arcueid."



"Yes, it's about time.

Then we'll start walking around town—"



"Shiki.

I want you to take off your glasses, but is that alright?"

"Take off my glasses?"

.... Why?"

"It's hard to notice them with just me.

I can sense the presence of humans and non-humans, but that won't help me find the vampire.

All I can sense is the presence, but with your eyes, you can quickly tell between living and dead things.

So it's a waste if we don't use what we have, right?"

"___"

.... Certainly I can understand what she's saying.

But, taking off my glasses means—

"I know.

Even I could feel your eyes getting stronger these past few days.

And if you keep doing this, it may not be good for your health.

I'm still saying despite that.

But, the choice lies up to you, so I'm not going to force you.

If you think it's alright to do so, take your glasses off and follow me."

.... Take off my glasses and walk around town?

I haven't done that since I received these glasses eight years ago.

In the first place, the things I see without my glasses give me such a headache, it'd be easy to imagine what would happen if I walked around town.

But still.

Just like Arcueid who keeps going even though her wound hasn't healed, Tohno Shiki should do the same and pay back his debt—

"Arcueid, I—"

—I'm fine, isn't it just a headache?

Compared to the pain her body must be feeling, this is nothing.

"It's fine, I can take off my glasses.

It's a small price to pay to make our search easier."



"—I see.
Then let's go, Shiki."

Arcueid turns around and starts walking.
I take off my glasses as I follow her.

.... I follow Arcueid.
I haven't walked in scenery so riddled with lines since my hospitalization back then.
"_"
Strangely enough, I don't get a headache.
It seems just seeing them won't cause it.
It's not the thin lines in the buildings, but seeing the "lines" on the people walking by makes me sick.
Before, I thought they were just lines that were easy to cut along.
But now I know they are the "death" of things.
That's why I feel disgust first.
It's not that those figures of people scribbled over with lines are disgusting.
Just seeing—that humans are an existence so close to death makes me feel like throwing up.

.... We walk the nighttime streets.
Arcueid doesn't say anything, she just continues to stride forth resolutely.
We walk for hours in the midst of town.
In the end, we don't see one aberration, not one person wrapped in "death".



"Shiki, you can put your glasses back on.
It seems like no matter how much we search tonight, it'll be useless."
Arcueid concludes with a sigh.

I put my glasses back on.
My vision returns back to normal and I relax.
"Useless?
Is it okay to just decide that all of a sudden?
We've only looked everywhere once, right?"



"No, just once is enough.
The presence of The Dead tends to linger around a place.
I haven't sensed any of them around at all, so there aren't any that are active."



".... The enemy is alert now that most of his Dead are defeated.

Seriously, he really is a coward.
I was so prepared to finish it all tonight, but it appears he still wants to play hide and seek."
Arcueid bites her lip, dissatisfied.
"You look like you're in a bad mood, Arcueid."
"Of course I am.
You went through such trouble to help me, but it's all meaningless now."
"—Well, I don't really mind.
If you're that dissatisfied, I don't mind going out to look again.
Maybe if I concentrate more we can find something."



"That's no good.
I can't strain you any more."
"Strain?"
"I'm not really straining."
"You are.
You might not realize it, but if you abuse your brain anymore, you might end up disabled."
"....?"
"Disabled?"
"Who?"
"You."
—That's right, you don't exactly know how your eyes work."



"Okay?"

You said yourself it was easier to see the death of living things than non-living things, right?

Basically, it's a problem of the circuitry of your brain.

The death of things.

Being able to see that cause and effect, it's closer to reading than seeing."

"... Everything has a main reason, the one source.

Um, it's the same thing that a German scientist called the Akashic Record.

In other words, in the core of all phenomenon, there is something that "records all things".

It's less of a record than an "existence", so it isn't information.

It just exists.

It doesn't have any purpose in and of itself, or any direction.

It's like a root swirl from which flows out all reasons."



"Things in this world flowed from that, derived from that, and preserve their current form.

You and I, vampires and humans, we all originated from that.

.... Things became more complex and separate, and cannot return to that original source, the beginning.

But you understand that there exists "The One", right?

But, no matter how different a form something takes from the great source, it is still a derivative.

So even if it is only a slender line, there is a thread connecting to the source."



"The source of all things, the record that records the beginning and the end of

all things.

Being connected to that means knowing the end of all things.

Originally the brain has the ability to control reception and transmission, but most humans close off all of these circuits except for themselves.

But, there are those people who have their circuits open latently.

Without a single use of Magic Circuits, there are humans who, despite not being a transcendental race, have the potential to create transcendent phenomenon.

"Magi classify them as being psychics.

While still human, they are mutants who are born with Magic Circuits.

—Such as, without any learning of the occult, someone who can see the 'death of things'."

"——"

.... Um, I'm sorry, Arcueid.

It appears I can't understand this kind of conversation at all.



"It's okay if you can't understand.

But what I want to tell you is you shouldn't try to see things that are hard to see.

Probably, if you want to, you can see the "death" of non-living things.

But in order to do that, your brain has to open its circuits from the classification of living things to the classification of non-living things in order to understand.

—That is normally an impossible process.

As a result, it overloads your brain, and you'll end up being useless."

"Useless—you mean, these eyes won't be able to perceive death anymore?"



"—Of course not.

Hey Shiki, what happens to an engine that blows up from overload?"

"It goes to the junk yard.

Once an engine breaks, you can't use it again—"

Oh, that's it.

In other words, the headache I get from seeing death is like the screaming of an engine that is working too fast.

"_____"



"You understand?"

If you can just see it, it won't be a problem.

But stop trying to see things you can't perceive.

The blood vessels in your brain will burst, and it'll all be over."

.... I'm speechless.

I've been living like this without realizing the seriousness of it all.



"You really have to thank the magus who gave you those glasses.
Most psychics use their abilities without realizing how dangerous they are and end up disabling themselves.
.... Well, those kinds of people are often incompatible with society, so maybe that's just for the best."

"—"

—It seems like that's the reason I'm here.
I'll let you go back to living the life you had before.
Sensei said that, and gave me these glasses.
.... I have so much to thank her for, my chest tightens.
That person, in so many ways, really did save me—

"H, uh—?"

I feel a, sharp sensation.
Not pain, but something strange, like an itch.



"Shiki?"

"What—what is this?"

It was really only just for an instant, but it was like something was in my chest.

"Hm—?"

Not understanding, I place my hand inside my shirt.
—Wetness.

Something.
Something is sticking to my chest, like ink.
"What is this... something's, wet?"
I pull out my hand from my shirt.
On my open palms,

is bright red blood.

"Eh——"
Sting.
Another strange sensation.
It takes me a horribly long time to understand that it's coming from the old
scar on my chest.



"Shiki, that——"
"Yeah.... that's weird.
It doesn't hurt and it's not even an open wound—but there's blood all over my
chest."
It's so, red.
A beautiful, unmuddied, red that steals my eyesight.
"Well, it doesn't hurt so it's gotta be okay.
It seems to have stopped bleeding, so there's no need to——"



Arcueid stares dumbfounded at my hand.
No, more accurately,

she stares at the red blood coating my hand.

"—Arcueid?"

"——"

Arcueid doesn't respond.

She just, starts to breathe heavier.

Pant, pant.

As if she is trying to withstand pain.

"Hey, Arcueid...!"

What's wrong?

Does your wound hurt...!?"

I grab her shoulders.

—And then,

she jumps back as if she was trying to escape.



"—"

She stares at me like I am an enemy.

".... Ar.... cueid?"



"Shi—ki?"

Short, clipped.

Her voice even contains enmity.



"I—never thought, about it."
....?
She averts her gaze awkwardly.
"What's wrong?
You're acting strange.
You still haven't recovered yet?"
".... Perhaps.
It seems I pushed myself too hard.
So, I'll go back now."
"—Ah, yeah.
I guess we'll call it a night."
".... Yeah.
I'll be waiting here tomorrow."

Not looking me in the eye, Arcueid leaves quickly.

```
if flg9 >= 1  
turn to 144  
turn to 143
```

143

.... I go up the residential hill and arrive at the outskirts of the mansion.
 It's around two in the morning.
 As expected, I'm totally assailed by sleepiness.
 "... I wonder if she's going to be okay."
 I'm concerned about how she seemed when we parted.
 It seemed like it wasn't pain from her wound, but—
 "Hm?"
 What is that?
 It feels like there's someone lurking in the shadows not illuminated by the streetlights.

—Thu,mp.
 My heart stops my breath.
 My blood rushes through my body, this sensation—
 Certainly, there's someone standing there.
 The figure gets closer and closer.
 Footsteps.
 The sound of dry footsteps reaches my ears.

—Thu, mp.
 I have a bad feeling about this.
 Chills race up my spine.
 "—"
 The figure draws near.
 Suddenly—the streetlights shatter loudly.

The moon is hidden by the clouds.
 The whole world instantly turns to darkness.
 "!"
 Thu, mp.....!
 My heartbeat skips, as if warning me of death.
 I jump back for no apparent reason.

A blade runs through the darkness.
 Not being able to get away fully, my glasses are grazed by it.
 They fall to the ground with a clatter.
 "Who—"
 The instant I start to say "are you?",
 The clouds part for a brief moment and illuminates the dark figure.



14 0

"Wha—"

A man wrapped entirely in bandages is gripping a knife.

The bandaged man goes to attack me again.
I quickly ready my knife and stop it.

Two slivers of light shoot towards each other.
"—!"

I can't, think calmly.

The fact that I'm being attacked causes my mind to panic.

Clang!

Clang!

Sparks fly from our clashing knives and scatter into the darkness.

"Kk—"

I still can't calm down.

It's not because I'm being attacked.

Clang—

I swing my knife to cancel out the one attacking me from every angle.

"Why—"

What's surprising is that,

my body is completely stopping all the attacks in this darkness without a pause.

"My body is moving by itself—?"

No, that's not it.

All my arms are doing,

is seeking out the lines and points that I can see in the darkness with my glasses off.

That's all I can see, so I swing my knife through the dark air after those lines.

As a result, the bandaged man's knife is simply stopping mine.

In other words,

It's not that I'm defending myself, but he's defending himself from me.

—I can win....!

I don't know who he is, but there's no doubt.

I'm overwhelming him.

My blood rages forth from my advantage.

I'll win.
 I'm, stronger than him.
 Because I'm stronger.
 Because he's trying to kill me, aren't I just returning the favor—!?

Clang.
 Clang.
 The sound of ringing metal echoes in the air and I force him back towards the mansion wall.

"—!"
 There.
 My eyes fixate on the "line" on his chest and I thrust my knife forward.

—Momentarily.
 For some reason I see a boy painted in blood and Akiha's crying face—

"Gh!"
 I pull my knife back before completion.
 —What, am I—I'm, trying to kill someone, why—

My head.
 My head hurts.
 My legs wobble and I stagger backwards.
 As I do so,
 I empty the contents of my stomach.
 My chest starts to itch.
 My head hurts, the old wound on my chest burns.
 My eyes, feel like they're going to burst out of my sockets—
 "Haa—ah, agh—!"
 I can't stop throwing up.
 The vomit splatters all over the asphalt.
 And there,
 the bandaged man comes after me with his knife.

"—!"
 Clang!
 Another collision.
 My knife shoots towards his.
 This time, I really defend myself.
 I know where he's aiming.
 Since I know, I block him once again with another clang.

Clang!
 Clang!

Clang!

Despite not being able to see his knife due to its speed, I somehow manage to block it over and over.

The reason I can defend myself is simple.

Because, where he's aiming are the "lines" on my body.
So I know where he is aiming at and I understand more than anyone that having them cut would mean instant death, so I have to defend it.

No, wait.

... Aiming—for my lines?

"—Ah."

It's the exact opposite of before.

That means,

don't tell me, he.

—Ku.

The bandaged man smiles in the darkness.

—Th, um, p.

My heart rate goes out of control.

Feeling some unnameable fear, I stumble backwards.

He doesn't pursue me.

He just smiles.

His blood-shot eyes seems to be saying "So you've finally realized it?" as he sneers at me.

"You can—see them?"

Yes.

He also, can see the "lines"—

Then,

He can, also kill with one blow—

—Ku.

The man laughs.

He draws near while laughing.

I—even down to my fingers gripping my knife, tremble uncontrollably.

Slice.

Slice.

Slice.

The sound of flesh being pierced by a blade resounds three times.

And then, a thud, a sound of a body hitting the wall.

"Eh—?"

—I can't grasp the situation.

The bandaged man was suddenly pierced by three spear-like pipes.

Not just pierced, but stuck onto the wall.

Like an insect pinned in a bug collection.

"—YOU'RE IN MY WAY."

His voice grates awfully.

At the same time—the three spears alight like candles and engulf him in flames.

"AAAAAAaAAAAaaaaAaAAAh!"

An anguished voice in the whirlpool of flames.

In the darkness, that scene seems less cruel, and almost beautiful.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

The bandaged man—no, the bandages are burned already, his skin is showing.

Wrapped in the flames, the man stares at me.

His blood-shot eyes filled only with murder.

His black eyes like a weapon bent on cursing Tohno Shiki.

"—Wha.."

Stunned, I can only watch.

He runs off into the distance, still engulfed in flames.

—The moon re-emerges.

After those flames, and that cursing voice, everything returns to silence like it was before.

"—"

I fall to my knees and lean against the wall.

I look up at the sky.

In the direction where those spears flew from, someone is standing high and far off.

"—"

Far away.

Standing composed on top of the streetlight, I see a familiar figure.

"... Eh?"

Robes like a priest from another country.

Clenched in her hand, large, nail-like swords.

Emotionless, pale eyes.

Blue, sky-blue eyes.

"... Sen... pai?"

Under the moonlight, I can only make out the silhouette.

But, she seems to resemble Senpai.

"—"

Our eyes meet.

The standing figure on top of the streetlight suddenly disappears like a ghost.

"Ah—"

I sit down roughly.

Is it relief from my headache fading or just the lifting of all this tension?

Leaning my back against the wall, I start to drift off to sleep—.

turn to **145**

144

.... I go up the residential hill and arrive at the outskirts of the mansion.
It's around two in the morning.
As expected, I'm totally assailed by sleepiness.
"... I wonder if she's going to be okay."
I'm concerned about how she seemed when we parted.
It seemed like it wasn't pain from her wound, but—
"Hm... crap, the front gate is locked."
It's only natural, but it's still locked.
.... If I climb over the wall like yesterday, alarms will probably go off.
"... Dang... does this mansion have a rear entrance or something?"

.... I walk around the mansion perimeter.
Anyway, there is something like a rear entrance, but it's locked so I can't get in.
It's probably not possible to force my way through to the garden.
"... Dang.
If this keeps up I'll have to spend the night out here...."
I want to avoid that if possible.
People don't really go by the mansion, so after the sun sets it's just a deep darkness around here.
Walking around during these hours sends chills down my spine.

"Hm?"
What is that?
It feels like there's someone lurking in the shadows not illuminated by the streetlights.

—Thu, mp.
My heart stops my breath.
My blood rushes through my body, this sensation—
Certainly, there's someone standing there.
The figure gets closer and closer.
Footsteps.
The sound of dry footsteps reaches my ears.
—Thu, mp.
I have a bad feeling about this.
Chills race up my spine.
"—"
The figure draws near.
Suddenly—the streetlights shatter loudly.

The moon is hidden by the clouds.
The whole world instantly turns to darkness.
"!"

—Thump.....!

My heartbeat skips, as if warning me of death.

Perhaps I was tired after having walked the perimeter of the mansion for so long.

My body gave an all-too-sluggish reaction as I tried to leap backwards.

A knife running through the dark.

The sound of the flesh over my heart being sliced.

"Ah—eh?"

—I don't, understand.

Just.. that.. there's a knife, sticking through my chest.



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The clouds part for a brief moment and illuminates the dark figure.

"Ah—"

An eerie figure wrapped entirely in bandages.

That's.. the last thing I see.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **424**

No.

turn to **1**

145

—White.
 The color white summons an old memory.
 Something forgotten.
 Something I was supposed to forget.
 Something my father commanded me to forget.

A hot, summer day.
 A blue sky and large, large columns of summer clouds.
 The wafting breeze,
 and the droning voice of the cicadas.
 The voice of cicadas.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 —So loud I want to die.
 Cicada shells are lying in the clearing.
 As if the sun is right by my side,
 the clearing is roasting.
 A hot midsummer's day.
 As if the entire world became a frying pan.
 waa, u, uwaaa.
 waa, u, uwaaa.
 waa, u, uwaaa.
 Akiha is crying.
 Akiha, who would always obediently stay close behind me, is brimming forth
 with tears.

A child lies collapsed at her feet.
 His white shirt is painted red with blood and he doesn't move at all.
 I'm, looking down at that.
 My hands are red, just like that child on the ground.
 No, that's not it.
 These hands are red with the blood of that child.
 "Akiha—!"
 The adults are coming.
 After seeing this sight, their expressions change rapidly.
 "What in the—"
 The adults take Akiha away.
 The child lies there, dead.
 In the distant sky, the white, white clouds.
 I'm left alone, staring at the sky aimlessly.

"Did you kill him—"
 The adults are yelling at me.
 They shout my name, the one who killed the child.
 Those two syllables, shouting as if they went crazy.
 Just those two syllables.
 Those adults call me SHIKI, as my hands are stained in red.

I feel like, I just saw an old, familiar dream.
 I open my eyes.
 "....."
 I'm in my room.
 After that—After losing consciousness by the mansion wall, it seems like I somehow made it back here.
 My thoughts still aren't coming together.
 I remember the whirling events of last night.
 That man wrapped entirely in bandages.
 And how he could see "lines" just like me.
 After he was impaled by those swords, his body burst aflame, and with a voice that sounded like his dying curse, he ran off.
 "—"
 After that, I can only remember things vaguely.
 The figure on top of the streetlight.
 That figure that saved me, that seemed to resemble Ciel-senpai—

"... Yeah right.
 That, can't be true."
 I finally wake up.
 Putting on my glasses, I get up in bed.
 The clock says it's past eight.
 Normally I would've long since eaten breakfast by now, but today's a school holiday.
 "Hisui... isn't here?"
 The figure of Hisui standing before the door like a shadow is nowhere to be seen.
 I'm sure she came here many times to wake me up, but I never did, so she probably went off to do other duties.
 *sigh*
 I let out a deep breath.
 —After I parted with Arcueid last night, the events afterwards were beyond my comprehension.
 That bandaged man, and that figure that helped me.. they're just not things I can understand no matter how much I try.
 "Whatever the case, I have to meet Arcueid tonight.
 She has to be able to give me some answers."
 I'll talk to her about all these strange things, but for now, I have to just return to my normal life or I'll go crazy.

"—Alright.
rst thing's first.
Time for breakfast."
People can't do anything on an empty stomach, after all.
Shaking the sleep from my body, I go to the sitting room.

"Hm...?"
On the second floor east wing hallway, I see a dark uniform.
"It's probably.... Hisui."
It seems like Hisui was leaving Akiha's room.
I guess we'll run into each other anyway, so it won't hurt to give a greeting.
"Hey, Hisui!"
I call out to her.
Hisui realizes I am here and quietly walks over to me.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
"Yeah, morning.
Sorry for just waking up whenever I felt like it."
"I apologize as well.
I should have been there when you awoke.
Please forgive me."
Hisui silently bows her head.
.... Being apologized to like this after I left in the middle of the night and managing to get back to my room, I suddenly feel like the worst person in the world.
"There's no need to apologize.
I didn't wake up at the usual time, so it's my fault.
It's okay if you want to voice your complaints."
".... Voice, my complaints....?"
"Yeah.
My friend always says I'm always a lazy bum, and he always tells me an occasional whack to my back is good to set me straight."
"....."
Hisui stands there thinking silently as she stares at me.
It's like that for about a minute.
She doesn't even blink, but just stares at me.

.... I knew forcing Hisui to do such an ordinary thing would be impossible.

"Don't worry about... just forget it.

More importantly, I'm kinda hungry.

Is breakfast ready?"

".... Nee-san went outside.

Your breakfast is ready in the dining room."

"Oh.

In that case, I'll go have some food.

Sorry to bother you while you were working."

After saying a quick goodbye, I head downstairs.

After breakfast, I return to the sitting room and come face-to-face with Hisui.



"Ah, that was good.

Thanks for making such a great breakfast every morning."

I bring my hands together in thanks.

"Preparing meals is Nee-san's duty.

If you wish to compliment the meal, please tell Nee-san instead."

"That's true, but—your duties are really completely separate?

Such as like today when only I slept in, I thought you might make it."



"Shiki-sama, are you saying the breakfast was not to your taste?"

"—Eh?"

Her words are so off topic it's.. troubling.

Does she think I was saying I wanted her to make breakfast because the break-

fast tasted so bad?

"That's not it.

Even cold, Kohaku-san's cooking is delicious.

.... But, I like it when it's warm.

And, it'd make me really happy if I got to taste your cooking, Hisui."



"—I cannot do that.

Shiki-sama, I refuse to cook for you."

Her eyes suddenly take on a challenging look.

"Oh, I, see.

Yeah, I don't want to force you to do anything you don't want to do.

You already do so much for me already."



"....."

Still silent, she faces me as if she wants to say something.

.... What could it be?

Is it something that's difficult for her to say?

"What's wrong Hisui?

Did I do something bad without realizing it again?"

Hisui shakes her head "no".

She just stands there silently.

".... Then, I'll go back to my room.

If you need me, please call for me."

"Later," I say as I start to walk out of the room.

But—before that, Hisui walks towards the lobby.



"—Shiki-sama."

"Hm?"

"This may be impolite, but I wanted to fulfill your request to the best of my ability."

".... Huh?"

She looks directly at me.

"This morning, I came to realize how powerless I am."

"Eh—Uh?"

"Seven times.

I called out seven times, but there was no response.

Is this acceptable?"

"Seven times?"

What, do you mean?"

I'm totally lost as to what she wants to say.

She turns around.



"To say it candidly, I think you are very dense, Shiki-sama."

Hisui disappears into the lobby with her footsteps trailing in the air.

"..... Huh?"

Left by myself, I blurt out stupidly.

After thinking to myself for a while, I finally realize she was complaining to me.

—It's okay if you want to voice your complaints.

I said that earlier.

"—That was.. my request?"

Yeah, there's no mistake.

Hisui was thinking about it the whole time, and was waiting for me in the sitting room just to tell me.

"..... Well, that is a complaint, but.."

She said it, but saying "dense" is a little too blunt, right?

.... I don't really want to think it,
but does Hisui really hate me?

I go back to my room, but I don't really have anything to do there.
Thinking about what I should do next, I decide to walk around the mansion I haven't explored in eight years.

I arrive at the lobby.

Come to think of it, I was always getting yelled at for playing in the mansion as a kid.

I'm no kid anymore to play in the mansion, and my old man is also gone.

I used to get so excited just walking the hallways when I was a kid, but now I don't feel anything at all.

For some reason, I aimlessly wander around the mansion to confirm my childhood memories.

The hallway stretches quite a long distance.

When I was a child, I believed this hallway would go on forever.

The mansion seemed as large as a castle and every day, I would walk a bit around the mansion and carve my name on the wall, the pillars, or the floor.

It was sort of a game I would play with Akiha to see who could take over the mansion.

Saying that wherever I put my name became my territory, it really was just the two of us walking around the mansion and carving our names here and there.

"Oh, here.

Still here."

On the handrail by the stairs is carved the name SHIKI.

It was probably because of these games that my old man forbade us from playing inside the mansion.

Anyway, if I look closely, I can see both my name and Akiha's all over the place.
The spacious mansion.

While I used to think it was like a giant castle, now it almost seems like an abandoned, haunted house.

Because, I've grown up since then.

Akiha and I, we're not the Tohno Akiha and Tohno Shiki that we were then.

I go outside.

—Come to think of it, most of the time we spent playing was in the garden.

Since Akiha was obedient to that old man, unlike me, she could only play outside for about thirty minutes a day.

And still, she usually just stayed behind us, watching and listening.

But she would energetically run out with us and compete with us in whatever games we would play.

".... Perhaps her personality stems from those times?"

She might have suppressed herself in front of that old man.

But still, Akiha's changed too much since then.

Maybe these eight years were a longer time than I thought.

—I go to the courtyard.

Outside, the walls are also inscribed with names.

SHIKI, Shiki, Akiha, SHIKI, Akiha, SHIKI, Akiha, Shiki, Shiki, SHIKI, Shiki.

The ratios are like that, and the name SHIKI appeared far more times.

I suppose Akiha was just a girl so she couldn't keep up with a boy.

"Geez.

It would've been better if I held back a bit."

Cursing myself from that time doesn't change the number of my scribbles.

If this was the case, I probably made Akiha pretty angry, considering how much she hates losing.

"I see.

Maybe she's taking it out on me now."

.... I'm sure she's not the kind to do that, but if she did, that's a little cute.

"I'm an older brother stupid for his little sister."

Yeah, I really am.

"—Well then."

With a nostalgic, peaceful feeling, I stroll through the courtyard.

"Hisui...?"

As I come to the rear courtyard, I see Hisui's figure from behind.

Hisui doesn't realize I'm here.

What is she doing, going into the woods like that?

"?"

A bit curious, I follow her from a slight distance.

—And.

Where Hisui headed to, there seems to be a small clearing.

"..... Huh?

There's a clearing in that place?"

Tilting my head to the side, I try to remember, but for some reason, my memory is a bit vague.

In the forest of the mansion, I can see a clearing as if the trees were cut there.

—No, "can see" is not quite right.

If you walk by normally, you probably would never notice it.

If Hisui didn't walk there, hidden enough by the surrounding trees as it is, I would never have noticed even if I lived here all my life.

".... ?

Was that always there?
 If it was, we probably played there as kids."
 To say the least, I don't remember ever playing with Akiha in the clearing.
 —I feel like I've never, been there, before.
 "....."
 After thinking for a bit, I decide to go into the clearing.

.... The clearing doesn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.
 I don't see any sign of Hisui.
 "What's this—it's just an empty place."
 I walk to the middle.
 It really is just an empty space.
 The perfectly level open ground.
 The deep woods enclosing the area.

The voice of the cicadas.
 And the strong, summer sunshine that feels like it could dissolve——

"Eh.....?"
 Summer, sunshine—?

"Ou—ouch....."
 The wound on my chest starts to hurt.
 It's like / stabbing
 This pain / that feels like / a kitchen knife stabbing my chest.

Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp—.
 What is this?
 —From somewhere, I can hear the voice of cicadas.
 But it's autumn now.
 —The summer sunshine bathes everything in white.

Columns of summer clouds in the far sky.
 I can practically see the voices.
 At my feet, discarded shells of cicadas.
 Discarded shell.
 Someone's—discarded shell.

"—....."
 My wound opens.
 My chest becomes painted a dark crimson; black vermillion soaks both my

hands.

.... Someone's crouched silhouette.
The approaching footsteps of a young girl.
The columns of clouds in the far sky.
The discarded shells of cicadas.
Then,
In front of me, the crying face of Akiha, who is drenched in blood.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
—Ah.
Voices which try to pierce my eardrums,
voices of the cicadas.

"Ah—gu."
My chest hurts.
I feel sick.
My wound has healed a long time ago; why does it hurt so much?

My chest is broken.
The old wound opens, blood flows forth from the opening.
—What is this?
My wound, it hasn't healed at all.
It hurts.
I'm scared.
This is,
The impulse called Death.

My consciousness sinks.
My wound hurts.
My body collapses to the earth with a large thud.

.... I can hear voices talking.
"Akiha-sama, are you not going to call for a doctor?"
"Don't be stupid, Hisui.
There's no way I could do that, since Nii-san's wound isn't normal..!"
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping in the bed.
I planned to say "Yo!" and get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My chest doesn't hurt anymore, but my body feels as heavy as lead.
All I can move are my eyes and mouth.



"Just what in the world were you trying to do, Hisui?
You know not to let Shiki go near that place....!"



-2 0



"Please.... Forgive me."
"This can't be solved by apologizing.
You were assigned to serve Nii-san to avoid this kind of situation.
So what were you doing..!?"
Completely different from her usual manner, Akiha gives full vent to her anger.
In comparison, Hisui is accepting the scolding, looking down silently.
.... I'm not sure how this all came about.
But I can at least tell that Hisui is being yelled at because of me.
"Answer me, Hisui.
What were you doing and where were you all day long?"
Hisui doesn't respond.

The air grows tenser between them.
Biting her lip, Akiha takes a step towards Hisui.

.... Even I can understand that Akiha intends to hit her.
Hisui seems to know this as well, but she just stands with her head hung in shame, ready to receive it.
"—Hold on, Akiha."



"Nii-san—You're awake!?"
"Yeah, you were so loud, I woke up."
"Ah....."



Akiha looks away uncomfortably.
Hisui still keeps looking down, not even trying to look at me.
"You know, you shouldn't let it out on Hisui.
I don't know the circumstances, but this has to do with me collapsing, right?
It's not her fault, I just collapsed on my own."
I strain hard and somehow manage to lift the upper half of my body off the bed.
But that's all I can manage, and I don't think I can even move an inch more.
But since Hisui is depressed, I have to force myself to act as fine as possible.
".... Honestly, getting into a fight over me.
Even if you look like an adult, you're still a child."



"But.. you completely fainted, Nii-san.
You were out for more than ten hours, and nothing like this has happened before.
If—you never woke up, what would I have done....!?"
"Idiot, don't say things like that.
Wasn't this just anemia?
.... huh?
It's ten o'clock already!?"



"Yes, you were unconscious since noon."
She speaks hesitantly.
I wasn't worried about me, but my promise to meet with Arcueid in the park at ten o'clock.
"Oh no, I have to go.
Akiha, I have to go so I'll leave the rest to you.
Don't bully Hisui, okay?"
"D, don't say such stupid things....!
I won't ask where you go every night, Nii-san.
I won't ask, so please at least tonight, take it easy on your body tonight....!"
"Haha, I'm okay.
This is pretty regular.
When I was in middle school, I used to collapse twice a day, you know that, right Akiha?"



"That's why I'm more worried.

—Nii-san, please listen to what I say, at least just for tonight."

She looks me in the eye with a serious expression.

I—

Do as Akiha says.

turn to **146**

No, I have to push myself to see Arcueid.

turn to **147**

146

"....."

.... I guess it can't be helped.
I'm afraid I'll make her cry if I keep going against her.

".... Alright.

I'll go to sleep for today."

Saying that, I lie down.



"Really....?"

You're not going to sneak out of the room later?"

"No, I get it.

To tell the truth, my body feels incredibly heavy.

I don't think I could sneak outside."



"—Thank goodness."

Akiha breathes out and relaxes visibly.

"Hisui, tell Kohaku that Nii-san is awake.

Nii-san, what about dinner?"

".... Oh yeah.

No, tell Kohaku-san I'm sorry, but I don't think I can eat right now.

I'm just going to go to sleep."



"... I understand.
Then Hisui, tell Kohaku that."
Still looking downcast, Hisui nods and leaves the room.
... Now then.
Lying in bed, I start to feel sleepy again.
Like this, I bet I could fall asleep in less than a minute.
—But, before that,
"Akiha.
There's a place like that in the garden?"



"Yes.
When we were children, we used to play there often."
"Oh.
For some reason, I don't remember it well."
... Yeah.
I really did forget all about it.
"And one more thing.
... It's a weird question, but when we were kids—wasn't there another kid
with us?"



"Huh?"

She tilts her head, like she doesn't understand what I'm saying.

.... I guess not.

There couldn't have been another kid.

But.. if that's true, how strange?

That scene I saw in my dream,
and the dream I saw in the clearing.

If these two are the same—

Then it doesn't make sense unless there's another kid that was killed....

"No, it's nothing.

Just talking about a dream."



"Is that so?"

Then, good night, Nii-san.

Please rest well."

"Yeah, I'll do that."

As soon as I answer her,
I fall asleep as fast as if I had passed out again.
turn to **148**

147

.... I'm happy she's so worried about me.
 But I can't break my promise with Arcueid.
 Yesterday, she waited three hours for me.
 That's not the whole reason, but with just my usual anemia, I don't want her
 to keep on waiting.
 ".... Alright.
 I'll go to sleep for today."
 saying that, I lie down.



"Really....?
 You're not going to sneak out of the room later?"
 ".... Hey now.
 Do you think I could sneak out in this shape?"
 "—Yes, come to think of it, that is true."
 Akiha breathes out and visibly relaxes.



"Hisui, tell Kohaku that Nii-san is awake.
 Nii-san, what about dinner?"
 ".... Oh yeah.
 No, tell Kohaku-san I'm sorry, but I don't think I can eat right now.
 I'm just going to go to sleep."
 ".... I understand.
 Then Hisui, tell Kohaku that."

Still looking downcast, Hisui nods and leaves the room.



"Then I will go back to my room.
If anything happens, please call for me.
No matter what time it is, I'll come right away."

Akiha turns off the lights and leaves the room.
"... Sorry, Akiha."
Saying that, I lift myself up.

"Gh....."
Just lifting myself up causes my consciousness to swim.
.... This isn't like my normal anemia.
I know that, but I can't keep Arcueid waiting forever.
Knowing her, even if I left her there, she'll wait forever.
I wobble to my desk.
I take my knife out of the drawer and put on my jacket.

"Heh.... dang, like this, I really, won't be able to, sneak out."
.... I have to gather up my strength just a little more until I can at least run comfortably or Hisui will find me and take me back to my room.
"... Sorry Arcueid.
It looks like I'll be even later than last night."
I sit down on the floor.
One hour.
If I rest for another hour, I'm sure I can leave—

I make it to the park before midnight.
In the end, even after waiting an hour my body still hadn't recovered, so it took me an hour to get there.

I pant heavily.
As my chest heaves rapidly, I look around me.
Night hangs over the park.
Near the place we decided to meet, there's a white figure standing.

"... I knew she'd be waiting."
I let out a large breath.
It seems like Arcueid notices I'm here.
She walks straight towards me.



"Hey Shiki, it's already two hours past the agreed time.
What were—"



She cuts off as soon as she sees my face.



"Hey, what's wrong, Shiki...?
Your face is so pale, and I can't even sense life in you.
This isn't normal."
"Yeah, my anemia acted up again."

It happens like that every now and then, nothing to be surprised about.
.... more importantly, sorry for making you wait for two hours."



"Eh—No, I really don't mind, but.... Shiki, for you to come out in your condition is just weird."

Even though she was really angry earlier, now it seems she's really worried.

"—I made a promise, didn't I?

I said I'd help you, so I'm not going to skip out on you."

".... That makes me happy but.... Shiki, you don't seem to understand your body at all."

"You don't need to tell me that, Arcueid.

I've been carrying this recurring anemia for eight years now, I'm pretty sure I understand my body."



"—No.

You don't understand how unstable your life is.

I sensed it earlier, but now I know clearly.

Shiki, you are always standing close to death.

I don't know if it's a reaction to your Mystic Eyes of Death Perception or not, but you are walking on the thin line in between life and death.

Saying that your anemia this time isn't a big deal because it wasn't a big deal before is a big mistake."

She looks directly into my eyes coldly.

"Look, Shiki.

Your resistance to death by external means is higher than that of most people.

That is probably because you've already faced death once before.
But on the other hand, you almost have no resistance to death from internal causes.

That anemia of yours, it wouldn't be strange if you die from it."

"Wha—What are you saying?

Are you saying I'll get killed by something like a cold?"



"Shiki, I'm trying to warn you seriously!

I'm glad you came, but you have to think about your health first!

So just go back for now and rest!"

She draws me closer to her.

She really must be worried about me because she's totally defenseless as we get closer.

"Ah—"

Before I can pull back, her chest touches mine.

.... Thump.

My head is assailed with another different kind of dizziness than usual.

All the things I didn't realize before, the softness of her breasts, the whiteness of her skin, her beautiful, golden hair, her womanly charm.

"Arcueid—Please, get away."



"What, you're saying you can't trust the word of a vampire like me?"

"Why are you saying that all of a sudden, idiot?"

There's no way I won't trust you."



"Liar.

Then why can't you look at me?"

"Could you get away from me because of a personal issue?

.... I'm a guy, so if you get this close, it's a little, troubling."

Giving a small voice of surprise, Arcueid steps back.

—Whew.

For the time being, the racking dual dizziness brought about by my anemia and Arcueid subsides.



I guess she finally realized our situation, and she looks at me embarrassedly.

"—Uh."

That idiot.

Seeing her do that, makes me think she's incredibly cute.

This is, troubling.

"I-said stop."

I mumble that quietly, so not be heard.

Those words are not directed to her, but to me for being excited by her.

.... There really is something wrong.

No matter how pretty she is, she's a vampire.

Just what am I thinking, forgetting something like that?

"—Anyways, I'm not that beat to have you start worrying about me.

Besides, if I was attacked like I was last night again, I might really die.
So I can't take my time doing this."



"Eh-?
Shiki, what did you just say?"
"I said if I was attacked like I was last night again, I might really die.
He is trying too, so we have to find him as soon as possible—"
Saying that, I suddenly remember.
".... I forgot.
Last night, I was attacked by one of those Dead."
"Last night?
After we parted!?"
"Yeah.
He was entirely wrapped in bandages and was waiting for me by the mansion."



Arcueid's expression suddenly turns serious.
".... I can't believe it.
How could you forget something so important?"
".... Uh."
I couldn't help it.
I've been through stranger things today.
".... Oh well.
More than that, please tell me in detail what happened, Shiki."
With serious eyes, Arcueid interrogates me on what happened.
"Um, let's see—"

I calm down and I describe as clearly as I can what happened last night.
.... But, I don't tell her that the bandaged man was seeing the "lines of death".
I can't prove it, so maybe it might have been just my mistake.

".... Yeah, that's how it was——"
Finishing my explanation, I read Arcueid's expression.



From when I started until now, her eyes remained sharp without any gentleness.
"So what is it Arcueid?
That bandaged man, and that person wearing those robes like some priest, are they enemies of yours?"



".... Yes.
Both of them are 'enemies'.
I don't know just who or what that bandaged man is, but that woman wearing those Catholic robes, I have an idea about."
She narrows her eyes as if she was in a bad mood.
No, she looks less like she was in a bad mood and more like she's irritated.
"I may know the person who helped you, Shiki.
.... Man.
If it's really her, she'll probably be able to find the enemy before me."
She bites her lip vexedly.
"Wait a minute.
I didn't say that person was a woman though."

"No, there's no mistake.

That woman is the only agent given authority to hunt heretics alone and who uses Black Keys that combine the Cremation Rite and the Steel Shell Effect."

Her irritability is almost like hostility.

Even when she spoke about Nrvnqsr, her voice was never saturated with emotion to this extent.

".... Arcueid.

Um, that person who helped me, is she a vampire...?"

"Of course not.

She's a member of those who see vampires as their enemy.

It doesn't exist in this country, but there is an organization that considers vampires or beastmen as heretics and goes around killing them.

The one who helped you was the most troublesome of that kind, Exorcists.

".... But that's strange.

The Burial Agency wouldn't have sent an agent this soon."

Arcueid speaks softly to herself.

I can't understand what the hell she's talking about.

"Exorcist?

.... Um, like a priest or something?"



"Eh?

Hm, it's not wrong, but it's not quite right either.

Well, it would take a long time to explain, so just know for now that there are those who go around exterminating vampires."

"....."

Um, she tells me to just understand, but..



"More importantly, why did you fight?
You said you'd team up with me, but you never said you'd fight by yourself."
She glares at me.
.... She seems seriously concerned about my safety—



"That's not fair Shiki!
Keeping it a secret, having all that fun by yourself!"
—or not.
".... Now how did you jump to that insane conclusion!?"



"Huh?
You weren't trying to hide your monopoly on prey from me?"
She says something so absurd with a straight face.
"Idiot, that's not it at all."
.... Fighting him was just a turn of events.

Just a turn of events.
 I don't plan to fight with The Dead or vampires without you."
 "... Oh?
 What kind of turn of events?"
 "My sense of justice as a normal person.... or something like that.
 I kind of regret it now."



"Justice?"
 She tilts her head as if to say "What's that?"
 Yeah, I was painfully shown yesterday it is just a justification.

—Back then.

When I realized there was a figure in front of me, there was only fear.
 That thing—that guy, I knew right away he wasn't normal, but all I could do was tremble.
 And then, I brought out my knife to meet him and began a fight to the death.
 You can't kill someone using a cheap notion like justice.
 People kill to preserve their own life.
 That's the most primitive, simple logic of the beasts.
 That logic—at that time, if that person resembling Senpai hadn't come, I probably would have executed that action without hesitating—
 "... Arcueid.
 That person who came to help me, can you tell me a little more about her?"



"There's nothing more to tell, she's an Inquisitor for the Church.

What I said earlier, the group that's like a nemesis to all vampires. This Burial Agency, not so much exorcists as murderers, no, killing machines, are a specialized group responsible for dealing with heretics—I'm very surprised that their eyes reach even in the Far East."

Arcueid crosses her arms while deep in thought.

She looks devoid of emotion, entirely different from before.

—She's serious.

She might be thinking more seriously about this than the enemy she's after.

".... Arcueid.

I don't quite understand, but those exorcists hunt vampires, right?

Then aren't you their target?"

I ask her that because I'm a little worried.



"Eh—?"

Of course not.

They are only natural enemies of the Dead Apostles.

We don't fundamentally mess with each other, so there cannot even be a fight.

But—if she is who I think she is, then she has to be armed with the Seventh Holy Scripture.

There is the danger of her getting there first."

".... Getting there first....?"

I can't quite grasp what she's saying.

I don't get the details, but it seems like Arcueid doesn't appreciate the emergence of this person who resembles Senpai entering the stage.

".... Well, I guess it doesn't concern me.

Well then, now that we're calmed down, shall we begin?

I didn't come here for nothing, so maybe we should find at least one of The Dead."



"Geez, what are you saying with such a pale face?
 We got off topic because you said something weird, but didn't I tell you to pay more attention to your body!?"
 Arcueid glares at me.
 I didn't think she was before, but she does seem honestly concerned about me.



"Okay?
 Your body is more unstable than most people's, so if you don't rest at a time like this, you're risking your life.
 You pass out a lot, not because of anemia, but because your body understands it's in danger.
 Your body senses the danger before you do, so it stops working to prevent your body from getting any worse."
 "Eh—for real?"
 "There's no reason for me to lie, right?
 Anyway, I warned you.
 Whether you believe me or not is up to you, Shiki."

".... Up to me?
 Well, I don't think there's any reason for you to lie to me...."
 As I speak, I sink deep into thought.
 I always thought I passed out because my body was weak from anemia, but now she's saying it's because my body is trying to protect me like a safety switch?
 What is this?



"Anyway, we won't go investigating tonight. I don't think the enemy will reappear until his wound is healed, and if he appeared by your house without using The Dead, that means he doesn't have any left."
She says this all severely.
.... If she says so, I can't argue.
In the first place, it's impossible for me to go look for vampires by myself.
".... Alright.
If you say so, Arcueid, I'll rest for tonight."



"Yes, please do.
Not only did you get attacked last night, but your body is so weak now. It'll be troublesome if you don't sleep tonight and return to your normal self by tomorrow."
".... I see.
It's true that I can't really help you in this condition.
Okay, I'll get myself fixed by tomorrow."



"No, that's not it.
It's boring talking to you when you're like this, so I just want you to be back to normal, that's all."
She almost seems disappointed.
... I knew it was useless to try and understand her.

"I'll be heading back to the mansion.
See you tomorrow, Arcueid."
Raising a hand, I start my walk back.
"Hey, Shiki."
Arcueid stops me.
".... What?
Is there something else?"



"Should I escort you home?"
She averts her gaze and speaks hesitantly.
—In her own way, she really is worried about what happened last night.
Thinking that, I guess it's not that bad..
"Oh—"
Before I can say "Yeah", I suddenly stop.
Wait.
Wait.
Aren't you forgetting your vow you made just now, Shiki?
No matter how pretty she is, Arcueid is a vampire.
I can't forget that.

If I relate myself to Arcueid more than necessary—I feel I'll cross a line that I should never cross.

"Cut it out.

I don't need to be worried by you.

Don't do things that don't suit you, stupid."

"Ah—yeah."

Just a little—for just an instant, Arcueid looks down, but then raises her head.



"Then, see you tomorrow!"

waving her hand goodbye energetically, the white-clothed vampire walks off into the darkness of the night.

turn to **92**

148

Tweet, Tweet, Tweet
 Is the window open?
 I can hear the soft singing of birds from the garden.
 A cool breeze blows across my face.
 I feel the sunlight hitting my eyelids.
 A quiet, gentle atmosphere.
 A gentle morning.
 Morning?
 I guess I fell asleep last night as Akiha cared for me, and slept till now.
 Lying down, my body feels heavy.
 But I feel much better than I did yesterday.
 I decide to open my eyes and sit up.
 And—

"Ah.
 The little rascal finally woke up."
 I see Arcueid's face right in front of mine.
 ".....!?"
 My brain goes blank and stops working due to this unexpected event.
 My mouth opens and closes, but my voice seems to be missing.
 —Seriously, what's going on?
 Arcueid is in front of me.
 This is my room.
 It's past nine o'clock in the morning,
 She's come inside, still wearing her shoes; that's all I know for now.
 "Y-Y-Y-You!"
 "Liar.
 We promised to meet again yesterday."
 She must be in a pretty bad mood as her red eyes have lost their usual beauty.
 —No, not lost at all.
 Being this close, her beauty is more vivid than usual.
 Arcueid glares at me as I lay in bed.
 ".... W-Wait, Arcueid.
 W-Why are you in my room this morning....!?"
 I start to shout, but I stop myself.
 If I shouted now, Hisui would come here and it would all be over.
 —Everything is still chaotic, but my brain can grasp that much.
 "A-Anyway, move....!
 Just going into someone's room, threatening a sleeping person, don't you know
 how awful that is....!?"
 "What's with that attitude?
 I came here because you broke your promise.
 Sleeping while making someone wait, just what in the world were you plan-
 ning?"

She stares at me ill-temperedly.
.... I calm down.
That's right.
I really did break my promise to meet Arcueid last night.
".... Mmmm."
I finally understand the situation.
I understand why Arcueid's angry.
I understand, but to do this.. to come into someone's room still wearing shoes like that, what does she intend to do?
Seeing that the window is open, she probably came in through there.
".... I see, since I broke my promise, I'm at fault here.
But sneaking in here is going a little far, you know."
"This isn't your house, Shiki."
She gives a quick retort.
"You know, I really was angry before.
I waited for many hours, and as soon as I realized you weren't coming, I got so incredibly angry.
I was thinking I would never let this happen again and I'd rip your throat out."
She speaks, still looking ill-tempered.
"Do you get it, Shiki?
That feeling, I couldn't resist it.
Even though I know I should calm down, the more I thought about it, the angrier I got."
As if she still felt that way, her red eyes seem to blame me.
"Yeah.. I guess you can't help yourself."
Giving thanks to God my neck is still attached, I keep the conversation going.
"Isn't it?
And I snuck in here, but since you were sleeping I decided to wait.
At least I wanted to hear your excuse.
And, since I didn't have anything to do, I watched your sleeping face.
.... Yeah, your sleeping face was very quiet, it was almost scary.
Sleeping like you were dead, I started feeling uneasy because I thought that maybe you would never wake up."
I sigh.
"If you were uneasy then you should've woke me.
I'm uneasy when you're next to me."
"But, I thought it would be a waste.
.... I don't know what I look like when I sleep, but I thought it would be real good if I slept like you did.
I wondered why you look so peaceful while I watched you sleep.
While I was doing that, my anger disappeared, and then you woke up."
".... Then you've been here this whole time?
From last night until now?"
"Yeah.
People from this house came in a few times, but I hid myself so it was okay.
A girl also came to wake you up, but I didn't like her so I sent her away."

Arcueid laughs brightly.

"Wait, you sent her away?

How?"

"I wasn't rough.

Didn't I tell you before that vampires have Mystic Eyes of Enchantment?

I merely used suggestion on her, saying that 'Shiki has already gone to school' and didn't leave any memory of her meeting me."

"No memory?

You..."

Really are a troublesome person.

.... Well, even if she is troublesome, at least she took care not to be detected.

I bring my hands to my head as I sigh.

"Alright.

Sorry for yesterday, Arcueid.

I don't know if this is making up for it, but I won't break any more promises.

Yeah, I promise."

I look her right in the eye as I declare this.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure.

Because I now realize your revenge is scary..."

Still lying down, I raise my hands in surrender.

All of a sudden, her bad mood disappears completely.

Arcueid gives a satisfied nod and says 'alright'.

Arcueid finally gets away from the bed.

".... Geez, sneaking onto someone's bed like that.

Didn't you think about how hard the sheets would be to clean if you left a mess from your shoes?"

Complaining, I get up from bed.

Arcueid stands in the center of the room watching me as I slowly rouse myself from bed.

".... Hey, what are you doing?"



"What am I doing?

I'm just waiting for you to change.

You're not going to go out in those clothes, right?"

"Well, yeah.

No one walks around in pajamas.. Wait, Arcueid?"

"Yeah, I was thinking we'd spend the day together, Shiki.

You said you'd make it up for breaking your promise, didn't you?"

Arcueid says this casually, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Today, all day.. What are you saying?"

I have school.."



"Hey, you even said you were sure.

Are you choosing school over me, Shiki?"

"Uh...."

She's got me there.

I..

It can't be helped

turn to **149**

It can be helped

turn to **153**

149

"—"

I glance at the clock.

It's already past nine.

I'd be late even if I went to school now—and to be honest, going with Arcueid is more fun than going to school...

"Alright.

I'll spend the day with you.

But if we go into the city during the day, I don't think there'll be any Dead around?"



"I don't care about that.

I just wanted to walk around, so even if it is daytime, it doesn't matter."

"....?"

What, aren't we making up for last night and going to look for vampires?"

"Yes, of course we'll look tonight.

But to have you help me all day and night would be hard, so during the day I thought we could relax."

"I think that'd be more fun too.

But, just the two of us walking around, that's...."

like what they call a date in the real world.

.... Maybe you can't say that with a vampire like Arcueid, but I suppose she's telling me to take her out for some fun.

For me, I—I need to get ready mentally and..

"....?"

What's wrong, Shiki?

Your face, it's turning red."

"—Uh."

I cover my face with my hands and look away.

.... Certainly it's been just the two of us many times before.

But, those were emergency situations, and it was more like a pact of cooperation than anything between a man and a woman.

That's why—no matter how pretty I thought she was, I tried not to notice it.

But, if..

Without any danger, without any purpose, if the two of us just walk around, I might notice something I never noticed before, and it makes me hesitate—



"Shiki?

Hey, are you going to school after all....?"

".... No way.

I said I'd do it, so I will.

I don't know what you're thinking, but walking around shouldn't be a problem."



"Then it's decided.

Then let's go."

She walks toward the window she snuck in earlier.

"Wait a minute.

I'm going to change, so can you just look outside for a while?"



"What, did you call me?"

"Oh, yes, no!"

Just go outside, I'll be there soon."

"Okay, I'll wait outside."

I've waited this long, so don't make me wait any longer, Shiki.."

She jumps out the window with the lightness of a cat.
I hear the rustling of the trees outside.
She didn't jump to the ground, but along the tree branches.
.... With a body like that, it should have been easy getting in here undetected.
".... This isn't the time to be impressed.
I too have to sneak out without Hisui noticing."
I change into some normal clothes.
Cracking open the door slightly, I look around to make sure no one's in the hallway and tip-toe outside.

Luckily, no one saw me as I made my way out.
Arcueid is looking the other way as she mumbles to herself.



"Thanks for waiting.

C'mon, let's go Arcueid.

If we stick around here, Kohaku-san will find us."



"Eh?
Ah, yeah, we should go."
Completely different from before, her words seem very empty.
"What is it?
This isn't like you at all.
Did something happen again just now?"
".... No, nothing really."
I said the 'again' part strong, but her words are still hollow.
—It seems like she's planning something.
I feel kind of scared.
".... Are you feeling sick because it's daytime?
There's no need to force yourself to go out.
If it's hard for you, we can stop."



"Mmh, I feel fine right now.
But seeing this wall reminded me of last night."
"....?
About last night, you mean while you waited for me at the park?"



"Yes," Arcueid nods meekly.



"I dashed here with all my strength and snuck into your room.... but it seems strange when I think about it now.
Why was I so angry back then?
It was just a little promise."
Saying she doesn't get it, Arcueid crosses her arms in thought.



"Ah, that's right.
Maybe you get it, Shiki?
You always tell me I'm so stupid, so maybe you can understand?"
"Hey...."
If she doesn't understand herself, then how does she expect me to?
There's no way I understand, but if I have to respond—

Well, it's because you're selfish, right?

turn to **150**

Well, it's because you hate me, right?

turn to **151**

Well, it's because you're a vampire, right?

turn to **152**

150

"Aren't you just easily angered?
You're a pretty selfish person at heart, after all."
I clearly voice my thoughts on the matter.



"Really?
Now that you mention it, you could be right.
It seems like I've become really emotional since you killed me."
Arcueid nods in a satisfied manner.

.... Well, whether that was the truth or not, the problem is resolved as long
as Arcueid is convinced.
turn to **154**

151

".... Let's see, isn't it because you hate me?
I haven't been able to meet you on time, and I've done a lot of horrible things
to you."
.... Leaving my feelings about Arcueid aside, I calmly analyze the situation.



"—Is that so?
This is the first time I've ever felt emotion towards someone, so I don't really
understand it myself...."

After being quiet for a few moments, she raises her head.



".... Um, Shiki, do you hate me...?"
And asks me such a question.
"M, me...?"
I, um—" "
"....."
Arcueid stares at me silently.
"I—I don't hate you, that's why I'm helping you."
.... For now, that's the honest truth.



".... I see.
Then maybe I feel the same way too."
Arcueid gives an ambiguous nod.
I'm not sure if she understands.

setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **154**

152

"How the heck am I supposed to know?
You're a vampire, so I bet you think a lot differently than we do."



"Hey...!
What do you mean!?
My thought processes are basically the same as a human's, so there's only a little difference!"
"But still different, right?
Well, leaving that aside, it's impossible to understand another's feelings.
I'm not too sure about my own emotions, so it's impossible for me to understand a vampire's train of thought."



"Yeah!
I don't understand you either; there's no need to understand!
Yeah, yeah, I'm just an idiot for asking you!"

Arcueid turns away with a "hmp!"
.... She's gotten a little angry, but at least she seems convinced.
setvar arkregard - 1
turn to **154**

153

"—"

I glance at the clock.
It's already past nine.
I'm late as it is, but it's not too late yet.
"No, I'd better not.
I'll help you, but I can't let that affect my daily life.
I've already decided we'll only work at night."



"... Oh?"

Looking like she wants to complain, she stares at me.
"Well, you have a point.
You're helping me to protect your way of living, so it wouldn't make any sense
to go out of your normal life to do so."
She takes in my point rather easily.
... She's emotional yet logical, I guess that would be like her.



"You can enjoy your life all you want.
As long as you don't forget your promise, there's no problem."

Saying that, she walks over to the window.



"Later.
If it happens again tonight, I'll kill you."

Arcueid tells the truth jokingly as she disappears.
Jumping out the window, she bounds from tree branch to tree branch.
"..... She was pretty angry."
But, school is important for me too.
I spend the nights with her, so I think it's alright if I relax during the day.
"Well then, shall I go to school?"
Because I slept all night, my body's completely recovered.
I have to quickly change into my uniform and sneak out so Hisui and Kohaku-
san don't see me.

"Hm—"
I'm a little dizzy.
.... It's probably the after-effects of yesterday.
My body feels a bit heavy and I have a slight headache.
".... Well, I guess this much is okay."
Just a small amount of dizziness.
I can always take it easy once I sit down at my desk in school.
I get myself together and jog towards school.

—*sigh*
I manage to make it into class before third period.
Looking around, Arihiko's seat is empty.
He's probably absent, but that means today will be quiet.

Lunch time.
It looks like Arihiko's not coming.
.... Inui Arihiko and Yumizuka Satsuki are the two people absent today.
Yumizuka Satsuki has caught a cold or something and she will be absent for a
while.
".... Senpai doesn't seem to be coming too, so I guess I'll eat by myself."
I say that, but I'm not hungry.

.... What is it?
I didn't feel so good to begin with, but after coming to school, I feel a lot worse.
It's not just my body feeling heavy.
The scar on my chest is irritating; it's an annoying sensation.
".... Maybe I shouldn't have come to school."
.... For a brief moment, I see the worrying faces of Hisui and Akiha in my mind.
Being worn out by just sitting, I start to feel a strange uneasiness.

turn to ??

154

"Does that clear it up?
Then let's go... Arcueid, do you have anywhere in mind?"



"Hmm, I don't know so I'll let you decide.
Just take me wherever?"

.... So she told me we're going somewhere and now it's this?
Oh well—I'm not sure what kind of place she likes, but I'll take her to a good
hangout place.
Well then—

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| Go for the usual, take her to the movie theater. | turn to 155 |
| She'll probably like somewhere such as a back alley, right? | turn to 156 |
| I don't really know, so let's go to the park for now. | turn to 157 |

155

For the time being, the movie theater is always a safe bet.
As long as the movie you choose is good, it can't be boring.



"This place is always pretty lively, although I don't know what's here."
Arcueid walks right next to me.

"___"

On the way—actually even now, everyone around us keeps casting glances our way.

.... It doesn't need to be said, but it's probably because Arcueid really stands out.

I'm aware of it a little, but everyone else's reactions make me even more conscious of it, and it's a bit troubling.

Arcueid acts just like she normally does, but since I can't help but be overwhelmed by her femininity, I can't seem to make any meaningful conversation.



"Hey, do you hear me Shiki?
I'm asking you where we're going."
"Ah—um, well most couples here usually go to the movie theater."
I point to the movie theater in front of us.



"Movie theater.... hmm, so watching a movie then."
.... The princess does not seem to be pleased.
But, after coming this far, I don't have a choice.
It's not like I have any clue what would please a vampire girl in the first place.
Because I've gone this far, I just have to prepare myself for her to say "Boring."
"Just go in.
If you're dissatisfied, we can always split up here."
"I'm not really.. dissatisfied."
Giving a sigh, Arcueid follows me.

She slumps her shoulders as if to say "you good-for nothing guy!".
"I'm going to go buy tickets, but what do you want to see?
Let's see, there's a romance, and a romance, and a romance.... this theater kind
of stinks."
To be honest, I want to go back too.



"Any one of them is fine.
They really all look the same."
"Yeah.
Then let's just buy one."

I get in the shortest line and buy two tickets.
"Here you go.
Just show this ticket when we go in.
They'll take half of the ticket, but that's how it's supposed to be so don't get

angry."



"I know that much.
You really think I don't know anything, Shiki."
"Ah... no, that's not it.
I just thought maybe you didn't know much about human society."



"I have some knowledge of it stored away.
I know at least about a movie theater."

Giving a small "hmp", she turns her face away and walks towards the theater.

.... It was a mistake.

I knew taking a vampire to a movie theater would be too dull.

—We exit the theater.

We watched a romance.. it wasn't exactly boring, but not terribly interesting either.

It was a typical French movie.

It focused less on breathtaking scenes and concentrated more on creating a calm atmosphere.

As we leave the theater, Arcueid walks with me wordlessly.

"....."

.... An uncomfortable silence.

Maybe she would've been happier if it was an action flick or a horror movie.

"Hey, Arcueid."



"Yeah, it was really fun, Shiki!"

Wh, wh, wha, what....!?"

"Uh, fun, Arcueid?"

"Man, hearing about it and seeing it were two entirely different things.

Even though I knew some background information about what a movie theater was, my imagination fell short of reality."

.... Arcueid gives a happy, heart-felt smile.

"The darkness was really nice, and even though the sounds were loud, they weren't noisy.

And having you next to me was also fun.

But more than that, the subject matter was really good!

I was surprised they would go so far to make up a story.

It's so detailed, my imagination was nothing like that.

I was really moved."

"... Ah, is.. is that so?"



"Huh?"

You look like you don't agree.

Was it was boring?"

"No, not really boring, just ordinary.

There's way more interesting things than that."



"No way.
That was really good, you know!?"
"Well, I guess movie experts like that kind of movie, but there's a ton of better ones.
They are not out right now, but there are epics out there many times better than that.
To be blunt, what we just saw was pretty low quality."
".... I'm surprised."
".... It's so easy to read your expressions Arcueid."

Not just surprised, but amazed.
That Arcueid, she looked so not into it, so I thought she was going to complain.. but now she's like an excited kid.
".... Too bad.
If it was earlier, we could've seen a better movie.
If I knew you would have liked it, I would have taken you."
It's not so she thanks me, but I genuinely do want to make her happy.



"Oh, I see.
I guess we don't have much luck."
Arcueid slumps her shoulders in disappointment.
"Yeah, we just keep missing the opportunities."
I slump my shoulders in disappointment too.
.... Yeah, really.
It really would have been nice to see her happy, smiling face a little longer.

setvar arkregard + 2
turn to **158**

156

For the time being, we go into town.
All that's left is to branch off the main street and go to the empty alley—



"Huh?
What is it, Shiki?"
"Nothing.
It's different that normal, so I was just a little confused."
"?"

Arcueid perplexedly cocks her head to the side.
.... It seems like she doesn't notice at all.
I can feel the weight of stares all around me.
Just walking down the street causes people all around to cast glances at us.
.... It doesn't need to be said, but it's probably because Arcueid really stands out.
I'm a little aware of it, but everyone else's reactions make me even more conscious of it, and it's a bit troubling.
Arcueid acts just like she normally does, but since I can't help but be overwhelmed by her femininity, I can't seem to make any meaningful conversation.



"Hey, do you hear me Shiki?
I'm asking you where we're going."
"We're almost there so hold on."

We're going somewhere you can relax."

—And we arrive at the alley.

"Here we are.

People don't normally come by here, so you can relax here—"



"....."

Huh—?

Her gaze suddenly turns heartless, almost deadly.

"Arcueid...?"

Don't tell me, you're not happy with this place...?"

"....."

... She seems so angry she can't even speak.

"That's odd... You're a vampire, so I thought you would like a place like this better than somewhere crowded—"



"_____!"

The light in her eyes sharpens.

... This isn't good.

This might be the first time I've seen her this angry.

Giving a deep sigh, Arcueid looks up again.



"Hey, Shiki.
What kind of a joke is this?"
"Ah—uh."
Frightening.
Her smiling face is really frightening.
"No, um.... I'm really sorry.
I really messed up."
I bring my hands together and implore forgiveness.
She keeps smiling.



"That's right, there's really nothing to do here.
The only thing we could do here is to replay the time we first met."
When we first met!?
That means—
"Yeah, the results may turn out a little different from back then, but that might
be fun too, right Shiki?"
—This is a threat.
She counterattacks with a smile.
".... I said I'm sorry.
I'll make it up to you, so please stop smiling like that.
I'll take you somewhere better."



"Really?"

I was getting in the mood for it too."

She looks disappointed.

.... I really must contemplate my actions.

Even though Arcueid is a vampire, I must have been really stupid to take her to an alley for a date....

For four hours..

Appropriate for the ball of curiosity that is Arcueid, we end up going to the department store in front of the station.

It seems like Arcueid made me take her there just to trouble me, but somewhere along the way, I guess it started to be pretty fun for her and she became happy again.

It was a little tiring, but I think it was a good time.

setvar arkregard - 1

turn to **158**

157

The weather's great so I decide to go to the park.
We can relax there and then go somewhere else more appropriate later.

We enter the park.
It's still midmorning but there's a bunch of people my age here.



"Hm, there's a lot of people here during the day.
I've met you here a lot, but it seems like a totally different place."
Arcueid seems to be in a good mood.
I just planned to walk around the park, but she doesn't seem discontent at all.
"Oh, there's a store in a place like this.
Shiki, what does that sell?"
Arcueid points excitedly at a vendor's stand.
The path from the fountain leads to a wheeled ice cream stand.
"That's an ice cream seller out of season.
Cold things aren't good for the body, so we should just pass it up for now." I
stop Arcueid's question before she asks.



No matter how unhappy a face she makes, I don't think eating ice cream in the
fall would be good at all.
—But, what is this strange feeling?
I feel weird just walking, I feel everyone's watching us....



"Hey Shiki, do you know all these people?"

"No, there's only one person I know who'd skip school to hang around like that. Why?"

"Hm, a lot of people seem to be looking at us, so I thought maybe you knew them."

".... I see."

So that's what felt strange."

I get it now.

I was just walking around to find a good spot on the grass to sit down on, but everyone is stealing glances at us.

It doesn't need to be said, but they're looking at Arcueid, not me.

I've been doing my best not to be conscious of it, but Arcueid is just unbelievably beautiful.

And walking in the park is just asking for stares.

The guys killing time in the park all start to look at her.

.... For some reason, I feel angry.

"Arcueid, let's go somewhere else."

Grabbing her hand, I pull her as I walk towards the back of the park.

The place we usually meet has much less people than right in front of the fountain.

.... This should be little better than before, at least.

"We'll kill time here a little bit.

I'm going to get something to drink, you have any requests?"

I let go of her hand and turn towards her.



"U.... um, is water okay?"

"Sure.

Go ahead and sit on that bench.... if some guy starts to talk to you, just don't listen to him."

Saying that, I run to a nearby vending machine.

Even though it's now past noon, we don't leave the park.
.... I'm not sure why, but Arcueid's been quiet since we came here.
She hasn't even drank the water I got for her, and she just looks around the park doing nothing.
We watch the flocks of pigeons around the park and the happily running figures of children accompanied by their mothers.



"Hey, Shiki."

"Hm?"

Are you bored just spacing out?

We can go somewhere and get something to eat if you want."

"No, that isn't it.... I was just wondering about what happened before."

"....?"

Before?

.... What is she talking about?

"I don't get it.

What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about when you grabbed my hand earlier.

We've come into contact before, but there was always a reason.

But just now, there wasn't a reason, so I was wondering just what it was."
"What it was?—There really wasn't a reason or anything."
Saying that, I also get confused.
.... Come to think of it, I pulled her along naturally for no reason.
That being said, I don't even understand why.
"It doesn't really matter.
It's not that big of a deal.
Something sudden like that, is just human."



"I see.
Having lots of things done for no reason.. you've done a lot of useless things."
Arcueid replies, amazed.



"Hey Shiki.
It's kind of off topic, but did you ever have a time like that?"
She really is asking about random things.
She's looking at the playing children, so she's probably asking about that.
".... Hmm, Maybe.
I played around a lot as a kid, but that was only inside the mansion.
I rarely ever played in a park like this."
.... That's right.
My only playmates were Akiha and the others.
I never played with people I didn't know like these kids.
I might have been more like..
A kid who led an insulated life.

"What about you, Arcueid?"

.... Um, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

.... Um, if vampires didn't have a childhood, asking her would be rude.



"Yeah.

Like you're thinking, I never had a childhood.

While I was weak as an individual, I slept through it, and I was active only when my existence was at its peak.

That's why I thought it was strange.

Infancy and old age are such useless times, why do people manage to live through it?"

She seems to be almost asking herself, not me.

".... Arcueid?"

"It's nothing.

This is the first time I ever spent time doing nothing, so my thoughts seem to be malfunctioning."

Saying that, Arcueid stands up from the bench.

I stand up with her.

.... Well, we've already been in the sun for about two hours, so we should probably head into the city.

"—Oh, if it was dull you should've told me so."



"Hm, maybe it is dull, but it wasn't boring.

I was even thinking I'd like to spend more time if it's this kind of dull, but you

didn't like it?"

"Eh....?"

.... That's right, even if it was uneventful, it wasn't boring.

Come to think of it, spending time sunbathing with Arcueid is something pretty rare.

"—That's right, it wasn't bad at all.

But, let's get something to eat.

I haven't had anything since this morning, so I'm pretty hungry."

Saying that, we start to walk from the park.

"Hm——"

For a brief moment, I think about holding her hand but I stop right away.

There wasn't any reason for it before, so it felt natural to do so.

But now that I have a reason to do so, to hold her hand seems very senseless.

.... To be senseless means that taking notice is the result of less-than-pure thoughts.

"I'm full of theories today."

Geez.

Just like Arcueid says, I guess I do a lot of useless things.

turn to **158**

158

It's now past two, so to ease my hunger I take us to a fast food restaurant.
.... I don't even know if she eats this kind of food, but after Arcueid stares long and hard at the menu, she ends up ordering the same thing I did.

"....."

I sit down across from her.

After Arcueid looks around quickly, she pops a french fry in her mouth like she's done it before many times.

".... Wow, you seem pretty used to it.

I thought maybe it was your first time."



"Yeah, this is the first time I've done it.

I've known about places like these, but it was only from information sources."

"Just information.... I see, you watch the news so I guess you read magazines too."

"Hm, not quite like that, I need knowledge to fit in with the times, right?

So when I wake up, I study the information of that time and then go into action.

Well, it's usually over in a few days so it usually ends up being useless."

"....?"

She says things that are hard to understand like this from time to time.

"Hmm.... why does it end up useless?"



"Because I go to sleep right away.

I don't know how many years later I wake up the next time, so I can't use much

of what I remember.
After it is over, all I do is sleep.
.... Hm, but maybe I've been missing out.
I only knew the world through those sources.
I knew about how people would gather like this, but I never experienced it."
"I see.... But isn't knowing just enough?
Just now, you ordered some food like it was perfectly natural."



"Of course.
I studied, so I can act that way."



But, that's all.
Experience is far greater than theory.
Even if I know about zillions of things, it's useless if I've never done them."
Arcueid sighs.
"Is that so.... I think some people say theory makes up for a lack of experience."
"That's something those who only know theories say.
.... I used to think that way until just recently."
Arcueid's expression starts to cloud.
For some unknown reason, I don't like seeing her face like that.
"Is that so?
I think there's just those for whom theory can make up for lack of experience
and those for whom experience trumps theory.
There's a lot of people out there in the world, so not everyone is the same."



"Wow, you got really deep and serious, Shiki."
"Hey now, Arcueid-san.
You're the one who started being all serious, I was just going along.
Don't kill the conversation like that."
Um, since you're telling me all that stuff about yourself.



"Yeah, I know.
You always listen to me when I want to talk.
You always yell at me, but you listen to me when it's serious."
"Ahaha," Arcueid laughs brightly.
.... Hmph.
That's what she thinks, anyway.
But, I think such a genuine smile suits her best.



"I was thinking about what you said earlier.

I really am narrow-minded.
I can't really see anything else after I make up my mind.
Not needing anyone but myself.
I'm the only one who is right.
I can only think in those terms.
—That's right.
There are a lot of hearts out there, so there's a lot of people that can do easily
what I can't."
She somehow seems very gentle as she contemplates.



"Ah, but, even if I contemplate it, my personality won't change.
I like this me the best, and I believe it is the correct way."

She smiles as she says those courageous words.
Then she looks around like before and takes a bite of her hamburger.
Chomp.
Chomp.
As if to erase any image of her being a vampire, Arcueid chows down on her
junk food.
"....."
How come?
It seems impossible to look elegant while eating a hamburger, but Arcueid makes
it look beautiful.



"What....?"

Staring at me like that.
 Ah, is this not how you eat it....!?"
 Arcueid hurriedly puts her hamburger back on her tray.
 She then wipes her mouth with a paper napkin.
 But even that simple action seems so elegant.
 "... No, it's right.
 It's right, but it's strange.
 In your case, it doesn't suit you, so don't do it."
 I don't even know why I say that as I chomp on my hamburger like a hamburger
 should be eaten.



"What do you mean it doesn't suit me?"
 "It's an image problem.
 That small mouth of yours isn't fit to eat fast food.
 Fries aren't a problem, so you can have my share."
 I put my french fries on her tray.
 I really don't know what I'm doing at all.
 "I don't want them.
 I don't feel like eating just those."
 After saying that, she brings the hamburger to her mouth once more.

.... She might be worried about my stare, as she eats it more normally.
 Well, I can live with that.
 But a hamburger-eating vampire?
 All living things need nutrition to live, so they eat.
 Before, Arcueid declared she doesn't drink blood.
 So, in order to gain that nutrition, does she eat food just like us normal hu-
 mans....?
 "... Hey, Arcueid."



"What, you meanie?"

"No, I wasn't going to criticize you.
I just had a question, if that's okay."



"Sure—what is it?"

"Um, you're a vampire, right?
Then I was wondering maybe if food for you.. was only blood."



Her eyes widen.

.... I knew it.

It was a rude question.

See, even Arcueid's facial expression is getting angry.... or not.



"Hey Shiki, normally, I don't eat food.
 Certainly eating like this allows me to move on my own, but it's more of a mental thing.
 For me to eat, in other words, taking in nutrition, is a different process than the one you have.
 I do have an appetite, but maybe it's more akin to lust.
 If I don't eat, I get irritated, but since I don't put much priority on it, inversion impulses rarely happen."

She easily denies the blood as food theory.
 Yeah, that's what it is.
 She really seems to be okay with not drinking blood.
 "I see—"
 That's good.
 Arcueid isn't someone that kills humans to feed.
 It really is a good thing.
 Geez.
 If Arcueid just said from the beginning "I'm a vampire that doesn't suck human blood", then I would have agreed to help her from the.... start....
 ".... Hey, wait a minute!
 You don't call that a vampire!"



"You do.
 Even you can't resist eating for one day, right?
 For those vampires who are True Ancestors—like me, the highest class of food,

the thing that can satisfy our desires the most is blood.
So in order to "live" and "fulfill our desires", we can substitute blood with other things."



"But when it comes to the Dead Apostles—vampires that were originally human, it is a different matter.

In order to maintain their existence, they need the blood of others."

"....?"

Um, in other words the best way to satisfy your hunger is blood?

.... But you said you hated drinking blood.

So just like people who don't like certain food, you hate the taste of blood?"

I take a guess at a satisfactory simplification for the long explanation she gave.

However.

It seems like I was a little off.



".... I don't know.

I don't know what blood tastes like."

"—Huh?"



"I told you I'm not a full vampire.
Not knowing the taste of blood.
I still don't know that.
All I know—is to drink human blood is to refuse to recognize them as people."
She looks away, not even trying to look at me.

"Hey Shiki.
What if?
What if birds or fish had the same amount of intelligence and life span as you did?
Could you eat them?
Could you justify it to yourself by saying no matter how much intelligence they have, they are still food?
And then eat them?"
"—No, that's.."
Could I—eat them?
I don't know.
I don't know, but first off, I'd try and eat other food, things that didn't have intelligence.



"See?
Just like that.
That's why I hate the thought of drinking blood.
.... Well, maybe there are likes and dislikes as you said too.
If I could, I like to avoid the sight of blood.

But—Yes, but if.. if humans didn't have the same worth, intelligence, or values than I did, then maybe I would drink blood.
Isn't providence of nature taking the lives of other things to protect your own?"
Right?
Arcueid asks me for agreement.
But that—even if Arcueid says it, I can only deny it.
.... I don't want to agree to that.
"Certainly that may be true, but in the first place, humans are like you.
.... So let's just cut short this kind of conversation.
I don't like talking about 'what ifs'."



"Really?
I like 'What ifs'.
Not knowing how things will turn out, yet still having hope at least for that moment."

If... what if.
Then, what if—she drank blood like other vampires, would we be talking like this?



"What's wrong, Shiki?
Your face got dark all of a sudden.
Ah, do you have to go to the bathroom?"
".... Hey.
You come up with that when someone is thinking seriously?"

I sigh.

Even though I'm seriously thinking about it, Arcueid doesn't seem to think much about drinking blood.

"Yeah—it doesn't concern me."



"Geez, just mumbling to yourself like that.

Trying to hide something isn't manly, Shiki!"

Arcueid looks like an angry cat again.

"I'm not really hiding anything.

Besides, you're the one with all the secrets.

You're just having fun saying things I can't understand."



"Having fun—I'm not trying to do that."

I don't know where her bad mood went, but she suddenly calms down.

She looks like she's uneasy with me nailing it on the head.

".... Really?"

You really were having fun seeing me stumped like earlier?

Do you like teasing, or is it secrecy?

Well, we are two different kinds of life forms, so I don't care."

"Th, that's not it....!"

I was just trying to answer you.

It probably looks like I'm hiding a lot of things because you never ask...."

"Hmm—so whatever I ask, you'll tell me?"



"Yes.
We are a team after all."

Alright.
Then as she wishes, I shall ask questions to clear things up.

Alright, I'll tell her about last night. turn to **159**

Then, let's hear the details about Arcueid's "enemy". turn to **160**

Well, I have to question her about her hobbies, history, and her three sizes!
turn to **161**

159

I forgot because she started telling me to take her out to play, but there was something I had to ask her about.

"Then I'll ask.

Arcueid, I was attacked two nights ago by a strange person."

"Eh?

A strange person?

What kind?"

"Well, that is—"

I calm down and I describe as clearly as I can what happened two nights ago.

".... Yeah, that's how it was——"
 nishing my explanation, I read Arcueid's expression.



From when I started until now, her eyes remained sharp without any gentleness.

"So what is it Arcueid?

That bandaged man, and that person wearing those robes like some priest, are they enemies of yours?"

".... Yes.

Both of them are 'enemies'.

I don't know just who or what that bandaged man is, but that woman wearing those Catholic robes, I have an idea about."

She narrows her eyes as if she was in a bad mood.

No, she looks less like she was in a bad mood and more like she's irritated.

"I may know the person who helped you, Shiki.

.... Man.

If it's really her, she'll probably be able to find the enemy before me."

She bites her lip vexedly.

"Wait a minute.

I didn't say that person was a woman though."

"No, there's no mistake.

That woman is the only agent given authority to hunt heretics alone and who uses Black Keys that combine the Cremation Rite and the Steel Shell Effect."

Her irritability is almost like hostility.

Even when she spoke about Nrvnqsr, her voice was never saturated with emo-

tion to this extent.

"... Arcueid.

Um, that person who helped me, is she a vampire....?"

"No, that's not it—that's right, I have yet to tell you about something else that's very important."



"I think I explained it before, but vampires like the one making his lair in this town turn humans into their minions and expand their territory.

At the same time, they try their utmost to conceal their existence.

Even though victims appear, they use various magical techniques to make things appear not out of the ordinary.

You know why?"

"... Well, it's because humans aren't stupid.

If they find out monsters like that exist where they live, they'd attack them.

Even though humans are weak, they do have things like police, so they might be able to do something."

"—Well, I guess that's true, but police are only a law-enforcement group against humans.

We don't consider them at all.

But, it's correct to say that vampires hide their presence for the sake of self-preservation."



"Shiki, there is a natural enemy of the vampires.

A group of something like professional killers that now have the power balance in their favor.

.... It's true for other transcendent species, but especially for vampires, it is fatal for them to reveal themselves.

Even if a vampire made a secret kingdom in a village somewhere in the mountains away from all civilization, this natural enemy would definitely notice if victims keep increasing.

Vampires exploit the humans in secret, for no reason other than self-preservation. The vampires hide their dead victim's bodies, not out of fear of human society finding out, but in fear of these natural enemies discovering them."

".... Huh?

The natural enemy of vampires?

Yet another group of monsters I don't know about."

For a normal guy like me, I just want all these unnatural things to stop appearing.



"What are you saying?

Their natural enemy is without a doubt you humans."

"—?"

Natural enemies, us?"

"Yeah.

Starting from a long time ago, humans used many kinds of magic, the occult, magical ceremonies to create an organization and started to eliminate primates other than humans.

The greatest of these is Christianity—the pride of the Vatican, the Exorcists.

The Catholic Church always viewed "nonhumans" as impurities, but vampires are considered the most dangerous."



"There are many religious groups in the world, but the Catholic Church looks at vampires with more hostility than the rest.

You know, it's almost an obsession.

They are so insane, I don't even want to mess with them."

Arcueid lets out a sigh.

"The one who helped you was a member of an elite organization that hunts heretics.

"This group, the Burial Agency, is part of the Church.

They use their own strength rather than law to deal with contradictions to Christianity.

These hidden exorcists are more like professional killers."

"....."

Priests that go around exterminating vampires, huh?

It's so fitting, I'm not really sure what to say.

"Then aren't they like us?

If this Burial Agency is a group whose purpose is to hunt vampires too, can't we search together?"

"—That won't work.

For them, it's enough that someone is a vampire.

To them, non-human primates are just "Evil".

It doesn't matter if they suck blood or not.

This exorcist may have even come here just to seal me rather than fight the vampire who lives in this city."

"....."

Things have gotten quite complicated.

Arcueid's enemy is sought after by both a vampire, and a group that hunts vampires.

".... What is this?

Then you're all by yourself?"

"Yes, that is the life of a vampire.

Didn't Nrvnqsr say so himself?

Even though vampires belong in the same species, their natures are so different that in the end, they are all alone."

Arcueid takes another bite of her hamburger.

She speaks of being all alone so casually.

"....."

Not feeling satisfied, I continue to listen with a sour expression.

setvar flgA + 1
turn to **162**

160

.... That's right.
I've been helping Arcueid look for this "enemy", but I don't even know what kind of guy he is yet.
"Then I'll ask.
Arcueid, your 'enemy', what kind of vampire is he?
You've been chasing him this long, so you know what he looks like, right?"



"Well—I—"
Arcueid looks away.
"What is it?
Didn't you just say you wouldn't hide anything from me?"



"Yes, but please listen without getting angry.
I only knew just recently that the vampire in this city was here.
I came here as soon as I knew the 'enemy' was in this city in this country, but I have never met him.
So to be honest, I don't know anything about the 'enemy' this time."
"You don't know?—Didn't you recognize Nrvnqsr on sight?"
"Nrvnqsr was famous, and he never changed his appearance.
While the "enemy" I'm pursuing isn't as strong of a vampire, his traits fall within a broad range and I have no idea of his specialties or features this time.
I'm really sorry Shiki—but I really can only tell you this much."
.... I know she's not lying.

I know, but still, I feel like she's hiding something.
 Like—
 "That's okay.
 You can't help it if you don't know.
 But—at least you know the name of this 'enemy', right?"

"N—name?"
 "Yeah, his name."
 She gets downcast, descending into silence.
 She cannot tell me his name for some reason, and she is troubled.
 Well, that's what I thought, anyway.



"—His name."
 Coldness.
 Rapidly, I feel a chill so great it seems like it could freeze the entire room.
 "Shiki, his name is..."
 Arcueid isn't having any trouble saying it.
 "... His name is Michael.
 Michael Roa Valdamjong.
 Called Uroboros, a Dead Apostle who used to be human."
 She speaks while still looking down.
 Pure enmity, as if she was spitting forth blood.

"Arcueid, you—"
 "——"
 Her shoulders are shaking.
 It looks like she's trying to hold herself back from going on a rampage.
 "... Sorry.
 I shouldn't have asked.
 It's okay, just forget about it."
 Arcueid shakes her head slightly.
 As if trying to say she could never forget.
 A period of silence ensues between us.
 "——I'm sorry."
 Arcueid says this, still looking down.

"—Mm."

I give a noncommittal response.

Both of us rise automatically from our seats and leave the restaurant.

turn to **162**

161

—Hmm.

I probably won't ever get a chance to talk with Arcueid in a fast food restaurant in the middle of the day like this again, so I'll ask not about vampires, but something more ordinary.

"Then I'll ask you.

Arcueid, could you tell me a little about your interests, your past, and your three sizes?"



"You want to know about that?

You sure ask strange things, Shiki."

"It's not strange.

I don't know anything about you, so it's natural to want to know about you."



"Ah, I feel the same way, perhaps—in that case, I don't mind."



"But, interests and a past.. I don't have any of those.
I've also never measured myself so I can't tell you my three sizes.
I never recorded my age or my height like you guys do."

"What do you mean?
You've never even wondered about yourself?"



"No, it's not like that, but it wasn't anything I ever had as a priority.
All I need is the ability to hunt Dead Apostles.... vampires."

"But still, there were things that happened before you came to this city, right?
I want to hear about those kinds of things."



"Before I came here.... hmm, that would probably be about eight years ago
then.
At that time, I wasn't in this country, but in some other country hunting a
vampire."

A vampire made its lair in a small, French countryside village that became a ghost town.

After two days, I found the 'enemy' and dealt with the female Dead Apostle controlling the town—"

As if remembering something horrible, Arcueid closes her eyes and cuts off.
 "Eight years ago?
 Then up until now, what were you doing, Arcueid?"



"What was I doing?
 I just went back to my castle and slept.
 My duty is to hunt Dead Apostles.
 I have no other meaning for existence, so until another Dead Apostle stands out, there's nothing to do but continue sleeping, right?"
 "Wha——"
 Continue sleeping?
 Does she mean literally?
 No, in the first place—
 "... Wait a minute.
 A castle, you mean that castle?
 I'd have trouble believing it, but don't tell me your place is like that Cinderella's castle..!?"



"Cinderella's castle?"
 Arcueid tilts her head like she doesn't get it.

"Uh—no, that's not a really appropriate expression.
Um, I mean, you're a, um.... princess?"



"Yes, it seems that way.
A long time ago I was told not to cut my hair and scolded to act more like royalty."
"_____"

.... I'm speechless.
Come to think of it, that Nrvnqsr guy always called her "princess."
But still—
"A royal princess?"
I steal a glance at Arcueid.
She's beautiful enough to take your breath away, but such a rambunctious person a princess?
She's not quite what comes to mind when I think of a princess.
"... Well, at least you are as selfish as a princess."
I give a deep sigh.



"Hey now!
I only said it because you asked, so don't respond like that!"
Her Royal Highness glares at me.

.... Arcueid doesn't seem to think of herself as a princess either, so I think it's just best to forget about this.

Still angry, Arcueid resumes eating her hamburger.
After she's finished and calmed down, we decide to go somewhere else.

turn to **162**

162

After eating, we do some window shopping on the main street and end up heading towards my school for some reason.

The sun starts to set.

Actually, it's because Arcueid suddenly exclaims 'Let's go to the school you're attending', and I couldn't tell her no.

"I've told you before, but we can't go inside.
I've skipped school today after all, and you're an outsider."



"I know.

I won't cause you any trouble, so just relax."

Arcueid peers at the school from the gate.



"Huh.....?"

Arcueid tilts her head.

"What's wrong?

Did something happen?"

I look at the school grounds from behind her.

"H... uh?"

This time I'm the one tilting my head.

There's no sign of anyone on the school grounds.

It's not even quite six o'clock yet.

At this time, there should be a lot of athletic clubs still practicing—



"Shiki, it seems there's no one here."
Hmm, I'm not sure why, but there really is no one here.
I don't see anyone in the building either.



"Shiki, there's no one inside you know."
Arcueid stares upward at me.
.... Somehow, I'm pretty sure I know what she's trying to say.
"No way."
I refuse her bluntly.
But, she doesn't listen to me.



"If there's no one there, then I can't get in trouble for going in.
We came at a great time, didn't we?"

"I told you, I don't want to."

"Wow, it's bigger than I thought inside.
The school building is also really huge, it seems well-suited for its task."
.... That's strange.
Arcueid's voice isn't coming from right near me, but from inside the school grounds.
"Shiki, this door won't open, so is it okay if I break it down?"
What blurring speed!
Arcueid is already right next to a glass door with her arm cocked to break it.
"Y... you, why won't you listen to what people are saying-!?"
With all my strength, I dash towards the glass to prevent it from being broken by a big idiot.



"Ah, you came over."
She gives a smile as if she was enjoying this.
"... Is going to my high school this much fun?
There's a lot of other better places I can take you, so let's just get out of here."



"I don't think so.
The place you always come to, it seems pretty fun."
Arcueid gives a mischievous laugh and smiles devilishly.
"Shiki, I want to go inside here.
Can you kill the lock on this?"
"K, kill it?"

You—"

"Wouldn't it be less messy than if I did it?"

The way you slice something apart doesn't leave any cross-sections that look like the action of a blade.

If someone finds it later on, it'll just look like it fell apart on its own.

C'mon, c'mon."

She points to the glass window by the hallway.

".... Sheesh, you're acting like a kid."

I half-lower my glasses.

.... Now then, a window with a "line" at the crescent lock would be..

".... Crap, there conveniently is one."

Taking my knife out of my pocket, I cut down the lock.

.... No, not cut down.

More like 'killing' it.

"All set.

Let's go in here."

Lifting open the glass window, we enter the school building.

..... *sigh*

I knew it.

Arcueid declares she wants me to guide her to my classroom first.



"Hey, Shiki.

What do you study here?"

"What?—Normal school stuff.

History, and a lot of deep studies into the culture of my country.

And to know about how things work, we study physics and math.

And we might go overseas one day, so we study English too."

"Oh really?"

Taking you into account, I thought you were studying things like the best way to slice up people or how to use various blades."

She says something pretty funny.

"Arcueid, you're saying that even though you already know what kind of place this is, right?"



"Ahaha, Good Job!"
She starts to clap.

.... It's always hard to understand what she's thinking, but today takes the cake.
Dragging me here, just what the heck is she planning?



"Shiki."
"What is it?
Suddenly looking serious like that.
You really did have a reason for bringing me here, didn't you?"
"No, there wasn't any reason.
I just wanted to hear about this kind of place."
".... This kind of place?
About school?"
"Yeah, you spend about half your day here, right?
Is there a use for all the knowledge and experiences you gain here?
Are you just wasting your time learning things unnecessary for you?"
"Huh—?"
Her question is the least understandable so far.



"For example, there's some skills you learn here that will never be used. Isn't that a waste?"
"... Well, maybe it is a waste. I learn math, but we only use the simplest of math in our daily lives. I learn about this country's history and English, but I don't know if I'll ever use it."



"Oh, so you realize it then. But.... then, why do you do such pointless things? Your time is so short, you don't have time to waste."
"No time to waste?"
Well, we don't have a specific goal, so we live pointlessly like this until we do."



"I can't believe it. Even though you know it's pointless, you make it something you live for."

.... Yeah, I really can't believe it."
Her voice is terribly hushed.
I don't know why, of course.
"... Something to live for, huh?
That may be true.
But are useless things that bad?"



"—Eh?"
"Isn't it alright to do extra things?
Even if I use what I learn only here, it still becomes a reminder of my days here.
Some years later, there'll be a time when I'll just think.
And I'll remember back and say 'yeah, that's how it was back then' and give a bitter smile.
So there's meaning in it."



".... I don't get it.
Those memories themselves are pointless, but you're saying there's fun in remembering them, Shiki?"
"Yeah, that's okay.
People are designed not to remember painful things.
But in the first place, the lives of humans are full of pointless things.
To think of it, isn't life itself pointless?
So I don't think about it too deeply.
I think it's best to just fool yourself and live like you don't realize there's no meaning to life."



"You know it's pointless yet you do it.
.... I really don't get it.
I can't do anything pointless.
Even now, I haven't done anything that I didn't need to do."
"What are you saying?
Wasn't this whole day full of pointlessness?
Isn't your purpose hunting vampires?
Then there's really no need for you to go walking around with me."



".... That's true.
I don't understand that either.
I wanted to ask you because you don't seem to do anything but pointless things,
but now I'm totally confused."
—Hey.
"Yes, yes.
I'm sorry, I'm only a completely pointless person."



"..... Ah—yeah."



"I'm sorry.

I understand what you're trying to say, Shiki.

Humans are a collective, so their worth isn't determined by the individual but by the whole group.

Even if an individual is mistaken, if the group is correct then it is forgiven.

But as for us, we are solitary creatures so we can't allow ourselves to be mistaken.

We can't allow our wills to be influenced by anyone else.

So—that's why I was always taught never to do extra things."

.... Quietly.

She talks as if she was in a confessional.



"—But now, I don't know anymore.

For just a brief time.. really, only seven days.
.... I started to wonder if I really was right?
Because it was so fun.
Doing this, living like this, I never thought until now how happy it could make me."
"Ar.... cueid?"



"Maybe I.. broke down.
I've never been awake for this long until now—Maybe I'm already fast asleep dreaming about all this."
.... With empty eyes, Arcueid whispers these words.
"Wha—"
I can't speak.
Her image flutters like a projected hologram.
".... Broken?
What do you mean?
You look pretty normal to me."
"Maybe on the outside, but I'm different on the inside.
.... Happiness and pain, all of these extra feelings are becoming greater.
I can't ignore things that I used to be able to in the past.
So I'm broken, right?"



And also, I'm not normal.
I'm different from you, Shiki.
I'm a vampire."

Saying that, she seems to laugh.
Really faintly, as if hiding in the red of the setting sun.
"——Tha-"
That's.. strange.
It's just.. weird.
The dusk classroom.
Bathed in the red sun, a vulnerable looking girl.
This scene, it's..
"That's—not like you at all."
Yeah, it's not like her at all.
You're a vampire—so don't look so vulnerable, like you were some ordinary girl.
"Things you can't ignore, having to do pointless things, if it's not causing trouble to anyone— isn't it alright just to let it all go?
I said not to think about yourself too seriously.
I don't know what you're thinking about, but I don't see a problem.
You're not—causing trouble to anyone."



"Really?
But you always yell at me, is that different?"
"—I'm an exception.
I have the sin of killing you, so dealing with you is just karma.
It's okay, I'm doing it because I want to.
So please don't think about the trouble you're causing me."



"....."

Arcueid's expression clouds over.

.... If she makes that kind of a face, it's a little troubling.

She looks so weak, I want to embrace her.

"... Please Arcueid, get it straight now.

It's true that you're selfish, you don't listen to other people, and you're full of problems.

But, other than that, you're pretty normal.

You're not broken, you're just like a normal girl.

—So smile.

If you keep making that expression, it'll make me feel bad."



"... That's pretty mean.

Am I really that selfish?"

Arcueid looks at me suddenly as if studying my expression.

I'm taken aback a little.

It seems this princess didn't realize she was selfish.

"—Hahahahaha!

What are you saying?

If you take every bit of selfishness out of you, there'd be nothing left but bones!
Just bones!"

What I'm saying doesn't quite make sense, but it seemed very funny.

—Because even in my wildest dreams, I never imagined I would see Arcueid embarrassed over herself.



".....!!!"

Oh, she got mad.

"Shiki you jerk!"

I was seriously discussing matters and you act so heartlessly!!"

"Like I said, didn't I say I was nice to everyone but you?"

So being mean to you now isn't anything new."

Stifling my laughter, I look back at her.

The cloud hanging over her head has dispersed and she has a genuine expression on her face, which is much more like her.

"But you know, I guess it's better for you to be lively.

I'm a little relieved."



"Eh...?"

Wh, why are you relieved?

Aren't you supposed to be heartless towards me?"

"Ah—yeah, that's right."

I tilt my head questioningly.

.... That's strange, I don't even know why myself.

.... Before, I just didn't want to see her looking depressed, and I wanted to protect her—

"....."

That's ridiculous.

Without a doubt, she is pretty, and I know she's a good person.

Also, it isn't boring to be with her.
.... But no way can such a ridiculous thing be happening.
Get a hold of yourself, Shiki.
She's a vampire.



"That's pretty vague.
Are you saying you don't understand yourself?"
"... Be quiet, it's alright if I don't understand myself.
I've always been aware of how strange I am from the beginning.
That's why my memories are always vague."



"Oh, I see.
That's why you're always spaced out, Shiki."
Arcueid nods to herself as if deeply understanding the matter.

"....."

Having her take my excuse so seriously makes me wonder if maybe it really is true.

"—Well then."

We can't stay in this classroom forever.

We should hurry up and leave before we're found by teachers left in school.

"Come on, let's head out.

There's nothing else to do here, right?"



"Yeah, nothing else, but.... Shiki?"
I throw her a questioning glance.
She seems to be pondering her words, and then asks me a strange question.
"Shiki, do you enjoy things?"
"... Are you sick today or something?"



"Don't make fun of me.
I know a little bit about your body.
Even you know it, right?
That it isn't strange for you to die at any moment."
"Wha——"
—Thump.
The scar on my chest almost feels like it's squirming.
"You—well, humans die eventually."



"But in your case, death will come quicker than for other people."
 Her eyes are serious.
 But, everyone has lines of death on them, so there are many places where they can die easily.
 It's not like—I'm the only one who's very close to death.



"Answer me.
 Do you ever have moments where you enjoy yourself even though you have such an unstable hold on life?"
 "—You really are stupid.
 There's no way I can know that."

.... But, there's one thing clear to me.
 I almost died eight years ago, and for a short while,
 probably when I was getting surgery at the hospital, I felt like I was in a dark place.
 Maybe it was a dream.
 Just, at that time, I truly felt like I died, like that place was truly "death".
 I was extremely happy after my miraculous recovery.
 Then, I met Sensei and was able to return to a normal life.
 I never realized it until I died once.
 But the world is so peaceful and such a fun place to be.
 They say fun things cannot be found, but I think for humans, just living is fun.
 That's why—I can continue living like this even knowing that it's all pointless.
 That's why.
 If someone asks me if I'm enjoying life, unless it's something really unforgivable,
 I can't help but answer that I am.
 No matter how much despair it is, I'm satisfied with just existing.
 That's something more certain than the nothingness of death.
 No one had to teach me that, but I still know that.
 Just being allowed to be here really is a wonderful thing—

"—It's just.. isn't living enjoyable enough?
 Everything up until now was fun, so I can feel like living.
 Well, I guess this is how I can answer your question."

I can't really say anything too profound.
I've only been alive for seventeen years.



"I see, so that is how your heart is.
.... Just doing that is fun enough?
That's true, even though you know it's something extra, you can't give it up
because you enjoy it.



.... I was scared of that and asked, but perhaps that might be a good answer."
"—What, are you still thinking about that thing from before?"



"Yes, but for now the hard feelings have faded.
I can't stray off course until this vampire is defeated.
Until then, we will fight together."

"Right?" She says, smiling.
 "—"
 Until this vampire is defeated, huh?
 "... That's right.
 That was the relationship between us."
 Because today was just so normal,
 I completely forgot about that most important fundamental fact.
 "—Hey, Arcueid."
 Just, without thinking..
 "When this is all over—when we're done defeating this vampire.. Before we
 part, can't we do something like this just once more?"
 Those words really come out of my mouth naturally.



"Eh—?
 What do you mean?"
 "I'm saying after your task is finished, let's do these pointless things one more
 time.
 In the end, we're here together because we agreed to help each other.
 So—I really was wondering, what would happen if we were to meet again with-
 out any responsibilities.. if we just met for no particular reason."

—That's not true.
 Just as friends, and not thinking about her being a vampire at all.
 I just thought it would make Arcueid happy if we created some normal memo-
 ries like that.
 "—If you're too busy, then it's okay.
 I only thought of it just now, anyway."
 But that's really the opposite of how I feel.
 After her eyes widen in surprise, she nods.



"Okay—!"

When everything's over, let's come here again, Shiki!
It won't have any meaning, but I'm sure it will be really, really fun!"
In the classroom bathed by the sunset,
Arcueid smiles and makes a promise with me.

.... In the end, when we go outside, the sun has already set.
It's just past seven-thirty.
A little early, but since we don't have anything else to do, we should start
searching for the vampire.
"Well then, shall we begin, Arcueid?"
I turn around to face Arcueid who was walking behind me.



"What, already?
Didn't the sun just set?"
"Yeah, but it wouldn't hurt to start earlier.
We've played around long enough today, so we should be serious at night, right?
Arcueid, let's stick to our decisions."



"Shiki, you're strangely serious.
If you're this serious, then why did you break our promise yesterday?"
"Hey, I couldn't help that; I couldn't even move.
I really did intend to go before."
Yeah, if Akiha didn't stop me, I probably would've gone ahead to the park in my condition.
"Hmmm, I see.
Then, let's do that."
With a slightly empty expression, Arcueid says something I don't understand.
"Do what?"
"You intended to go to the park, right Shiki?
We still have time, so if you couldn't get it done yesterday, then isn't it okay if we do it now?"

She starts to run lightly.
She really seems to be serious about going to the park.
"-Hey, wait.
Hey....!"
I run with all my strength so I don't lose sight of her.



"See, even though you were complaining, you still kept up, Shiki.
Ahaha "
Arcueid laughs.
".... Idiot.. if I.. left you alone.. you'd.. bother.. someone else.."

I desperately try to catch my breath after running the whole way.



"I knew there would be a lot of people here now.
It's a bit unsettling since I can feel their presence everywhere."
".... Like I said, why.. won't you.. ever.. listen.. to what I.. have to say..?"



"Hm?
I hear your voice all the time."
".... Oh.
Then.. you hear me.. but you just ignore me, that's.. worse.."



"I don't ignore you.
If I answer whenever you scold me, you'd just call me an idiot so I stay quiet."
".... Oh.
Then maybe.. I have a problem.. too?"

I still try to catch my breath.

From my school to this park is roughly six kilometers.
 Even if it was a little jog, going that far is too much for a heart like mine.
 It's not that she was running all that quickly.
 Actually, she seemed to be running slowly.
 But probably because of the effects of my anemia, I don't feel too well.



"Are you okay Shiki?
 You don't have to force yourself.
 Shouldn't you rest on that bench?"
 "... I'll do that.
 Once I'm rested up, we'll go to the city again, Arcueid."



"Sheesh.
 I'm happy you're motivated, but it's still too early.
 Nrvnqsr was like that too, but vampires don't move around unless it's their
 time.
 Since they won't move around until they sense deep night, it's okay to kill a
 little time here."
 "—"

If that's how it was, then she could've told me earlier.

—Sitting on the bench, I stare at the clock aimlessly.
 It's just past nine o'clock.

The people all around have gone away and the night deepens quickly.
For some reason Arcueid doesn't sit down, but paces back and forth as if she was bored.

if flgA == 0

turn to **163**

turn to **164**

163

Time is the only thing which passes by.

A quiet night.

It's completely different from two nights ago and there isn't a single cloud in the sky.

The bright, pure moonlight illuminates the park and Arcueid.

"... Moonlight..."

If it was as bright as this back then, maybe I could have seen the bandaged man's face... wait a minute..

"Ah——!"

I jump up from the bench.



"Shiki!?"

What's wrong, did you see The Dead?"

Arcueid rushes towards me.

"No, that's not it—I forgot something really important."

It really was careless of me.

I was attacked yet I completely forgot about it until now.

"Arcueid,

I was attacked two nights ago by a strange person."



"Eh?"

A strange person?"

What kind?"

"Well, that is—"

I calm down and I describe as clearly as I can what happened last night.

".... Yeah, that's how it was——"

Finishing my explanation, I read Arcueid's expression.



From when I started until now, her eyes remained sharp without any gentleness.

"So what is it Arcueid?"

That bandaged man, and that person wearing those robes like some priest, are they enemies of yours?"

".... Yes.

Both of them are 'enemies'.

I don't know just who or what that bandaged man is, but that woman wearing those Catholic robes, I have an idea about."

She narrows her eyes as if she was in a bad mood.

No, she looks less like she was in a bad mood and more like she's irritated.

"I may know the person who helped you, Shiki.

.... Man.

If it's really her, she'll probably be able to find the enemy before me."

She bites her lip vexedly.

"Wait a minute.

I didn't say that person was a woman though."



"No, there's no mistake.

That woman is the only agent given authority to hunt heretics alone and who uses Black Keys that combine the Cremation Rite and the Steel Shell Effect."

Her irritability is almost like hostility.

Even when she spoke about Nrvnqsr, her voice was never saturated with emotion to this extent.

"... Arcueid.

Um, that person who helped me, is she a vampire...?"



"No, that's not it—that's right, I have yet to tell you about something else that's very important."



"I think I explained it before, but vampires like the one making his lair in this town turn humans into their minions and expand their territory.

At the same time, they try their utmost to conceal their existence.

Even though victims appear, they use various magical techniques to make things appear not out of the ordinary.

You know why?"

"... Well, it's because humans aren't stupid.

If they find out monsters like that exist where they live, they'd attack them.

Even though humans are weak, they do have things like police, so they might be able to do something."

"—Well, I guess that's true, but police are only a law-enforcement group against humans.

We don't consider them at all.

But, it's correct to say that vampires hide their presence for the sake of self-preservation."

"Shiki, there is a natural enemy of the vampires.

A group of something like professional killers that now have the power balance in their favor.

.... It's true for other transcendent species, but especially for vampires, it is fatal for them to reveal themselves.

Even if a vampire made a secret kingdom in a village somewhere in the mountains away from all civilization, this natural enemy would definitely notice if victims keep increasing.

Vampires exploit the humans in secret, for no reason other than self-preservation. The vampires hide their dead victim's bodies, not out of fear of human society finding out, but in fear of these natural enemies discovering them."

".... Huh?

The natural enemy of vampires?

Yet another group of monsters I don't know about."

For a normal guy like me, I just want all these unnatural things to stop appearing.



"What are you saying?

Their natural enemy is without a doubt you humans."

"—?"

Natural enemies, us?"



"Yeah.

Starting from a long time ago, humans used many kinds of magic, the occult, magical ceremonies to create an organization and started to eliminate primates other than humans.

The greatest of these is Christianity—the pride of the Vatican, the Exorcists. The Catholic Church always viewed "nonhumans" as impurities, but vampires are considered the most dangerous."

"There are many religious groups in the world, but the Catholic Church looks at vampires with more hostility than the rest.

You know, it's almost an obsession.

They are so insane, I don't even want to mess with them."

Arcueid lets out a sigh.



"The one who helped you was a member of an elite organization that hunts heretics.

This group, the Burial Agency, is part of the Church.

They use their own strength rather than law to deal with contradictions to Christianity.

These hidden exorcists are more like professional killers."

"....."

Priests that go around exterminating vampires, huh?

It's so fitting, I'm not really sure what to say.

"Then aren't they like us?

If this Burial Agency is a group whose purpose is to hunt vampires too, can't we search together?"



"—That won't work.
For them, it's enough that someone is a vampire.
To them, non-human primates are just "Evil".
It doesn't matter if they suck blood or not.
This exorcist may have even just came here to seal me rather than fight the
vampire who lives in this city."

Sounding irritated, Arcueid starts to pace back and forth again.
"....."
Things have gotten quite complicated.
Arcueid's enemy is sought after by both a vampire, and a group that hunts
vampires.
"... What is this?
Then doesn't that mean she's all by herself?"
Thinking aloud, I watch Arcueid as she paces back and forth.
Under the white moonlight,
Arcueid appears to be dancing a solitary waltz.

turn to **164**

164

The hand of the clock ticks by.
It's been two hours since we came here.
"—Pheh."
I've started to settle down and there's nobody around now.
The night starts to deepen.
"Arcueid, is it alright now?"



"Yeah, it's alright."
She agrees with me, but she doesn't really seem enthused yet.
"You've been acting strange since before, Arcueid.
Is there something wrong?"
"—Not really.
I was just concerned about that bandaged man you told me about."
Arcueid sighs as she ponders to herself.



"Oh, that's right.
Shiki, last night someone hit on me here."
"—Huh?"



"I'm saying, some guy started to talk to me here."

".... No, I heard you."

I thought you said you were thinking about that bandaged man though."



"I was, that's why I remembered."

Just like when you were attacked, someone started to talk to me."

".... I see."

Well, that's good."

Just looking from the outside, you are a beautiful person so if you were waiting around by yourself, it is entirely natural for a guy to talk to you."

I give a serious response."

Sometimes, I'm a little too honest."



"You think so?"

I thought it was an enemy at first, but I remembered you saying something

before about how I always stand out.
So after studying him briefly, I saw he was just a human."
"... Wait a minute.
Don't tell me you did something to the guy trying to hit on you?"



"No, I didn't do anything.
I just talked with him a little bit and made him forget about it.
.... But if I didn't remember what you said, I might have."
"I see.
Good job, Arcueid.
I guess even you can make distinctions."



"Of course.
It would have to take someone like you to make me angry."
She seems to say this with some amusement.
.... Well, it's natural for someone to get mad if they were killed.

I sigh as I glance around the park.
.... A month ago.
If those serial murders never started occurring, there would still be young couples around and the figures of students hanging out.
But now, the only ones talking here are me and Arcueid.
I calmly think about my current situation.
Since when did Tohno Shiki step off onto the path of such a world—?



"Ah.
 Hey, see."
 Arcueid suddenly calls out to me.
 "What, did something happen?"



"Yeah.
 See?
 Look at the clock.
 It's time."
 She points to the park's clock while giving a full smile.
 Looking—it's ten o'clock now.

The promised time.
 The promise backed only by words, to meet here at ten o'clock at night.
 Last night.
 The promised time I couldn't keep.
 "....."
 My words get stuck in my throat.
 Why does such a trivial thing suddenly cause my chest to tighten?
 Why.. does such a trivial thing make her so happy?
 I really don't understand.
 I spent all day with her today.
 But it never felt like she was really a vampire.
 ".... Let me ask you something."
 —Stop it, Shiki.



"Yeah, what is it?"
"... Are you.."
—Don't ask her that.



"Um, am I what?"
"... Really a vampire?"
—What kind of answer are you hoping for?



"A vampire?—what's with that all of a sudden, Shiki?"
"It's not all of a sudden.
I was just thinking."
I look away.



"Huh?
I can't tell if you're really stubborn or not.
I don't really mind, but that's pretty insulting.
Tell me why you're asking that."

There's no reason.
But—at the same time, there's no real proof she's a vampire either.
So—
"... Well, you said you don't even like to see blood.
What kind of vampire is that?
You even said you weren't a full vampire, but a vampire that hasn't sucked
blood isn't a vampire, is it?"
—That's not it.
Isn't it just that Tohno Shiki, deep inside, wishes she wasn't a vampire?



"Shiki.
Stand up."
Arcueid approaches the park bench.
I stand up.
"—"
Our eyes meet.
We're about two meters apart.
Arcueid gives a huge sigh, and suddenly grins.



"I guess you're right.
 I even thought about it myself.
 I wondered, is Arcueid Brunestud really a vampire?
 Ahaha," she laughs.
 That's a relief.
 I thought this question would insult her—but thankfully, she seems to have
 taken it as a joke.
 "—Yeah.
 You really don't look like a vampire at all."
 "Ahaha," Arcueid laughs again.
 "Then, shall we try?"
 She says this, still smiling.
 "Try—eh?"



"Shall we see if I can really drink blood?
 If I could, can you give me a prize, Shiki?"
 "Wha—"
 With that smile still on her face, she takes a step closer.

Tap, tap.
 Her footsteps echo in the air.
 I know she's joking.
 Still—I can't move, at all.
 "Wa—"
 -it.

But I can't even finish.
It's not her power—but me who stops.
Closer.
One step.
Another step.
Looking down, bit by bit.
I—not even able to lift a single finger, am transfixed by her lips—

"Shiki, you said I wasn't a full vampire, but...."
A sweet voice that seems to echo in the back of my head.
Another step, and the footsteps stop.
—You know, drinking blood is very easy.
I hear that voice right by my ear.

Her body weight presses up against me.
"——"
My throat freezes and I can't even speak.
I can only feel her breath on my neck.
—It's hot like a burning fire.
"Ar——"
I stop calling her name.
With my own will, I stop.
Because I know if I call out her name, she'll pull away.
"——"

Her breath is so close.
Her white fingers on my shoulders are trembling.
—She's, scared.
My mind is blank and I'm not scared at all.
But, Arcueid is the only one shaking.
I can't see her face.
Just the swirling of her breath around my neck, and the feel of her trembling
body against mine.
It changes from a weak breeze to heavy breathing.
"Ar—cueid?"
"It was——supposed to be a joke."
Her voice shakes.
The fingers on my shoulder cease their trembling.
Instead—they dig into my shoulders like a bird's talons.
"Gah——!"
A pained gasp escapes me.
But her claws do not let up.
They sink in as if not allowing me to escape.
"Arc—I'm sorry, I guess I joked around too much.
I'm sorry—so can you, let go?"
"Shi——ki."
Her fingers don't move.

—This isn't good.
 My mind screams in warning and I gather up all my strength.
 My arms move to push her away.
 Before that,
 Pain shoots through my shoulders.
 ".....!!!"
 My arms can't move at all.
 Her vice-like grip on my shoulders cause my arms to go numb.
 "—, —, —"
 I can feel her breath grow even wilder against my neck.
 Maddening.
 Her teeth almost touch my neck.

"N—No....!"
 After the grip increases one more time from her white fingers,
 Arcueid flies back, practically screaming.

Panting fills the air.
 Hard breathing echoes through the park.
 My ragged breathing—Arcueid's trembling breaths.
 "Shi—ki."
 Her entire body shaking, she gasps as if to suck in the entire atmosphere as she
 stares in disbelief at her two hands.
 Her white fingertips are now dripping with my blood.
 The redness flows from her fingers to her palms, and then along her arms.
 "Ah—"
 She looks at it, and seems to be on the verge of collapse.
 "... Arcueid, just now, was—"
 I call out to her.
 Looking up from the blood on her hands, she meets my gaze.



"Shi—ki?"
 "... Yeah, I'm here.
 Just now, was—a joke, but it seems like it went a little far."
 I say that, wanting to let this end just as a joke.

But I guess it didn't work out.

"Shiki—I, just—"

Her eyes lose sanity.

"Got—very thirsty—"

Her convulsions become deeper, and even now—she seems like she'll crumble to the ground.

"Please—go home, Shiki."

"Hey, Arcueid...!?"

With that, she starts to run.

She disappears fast.

Not like she ran before, where she was taking me into account.

With a speed I couldn't even match if I sprinted with all my strength, she vanishes into the night towards the city.

"—Wha.."

She thinks I can just go back after seeing her like that?

"That idiot—where is she going when she's in that much pain...!?"

I can't just go back home.

Even though I don't know where to find her, I start to run after her into town.

—I don't see her anywhere.

The city is too big, and it's nearly impossible for a single person to track her down when she leaves no trace behind.

I'd be much more likely to find her if I predict where she's going to go rather than blindly searching.

Then—

Go to Arcueid's apartment.

turn to **165**

Look in the commercial district.

turn to **166**

The school, perhaps?

turn to **412**

165

—I'll go to Arcueid's apartment.
 I don't know what's behind it all, but she was breathing so painfully.
 Rather than trying to hunt The Dead, she might have just gone back to her room.

.... I press the doorbell.
 It doesn't seem like anyone's coming out.
 "—Shit, she hasn't come back?"
 No matter how many times I push the button, her door doesn't open.
 "....."
 Did she not come back, or is she just not coming out?
 —After hesitating, I decide to go inside.
 It'd be a simple thing to cut the "lines" on the door.
 But, I should just check the knob first.
 ".... Huh?"
 It's not locked.
 The door opens simply with a turn.

".... Arcueid, are you here?"
 No response.
 Did she not lock it in the first place?
 There's no one around.
 "Where does she think she's going in that condition....!?"
 I slam my fist against the wall.
 ".... Grr."
 what am I doing?
 If I have time to let it out on the wall, I have to go out and look for her—

.... I can't find her.
 Come to think of it, if she really intends not to be found, there's no chance of me finding her at all.
 ".... She said we'd meet again tomorrow."
 All I can do in this situation is to trust her and wait for tomorrow night.
 "....."
 With a great uneasiness in my chest, I return to the mansion.

turn to **419**

166

—I'll search the shopping district.
Even though she was in so much pain, she's not the kind of person to rest because of it.
She told me to go back.
In other words, she was saying she won't be going back.
I think she plans on finding the vampire by herself.
Then—I'll go to the shopping district and find the vampire or The Dead before she does.
Arcueid can't find them, but I can spot The Dead if I take off my glasses.
"—Alright."
Taking off my glasses and grimacing from the slight headache, I run to the shopping district.

"Ugh—"
The pain races through my forehead.
.... I'm not particularly concentrating on looking for "lines", but it seems running through town without my glasses on is a huge burden on my brain.
"Damn it—still, I'm not finding anything."
.... All the people walking through the shopping district have normal "lines" on them.
I don't see anyone painted with the disjointed scribbles I saw before.
".... Ow"
I rub my temples with my fingers.
As long as I have my glasses off, this headache will only get worse.
But still—I can't give up this easily.
Taking a deep breath, I start to run through the shopping district once more.

I start to pant from exertion.
The exhaustion from running coupled with the pain in my head makes me nauseous.
No matter how many times I run around, I can't find any Dead or anything out of the ordinary.
Lifting up my hand to my forehead, I feel a feverish heat.
It really does feel like I have a high fever.
".... Damn it, I'm not done yet—"
I tell myself this as I start to run once more.
—And then.

"..... Ah."
Not here, but somewhere farther away.
In a narrow alley between two buildings, I can see something like sparks flying in the air.
No, more accurately,
it feels like the "points" of death are shooting forth and disappearing.

"—That's.."
.... There's no mistake.
It's exactly the same as when Arcueid defeated The Dead before.
She—in that condition, is fighting by herself....!
"—Found her....!"
Forgetting my pain and weariness, I dash towards the alley.

The entrance to the alley.
I run to the narrow path between the buildings.
"Death" is flying through the air and fading away.
.... How many is she fighting?
There's an enormous amount of it.
"—Gh."
I can hardly bear it.
As I run to the alley, my spine groans in protest.
"Ha—agh."
As if a saw was slowly but surely slicing through my spine,
a pain works its way from inside me.
My instincts scream at me.
They say where I'm going is too dangerous, and I have to go back.
"Shut—up."
But, that goes without saying.
The amount of death there isn't normal.
Inside.
I know something terrible is happening inside this alley.
But I can't turn back now.
I can't leave Arcueid alone.
If—I run away here, she might go off and die.
I can't shake off that feeling, and I enter the alley filled with death.

"Wha—"

My mind freezes.
What I see is surreal.
Scattered all across the ground are the figures of numerous people.
Faceless, limbless, their stomachs sliced open, the corpses bathed entirely in crimson.
On the wall, the ground, even on the moon overhead.
Everything here is just.. red.
A dull, sickening sound.
The last one, the last human shape full of lines expires from her hands.
With a single hand.
She smashes the head of The Dead into the wall, squishing it like a tomato.
As if not satisfied, she tears the headless body vertically in half and smashes it onto the ground.

"Ar—cueid."

The world is only filled with red and the moonlight.
In the center of it all stands Arcueid.
She doesn't notice I am here.
She only looks up at the moon—in a trance and breathing heavily.
"____"
I can't speak.
The pain inside me reaches a feverish pitch.
It seems like the saw has cut all the way through.
—Creak Creak.
My entire mind is screaming.
I shouldn't be here.
I don't want to die, it shouts.
Then,
Arcueid's eyes suddenly shift.



Her eyes aren't her usual crimson, but a golden flare.
It's not that our eyes have met.
It's just that I looked at those "eyes".
Th, ump.
My blood races through my entire body and my mind is jolted.
—At first, a sense of overwhelming crisis.
I shouldn't be here.
I shouldn't be in front of that thing.
IT WILL KILL YOU.
YOU CAN'T STAND UP TO IT.
That "creature" is on an entirely different level.
Not a matter of higher or lower, but something beyond evaluation.
Before that thing—just being there means death.
THU, MP.
My entire body throbs.
At first, it was fear.
Then, a desire to kill.
Because, that thing shouldn't exist.
So kill it.

Hurry up and kill it.
 Kill it here.
 Kill it now.
 In the name of this blood,
 take that thing here,
 and destroy it—
 My heart pounds furiously.
 I know there's no way I can face it, but my entire body screams for me to kill
 it.
 What a contradiction—Is it telling me to kill it even though I know it's going
 to kill me?
 Is it telling me I don't want to be killed, so kill instead?
 "Gah—, ah."
 No.
 I'm not.. here.
 Those eyes—I must not look at those golden eyes.
 I know this, but I can't escape her eyes.
 Thump.
 Thump.
 My blood boils..
 The stimulating throb of my blood.
 But, there's something else that tries to burst through my consciousness.



"Gh—ah, ghaa—"
 Why do I want to kill?
 Are you going to kill before being killed because you don't want to die?
 No, that's not a reason.
 There's no need for a reason to kill.
 Be honest, Tohno Shiki.
 Already, from a long time ago—you wanted to take this woman and..
 "Shut—up."
 No, your reason and conscience should shut up.
 That's how it should be.
 I just, want her.

I want Arcueid.
Remember.
Remember the feeling from that time.
You knew from the first time you saw her.
Since that time you killed that creature with your hands and lost your virginity
as a killer——!

"Ah——Ah."

Yes.
I want all of it.
Her heart, her body,
Her tears, her saliva,
Her blood, her flesh, sin and punishment, desire and impatience——
"HA——agh....!"
My breathing is out of control.
I can't get a grip on my mind.
Her eyes are consuming me.
Those swaying, golden eyes.
That is,
something that cannot be killed no matter how much I kill..



"—Shiki!?"

Arcueid realizes I'm here.
As soon as she sees I am fixated to her eyes, she changes them to their crimson
color.
But, by now,
it's far too late.

I bring out my knife and push Arcueid down.
Her powerless body is easy to push.
I straddle her.
One arm at her neck, the other arm holding my knife overhead.
All that's left,
is to strike between her breasts.
"Calm down——!"

This isn't what you want, Shiki....!"
I can hear her voice.
The core of my brain starts to overheat.
"Shut up——!"
My arm tightens around her neck.
She painfully lifts her chin.
.... I can't believe it.
With all of her strength, she can't even free this one arm right now.
"Shi—ki."
Breathing painfully, Arcueid coughs out my name.
Thump.
My heart beats hard in my chest.

I pant.
And pant.
My breathing is out of control.
My vision is blurry and indistinct.
This fire inside of me—I have to release it right away.

Panting.
I slowly start to move.
I move my hips down her stomach.
Spreading her legs, I press myself between them.

"Wha.."
She looks at me uncertainly.
That look makes my head pound.
Panting.
And panting.
Swelling.
My shaft swells so fast it's almost painful.
I have to violate her right now or I'll go crazy.
Her vermillion-shaded cheeks.
Her soft neck.
And below me, her unparalleled body.
My panting fills the air.
I can feel her heartbeat.
Panting, panting, panting.
Her golden eyes seem to suck away my soul.
I release her neck.
And instead touch her breasts.
Her arms.
Her legs.
My fingers trace the white skin under her clothes, soaking up the coolness of her body.
"No——this, this isn't like you, Shiki....!"

Her burning voice.
Her inviting red eyes.
Seeing these things, my mind completely shatters.

"N.....!"

She stifles her cries as if embarrassed.
Frantically, she tries to push me back with both hands.
Pushing them away, I press her onto the ground.
Would it be better if I had some nails?
With both arms pushed back and her figure spread open like a cross, Arcueid looks at me with naked hate in her eyes.

"——Kk."

Stretched out like this, she looks even more beautiful.
Like this, I can't use my arms either.
If I let go, she'll rip my throat open for sure.
This tension.
This balance that makes us seem like we're killing each other rather than me violating her increases the beast-like lust in me.

"—Stop, it—stop, or you'll regret it—"

I won't let her finish.

Since my mouth is free, I use that to undress her.
Breathing wildly, I violently tear the clothes from her body.
"... Nn, Shiki, get ahold of your—!"
She squirms, still trying to resist as she trembles in my grasp.
—Pan.. ting.

My breath blows across her stomach.

"Ah——n....!"

Is she that sensitive?

Her whole body reacts.

.... I feel excited.

As I strip off her clothes, my tongue dances teasingly along her white skin.

"Shiki, No——!"

She struggles harder, but I'm stronger than her right now.

I won't let her resist.

I continue removing her clothes.

In the middle of it, her bra gets stuck on her chest, but I simply tear it off.

Her breasts move as I do so.

Her well-shaped globes are bared for me to see.

I bite down on one of them.

"Naha——!"

She lets out a gasp.

Her entire body arches like a bow.

I don't care.

I run my tongue along the flesh between my teeth, relishing the taste.

"Shi... ki....., stop....!"

Her voice becomes a bit hotter.

Her pink nipples harden.
 Just like the hardening of a man, her nipples seem to stiffen regardless of what she's thinking.
 "N——!"
 She must be embarrassed about it, as she stifles her voice.
 "Shiki—if you do this, afterwards—"
 Ignoring her voice, I continue to lick her gorgeous breasts.
 "N.... ah—!"
 Her face starts to contort.
 Her breast is firm.
 The more I push my face into it, the more it pushes back against me.
 Her white breasts turn a light shade of red.
 I keep sucking.
 "... Ah.... oh.... ah, n—"
 Her heated voice.
 Her body glistening with sweat.
 Her shaking head, her pained gasps.
 My tongue plays along her soft breasts.
 There's no reason for it.
 All that's left inside of me is a desire to lick, moisten, and play with her.
 I bury my face in her chest.
 Her white mounds glisten with my saliva.
 "... Ha.... sto, p.... I.... won't ever.... forgive.. you....!"
 It sounds like she's gritting her teeth.
 I'm annoyed that her voice is still so reasonable.
 I bite down on her nipples.
 "N, gah—!!"
 Her entire body arches harder than before.
 As if pushing her breasts up, she arches back.
 It's not my intent to give her diligent, caring foreplay.
 I just move my face.
 "S, stop.... Shiki, pl.. ease—"
 I move my tongue to the space in between her breasts.
 "If you, touch me there, I'll start.. to—"
 As if to leave a mark that won't go away, I suck on her skin.
 "Hwaa—!"
 Her arms start to flail.
 Holding them down, my tongue continues to crawl along her body.
 From her chest to her collarbone.
 From there to her neck.
 "No.... Shiki.. you.. don't.. even.. like.. me....!"
 I don't acknowledge her.
 I can't even hear her.
 Her glistening body destroys any reason I have left.
 Her beautiful body looks even better covered with sweat.
 —Thump.

My blood is surging painfully.
I want to take her right now.
My panting echoes through the alley.
There's no need to hold back.
If I want to do it, I'll just do it.
I move my mouth away from her neck and bring it down towards her lower half.
".....!!!"
Arcueid struggles harder than ever.
Like this, she could free herself from my arms.
But before that,
I move lower, traveling quickly past her navel.
Into the midst of her golden curls,
my tongue crawls down to her pink, fleshy creases.
I suck lightly on the protruding nub in between those slick walls.
"Ah—N, no—!"
Arcueid arches her back.
I bite down on the most sensitive spot of the female anatomy.
This sensation of pleasure is far different from when I was licking her whole
body.
Looking at her,
I see sticky fluid building up inside of her.
The smell of warm juices.
I don't care if it's enough lubrication for her.
I'm not thinking at all about her pleasure.
I just—have to have her body.
"—Shi.. ki."
Her voice is weak, as if realizing what's coming next.
Has she given up?
She looks at me with dampened eyes.
"—"
Her moist.. eyes.
Does that mean..
she's crying?

"Ghaa.....!"
My head is splitting with pain.
My instincts tell me to go on.
That if I stop now I'll die.
My heart beats wildly—Telling me that if I don't do it now, she'll kill me later.

"—"
She's crying.
Why—is she crying?
If it was me, I would never let her cry.

My headache continues.

Screaming at me to go on.
—It's strange to be distracted.
There's only one thing that needs to be done.
I—

I can't do something she doesn't want.

turn to **167**

I just want her, that's all.

turn to **168**

167

—I can't do it.
I can't do anything she doesn't want again.
Once, I gave in to this headache and I killed her.
That's why, never again.
I can't lose to myself and make Arcueid cry.
Even if this headache tears me apart, I won't do it—

"Ha—ah!"
I pull back from her body.
The headache disappears and my heart returned to normal.
The urges rampaging in my heart have also disappeared and I finally start to comprehend what I just did.
"—What—have I."
I can't believe it.
But the memory is all too clear.
How I pushed her down.
How I choked her and held my knife over her.
.... and the disgraceful things I did afterwards.
"___"
I don't know what to say.
Arcueid adjusts her clothes and stands up.
I—don't know how to apologize.
Just saying sorry.. how can that make it up?
"—Arcueid, I—"



"Don't worry about it.... I'm the one who should apologize."
She looks away uncomfortably.
"Wha—what are you saying?
I was the one who did something wrong.
If only—I had been stronger, that never would have happened."



"No.
I don't think it was something you could have resisted because you saw my
'Mystic Eyes'."
"Eh—?
Mystic Eyes?
Like, Nrvnqsr's eyes....?"



".... Exactly.
I wasn't sane earlier.
I was so thirsty, I couldn't control myself.
That's why—I found some of The Dead, and tried to replace that urge with
the urge to destroy to stave it off.
Back then, I was unable to hold myself back—so that's why you saw my Mystic
Eyes when you came."
".... Certainly I felt odd from the time I saw your golden eyes—but that's just
that.
I, with my own will—"
"No, that's wrong.
Shiki, my Mystic Eyes of Enchantment completely captivate whoever looks upon
them.
.... I think that's why you started to feel all those sexual desires."
"—That—can't be right."
Because even if she wasn't controlling me.
I, I might, still like her.
"Anyway, this was all because of my carelessness.

.... I'm sorry, Shiki.
I manipulated your body without any regards to your feelings."

Her gaze shift away as she says this.
.... Being apologized to like this hurts my heart.
Because I didn't feel like I was manipulated at all.
Rather—it seems like I used it to obey my own lust.
"Arcueid, I—"



"Don't apologize.
.... Shiki, this was all an accident.
I'll forget about it, so please forget about it too.
I think it's better for the both of us that way."

Saying that, she starts to walk quietly.
"... Arcueid...?"



"—I think this is enough for tonight.
I killed all these Dead tonight, so it's probably useless to search any further."
"... That's fine, but what do we do with that mountain of dead bodies?
If someone finds it, there'll be trouble."
"There's no need to worry.
Once something becomes a vampire and dies, it won't leave a trace.
Those who refused to return to the Earth become ash to be scattered in the
wind once they die."

They will return and disperse on their own in a while."

Without turning around, she disappears from the alley with weak steps.

"....."

I can't stop her now.

I still feel the sensation of Arcueid on both my hands.

"—Idiot.

What a stupid idiot I am."

I groan to myself.

In the alley which became a stage of tragedy, I look up at the moon in remorse.

turn to **169**

168

—I just want her.
There's no mistaking that.
"Shi... ki...?"
She still sounds like she has some reason left.

—I don't like that.
I've long since gone insane thanks to Arcueid.
But for her to stay sane like that, I can't let it go.
pant *pant* *pant*
I release her.
Her arms fall to the ground.
"Shiki—are you sane again...?"
She sounds relieved.
Without answering—I grab her skirt and tear it from her body.

"—!"
No, stop it Shiki!"
Her hips rise up.
Her hands move to push me away.
I don't care.
I push my groin against her waist.
"I said stop...!"
Snap out of it.
Snap out of it Shiki—"!"
She tries to move back, but it's too late now.
Freeing my imprisoned member from my pants, I forcefully enter her.

"H—"!"
There are no wet sounds.
Her dry, unprepared inner walls resist my entrance.
They resist, but they can't stop me.
Ignoring the tightness around me, I slide deeper.
"Sto—ow, it hurts—Shiki.....!"
She pushes up against my body in an attempt to stop me.
But there's no power in her arms.
Is it because of the pain?
Is it that she doesn't have any power left?
Either way, I don't intend to stop.
My throbbing tool burns inside of her.
Since it's dry, it's even painful for me.
This pain, and the intense pressure around me, assails my senses.
Pain and pleasure are so close they're nearly indistinguishable.
My shaft seems perfectly eager to seek either one.
As I continue to slide inwards,

the pain and the feeling of her walls encircling me burn into my brain.
 "Nh—!"
 Twitch.
 Her hips rise upwards.
 Slide.
 After a feeling of breaking through an unseen barrier, my shaft is coated with something wet.
 "Hwa, ah—ah, n—!!!"
 A pained gasp.
 Arcueid's body twists and tries to escape.
 From deep inside of her comes a mixture of clear liquid and red blood.
 No wonder she was tight.
 If it's her first time—pain should be overwhelming pleasure.
 "Ha—haha, ha."
 Then I just have to go farther.
 Fortunately, she's moist with blood inside.
 I pull back, and plunge in once more.
 "Nhaa....!"
 Sticky, sexual sounds rise between us.
 As I enter, her body shakes.
 Over and over.
 Almost smashing myself against her,
 faster than my mind can process, the sensations inside her body assail me,
 I pound her again and again, like a boxer slamming a punching bag.
 More panting fills the air.
 Her breathing is totally wild.
 So she cannot think, I pound into her as hard as I can.
 Appropriately, she grows even hotter inside.
 "Haa, ah, hwa, ah, oh—!"
 "Ggah.....!"
 I let out a groan.
 She's so hot—It feels like I'll melt.
 Just pushing myself into her causes intense waves of pleasure to swell up inside of me.
 Not just around my shaft, but my whole body feels like it's being sucked up.
 As if—I was trying to push my entire being inside of her.
 "Ga—"
 I try to keep myself from exploding.
 I can't stop.
 The only sound filling the air is the lustful noises of flesh and fluids.
 —I don't understand.
 Maybe I just didn't realize it, but I feel like I've exploded numerous times already.
 "N—, ngah, n, ah, n....!"
 Her fingers match my rhythm as she scratches my arms.
 Red claw marks.

The sight of my blood only seems to encourage her.
"Tсах—!"
A primitive copulation where I only move my hips.
In the midst of the pleasure, I'm losing my strength.
At first, it was only me.
But it's different now.
We move like beasts, demanding more.
"Shi... ki...!"
A jolt runs through me as I hear my name being called.
I've forgotten until this moment.
That I was a human called by that name.
"Gah—!"
With all my strength, I plunge deeper, as if trying to reach her very core.
The feeling of release.
The burning inside of me bursts forth.
Thump.
Thump.
I can't stop the convulsions.
Even after I climax, she still continues to stimulate me.
"Kka—!"
I try and pull back, but she wraps herself around me, draws me in, and does not let me escape.
"Ah—gh.....!"
I can't get away.
I've already gone past my limit, yet she continues to drain me.
Thum.. p.
Thump.
Thump.
Thumpthumpthumpthump...!!
"Ah—ha, ah—"
My tongue hangs from my mouth.
Saliva drizzles forth in my ecstasy, and my mind clears.
I'm going to die.
A destructive wave of pleasure building to a climax powerful enough to bring death.
It courses through my entire body.

I breathe harder.
The strength drains from my body.
I collapse onto Arcueid as I try in vain to catch my breath.
Her white skin is now tinged red.
Her normally cool body burns with heat.
Pricking my ears,
I can hear her breathing, still faintly accented with lingering pleasure.
Panting, and gasping for air.
Completely weak, and numbed by what I've just done, I can't think.

We remain like this for some time.
Residual waves of pleasure still crash upon my brain, and all I can do is look at Arcueid as she lies there—.

.... I don't know how long it's been.
It felt like many hours, but maybe it was only a matter of minutes.
"——"

I pull back from her body and scratch my chest.
My headache is gone and my heart has returned to normal.
The urges rampaging in my heart have also disappeared and I finally start to comprehend what I just did.
"—What—have I.."

I can't believe it.
But the memory is all too clear.
How I pushed her down.
How I choked her and held my knife over her.
.... and the disgraceful things I did afterwards.
"——"

I don't know what to say.
Arcueid adjusts her clothes and stands up.
I—don't know how to apologize.
Just saying sorry.. how can that make it up?
"—Arcueid, I—"



"Don't worry about it.... I'm the one who should apologize."
She looks away uncomfortably.
"Wha—what are you saying?
I was the one who did something wrong.
If only—I had been stronger, that never would have happened."



"No.
I don't think it was something you could have resisted because you saw my
'Mystic Eyes'."
"Eh—?
Mystic Eyes?
Like, Nrvnqsr's eyes....?"



".... Exactly.
I wasn't sane earlier.
I was so thirsty, I couldn't control myself.
That's why—I found some of The Dead, and tried to replace that urge with
the urge to destroy to stave it off.
Back then, I was unable to hold myself back—so that's why you saw my Mystic
Eyes when you came."
".... Certainly I felt odd from the time I saw your golden eyes—but that's just
that.
I, with my own will—"
"No, that's wrong.
Shiki, my Mystic Eyes of Enchantment completely captivate whoever looks upon
them.
.... I think that's why you started to feel all those sexual desires."
"—That—can't be right."
Because even if she wasn't controlling me.
I, I might, still like her.
"Anyway, this was all because of my carelessness.

.... I'm sorry, Shiki.
I manipulated your body without any regards to your feelings."

Her gaze shift away as she says this.
.... Being apologized to like this hurts my heart.
Because I didn't feel like I was manipulated at all.
Rather—it seems like I used it to obey my own lust.
"Arcueid, I—"



"Don't apologize.
.... Shiki, this was all an accident.
I'll forget about it, so please forget about it too.
I think it's better for the both of us that way."

Saying that, she starts to walk quietly.
"... Arcueid....?"



"—I think this is enough for tonight.
I killed all these Dead tonight, so it's probably useless to search any further."
"... That's fine, but what do we do with that mountain of dead bodies?
If someone finds it, there'll be trouble."
"There's no need to worry.
Once something becomes a vampire and dies, it won't leave a trace.
Those who refused to return to the Earth become ash to be scattered in the
wind once they die."

They will return and disperse on their own in a while."

Without turning around, she disappears from the alley with weak steps.

"....."

I can't stop her now.

I still feel the sensation of Arcueid on both my hands.

"—Idiot.

What a stupid idiot I am."

I groan to myself.

In the alley which became a stage of tragedy, I look up at the moon in remorse.

setvar flgB + 1
turn to **169**

—It's morning.
I open my eyes and put on the glasses near my bed.
Looking out the window, I see a cloudless blue sky.

"....."
Even though a flawless morning greets me, I can't help but feel down.
There's no need to wonder why.
What happened with Arcueid last night sticks in the back of my mind, and the accompanying guilt troubles me.
"... She said we should just forget it—but I can't forget such a thing."
I look at both my hands.
Those fingers still remember how Arcueid felt.
Even now I remember the texture of her skin and her cool, gliding body temperature.
I wasn't thinking at all back then, but I understand it all now.
After doing such a thing.
Arcueid said to forget and pretend like it never happened.
But while I regret it totally, I can't even forget one little bit of it.
What I regret is not being able to control myself back then.

If I didn't touch her like some animal, if I touched her more like a human,
how would things have—

—I knew it.

I didn't lose myself by looking into her golden eyes.
I didn't realize it, but I was caught up in her a long time ago.

To realize such a simple thing just now—

The morning in the Tohno mansion is the same as always.
Hisui comes to wake me.
Akiha and Kohaku-san are in the sitting room, and we greet each other briefly before we go to school.

The same as always.
Yet I feel so empty, I can't even respond properly when people talk to me, and I leave the mansion vacantly.

The students streaming through the gate are all bright and cheerful.

"Oh yeah.

Today is Saturday."

My sense of time has totally disappeared since Arcueid came into my life.

The first time I met her was on a Friday.

A week ago in the morning, she was waiting for me at the intersection in front of school.

".... She was smiling, I think."

Come to think of it, she was smiling.

Even though she was waiting for the one who killed her, she was waiting for the killer Tohno Shiki with excitement in her eyes.

".... I wonder why?"

If she comes tonight, maybe I'll ask her."

After thinking aloud, my spirits sink further.

She probably won't come to the park.

The feeling that last night was our final meeting turns over in my mind.

My heart is heavy and everything else simply feels empty.

I may not ever see her again.

The regret hangs around me like a leaden chain—

I sit at my desk.

It's about five minutes until homeroom starts.

I stare outside blankly, not wanting to do anything.



"Yo, delinquent.

You skipped class yesterday.

What the heck were you doing, Tohno-kun?"

"....."

I let out a heavy sigh.

Usually I would, but today I don't feel like talking with Arikiko at all.



".... What's with you?
 You don't look happy at all.
 You didn't come to school yesterday and now you come back an empty shell.
 If you're like that, school's no fun."
 Arihiko slumps his shoulders exaggeratedly.

"—Arihiko.
 Sorry, but can you leave me alone today?
 If I'm not here, you can always talk with Senpai.
 Actually, isn't that better for you?"
 "Huh—?"
 Senpai?
 I don't know any third year students."
 ".... What are you saying?
 Ciel-senpai's in third year, not second.
 Well, sometimes you think she's younger, but Senpai is a senpai after all."
 "Shiel-Senpai?
 Who's that?
 Are there any foreign students at our school?"
 He seriously tilts his head in thought.
 "What are you saying, Senpai is Japanese...."

No, wait.
 No one ever said she was Japanese.

".... Well, no one said she was, but everyone called her Ciel-senpai."
 "That's what I'm saying, who is this senpai?
 What's wrong Tohno, are you sick or something?"
 I can't hear his banter.

"Wha....."
 That's right.
 Why didn't I realize such an obvious inconsistency.
 Ciel isn't a Japanese name at all.
 Even though I know her, I don't even know her full name.

I don't even know what class she's in.

To begin with,
when I first met her, why did I feel like I knew her for a long time....?
"——!"

My chair clatters as I quickly stand up.



"?"

What's wrong, Tohno?
You've been acting too funny."
"I'm going to the office.
Sorry, but please say that I'm here during attendance."

Turning away from Arihiko whose head is tilted in confusion, I dash out of the classroom.

I investigate the third year roster for the name Ciel, but as expected, it isn't anywhere to be seen.
To be sure, I ask the teachers in the office, but none of them remember Ciel-senpai.

The end of classes.
Being a Saturday, right after homeroom all my classmates scatter and run out the room.

"——"

Saturday is finally here, but I don't feel like doing anything.
Feeling like The Dead, I walk home by myself.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."

Hisui greets me as I return.

Even though she's waited all this time, I can't even return a greeting and I go to my room.

—After dinner, I return to my room.

It's close to the promised time with Arcueid.

"... Shall I be going?"

I don't even know if she's coming.

But still, I swore never to break a promise again, so I have to go.

I arrive at the park shortly before ten.

There's absolutely no one here.

Sitting on the bench, I stare at the clock and wait for Arcueid to come.

Return to the mansion.

turn to **172**

Still wait.

turn to **170**

170

It's now eleven o'clock.

.... The park is completely still, as if entirely frozen.

There's no fresh flow of air, nor the presence of anyone approaching.

There's no sign of Arcueid coming.

Time passes by meaninglessly.

I-

Still wait.

turn to **171**

Return to the mansion.

turn to **172**

171

-Both hands on the clock approach the top of the dial.
It's been two hours since I came here, yet there's no sign of Arcueid.

I-

Still wait.

turn to ??

Return to the mansion.

turn to ??

turn to **173**

if selected == 2

turn to ??

172

.... Arcueid doesn't come.
It's only natural.
After doing that—after trampling over everything she trusted me with, I forcibly violated her body.
She probably won't come.
This is what she meant when she said for both of us to forget about it.

"Damn it....!"
My heart wrapped in regret, I leave the park.

.... I return to the mansion.
Opening the rear door, I walk inside.

I yawn.
I sink onto my bed without thinking.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
The sound of the clock echoes through the room.
"....."
.... Just sleep for now.
When I wake up tomorrow things will be different.
About Arcueid, about the vampire roaming this city, when morning comes all of it will be—

THROB THROB THROB
THUMP THUMP THUMP
Throb Throb Throb
Thump Thump Thump
.... The pain synchronizes with my pulse.
Every time I feel the throb of pain, my memories fade away.
Every time my heart thumps, memories are plastered on.

The fading away memories are probably extras.
Memories, the past, experiences I don't need.
All of it fades away.
In other words, oblivion.
"Ah——"
As regret washes over me, as my memories thin, as my past fades away, I reach out with my hand.
But I can't grasp anything.
Because,
I've already forgot what kind of memories I've lost.
THROB, throb.

The repeating headaches make me feel sick, and even in my dream, I feel like throwing up.

"Shiki-sama, are you awake?"

—I hear a voice.

"Please hold on.
I will bring you something to drink."

—After that, the sound of running footsteps.

I slowly open my eyes.
I'm lying in bed with the radiant sunlight streaming through the window.

"—Morning?"
Slowly lifting myself up, I feel my own sweat drenching me.
"What....?"
I must've had a nightmare or something."
I try to remember what I dreamt about.
..... I can't remember.
It is the nature of dreams to fade upon awakening.
But, there's still something.
I feel like there's a vague image of something I've forgotten.



"Shiki-sama?
Have you woken yet?"
"I'm up.
Morning, Hisui."
"Yes, good morning, Shiki-sama."
Hisui approaches the bed, expressionless as always.
"I have brought you something to drink.
If you are not feeling well, please drink."
Hisui carries a silver tray with a drink prepared on it.
"No, I don't feel bad or anything."

I slept deeply, so my head is clear too."
"—However,"
Hisui offers a rare reply.
"It appeared your condition was bad last night."

.... It seems I did have a nightmare last night.
"Nah, there's nothing wrong with me.
But I'm really grateful you're concerned, Hisui."



".... Yes, I am glad you are well, Shiki-sama."
Hisui looks at me with her delicate, glass eyes.
.... Um, I feel uneasy.
"I'll go change and head to the dining room.
Please tell Kohaku-san I'll be having breakfast."



"I understand."

.... Well then.
It's seven o'clock.
I can take my time this morning.

Akiha and Hisui are in the sitting room.
From the kitchen, I can hear Kohaku-san's lilting humming.



"Good morning, Nii-san."

"Morning.

You don't seem very cheerful today, Akiha.

Was there something you didn't like in your breakfast?"



".... Nii-san, how did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Just came to my mind.

I just remembered there were many kinds of food you either liked or disliked."

"That's rude.. I was that way as a child, but now I have no dislikes."

".... I see.

That's odd, cause if that's the case, you should have more physical development for your age...."



"Nii-san.

Did you just say something?"

Akiha glares at me.
.... Crap.
I should watch my mouth.
"... No, I didn't say anything.
I was just thinking aloud, so don't worry about it."

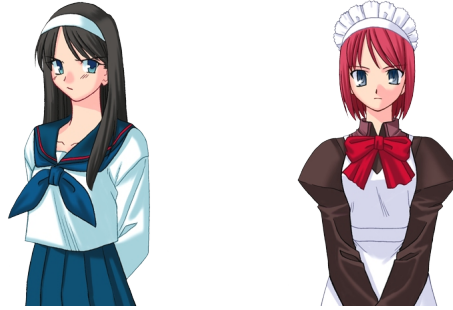


".... Geez.
It seems there was no need to worry, Hisui.
I don't think Nii-san will die even if you kill him."
"Yes, I feel the same way."
Akiha sighs and Hisui expressionlessly agrees.
I can guess from their conversation they were both worried about me.

"—Why?"
I wonder why.



"Why?
Normally, you would worry!
After you came home last night, you went straight to bed and had nightmares
all night.
Even though we tried to wake you, you never woke up.
Doesn't that sound like you were sick?"
"Oh?
Really—But I didn't really catch a cold or anything."



"I do not think you had a cold.
Shiki-sama, you were sleeping as always, and your temperature and breathing
were normal.
But you were secreting lots of sweat."
"... Secreting?
I don't like that word choice."



"It was worse on me because I was tending you, so please be a little thankful.
And thank Kohaku as well.
I couldn't have done it by myself."
"Yourself... Akiha, you were caring for me?"



"O-of course I was.
We are siblings.
I was only watching your condition; it was Kohaku who cleaned your sweat."

She looks away and mumbles like she was talking to herself.
This isn't like her as she normally looks at you directly and says things directly.
"Really.
Thanks Akiha.
Sorry to worry you."



"You don't have to thank me.
I was just doing my duty.
If you want to thank someone, thank Kohaku."
She looks away and doesn't even try to look at me anymore.
"Shiki-san, breakfast is ready," Kohaku-san's voice rings out from the kitchen.
"Nii-san, please hurry up and eat your breakfast."
"Gotcha."
I head to the dining room.



"Please be careful on your way, Shiki-sama."
"I'm off.
I'll be back around four o'clock today."
Raising a hand to the bowing Hisui, I leave the mansion.

I walk the morning path to school.
Monday morning.
For some reason, my feet feel really light today.
Maybe it's because these past few days were so out of the ordinary, my body
welcomes such a normal day.

"..... Huh?"

That's strange.

I said 'out of the ordinary', but what kind of life was that?

"....."

I feel like something very important happened.

But, I can't remember what it was.



"Yo, Tohno!"

Arihiko whacks me on the back in greeting.

"Mornin'.

You're pretty early today."

"Ah, just a whim of mine.

Well, it doesn't hurt to act like a good student every now and then."

Arihiko laughs brightly.

Seeing that smile assures me that this is my world.

"....."



"Mmm, what is it, Tohno?"

Making such a difficult expression...

Did you forget something at your house?"

DID YOU FORGET SOMETHING?

.... Those words reverberate through my head like a curse.
But, in the end,
I can't remember what it was I forgot.
".... Nah, I didn't forget anything.
Let's hurry on to the classroom.
After waking up this early, it'd be a waste if you were late, right?"
"Haha, you got a point."

I pass the school gate with my friend.
With that, something ends completely.
"_____"

I feel someone staring at me and I turn around.
But there's no one there.
Just the scattering leaves in the courtyard.

Tohno Shiki heads to class.
As if returning to a peaceful, happy, and normal everyday life.

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **427**

No.

turn to **1**

173

..... The clock's hands point to twelve.
It's two hours past the promised time.
"—Whew."
I slouch on the bench and sigh.
"... She might not come after all."
I don't know.
I don't know, but I don't feel like going back.
"—Yeah, I'll wait until the morning.
Damn it."
I lie on the bench in frustration.

—And then.
"..... Huh?"
Wait a minute.
I think I saw a flash of white behind the rest area.
.... Besides, it moves back as soon as I saw it.
"——"
I stand up from the bench and stride towards the rest area.
.... As if it knew it couldn't hide anymore, the white figure shows its face.



"Ahaha, you found me "
Arcueid appears more cheerfully than ever.
"Arcueid, you—"
"Hm?"
"What?"
"—You really came?"
I blurt that out because I still can't believe it.



"Of course, we promised.
I came about ten minutes before you did."
She looks the other way.
"... Ten minutes before, but, I—"
I came before ten o'clock, and she came earlier?
"Why...?"
If you were here before me, why didn't you tell me you were waiting there?"



"I wanted to watch you while I was hiding."
"___"
.... I see.
Even though she doesn't act any different, she must be bothered by what happened last night.
That's why—she couldn't face me directly and was hiding.
"... Sorry.
That's right, it's not that simple—"
"Yeah.
You never even knew I was here.
I was waiting for you to notice.
I was planning on meeting in a different way this time, but you ruined it by just spacing out."
"—Eh?"

Ruined what?
"Arcueid—you weren't hiding because you felt awkward....?"



"Why?"

I was a little bored so I wanted to play around."

She says it lightly, not even knowing an inkling of the frustration I felt.

".... Play around with me, you—"

The joy I felt from meeting her fades away instantly.

It's not a mood where I have to think about what I should do after seeing her.

.... As usual, she's acting at her own pace without even understanding how I feel.

"—Ha."

I fill my lungs with a deep breath of night air.

I'm less angry than surprised.

Maybe I'm just relieved she is acting normally.

Well, normal for her.

As proof, it feels like my heart laden with impurities has just been cleaned anew.

".... Man.

You win."



"Really?"

I thought you were just zoned out."

"No, not about the hide-and-go-seek."

.... Oh well, it's useless putting it into words.

"I'm glad you came.

To be honest, I thought I'd never see you again."



"—Eh?
You thought so after only waiting two hours?"
"... That's not it.
It's because of last night.
I thought we would never meet again."



"_ _"

".... That won't do, Shiki.
I said to just forget about it."
Arcueid says this weakly.

"Ah—"
.... Idiot.
I am such an idiot.
I selfishly thought she was acting completely normal.
But, I was wrong.
She was acting that way so I wouldn't feel bad.
"... Sorry.
I was an idiot.
I don't have any right to yell at you anymore."



"I said it's okay.
 If anyone is to blame, it's me.
 So just forget about it.
 Isn't that better for the both of us?"
 She tries to fool us both by speaking cheerfully.
 Fool us about last night, fool us about how bothered she is.
 But.
 Telling me to forget with that expression, how can I forget?
 "—No.
 I wasn't apologizing for last night.
 I'm an idiot because I can't forget about something I should forget."
 "Eh—Shiki?"
 "Since this morning, all I thought about was you.
 All I could think about was how I should apologize to you and what to say after
 I saw you.
 So, I can't—just forget about it now."



"—"
 Arcueid looks away.
 I—can't look at her either.
 After sensing I said something I shouldn't have, I can't look into her eyes now.
 She doesn't respond.
 I can't either, and a long silence begins.
 —I don't know how long the two of us stood there.

Arcueid nods slightly.
"... Yeah, to tell the truth.



I couldn't forget about it either, Shiki."
Arcueid blushes as she says this with some difficulty.
"Arcueid—"
She looks so cute doing that.

As soon as I think that—Arcueid looks around her.

I don't know when this happened, but we're surrounded by human shapes.
"Wha.....!?"
I can't think since it was so sudden.



"We're surrounded.
Get ready Shiki.
If you don't fight, you'll just die."
"Fight?
Then they—"
"If you take off your glasses, you'll get it, won't you?
They are 'The Dead' without even a finger's worth of normal blood."
".....!"
I quickly take out my knife and take off my glasses.

Like she says,
 The five people surrounding us are just scribbled lines making a human shape.
 "Why—!?"
 You said you killed them all yesterday, Arcueid!"



"—Yes.
 These are the ones I destroyed yesterday."
 She narrows her eyes and glares at them.
 They advance sluggishly.
 "Then were they only pretending to be dead....!?"
 "Of course not.
 I'm not weakened enough to be fooled by such tricks.
 But, the fact that I made a mistake can't be excused.
 I didn't make sure they dissolved into ashes at the end."

Shuffle.
 They close the circle around us.
 My fingers grasping my knife tremble a bit.
 To be blunt, there's no pressure coming from these Dead.
 Compared to a monster like Nrvnqsr, they're practically nothing.

—But, five of them.
 Can I fight this many Dead—this many things who were once human?
 "—Shiki, if you hesitate you'll die.
 They are no longer alive.
 Once they have their blood sucked by a vampire and become The Dead, they
 can no longer return—they are just dolls used by the vampire.
 There's no sin in killing them."
 I hear her voice from behind me.
 It seems she moved to protect my vulnerable back.
 "Wait.
 What do you mean?"
 ".... I mean there are many ways to magically control a dead body.

It's easier to infuse a human corpse with mana than animals or intangible objects, so it's very convenient—unfortunately, I don't have time to go over the details.

They're coming."

I sense her moving away.

At the same time, they attack.

The shapes of death attack.

They simply fly forward, arms outstretched.

"—K!"

I take a huge leap to the side and evade their attack.

Then, I sense something terrible behind me.

"Why—you....!"

I whirl around with all my strength.

There, one of The Dead is trying to punch me.



47 0

—The Dead's body is almost devoid of places without "lines".

Which lets me slice anywhere on its body.

What's more, its movements are incredibly sluggish.

Far easier than anything that came out of Nrvnqsr.

"——"

The Dead charge me.

I can kill them with ease.

Evading the swinging arm, I aim for the first one's unprotected lower left abdomen.

In the "line" of blood vessels there.

I stare at the heart called its "point"—

"Damn—it....!!!!!"

Thrash.

The knife doesn't reach its target, only slicing through its upraised arm.

The one-armed Dead doesn't even pause its attack.
The other Dead also comes in showing no fear.

The one-armed Dead attacks.
Right when I evade that Dead, the other Dead jumps on me from behind.

"Ah—"
Grind.
From behind, like a piggy-back stance.
The Dead bites on my neck.
Not to suck my blood or anything like that.
Just like a beast trying to kill its prey by biting its neck off.
"Gah—!"
Is a neck able to be bitten off by human mouth?
The Dead's mouth is shallow.
It bites with its front teeth rather than its back.
As a result, The Dead's teeth actually break off.
Even still—it tries to bite through my neck with its flat mouth.

It doesn't really hurt.
It's just disgusting.
"Ah... ah, ah—"
The one-armed dead walks toward me.
I have to kill The Dead behind me or I'll die.
The method is simple.
As it tries to continue biting my neck, I can just slice my knife through its face.
"——"
But—that means I am going to kill.
I understand.
They aren't human, they aren't even living—but I still feel it's wrong.

—How naive.
Even if they are corpses.
They have the shapes of humans, and they move like them.
It still seems mistaken to kill them as another human being—
"Shiki—!?"
I hear Arcueid's voice as she deals with the other three Dead.
Without thinking, despite the one in front of me, I look over at her.

—And.
I see something terribly unbelievable.



"—"

Arcueid is wounded.

Even though they move so sluggishly and would only take her a second to kill, Arcueid is being pushed by those Dead.

She breathes heavily.

Her footwork is also unsteady—and she's having difficulty evading those attacks even I can evade.

The Dead rips into her arm.

She counters.

She tears the body in two from the head to its waist.

Both halves crumble to the ground.

At the same time—the other waiting shades of death pounce on her.



"A—"

With a crash she lands on her knees.

I can tell she's breathing wildly from this distance.

There—the two Dead attack.

They kick her kneeling figure in the face and makes her collapse on the ground.

"St—"

After that,

they carry a dull, expressionless smile as they get on top of her.
"Stop—"

.... She lies there arms outspread like a cross.
Like when I did those disgraceful things to her last night.

"Stop it, you fucking bastards—!"

Stab.
I cut through the face of the one behind me still trying to bite me.
I pierce the lower right abdomen of the one in front of me which had strangely paused.
That's where its "death" is.
Not even looking at it as it crumbles away, I turn around and kill the faceless Dead behind me.
I run.
The ones around her realize I'm coming and get up and attack.
"——"

No problem.
I slice through their "points" of death as they attack me.

"Ha—agh."
After it's all over.
I start to catch my breath.

"Gha—ah."
The four figures crumble away into ash.
The one Arcueid killed earlier makes five.
"Ha—aah."
Killed.
Without hesitating, I stopped them completely.

"Agh, ah."
I can't think clearly.
Probably because regret and self-admonition are screaming at me.
My panting fills the air.
But, it's still good.
It's better than her getting hurt.
For the first time,
With my own free will, with the mind of Tohno Shiki—I used this power for someone else's sake.

I keep panting.
I can't seem to fully catch my breath.
I can hear slight wheezing mixed in with the wild breathing.
".... Arcueid."

Turning around, I see her full of pain and on her knees.

"Are you okay, Arcueid....!?"

I dash towards her.

She's curled up as she breathes like something who can do nothing else.

"What's wrong, you're covered in sweat.

Did your wound open up....?"

I kneel and try to look at her face.



"Shi—ki."

However, she has a hand covering it.

I can't see her face.

All I can see—is the blood-shot red eyes through her fingers.

"_"

Her suffering isn't normal.

The way she's breathing intermittently isn't natural.

A hungry breath.

Bloodshot eyes.

Her waving hair.

"Ar—c"

—Chill.

Sensing danger, I step back.

Yet far faster than my movement is her teeth closing in to suck my blood.

if flgB >= 1

turn to **174**

turn to **175**

174

—I hear a creaking noise.

Her cool hand on my shoulder and her low body temperature are so cold that I hear a creaking, freezing noise.

The sound didn't come from anywhere around me.

It's just that my body is freezing as the cold penetrates deep inside from where she touches me.

In other words, the sound is coming from inside me.

My heart, my guts, my brain, they are creaking.

"——Ah."

Just like a cancerous cell.

Rapidly, limitlessly, unordered, and lacking intelligence.

Violating me from inside out.

"——Ar,"

.... I can't feel her breath.

Like a ravenous beast, she just bites into my neck.

At the same time—

I descend into a limitless hell of pain, as if my nerves were being torn apart one by one.

"—cued—"

My frying mind manages to utter this last word.

It, hurts.

i, t, h, u, r, t, s, s, o, m, u, c, h

i, t, c, a, u, s, e, s

m, e,

t, o, f, a, d, e, a, w, a, y.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **428**

No.

turn to **1**

175

Arcueid's arms stretch out.
Like that, she holds my body.
"Ar—"
My breath stops in my throat as I call her name.
Her bloodshot eyes.
Her sharp teeth like a beast's.
The overwhelming pressure that drains me of any will to resist.
The thing with its teeth nearing my neck isn't the woman I know.
I can't do anything.
I can't even lift a finger.

I'm going to be eaten.
This is what it means to be preyed upon.

Her teeth push against my neck.
The only thing filling my mind is fear.
"Hiii—!"
A shriek comes out.
I almost think for an instant how pitiful it is for me to make such a sound.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but..

It feels like she freezes in place.

But before I can even confirm this,
Wham!
A violent explosion erupts before me and Arcueid's body is smashed sideways.

"Wha—"
As if she was hit by a car, she was blown back several meters.
But she gets up like it was nothing.



"I... I"
Arcueid stands there, stunned.

I—can't even think what to do, either.
And there,
"You were going to suck his blood."
A cold, scolding voice.
"That is your true nature, Arcueid Brunestud."
The merciless voice towers from above.

I look up at the moon.
There—stands the robed figure from that one night.

"Sen, pai—"
There's no mistake.
No matter how I look at it, it's Ciel-senpai.
She doesn't even look at me, but she glares at Arcueid crouching far away.
"Even if you destroy your kin, you cannot change the fact you are a vampire yourself.
... I don't know why you drew him close to you, but didn't you think it would end this way?"

Her voice is completely different from normal.
Neither strict nor kind.
Her emotionless voice—is horribly devoid of any humanity.

Without making a noise, Senpai descends from the streetlight to the ground.



"Usually, it's nothing I mess with, but I will not overlook you trying to kill an ordinary person.
It isn't part of the plan to fight you—but if there is a need, we can settle our score."



100 0

"—Don't be ridiculous.

I don't want anything to do with you.

And—"

She looks at Senpai hatefully.

"I never intended to kill him."

"—That does not sound convincing at all.

It's not like you don't realize what you did earlier, and what kind of yell he gave out when he saw you."



100 0

"——"

"I don't care if you hate me.

But you took your insanity and directed it at him.

Shall we ask him how he felt?"

With a turn of her head,

Senpai casts a glance at me for the first time.



100 0

"_____"

Arcueid averts her gaze painfully.
Silence fills the park.

A footstep.
The robed Senpai takes only one step towards me.



"Get back, vampire.
You had no right to stay by his side from the beginning."
"Wha—"

That's not true.
I don't know who Senpai is or what happened to Arcueid earlier, but I can at least declare this.
Because—I myself want to be by her side—
"You're wrong...!"
What's with you, coming out of nowhere, wearing weird clothes, and speaking like you understand everything...!?
Arcueid is definitely a vampire, but she hasn't drunk blood even once!
That was probably just a joke, and you don't have any right to—"



"Please be quiet Tohno-kun.
She hasn't drank blood even once?
Yes, certainly these past eight hundred years, there's no record of her having
any victims.
However—"
"Just shut up!
I don't care to listen to whatever strange story you have to say....!
Look, if you try to get in her way, I'll not forgive even you.
After all I—I'm helping her because I want to.
It's none of your business to interfere—!"



"—Tohno-kun, you—"
An inkling of emotion enters her voice.
"—I understand.
If you say so, then I won't do anything else.
However—"

Senpai changes her gaze to Arcueid.
Arcueid looks away—not at me or Senpai.



100 0
"....."



100 0
"As he said, Arcueid Brunestud.
Do you still intend to be by his side after this?"

Arcueid doesn't answer.
She raises her head to look at me once, and then—runs off into the night.



"Wh—why are you leaving, Arcueid....!?"
I start to run after her.

But.

"—!?"

My feet don't leave the ground.
Senpai walks slowly over to me.



"I won't let you follow her.
I can't let you be killed, Tohno-kun."

In her hands are thin, rod-like blades.
One of them stands by my feet—pinning my shadow to the ground.
"You cannot move until that is removed.
No matter how hard you struggle, your shadow will struggle just as hard not to separate from you."
"—Stop fooling around, I'll lose her!"
I grip the blade below me.
But no matter what, I can't pull it out.
"I forgot to mention this, but I'm the only one who can remove it, so please give up."
Saying that, she stops in front of me.
"—"
I glare at her.
She takes in my gaze—then sighs.



"Geez, really—why do you go overboard so much, Tohno-kun."
"—Eh?"
.... Um, Senpai?"



"I know.
I don't hate her myself, but this is for both of your sakes.
I will let you go soon, so please listen to what I have to say for a while."
She looks up hesitantly.
This is the leisurely Senpai I know from school.

—Is that why?
Even though I still can't grasp the situation, I start to calm down.



".... This is abrupt so I am prepared for you to hate me.
But I have something I have to tell you.
I'm very sorry for restraining you like this."
Senpai bows her head.
.... She's dressed strange, but Senpai is still Senpai.
"—It's okay.
I'm not angry so please don't apologize.
You've already helped me once Senpai, and I want to ask you some things as well."



"—That does help.
.... But, what would you like to ask me, Tohno-kun?"
".... Um, isn't it obvious?
Just who are you, Senpai?
Dressed like that and smashing away Arcueid, and I'm the only one who re-
members you at school."
Senpai gives a sigh in response.
"Then let me ask.
Tohno-kun, what do you think about me?"
".... Hm.
I've only heard some things from Arcueid, about the Church and stuff."



"That's right.
As you know, I am an exorcist of the Church.
My specialty is hunting vampires.
I can't answer anything else, but I think that is enough for you."
"Enough?"
—Um, why would someone like you even come to my school?
If you wanted to exterminate vampires, wouldn't you be searching the city like
Arcueid?"
"No, there was a reason for me coming to your school, Tohno-kun.
Um.... right, since this overlaps with the talk I want to give, I will ask the
questions from now on."



"Tohno-kun, you seem to have teamed up with her, but do you know anything about what she's after?"

"Yeah.

.... Well, I heard he's the old type of vampire who drinks the blood of humans to expand his territory."

"It seems you know about the two main classifications of vampires.

Then I think you know about how he is imperfectly immortal—"

"Yeah.

About how he needs to drink blood to maintain his body.

But on the other hand, as long as he can drink blood he'll never age, right?"

"Yes.

But you can't say he's 'immortal' in the end, can you?

Besides, there are ones for whom drinking blood does not maintain their body fully, and there are some that are exterminated by us.

You can't call something that can die like that immortal."

"—Well, certainly—he's not immune to death."

I don't know what Senpai's trying to get at here.

"Is this related to why you came to my school?"



"Of course.

Geez, please wait until I'm finished."

".... Okay, but—if you could give me the short version, I'd appreciate it."

".... Oh really?

If that's the case, then I'll explain as directly as I can."

Senpai seems a little disappointed.



"Then, a simple explanation.

Hmm, anyway, the immortality of the vampires known as Dead Apostles is very unstable.

For them, it is merely a prolongation of their lifespans many times that of normal people."

".... A question.

Not only are their life spans long, but they also have unnatural powers.

Is there any relation?"

"Not really.

Their individual powers are things they had when they were human, strengthened over hundreds of years.

Continuing their studies from their human lives gives them these extraordinary powers."

"The Dead Apostles each have different goals.

What they each decide to study is different.

Because of that, there was one who seriously studied immortality."

"....?"

He became immortal yet he still researched it?"

"Yes.

The instant the Dead Apostles become vampires, they assume they have reached the limit of immortality as humans.

However, he felt that it was just a degeneration.

He did not want something so imperfect, and he wanted to come up with a more perfect immortality."

"....."

Senpai seems to be more engaged.

"But, as long as something has shape, it cannot but perish.

There isn't anything that can withstand the passage of time.

Vampires merely have a resistance higher than that of humans.

Anything living internalizes death the moment they are born.

Even if in possession of a body which does not age, as long as it exists, it cannot escape death.

To escape death is to die.

This contradiction is a problem that cannot be solved."

"—Yeah.
Everyone has death within them.
If there is someone who doesn't, then that's—"
Probably something that never existed in the first place.
Even Arcueid can die during the day.
There can't be anything that cannot die in this world.



"That's the reason, but he concluded that if he could preserve his existence after death, then he would be immortal.
.... It isn't in our doctrine, but it's what you call reincarnation.
Even if you die, if you could preserve your sense of self and start over again as a new human, that would be eluding death.
.... Well, when he isn't completely annihilated, he isn't dead, so it's actually not quite eluding death."
"Reincarnation—you mean if he dies he will start over as a baby?"



"Yes.
While he is alive, he chooses his next host and when it is born, he transmits all the information of his 'self'.
His information stays deep within the baby until it matures, or until it gains its intelligence as its own.
As soon as that baby has the intelligence to succeed 'his self', the baby becomes a new vampire that is him."
"—Wait a minute.
What's that?"

Don't tell me that he does surgery on it while it's in the mother or something like that."

"No, it's not anything medical.

Because the instant his body is destroyed, he reincarnates into the body he chose as his next body.

"I said all of 'his information' earlier, but to use simpler terms, think of it as his 'soul'.

It wouldn't be quite correct to say his soul propagates through the air and takes over someone's body, but it's similar to an electromagnetic wave.

In this case, the human brain is what does the transmitting and the receiving.

His exceptional point is that he took this soul, which is incalculable and something that disperses as soon as it leaves the envelope of the body, and processed it as something that could be transmitted."

".... Sorry, Senpai.

I can't see how this relates to you coming to my school."

"It is related.

Because this reincarnating vampire is in your school, Tohno-kun."

"——Huh!?"



"The vampire I am pursuing and the vampire Arcueid is pursuing are the same. Although she's probably only referred to him as the 'enemy'."

"....."

I nod silently.

Certainly she's only used the word "enemy", but she never told me anything about him.



"Her duty was to kill vampires, but since he appeared, she only pursued him. He has reincarnated seventeen times already. She has destroyed him every time."
 "Every time.... But, even if he dies he will just be reborn, right? Isn't that pointless?"
 "—Yes.
 He is killed by her, reincarnates each time, and is killed again by her. That cycle has been repeated over and over. If she... if Arcueid had the power to kill not the 'body' but the 'meaning', then this probably would not be happening."

Senpai looks down a little, and it seems like she is gritting her teeth.
 I don't know why.
 However, it appears that Senpai also has some grudge against the "enemy" like Arcueid does.
 ".... Senpai.
 What kind of vampire is he?"



"He was originally a man, but that can change depending on his body he reincarnates into.
 The troublesome part of this Dead Apostle is that his incarnations are hard to find.
 Because he is properly born as a human baby and has parents.
 He transforms into a vampire only when he reaches the age where he can do everything at a satisfactory level.

"Until then, that human shows no hint of being a vampire.
But once he awakens, he uses the relationships he gained until that time to blend perfectly into society.
I heard that the Church detects his presence usually after a whole town is turned to The Dead."
"Wait a minute.
Um, well, then this new host, he wouldn't ever realize he is a vampire until he awakens?"
"... Yes, but it isn't like two people sharing one body.
The baby born as a human is still him.
Depending on its environment, it's a good or bad person.
... But even that, the instant he awakens, goes away.
"Um, to sum it up, once he dies, he is reborn into the next body, and once that body gains intelligence, it gains the previous life's 'self' and becomes a vampire."

"——"

What is it?
Just hearing this—it's terribly.. scary.
"... That's strange.
I don't really understand it, but it's strange.
Because what you call vampires.. they don't just suddenly become vampires, right?
So, even if their old self awakens, wouldn't the body still remain human....?"



"No, reincarnation isn't the transmitting of personality, it is the transmission of the soul.
Once bitten by a True Ancestor, not just the body, but the soul is forever soiled.
He transmits all of his information called his soul to his next self, so when he awakens, the body becomes one of a vampire but—"
"But what?"
"As you said, just that is too weak.
So he selects his next host while he is alive.
The family he is born into must meet two conditions, the first being one of wealth.
Being born into a family of high social standing, property, and money makes it

easier to make the whole town into vampires later on.

"And there is another requirement.

This is the important one, but amongst normal people like us, there are also people that carry special powers.

Not like magic, which is a mystic power that can be learned, but rather special abilities from birth.

—Such people are normally called Demonic Children or psychics.

"These special abilities are genetic, so they are inherited—passed on by blood.

He chooses those families that have "something not human" in their lineages.

A family with wealth and influence, and inhuman power.

Those are the requirements for his host, Tohno Shiki-kun."

"——"

There's still something weird.

I think that story is weird.

What's weird—is that Senpai is telling me this story—

".... His name."



"Yes?"

Did you say something?"

"His name...!"

You keep saying 'enemy' and 'him', but how can I understand that!?"

Can't you tell me his name...!?"

I yell at her, not even knowing why I'm angry.

She doesn't look flustered at all.

She only—looks at me sympathetically.

"No problem.

Amongst the Dead Apostles, he is known as the Serpent of Akasha.

This is due to the serpent being the symbol of infinity and cycles.

Shedding its skin and gaining a new body, it was perfect for his name.

On the other hand, he is recorded in the Church as the 'Infinite Reincarnator'.

His human name is Michael Roa Valdamjong.

He is also simply referred to as 'Roa'."

"Ro, a—"

Never heard of it.

.... Of course.

It's not like I've ever met him.

".... In short, you came to my school because you knew this Roa was there?"



"Yes.

It truly was a sketchy feeling, but I knew this incarnation of Roa was there.

I can sense Roa far better than Arcueid.

That's why I came here much earlier than Arcueid and already found out who his new host is."

—.

The voice stops for some reason.

Senpai looks at me sympathetically like before.



".... I explained this before, but Roa chooses fine lineages and excellent bodies for his next host.

So once you find out Roa is in this place, the answer comes naturally when you investigate the families which meet his criteria."

"——"

"In this area, there is only one old family that meets his criteria.

I don't have to say any more, do I, Tohno—Shiki-kun."

—That's why.

That's why I'm saying this conversation is weird.

"Ha."

"Ha."

"Hahaha, ha."

I'm the one laughing dryly.

".... What are you saying, Senpai?"

That can't be."

Senpai doesn't answer.

Almost as if,

she is saying that I am this Roa's host.



".... But, there can be no doubt.

The Tohno family has 'something different' in its blood.

It has power and the latent superhuman ability that Roa needs.

The power you used to defeat The Dead earlier wasn't human.

So—this time's Roa's host is unmistakably Tohno Shiki."

—I don't understand.

I don't understand a single thing she says.

".... Why?"

Why can you be so certain, Senpai?"

"What?
Because I'm the one who decided all this."
She says something I can't understand once more.
"Wh, what!?"
"... But, it's different.
You were the one killed, yet you are the one who survived.
The one killed survived and the one who killed is dead.
I think all the mistakes began there."

She says so as if she's on the verge mentally.
Senpai pulls the "sword" from the ground by my feet.
"Ah—"
"That is all I had to tell you.
I'll leave the rest for you to decide, Tohno-kun."
"Leave it to me?
But according to your story, I—"



".... To be honest, I don't know either.
You are an incredibly ordinary person, like a student you could find anywhere.
My intuition has to be wrong.
Because—you are someone who shouldn't be in a world like mine."

With a sad smile, Senpai leaps an incredible distance from me.
As if trying to tell me she's someone else now, an unreachable, far distance.
"——"

I—still can't leave Arcueid alone.
Unless I chase after her now, I feel like I'll never see her again.



"You're going after her, Tohno-kun?"

Senpai's voice returns to the way it was when she drove off Arcueid.

An inflectionless voice devoid of emotion.

"—Yeah.

Because you're a person of the Church, I know she's an enemy of yours.

But a lot of things have happened and I agreed to help her, so I have to look for her.

I don't know what she'll do if I leave her by herself."

Laughing as if it was a joke, I tell her "Later" and turn around.

"—Please wait.

If you go after her you will only get killed.

You must not see Arcueid Brunestud again."

"Only get killed?—Well, you may not believe me, but she really doesn't suck blood.

She's quite a good person, actually."

".... I know.

Certainly she hasn't drunk human blood.

However, that's at an end.

A True Ancestor who gives in to the vampiric impulse once can only fall downward from there."

My feet freeze in place.

".... Senpai?

True Ancestor—vampiric impulse, what do you mean?"

".... I mean the desire to drink blood.

Tohno-kun.

The vampires called Dead Apostles mostly became vampires after a vampire sucked their blood.

To preserve their bodies they need the blood of humans.

In other words, they can't escape drinking blood if they want to live."

"But the ones that were vampires from the beginning are different.

.... The Dead Apostles were originally humans like us.

So maybe you can still call them human.

However, if someone was born a vampire, can you call it human?"

"Wha—what are you saying, Senpai?"

I'm asking about about Arcueid."

"This is about her.

I won't let you say you never thought about it.

If Dead Apostles become vampires from vampires, there has to be an origin, 'an existence that is a vampire from the beginning'. These vampires that are a completely different species from us, we call the True Ancestors.

Those who don't need human blood and have special powers equivalent to, no, surpassing the Dead Apostles.

She is a member of the royal family of the True Ancestors.

.... although they don't really have any rank structure, so saying 'royal' isn't quite accurate."

"—So what, Senpai?

This conversation—this doesn't have anything to do with me....!"

"It does.

These vampires known as the True Ancestors have a deeper impulse to drink blood than the Dead Apostles."

Her eyes are completely emotionless.

Like mirrors, they show my agitated face.

"Do you see, Tohno-kun?

The True Ancestors can live without human blood.

However, maybe a mistake happened in their evolution, or maybe there's no such thing as a perfect existence, but anyway, there is a period when they desire the blood of humans.

".... The instant a human has his blood drunk by them, he no longer remains human.

True Ancestors are on a scale different from humans as creatures.

When the powerful life of a True Ancestor touches the blood of a human, the sheer difference means a human cannot remain human after such contact.

Like a small wave absorbed into a larger wave, that person becomes a part of the True Ancestor—to simplify, it becomes a doll."

"The problem is, there's no reason for their vampiric impulses.

There's no reason, so there's no way to stop it.

The fatal flaw in an otherwise perfect existence.

You can call it a terminal illness.

Anyway, they live by resisting their urge to drink blood.

It isn't a matter of using the mind to put up with it.

They use all their powers to resist this urge and seal it within themselves by force.

".... By using their enormous power on themselves, they are suppressing the vampiric impulse.

But if—something external causes them to lose their power, what do you think happens to their ability to suppress it?"

.... If something external causes them to lose power....?

Such as, receiving a wound which requires power to heal, or using power to regenerate after being killed completely—
 So let's say she has ten units of power.
 And say she uses seven of them to resist the urge to drink blood inside her.
 But if—for some reason she loses five out of the ten units, then even if she uses all her remaining power, she can only use five units of power to resist.

That's not enough.
 Then, what will it take away from her—?
 ".... And?
 What happens to those True Ancestors who couldn't resist, Senpai?"



"They drink human blood, of course.
 After that, nothing.
 Once they give in, they can only keep on falling.
 Once a True Ancestor knows the taste of blood, I hear the urge becomes many times more painful than before.
 As a result, they aren't able to resist the urge anymore.
 "And when that happens, they become the dreaded Demon Lords.
 True Ancestors are certainly a superior race, but since they they bind themselves to resist the vampiric impulse, they can never utilize their full powers.
 But once they fall, there's no longer the need to restrain themselves.
 Then, they just become demons which suck human blood for their own pleasure."

.... I remember how Arcueid appeared earlier.
 Her blood-shot eyes.
 Her wild breathing.
 Her breath assailing my neck.
 ".... Lies."
 That's a lie.
 Because,
 She certainly said she's scared of drinking blood—

"Ah."

.... Yeah, she's scared.
Because once she does it, she knows she won't be able to stop.



".... If there is any salvation, it is that the urge is instantaneous.
The True Ancestors keep just one subordinate for the time the urge gets too great to suppress.
That's the beginning of those called Dead Apostles.
They are something that is already dead.
A vampire kept alive for the sake of easing the pain of the True Ancestors.
That is the form of the vampire in this city."
"But, she doesn't have such a thing.
.... No, until now, she never needed one.
Special among all the True Ancestors, she was able to resist the vampiric impulse using her will alone."
"—Then there's no problem.
Once her wound heals, once her body returns to normal, she can resist it, right....?"
".... Technically, but there is a limit, Tohno-kun.
The vampiric impulse has no end, and it will not go away.
The resisted urges which build again and again will eventually overflow their vessel.
The longer they live, the larger the vampiric impulse in them gets.
And when they can no longer restrain themselves with their own power—when the impulse overwhelms their power, their lives are ended by others.
That is the life span for those without life spans."
"—But Arcueid is okay.
She's just weak because of me, so after a few days, she'll—"
".... Perhaps.
But she's reached her limit already.
Even though she was only actually active for a few years, the amount of time of her existence does not change.
The urge which has grown inside her will soon consume her.
There's no denying that now is not the time.
She—Arcueid's life cannot be saved."

—Thump.

For the first time.
Not because of my anemia, but someone else's words.
Everything starts to fade away in a haze of dizziness.
"___"

What does it mean?
Even though she knows she's past her limit, she's still hunting vampires here?

—That's odd.
No matter—how I think of it, it's odd.
"... It's all lies.
Because if she knew she's at her limit, then why would she hunt vampires for our sake?"



"She deals with them not for our sakes, but because it is her purpose."
"Purpose—who decided that?"
"Probably the other True Ancestors.
She was born in the 12th century when there were many fallen True Ancestors.
The True Ancestors could not ignore their fallen kin nor the Dead Apostles increasing in number.
That's why they created something solely for killing.
Without a need for anything else, the most pure True Ancestor created for punishment.
That is the True Ancestor called Arcueid.
She's like a nuclear missile without a mind of its own, once she leaves the castle, her target is definitely destroyed."

—Thump.
This dizziness again.

.... She should stop saying that.
She's a person.
Talking about her like she's just some sort of weapon makes me mad.
"No, she is a weapon.
In the first place, she existed only for that purpose.
.... So it seems there is now something wrong with her.
It is the first time I've seen her talk like that.
She never spoke any words before."

—Huh?
Hold on.
Never spoke—that's odd.
"Because she never does anything extra.
From long ago—for the past hundreds of years, she has lived that way.
Ever since she was born in the old castle amongst the mountains, never changing."

—Thump.
My heartbeat, and this dark dizziness.
.... What is this?
This unknown scenery, these memories I've never had, they start to fill my vision.

The wide, castle courtyard.
The unadorned grassy field inside the solitary castle.
The white girl stares blankly up at the sky.
"She did not have any extra knowledge, or freedom beyond what was needed for her purpose.
She only goes outside when her target is determined.
She gets taught only the information needed to definitely destroy the enemy."

No one is there.
No one to talk to.
Not even another face to see.

"After killing her target and when she returns to the castle, her taught knowledge is washed out and she is taken to sleep.
Without knowing anything, nothing other than killing vampires."

There's nothing.
Such as the fun of speaking with someone else.
The precious moments of seeing someone else and greeting them.
She was excluded from all of it.
"Her power was strong enough to defeat the fallen True Ancestors.
.... But, it's ironic.
She was so powerful that she was shunned by the rest of the True Ancestors.
Even while praising her as the princess, no one approached her.
Even while giving her a castle, her world was only the dark basement.
So there was nothing to give her any feelings."

That's,
almost enough to make me pity her for living.
A parody of life.
"She apparently had no words or even time of her own.
-The True Ancestors treated her only as a weapon.
A weapon has no need for extra functions, such as baking bread or doing laundry.
If you're going to put on extra functions, you would put on something more fit for a weapon, right?"

-I was always taught never to do extra things.

Yes, she has said that before.
The reason for deciding everything for herself, for having those empty eyes.

That's why she never needed anyone else.
No, maybe she never knew about it.

"All they wanted of her was to be a superior killing machine.
That's why she doesn't know anything.
I don't mean something big like the meaning of life, but not even the small joy
of just living normally."

She was always so cheerful.
Even trivial things made her so happy.

So I thought she was always like that.

.... But I was horribly wrong.
She really was—just enjoying those simple things.
She must have enjoyed those things so much.

—Because it's so fun.
I never thought about how life could be fun just by living.

Like it was an uneasiness she couldn't understand,
The classroom filled with the red setting sun where she asked me those questions
with a reserved voice.
"Even though Arcueid has existed for so long, she knows less about living than
we do.
If you convert it to the time she was allowed to move freely, it is amazingly
short.
Her lifetime was spent almost entirely in sleep.
Most likely a deep, dark sleep."

—Really?

I have enough fun just talking, you know.

"After dealing with all the fallen True Ancestors, she did not leave the castle. Having fulfilled her purpose, the True Ancestors sought to educate her properly. However, she could not be free. Because of a slight mistake, she ended up killing all the True Ancestors remaining in the castle."

Maybe the one that was taught how to kill vampires really did finish her job until the very end.

In the end, she was left alone.

"After killing all the True Ancestors, she sealed herself up in the castle.

In the empty castle of the True Ancestors, bound with a thousand chains.

Whenever Roa is reborn, she awakens from her sleep and moves around for a short time."

In the middle of that fixed world,

She never said a single word.

"That's why she is a killer down to her very core.

Even though the True Ancestors which bound her are now gone, she still wanders around with the sole purpose of killing vampires.

She probably does not have any other fun."

That's.. a lie.

That's not what made her happy.

"—"

I wasn't.. watching anything.

"—it."

Like her words, or her happy face.
If only I looked closer—I would have known.
"—of it."

I never realized how alone she was until now.

All the things we feel and take for granted.
Such as talking with a friend about meaningless things or the fun that lets you forget time.

At the end of a day, lying down on a bed and the peacefulness of just staring at the ceiling.

To her, those unimportant things were priceless moments of happiness.
"—all of it."

What is misery?
It's her not even knowing how miserable she is.

Such a terrible—almost comical solitude should not exist.
"—Lies, all of it."

.... Enough with all these difficult things.
I never knew she felt such happiness from trivial things.
If I could let her know that such things were things she could always enjoy, that would have been such a great—



"Tohno-kun—?"
Her voice returns my vision to normal.

"What's wrong?
 You suddenly went quiet and spaced out.
 Were you listening?"
 "No—sorry, I don't remember.
 I heard you speaking, but it felt like someone else was talking."
 Senpai nods doubtfully.
 "Um, in other words, she—"
 "It's okay.
 I don't care what she did or what she's like.
 I can't leave her alone any longer, so I'll be going."

Turning away from Senpai, I start to walk towards the city.
 "—Tohno-kun.
 Once a True Ancestor fails to suppress the vampiric impulse, there is no hope
 for recovery.
 If she appears in front of you, it means she came to drink your blood."

I think what she says is the truth for her.
 But it's a different truth than mine.
 "That's not true.
 Because she hasn't drunk blood yet."
 "No.
 If I had not have stopped her, she would have drunk your blood."
 "... You're wrong, because she stopped.
 Arcueid was fine.
 That's why even if you didn't stop her, the result would have been the same."

Yes, certainly.
 She stopped right then.
 "... So you're going to be on her side no matter what, Tohno-kun?"
 "Yeah.
 Sorry, Senpai."
 Senpai doesn't answer.
 I think I hear her sigh.
 "—We may end up fighting, you know."
 "Maybe.
 But, I won't apologize, Senpai."
 "....."
 There's no response from Senpai.
 Just her presence getting farther away.
 Disappearing footsteps.
 Without turning around, I head towards town, shrouded by night.

—There's no one on the main street.
 Not Arcueid, not even just regular people.

"Damn——"

This is the same as last night.

I don't have any way of finding her.

Right now, even though I want to see her so badly, I don't have any means.

—She,

Even though she's in so much pain, I can't help her, at all—

"—Damn it!"

I'm so irritated, it drives me nuts.

Somehow—I have to find her somehow, or else I can't move forward—

I gasp painfully.

Even though I ran all through the city, I don't see her.

My body is exhausted, and I can't get enough air.

I breathe harder.

The scar on my chest throbs with my heartbeat.

Until now—I've never hated this fragile body this much.

I hungrily breathe in air.

.... I can't find her.

I won't find her just running around aimlessly like this.

I struggle for breath.

If, if I have any chance of finding her, it would be—

Rush to the same alley as last night.

turn to **176**

Wait here in the park.

turn to **177**

Go to Arcueid's room.

turn to **178**

176

—I'll check in the alley she was in last night.
If she's running away from people, that's the only place I can think of.

I still have no control over my breathing.
I run with all my strength from the park.
My heart screams from overexertion.
Ignoring it, I continue to run to find her as soon as possible.

"—Arcueid!"
As soon as I get to the alley, I call out her name.
"You're here, aren't you?
Come out, Arcueid....!"
Under the moonlight, my solitary voice echoes in the alley.
".... Arcueid....!"
Please, come out....!"

.... There's no response.
There's only an empty loneliness here.
"Damn.....!"
Arcueid isn't here.
Then where else is there?

I can't find her running around aimlessly.
At this rate I'll never—never see her again.
"——"

No, I'm not done yet.
I still haven't fulfilled my promise with Arcueid.

The promise to help her defeat the vampire, and the promise to meet tonight
so we can fight together.
".... Pro.... mise...."
.... That's right.
There's still our promise.
Even if it's just one-sided, I—even if it's just me, I'll fulfill our promise.

I return to the park.
Our promise still remains here.
Our unfulfilled promise for tonight remains here.

—So,

If I can't break this promise, and if she thinks it's important too,

Arcueid will come back here.

I can only continue to believe in her and wait here.

turn to **179**

177

.... I'll stay here.
We promised.
We promised to meet here.
We still haven't fulfilled our promise for tonight.
To meet here, and to fight together.
—So,
If I can't break this promise, and if she thinks it's important too,

Arcueid will come back here.
I can only continue to believe in her and wait here.

setvar arkregard + 2
turn to **179**

178

—I'll go to Arcueid's room.

If Arcueid is as weak as Senpai says, she had to have returned to her room to rest.

I gasp for air.
My legs, which ran as hard as they could, finally stop.
Trying to catch my breath, I enter the apartment.

.... I grab the doorknob.
It isn't locked.
Without hesitating, I turn it and open the door.

.... Even though it wasn't locked, there's no one here.

"Arcueid.... are you here?"

There's no response.
Does she never lock her door?
There's no sign of her having even returned here.
"Damn.... Then she's still in town....!?"
I hit the wall.
But letting it out on the wall is not going to get Arcueid to come out.
"... Where did you go.... where did you go, Arcueid....!?"

—If there really is a God, I want to ask him for help.
Arcueid isn't here.
But I can't find her just running around aimlessly.
At this rate I'll never—never see her again.

"——"

No, I'm not done yet.
I still haven't fulfilled my promise with Arcueid.
The promise to help her defeat the vampire, and the promise to meet tonight so we can fight together.
"... Pro.... mise...."
.... That's right.
There's still our promise.
Even if it's just one-sided, I—even if it's just me, I'll fulfill our promise.

I return to the park.
Our promise still remains here.
Our unfulfilled promise for tonight remains here.

—So,
If I can't break this promise, and if she thinks it's important too,

Arcueid will come back here.
I can only continue to believe in her and wait here.

turn to **179**

179

Time passes by.
The clock ticks mechanically, recording the passing of each second.
"_____"

I feel like I'm drowning.
My body doesn't want to wait a minute longer.
Just sitting here waiting seems like the utmost in idiocy and I want to run off
and search for her again.
"_____"

But, my heart is calm.
Even though my body urges me to hurry, my heart remains calm.
I continue waiting, staring up at the moon.

—It's horribly quiet.
No sounds, as if the night froze everything.

A quiet stillness as if Arcueid and I were the only ones in the entire world.
If I can stay in such a place, then it isn't painful at all to wait for any amount
of time.

So, right now,
I'm drowning in bliss.
Only time passes by.
Just two hours until dawn.
If the day breaks, Arcueid and I will probably never see each other again.

And time just passes by.
And then like a white rabbit in the snow,
she unexpectedly arrives in the park.

"....."
Arcueid doesn't say anything.
With downcast eyes, she doesn't make a move to come closer.
"—Arcueid."
I call out to her.
She doesn't respond or even look in my direction.
"....."
I can't speak.
I don't know what I can say to make her smile again.
Right now, I feel like any words coming out of my mouth will only make her
sadder.

.....

.....

.....

Time seems to stretch to eternity.

In reality, the ticking of the clock can't have happened even close to a thousand times.

Arcueid lifts her head, looking like she's watching a dream.

"You wouldn't go home at all, Shiki.

So I came here because I couldn't leave you alone.

.... Even though I really was thinking of going back to my room."

She hesitates as she speaks, but she says this in her usual cheerful manner.

".... Of course I wouldn't go back.

Didn't I say I'd keep my promise?

I still haven't been any help tonight."

"—That's enough.

You don't have to do that anymore."

"Enough?—Just what's enough, Arcueid....!?"

"Doesn't it go without saying?

It's just that I'm a vampire and you're a human, Shiki.

I didn't have any right to receive help from you.

I didn't understand that earlier, and I would have ruined you if I went a bit farther.

That's why—"

it's enough, she whispers.

—What are you saying, all of a sudden?

I was ready for that from the time I agreed to help you.

I understood far better than you that you were a vampire.

Knowing that, I still said I'd help you.

This—is nothing I can agree with....!

".... Arcueid, you don't need to worry about what happened earlier.

You were just tired and weak.

I'm an idiot, so I couldn't realize your lie.

You weren't in pain because of your wounds, but because of your vampiric impulses, right?

.... Senpai told me all about it."

".... That woman.

Since when did agents from the Burial Agency become so talkative?"

Less with hate and more with exhaustion, Arcueid gives a deep sigh.

".... I heard it all from Senpai.

So I'll be direct.

I don't see any problem, Arcueid.

You're in pain now, but you'll return to normal in a few days, right?

So you don't need to worry.

And about before—even though you were in so much pain, you held yourself back, didn't you?

So it's alright.

Let's just continue like we were until now."

"....."

With some difficulty, Arcueid smiles weakly.

"... Shiki, you don't understand at all.

It's useless to do this.

Even now, I want to drink your blood."

"—But you only think that.

Then try hard and resist it.

... Haven't you tried so hard like that until now?"

"... That's true, until now I've held myself back, no I was able to.

But I guess it's useless now.

Even though the only meaning for my existence is to hunt other vampires, I did a lot of extra things.

If I didn't know anything, I never would have thought of wanting anything.

If I didn't rely on you and pursued the enemy by myself, it would have been alright."

"——"

It would've been okay if she was by herself....?

Is she serious?

Does she seriously believe that?

With such a sad face?

With such a sad voice?

With such a solitary appearance and on the verge of collapse?

"—That just pisses me off!

Snap out of it, you idiot....!"



"Wha....."

"Don't be ridiculous....!"

What do you mean if you pursued the enemy by yourself, it would have been alright!?

Because it was impossible by yourself—because you finally realized there are things you can't do by yourself, you asked me for help, right!?

Then rely on me until the very end....!

I'll help you.

No matter what happens, I'll help you, so—"

Don't look like that.

"—Don't say those.. things."

.... Finally.

If you've finally realized that life is fun,
please don't simply give up on such happiness.



"Shiki—are you, crying....?"

"Like hell I am....!"

Why would I cry over you....!?"

It's just.. she's saying such stupid things.

It makes me so angry, that my emotions are going crazy.

"Anyway, we'll continue searching for this vampire, okay!?"

If we can defeat this Roa guy, then you can get some rest.

Then, everything's solved.

There aren't any problems at all....!"

With terribly peaceful eyes, she gives a quiet nod.



"But—It's too late for me, Shiki.

You said I held myself back before, but I really didn't.

Back then, I only stopped because you became afraid of me.

Many people have been afraid of me, like a monster.
So I didn't feel anything when hated or feared.
"... But it really is strange, you know?
I really didn't want you to look at me like I was a monster.
But I am a monster no matter how you look at me."
Ahaha.
She forces out a dry laugh.

".... No—it just happened so fast, I was just surprised—"
.... That's a lie.
That's a lie I can't even fool myself with.

Arcueid painfully looks away.
.... Sensei told me before.
That you'll only hurt the other person when you tell lies that you can't even
deceive yourself with.



".... That's why I stopped for an instant.
I was scared of you looking at me like that.
I would break apart if you look at me like that in the future too.
So—I won't see you anymore."
"Wha—"



"Let's say goodbye here, Shiki.
We probably associated too much with each other."

She turns around swiftly.
She says this while trying not to look at me.
.... associated too much, huh?
Maybe that's true.
For both me and Arcueid.
If we never knew much about each other, this would have never happened.
I would have just returned to my normal life, and she'd have probably kept going by herself.
".... You're right.
Maybe we have associated too much already.
But, I think we're fine like that.
Because, isn't always being by yourself lonely?"
"—" "
Arcueid doesn't answer.
She looks so vulnerable.
I want to embrace her and support her.
"And to be honest, I really enjoyed these past few days.
I almost died, but it wasn't all bad.
.... So let me help you until the very end.
How could I sleep if I knew I left you alone?"
".... No, you don't have to worry about me.
I will kill Roa no matter what.
I will destroy him even if it kills me.
.... You've done enough already, Shiki.
This city will soon return to normal, so you don't have to worry anymore."
Her voice as she faces away from me has no trace of her usual brightness.
.... I can't bear this anymore.
I'm going to stop acting like this.
".... Idiot.
That's not what I'm worried about."
Saying that, I draw closer to her.

"Ah—"

Arcueid tries to escape.
I grab her arm from behind and make her turn around.



"Shi—ki."

"Since you don't understand me unless I'm direct, I'll be direct.
... Look, I didn't agree to help you to stop the vampire in this city.
I really don't have any fine ideals such as protecting this city I live in."
Right, I was only fooling myself.
The reason isn't anywhere near to being that noble.
I just..
"I just like you.
I wanted to help you, so I agreed to help you.
So now—I just can't leave you."

I reveal it all.
And I embrace Arcueid straight on.

"Oh—"
Her gasp isn't one of resistance.
She simply stands there in astonishment, accepting my embrace.

Thump.
"There's nothing wrong with you wanting to drink my blood."

Thump.
"... Shiki, it hurts—my arms, hurt—"

Thump.
"That'll make it even.
Because I—"

Thump.
"I have always wanted you too.
Even now—I'm consumed with passion just hearing your heartbeat."

Thump.
From her arms I hold, from her body up against mine,
I can feel the beating of her heart.

".... No, Shiki.
That's just.... for right now, it's only a whim of yours.."

Thump, Thump.
Just hearing this sound—makes me want to hug her to death.
"—Even so, if I love you right now Arcueid, that is my truth.
I don't care about what happens later."

Thu, mp.
"Or do you—hate me?"

Thu, mp.
The heartbeat skips.
".... No.
I can't answer that."

The heartbeat stops.
In it's place,
Her arms wrap around my back like falling rain.

At first, just gently.
Then, hard as if answering me.
Her arms squeeze my body into hers.

Our embrace lasted only an instant.
I don't even know which one of us separated first.
But as if we planned it, we both let go.



"....."
She blushes, looking away.
"——"

There is only about an hour until dawn.
As the night ends, so does Arcueid's time.
But—I can't bear parting with her anymore.
If it can be forgiven, right now, I want to—

"—My room."

"Eh?"

"... Um, can we go, to my room...?"

If you say you're going to protect me—I don't want you, to go back."

A hesitant voice.

... Even I can understand what she means.

Nodding wordlessly, I walk with Arcueid to her room.

I enter before her.

... Behind me, I can sense Arcueid.

If I turn around, I know my feelings will rise out of control.

But still, my mind is almost surprisingly calm.

I don't quite understand it myself,

but perhaps it is the contradicting impulse of being insane yet sane that loving someone brings.

"—Arcueid."

I try to turn around.

Before I finish—I feel her hand lightly rest on my back.

"Don't turn around.

... Wait just like this for a while."

... Her voice is exceedingly calm.

The hand on my back doesn't move, as if making sure of something.

"... Hey Shiki.

Do you remember when I first waited for you?"

"Yeah, I remember.

The one I killed was waiting with a smiling face.

How could I forget?"

"Yeah—back then, I really hated you."

Despite her words, her voice is very gentle.

"... Arcueid?"

"—I knew I wouldn't be able to suppress my vampiric impulses by myself any longer, and I knew this probably would be my chance, and I pursued Roa.

I thought I finally found him, and then someone I didn't even know killed me and ruined everything.

Back then, all I could feel was hatred."

"And I found the one who killed me and waited at that road for such a long time.

I was thinking for you to hurry up.

Hurry up and come here.

Once I saw you, I'd make you suffer the same fate.

... I really did hate you.

I hated you so much I thought my chest would burst with hatred as I waited."

The pressure on my back increases.

".... Ar.... cueid....?"

"But, no one has ever killed me like that before.

I was a bit curious about what kind of person you were too.

And—I never thought so strongly about someone before."

"In the beginning, it was just hatred.

But it started to slip when I wondered what kind of human you were.

Soon, I wanted to meet you to find out about you.

The one who killed me like that, and for the first time I almost lost track of myself—and I kept wondering."

"—Shiki, what you said before.

About how being by yourself is lonely.

I thought that wasn't true.

But—when I waited for you, the one who I madly thought about, I felt happy.

"I wanted to meet you right away, but it turned out great that I held on and waited for you.

It was really fun.

I was so excited, I kept imagining what kind of person you were."

.... She pulls her hand from my back.

I—

"—Thinking back, I started to feel the need for someone else from that time, and I felt unsatisfied with just being by myself.

You said you liked me,

.... but I think I fell in love with you before we even met—"

Her voice is.. just so.. lovely.

.... There's no need for hesitation.

Turning around, I embrace her.

"N...."

Our lips come together naturally.

I don't know who started it, maybe we both did.

We just did it gently.

We kissed to feel each other's presence just a bit closer.

—Hha.... ah.

Holding my breath, I take in everything about the way she feels.

Her soft lips.

The skin that would never touch anything.. is touching me right now.

Just thinking about it makes my head spin, yet touching her is so warm and relaxing.

Her body is trembling lightly.

But she doesn't seem to be scared at all.

Her closed eyes, the shade of red on her cheeks is so adorable.
.... I really can't believe it.
This Arcueid is the one I love so much.
I couldn't even imagine that just doing this would make me feel more love toward her—

We pull back.
Still holding each other, we look at each other in embarrassment.
"... That was a.. kiss.. wasn't it?"
She says this with a deep blush.
Her red eyes looking up at me imploringly.
Her golden hair waving before my eyes.

"Arcueid.... you don't like this kind of thing?"
"—That's not it.
My heart's beating fast right now."
Thump.
Certainly, her heart is beating loudly.
Or—is it my heartbeat?
She looks straight into my eyes.
"But, this is troubling.
.... I'm wondering, if this is really okay?"
"Is what okay?"
"Because, there aren't any vampires that kiss."
Blushing,
She smiles embarrassedly.

"——"

That gesture was checkmate.
Taking off my glasses, I embrace her once more.

—One more time.
Not the mutual kiss of before.
I do a hungry, searching, stealing kiss.
"Mmph—"
Arcueid sucks in a breath.
I don't care.
I just can't hold anything back.
And kiss her deeply.
"N, mm.....!"
Arcueid tries to breathe in.
I steal even that.
I lift her chin and hold her head.
Covering her lips with mine and intertwining our tongues.

I want to become one.

"Ha—ah, n—"

Pushing against Arcueid's mouth as she tries to escape, I slip my tongue past her lips.

My tongue easily dips into her mouth.

The sounds we make, the sensations of our touching tongues easily lets me imagine what we look like.

As her tongue tries to pull away, I wrap mine around it.

Wrapping, intertwining, sucking.

The sensation on the tip of my tongue is almost ticklish.

But the sucking on the base of my tongue feels like absolute zero.

"N.... ah, n...."

Unable to breathe, our throats still try to swallow.

Her white throat moves painfully, crying for oxygen.

At the same time—her mouth sucks my tongue in, and our tongues mix together even more deeply.

Moving my tongue, I draw her lip in further.

Our breathing,

our exploring,

.... all within our mouths.

The sounds of our joining fill the air.

There's no end.

The pleasure from this is enough to make me pass out.

Is it because our mouths and tongues are so close to our brains?

Meeting like this causes my mind to go blank more than anything I've felt before.

Pleasure trips a fuse in my brain, threatening to overwhelm me.

"Ah.... n, mm.....!"

Our interrupted breathing.

At some point, her mouth—which was seeking oxygen—started to tangle her tongue with mine.

As our tongues intertwine, they come into my mouth.

"Ha.... ah."

I realize that was my own voice.

I can't believe it.

Someone else's tongue—someone else's tongue is entering my mouth.

This feeling.

This slight sense of discomfort of something foreign in my mouth.

And above that, this overwhelming pleasure which feels like it could kill me—

"Ha.... mm, mm, mha....!"

We try to breathe as our tongues indulge one another.

"hwa... ah, mm——"

I had no idea a tongue could generate such a sensation simply by touching another tongue.

Just being in contact puts us out of breath.

Inhaling, nibbling.

Just that makes me go crazy—makes me unable to think of anything but her.

"Mm——"

Closing her eyes as if resisting something, Arcueid answers back.

It's completely different from our gentle kiss from before.

There's only a male and a female here now.

Our mouths are already wet.

Saliva begins to spill from our lips.

From mine to hers, from hers to mine.

But—it isn't dirty, and like the world's most powerful aphrodisiac, it causes all thought to crumble away.

And like that..

Not just my tongue, but wanting everything to come together, I pull back from Arcueid's mouth.

I gasp for air.

My chest hurts.

I don't know how long we were like that.

I can't even breathe properly.

But, even more than that, I want to touch her body and feel her against me.

"... Shiki?"

Concerned, Arcueid looks into my face.

Her blushing, hesitant expression.

"Ar... cueid..."

I can't stop.

I hold her tight.

"I—want to sleep with you.. I want you——"

"....."

At first, she gives no answer.

Then, keeping her head down,
her entire face goes red as she nods.

As naturally as if she was taking off her hat, Arcueid removes her clothing.

It is less a removal and more an emergence, though, a sight beautiful enough to take my breath away.

Her white clothes disappear without a sound.

The bra covering her lovely breasts, and the underwear concealing her femininity, disappear like flowing water.

.... Looking at Arcueid's nude figure causes my rampaging mind to come to a complete stop.

It's not that I became calm,

but she's just so beautiful—I forget to think, or go wild.

"—"

I can't speak.

She shyly sits down on the bed.

"Shiki....?"

Her gaze asks me what's wrong.

"Uh—nothing—"

.... Her white skin is tinged with a faint hue of red.

That charming tint causes all rational thought to fade away.

"Um.... Shiki, am I not—"

"That's not it.

You're so beautiful, I was just.. fascinated."

"Y.... yeah."

She shyly averts her eyes, and reveals her naked body.

Using both hands to cover her lower body causes her breasts to be accentuated.

"—You really are beautiful.

Your breasts are just so perfect."

Saying that, I reach out and brush them with my fingers.

"—Ah."

Arcueid trembles.

"Shiki, wait—"

"What?"

Why?

I've already decided to make love to you.. this is only the beginning."

"Y, yeah—I know that, but.."

Maybe she's still embarrassed.

She looks at me uneasily.

".... There's nothing to be embarrassed about.

Your breasts are perfect, and you have a fantastic body."

"Ah—!?"

Arcueid's body shakes.

Most likely because of me tightening my fingers.

Leaning down, I nibble at the tip of her right breast.

I knead the luscious mounds, the flesh feeling like ripe fruit in my hands.

"Ah—"

She blushes even more.

She must not be used to the feeling, as she looks at the fingers caressing her breasts in amazement.

".... They really are big.

I could never tell from your clothes, but for you to have such a dirty body like this.."

"—Mmph."

Arcueid doesn't answer.

She just gives a few short gasps as I slowly continue to massage her breasts.

Mm, ah, ahn—

Her breathing almost sounds rhythmic.
"Mm... Shiki, wait—"
I don't pay any attention.
At first, just very lightly.
And then, bit by bit.
Almost enough for her not to realize it, I gradually strengthen my grip.
Not touching her nipples, because she'll probably try and escape if I do it too quickly.
So for now, just slowly.
So that when she realizes it, it'll be too late for her.
I continue caressing her perfectly shaped breasts.
"Ah... mm, mm—"
Her breathing gets heavier.
Pretending I don't notice, I rub her even more.
... I intended to stay calm, but just doing this turns me on.
"Mm—, Shiki, I feel—"
Her voice gets warmer.
It trembles with impatience.
"Ah... ah, I—feel.. hot.. all over."
Arcueid's words are interrupted with soft, sexy gasps.
"You MUST be hot, since you're sweating like that.
Getting hot all over after just a little massage?
You must really want this, Arcueid."
"But Shiki, it's.. because.. you.. keep.. doing.. that—!"
I squeeze even harder.
Her face stiffens as if in fear.
"Ha—ha, I'm not one to talk.
Just doing this—it's making me go crazy, Arcueid."
Taking a deep breath, I massage her harder.
"Ah... ahn."
Her sweet voice.
It's only natural for her to get hot being touched.
But.. what is this?
I'm only touching her breasts,
but the feeling of her breast overflowing from in-between my fingers is eating away at my mind.
—There's something strange about her body.

Just touching it like this..
It seems to send pleasure rebounding towards me in ever-increasing magnitude.
My breathing gets heavier.
Before I realize it,
I start to breathe wildly, intoxicated by her body.
Arcueid is warmed up enough.
Her pink nipples are proud and stiff.
She gasps quickly.

I bring my mouth to one.
 "Ah—"
 Arcueid looks away in embarrassment.
 Ignoring this, I stick out my tongue.
 I give the hardened peak a tentative lick.
 "Mm, kk..."
 I can hear Arcueid's voice.
 Her nipple's so hard I barely move it with my tongue.
 "Ha—gh."
 For some reason, my head hurts.
 The intense sensations are causing it.
 But ignoring all that, I tongue her nipple.. and slowly take it into my mouth.
 "—Mm, ah—!"
 Her breasts swell upwards.
 After sucking them diligently for some time, I let my mouth slide lower.
 "A—Shi—"
 A thin trail of saliva runs the length of her white body.
 "—ki..."
 The sounds coming from her throat no longer resemble words.
 My tongue plays along her body as my fingers continue their massaging.
 Her body shudders in time with her breathing.
 "Wa..... it—"
 I become aware of a different smell.. something other than her sweat or skin.
 It's a warm, light scent.
 The area covered by her hands is already moist.
 Her slender fingers are covered in sticky juices.
 "... What's this?
 you feel this much already with just your breasts.... you're more.... sensi-
 tive.. than I thought, Ar.... cueid."
 But again, I'm not one to talk.
 I can't even speak properly.
 "Shi.. ki—I.. have a.. request."
 "—?
 What?
 A request?"
 "I don't.... want you to be rough... like that time."

 That time.
 That time I pushed her down in the alley.
 Why does she have to bring that up now?
 Even if she didn't say it, I wouldn't be like that anyway.
 "... How come?
 You don't like it rough?"
 "Well... um.... this is my first time, so.."
 She blushes and tries to contain her harsh breathing.
 She sounds so incredibly cute.

"——Eh?"

".... Really, I'm still really scared.... that's why, Shiki.... just for now.... please be gentle——"

——That does it.

That's the last straw.

"Why are you——"

I squeeze her breasts.

All thinking, all reason, all knowledge disappears.

Even my breathing stops.

"Shiki—?"

What is it?

You're acting strange.... you're making a scary face—it's.... strange...."

Yeah, of course I'm acting strange.

Because I can't think straight.

But she made me this way.

"Ow.....!"

I push her down onto the bed.

"Shiki, ow——!"

I'm not——"

"Shut up!"

I climb on top of her.

I cover her lips with my own.

.... My heart pounds furiously.

My fully erect shaft lands right on top of her slit.

Like a crude sword, it pierces into her.

"Ah.....!"

The maddening mixture of shyness and anticipation on her face disappears.

"——No....!"

I'm not——"

You're not ready for it yet, right?

Even I know that.

But.. I can't help it.

Tohno Shiki has been driven mad by her words.

Panting fills the air.

My breathing goes out of control.

Really!

Why do you——

"——Always.. say things that make me go crazy, Arcueid——!"

There's nothing else left now.

I brutally thrust into her.

"Ah.....!"
Her body stiffens.
She begins to quiver.
pant *pant* *pant*
Without paying any attention, I continue pushing inside of her.

She's already wet enough to accept me smoothly.
However, that was only at the beginning.
She's really tight.
Even if we are both wet,
Only my tip goes in smoothly, and the rest of it won't go in unless I force it.
"It hurts—Shiki, it really hurts—!"
Her voice is almost a scream.
"—You have to put up with it.
If you talk, you might bite your tongue."
Pushing down on her squirming body, I continue to thrust myself in.
"N—ah, aaahaaaa.....!"
Her voice is full of pain.
"Haa—ah."
My voice on the other hand, is different.
I only have my tip inside of her.
But still, the tightness is out of this world.
Maybe it's because I didn't give her much foreplay, but she's not very wet inside.
I can only feel hot walls of flesh surrounding me.
"Gghh....!"
It's, a little, strange.
Are my nerves damaged, or is being inside her just that good?
Just having her wrapped around me, I feel like I'm being sucked dry.
I've only had it in for a matter of seconds, and just the very tip, but the pleasure is intense enough for me to come over and over again.
"Gh—ah.....!"
I frantically hold back by biting my tongue.
My arms move on their own to caress her breasts, the sides of her body, her neck.
Her ivory figure.
She feels warm when I touch her, yet she she's so soft it feels like she would melt if I press too hard.
Just touching.
Just touching causes my mind to go blank.
"Ar—cueid.....!!!"
In contrast to her pain, my mind has gone completely empty.
If I go any deeper,
if I touch her any more, I feel like I'll enter a world of pleasure so intense I would never return.
"Gha—!"

This is bad.
I have enough reason, at least, to know this is bad.
So I use my hips and try to pull out.
"Mm—!"
Yet the simple motion of pulling back is too much.
Just doing that gives me pleasure out of this world,
and Arcueid almost screams in pain.
"Shi... ki—!"
Arcueid calls my name.
Looking down—her hands grip the sheets tightly as if trying to resist the pain.
"... Arcueid, you—"
... she's bearing it.
Trying to bear me as I indulge my selfishness, and bearing the pain of her first
time.
Bearing it all, she tries to allow me my wish.
"——"
Why am I hesitating now?
I like her—I love her, so I want her.
Then—no matter what happens, don't I just want to become one with her—?
"... Arcueid.
I know it hurts, but can you bear it...?"
"——"
She gives a slight nod.
"Then here I go.
If it hurts, just say so... it should ease things a bit for you."
I lower my body again.
All that's left is for me to bury myself in her depths.

"—Mgh!"
The bed creaks.
Her body bends like a bow.
My swollen, hardened shaft thrusts forth.
There is a feeling of something tearing like paper.
Arcueid's face colors with shame, and tears gather in her eyes from the pain.
"Ha—A.....!!!!!"
What pain.
The deeper I go, my awareness breaks apart.
This pleasure.
Surpassing the pain are waves of pleasure, crashing into my brain.
re races through my spinal cord and assails me.
"Ha—, gh."
There's no forgiveness inside her.
Her flesh wraps around me.
Embracing, massaging, pressuring, caressing, constricting.
The nerves in my shaft are squeezed as if held by a fist.
"Kh—ah, ah—"

But I keep going further.
 These waves of pleasure threaten to make me pass out.
 Though I fear them, I also want more.
 "Mmph—ah, nn....!"
 Arcueid throws her head back, exposing her white neck.
 Her body arches in pain.
 Doing that only serves to make her tighten around me more, making me go insane.
 "Ow—Shiki, it hurts.. there.....!"
 "—It's okay—we're almost there....!"
 I push with my hips once more.
 Sliding.
 The sounds of flesh against flesh.
 Sloshing.
 The sounds of our fluids mixing together.
 As I move back and forth, a translucent liquid seeps out of her.
 "Ah, ah, nn....!"
 There's still pain in her voice.
 But, on the other hand..
 her body, which was trying to escape before, is starting to reply.
 That means,
 she's starting to feel pleasure.
 "—!"
 I use my hips a bit more.

 "Shi... ki-!"
 Her body jumps up.
 Her breasts quiver.
 Her well-shaped eyebrows contort in anguish.
 Her passage gets tighter.
 There is no end to Arcueid's inside,
 and the pleasure keeps attacking me.

 "Ah—ha, nn, nha.....!"
 Arcueid moans.
 I just keep thrusting.
 Her pain, my pain, our hips, everything moves together as if one.
 "It—that deep, it.. hur.. ts!"
 I can't even answer.
 Right now, the pain is still greater than pleasure for her.
 If I can't hold off until it reverses, it would be meaningless.
 "Ah, mm—Shiki—har.. der-!"
 She begs me even as her tears start to flow.
 There's still pain, but she can't think about it.
 She's no longer holding me off.
 "—Here I.. go—"

Gathering up my strength, I start to thrust.
Over and over.
As long as I can concentrate, until she loses all rational thought, I'll keep going.
"Nn, hwaa, ah, ah——!"
Her breathing matches the quivering of her body.
Her hot skin.
Her face tinged with pleasure and pain.
Just touching them steals away my rationale.
"Shi, ki—Shiki, Shiki.....!"
She calls my name as if remembering nothing else.
In response, I thrust deeper.
"Mm....!"
I'm okay, so please—go deeper....!"
"—Ggh.....!"
I feel like I'm melting inside of her.
It isn't a matter of me simply releasing semen in her anymore.
It's like my entire body, my entire mind, is trying to release itself in pleasure.
Holding back this long might be what's called a miracle.
But, I'm almost at my limit.
The pleasure escalates without end.
As the pain in Arcueid dwindles, the pleasure increases.
"Ha—gh—!"
I clench my stomach.
A burning fire starts to well up inside me.
That was it.
Using all my strength, I plunge into her one last time.
"Oh....!"
Arcueid arches in response.
"—Nn, Aahaaaa—!!!"

Spurt.

I start to release it all.
Splurt, splurt.

"N—, ah, haa, ahn—"
Arcueid breathes heavily.
After waiting this long, only one or two spurts won't finish it.
Splurt, splurt.
My essence fluids her insides.
After what seems like eternity,
Arcueid collapses on the bed, completely exhausted.

Only the sounds of our breathing echo through the moonlit room.
Arcueid's glistening body lies next to mine, a thin line of blood on her thigh.
We lie there, panting.

The results of her first time.
 She really must be worn out.
 I try and catch my breath.
 But, for me,
 even after coming that much, and pushing myself past the limit like that, it still
 isn't enough.
 The ecstasy was more than enough.
 But my mind is wanting to hold her even more.
 Even though I would be limp already, normally, my shaft is fully erect as if
 telling me things are just getting started.
 "Ha—ah."
 Arcueid has to be at her limit.
 Going non-stop like that for her first time.
 I bet she can't even move after all that pain and movement.
 Her unguarded back.
 Completely flawless.
 The gentle curve of her hips.
 Her delicate breasts,
 and her slit, still swelling with my fluids.

 The hair on my neck stands up.
 This isn't good—this isn't enough at all.
 "..... Shiki?"
 Arcueid asks questioningly.
 "Arcueid—"
 I call her name and wrap my hands around her hips from behind.
 "Hya—!?"
 She gives an unbelievably cute yelp.
 "H-hey, Shiki—!?"
 She turns and faces me in surprise.
 "Ah—"
 She blushes after looking down at me.
 Of course she thought I already had enough.
 But after seeing my fully erect shaft, her eyes flicker in surprise.
 "Shiki..... you're.. very lively."
 ".... I'm surprised myself.
 Usually, I would be done by now—but my body still seems to want you."
 So I don't want it to end now.
 Saying that with my eyes, I bring my face in between her legs.
 "Shi.. Shiki....!"
 ".... If we stopped now, wouldn't it be a waste?
 You finally started getting used to it all, so this time it's your turn to feel noth-
 ing but pleasure."
 "Eh—eh!?"
 I ignore her troubled voice.
 With a flick of my tongue,

I start to lick her red, inflamed lips.
"Stop, what are you doing Shiki....!"
"What am I doing?
Just getting ready for next time.
We have to clean you up."
"Ah—y, yes.... but, isn't it.. dirty?"
She blushes even more as she speaks.
Her face is filled with embarrassment and pleasure.

—That is.. unbelievably cute.
".... I quit.
I can't take it this slow."
Pulling my mouth back, I place my hands on her well-shaped ass.
"Eh?
Shiki, what....!?"
"——"
I don't bother answering.
Putting my hands on her hips, I push against her from behind.
"W, wait Shiki.
I'm.. already—"
"At your limit?
But I've been—teased inside of you for so long."
I take my fully erect shaft and slip it inside of her from behind.
"Mm—!"
She looks upward in shock.
She collapses on her elbows as if resisting my rear assault.

"Ah—m, mm....!"
There isn't a shadow of pain in her voice anymore.
I slide inside of her.
It feels completely different than the first time.
Our fluids from before make for a smooth entry.
But there is no difference in the pleasure I feel.
No, it's even better this time.
Inexorably, her walls tighten around me, not allowing even a millimeter of free room.
Even though she's as hot as an oven, there isn't any pain.
"No—stop, not from behind—"
Before she can finish, I thrust even deeper.
"NaAaa—!!"
Her reactions are very innocent.
Just by pushing in, she returns twice as much sensation as my movement.
".... You haven't even come yet, right?
It isn't fair if it's only me, so just accept it."
"Accept it—if you say so, I don't mind, but...."
"But what?"

".... Then, um, I want it...."
 like we did before, she trails off weakly.
 Her gesture is just too cute.
 Over and over,
 she seems to be able to make me go insane over her.
 "_____"

I thrust deeper into her.
 "Mmm.....!"
 Her back twists and bends like a snake.
 It seems she doesn't feel much pain when I'm putting it in from behind.
 Is it just her healing ability, or does she have some supernatural adaptation
 ability as well?
 The only thing she's feeling right now is embarrassment from being taken from
 behind, and the pleasure from the act itself.
 "—Here I come....!"
 I thrust deep inside her.
 "Ah—mm, mm.....!"
 She raises her voice as I move.
 Her once calm breathing and body temperature shoot rapidly upwards again.
 "Ah—mm, mm, mm.....!"
 She breathes faster, as if urging me to hurry.
 She reacts much more than before and her passage is overflowing with her juices.
 "Ah... Shi... ki..... so.. warm...."
 Her words are punctuated by gasps.
 Her voice asking for me.
 The voice I want.
 "Ar.... cueid....!"
 I call out for her the same way.
 At the same time—she tightens up around me.
 "Y—you.....!"
 I strike into her as hard as I can.
 "Ah.....!!!!"
 Her body twists in response.
 "Haa... yes, Shiki, there, more....!"
 "Haa—haa, ah....!"
 I oblige her, pumping her tunnel almost ruthlessly.
 So hot.
 I want to feel her hot skin so much it drives me crazy.
 —I can't stop.

"Nn—ah, hwaa, ah....!"
 Her voice rises higher in passion.

—As if invited by it,

"Nn—haa, ah, nn...."

I grow even wilder.

This,

"Nn, nn, aha, aah, ah....!"

might be the most destructive thing I've ever done.

"Ah, nn—nn, ah.....!!

Shiki, I, want, you—more, Shi.. ki....!!!!"

Spurred on by her voice, I continue to claim her.

I bury myself in her depths.

I wrap my hands around her,

and taste the sweat streaking her back.

"Ah—!"

I love her.

Even while in the midst of this beast-like passion—I love her so much.

I don't understand.

I can't understand it, so I just keep on loving her.

My restraint is pretty gone by now.

I can't hold back this time.

As I thrust into her, hot passion courses through my shaft.

"Gh....!"

Still, I'll keep going until I can't move.

I want to satisfy her completely, so over and over I thrust, changing the position I'm in.

"Mm—Shiki—you're moving inside of me—"

As she breathes wildly, she moves her fingers down to her slit.

As if to help me enter easier, she spreads her lips apart.

"Ah—ha, nn—!"

Maybe the pain or pleasure is too much.

She starts to rub herself as tears roll down her cheeks.

"Hwa... ah, aaa, mm, aah....!"

Her fingers are getting wet.

With my semen and her juices, her fingers glisten and overflow.

"Arcueid—not there.. touch here."

I guide her as I keep thrusting.

"Mm.... right here....?"

Her fingers hesitantly move to the most sensitive part of her body.

"Eh—ah!?"

Her back arches upwards.

Touching her engorged clit causes her to gasp in shock.

She breathes even more wildly after touching that sensitive place.

"Ah—I can't, believe it—!"

She lifts her head as she keeps rubbing herself.

As I continue thrusting inside her,
 she continues caressing herself on the outside.
 Her skin tinges pink from all the pleasure she's feeling.
 "Mm, ah—Shiki.. it's.. so good—!"
 Her body jumps up and down.
 "—, Take, that....!"
 As she jumps, my head goes blank.
 As if I were completely connected to Arcueid,
 her pleasure seems to channel into me.
 "Mm, naa, ha.... ah, mm....!"
 She gets hotter as her body gets wilder.
 Her body glistens with sweat.
 "Ah, ha—Shiki—more...."
 This heat inside her is like a tropical forest.
 "Inside.... come inside me—!"
 "Gah—!"
 I'm totally enchanted.
 At this rate I'll die.
 It feels so good inside of her that it seems like it would be the greatest thing in
 the world to die from the pleasure.
 The rhythm of my breathing is like a freight train.
 I thrust again.
 If there's no end to her climax, I'll just have to finish it myself.
 "Ar.... cueid....!"
 —I thrust into her.
 My mind has gone numb a long time ago.
 "Shi..... ki—!"
 All she's able to say is those two syllables.
 Like I'm at the limit of my consciousness,
 she seems to be on the verge of ecstasy too.
 Slide.
 Sliiiiide.
 Sliiiiiide....!!!
 "Ha—mm, AaAaaaa—!"
 I keep thrusting harder, no matter how much she screams.
 So hard I might break her.
 "HA, ha, ha, haa....."
 I continue to push into her.

 "Ah—Hwaa, ah—Shi.. ki—!"
 Her trembling body,
 Her tightening arms around me.
 "I.. I'm going to—"
 She cries out imploringly, her eyes moist with unshed tears.
 I keep going.

She tightens up.
Her body stretches in an arch.
Like her,
I'm nearing the end too.
I truly feel the very last of my passion welling inside me.

"—!"

"Shi—ki——!"

With one last push, I thrust deep inside of her.
My come surges through my iron-hard rod.

"Nm, kk.....!"

—Thump.

"Ah—a.....!"

Arcueid stops breathing.
The sensation of heat flowing out of me.

"Ah—Shi.. ki——"

Taking it all in, she wraps her arms tightly around me—

"Ha—ah——"

Her body collapses.
She takes in my semen as she lies there, convulsing and weak.
Entranced by ecstasy, she sags to the bed.
.... Her eyes are closed.
With tears still trickling down her fully satisfied face, she falls asleep.

"..... I'm.... spent...."

I look down at her as I breathe heavily.
She's breathing peacefully as she sleeps.
"..... Nn."
I start to feel a little embarrassed thinking back on it.
I feel no regrets over having sex with her.
Well, maybe just a little.
I wanted to be a bit calmer, so that I could've enjoyed more of the sensation of her skin and the look of her embarrassed expressions.
".... I guess I still can't.
I'm doing my best only keeping up with her."
.... Actually, I'm not sure a day will come where I can be calm about Arcueid's body.
Even today, I don't remember much about what I did.
All I can remember is how good it all felt.
If tiredness is any indication of how good it was, I'm so exhausted I can't even

walk now.

"—Hwah."

Stiffing a yawn, I look down at her sleeping face.

.... I really do love her.

She answered my selfish love.

It might be a different form than the love I'm feeling, but Arcueid needs me too.

Just that.

Just that makes me extremely happy.

Not the fact that I'm needed.

But for her—who until now was always alone, for her to need someone else makes me happy.

"—And you know, with this, you're not alone anymore, Arcueid."

Everything starts to sway a little.

.... It seems I'm getting sleepy too.

Laying down on my back next to her, I take a deep breath.

Like that, I sink into a deep sleep.

In the midst of a deep sleep,
I have a dream where Arcueid wakes up before me, and is doing something terrible.

Arcueid is rustling about by herself.

What are you doing?

I ask.

"Oh.

You're awake, Shiki?"

Not really, I'm more asleep than awake.

Thanks to you, my body isn't quite doing what I tell it to.

"—I see.

I'm flattered, but it's a bit embarrassing."

.... Arcueid smiles like a little girl.

I think it's strange for me to know how she looks like when I have my eyes closed, but since she looked so happy, I decide to ignore such a trivial thing.

"Hey, Shiki?"

What is it?

You must be tired too, so you should sleep until nighttime.

"What if.. What if I became a true vampire?

What would you do, Shiki?"

.... such a strange question.

But, that wouldn't ever happen.

Because you're afraid of drinking blood, right?

"—That's why it's a 'what if' question.

It is only natural to steal other lives to preserve your own in nature, right?

So—it's just a story of 'what if I became like that'."

.... Cut it out.

That won't ever happen—and I don't like talking about "what ifs".

Didn't I say that before?

"Really?"

I like 'what ifs'.

Not knowing how things will turn out, yet still having hope at least for that moment."

.... That's right, you said something like that before too, Arcueid.

"Yeah.

So.... I was wondering what I would have done if you were a horrible person."

.... Ar.... cueid....?"

"—I love you, Shiki.

You let me feel this way, and enabled me to tell you like this.

You really were kind to me."

.... Why?

Why is Arcueid crying?

"Well Shiki, I'll be leaving before you wake up.

.... I won't be able to say goodbye directly, so forgive me for doing it this way."

.... The sound of a door shutting.

Still sleeping,

I hear it close.

"——Mm."

I wake up.

Bright sunlight streams in through the curtains.

Looking at the clock, it just turned noon.

"Crap, school....!"

I quickly get up.

.... But, come to think of it, it's Sunday today.

There's no need to go to school.

If there's anything I should worry about, it's the fact that I stayed over at Arcueid's place without calling home.

"——"

Come to think of it, I think I saw a weird dream.

A dream where I was talking to Arcueid and she kissed me at the end.

.... *sigh*

"I'm really out of it."

For me to see such a happy dream when Arcueid is sleeping next to me might be proof I'm really happy right now though.

"Don't you think so, Arc—"

I turn to the bed.

And my voice cuts off there.

"—Ar.... cueid?"

I look at the bed in shock.

There's no one there.

Arcueid isn't around anywhere.

—I'll be going now.

In my dream,

Arcueid said that.

"Hey, wait."

I look around the room.

But of course she isn't anywhere.

The only thing I find,

is a single piece of paper on the table.

"—Wha.."

.... I don't know if it's some kind of a joke or it's in another language, but the paper only has the word "Bye" written on it.

"—Why?"

I don't want to believe it.

But more than that—I can understand what Arcueid did.

"—Why?"

.... You've got to be kidding me.

"Bye" is just too simple.

We even promised.

We promised to be together.

I told her I'd help her until the very end.

Why—Why did she go off by herself again—

"Why, Arcueid—!?"

I scream as loud as I can and crumble the piece of paper.

—After that,

I fly out of the room and look all over like I've gone mad.

.... I can't find Arcueid.
I know.
I already know that she won't ever appear before me again.

—But I still can't give up.
I'll go crazy like this.
I'll go crazy unless I find her and yell at her for how much of an idiot she's been,
but I still can't find her.

I'll never.. see her again.
"_____"

Something, desperately ends.

She will settle things with Roa and disappear by herself.
.... No, I think she's already finished and left the city already.
"_____"

I stop thinking before I go crazy.
.... I hear the voices of cicadas in the back of my ear.
The discarded shells of cicadas.
My body becomes light with nothing inside it, and I cannot think anymore.
So this is what it means to be truly empty.
Not even tears come forth.
Still an empty shell, my legs move.
I guess it's just like an animal's instinctual sense to go home.
Even though I have nothing left in me, I am walking towards my house—

turn to **180**

180

I wake up to the sound of Hisui's voice.
Since then—after returning to the mansion, I must have made my way to my room somehow and slept.



"Shiki-sama, are you not feeling well?"

"—No, I'm fine."

Answering, I sit up in bed.

.... I'm almost amazed at myself.
I don't even feel like talking, but my body tries to start my day as always.
"Breakfast?
I'll be down soon."



"..... Yes.

I will be waiting."

Looking as if she still wants to say something, Hisui leaves the room.

I change my clothes and head to the sitting room.

Akiha and Kohaku are there.

"Morning."

Giving my usual greeting, I go to the dining room.

I eat breakfast and return to the sitting room.
I sit on the sofa and stare at the clock.



"... Nii-san?
Um, you know you have school today, right?"
"Hm—?"
Yeah, that's right.
I guess I should go to school."
I forgot.
I didn't feel like doing anything, and I thought I would keep living like this empty shell.
"... I do have my life as Tohno Shiki.
If I don't have anything to do, it won't hurt to go to school."
"Nii-san...?"
Akiha looks at me uneasily.

... Speaking is just a pain.

Without saying anything, I go to school.

Time passes by uneventfully.
I emptily attend my lessons.
The sound of the chalk.
I mindlessly write down what's written on the board into my notes.

I look out the window into the rear courtyard.
Of course there's no one there.
"_____"

—What am I doing?
Just calmly attending my lessons like this.
Not searching for her and just returning to my normal life.
"_____"

But, there's no way for me to search for Arcueid.
Since she left on her own, there's probably no possibility of me finding her.

That's why..
I've really lost Arcueid—.

snap

"....."

A sound comes from above my desk.
.... Ah, it's nothing.
I was just gripping my mechanical pencil so hard that I snapped another one.

Classes end.
In the commotion of the classroom, I still remain seated.

"Tohno, can you come here for a moment?"
My math teacher speaks up from the podium.
"—Yes, what is it?"
I respond and walk towards him.
"Tohno, hasn't your recent behavior been a little wild?
I have received information that you have been going out late at night.
Does it ring a bell?"
".... Yes.
These past few days, I had things to do in town at night."
"—I see."
My math teacher—well, my homeroom teacher as well—looks a bit concerned,
then looks a little sorry.
"I know you're not the kind of student to goof off at night, but there have been
concerns voiced by the faculty.
It appears the head of the student council would like to speak to you.
Because of that, please go to the student council room after school.
Just consider yourself unlucky and bear with it."
Saying goodbye, he leaves the classroom.

After school.
I stop by the student council room, but the teacher isn't there.
.... Now that I remember, that teacher is also an adviser to the gymnastics
team.
He probably won't come until practice is over.
"——"
I sit in my chair and wait faithfully.
"..... Kk."
I bite my lip.
I know this isn't the time to be doing this.
I know, but there's nothing I can do.
Outside the window, the sunset paints the sky vermillion.
I can hear the voices of club members practicing outside and the students talk-
ing while going home.

Within that, this classroom is the only quiet place.
.... This makes me angry.
Why am I here?
I can't do anything.
I'm angry at my powerlessness.
However, I have no way to solve this myself, so in the end, all I can do is accept everything I'm told emptyly.
".... What am I doing?"
There's no answer.
I just sit in the empty classroom listening to the sounds outside.

Tick.
The second hand of the clock sweeps by, telling me it's now seven at night.
No one comes by.
The school closes at six and all the teachers leave at six-thirty, so no one else remains on the school grounds.
".... I guess I'm forgotten."
I get up from my chair.
After pondering matters so long, my head starts to clear a little.
I was thinking all this time.
About what I should do, what I should prioritize.
From here, I should—

1. Even if it's useless, I'll look for Arcueid. turn to **181**
- Accept it and go back to the mansion. turn to **182**
- If this is how things are, I'll search for Roa myself. turn to **183**

181

—I should look for Arcueid.

No matter how impossible it might look, no matter how hopeless it seems, it's all I can think of.

I'll keep searching until I find her.

I can't leave her by herself, and I can't let her—settle things with Roa by herself.

"—Alright."

My mind is set.

So I can't waste any more time here.

I have to go in town this very minute, and even if it means looking for a needle in a haystack, I have to find Arcueid—

setvar arkregard + 1
turn to **184**

182

-I'll go back to the mansion.

It's not like I've given up on Arcueid, but without any leads, I don't think I could find her.

Then instead of running around blindly, I should go back to the mansion and think calmly about what I can do.

".... Is that all I can do?"

I am pained by my lack of ability to do anything.

But right now, it is all I can think of.

turn to **184**

183

—I should find this vampire Roa.

Arcueid isn't going to come see me, and it's almost impossible for me to find her.

So I'll take the opposite route.

Arcueid said she would defeat Roa no matter what.

If her purpose is Roa, then I'll look for him too.

Arcueid will come to Roa, so if I could find him before then, that'll be good.

And with that option,

I can help Arcueid at the last moment.

"—Alright."

My mind is set.

So I can't waste any more time here.

I have to go into town this very minute, and even if it means looking for a needle in a haystack, I have to find this vampire—

turn to **184**

184

Naturally, the hallway is empty.
The lights are shut off and the hallway is illuminated solely by the blue moonlight streaming in from the windows.

"——"

I realize as I look up in the sky from the hallway,
tonight is a full moon.

"....."

I lose myself for a moment gazing at it.

The silver moon.

Delicate beauty like glass, it feels like it will crumble if I were to reach out my hand and touch it.

That moon.

When I was a child.

I feel like.

I saw it.

In a stupor.

—Throb.

"Gah.....!?"

Suddenly, the scar on my chest begins to ache.

—Thump.

My heart skips a beat.

My blood starts to circulate wildly and I can't control my breathing.

—Thro, b.

I place my hand on my chest.

My uniform is soaked in blood.

My scar has opened and is bleeding.

—Thu, mp.

Panting.

My breathing is out of control.

A chill runs through my back, and my spine painfully feels like it's going to burst open.

—Thro, b.

-Thump.

—Th, ro

-Thum

—Tap.

In between my heartbeats, I hear a sound.

"Ah——"

Someone is coming.

From the far end of the hallway, walking towards me.

Tap.

The sounds of footsteps.

—There's something.. not right.

This isn't the wild beating of my heart which comes from my body sensing danger like before.

A headache runs through my head.

This pain, this sense of danger is directed against me.

I feel that shadowy figure is something I—Tohno Shiki must not meet——

.

I breathe harder.

Not even able to breathe properly, I take off my glasses.

My knife—is in my pocket.

The figure draws closer.

The moonlight seems to suggest it's a male.

The "point" indicating death pulsates in the center of his body like a heart.

All around his body are numerous "lines" of death covered like wires for a machine.

"—————"

My breathing stops.

.... There's, something wrong with my head.

I don't know this figure.

Even though I don't know—I can't help but feel like it resembles someone.

Tap, tap.
He approaches.
I'll be able to see his face soon.

"_____"

Who does he resemble?
Who does he resemble?
Who does he resemble?
Who does he resemble?

Who am I forgetting——?



14 0

—Bloodshot eyes.
The death all over his body.
An alien stillness as if the very air around us was frozen.
There's no mistaking it.. he isn't human.

He draws even closer.
He heads straight in my direction looking solely at me, smiling wordlessly.
"_____!"

I ready my knife.
The blade pops forth.
He continues walking.
There's no time to think or hesitate.
Under the white moon.
As if in slow motion, I ready my knife.
He doesn't stop.

Slowly,
as if time stopped only for me,

he easily reaches out and takes my knife, holding it upside down.



14 0

"Wha—"

My body—doesn't move—

"... Shiki.

Being able to see death isn't just your privilege."

Saying that, he moves his arm.

—Th, rob.

A chill runs through me again.

My brain freezes.

My body remembers the same pain from before.

"———Ah."

The sound of slashed flesh.

My knife he stole—is now plunged deeply—in my chest——

My body collapses.

All my strength drains as I crumble to the floor.

Fluttering,
a white sheet falls.

—It's because I leaned on him when I fell.

As I fell, my hand took the bandages wrapping his body.

"I see.

You wish to see my face, Shiki?"

Saying that,
he unfurls the bandages.



14 0

"——"

Everything turns dark.
His face.
This face before me, I know it.

—It does resemble that.
Because his face—
It resembles the face of the bloody child before me on that hot summer day—

I fall onto the ground,
the knife still embedded in my chest.
Strangely, there is no blood or even pain.
My body just gets colder. My consciousness drifts away.
My control over my body.. everything starts to fade away.



14 0

"I did pay you back for killing me."
He says this as he looks down at me.
The face I see as I look up.
I recognize him.

—Of course I recognize him.

Yeah—why have I forgotten until now?

When I was a kid.
 The other child me and Akiha played with at the mansion.
 Always—always, we were together.
 When Akiha came to play, me and him were always there to welcome her—so
 why—have I forgotten his name until now....?
 "SHI—KI"



14 0
 "That's right Shiki.
 It's really been a long time."
 He—SHIKI smiles with satisfaction.

SHIKI.
 Shiki.
 Akiha.
 SHIKI.
 SHIKI.
 Akiha.
 Shiki.

Those meaningless scribbles.
 "That's—ridiculous."
 "Sorry Shiki.
 You'll have to listen to my grudges just a little longer, so I just avoided the
 "point" of death slightly.
 It's not fatal, so you'll probably stay conscious for a bit.
 Don't fade away that easy."

The unpleasant laugh and the terrible uneasiness I felt when I faced Nrvn-
 qsr.
 In the midst of my fading consciousness, I realize something.
 He is—Arcueid's "enemy".



14 0

"Well then—shall I take that knife?
Someone like you who's about to disappear won't need it."

He reaches for the knife stuck in my chest.
He grips the handle.
The moment he takes it out will be my death.

But I can't do anything.
I can't move even to close my eyes.

"Gah—!?"

He flies.
Suddenly, SHIKI flies back as if he was struck by a car.

At the same time, a black-robed figure appears.

Even though this is the third floor, she crashes through the glass window and
makes a flashy appearance.

"Kk——!"

After flying back many meters,
SHIKI stands up slowly and stares at me lying on the floor—and Ciel-senpai
protecting me.



14 0

"Bitch—interfering once and now twice?"



"....."

Senpai only stares back wordlessly at SHIKI.

He lowers himself as if to attack Senpai.

—And then.

As if realizing something, SHIKI suddenly begins to laugh.



14 0

"Huhu, hahaha, ahahahahaha!"

"I see, that's how it is, woman!

I can't believe it, but that's how it is!

Interesting, this is the first time such a thing has happened in 800 years....!

If that is the case, then new things truly do await me....!"

SHIKI continues to laugh from the bottom of his heart.

.... Senpai merely stares at the vampire in front of her.

"What is it?

You have come to kill me, right?

Or is it something else?
Or is it that a cast-off shell cannot do anything on it's own?"
"_____"

Senpai doesn't respond.

She looks away from the vampire and lifts me up.

"Oh?"

That impostor is more important than cutting off the cause behind you?

But, that's useless.

He is beyond help.

It's only payback for him living as Tohno Shiki until now.

No matter what, there is no healing someone who's lines of death are cut.

Even that princess had to exchange her 800 years of time in order to regenerate.

—A human like him can't escape death."

His voice is full of mocking laughter.

Senpai doesn't say anything in response.

In the end, without a single word,

as she holds me, she goes through the glass window and jumps outside.

She seems to treat the height as if it were nothing.

With a light step, she lands on the ground and runs from the school without even looking back.

—Through it all,

I look only at the school building with empty eyes.

The third floor hallway I was in until just now.

I blankly look at the vampire with long, black hair as he victoriously watches us leave—.

turn to **185**

Still holding me, Senpai heads straight for my mansion.

.... I don't know what she's planning, but this can't be good.

With a knife still embedded in my chest, there's no mistake that my death is near.

If Akiha sees me like this, it won't just be a matter of her worrying—

"_____"

.... Damn it, I can't speak.

I want to tell her to cut it out, but I can only gasp for air.

"Please be quiet Tohno-kun.

.... It is okay, I am sure your sister can help."

"_____"

.... Help?

That's impossible, Senpai.

I'm stabbed in the chest and I can't even move.

.... There isn't anyone who can help a person about to die like this.

"No, it's possible.

Otherwise it would not make any sense....!"

Look, if your sister couldn't help you, you would have died eight years ago.

That's why—I know we can still make it....!"

.... Her words, they have so many "you's" in them, I can hardly understand.

"_____"

.... Senpai, what do you—

"Geez, just please be quiet already!

If you speak anymore, we may not even be able to help you!"

She gives an unbelievably serious, angry face.

.... I feel terrible, so I close my eyes.

..... Well, anyways.

..... It's beginning.

to get hard.

staying up.

So

—I was always an outsider to my family.

From an early age, I always thought that.

From the time I was adopted from the Tohno family by the Arima family.

No, actually, long before that, I was an outsider to my family.

I never even wondered why.
Before I realized it, I was alone.
There were people around me acting like my parents so I tried hard to act like their child.
I think the house with the old tatami room was my first house.
From there, after some incident, I was taken to a large western-style mansion.
.... There was a brother and a sister around my same age, and we became good friends, I think.
But there was always a wall between their father and me.

.... But still, we tried hard to be like a real family.
Even if we weren't related by blood, we tried to believe we were a family.
But, that ended abruptly.
After a large accident, I was taken to a hospital.
No one came to see me and my eyes became abnormal.
Until then I was alone, and in the end I was alone.
I thought maybe I should just disappear like that.

Until I met that sorceress who was as beautiful as the clear blue sky overhead.

.....
..... A nostalgic,
dream.
"I'm—alive?"
I speak aimlessly.
I don't seem to be able to lift a finger, but at least I can speak clearly.
My mind is clear enough to grasp that this is my own room.



".... Nii-san?
Are you awake?"
"Akiha—you're there?"
Akiha is standing by the bedside, apparently having taken care of me.
"Akiha, you—"
I look at Akiha not knowing what happened.

She looks away uneasily.

".... My... this wound, is.."
I can't say he—SHIKI did it.
In the first place, how did she react when I arrived with this wound?
I would think usually, you'd send someone with a knife in their chest to the hospital...
"Akiha, um—"



".... It's okay.
I heard most of the circumstances from that person."
".... That person.... you mean Senpai?"
Still looking down, Akiha nods.
"....."
.... I'm more confused.
What exactly did Senpai tell Akiha by "most of the circumstances"....?
"..... Hmph."
This isn't good.
Not knowing what Senpai told her, I can't ask her something wrong.
"Um.... Akiha, where's Senpai?"
"If you mean that person, she is resting in the sitting room.
.... Normally I would not let such a person stay in the house, but she has helped you.
So I can't treat her poorly."

—As she speaks,
her expression turns more severe.



"Nii-san.

The wound in your chest was caused by SHIKI, right?"

Directly,

Akiha cuts to the heart of the matter.

"A, Akiha, you—"

"Didn't I say so earlier?"

I heard most of the circumstances from that person.

.... Although, I would have understood the situation if I looked at you."

"__"

My words.. stick in my throat.

Akiha—sounds as if she knew about SHIKI from the beginning.

"Akiha, you.... about SHIKI—"

".... Yes, I know.

From the very beginning, I was aware of everything and called you back to the mansion."

I suddenly get assailed by dizziness like I just got hit in the head with a hammer.

".... W, wait a minute.

What do you mean you were aware of everything?"

I don't.... honestly know what's going on.

Certainly, there was another kid with me and you back then, but when I asked you—"

You said there wasn't a third child.



".... I'm sorry.

All I have ever done is lie to you.
.... Even about this.... I knew it would turn out like this, but I lied to you all this time and deceived you."
"Deceived?
.... Then, there was the third kid?
But, why did he disappear suddenly?"

.... Yeah, I really can't remember.
The third kid.... I remember always playing with another boy my age.
Akiha sometimes would sneak away when her father wasn't looking and come play with us.
But, how come I don't remember?
Things like why he disappeared.
Or like how his name SHIKI was the same as mine.

Yeah, everything—I have clearly forgotten.
".... I don't know.
The only thing I remember is that—"

The scene I saw in the courtyard.
Since I came back, it's only that hot summer day which floats in the back of my mind like a daydream.
Akiha's there, I'm there.
And before me is the bloody corpse of another boy.
"—Ah."

Yes, SHIKI did say so.
"I paid you back for killing me," he said.
So, that means—
"That dream—I, really—"

killed him?
Is that why he suddenly disappeared and I conveniently forgot all those bad memories?
"Akiha, I—"



"No, you're mistaken.
You did not kill anyone.
Tohno Makihisa.... our father commanded you to think that way."
"My.... old man did?"
.... I don't understand even more.
Why would my old man command me to do something like that?
".... Akiha.
You said you were aware of everything when you called me back.
What do you mean?
You—you know about eight years ago, about SHIKI, about everything?"



".... Yes.
I didn't want you to remember about SHIKI, Nii-san.
If possible, I wanted you to forget about it forever.
.... But it's all over.
From the beginning—it was impossible to hide it."
Saying that, she gives a self-derisive smile.
She looks at me in the eye and starts speaking again.



".... Nii-san.

That person told you about the Tohno blood being special, right?

You may not believe it, but there is non-human blood in the Tohno ancestry.

.... At least that is what Father has told me since I was young.

Of course, I did not believe it at first.

But, something happened to make me believe it.

.... That incident was when you were killed by SHIKI eight years ago."

".... Killed?

.... me, by SHIKI...?"

Akiha nods wordlessly.

.... But, that's strange.

That's the exact opposite.

SHIKI was the one lying bloody on the ground.... and didn't he say "I paid you back for killing me"....!?"



".... As the people in the Tohno family grow older, the "inhuman blood" in us increases.

This blood isn't anything good.

I think the type of blood mixed with the Tohno family greatly increases one's instincts and makes me think it's just the blood of a beast.

If you call the human part reason, the instincts of the non-human blood overpower reason."

"..... Akiha, that's...."

".... I know.

I know you can't believe it because it's so sudden, so please be quiet for now."

—No,

I know someone exactly like that.

Even now, if I could move freely and avoid SHIKI, I'd fly out of here and look for her.



"However, the end comes for members of the Tohno family as they grow older. There has not been an instance of 'inversion' as a child like SHIKI did. The blood in the Tohno family varies from individual to individual. There are those whose appearance will not change and those whose appearance will.

—SHIKI was a typical case of the latter."

"The latter... his appearance changed...?"

"... Yes.

I do not understand why he went crazy at such a young age.

But he inverted without any warning.

When that happened, he attacked you, Nii-san."

"SHIKI... attacked me...?"

Throb.

The old wound on my chest aches.

"It happened in that courtyard.

You were stabbed in the chest and were on the verge of death when Father came and stopped SHIKI.

.... To stop SHIKI who has lost his mind, you can only kill him.

It is the duty of the head of the Tohno household to deal with members of the family who have inverted.

So—the bloody SHIKI you saw was probably the result of Father dealing with him."

"——"

I can't remember.

There was something else.

I feel like there was something more important that I can't remember.



".... Afterwards, you miraculously recovered.
And as you remember, you were taken to the hospital and told you were in a big accident."
"—" "
".... For that reason, I was then raised to be successor of the Tohno family even though I was the second child.
Once "inverted", SHIKI could no longer be the successor, so the only other remaining blood relative had to be chosen."
.... I see.
That's why Akiha had to take such a heavy burden of becoming the successor.... huh?
"Akiha.
That's.. weird.
You said it was SHIKI that inverted, right?
Then I'm—not normal?"



".... I'm surprised.
Nii-san, you believe all of this....?"
"—Hey now.
It's not like you'd lie like this.... Well, I'm used to this kind of talk.
M, more importantly!
I'm asking you if this is a bit strange, Akiha."



"I suppose you are right.
.... But Nii-san, there's nothing wrong with the story, so can we not discuss it any further....?"
"—No, Akiha.
Sorry, but finding out about SHIKI is important to me.
He is both mine and her mutual enemies, I can't just ignore him.
So—I have to know the truth.
I can't have any traces of doubt left.
Why he is alive if the old man killed him, why—I forgot something so important.
Please.
Tell me, Akiha."
".... It is simple.
You had a reason you could not succeed the Tohno family.
You really even forgot that, didn't you Nii-san?
.... I wish that illusion continued forever."
".... Akiha....?"



"..... Nii-san, you are not part of the Tohno family.
Because of a whim of Father's, he adopted you just because you had the same name of his son, SHIKI."

_____, eh?
".... You and I, and SHIKI.

We were raised as true siblings.
You were really good friends with SHIKI, almost enough to make my childish heart feel jealous.
But, after what happened to SHIKI, everything went wrong.
SHIKI was taken care of secretly, but the eldest son of the Tohno household could not be killed.
The Tohno family has important standing in society, doesn't it?
So... they could not tell society that the heir to the family suddenly just disappeared."
"Then Father had an idea.
To treat Nii-san, who was almost killed by SHIKI, as Tohno Shiki and to let SHIKI be the adopted son who died in an accident.
—In other words, you traded places with SHIKI.
The one killed remained alive, and the one who killed, died.
That is your relationship with SHIKI."

Ha———ha.
"... Then what is this?
I'm not your brother, I'm not even a member of the Tohno family—"
Of course, not a member of the Arima family either.

Then, where—am I from?



"... I'm sorry... No one can answer that now.
Nii-san—the child named Shiki is gone.
The child named Shiki died eight years ago.
Not in terms of living, but in terms of existence.
Name, a past, family, even memories; none of these remain anywhere.

You traded places with Tohno SHIKI eight years ago.... Father disposed of everything."

——ha.



"That is why.... you were adopted by the Arima family.
To maintain appearances, the eldest son of the Tohno family must still be alive.
However, since you are not related by blood you cannot be the heir.
Reasoning that your body was weakened by the accident, you were given to the care of the Arima family.
.... He commanded me not to let you near the mansion again."
.... Akiha's voice is trembling.

She looks down, acting like she's resisting something.
.... I know she must feel terribly guilty.

—But I don't intend to blame her.

It might make me feel better that she feels that way, but—there's something I still have to ask right now.

".... No.

There are still two things I need to clear up.

Please keep talking, Akiha.

There's some things I still don't get all the way."



"—Nii, san?"

"First.

I understand I'm not a member of the Tohno family.

But that raises another question.

.... You said the members of the Tohno family are special.

But the truth is, I also have a something strange.

Senpai said it was because I was a member of the Tohno family so I was convinced.

But, I'm not a member of the Tohno family, right?

Then, what does it all mean?"



".... I do not know.

Certainly Father did not seem the type to just adopt someone on whim—there may be some reason to why he adopted you, Nii-san."

"I see.... well, it doesn't really matter to me what family I'm from.

So there's no need to worry about it, Akiha.

And, um.

I always thought I was just lucky to be alive.

It was a really fatal wound, wasn't it?

Then I'm blessed enough just being alive."

Yeah.

And more than that, the problem is—

"And second.

Why is SHIKI alive?"

Glare.

I unconsciously let hostility slip into my stare as I look at her.



"... Nii-san.... that's...."

"It's strange that he's still alive.

SHIKI lost to his Tohno blood and did this inversion thing, didn't he?

And he killed me and was struck down by the old man.

Then—he shouldn't be alive."

"—That—um."

"There's really only one possibility.

Just like I recovered, he must've recovered.

.... Well, maybe my old man didn't kill him.

After all, no matter how insane he was, it was still his son.

So maybe he didn't kill him and hid him from the eyes of everyone else.

Just like how I was sent to the hospital."

Akiha doesn't answer.

.... It seems I wasn't off the mark.

".... I see.

The old man probably intended to call him back to the mansion when SHIKI regained his sanity."

"That.... that isn't—"

True?

But she can't say it.

She only silently looks downwards.

".... It's okay.

It isn't your fault, or the old man's.

Of course, not SHIKI's either.

It really all just sort of happened.

It was just bad luck that some insane guy from overseas entered SHIKI.

You said everything went crazy, but that's all that happened."

Akiha doesn't respond.

—I'm a little tired.

To be honest, I didn't want to know anything about myself.
More than that, I have to find Arcueid right now.

"... Akiha.

I'm a little tired.

I'm gonna sleep, so could you please leave?"



"..... Yes, if you say so, Nii-san."

Akiha heads towards the door.

"—Akiha."

There's still one thing left to ask, so I call after her.



"What is it, Nii-san?"

"Yeah.

.... Why did you call me back here?

I'm not even your real brother."



"... Please don't say such foolish things.
You are my only Nii-san.
Now and back then, even if you forgot, from when we were little—To Tohno
Akiha, you are my only Nii-san, Shiki."

The door clicks shut as Akiha exits my room.

"....."

After she's gone, I finally realize my situation.

It's just past ten.

It's been three hours since SHIKI—no, Roa attacked me at school.

I still can't move at all.

I feel like my body is a remote control robot.

My mind's working and I don't even feel any pain, but I can't move my arms
or legs.

sigh

I take a deep breath to calm down.

I can't move because I'm trying to move large things like my arms or legs.

rst I'll start small.

Like the little finger on my right hand.

I concentrate on trying to move it.

"——Ggah."

I focus all the power in my body to my little finger.

My whole body starts to break out in a sweat.

After few minutes, I finally move my little finger.

It's just my little finger, but it gets the momentum going.

As if forcing my nerves to remember the sense of movement, I go from my ring
finger, to my palm, to my elbow, to my arm, and to my shoulder until I increase
the parts of my body able to move.

I start to pant.

The more I can move, the more pain fills me.

I see—I didn't feel pain because my whole body was numb.
 Restoring my nerves like this means pain returns at the same time.
 "G.... ah....!"
 Sweat trickles from my forehead.
 Pain shoots through my body like countless blades.
 But if I can't move on my own, I won't be able to leave my room.

Leave my room, go into town, go to school.
 I won't be able to find Arcueid.
 "Gah—argh....!"
 Resisting the urge to puke, I lift my upper body.
 It would take all my effort just to walk in this condition, but I don't care.
 In the first place it's a miracle I'm alive after Roa stabbed me in the chest.
 If I wished for any more luck, karma would probably punish me.

I look at the knife wound on my chest.
 —And,
 I don't see the point indicating death on my chest anywhere.
 ".....?"
 I calm down slightly.
 Come to think of it—if he hit the point of death, I would have died instantly.
 Not even Nrvnqsr's immortal, monstrous body could escape it.
 So there's no way someone like me would walk away from it alive.

"—Maybe what he sees is different?"
 As I ponder this,
 a light knock sounds at my door and Senpai enters the room.



"—To, Tohno-kun!?
 You were told to rest, so why are you up...!?"

She forcefully walks toward my bed.
 "....."
 For now, I wordlessly watch her.



"....?"

What is it, Tohno-kun?

Is there something on my face?"

"No, you just aren't wearing your glasses.."



"Yes, it is a pity.

Yours and mine made such a good set together."

.... As she smiles like this even now, I can't help but think Senpai will always be Senpai.

Even though she's wearing those priestly robes and can fight evenly with Roa, she'll always be the Senpai I know.

".... Thanks.

You saved me once again."

"Yes, that makes it three times.

I won't keep lending you a hand so please be more careful."

".... I see.

Got it, I'll be prepared.

Next time I'll be sure to get him before he gets me."

After I say this Senpai looks directly at me.



"Tohno-kun.... don't tell you have not learned from experience yet?"
 ".... Hey now.
 I'm the victim here, why did I have to learn?
 He was the one who attacked me, so I can't do anything about it."
 "That's true.... but Tohno-kun, you're certainly set on finishing this."
 "....."
 I don't respond.
 I don't know if I'm set on finishing this like she says.
 It's just—I can't just sit around and do nothing right now.
 "—Senpai, I have a question if that's alright."
 ".... No.
 But even if I said that, you wouldn't stop anyway.



Alright.
 If that makes you calm down, it's a good price to pay.
 Then let's talk, shall we?"
 Senpai sits in the chair Akiha was in earlier.
 I thought she'd try to stop me right away, but I don't know what she's
 thinking.
 "Then I'll ask.
 That guy before was Roa, wasn't he?"



".... Yes.
That is his host this time.
The same Tohno SHIKI who plundered your life eight years ago.
.... You heard about that from Akiha-san?"
"Yeah, I heard.
.... Are you friends with her or something, Senpai?
She seems to hate you though."



"Yes, I am hated.
She despises my job of hunting heretics, and it seems she does not like me either.
Um, it seems to be a rather remarkable hatred."
.... She amazingly says this all with a smile.
"—Oh.
Well, that's another matter.
Back to Roa, his lair is at our school?"
".... I can't say exactly, but it seems like the school building is his lair.
I think he has started to move on his own because Arcueid killed all of his
Dead."
"....."
In other words, Arcueid hasn't found him yet.
If so—then there's still a chance of me finding her.



"Tohno-kun?"

"Uh—nothing.

But why would he set up at my school?

.... No, in the first place, he seems more like SHIKI than Roa.

He didn't seem like a vampire at all.

Just what does it all mean?"



"It doesn't mean anything other than the source of his character is SHIKI.

Of course he doesn't act like a vampire."

"....?"

Hold on, SHIKI is Roa's host, right?

Then his personality is Roa's, so wouldn't he start acting less like a human....?"



".... No, not at all.

Okay, Tohno-kun.

The body Roa reincarnated into is raised as a different person with a different character.

Unless he matures as a human until Roa awakens, he will not be able to use his intelligence as Roa.

But after Roa awoke within him, Roa's principles follow that of the host."

"Then that guy is unmistakably SHIKI, and there's none of Roa's personality at all?"

".... Yes.

In a way, Roa doesn't exactly exist anymore.

What does exist is the conceptualization of Roa's desire for immortality.

What's troublesome is the steady accumulation of wills, of history, of magical knowledge, all parts of this malicious conceptualization.

For Roa, as long as he can continue his thesis on immortality, he doesn't care what else he does.

"Roa increases his Dead, but it's really more like a instinct in a species to 'breed children'.

SHIKI's true desire and what Roa really wants to do are completely different from each other.

".... What SHIKI.. really wants to do...."

"Yes.

Probably, his desire to kill you is far greater than any conciliation with Arcueid."

"——Wha..?"

I don't get at all what she's trying to say.

"Why would he want to kill me?"

".... Hmm, it's hard to say, but SHIKI thinks you killed him."

"What do you mean?"

I'm the one who was killed, he's got it all backwards."

"But you are alive, Tohno-kun, and SHIKI was killed.

In the end, you became Tohno Shiki, did you not?

After SHIKI received judgment from the Tohno family, he had a miraculous recovery just like yours.

However, he didn't have his house to return to.

Because Tohno Shiki was very much alive, living with his sister Akiha-san."

"In a way—you killed Tohno SHIKI.

You took away his only place to return to.

Being hid away by Tohno Makihisa while you lived in his place.. you can only imagine how SHIKI felt."

".... To SHIKI, I'm just an impostor who is using the name Tohno SHIKI?"

"Yes, which is why SHIKI hates you more than anything, Tohno-kun."

But—I didn't do so because I wanted to.

But I guess SHIKI doesn't care about that.

To him, I'm the hated impostor who stole everything away.

The man who stole his home.

Without any abatement, he lived and seethed in hatred these past eight years.
 So of course he wants to kill me.
 "—But, I was still the one killed, Senpai."



"Tohno.... kun?"

Yeah, I had things stolen from me too.
 Eight years ago I was nine years old.
 Back then, the Shiki who lived up until that time disappeared without a trace.
 I can't recall my past too well.
 I don't have this urge to meet my true parents, but I can't even remember any
 treasured memories I may have had.

Whoever Shiki had been, he is nowhere to be found—

"Tohno-kun.
 You can't fight because of hatred."
 As if sensing the danger in my words, Senpai warns me.
 I tell her not to be ridiculous as I shake my head.
 "That's not it.
 I have to deal with Roa for a different reason."
 "You don't.. hate him...?"
 "I'd be lying if I said no, but it doesn't really matter.
 I just can't let him run loose by himself, because if I do that, the princess would
 try too hard.
 That's why I have to help her.
 I promised her I'd help to the very end."

—That's right.
 Which is why I can't be resting here by myself.
 She's always—going through so much pain yet tries to act so cheerful in front
 of me.
 ".... I just can't understand.
 Why do you support her so much?
 Arcueid is a vampire, isn't she different from you?"

"—I don't care about that.
All I know is I love her.
That's enough reason for me to help her."
Looking at Senpai's eyes, I speak directly.

Senpai brings her hand to her mouth as if moved and blushes for some reason.



"—I see.
You're saying you will help her to the very end, Tohno-kun?"
"Yeah.
I don't have time to waste.
If Roa is at my school, I have to leave right away—"
Otherwise Arcueid might try and fight Roa.
If that happens, her safety isn't guaranteed.

So I have to lend her a hand.
I don't know how much use I can be, but it has to be better than Arcueid by herself.

"—It is hopeless.
Even if you were able to move fully, she isn't able to match Roa in her present state."
"Not able to match him.... how do you know about that, Senpai?"
"A simple calculation.
She is already suppressing the urge to drink blood which she fell victim to before.
This reduces her power so much she couldn't even stand up to a half-powered Roa.
Your power is less than half of Roa's, so you can't match him even if you worked together.
"... In the first place, she is very close to death.
Her power is weak, and she's using that to suppress the impulse within herself.
It would be like us moving around after having our lungs smashed."
"Wha—"
What do you mean?
Close to death.. why?

Certainly she was in pain, but she didn't look close to death at all....!
 "Of course, that is all because she is resisting the urge to drink blood.
 It would be easier if she drank it.
 But I don't think she would ever do that, so as long as she pursues Roa in her
 present state, she is racing towards death."
 "That.... that's just, ridiculous....!"

I stand up from my bed.

I fall to the floor instantly.
 Without even catching myself, like a piece of trash hitting the carpet.
 "Ha—ghh....!"
 How—how weak.
 Arcueid is in such a desperate situation, but I—I'm so weak I can't even walk.



"Please don't force yourself, Tohno-kun.
 Even though you are not wounded, your energy is practically all gone.
 It's probably Roa's host, SHIKI's ability.
 Just being stabbed by a knife shaved some of your 'life' away."
 "... My... life....?"
 "Think of it as your energy which allows you to live.
 It is infinite, but exhaustible.
 It is produced as long as one lives, but the amount able to be stored varies from
 individual to individual.
 So the amount of life that can be taken away from a body is limited.
 Before we use up all the energy we have accumulated, we draw more from this
 unlimited source.
 So if there was a way to steal all the accumulated energy in a single instant, the
 person wouldn't even have the minimal energy needed to draw in more energy
 from this unlimited source, and all life activity would cease."

.... Life.

Life, which uses life.

"... Then.... things use it to live....?"



"That's true, you can't exactly call it death.

It's more like a car that has no gasoline; it can't run."

Saying that, she helps me stand up and moves as if to tuck me in to bed.

"... Enough, I'm not going to lie down."

"What are you saying when you can't even stand by yourself?"

If you don't want to lie down, then please stay like that."

She pushes me down and I forcefully sit on the bed.

"... Ha.... ah."

Just sitting up like this leaves me out of breath.

"—Sh—it."

In this state, I can't make it to school.

Even if I was able to see Arcueid, I'll just be a burden on her like this....!



"You don't have to fight anymore, Tohno-kun.

It will all be settled in a matter of a few days."

"—?"

Se.... ttled, what do you...."



"Because I have found the reincarnation of Roa, the Vatican.... um, our headquarters, has approved my request. Within seven days the Burial Agency, under direct control of His Holiness the Pope, will arrive and put an end to Roa. In the end, it will mean just another continuation of the cycle, but this instance of Roa will be dealt with."

.... Seven days.
Seven days....!?"

".... No, I can't wait that long. Even now Arcueid might be trying to settle things with Roa. Then—it'll all be meaningless....!?"
I force strength back into my legs. Deceiving myself into ignoring my ragged breathing, I stand up from my bed.
".... Senpai.
My knife, where is it?"



"I have it, but—do you think I will give it to you, Tohno-kun?"
".... No, but you shouldn't keep other people's things, Senpai. Isn't it common courtesy to hand dropped things to their owners?"
After saying I'm right, Senpai rustles through her pockets and brings forth my knife.
"Because this dagger is yours, I will return it.
But you really intend on going back to the school, Tohno-kun?"

"—Yeah.
Before Arcueid finds Roa, I have to—"

kill him.
If SHIKI's objective is to get me, I can't escape a fight to the death anyway.
So—in order to protect Arcueid, I'll go kill Roa myself.

"In your condition?
.... I just don't understand.
Please tell me why you're so into her.
If you tell me, I won't stop you."
.... Senpai asks me the same thing as before.
Her look is calm and sincere.
She really does want to know.
"—I—"

Why I want to help her.
Because I like her?
Or because being with her was fun?
.... Yeah, those are really important too.

But, it's deeper than that.
There's something I can't let go.
"... Because she's by herself.
I can't just leave her alone.
I think that's why."



"—That's a lie.
You can't risk your life because of that.
Please answer seriously, Tohno-kun.
.... I can't understand that kind of reason."
"No, it really is my reason.
.... Until now she's been alone, she never even knew what it was like to have fun.
Always, almost foolishly isolated.
Isn't it too lonely?
I won't allow such a meaningless life.

So—"

So I just.. want her to know.

That there's so many things to do in this world , and although most of it is useless and meaningless, knowing those is part of the fun of being alive.

Such things even a child knows, —

".... I just, wanted to tell her.

Even though she smiles like she's enjoying herself immensely, I wanted to show her anyone can have that.

I wanted to show her over and over this world has more—even more enjoyable things, enough to make any hardships seem like nothing.

To be able to feel all the normal things as something normal—I wanted to make her happy."

So she can truly smile all the time.

Because I like Arcueid's smile.

"Isn't that right?

As much as she hasn't been saved until now, I want to make her so many more, many more times happier.

I have to at least balance it out.

In the first place, it's so simple to end her solitude."

.... Yeah, it's very simple.

Just speak with someone and do what you want to do.

".... And I know anyone can do it.

Someone else can make her happy.

So—certainly, with my body in this pitiful state, there's no need for me to act this desperately.

Someone else could just make her not solitary."

.... I know that.

I know, but it's not all logic.

"—But I can't.

I can't let someone else do it, and I can't part with her like this.

.... For me, there's no one else besides her."

Because,

Arcueid is the only one in this world I want to make happy.

".... I love Arcueid."

I love her as a man, I love everything about her.

"But more than that, I want to make her happy with my own hands.

For that, it doesn't matter what happens to my life.

I don't want her to die like this.

—Right now, that's all there is, Senpai."

.... Yeah, that's all.
She's more precious to me than my own life right now—



".... Please don't say such stupid things.
No one else can do that.
It seems you're the only one in this world who can even say that."
Senpai shrugs her arms after a big sigh.
"—Senpai."



".... It makes me a little angry.
She is happy enough already."
As if she is giving up something,
Senpai speaks with gentle voice.

—And then,
I hear the rustle of tree branches from outside the window.
"....!?"
"Oh, you don't need to be surprised, she was just leaving.
I felt something out of place before, so I guess it was that after all."
Senpai casts a glance out the window.
"It isn't like her to put a higher priority on you than Roa.
—Well, if she gave more priority to Roa after such a speech, she'd deserve some
divine punishment."
"..... Eh?"

Then that means..
Arcueid was outside my window until just now?
"Why—would Arcueid come to my room, Senpai...!?"



"She came to check up on you because she was worried after Roa attacked you.
She must have heard what we were talking about and left for Roa."

—In other words,
she went to settle things with Roa?
"Wha—she went, why....!?"
"Of course.
After hearing something like that, even I would have done the same thing.
.... Yeah, I'm envious, but I pity her just as much."
"—But, how come—"



"You want to help her, but she doesn't want to get you involved.
So—there's only one answer, right?"
Senpai acts calm as if she knew this would happen.
"So now you can give up, right Tohno-kun?"
No matter how hard you try you can't catch up to her.
So leave the rest to me, and rest...."
"—Like hell!"

I wildly grab onto Senpai's collar.
Just that makes me dizzy, but I don't care.

"You asked me knowing this would happen, Senpai—!?"



".... No, I didn't know you saw her that way.
.... Certainly this was a mistake on my part."
But her expression doesn't change.
She looks down at me gently as I clutch her collar.
"_____"

.... Doing this accomplishes nothing.
Arcueid is already gone.
What I should be doing isn't blaming Senpai.
"—I'm going after her.
Take me there."
"Do you think I'll follow an order from a person in your condition?"
Yeah, of course I don't think so.
"If you don't listen to me, I'll rape you right here."



"_"

Her expression collapses.
She casts a look as if staring directly into my heart.
But now, I can't back down.
"_____"

And then,
Senpai gives yet another sigh.



"Your proposition is intriguing, but I'll pass.
 It was my mistake, and I've gone this far already.
 I'll stay with you till the last stop."
 She pulls back from my hands and steps over next to me.
 "I will take you there, so please be quiet."
 "Eh—?"

I don't have time to be surprised.
 Giving a slight heave, she picks me up.
 "If Akiha-san sees us she would try to stop us, so shall we use the same method
 as she did?"
 "Eh—eh!?"
 A light footstep,
 and we fly out the window as Senpai holds me.

.... We arrive at school.
 Even though she was carrying me, Senpai isn't even out of breath, and she ran
 as swiftly as if she was sprinting by herself.
 "Tohno-kun, can you walk?"
 "—Barely.
 We're going to kill Roa, so we can't go in like this."
 "That's true.
 Then please walk on your own from here."
 Senpai lowers me to the ground.
 "——"
 The school is eerily quiet.
 Once we go inside, all that's left is a fight to the death.
 I take off my glasses after a deep breath.

My head starts to pound.
 In addition to not being able to move myself fully, I feel really sick.



".... This isn't good."
Senpai looks up at the night sky with a serious expression.

A full moon.
The radiant moonlight illuminates the school grounds.

".... What isn't good?"



".... Yes, the True Ancestors are said to be originally from the moon, so they gain much strength from the moon.
This is the same for Roa, as a Dead Apostle under the True Ancestors, so he is practically immortal tonight.
.... With my current equipment, I may not be able to fully kill him."
She grits her teeth.
—Practically immortal?
But that doesn't mean a thing to me.
If I can get close.
Even if in the next instant I'll be stabbed in the chest once more, if I can get close—I can pierce his "death".
"—It's very bright tonight.
It will be difficult to conceal ourselves in darkness.
.... I'm rather fond of moonlit nights, but it's a little different tonight."
Senpai sighs.

.... The pale shining moonlight and the frigid night air.

I can even see the lines of death growing.

"Really?"

I don't like moonlit nights."

"Tohno-kun...?"

Creak.

My brain creaks.

"... Rather than in sunshine, I can unpleasantly see everything clearly in the weak moonlight.

I like the strong sunshine that erases everything, or a real darkness."

Creak.

Not pain, but my brain actually does start creaking.

"Man—It seems like I'll go especially crazy tonight.

Everything seems to die easily, it's like I'm in the deserts of the moon."

—But, with this,

there's no way I'll miss Roa's "death" either.

I put my glasses back on.

Gripping my knife, I walk towards the school building.

I pass through the front entrance.

Even walking normally is difficult.

The distance to the school building seems incredibly long.



"Tohno-kun, we'll split up here."

Senpai says this suddenly.

"From here on, please go ahead by yourself.

I will be doing something else."

"... Something else—Senpai, you're going to do something?"

"Now look, even my goal is to deal with Roa.

It seems this Roa is stronger than his previous hosts, so I can't face him directly.



"When you and Arcueid are killed by Roa, I will use that opening to dispose of him."

She says this directly with a serious expression.

"... You really seem serious, Senpai."

"Yes.

That was the last time I'm letting personal circumstance enter my work.

You're fighting for her, aren't you, Tohno-kun?

Like that, I also have my reasons.

So from now on—I cannot help you."

"Oh..... yeah, thanks, Senpai.

Since this might be goodbye, let me say I liked you, Senpai.

It was fun spending time with you and Arikiko talking about stupid things."



"—Yes, it was like a dream for me too."

Senpai disappears towards the building like a black shadow.
"Well—time to go?"
I push my body which hurts every time I move, and I run into the school building.

.... The school building is full of cracks.
As if a small typhoon was let loose inside, and they shift higher and higher.
It seems the fight between Arcueid and Roa already began.

".... Upstairs....!"
I spit this out as I dash up the stairs.

I gasp for air.
I make it to the fourth floor.
The cracks running through the walls continue down the hallway—and to the passageway which connects the two buildings.
"Damn—it!"
I somehow manage to move my wavering legs and run towards the connecting passageway.

I pass through the hallway and reach its intersection with that passageway.
—That's the last stop.

In the middle of the passageway,
two figures are glaring at each other from a distance.

SHIKI stands at the end of the passageway reaching to the nearby building,
wide open.

And in the very center, Arcueid is kneeling on the floor breathing hard—
"Arcueid—!"

I start to dash towards her,
but before then,



Arcueid, still kneeling, looks up at me intensely.

".....!?"

I can't move...!?

The instant her eyes fixate on me, my body—as if it became stone, doesn't move at all...!



14 0

"—How awful, binding your friend with your Mystic Eyes like that.
It would have been okay for you to let him die with you."

Hehehehe.

SHIKI—no, Roa, laughs amusedly.

"Mystic Eyes—why?"

Why is Arcueid using this on me?

Finally.

Even though I finally made it here on time—

"—Why?"

Why, Arcueid....!!"

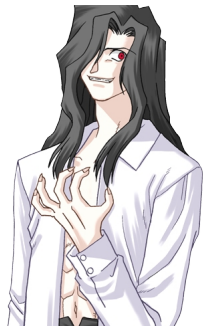
Arcueid looks away from me and directs her gaze at Roa.
.... She doesn't say anything.

She doesn't say anything to me.
 She only glares at the enemy in front of her as she breathes painfully.
 "Why—why—"
 I can't even shout out.
 Not because of her Mystic Eyes,
 but I've finally made it here.
 Cursing my ineffectiveness, my body which I forced for so long starts to lose its
 heat.

Roa laughs loudly as he watches the two of us.



14 0
 "—I see.
 You are finally prepared, Princess!?"
 Roa leisurely walks over to Arcueid.
 Arcueid remains kneeled, unmoving.



14 0
 "My my, you're pretty good, Shiki.
 It seems the princess here is going to fight me to save you.
 If it were the former princess, you would be terrifying, but you are now just a
 regular vampire.
 You don't even have the power of a True Ancestor anymore.
 —Geez, it would have been better if only you fell to your desires."
 "Quiet!"

Arcueid's voice echoes through the hallway.

—What is this?

If it's not a hallucination—everything around Arcueid starts to waver.



14 0

"Wha—"

Roa stops walking forward.

"—Marble Phantasm?

You can still use that?

As to be expected from the royalty of the True Ancestors."

Roa retreats fearfully.

"However, you cannot win against me.

Because I have something you lack."

"——"

Arcueid stops breathing.

As if ceasing all movement in order to gather up all her strength.



14 0

"You know, don't you?

Right, it is the experience of death.

I know what death is, but you do not.

That is our difference.

.... Well, as long as something is alive, it cannot experience death.

The only one who knows is probably only an infinite reincarnator like me."

.... The wavering of everything around Arcueid grows stronger.
 "Humans are instinctually afraid of the unknown.
 This does not change even for transcendent races like the True Ancestors.
 No matter how much of the occult you study, no matter how long-lived you are,
 you cannot experience death.
 You all gain so much power by resisting death, but at the same time it is the
 source of your weakness.
 You run away from death whereas I accept it.
 That is the difference in nature between you, Arcueid Brunestud, and I, Michael
 Roa Valdamjong.



14 0

"Even now I live as a human in this age.
 An out-of-place ghost like yourself has no right to judge me."

Crack.

The glass along the passageway starts to break.

"—I know.

About death.

About the darkness.

The nothingness which I have journeyed through so many times—!

To me, death is little more than a common ritual.

Let's say you destroy this body right here.

I'll still remain in this world.

Why don't you understand it's useless to fight me?"

Roa spreads his arms higher.

Arcueid doesn't answer.



14 0

"—Alright.

If you still insist on challenging me, I will not stop you.
Your resistance will be rewarded."

Roa lowers his arms and crouches.

Everything around Arcueid seems to burst apart any minute now.

"A——"

I can't speak.

This isn't good.

My brain screams to me.

I shouldn't let this happen.

I don't know why, I don't even have proof.

Just, I, someone who has seen lots of death, can tell.

Roa and Arcueid.

Which one of them is closer to death.

"St—op."

.... I can't speak.

I, can't.

—Crack!

The sound of the air itself ripping apart.

The warping of Arcueid's surroundings propagates along the entire passageway.

The entire hallway pulses.

The glass windows, the walls, the hallway, the whole building.

They become roiling waves, as if they were a shredder with tens, hundreds, thousands, no, a countless number of blades.



14 0
"Gi——!"

In a single instant, Roa's body disappears.
Distorted, sliced, compressed.
All that remains are his ankles.

The sliding of the hallway ceases.
Maybe it only lasted a moment.
The passageway is like it was before.
Only all that's left are Roa's ankles.

But, it didn't end there.

"A——"

The ankles start to move.
They start to run towards Arcueid.

As they do,
with each step, a leg, his hips, his other leg, his torso, his arms sprout to life.



"——"

Arcueid is still kneeling, not moving.

Directly in front of her,

Roa's neck and head come back into being.

"Ar——"

I couldn't warn her in time.

The completely regenerated Roa slices through her stomach.

Like cutting cleanly through the "line", with no slicing of flesh, no flowing of blood.



14 0

"—That was close.

I knew it was correct to choose tonight.

If the moon was waning even the slightest bit, I could not have regenerated from just an ankle."

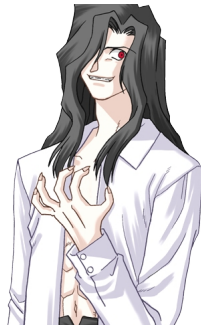
"——"

"And princess, you cannot regenerate from that wound.

My claws have the same ability as that man over there."

Thud.

Arcueid collapses to the floor.



14 0

"—This is the power I got from experiencing death.
Ironically, I did not know how to use this myself.
But he taught me.
For someone who has seen death, perceiving its form was not difficult."

Roa boasts as he kicks Arcueid.
Her body tumbles towards me.
"Arcueid....!"
I can move again.

—It's because the power behind her Mystic Eyes has vanished.

.... It means her power is no longer working.
"—Damn!"
Shaking the thought from my mind, I hold her close.

—A chill runs through me the instant I hold her.
Her body is terribly cold.
The only heat left within her is like a candle about to go out.
Roa still stands before us.
But, I don't care about that.
Right now—I just want to help Arcueid.

"Arcueid—!"
I call out to her.
Her closed eyes open energetically, as if waking from a dream.
"Aha—that was very lame, wasn't it?"
With patchwork brightness,
Arcueid puts forth a strained smile.
"You... what kind of stupid things are you saying?
Why—why did—"
.... I can't speak clearly.
I wanted to say something more, something better, but my brain doesn't work.
I can't be calm now.

As I hold her, the lack of lingering warmth in her body tells me it's hopeless.
If I took off my glasses—there's no doubt I would see something even more
hopeless.

—More than anything else,
I don't want to see that.
"Why—why, why—"
It's all I can manage to say.
Exasperated at myself,
I hold her tightly.

.... There's no embrace in response.
She doesn't have any strength left in her.
All she does is smile happily.
"No—!"
This can't be happening.
"—Why—why did—why did you do it all by yourself....!
We're partners, we said we'd help each other—to the very end....!
".... Oh yeah.... that's right, yeah.
I... kind of forgot."
"How can you forget....!
This—this makes me useless.
I said I would help you.
I said I would definitely help you—but I couldn't even help one bit."
".... No, that's not it at all Shiki.
You've helped me more than enough.
.... That's why.. it's.. enough.. already."

Cough.
She coughs up blood and smiles painfully.
".... So.. I wanted to.. thank you.
In the end, I'm glad.. I was able.. to protect you.. from Roa."
"....."

I gasp.
.... Arcueid's glazed over eyes don't see anything.
Not her wound, or even Roa who still lives.

.... Her time.
Since attacking a while ago, ended right then.
"Ah—y-yeah.
Thanks.
Than.. ks."
I can't.
I can't even lie properly.

.... The light in her eyes is fading.

Her body warmth is rapidly approaching zero.

—I'm going to lose.

Am I going to lose her like this?

"... Ar.. cueid."

"—Y, yes?"

"... Drink my blood.

If you do that, you'll get your power back....!"

... Not even thinking, I scream that out.

"....."

She doesn't answer.

But slightly,

she shakes her head.

"—Why!?"

Don't tell me you're still scared?

Look, you said it before, right?

You asked what if birds or fish had the same amount of intelligence, could I eat them?

I would.

If it meant I would live, I would.

Isn't stealing things from others to live a natural law of the world....!?"

That's what she said herself back then.

So why?

Why does she just shake her head with those pitiful eyes?

"I.. don't like.. talking about 'what ifs'."

A denial.

But that was—my line back then.

But she said before..

She likes playing 'What if'.

Because it feels like there's hope.

"—Really?"

I, like what ifs.

Even if it is sugarcoating things.

I feel—there's always.. some hope.."

isn't there?

But I can't finish.

My throat is just so tight.

I can't.. speak properly.

"... That's true.... But right now, there's.. something else I want more."

With a wavering voice, I ask her what it is.

"Yeah.... I want.. you to kiss me.. Shiki.."

—What?

Such a simple thing?

Is that alright?

I press my lips to hers.

It isn't sweet like before, or gentle.

Just,

a kiss where I press my lips against her cold lips without any warmth.

After that,

she smiles as if extremely happy.

"... I always.. wanted to do.. something like that."

"... Oh?

You really like strange things."

"... Yes, but I'm still happy.

Just that.. felt so good.

I've lived for so long.. but I've never been this happy like I am now."

—So

"I kind of thought to myself.. maybe.. disappearing like this might be good."

After murmuring such a thing,

all warmth disappears from her body.

"Ar.... cueid....?"

There's no response.

Even though her body is still here..

Even though her body is still this soft..

Even though I still remember the sound of her voice in my ears..

—Never again.

None of this will ever happen again.

"A————"

What have I been doing?

.... I wanted to make her happy.

I wanted to teach her so many things.

I wanted to take her to so many places.

I wanted to be with her forever.

But, it can never happen.

"————"

She's done it.

No matter how you look at it, there's nothing more.

Suddenly, before I could say the right thing, she went off and passed away by herself.

For my entire life—I won't be able to forget this.
This death.
This maddening calmness.
I'll never forget it.

Tap.

I hear the footsteps of the man who was watching it all.
"Finished, Shiki?"
"Yeah, it's finished."

—Answering,
I turn towards my enemy.

We face each other in the moonlit hallway.
Roa doesn't move from the spot where Arcueid was before.
He was watching everything silently, probably because he knew he was in a dominant position.



14 0

"I didn't think you were still alive."
Roa says this casually as if nothing has happened.

—I take off my glasses and ready my knife.
"It seems those who can see death are good at escaping death.
It isn't a matter of the strength or weakness of your life."
—However.

Normally, people call that useless effort."

".... You're one to talk.

You and I, we've already died once."

"Exactly," Roa says as he smiles.

"Those returning from the dead can understand death.

You and I are special cases of that kind.

I've experienced death seventeen times before I got to this—but you've only done it once.

Honestly, it must be the difference in our latent ability.
I am really curious what kind of ability it would have been if I had reincarnated
in your body."

—A bothersome, overly-composed voice.
Just hearing it makes my head hurt.
"... I have two things to ask you, and one thing to tell you."
I manage to say this while my head fills with pain.



14 0
"—Oh?
Alright, go ahead."
Probably because he's so absolutely confident in his dominating position,
Roa responds amusedly.
"... The first question is the most important.
You—why did you kill Arcueid?"
"Why?
She was trying to kill me, so wasn't it natural to kill her back?



14 0
Well—the one I desired wasn't this weak princess who came here.
My current self could have taken apart the princess while she lived.
But there's no point in taking in a True Ancestor no different from a regular
vampire.
So I figured there was no value in taking her in, and decided to settle it.

Even I'm disappointed with the way things have turned out."

Kuku.

Twisting his lips, the "enemy" laughs.

—My head, hurts.

Hurry—I have to kill him as fast as possible.

I can't stand him "existing" a single second longer.

"Well, what do you plan on doing now?"

Don't tell me you think you can fight me in your condition?

Resisting is useless, Shiki."

.... I know that more than anyone else.

Dizziness causes me to collapse to my knees.

But still—even if I don't have any power left to even stand, I gaze at him.



14 0

"Enough, enough.

Even if you see my 'death', if you can't touch me it's meaningless.

You know, Shiki.

I'm rating your ability rather highly.

.... Yes, it seems SHIKI's personality is fading away.

Since he has avenged you, I'm more Roa than SHIKI now.

Well, it doesn't really matter."

Roa takes another step forward.



14 0

"Isn't this power wonderful, Shiki?

You should be happy.

We're probably the only ones who possess the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception in the entire world.

It would be a shame to lose such a rare ability, and more than anything else, we're the same entity.

We can understand each other more than anyone else.

There's no other partner who would assure me as you."

".... You're trying to tell me to be your partner?"



14 0

"No, not asking, I'm letting.

I don't care about what you want.

That would only get in the way.

You can relax—After I drink your blood and plunder even your soul, I'll make you into an existence where you won't hesitate to use your power."

—The gritting of my teeth.

".... I see.

Then the next question.

What you see, are they lines or points?

No, I'll make it simpler.

You can only see it on living things, right?

You can't possibly see it on anything else."

".... Hm?

Of course, non-living things don't have any life.

Only living things have this 'place' indicating the source of life."

"—I thought so.

I understand completely, vampire."

I grip my knife.

The headache completely governs the inside of my brain, and all I can see is one thing.



14 0

"... You're not being clear and those aren't really fitting final words.... but enough talk.

There's also the hiding woman from the Church I have to deal with.

—You're lucky, Shiki.

Once I make you my subordinate, your first opponent will be that woman you trust."

Roa approaches.

My wavering vision isn't fixated on his figure.

"—What you and I see are totally different, SHIKI."

In the back of my head,
a switch turns on.

"All you're seeing is life.

You don't understand death at all.

That's why you can't kill me, and you're only able to kill a weakened woman."

My brain reaches a white heat.

"—Wha.. t?"

"If you could see death, you couldn't maintain your sanity.

All you can perceive is the part which keeps things alive.

If you could see death—you couldn't even manage to stand."

—To give an example, it is the world on the moon.
Everything is like a desolate wasteland.
The seam of death on everything I see.
Events of the world which disappear when I touch them.
"What—are you...."
"... Being able to see the 'death' of things means you are forced to see the world's uncertainty and fragility.
The ground is like it's not there, and the sky seems about to fall at any moment."
"What are—you are talking about?"
Roa's voice falters.
.... Of course.
Because he can't even understand the slightest bit of what I'm saying.

In other words—his eyes and mine may be similar, but they're completely different things.
"—Stop it.
Those eyes—don't look at me with those eyes."

Fear mixes into Roa's voice.
He even said it himself.
Humans are instinctually afraid of the unknown.
"... You don't know of the illusion that the whole world could perish in an instant.
—That is what it means to see death.
These eyes, this power isn't something you can boast about like you did."

Yeah, back then, I was even scared of walking.
Even I would—If I hadn't met that person, I would have long since been insane.
"That's your mistake, vampire.
Life and death may be back to back, but they will never face each other."
"I'm telling you—don't look at me with those eyes....!"
The sound of running footsteps.
But, I'm many times faster.

"—I'll show you.

This is what it means to kill something."
Saying that,
I thrust through the hallway's "point" on the floor.

Instantaneously—the lines racing through the passageway undulate.

"Wha——!"
Even the sound of Roa's screaming voice is buried amidst the crashing rubble.

The passageway is literally killed.
The blocks which lost their meaning break apart and crumble away.

For Roa, it must have been a total surprise attack.

Pulled down by the destruction of the hallway and the collapsing rubble, Roa falls to the earth.
"....."

In front of my very eyes, the passageway crumbles away.
Enduring the pain in my head and the burning in my body, I head to the stairs.

"....."
I head past Arcueid's corpse and hurry to the courtyard.

.... Under the moonlight.
The courtyard under the passageway has become a sea of rubble.
In its center, something moves.
"....."

He really is sly when dealing with death.
I pull my almost collapsing body towards it.

.... He's really something.
The lower half of Roa's body is almost completely gone.
Yet coming out from underneath the rubble, the upper half of his body still moves, ignoring that fact.
This amount of life may almost be something worthy of respect.
"—What, was that?"

Quivering, Roa wonders aloud.
Walking on top of the rubble, I move directly in front of him.
"—Shiki."

Roa lifts his head to look at me.
His eyes seem to practically ooze with hatred.
"—You, monster."
His voice equally full of indignant hatred.
"Who is?"

Replying, I stand in front of him.
Roa's "death" is just a little right of his heart.

I lightly thrust my knife forward.
A sensation like piercing paper.
That feeling is indeed "death".

Ah

Roa gives a small scream.
.... He's someone who has experienced death.
He should know this feeling really well.
".... You're not scared, are you?
It's a path you're quite familiar with.
If there's a difference, it's only one thing."

"—This time, you can't come back."

I pull out my knife and turn away from Roa.
Roa isn't dead yet.
Like Arcueid, someone as long-lived as him will linger just a little longer.

I breathe weakly.
My mind wavers.
If my body is at its limits, then my head is past its limits.
.... Arcueid even said back then,
I shouldn't force myself to look at the death of non-living things.
If I do it too much, the blood vessels in my brain will burn away.
"....."
—I don't care about that.
It would have been alright.
Even if I turned myself into a vegetable, it would've been worth it to stop Roa sooner.

That way, you wouldn't.. had to have—

".....!?"
I collapse.
I fall on the ground.
My ankles are in pain.
I turn around and see—
The upper half of Roa's body which crawled this far.
"Y, you, you——"

With bloodshot eyes, he makes his way onto my collapsed body.

"Fading, Disappearing, I... am, dis, app—"

His bloody arms wrap around my neck.

"Why, why, I—disappear, hoW, DId, yoU, kILL, ME, mEeeE, mee, mEeE mEEEME EEee—"

Opening his saw-like mouth, he moves to bite my neck.

"I WoN't.. disAPpeAr, yOU, aND i, ARe CoNNEcted, You SEe.

Y, ou, tRAn, sFer, mY eXisTEnce, LIInks, caN nOt, be.. cUT.....!"

—His teeth
dig into my neck.

"Ah——"

He vanishes.

Roa's body falls apart in a single instant.



"—Yes, with this, it means I'm the one who killed him."

Senpai says this, sword in hand and breathing happily—.

".... Eh?"

I don't quite understand.

"I'm saying, I'm the one who killed Roa.

.... No matter who your opponent is, you should not kill humans.

You are not someone who should come to my world.

So I'm the one who killed him."

Senpai says this haughtily as she places her hands on her hips.

".... Senpai.

That's just sugarcoating it."

"Maybe it is.

But it is a kind lie, so isn't it okay?

Even if it is hypocrisy, doesn't it allow room for hope somehow?"

"——"

Those words are similar.

When I told her not to talk about "what ifs", she answered with something like that.

"... Yeah, that's right.... somehow—somewhere, if there's hope, then."

How happy can that be?

"But, that isn't really important, is it?
Are you okay Tohno-kun?
Were you bitten!?"
Senpai rushes quickly to care for me.

"——"

My consciousness fades away.
I don't want to move anymore and my brain wants to rest.

"... kun... Shiki..... hey..!"
.... farther and farther away.
Eyes still open,
with the glass-like moon overhead,
my consciousness completely ceases.

As it happens,
I think to myself how it seems just like a television being switched off.

if arknormalcleared != 0
turn to **415**
turn to **37**

186

I feel the morning sunlight.
I keep my eyes closed as I try to fall asleep again, but the gentle sunlight keeps urging me to open my eyes.

—Slowly, I start to awaken.

A quiet atmosphere.
The air is comfortably cold, and the sunlight is warm enough.
I guess the weather will be great today.

—Then, I should get up and go to school.

That's right, I have to go to school.
The past three days, my life was chaos and it made me forget I was a student.

"....."

I wake up.
I'm lying on my bed, and my glasses are on the bedside.
I automatically put them on and look around.
The sunlight streams so strongly in through the window, I almost expect to hear it pouring through.

"—"

I take a quiet breath.
I fill my lungs with fresh air, and it feels like my chest is purified.
I hear the clock ticking.
Small birds chirp in the woods outside.
I stay on my warm bed, aimlessly feeling the relaxed passage of time.

—This is, of course, another peaceful day.

"....."

But, I feel a bit unsatisfied.
Although I'm back in this calm morning, I—feel that there is something that seems out of place.
Even though I killed that vampire with the black coat and everything is back the way it was—I'm feeling that something is missing.

"... That's ridiculous."

I shake my head, and shake off that unimportant thought.

—And then.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"Uwaaaa!"

I jump up in my bed.

Now that I look, Hisui is standing quietly at the side of my bed.

"Hi-HiHi-Hisui—"

"... Please excuse me, Shiki-sama, but since you did not notice, I spoke."

"Ah—well, I mean, I'm sorry, too."

Hisui respectfully bows to me.

—Sh-she surprised me.

My heart is still pounding rapidly.

"—Huh?"

But it's still before seven o'clock, Hisui."

"Yes.

It is a bit earlier than your usual waking time, Shiki-sama."

"Well, yes—then why are you here, Hisui?"

"I came to wake you up.

Akiha-sama wants to know what have you been doing these last two days so she wanted me to bring you no matter what."

"—Ah."

.... I forgot.

Come to think of it, I skipped school last Saturday and was with Arcueid through all of Sunday.

What's more, I came back late last night, snuck in like a burglar, and then went to sleep.

"... Don't tell me, Akiha's angry....?"

"I do not know.

Please confirm for yourself, Shiki-sama."

—Hisui's voice sounds very cold.

"... Hisui, you knew I came back?"

"Yes.

I noticed when you returned early this morning around two o'clock.

We saw you on the security camera when you were climbing the gate, Shiki-

sama."

"—Um, does Akiha know this?"

"No, only Nee-san and I know this."

"That's—good."

.... Anyway, I think I avoided the worst possible situation.

However, it's still pretty bad.

Not informing her what I've been doing these last two days and returning in the middle of the night, it's pretty bad.

"—Alright.

I'll head down immediately.

Umm.... and, if possible, I'd be happy if you tried to calm her down as much as possible."

"Akiha-sama already appears calm.

I think it will be difficult for my words to calm her even more."

"—"

Ugh, one problem after another?

I just got done with Nrvnqsr, so I never thought I would face another life and death battle without even a rest break.

Well, time to get up.

I can't do anything staying in bed.

"I'll go after I change, so please go ahead, Hisui.

.... It's alright, I won't run."

"—Well then, we will be waiting for you."

.... *sigh*

Well then, I should change quickly so Mistress Akiha may pass judgment on me.

—Alright, I'm here.

Now only a door separates me from the sitting room where Akiha awaits.

No matter what the circumstance was, there's no excuse for skipping school and not coming home for two days.

Now—

I will apologize. turn to **205**

Try to deceive her. turn to **206**

Tell the truth. turn to **207**

187

I walk along a different path than the one I usually take.
Passing through unfamiliar streets, I slowly approach the Tohno mansion.
The surroundings are not completely unfamiliar.
After all, I had lived here until I was nine years old—eight years ago.
This is not the first time I have taken this path back to the mansion.
My feelings are a little complex.
The path home is nostalgic, yet fresh.
Up until just now, I had not looked forward to returning to the Tohno household.
Now, it doesn't seem so bad.

.... The house I lived in until I was nine years old.
Right now, my sister Akiha is in that utterly un-Japanese, western-style mansion.
Tohno Makihisa—My old man who hated me, and the master of the Tohno household, died a few days ago.
My mother died from illness after Akiha was born, so the Tohnos had dwindled down to me and my sister.
Being the eldest son, you would think I would stand to become the Tohno heir, but I have no such privilege.
To become the Tohno heir means being bound by a strict upbringing.
I have lost count of the number of times my father had scolded me over my dislike of not being able to live freely.
That was when I got involved in that accident, and my body became weakened..
My father saw it as a good opportunity to get rid of me.
His reasoning was something along the lines of "someone who could die any moment can't become the heir, even if he is the eldest son".
Sadly for my father, I betrayed his expectations by making a recovery, but my sister Akiha was already deemed to be the heir to the Tohno household.
And so I've heard that Akiha, who was already being raised harshly in order to become a proper daughter of the Tohno household, received an even harsher upbringing since then.
That was a long time ago—I played together with Akiha in the mansion back before the accident.
After that, I never saw her again.

.... The life in the mansion I abandoned eight years ago.
Those eight years were long, and my memories of that time have largely faded.
But in spite of that, there is one thing that even now continues to burn strongly within my heart, and that is—

About my little sister Akiha.

turn to **21**

About the cheerful girl.

turn to **22**

About the girl by the window.

turn to **188**

188

.... Akiha isn't the only person I haven't seen since then.
I can't remember all the details because it's been eight years, but there were other children at the mansion around the same age as me.
I don't remember their names, but there were two girls who were twins.
The old man once said that they didn't have any relatives, so he took them to work as servants.
".... That's weird.
We played together so often when we were small, but I can't remember their names."
I close my eyes and cast my mind back.

I should be able to remember.
She was a girl who was always cheerful, so cheerful that you would become cheerful just by looking at her.
A girl with a carefree personality who was loved by everyone at the mansion.
Because she was close to my age, I got along very well with her, and it seemed like everyday we would run around the garden together.
"Let's play together, Shiki-chan."
She would say, and I could remember her taking me out of my room after I secluded myself inside.
She would often laugh and take shy Akiha's hand, trying to make her play with us.
Maybe she was older than the both of us.
She would guide me and Akiha to play together, but once we started playing, she would just watch over us.
Even Akiha's tutor, the harsh butler, would say "I don't mind, as long as ***** is with you guys", and let Akiha out to play.

But I'm much more concerned about the other girl.

.... I don't know what kind of girl she was or why she was always like that.
From the second floor,
there was always a girl looking down at us every time I turned to look at the mansion while we were playing in the garden.
She was the twin of that cheerful girl, but she would always gaze at us expressionlessly.
That girl would never try to leave the house.
All she would do was watch us with those cold eyes.
.... Was it because it bothered me so much that I thought she seemed so lonely?
Most of the memories I have about the Tohno mansion are only about her.

—Well, in the end, I only ended up talking a little with her.

"I wonder if those girls are still at the mansion..."
While I think about that, I take a white ribbon out of my bag.
An old white ribbon that the girls gave me at the very end.

—Eight years ago.
After I was involved in the accident.
The day I was entrusted to the Arima family.

Right before I was to leave the mansion, the girl gave me this for some reason.

.... I'm just lending it to you, so be sure to return it.
Saying something along those lines, she ran off.
A promise made under a large tree.

The weather was beautiful that day.
Looking up, there was a high, high blue sky I could just lose myself in.
It was my last memory of when I left the Tohno mansion, eight years ago.

sigh
I put the ribbon back in my bag.
"But it's been eight years, after all...."
Not only do I not know if they are still at the mansion, I can't even remember their names.
"... Even so, this ribbon is precious to me...."
The time when my father had disinherited me.
Rather than being saddened over having been discarded by him, I felt a warmth inside when I thought she was waiting for me to return the ribbon.
That's why I want to keep the promise, as long as I still remember it.
I agreed to return to the mansion because Akiha is now there all by herself.
I left her there for eight years, pushing all responsibility onto her while I selfishly lived freely.
.... But there is something else.
I really think I decided to return because of that promise.
The white ribbon.
.... Because of that promise made to the only one who said she would be waiting for me.

setvar kohakuregard + 3
turn to **24**

189

The howling continues.
There's no way I can sleep like this.
.... I can't sleep, but that's just normal.
"..... I'm sleepy, so I'll pass."
Pulling the sheets over me, I stretch out on the bed.
I can just think of the howling as the sound of something mundane, like cars driving by on the street.
sigh
Today's been a very long day.
I'm mentally tired from eating dinner in this unfamiliar mansion and my conversations with Akiha and everyone else.
After all that, the howling is just background noise.
I close my eyes and gently fall asleep.

"—Nng."

I think I just heard something.
Half-awake, I look at the clock.
It's just past two.
.... It's been about two hours since I heard the dogs howling.
The dogs' howling has already stopped.
The mansion is so quiet, I can hear the clock ticking in the silence.

"—?"

I hear it again.
.... Inside the mansion.... from the lobby?
"—Could it be a burglar?"
It's not impossible.
The mansion's contents are outrageously valuable.
On top of that, with no one here now except Kohaku-san, Hisui, Akiha and myself, it's very insecure.
"....."
I get out of bed, and slip out of the room quietly.

.... If it's a burglar, Akiha and everyone will be in danger, so I can't let this one go.
I'll just look down from the second floor into the lobby; that should be safe enough.

There's nothing wrong there.

".....!"

No, someone's there.
The figure that enters from the entrance and crosses the lobby with wobbling, uncertain steps, is—



"Aki... ha?"

She's not going to her own room on the second floor, but to the first floor of the west wing.

The only things there are Kohaku-san's room and my old man's room.

"... What's she doing at this time of night...?"

I can murmur all I want, but there won't be any answers forthcoming.

After gazing at the lobby for a while, I decide to return to my room.

..... Well, she probably had something to do, or went to see Kohaku-san.

I feel bad about sneaking around and watching her, and I don't want to just ask her about everything she does.

"... Sleep, sleep.

There's school tomorrow."

I bury myself in bed and close my eyes.

—As I fall asleep,

my thoughts keep returning over and over to Akiha's hollow-eyed figure in the lobby, and how something seemed wrong.

turn to **191**

Back then, the whole mansion was like a giant playground.

The garden, a deep forest.
The house, a tall castle.

We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.
Every day was fun.
No one thought about ever growing up,
and we believed that days and nights would always be the same.

It was just a childhood spent playing like puppies.
We got along wonderfully, and were the best of playmates.
Whenever I turned back, Akiha would be there, waving her hands and hiding shyly.
Yes, always the same.
Back then, the whole mansion was like a giant playground.

The garden, a deep forest.
The house, a tall castle.

We played in our own little world, which would take days to explore.

"—Good morning."

.... I hear an unfamiliar voice.
The dream disappears, and all that remains is the feeling of my languid, waking body.

"It is morning.
Time to wake up, Shiki-sama."

An unfamiliar voice greets me.
.... Stop calling me Shiki-sama already.
I told you yesterday, it sends chills down my back—



—I wake up.

Hisui stands far from the bed, like a statue.

"...."

Where am I?



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

A girl in a maid uniform bows.

"Ah.. yeah, I came home, right.."

I push myself up, and look around the room.

"Good morning, Hisui.

Thanks for coming to wake me."



"There is no need to thank me.

It is my duty to come and wake you, Shiki-sama."

Hisui answers indifferently, completely expressionless.

"Ah, really..?"

Okay then.."

.... Even in an unfavorable light, I think Hisui's features are beautiful.

It should be wonderful for such a girl to wake me every morning, but as Hisui never smiles, I don't feel that happy about it.

.... What a shame.

If Hisui only had half of Kohaku's brightness, she would be really cute.

"—Do you need something?"

Realizing I am looking at her, Hisui stares straight back at me.

"No, nothing at all.

Waking up with you there makes me feel like I'm really at the Tohno mansion."

Now then.

Getting off the bed, I stretch out both arms.

"Shiki-sama, there is no time.

From the mansion to your school is a thirty minute trip.

This leaves only twenty minutes for breakfast."

"Eh?"

.... Ahh!

It's already seven o'clock!?"

I gasp in amazement after looking at the clock.

.... My repeated awakenings last night must have messed up my sleep pattern.

"Your uniform is folded and awaits you over there.

Please come to the sitting room after you have changed."

"Damn it, if you're going to wake me, wake me up earlier.."

Muttering selfishly to myself, I reach for the uniform.

It's folded neatly, and the shirt has even been ironed.

Passing my wrists through the sleeves feels good.

It's that fresh, brand-new feeling.





Akiha and Kohaku-san are relaxing in the sitting room.
Akiha is wearing the uniform of the Asagami Ladies' Academy, a famous school for young girls.
They are drinking tea together gracefully, as if breakfast ended a long time ago.

setvar flgP + 1

Greet Akiha. turn to **289**

Greet Kohaku-san. turn to **109**

Greet both of them. turn to **110**

191

"—Good morning."

.... I hear an unfamiliar voice.
The dream quickly fades away as a voice calls me back to reality.
"It is morning.
Time to wake up, Shiki-sama."

An unfamiliar voice greets me.
.... Stop calling me Shiki-sama already.
I told you yesterday, it sends chills down my back—



—I wake up.
Hisui stands far from the bed, like a statue.
"Mm..."
I sleepily look around.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
A girl in a maid uniform bows.
For a moment, I doubt my eyes.
Finally, I recall my current condition.
"Yeah, I came home, right.."
I push myself up, and look around the room.

Outside the window, the weather is great.
A blue sky like the one I saw in my dream.
"Good morning, Hisui.
Thanks for coming to wake me."



"There is no need to thank me.
It is my duty to come and wake you, Shiki-sama."
Hisui answers indifferently, completely expressionless.
sigh
"... Why do you have to be so formal, Hisui?"
It's really a shame.
If Hisui only had half of Kohaku's brightness, she would be really cute.
"—Do you need something?"
Realizing I am looking at her, Hisui stares straight back at me.
"Ah, no, nothing at all.
Waking up and seeing your face, I just felt like I'm really at the Tohno mansion."
Hisui's eyes are like cold ice.
Seeing that all of a sudden, something reminiscent of a dream flashes through my mind—
"—I, see."
I remember it completely.
That day, that girl who gave me the ribbon right before I left was the one who always watched us from that window.
That is, in other words—
"It was.... Hisui."
"Yes?"
Did you say something, Shiki-sama?"
"Ah... Hisui, do you remember?
About when I left here eight years ago?"
"Yes, I remember it.
But, was there anything special that happened?"
"Eh—anything special?
Hisui?"

"Please forgive me.
Eight years has passed since you departed this mansion.
So even if you speak of those times, I cannot answer with any specific details."
"Wha—"
Does she not remember the promise we made back then?
"Hisui—you don't remember about the ribbon?"



".... Ribbon...?"
She looks downcast as she admits with difficulty that she does not remember.
".... I see.
That's right, it was eight years ago.... Sorry, it's nothing.
Just forget about what I said."



"....."
.... She doesn't remember the promise.
But, it isn't anything I can hold against her.
Even though it was maybe just a childish promise, it really did help me to face
forward into the future back then.
"Well, time to get up.
Hisui, do you know what time it is?"



"Yes, it is now past seven o'clock in the morning."

"Okay, that leaves me just a little time then."

Stretching my back, I get up out of bed.



"You say that, but you do not have much time.

It takes about thirty minutes to go from the mansion to your school.

You only have twenty minutes to eat breakfast and get ready."

"Eh—that's right, this isn't Arimas' house!"

I'm filled with horror.

I was so used to the Arima house being only twenty minutes away from school,
but from here, I don't even know a shortcut.



"Your uniform is folded and awaits you over there.

Please come to the sitting room after you have changed."

"Damn it, if you're going to wake, me, wake me up earlier.."
Muttering selfishly to myself, I reach for the uniform.
It's folded neatly, and the shirt has even been ironed.
Passing my wrists through the sleeves feels good.
It's that fresh, brand-new feeling.



Akiha and Kohaku-san are relaxing in the sitting room.
Akiha is wearing the uniform of the Asagami Ladies' Academy, a famous school for young girls.
They are drinking tea together gracefully, as if breakfast ended a long time ago.

Greet Akiha.	turn to 289
Greet Kohaku-san.	turn to 109
Greet both of them.	turn to 110

192



"Akiha-sama?
It's almost time to leave; is this alright?"



".... I know.
Sheesh, don't be so worried over stuff like this on the first day."
Muttering some complaints, Akiha stands up.



"Well, I must say goodbye.
Nii-san, you should apply yourself to your studies today."

Akiha leaves the sitting room.
Kohaku-san follows, seeing her off.
"Apply myself to my studies..?"

She's quite ceremonious about trivial things in an old fashioned kind of way.. I guess it's because she's been disciplined under our old man for the last eight years.

".... Well, I'd have gone to school even if she hadn't said anything."

I scratch my cheek.

There was something about Akiha's face as she left.. because of it, I paid no attention at all to her various admonishings this morning.

"Of course—"

I clap my hands together.

For some reason, Akiha's face just then seemed to resemble her face from long ago—

After eating the breakfast Kohaku-san prepared, I exit into the lobby. Hisui was waiting there with my bag.



"Shiki-sama, have you enough time?"

"Yeah, it should only be twenty minutes to school if I run.

It's only seven-thirty, so I should be fine even if I take the long way."

Seeming satisfied with this answer, Hisui bows her head in assent.

"Then, allow me to see you out."

"Eh?"

Ah, yeah.. thank you."

.... I still feel terribly awkward having my own servant.

"Oh, Shiki-san!

Please wait just a moment!"

With pattering footsteps, Kohaku-san runs down from the second floor.

"...."

Hisui steps back and falls silent as Kohaku-san approaches.



"Huh?
Weren't you with Akiha?"
"Lady Akiha goes to school by car.
Since I had something to give to you this morning, I stayed behind."
"Something to give me?"
"Yes.
This came from the Arima family yesterday."
Kohaku-san smiles.
"Eh?
But, I have all my luggage already.
The things I used while I was at the Arimas' house all belonged to them, so all
I've got are my own clothes.."
"Really?
But this was sent here, nonetheless."
Kohaku-san hands me a thin wooden box, perhaps twenty centimeters long.
It's not heavy at all.
".... Kohaku-san, I've never seen this before."
"Well.. apparently it was left to you by your departed father.
It was to be given to you in the will."
".... By my old man?"
.... I can't feel anything about that.
What's the old man who expelled me from this mansion eight years ago doing
leaving me things?
"Oh well.
Kohaku-san, please take it to my room for me."



"___"

Kohaku-san is staring intently at the wooden box.
She seems almost like a child who wants a toy.

Staaaaaare.

No, she is a child.

"... I get it.

You want to know what's inside, right?"



"Oh, not at all.

I merely wondered for a moment."

.... Like I said, you do wonder what's inside.

"Alright, let's open it.

One, two.. three!"

With a dry sound, the wooden box opens.

Inside, there is—a ten-centimeter bar of thin iron.

"... It's.. an iron bar."

Undecorated and worn, it has finger marks all over it.

.... The old man must have really hated me to leave me a piece of junk like this.

"No, Shiki-san.

It's a fruit knife."

Kohaku-san takes the iron bar out of the box.

"See, isn't it one of those folding knives?"

One, two.. three!"

With the sound of sliding metal, a ten centimeter blade pops out from the bar.
 I see, it certainly is a knife.
 "It's old, but it seems pretty solid.
 The year and the era it was made in is written on the back."
 Kohaku-san replaces the blade, and hands over the knife.

Certainly, there's a number written on the grip.
 The character "seven", and under it, the character "night".



-2 0

"Nee-san, there is no era by that name.
 It just says 'Nanatsu-yoru'."
 "Ah!"

I turn around in surprise.
 Hisui, who had been silent until now, was looking at the knife over my shoulders.
 "Y, you surprised me.. Hisui, you should say something.
 You don't have to look over my shoulder like that, you know.
 If you want to see it, I'll show it to you."



-2 0

"Ah—"

Hisui's cheeks become faintly red.
 "P-please excuse me.
 Um—That knife was so beautiful that I could not help myself."

"Beautiful?
You really think it's beautiful?
It looks kind of beat up to me."



-2 0

"—Not at all.
The tempering of the blade is masterful.
I think it is a knife with its own proper history."
"Really?
It looks to me like a piece of junk.."
But since Hisui seems so convinced, I begin to feel the same thing.
.... Hmm.
In its own way, I guess it's not such a bad inheritance.



-2 0



"Seven nights'..?
 Maybe that's the name of this fruit knife?"
 "Maybe.. though, I can't imagine him naming a knife like that."
 Whatever the case may be, it's obvious that it's an antique.
 "Well, in any case, I believe in taking what's given to me."
 I replace the blade, and put the knife in my trouser pocket.



-2 0
 "Shiki-sama, have you enough time..?"
 "Ah!
 I have to get going.
 Well, Kohaku-san, thanks for the delivery."
 Kohaku smiles and waves me off.



I come out to the gates.
 Hisui follows in silence.
 ".... Hisui.
 You're seeing me off?"
 Hisui nods wordlessly.
 "Shiki-sama?
 What time shall we expect your return?"
 It seems Hisui will continue to use "-sama" to the bitter end.
 Well, if I take time to argue it now, I'll be late for school.
 I'll complain about the honorific later.
 "Shiki-sama?"

"Ah, yeah.
Uh.. probably around four o'clock, I think.
I don't do any club activities."
When I don't hang out with Arihiko, I usually get back pretty early in the evening.
Hisui bows deeply at my random estimate.



"I understand.
Please take care on the way."
.... I'm not sure what to take care about, but she's probably just worried about my health.
"Yeah, thanks.
You too, Hisui."
I return the goodwill with good intentions.
With an energetic wave of the hand at Hisui, I leave the gates of the mansion behind.

—I go down the hill.
Since I've attended school from the Arimas' house up until now, this is my first time taking this route.
"Not many from our school.."
Apparently, there are not many people from my school who live around here.
Half past seven in the morning.
I can't see anyone running along the streets in a school uniform except me.

Slowly, I begin to see some people in school uniforms intermingled with the crowd.
This is around where the road to school begins.

".... Where's Yumizuka-san..?
Well, I'm not going to be that lucky.."
I recall the smiling face of the classmate who departed here yesterday saying "my house is this way".
As I think of Yumizuka Satsuki in the classroom, my pace quickens a little, and

I hurry towards the classroom.

I leave the residential area and reach the crossroads.
The gates will be closed in about ten minutes.
I start to run across the asphalt.

—I made it.

It seems like it took twenty minutes rather than thirty from the mansion.
I'll need to leave around seven if I want to go slowly, since I ran several times on the way.

"—?"

When I get to the classroom, I notice the air is buzzing.
Although the classroom in the morning is always noisy, there's something different about the noise today.
I walk to my desk by the window.
Arihiko is waiting there sullenly.
"Arihiko, did something happen?"



".... Dunno.
It's nothing big.
There's a rumor that someone in class ran away from home."
"Ahh.. that's what all the fuss is about, then."
I sit down at my desk with a sigh.
"—What do you mean, nothing big!?
Who ran away?
Who!"



"How should I know?

But we'll know when homeroom starts.

Whoever's seat is vacant, they must be the one who ran away from home."

"Ahh, that's true."

It's true, but, Arihiko's attitude seems a little dry.

.... If one of our classmates really has run away from home, I think it's a bit much to just ignore it as someone else's problem.

"Arihiko?

Aren't you being insensitive?

One of our classmates ran away from home.. aren't you worried?"



"Eh?

You're the only one who's seriously worried, dumbass.

Everyone's talking about it because it's an interesting thing to talk about.

It's not as if you or I had run away from home, so there's no need to worry, is there?"

.... Now I remember.

This guy's cold like that to everyone except his friends.



"Though, I guess I am a bit worried.
Running away from home at a time like this.. they'd have to be really brave or really.."
"..?"
A time like this?
What kind of time is that?"
"I told you yesterday, Tohno.
There's a serial killer going around on the streets right now.
I don't know who ran away from home, but they'd have no excuse if they got attacked by him while living on the streets."
"Can't be—there's no way that'd happen."
"Tohno, you should watch TV more.
There's been eight victims already, and he doesn't discriminate.
You'd better think again if you think you're safe.
The town's empty at night nowadays.
The only people who go out are drunkards and policemen, which is why it's so boring."
Arihiko's voice is very serious.
Hearing it, I begin to feel uneasy.
"Oh, Kunifuji's here.
It's homeroom at last."

Arihiko returns to his seat.

After a while, everyone is seated.
Only one seat is empty.
There's no mistaking it.
The desk of Yumizuka Satsuki is empty.



"Well, my house is this way.
Bye-bye.
See you at school tomorrow."

"...."

.... Yumizuka said that when we parted yesterday.
I don't know what happened at home, but I can't see her making that smiling
face before running away.
"Yumizuka is absent."
Yumizuka Satsuki is merely treated as absent as attendance is taken.
.... As if nothing is amiss, homeroom proceeds.

I—

Ask about Yumizuka Satsuki.

turn to **193**

Just sit silently.

turn to **194**

193

—I know Yumizuka was smiling yesterday.

I didn't think that she could make such a face, say "bye bye", and then run away from home.

"—Sensei."

"What is it, Tohno?"

A question?"

"Yes.

Is it true that a student in our class has run away from home?"

"Hrm——"

Instantly, the air in the classroom solidifies.

He frowns, then, with a difficult expression, bows his head in assent.

"Yes, that is what we've heard from Yumizuka Satsuki's parents.

Yumizuka didn't come home last night, but they've been searching, and I'm sure they've already found her."

Saying so, he departs.

The classroom becomes noisy again.

I have a bad feeling about this.

.... It's really heavy.

A terrible feeling as if my body is tied down to this chair.

if flgP >= 1
turn to **195**
turn to **196**

194

—I was about to ask, but I didn't think the teacher would tell me.

If she did run away from home like Arihiko said, it's her business.

Besides, there isn't a teacher on the planet who'd answer a classmate who just casually asked "Has Yumizuka-san run away from home?"

"... Yeah, it's not like it's been confirmed yet or anything."

Maybe Yumizuka was just late.

It would be a better idea to see how things go for a little while longer before asking the teacher.

if flgP >= 1
turn to **195**
turn to **196**

195

I still feel down even when lunch time arrives.
While the news of Yumizuka Satsuki running away from home was shocking, it seems it wasn't a topic that could last forever.
The classroom is just like always, and it seemed that I'm the only one troubled by our absent classmate.



"Tohno, let's go get lunch."
"That's okay.
I don't really feel like it."
"Huh.. I guess it can't be helped.
Don't be troubled with other people's problems too much."

"...."

Other people's problems, huh.
Arihiko's words are too close to the truth.



"Huh?
You're not with Inui-kun today?"
".... Senpai?
What are you doing in our classroom?"



"Well, I thought I'd have lunch with you guys.. Tohno-kun, aren't you going to eat something?"

Senpai sits down on the desk, looking at me anxiously.

"Nah, I just don't seem to have any appetite today."

"Ahh.. Are you not feeling well?"

"... Something like that.

Don't worry about me, you go on to the dining hall.

Arihiko's probably already there."



"Oh, you're not energetic at all!

I don't know what happened, but if you don't eat lunch, you'll just feel even worse."

"That's.. true.

But.."

But since I'm not hungry, there's not a lot I can do.



"Alright, I'll take you somewhere special.
It's really a secret, but you're special, Tohno-kun."

With that, she grabs my arm and pulls me out of the chair.
turn to ??

196

—Even after second period, Yumizuka still didn't show up.
With no way to find out, my bad feeling about this grows.

It's lunchtime.

In spite of the morning's excitement, the classroom has returned to its everyday cheerfulness.

It seems that no one in class is really taking Yumizuka Satsuki's running away from home seriously.



"Tohno, let's get lunch."

"That's okay."

"I don't really feel like it."

"Huh, I guess it can't be helped."

"Don't be troubled with other people's problems too much."

"...."

Other people's problems, huh?

Arihiko's words are too close to the truth.

"Huh?"

"You're not with Inui-kun today?"



".... Senpai?"

"What are you doing in our classroom?"

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"Nah, I just don't seem to have any appetite today."

"Ahh.. Are you not feeling well?"

".... Something like that.

Don't worry about me, you go on to the dining hall.

Arihiko's probably already there."



"Oh, you're not energetic at all!

I don't know what happened, but if you don't eat lunch, you'll just feel even worse."

"That's.. true, but.."

But since I'm not hungry, there's not a lot I can do.

I—

Ciel-senpai is right.

turn to ??

No, I really don't feel well.

turn to **198**

197

.... There is no one around.
The shopping district still had some people, but the way back to the mansion should be completely empty.

"....."

The words "serial killer" run through my mind.

Midnight.

Walking through town alone.

I might be an easy prey for such an attacker.

"—!?"

A sound.

Somewhere behind a building, there is a sound.

I think it is the sound of someone falling?

"... The back alley...?"

The noise came only once.

An eerie silence surrounds me.

.... I have a bad feeling about this.

Did someone collapse in the back alley?

Did the wind just knock something over?

.... Whatever it was, I probably shouldn't get involved.

—But.

Is it because I was looking for Yumizuka a while ago?

I feel like she's there for some reason.

"... What.. should I do...?"

There's no one around.

The only help I can rely on is this knife Kohaku-san handed me this morning.

I——

Go and look. flgP >= 1

turn to **203**

Go and look.

turn to **204**

Don't go and look.

turn to **220**

198

".... Sorry.
I really don't feel too good right now.
I'm going to the clinic, so please just have lunch with Arihiko."



Senpai sighs.
".... I don't know what is going on, but please do not push yourself, Tohno-kun."
"Haha-I'm going to the clinic so I won't push myself."

Forcing a smile, I leave the classroom.

When I get back, homeroom has ended.
I'm the only one left in the classroom as everyone else has rushed off to club activities or to their houses.

"—Well."

There's really no need for me to stay here.
Putting my things in my bag, I leave the classroom.

It's past four o'clock.
I told Hisui that I'd return around four, so I don't have time to wander around.

"...."
I suddenly stop as I walk up the hill.
Yesterday, at this same time.
I remember how natural the parting was between Yumizuka and I.
"....."
To be honest, I'm concerned about Yumizuka.
But no matter how much I worry, there's nothing I can do.
I told her I would help her as much as I could whenever she was in a pinch.
But now, I don't even know how I can help.

I reach the top of the hill, walk along the wall and reach the front gate of

the mansion.

"... This western mansion does seem out of place."

In the middle of a residential area and at the top of a hill, this imposing mansion really does give the impression that it is from a country other than Japan. Besides, to top it all off—



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."



And standing there in front of the gate to welcome me is a maid.

Hisui stands like a statue in front of the gate.

"Thanks, Hisui... Um, forgive me for asking, but have you been waiting for me here the whole time?"

"No, not the whole time.

I have only waited for half an hour.

Is there something wrong?"

She speaks extremely matter-of-factly.

.... Wait a minute, waiting for me like that is going overboard.

"—I'm really happy that you waited to greet me, but you don't have to go that far.

Wearing that and standing so conspicuously, I feel a little embarrassed."

Plus it is autumn.

It'll get pretty cold out soon.

"....."

Hisui is silent.

She might be part foreigner, as her blue eyes are like finely crafted glass, staring

at me lifelessly without emotion.
A brief silence ensues.



"... I understand.
Then, starting tomorrow, I will wait in the lobby."
Hisui gives a brief bow and opens the gate.



After that, she resumes her immobile depiction of a statue.
After I walk through the gate and enter the garden, she quietly follows behind me.

When we reach the entrance, Hisui whooshes past me.
"Uwaa!"
I instinctively jump back.



"... What is it, Shiki-sama?"
"Uh, no—nothing, it's nothing."
"....."

She silently opens the front door.
She must have moved ahead of me to do so.
Waiting behind her master until her turn arises and quietly fulfilling her duty.
Perhaps that is the duty of a maid, but it makes a normal person like me a little nervous to have her attending my every move.
.... This isn't good at all.
This just makes me feel like a perpetual guest in my own home.

"Um, Hisui?"



"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"I said this yesterday already, but I'd like to do things that I can do by myself.
No, please let me.
This is sort of a secret, I suppose, but the truth is, I really am pretty lazy deep inside, so I tend to let things go."
Yeah, I really want that to be a secret from Akiha.
".... I do not understand, are you telling me to be more strict?"
"No, that's definitely not it.
I just want to live as relaxed as possible."
".... I am deeply sorry.
I do not appear to understand what you are saying, Shiki-sama."
".... Um, that's why I'm saying—you don't have to look so serious."
.... This is troubling.
Last night when I talked to her a little about this I had a premonition, but I didn't know she took things this seriously.
"—Sheesh, what I'm saying is that you don't have to worry about me.
I don't mind being helped with things like laundry and cooking, but other than that, I can take care of myself.
Isn't it just you and Kohaku-san taking care of this enormous mansion?
So I don't want to add to your duties; just relax!"



"....."

Her expression doesn't change.

She doesn't answer or even give a nod.

Just.. a quick closing of the eyes, I think.

"I understand.

But you do not have to worry about me, Shiki-sama."

—Argh, she doesn't understand at all.....

Hisui swiftly swishes to the side to make way for me.

I sigh.

.... I am really taken aback..

All this devotion really does make me happy, but I think it'll be good if she was just half as cheerful as Kohaku-san.

She has such a beautiful atmosphere around her, maybe if I just relax a little bit, that would be—



"Shiki-sama, are you not going to return to your room?"

"No, I was just thinking about something."

I turn to the side and face the stairs.

Hisui looks rather longingly at the bag in my hand.

.... I think she wants me to let her carry it.

She already went through all this trouble just to greet me, and now she wants to carry my bag.

I ignore her longing attitude as I quickly walk towards my room.



"Please take off your school clothes and place them here.
I have to clean the mansion, so if you need anything, please call for me."
"... Hisui, you clean the mansion?
I wonder what Akiha and Kohaku-san are doing."
"Akiha-sama is in the salon taking care of Makihisa-sama's business and inheritance matters.
Nee-san would most likely be sweeping in the courtyard."
"... Huh?
My old man's business inheritance?
Is she talking with a lawyer or something?"
"Yes.
It seems that she is being informed about all of the administration policies, so she will be extremely busy until dinner time."
"....."
Well, the old man DID suddenly pass away, so he probably didn't tell her anything about his company.
"Sorry for taking your time.
I'll call you if anything happens, so you can return to what you were doing."



"I understand.
Well, then, please excuse me."

I change out of my uniform and into some normal clothes.

The clock says it's just past five o'clock.
It'd be a waste if I just spaced out in my room, so now I should—

Go see Hisui. turn to **200**

Go help Kohaku-san. turn to **199**

Stay in my room. turn to **201**

199

.... That's right, she's been taking care of me since yesterday.
So if I have time to fool around, then I should go help Kohaku-san.
"I guess she's sweeping in the garden."
If it's just sweeping the garden, even I could help with that.
I psyche myself up, and head towards the garden.



"Oh, welcome back, Shiki-san."
Kohaku-san faces me with a tender smile.
"Thanks.
You're sweeping the garden by yourself?"
"Yes.
The gardener will not be here for another three days, so I thought I should just straighten up these fallen leaves."
Kohaku-san holds the bamboo broom with both hands.
She looks like she's really enjoying herself.
Cleaning up this large area by herself should be quite a huge task.
"You're really something, Kohaku-san.
I'd complain if I had to sweep this whole garden."
"Oh no, it isn't like that at all.
This is my duty, so I have to do it to put food on the table.
That is why I must push back my tears and sweep this garden.
Ahaha!"
Kohaku-san laughs and gives a care-free smile.
She certainly is cheerful.
"Besides, there are some things I do in the back courtyard, so when I am not busy, I always check up on the garden."
"Eh....?
'Things you do' ?
Like what?"
"Well, let's see.
Ever since I was a child, I've liked growing flowers.
I gathered so many kinds of flowers on whim that it is more like a jungle than a flowerbed."

"Ahaha," Kohaku-san laughs brightly once again.
.... But I didn't know that.
I rarely go back here so I didn't realize it, but I guess I have seen something like
a flower garden from the second floor.
"I see.
You like gardening, Kohaku-san?
What kind of flowers?"



"Well, lots of kinds.
But most of them are morning glories."
"Oh, morning glories?
That seems like a fitting choice."
"Really?
I always thought that they didn't quite match the mood of the mansion though."
"No, not the mansion.
I mean they suit you well, Kohaku-san.
Morning glories are so pretty in their simplicity."



"Shiki-san, I think you have the wrong idea.
The ones in the garden are Korean morning glories.
They are a bit dangerous."
Kohaku-san laughs as if something was really funny.
"Is that so?
But Korean morning glories are still morning glories, right?"



"Yes.

It is also known as crazy eggplant, or datura.

The flowers can be made into an anesthetic.

The world's first general anesthetic, Tsuusensan, was made in Japan with the Korean morning glories as its main active ingredient.

If you drink it by accident, it will cause dangerous hallucinations, so please be careful, Shiki-san."

.... Um, I don't really think I'd ever "accidentally drink" the flowers, Kohaku-san.

"I also wanted to grow some cactus and other cute things like that, but Akihasama was vehemently against it so I had to stop.

It really is too bad that I tell you all these things, but cannot show them to you."

Saying that, she takes up the broom again.

".... I see.

So you sweep the garden because you like flowers and stuff like that?"



"No, that isn't really the reason.

Actually, I'm terrible at cleaning inside the mansion.

I don't know why, but I always seem to break something."

"Huh?"

"I seem to break or rip the most valuable thing in the room.

Well, but I don't do it on purpose, right?

But Hisui-chan told me, 'Nee-san, maybe you should just stick to the family

finances and cooking.' How mean of her!"
Kohaku-san is still smiling while acting angry.
But—this is quite different from my first impression of her.
"... You don't mean.. Kohaku-san, are you clumsy?"
My statement is more of a blurted outburst than a direct question.
Kohaku-san groans in disappointment.
"You're saying it too, Shiki-san?"
Hisui-chan is too cruel and says, 'Nee-san, you are too slow', while Akiha-sama teases me and says, 'You are not being careful enough.'
I don't mess up because I want to!
They're so mean!"
"... That's right.
There really aren't too many people that mess up because they want to."
I didn't know what to say, so I tried to be somewhat neutral.
"That's right!
It's the thought that counts, so I think they should overlook it if I mess up ten or twenty times!"

Kohaku-san starts quickly sweeping the leaves again.
—Well, I didn't come here to get in her way.
"Kohaku-san, is there another broom?"



"Yes, there are many in the shed.
What are you going to use it for?"
"No, I just thought I'd sweep up some leaves too."
Kohaku-san's broom freezes.



"—That will not do, Shiki-sama.
If you were to do that, I would be in trouble."
"Get in trouble?"
Who would get you in—well, I guess there really is only one person who would."
"Yes."
Kohaku-san nods quickly.
"Don't worry about it.
I'm doing it because I want to.
So it's wrong for Akiha to complain.
If Akiha has any complaints, she'll have to blame me, not you."
"Oh, that is true."
"Isn't it?"
So relax.
Besides, it's more fun if we both do it."



".... Um.
Shiki-san, you do not seem to understand Lady Akiha.
If you did that, she would get angry for another reason, I think."
".... I don't get it, but you're saying she'll get angry whatever happens?"



"Ahaha, that's it.
 So please do not worry about sweeping."
 Still smiling, Kohaku-san says this directly.
 "... Oh.
 No matter what happens, Akiha will get mad at you.
 Then I don't want to make any trouble for you.
 Sorry, forgive me for just being careless."
 "No, you were not being careless.
 I'm very happy you wanted to help me."
 Even though she says that with her bright smile, I feel bad because I really did
 want to help her.

I sigh.
 Kohaku-san looks up at my face cheerfully.



"Shiki-san, did you really want to help me?"
 "Yeah, if I won't get you in trouble."
 "Then, shall we go somewhere else?
 Akiha-sama will find us here, so I think it is better if we sweep behind the
 mansion."
 "Behind.... in the backyard?"
 "Yes.
 Akiha-sama will never find us there, so we can sweep all we want.
 Here you go," Kohaku-san hands me the broom she had in her hands.
 "I will go to the shed to get another broom, so please go ahead, Shiki-sama.

Please don't let Hisui-chan or Akiha-sama spot you as you go, okay?"

Trot trot trot!
Kohaku-san dashes with quick, light steps.

—She really looks like a mischievous kid.

Before I realize it, a grin creases my lips.
Akiha and Hisui don't seem to be the joking type, so Kohaku-san's brightness is quite charming.
"Alright, let's do this—!"
Gripping the broom that Kohaku-san was using earlier, I covertly walk to the garden behind the mansion.

setvar kohakuregard + 1
turn to **202**

200

.... That's right.
She's been taking care of me since yesterday, so if I have time to fool around, I ought to go help Hisui.

—Well then.
Hisui said she'd be cleaning the mansion, but where could she be?

I go down to the lobby.
She wasn't in the hallway on the second floor, so maybe she's in the sitting room?

.... Not here.

..... Not here.

..... Not here.

..... Not here.

She's not anywhere on the first floor.
The only place I haven't been are the locked recreation rooms, the guest rooms, and the salon where Akiha is right now.
".... I guess she's on the second floor then."
It is a big mansion, so there's probably a bunch of places I haven't looked.
Psyching myself up, I start up the stairs.

I go up the stairs and glance down the hallway.
And then,
I see Hisui's silhouette standing by the window in the east hall of the mansion.

"Hisu—"
My voice dies in my throat.
In the middle of the hallway.
In the twilight, between light and shadow, Hisui stands motionless.
"_____"

.... I can't.. speak.
Something about her seems.. dangerous.

Hisui lingering in the gloom of this western-style mansion.

She seems so incredibly beautiful; but at the same time, a chill runs through me, as if I were looking at a ghost.

She doesn't even move a finger.
She simply stares out the window.
"_____"

That window.
Is that the same one she watched us from back then?
"Hisu—i"
I can't do anything but stare in fascination.
I'm so dumbstruck I can't speak, or even blink.
I can only watch her.

—And then.
Her eyes, still like that of a doll's, suddenly turn towards me.
"Shiki-sama, is something wrong?"
"Ah—no, nothing, I just, um...."
"?"
Hisui tilts her head in curiosity.
That seems to break the mysterious spell I was under.
"I was looking for you because I had some free time and thought I'd give you a hand.
For some reason, I couldn't find you, but I made it."
".... I see.
But Shiki-sama, there is no need for you to do that.
Please return to your room."
"Hmmm....."
I thought it would turn out like this, Hisui doesn't want me to do any work.
"But Hisui, I don't have anything else to do.
I don't like just doing nothing, so I thought I ought to pitch in."
"Shiki-sama, you may say that, but there is no longer any work that you might assist me with.
The only thing that remains is to arrange Akiha's bedroom.
No males are allowed to enter Akiha's bedroom.
Not even you, Shiki-sama."
"Hmmm....."
Well, that's definitely true.
.... But, it is a little cruel.
She didn't have to emphasize that last part.
"Please excuse me, I have to finish my duties."

Her footsteps echo in the air and she goes into Akiha's bedroom.
"..... Sheesh."
I can't just go into a girl's bedroom because I have free time.
".... Oh well, I guess I'll go back to my room."
I turn on my heels.

Before doing so, I get curious about the window Hisui was staring out of.

"Huh—isn't that Kohaku-san in the courtyard?"

You can see the whole courtyard from this window.

Was Hisui looking out into the courtyard from this window just as she did when she was a child....?

setvar hisuiregard + 1
turn to **202**

201

.... No, I would feel bad about moving around and interfering with Hisui and Kohaku-san's work.

It's still only been two days since I came back to the mansion.

Perhaps it's because I'm not used to it yet, but for some reason, I feel tired.

I should relax and rest until dinner.

turn to **202**

202

It's after dinner, and we drink tea in the sitting room.
Akiha sits across from me and Hisui stands by the wall.
There is no such thing as a TV in the room, and Akiha doesn't say much.

—Everything seems so.. high-class.
"Shiki-saaan, can you come here for a moment?"
Kohaku-san's cheerful voice calls from the lobby.



"Nii-san?
Kohaku is calling you.
Did you do anything to make her call for you?"
"No, I don't remember anything—I'll be right back."

I leave Akiha and Hisui behind and go to the lobby.
Kohaku-san is pacing back and forth by the entrance.
"... Kohaku-san.
What are you doing?"



"Ah, Shiki-san.
Well, it's a little complicated.... Can you please step outside with me?
Here is not a good place."
"...?"
I don't understand what's going on, but I follow her anyway.

"You have something to tell me?
Is it a secret or something?"



"Yes.
If Akiha-sama were to hear it, she would get mad at you, Shiki-san."
Something Akiha would get mad over....?
"What do you mean?
I haven't done anything to make her mad."
"Oh, it isn't anything you did.
But you know, while you were eating with Akiha-sama, a guest came to see you."
"Huh?
A guest, for me?"
"Yes.
She was walking around the front gate, so I called out to her.
She was wearing the school uniform of your high school."
And then Kohaku-san began to describe the guest's appearance.
About my age, with a slightly childish face.
A cute girl, her long hair tied in pigtails....?
"....."
Thump.
I feel as if my world is enveloped in darkness.
That description.
Isn't it Yumizuka Satsuki, who ran away from home—
"She asked 'Is this Tohno-san's mansion?' And I answered 'Yes it is.' Then she asked 'Is Tohno-kun here now?'"
"... Hmm.
And then what, Kohaku-san?"
"Yes, well she seemed to want to talk to you, but she refused when I asked if she wanted to come in.
She seemed okay that she would not get to meet you right now."
Kohaku-san wonders aloud what it was all about, and she tilts her head.
But, I'm the one who wants to know.
"Why——why did Yumizuka-san come to my place...."

I don't know.
 I don't know, but, I have a bad feeling about this.
 "... Kohaku-san, how long ago was this?"
 "Um, it was before the end of dinner, so about ten minutes ago."
 "—!
 And, which direction did she go?"
 "She went down the hill, towards the station, I think."
 —Can I make it?
 If I run—if I get lucky, I might make it.
 "... Got it.
 I'll be gone for a little bit, so please keep this a secret from Akiha."



"I understand.
 If Akiha-sama found out, she would not leave you alone, Shiki-san."
 Giving a quick bow to the smiling and cheerful Kohaku-san, I run down the road and into the night.

pant—*pant*, *pant*—
 Dashing with all my strength, I run toward the station.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*—!
 I look for someone like Yumizuka in the crowd in front of the station.

pant... *pant*, *pant*.....
 I'm out of breath.
 My legs are painfully aware of how fast I was running, and they stop.
 "... I, knew... it wouldn't, be this easy, to find, her..."
 pant, *pant*.
 Trying to control my breathing, I start to run again.

—I don't see Yumizuka Satsuki anywhere.

It's only natural, but I can't seem to give up that easily.

.... I don't think it is because I am so worried about her.
It's just that I have this terrible premonition, that's why I am running like this.
—I'll be going.
Bye-bye, Tohno-kun.

That was a goodbye just like any other.
.... A truly happy, gentle smile.
That was not the face of someone who'd run away from home.

—Tohno-kun, help me when I'm in a pinch, okay?

Yes, it really is that simple.
I just.. don't want to betray that smile—

I pant with exertion.
I don't see her in the park, either.
.... There wasn't a way to find her from the beginning.
I should just give up and go back to the mansion.
".... Damn.... it...."
Still, I try to look for her as I turn to go back through town.

I come to the front of the station once more.
It's already past nine o'clock.
It's probably because of all the recent serial killings that the area around the station is quite empty already.

—At that moment,

"Yumi—zuka."
For an instant, I doubt my eyes.
But the back of the figure in front of me, it resembles Yumizuka Satsuki too much.

Yumizuka walks quickly into the midst of the crowd.
.... I can't tell for sure.
I may have been wrong, but I decided I should catch up to her and call out to her.
"Wait, Yumizuka-san—!"
I shout while running.



"____"

Did she hear me?

Yumizuka quickly turns around to face my direction.

That face.. there's no confusing it.
The girl walking ahead of me is unmistakably Yumizuka Satsuki, and the expression on her face wasn't frightening.

"—Ah."

But I feel a chill run through my spine.

—Thump.

My heart starts to pound quickly.

The back of my head throbs heavily, and my throat is burning.

"What is this.. It's weird.."

The inside of my body is burning.

I feel dizzy as if I'm in the grip of a terrible fever.

In that moment, Yumizuka begins to walk again.

"Wa—wait, Yumizuka-san..!"

I call out, running.

Yumizuka walks on unsteadily, not turning.

"Ca.. can't you hear me, Yumizuka..!"

I urge my hot body onwards.

But, no matter how much I try, I cannot catch Yumizuka.

.... No matter how fast I run, I cannot catch up to her even as she walks.

"____"

Something is.. strange.

I know that, but I couldn't tell what it is.

Right now, all I can do is follow Yumizuka Satsuki.

—And then.

I lose sight of her.

Yumizuka Satsuki, whom I had been chasing without success, is nowhere to be seen.

".... Shit.. What the hell is going on..!"

I stop, catching my breath.

My chest heaves deeply.

.... Though I hadn't realized until now, I must have been running for a long time.

"What.. time is it..?"

Resting my hands on my knees, I glance up at a nearby store window.

It is—already midnight.

"—Can't be.

I couldn't have been running for that long."

.... It's hard to believe, but the clock is correct.

Looking around, most all the lights in the shopping district are off.

"—I should.. go back."

Even though I'm worried about Yumizuka, I feel like I won't be able to find her anymore.

.... I chased her for almost three hours, calling her name all this time, but she did not even respond.

What was she thinking?

With a big sigh, I decide to head back to the mansion.

turn to **197**

—I can't ignore my feelings.

With a killer skulking around town at night looking for victims, I shouldn't be investigating suspicious sounds in alleyways.

But.. I still remember Yumizuka's smiling face from yesterday.

There's no reason for Yumizuka to be there.

But if she is, she might need my help.

.... I'll never forgive myself if I just ignore this.

"—Alright."

Putting my hand in my pocket, there is the cold touch of iron.

Even though I don't intend to use it, it's comforting to know that I'm not un-armed.

.... And if it comes to it, I have my "eyes" too.

Sensei said not to use them recklessly, but she'll find it acceptable if I use it against a killer.

".... The sound.. it came from here.."

Preparing myself, I step into the alley.

—Thump.

My heart pounds.

The back alley is quiet.

.... The noise came from the open area at the far end.

—Thump.

The back of my head, hurts.

As if convulsing under the utmost strain, my wracked spine hurts as if it's about to rip itself out of my body.

—Thump.

Why is it?

I can't think, yet my instincts shout at me.

—Thu-mp.

Don't go.

Don't go any further.

If you do, you won't be able to come back.

—Thu-mp.

But it's already too late.

I step out of the back alley, and into the the open space.

"—Eh?"

That weak voice is all that I can get out.

The back alley is a single sheet of crimson.

Limbs are strewn amongst the garbage and rubble.

Not the limbs of dogs, or cats, or the like.

They are human limbs, blood dripping from fresh meat and bone.

The ground and the walls are painted with red blood.

A heavy scent fills my nostrils.

Thick.

Like a red fog permeating my body, the choking smell of blood.

A face.

A face.

A face.

A face on a severed head, rolling around with an expression of agony.

A face shriveled up like a mummy, split in halves.

A face with both eyes gouged out, so distorted I can't even tell if it used to be a man or a woman.

"——"

Unable to make a sound, I merely gaze speechless at the corpses.

No, they can't even be called human bodies any more.

Even a badly made sculpture looks better than this.

There are four bodies.

They roll around like scraps of leftover food.

"Ah—ah."

I gape in shock at the sea of bodies.

The back of my head throbs, my throat is parched, and my breath burns like fire.

My fingertips quiver, and my mouth distorts.

What—is this?

What is this world before my eyes?

"—Red."

Yes.

Before my eyes, everything is that terrible color—

But I merely stand.

No screaming, no fear.

Like the scene of an accident in a movie, I only stare at the back alley.

Undoubtedly,

this is how my mind is protecting myself.

Otherwise I would have gone mad.

A corpse against the wall moves.

No, that's wrong.

It's not a corpse.

It's not like the scrapped hands and feet.

It's a living human being, with limbs attached.

"Ah....."

I see something out of place.

In this ghoulis spectacle, the response to seeing someone alive is more of astonishment than happiness.

But, if he's alive.

If he's alive, I have to help him.

"Uh—hello?"

With my mind still paralyzed, I step towards the living figure.

"—Gih."

Pulling itself up from the sea, it raises its face toward me.

A face like a dried out skull.

"Hii—!"

I leap back reflexively.

But, the skull moves faster than I do.

With a voice crying out "hyuuu!

hyuuu!" he jumps at me.

—-Hyuu!
Hyuu!

A hideous voice, right next to me.
Looking down—there is a large hole in the skull's throat, preventing him from speaking correctly.
"—-Ah!"
The dried up face, the dried up arm reaching for me.
In the throat of this bag of bones, vocal chords vibrate in accord with the ghastly voice.
"Uwaaaahhhhh!"
Desperately, I try to tear him off me.
But he merely raises that ghastly voice, and will not get off.

Rip.
Its fingers pierce my shoulder.
"... Chhh!"
My body arcs from pain.
The fingers were like a sharp needle.
It shreds my skin mercilessly, scooping out nerves and flesh as it goes—
"Ah, aahhh—!"

The pain is so great that I can say nothing else.
Though I try to tear him off me screaming, he is too strong.
Whatever I do, he does not move.
With a creak, the skull's jaw opens.
The mouth opens wide enough to rip off my shoulder with a single bite, and he approaches my face as if saying, "I don't want to die, somebody save me".

"St—"

I can't even say "stop".
The guy made only of skin and bones, tries to bite my head—and suddenly, he collapses.

"Eh..?"
The awesome power vanishes.
The bag of bones in a person's form crumples to the ground and disappears.

Softly,
 like a bad dream, it turns to ash and blows away.
 "... What the hell is this?"
 Pain runs through my shoulder.
 "Ach.."
 My own blood flows down my back.
 The pain is real.
 So this must be real.
 A terrible nightmare.
 But—it can't be a nightmare, because it's not a dream.

"Tohno-kun.
 It'll be dangerous if you stay there."
 "—!"
 I turn towards the voice behind me.
 At the mouth of the alley where I came from, I see Yumizuka Satsuki.



"Yumi.. zuka—?"
 "Good evening.
 Fancy meeting you in a place like this, huh?"
 As if we had merely bumped into each other in the mall, Yumizuka greets me lightheartedly.
 "Yumizuka, you.. What are you doing, out at a time like this?"
 "Oh, just going for a walk.
 But what's Tohno-kun doing?
 Killing so many people like this is bad, right?"
 Yumizuka says, with a light smile.
 "Killing so many people.. eh?"
 I look around me.
 And I remember the tragic scene I'm surrounded by.
 In a sea of blood.
 Tohno Shiki stands aghast like a murderer.
 "N.. no!
 This wasn't me!"
 "Oh, of course it was.

Everyone's dead, and Tohno-kun's alive, so obviously Tohno-kun must have killed them."

"No way!

It just attacked me....!"

I point at the monster that attacked me moments ago.

But, nothing's there.

Even the ashes of the bones have been blown away by the wind.

"Ah—"

I swallow my breath.

Yumizuka is chuckling.

"It's not.. this wasn't.. wasn't me.."

My head is paralyzed, and can only manage broken language.

.... I understand.

I can think clearly, but I can't put my thoughts into words.

For example, why is Yumizuka at a place like this after running away from home?

For example, why is Yumizuka laughing in the face of this tragic scene?

"Yumizuka-san, I—"

"Yeah, I know.

You just interrupted someone's meal.

I'm sorry for sounding mean.

I always act against my feelings, so I'm always acting like this to you."

Yumizuka is still laughing.

.... It's so inappropriate for this scene, I feel a chill.

Yumizuka doesn't move from the entrance of the alley.

Her arms are positioned strangely, as if she's hiding something behind her back.

—And, looking closer,

there are spots of something red on her sleeve.

"Yumizuka, you—"

"What is it?

Your face looks scary, Tohno-kun."

She laughs again.

"——"

.... No.

Somehow, this girl cannot be Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Yumizuka.. why are you hiding your hands like that?"

"Ah, have I been found out?

I guess you're too observant to miss that, huh.

I've always liked that about you, Shiki-kun."

After emphasizing the "Shiki-kun",
she brings her hands out.



Both hands are dyed crimson.
 Not yet dry, the blood drips off them in red droplets.
 And, proudly,
 Yumizuka Satsuki is smiling.
 "Yumizuka, your hands—"
 "Yeah.
 I killed those people."
 "Wha—"
 "Oh, but, it's okay.
 I didn't kill them because I hated them.
 I just needed their blood to live, so I had to kill them."

.... What.. is this?
 I.. don't really understand what Yumizuka is saying.
 "You.. really killed them, Yumizuka?"
 "You wouldn't believe me even if I told you it's a lie, right?
 Or do you think it's impossible for a girl like me to do such a thing?"
 Her voice laughs softly.

—I don't believe her.

I don't believe her, but she is definitely not telling a lie.
 This tragic scene.
 It's all Yumizuka's doing.
 "Why.. such a terrible thing..?"
 "It's not terrible.
 Like I said, I didn't kill them because I hated them.
 There's nothing wrong with killing others in order to live, is there, Shiki-kun?"
 "What..!
 That's absurd!
 Killing is wrong!"
 "No, it's not.
 But, I did do one bad thing.
 Since today was my first time drinking blood, I let a little of my blood get back

into them.

Because of that, you got attacked, Shiki-kun.

"I'm sorry for getting you involved.

But we're lucky; it died without being able to finish changing."

"What.. what are you talking about, Yumizuka?"

"It's okay if you don't understand right now.

I don't really understand myself yet, so I can't explain it very well."

But, I think after a few days I can become like Shiki-kun.

Like Shiki-kun, become a great—"



As she says so, her face distorts in pain.

"Ha—.. aaau!!!"

Rasps of agony echo from her throat.

Yumizuka chokes up blood.

"It—hurts.

I guess, even if I'm hungry, I shouldn't just drink blood at random.

If it's not good quality, beautiful blood, it won't agree with me.."

She breaks out in a fit of coughing.

She chokes out blood with every cough.

"Nn—kuh, nnaaah..!!!"

Yumizuka's body convulses.

.... I don't really understand.

All I know is, Yumizuka's in terrible pain.

That's all I can clearly understand.

"Hey.. are you okay, Yumizuka..!?"

I run towards her to take her hand.

"—No!

Don't come any closer, Shiki-kun!"

But, Yumizuka's voice stops me.

"... You mustn't.

I'm not.. entirely okay, Shiki-kun."

She speaks painfully, still vomiting red blood.

"Yumi.. zuka, you.."

I don't understand.

Why Yumizuka's in pain, or why she's like this.

"What the hell is going on?
You said you killed those people, but it's a lie, right, Yumizuka..?
If you're in that much pain, shouldn't you be in a hospital?"
.... I'm fooling myself.
Even though I understand Yumizuka brought about this tragic scene, I still lie to myself.
"Yumizuka.. I'm coming over there, okay?"
I speak gently.
But Yumizuka shakes her head in violent refusal.
"Why!?!—If you're in pain, we have to get you to a hospital right away..!"
"Shiki-kun, you're not getting it.
You really never understand anything.."
"Idiot!
I told you before, I don't understand..!"
"Ah.. yeah, you did, didn't you.
But you're still here.."
Yumizuka begins to pull away.

".... It hurts, Shiki-kun."
She breathes raggedly, coughing up red blood.
"It hurts, it's cold, and I'm scared.
I really want your help right now, Shiki-kun."

—But it's too early.

Saying that,
Yumizuka straightens up again.



"Wait for me, okay?
I'll go become a great vampire, then I'll come back and see you!"

"Ah.. wait, Yumizuka!"

"——"

Yumizuka is gone.

Even as I start to run, Yumizuka is long gone.
.... Her speed is inhuman, like that of a wild beast.
"—Yumizuka, you—"
What happened to you, really.....!?
"Gah—!"

My injured shoulder throbs.
When I look back, the open space where all the limbs were scattered only left red blood.
The faces, the organs, the hands and feet.
They all turned to ashes, like the skull did before.
"Sh.. it.."
Angrily, I strike the wall.
"What the hell is going on!!!"
I bellow pointlessly, and the alley echoes my voice.

"—"
The next thing I know, I'm at the gates of the mansion.
The wound on my shoulder aches.
The lights of the mansion are dark.
Somehow, I hadn't realized I would be coming back so late.
Akiha—Akiha will surely be angry with me, I think as I put my hand on the heavy doors.

.... The lobby is empty.
So, what should I do?
Even though my wound needs treating, Kohaku-san is probably asleep—

".... Nii-san?"
"Eh?—Akiha?"
I look up in the direction of the voice.
.... Akiha is standing on the stairs.



"It is you.
Coming back so late at night, just what do you think—"

Akiha reaches the bottom of the stairs, and her rebuke stops.



"Nii-san.. where did you hurt your shoulder?"

"Ah—"

Damn it.

I had wanted to hide the wound, but it's too late now.

"Ah, no, this is.."



"Never mind.

Hold still.

Is it only your shoulder..?"

"Ah—yes, but, how do you know.."

"I can tell with all that blood on your clothes.

I'll hear about it later, but right now, we'll treat it.

Please, forgive me, Nii-san."

Saying so, Akiha touches my shoulder.
"—Tch!"
My body jumps at only the slight touch of Akiha's finger.
.... It appears that the wound is deeper than I thought.



"Ah.. I'm sorry, did it hurt, Nii-san?"
".... No, I'm.. I'd like to say I'm okay, but I guess I'm not.
Even a touch is really painful."



"I see.. if it's this deep, I think it is too much for Kohaku.
I'll treat it, so please go into the sitting room."

Akiha walks upstairs.

"..... Phew."
I turn on the sitting room lights, and sit on the sofa.
The wound on my shoulder hurts, and begins to become unbearable.



"Sorry for making you wait.
I'll treat the wound, so please relax."
Akiha comes in holding a first aid kit.
.... I don't think that would really help on this wound, but I guess I should at least get it disinfected.

Akiha moves behind me, and begins to treat the wound.
The uniform, damp with blood, is cut away with scissors, and the wound is exposed and disinfected.
"—Guuuh!"
I clench my fists as the pain flashes through my body.
.... But after that, the ache of the wound begins to fade.
Akiha must be skilled at medical care, or perhaps the wound wasn't so bad to begin with.
After a few minutes, the pain completely goes away.



"Alright, we're done.
I expect a wound like that should be healed by the morning."
Akiha packs away the first aid kit.
.... Somehow, I'm surprised.
I would have expected Akiha to ask where I got injured, and to rebuke me for playing outside so late.
".... You haven't asked, Akiha."



"I haven't asked.. about what?"

"Well.. you know.

Why I'm back so late.

Why I'm hurt."

I blurt it out like a complaint.

After what happened with Yumizuka, I'm exhausted.

And because I'm tired, I said such a thing.



"Nii-san.

I.. think I know the right order for things.

Right now, the priority is to tend to your injury."

".... I see.

Of course, I see.."



"Ohh!

What kind of person did you think I was, Nii-san!
I'm not about to yell at someone who's hurt."
"... You're right.
I'm sorry; thank you for everything.
But, even though you treated it—"



"You're going to say you can't explain the situation, right?
I don't want to listen to your excuses, but today is special.
If you do not wish to talk about it, I won't inquire either."
"Eh?
Is that, okay?
I came back so late at night.."



".... Certainly, I am curious about what might have happened to you.
But, I trust you and I have enough trust to believe you weren't doing something
too dangerous.
And.. I can't force someone to talk when they look like that."
Akiha looks away shyly.
"...."
Look like that—is my expression that bad right now?"



"I'll listen when you have recovered, Nii-san.
If you rest overnight, your health should improve."

"——"

Feeling awkward, I look away from Akiha.
.... I'm glad she won't listen to me until I'm better, but I feel like I won't be able to talk about it even in the morning.

In the end, I can't tell Akiha anything.
I feel too guilty to even look at her face.
".... Akiha, I—"



"Ohh, please don't keep making that face!
I told you, I'll make an exception today, so go back to your room and rest, alright?
I bet it's something you can't talk to me about anyway!"

Having read my expression perfectly, Akiha turns and goes out to the lobby.
I can only sit on the sofa and watch her leave.

Suddenly, I wonder.
Was Akiha waiting for my return?
Is that how she appeared in the lobby so quickly?
"—Akiha."



"What is it, Nii-san?"

".... Thank you for treating me.
I'm sorry for making you worry."



"Eh—"

Suddenly, Akiha stops walking.

—And then she turns away.



"I. I wasn't worried about you, Nii-san.
If you've that much energy for flattery, you should concentrate on taking care
of yourself!"

With a crash, she slams the door behind her.

"—I really don't understand her."
But, I do understand that she was worried about me.
"... Seems like I wasn't doing something too dangerous, huh?"
Akiha seems to believe me since she said that.
But really, it was a frighteningly dangerous scene.
The bodies scattered in the back alley.
The figure of Yumizuka, her hands stained red with blood.

"—Guh."

A chill runs through me just at the memory.
I stand up, taking care of my wound, and return to my room.

I change clothes, and fall onto the bed.
But if I close my eyes, I'll see the scene in the back alley.

—I killed all those people.
Yumizuka said so, as if it was nothing.

—I needed their blood.
So, she killed them.
Just like a vampire.
Like.. a bad joke.

—Wait, okay?
I'll go become a great vampire—
.... I don't remember.
What did Yumizuka say at the end.

"Huh.."
Sleepiness fills my body.

With Yumizuka's face still etched in my mind, I close my eyes slowly.

.... Only one thing is clear.
That Yumizuka told the truth, and she really did slaughter all those people.

But even then.
Instead of fearing everything that happened, I'm more concerned about the one thing she said.

—It hurts.
It really hurts, Tohno-kun—
.... There's something wrong with me.
Yumizuka is really a murderer, but those words will not leave my mind—
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—I can't ignore my feelings.

With a killer skulking around town at night looking for victims, I shouldn't be investigating suspicious sounds in alleyways.

But.. I still remember Yumizuka's smiling face from yesterday.

There's no reason for Yumizuka to be there.

But if she is, she might need my help.

.... I'll never forgive myself if I just ignore this.

"—Alright."

Taking a deep breath, I steel my spirit.

Besides, if it comes to it, I have my "eyes" too.

Sensei said not to use them recklessly, but she'll find it acceptable if I use it against a killer.

".... The sound.. it came from here.."

Preparing myself, I step into the alley.

—Thump.

My heart pounds.

The back alley is quiet.

.... The noise came from the open area at the far end.

—Thump.

The back of my head, hurts.

As if convulsing under the utmost strain, my wracked spine hurts as if it's about to rip itself out of my body.

—Thump.

Why is it?

I can't think, yet my instincts shout at me.

—Thu-mp.

Don't go.

Don't go any further.

If you do, you won't be able to come back.

—Thu-mp.

But it's already too late.
I step out of the back alley, and into the the open space.

"—Eh?"
That weak voice is all that I can get out.

—The back alley is a single sheet of crimson.

In it, limbs are strewn amongst the garbage and rubble.
Not the limbs of dogs, or cats, or the like.
They are human limbs, blood dripping from fresh meat and bone.

The ground and the walls are painted with red blood.
A heavy scent fills my nostrils.
Thick.
Like a red fog permeating my body, the choking smell of blood.
A face.
A face.
A face.
A face on a severed head, rolling around with an expression of agony.
A face shriveled up like a mummy, split in halves.
A face with both eyes gouged out, so distorted I can't even tell if it used to be
a man or a woman.

"——"

Unable to make a sound, I merely gaze speechless at the corpses.
No, they can't even be called human bodies anymore.
Even a badly made sculpture looks better than this.
There are four bodies.
They roll around like scraps of leftover food.

"Ah—ah."

I gape in shock at the sea of bodies.
The back of my head throbs,
my throat is parched, and my breath burns like fire.
My fingertips quiver, and my mouth distorts.
What—is this?
What is this world before my eyes?
"—Red."
Yes.
Before my eyes, everything is that terrible color—

But I merely stand.
I think I may be going crazy.

Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

While being faced with a totally bizarre, alien landscape like this,
my heart screams shrilly in anticipation.

A corpse against the wall moves.
No, that's wrong.
It's not a corpse.
It's not like the scrapped hands and feet.
It's a living human being, with limbs attached.
"Ah.."
I see something out of place.
In this ghoulish spectacle, the response to seeing someone alive is more of as-
tonishment than happiness.

But, if he's alive.
If he's alive, I have to help him.
"Uh—hello?"
In my rush of emotion, I step towards the living figure.

"—Gih."

Pulling itself up from the sea, it raises its face toward me.
A face like a dried out skull.

"Hii—!"
I leap back reflexively.
But the skull moves faster than I do.
With a voice like "hyuuhyuu!", he jumps on me.

—Hyuu!
Hyuu!

A hideous voice, right next to me.
Looking down—there is a large hole in the skull's throat, preventing him from
speaking right.
"—Ah!"
The dried up face, the dried up arm reaching for me.
In the throat of this bag of bones, vocal chords vibrate in accord with the ghastly

voice.

"Uwaaaahhhhh!"

Desperately, I try to tear him off me.

But he merely raises that ghastly voice, and will not get off.

With a creak, the skull's jaw opens.

The mouth opens wide enough to rip off my shoulder with a single bite, and he approaches my face as if saying, "I don't want to die, somebody save me".

"St—"

I can't even say "stop".

The guy made only of skin and bones, tries to bite my head—and suddenly, he collapses.

"Eh...?"

The awesome power vanishes.

The bag of bones in a person's form crumples to the ground and disappears.

Softly,

like a bad dream, it turns to ash and blows away.

"... What the hell is this?"

A pain runs through my shoulder.

"Ach.."

My shoulders begin to turn red and swell where he has grasped me.

The pain is real.

So this must be real.

A terrible nightmare.

But—it can't be a nightmare, because it's not a dream.

"Tohno-kun.

It'll be dangerous if you stay there."

"—!"

I turn towards the voice behind me.

At the mouth of the alley where I came from, I see Yumizuka Satsuki.



"Yumizuka.. san—?"

"Good evening.
Fancy meeting you in a place like this, huh?"
As if we had merely bumped into each other in the mall, Yumizuka greets me lightheartedly.
"Yumizuka-san, what about you.. what are you doing, out at a time like this?"
"Oh, just going for a walk.
But what's Tohno-kun doing?
Killing so many people like this is bad, right?"
Yumizuka says, with a light smile.
"Killing so many people.. eh?"
I look around me.
.... And I remember the tragic scene I'm surrounded by.
In a sea of blood.
Tohno Shiki stands aghast like a murderer.
"N.. no!
This wasn't me!"
"Oh, of course it was.
Everyone's dead, and Tohno-kun's alive, so obviously Tohno-kun must have killed them."
"No way!
It just attacked me....!"
I point at the monster that attacked me moments ago.
But, nothing's there.
Even the ashes of the bones have been blown away by the wind.
"Ah—"
I swallow my breath.
Yumizuka is chuckling.
"It's not.. this wasn't.. wasn't me.."
My head is paralyzed, and can only manage broken language.
.... I understand.
I can think clearly, but I can't put my thought into words.

For example, why is Yumizuka at a place like this?

For example, why is Yumizuka laughing in the face of this tragic scene?
"Yumizuka-san, I—"
"Yeah, I know.
You just interrupted someone's meal.
I'm sorry for sounding mean.
I always act against my feelings, so I'm always acting like this to you."
Yumizuka is still laughing.
.... It's so inappropriate for this scene, I feel a chill.
Yumizuka doesn't move from the entrance of the alley.
Her arms are positioned strangely, as if she's hiding something behind her back.

—And, looking closer,

there are spots of something red on her sleeve.

"Yumizuka, you—"

"What is it?"

Your face looks scary, Tohno-kun."

She laughs again.

"_____"

.... No.

Somehow, this girl cannot be Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Yumizuka—why are you hiding your hands like that?"

"Ah, have I been found out?"

I guess you're too observant to miss that, huh.

I've always liked that about you, Shiki-kun."

After emphasizing my name,

she brings her hands out.



Both hands are dyed crimson.
Not yet dry, the blood drips off them in red droplets.
And, proudly,
Yumizuka Satsuki is smiling.

"Yumizuka, your hands—"

"Yeah.

I killed those people."

"Wha—"

"Oh, but, it's okay.

I didn't kill them because I hated them.

I just needed their blood to live, so I had to kill them."

She says it as if it was normal.

Of course I can't understand it.

All I do understand is—my blood is pulsing wildly throughout my whole body.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

pant.

pant.

pant.

Like I've fallen in love at first sight with that bloody Yumizuka, I am excited—

"You.. really killed them, Yumizuka?"



"You wouldn't believe me even if I told you it's a lie, right?

Or do you think it's impossible for a girl like me to do such a thing?"

Her voice laughs softly.

—I don't believe her.

I don't believe her, but she is definitely not telling a lie.

This tragic scene.

It's all Yumizuka's doing.

"Why.. such a terrible thing..?"



"It's not terrible.

Like I said, I didn't kill them because I hated them.

There's nothing wrong with killing others in order to live, is there, Shiki-kun?"

"What..!"

That's absurd!

Killing is wrong!"

"No, it's not.

But, I did do one bad thing.

Since today was my first time drinking blood, I let a little of my blood get back into them.

Because of that, you got attacked, Shiki-kun.

"I'm sorry for getting you involved.

But we're lucky; it died without being able to finish changing."

"What—what are you talking about, Yumizuka?"

"It's okay if you don't understand right now.

I don't really understand myself yet, so I can't explain it very well.

"But, I think after a few days I can become like Shiki-kun.

Like Shiki-kun, become a great—"

As she said so, her face distorts in pain.



"Ha—.. aaau!!!"

Rasps of agony echo from her throat.

Yumizuka chokes up blood.

"It—hurts.

I guess, even if I'm hungry, I shouldn't just drink blood at random.

If it's not good quality, beautiful blood, it won't agree with me.."

She breaks out in a fit of coughing.

She chokes out blood with every cough.

"Nn—kuh, nnaaah..!!!"

Yumizuka's body convulses.

.... I don't really understand.

All I know is, Yumizuka's in terrible pain.

That's all I can clearly understand.

"Are you okay, Yumizuka..!?"

Without thinking, I run towards her to take her hand.



"—No!
Don't come any closer, Shiki-kun!"
But, Yumizuka's voice stops me.



"... You mustn't.
I'm not.. entirely okay, Shiki-kun."
She speaks painfully, still vomiting red blood.
"Yumi.. zuka, you—"
I don't understand.
Why Yumizuka's in pain, or why she's like this.
"What the hell is going on?
You said you killed those people, but that's a lie, right, Yumizuka..?
If you're in that much pain, shouldn't you be in a hospital?"
.... I know.
Even though I understand Yumizuka brought about this tragic scene, I still lie
to myself.
"Hey, Yumizuka—I'm coming over there, okay?"
I speak gently.
But Yumizuka shakes her head in violent refusal.
"Why!?!—If you're in pain, we have to get you to a hospital right away..!"
"Shiki-kun, you're not getting it.
You really never understand anything.."
"Idiot!
I told you before, I don't understand..!"
"Ah.. yeah, you did, didn't you."

But you're still here.."
Yumizuka begins to pull away.
"... It hurts, Shiki-kun."
She breathes raggedly, coughing up red blood.
"... It hurts, it's cold, and I'm scared.
I really want your help right now, Shiki-kun."

—But it's too early.

Saying that,
Yumizuka straightens up again.

"Wait for me, okay?
I'll go become a great vampire, then I'll come back to see you again!"
"Wha—wait up, Yumizuka!"

"——"

Yumizuka is gone.
Even as I start to run, Yumizuka is long gone.
... Her speed is is not that of a human's, but of a wild beast.
"—Yumizuka, you—"
What happened to you, really..?

"Gah—!"
My shoulders throb in pain where he grabbed earlier.
When I look back, the open space where all the limbs were scattered only left
red blood.
The faces, the organs, the hands and feet.
They all turned to ash, like the skull did before.

"——Ah."
Thump.
I feel sick as if I'm going to cough up blood.

"This can't, be—"
Thump.
This excitement, is so intense, I almost ejaculate.

"This—"
For a while,
the crimson color of blood burns in my eyes.

"This can't be real—!"
My world swims before me.
My eyes see nothing but a distorted world.

—Before I realize it, I'm back at the mansion.

Just like a pet somehow finding its way home, I guess.
I'm on the verge of collapsing from dizziness; I didn't think I would make it back this far.

"..... Ggh."
Vomit.
I'm going to vomit.
"Ah—gha, ah—"
My heart is exploding, I can hardly breathe.
"... I have to.... hurry and rest..."
Since I've collapsed so many times before from my anemia, I know I'm about to faint.
—If I rest.
If I just rest my body in bed, this nausea, my exploding heart, will all go back to normal.

I—I can forget all about that, as if nothing happened, and wake up to a normal day.



"Shiki-san?
You have returned?"
"Ah.... Kohaku-san."
Kohaku-san emerges from the west hallway.
.... That's right, Kohaku-san's room is in the west hallway on the first floor.



"Welcome back, Shiki-san.
 Did you get to meet your friend?"
 "Uh—ah, yes, I met her."
 I remember as soon as I answer.
 The scattered limbs.
 Face.
 Face.
 Face.
 Face.
 The blood-stained alley.
 Yumizuka's laughing face and her bloody hands—
 ".... Sorry.
 I'm going back to my room, so please go back as well, Kohaku-san."
 I don't feel like talking with anyone right now.
 I leave Kohaku-san behind and go up the stairs.

I collapse on my bed.
 "Ah—-ah."
 My chest rises and falls as I take deep breaths.
 "_____"
 My mind feels faint.
 Dizziness overwhelms me.
 Even if it means passing out, I just want to go to sleep right now.
 —So why can't I sleep?

I'm so dizzy right now, but why don't I pass out like always?
 If I close my eyes, the vision of that scene in the alley shows up under my eyelids.
 My heart throbs violently.
 It isn't terror, rather—it's closer to sexual excitement.

"Why—"
 I don't understand it at all.

Is there this thin of a line between terror and lust?

"Eh.....?"
Who can it be at this hour?
"Shiki-sama, are you awake....?"
That whisper is Hisui.
Thump.
Just imagining her form, my heart calms down a bit.
"... Yeah, I'm awake.
Please come in."
"—Please excuse me."



.... What's this?
Hisui enters carrying a tray and something that looks like medicine wrapped in paper.
"... Hisui.
What are you doing at this hour?"
"Shiki-sama, you seemed to have trouble sleeping so I brought you some medicine."
"Eh.....?"
Uh, that's right.
.... But how did you know, Hisui?"
"I heard it from my sister.
She told me that you were very tired, so I should give extra care."
.... I see, it was Kohaku-san.
She must have seen how bad my face looked when we met in the lobby.
"... And, this medicine is?"



"It is a sleep-inducing medicine.
Your personal physician gave his approval that it could be used for you."
"Approval... at this hour!?"
"No, my sister asked your personal physician as soon as she found out you were coming here to live in this mansion."
"Wow—Kohaku-san is pretty amazing.
She's pretty thoughtful."
Anyway, I'm very thankful right now.
Taking the water from Hisui, I drink the medicine.



"Nn—ah."
I start to feel very sleepy after a while.
"... Thanks, Hisui.
Please give Kohaku-san my thanks as well."



"As you wish.
Well then, please rest well, Shiki-sama."

.... I can hear Hisui's footsteps.
It feels like all the power is draining from my body.
"Mm—feels, good—"
I space out.
As if I was passing out, I quickly fall asleep—

—Is this a dream?
A red alley.
The same back alley that I was in before.

Where Yumizuka Satsuki is killing.
Luring appropriate passers-by into that back alley.

Mercilessly killing them from behind by twisting their necks like a damp cloth,
then plunging her teeth into them.

One person.
Two people.
Three people.
Four people.

How dare she—do those things without me!
As if in a dream, indulging herself in drinking the blood, Yumizuka tears apart
the four dead bodies and continues licking the blood.

A crimson world.
But, I don't feel it is sick, or detest it at all.

Pathetic.
Pathetic, pathetic.
A knife in my hand.
pant *pant* My breathing is out of control.
My heart is pounding like a piston, urging me to do something.

If it were me, I'd do a much better job.
pant, *pant*, *pant*.
I breathe hard.
Is it because I'm holding back my impulse of wanting to do the same things
Yumizuka Satsuki is doing?

I'm going out of control.
Because I don't—want to see such a thing.

Why are you hesitating?
There's no-hesitation.

Why are you holding back?
There's no-holding back.

There's no point resisting it.
Someone's.. irritating voice.

I I want to do what I want to do.
That voice.
It is, my own.

.... Yumizuka is crying.
Is she crying because she's not good at killing?
Or is it because she's in pain?
I don't know.

Worthless.
Is it alright to think so?

That woman is worthless.
.... But, am I the one who is worthless?

WORTHLESS ones should just be killed.

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".... That's right.
I think that's the best choice."
I don't think Akiha will understand about non-humans like Arcueid and Nrvn-
qsr, and since I can't tell the truth, I should at least sincerely apologize.

"—Alright, let's go."
Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Good morning, Nii-san."
Her gaze is telling me "I am angry."
"Um, uh.... Morning, Akiha."
"Let's dispense with greetings.
Please sit there.
I wish to speak with you, Nii-san."

"___"

Her words are so forceful, I can't say no.
I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from her.



"Nii-san.
This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"

"—Ugh."

Despite her polite language, Akiha's words are unmistakably a threat. But, her Onii-chan cannot tell her such a story.

"About that, Akiha."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you."

Crash.

The teacup that Akiha was holding falls to the table. Rather, I think she dropped it intentionally.



-2 0

"Akiha-sama—"



-2 0



"Oh, I'm sorry Hisui.
Would you please clean it up?"

Hisui silently cleans up the spilled tea and the shards of the (very expensive-looking) teacup.

I uneasily watch her do so while Akiha is glaring at me.
Once done cleaning, Hisui goes to the kitchen.



"—Then, Nii-san."

".... Yes?"

"Could I ask you again?"

Akiha doesn't give up.

I can feel her drive to get the story out of me no matter what.

But still, I don't think I can tell her about it.

Of course not just for my sake, but hers as well.

".... No.

No matter how many times you ask me, I can't tell you.

I feel sorry that I made you worry, but I can't tell you about it."



"—Even though you are sorry, you can't tell me, Nii-san."

"That's right.

I'm sorry I haven't contacted you and for not being able to talk about it.

But I haven't done anything wrong the past two days.

... I don't even want to think that was a wrong thing to do."

—That's right.

Even these past two days were simply kill or be killed—I want to believe it was the right thing to do.

I did it to help Arcueid, but most of all.. I do not regret killing that cannibalistic monster.

At the very least, there will be no more victims killed by having their blood drained.

"—I'm sorry, Akiha.

I'm sorry to worry you, but please don't ask me anymore."



"——"

Akiha looks me in the eye.

For a while, she stays like that.

".... I understand.

After thinking about it, you must have your reasons, so I won't press you on this anymore, Nii-san."

".... I'm sorry.

Thanks for understanding."



"__"

turn to **208**

Well, I just have to deceive her somehow.
I don't think Akiha will understand about non-humans like Arcueid and Nrvn-
qsr, so I'll have to minimize my lying without telling the truth.

"—Alright, let's go."
Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Good morning, Nii-san."
Her gaze is telling me "I am angry."
"Um, uh.... Morning, Akiha."
"Let's dispense with greetings.
Please sit there.
I wish to speak with you, Nii-san."
"——"

Her words are so forceful, I can't say no.
I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from Akiha.
"Nii-san.
This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"
"—Ugh."
Despite her polite language, Akiha's words are unmistakably a threat.
But, her Onii-chan cannot tell her such a story.
"About that, Akiha."



"Yes, what is it?"

"The truth is, I ran into a minor acquaintance of mine and I showed that person around the city."



"Oh?"

"A minor acquaintance?"

"Yeah, I got to know the person just recently, and we met just outside of school. I was asked to keep this acquaintance company until Sunday, so—"

"So you skipped school and stayed away from home without even notifying me or asking permission."

.... Akiha's gaze is extremely frigid.
She seems even more shocked than angry.

"....."

"....."

I remain quiet as Akiha stares at me wordlessly.



"And, who was it?"
"Eh?"



"I asked who this acquaintance of yours is."
She looks at me directly in the eye.
I can feel her thinking "I will not be deceived".
"-Well, I-"
"If you can't tell me, that means you feel guilty about it, Nii-san."
Her gaze shoots right through me.
I get the feeling she'll attack me more if I look away, so I stare back at her.
.... Well, this is totally random, but..
She does not remind me of the Akiha from back then.
Her stretched back, her perfect posture, her unwavering eyes.
Perhaps this is imprudent, but I honestly think she has become very beautiful.
"You know, Akiha."



"What?"

"Your eyebrows are pretty thick."



"——!?"

Bam!

Akiha's leg smacks the table as she jumps up.

"..... Ah."

How do I say this—she's surprisingly surprised?

".... I don't get you at all.

That wasn't something to be surprised about."

"——"

With a deep breath, Akiha slumps her shoulders.



"Nii-san, it seems like you do not wish to answer me seriously."

".... That's not right.

Honestly, I won't lie to you.
It's just that I have a lot of things I can't say to you."



"Geez.
Really, ever since we were small I was never able to tell if you were an honest
or dishonest person, Nii-san."
"... Really?
I don't really remember how I was when I was small."



"You don't have to remember.
But, I haven't changed either.
Pressing you like this even when I know how it will turn out.. maybe I haven't
grown up at all."

turn to **208**

207

—I'll try telling the truth.

I don't want to lie to Akiha, and if I explain everything sincerely, Akiha may understand.

.... Well, the possibility of that is like winning a lottery.

"—Alright, let's go."

Taking a deep breath, I open the sitting room door.

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"—Morning, Nii-san."

Her gaze is telling me "I am angry."

"Yo, morning, Akiha."

A defiant person is strong.

I give a cheerful greeting to Akiha's bullying gaze.



"—"

She might be confused with my cheerfulness, as she just stares at me.



"Nii-san, let's dispense with the greetings.
Please sit here, I wish to speak with you."
"Sure.
Let's keep it short though."
I solemnly and calmly sit down on the sofa across from Akiha.



"Well then, Nii-san.
This is very abrupt, but may I ask about these past two days?"
"—Hm."
.... I knew it.
Since I left the house for two days, there's no excuse.
Time to honestly tell her all about Arcueid and these past two days.
"About that, Akiha."
"Yes, what is it, Nii-san?"
"These past two days, I was hunting a vampire.
You know about the recent killings, right?
They were the work of a vampire, so I helped the 'good vampire' I met recently,
and I fought with the 'bad vampire'."
—Like that, I explain concisely.



"Wha——"

Akiha is taken completely by surprise.

.... Well, I guess it is a natural reaction.

In her head, she's probably thinking I'm making a fool of her, and anytime in the next instant,



"Are you making a fool out of me, Nii-san!!!???"

She'll shout something like that to me—



"....."

..... Huh?

She seems upset, but she doesn't say anything.

"Um.... Akiha?"



"... Nii-san, is this some sort of a bad joke?"

"—Uh."

Akiha looks at me quietly, like she was seeing directly into my heart.

"No... well, how should I put this."



"A joke, right?"

"... Well, I know it sounds like one, but.."



"—No, it has to be a joke.

So please do not say such things in the future, even if it is a joke."

She stares at me, more uneasy than angry.

Since her stare looks so serious,

"..... Yeah."

I can only nod to her.
turn to **208**

208



"I understand.
 Then I will no longer ask about this.
 But, please refrain from doing anything like this ever again.
 Nii-san, you are the eldest son of the Tohno family; if you do not understand your position better, it will be very troubling."
 "-Hey, that has nothing to do with this.
 Besides, you are now the successor to the Tohno family, so it doesn't really matter what I do.
 If you're so worried about the future of the Tohno family, you should go find a husband appropriate for the Tohno household."



"___"
?
 For some reason, Akiha descends into silence.
 "What's wrong?
 Are you feeling alright, Akiha?"
 "-It's nothing.
 If you have enough time to worry about me, please pay more attention to yourself.
 You have your chronic anemia to worry about, Nii-san."
 "..... Hmph."
 Well, it is true that I frequently collapse from anemia.



"Anyway, please do not leave the mansion by yourself often.
Even without that, the city is dangerous recently.
Someone like you, who meanders about in a daze is just asking to be attacked
by that serial killer."
"Serial killer?—Oh, those serial killings."
Those serial killings where nine victims have been found.
Their bodies were all drained of blood, so they call it the modern day vampire,
but—
"Oh, that's okay.
Those incidents, they won't ever happen again."
"—Huh?"
"It means the vampire isn't around anymore.
That killer—is caught already."
"Is that so...?"
Nii-san, how do you know about that?"
"Well, I just happened to see it, but for sure, such things will not happen again."

.... Yeah, at least there won't be any more people killed by Nrvnqsr.
These past two days spent with Arcueid.. so many things happened I really
can't say just what is right and what is wrong.
But, the simple truth remains—I can say it was all for the best.



"Nii-san—?
What happened?
You suddenly seem very happy."

Akiha looks strangely at my face.
"It's nothing.
I just feel that it is finally, finally over."
A smile unconsciously creeps over my lips as I answer.

It's half past seven.
"Shiki-san, breakfast is ready!"
Kohaku-san's cheerful voice rings out from the dining room.
"Well, I'll go eat breakfast.
Isn't it almost time, Akiha?
Don't mind me and go ahead."



"Yes, I know, Nii-san."
Maybe it's because of our conversation, but Akiha is in a good mood.

Rising from my seat, I head to the dining room.

I really don't have an appetite.
How come?
Well, having white rice with something blood-red all over it would make anyone lose their appetite.
"___"
I shake my head.
It's certainly just an illusion, and Kohaku-san's cooking looks excellent as always.
Getting a hold of myself, I take a bite of the breakfast.
—I instantly spit it out.



Akiha looks at me questioningly as I came out of the dining room right away.
"Nii-san, did you forget something?"
"No, it's nothing.
It's just something really trivial."



"Shiki-san doesn't seem to have an appetite this morning.
He just throws anything he eats back up, so I got him to take some medicine."



"Eh—?"
"She said medicine, but it's really just some vitamins.. I had a bad dream last night.
I should settle down in a bit so I'll eat at school."
I didn't say this to Kohaku-san, but to Akiha's eyes telling me she wants to say something.

"So I'll head out soon.
My head should clear up once I start walking to school."



"Wait, Nii-san—"
Akiha's voice comes from behind me.
"I'm going.
I'll be back early today, so you can scold me then."
Ignoring Akiha's worried voice, I exit the mansion.

Hisui walks with me to the gate, carrying my bag.
"Well, I'll be going.
Thanks for seeing me off, Hisui."
Hisui wordlessly hands me my bag.



"Shiki-sama, around what time will you be returning?"
"You don't trust me either?"
It's okay.
I'll definitely be back in the afternoon."
"—I understand.
Then please be careful on your way."
Hisui bows deeply.
Feeling a bit embarrassed about it, I leave the mansion's gate.

At the intersection there are only the figures of my fellow high school students.

No young woman sitting on the guardrail like that one time.

"—Well, of course."

I probably won't ever see her again.

First of all, her goal was to execute the vampire, and with Nrvnqsr gone, there's no reason for her to stay around here any longer.

—Just a little bit, in my chest.

Things like regret.. and lingering affection.

It is true she only brought trouble, but even still.... it was fun being with her.

"....."

I think there must be something wrong with me.

Even though I was in such danger the whole time, there's still a part of me that unconsciously tries to remember her.

.... It's almost like I'm in love with her.

Even though I would never want to be exposed to that kind of danger again.

Because I skipped breakfast, I arrive at the front gate ten minutes before it closes.

Everyone who doesn't have club activities before school arrives at this time.

The only clubs that meet in the morning are the sports clubs.

So naturally, the entrance gets crowded with students.

"—Ah."

By the gate I see a familiar figure.

Not even knowing what I plan on doing, I chase after her.



"Ah, good morning Tohno-kun.

It's strange to meet you out here."

".... Yeah, I saw you from behind, so I ran after you.

Um.... there was something I wanted to ask."

I sneak a look at her face.

"Yes, what is it?"

She faces me with her usual, gentle smile.

I—

No, that had to have been someone else.

turn to **209**

Ask about last night.

turn to **210**

209

.... Wait a minute.

All of that happened, and Senpai still greeted me with her usual smile.

Last night—if she saw me fighting Nrvnqsr, then she definitely can't just greet me like this.



"Tohno-kun?

Did you want to say something?"

"Um, hold on."

.... If I think back, that person who helped me last night may not have looked like Ciel-senpai at all.

I couldn't get a good look at her face because it was dark, and her atmosphere was completely different.

"Senpai, could I get a good look at your face?"

"Uh, yes?"

She curiously tilts her head and looks up at me.

.... Of course.

Once I think it through calmly, that person didn't resemble Senpai at all.

".... Sorry, it's just a mistake.

It's nothing, so please forget about it."

"A mistake?

I'm a little interested—Mistake about what?"

She still stares up into my face.

"Uh.... It's, ummm."

Looking away, I try to hide my blushing face.

.... Having her so close to me at the school gate is embarrassing.

"N, nothing.

I just thought I saw someone that looked like you last night, but it must have been a mistake."

".... Hmm, a person that looked like me?"

Senpai gives a very interested nod.

It seems she isn't going to just forget about it.

turn to **211**

210

—I gather up my courage and ask her about last night.

".... Uh-Senpai.

Last night, were you in the park?

I thought I saw you wearing something like a black coat, with your skirt flowing in the wind."



".... What is that?"

"Um....!

well—yeah, the high-laced boots suited you.

I was kind of fascinated, you looked.. really cool."



...."Huh?" Senpai tilts her head.

She frowns like she doesn't understand my words completely, and then denies it.

"Um, I don't quite understand, but you're saying that I was near your house two nights ago, looking like that?"

"Yeah.

Senpai, that was you, right?"



"No way.

Tohno-kun, are you saying I look like I really have that much free time?"

—Senpai is really angry.

She can't be playing ignorant or lying.

"Ah—No, that's not it, but I just.... saw someone that looked like you in park last night, so—"

Senpai gives a sigh.



"Tohno-kun, that wasn't me.

I don't have that kind of hobby."

"Ah—Yeah, I know.

I just wanted to ask."

Certainly after having her say that, she is right.

Ciel-senpai and the person that night aren't related at all.

In the first place, Senpai's just a normal person, and if she was actually there—she had to have seen me kill that vampire with my knife.

If she saw such a gruesome scene, there'd be no way she could talk with me normally like this.

".... Sorry, please forget about it.

I guess it was just someone else."



"That's fine, but.... did that person really look like me?
That weird person?"
"Well, I'm not too sure.
It was dark, and far away..... huh?"
Yeah, it was far and I couldn't make out her face.
So why did I think it looked like Senpai...?
"... Hmm.. Maybe there is something wrong with me."
I cross my arms and think.
setvar flgC + 1
turn to **211**

211

The ten minute bell rings.
"-Uh-oh, we'll be late.
Well, bye Senpai, see you later!"



"Yes, I'll come see you during lunchtime."

I fly into my classroom.
It's still five minutes before class, so it's very noisy inside.

"-Whew."
I take a breath and head to my seat.
With this much time left, I didn't even need to run at all.
"Yo, Duke of Delinquency."
"....."
From behind, I hear the voice I never look forward to.



"What's going on, Tohno?
I never heard you were skipping class.
It's a lot of trouble.
You have to tell me when you skip school and go play!"
Arihiko says those preposterous words with an unbelievably happy expression.
"... Why should I have to tell you when I don't go to school?"
"Isn't it obvious?"

When you don't show, neither does Senpai, so it's bad unless I think of something ahead of time."

.... What's bad for this guy?

"But seriously—What happened?

Since middle school, you've had anemia, but never skipped school.

Well, you did a cool trick several times, leaving as soon as you arrived."

"It's kind of like that.

I made it to the intersection and felt bad, so I went back home."



"Hmmm.. Both you and Yumizuka seems to be acting like bad students lately."

"—Well, I'm guilty as charged, but is something wrong with Yumizuka-san?"



"Her?

She's been absent lately.

She was always such an honor student, so I think she might have been stressed out.

But I bet she can't call a raise 'cause she has a bad hand."

"....."

Arihiko's words are always.. very unique.

—While we are talking, the homeroom chime rings.

"Well, I'm off.

Since you skipped Saturday, make sure you study hard today."

Arihiko goes back to his seat.

Fourth period ends and the class erupts into pandemonium all over again. The guys dash off to the cafeteria, the girls eat their lunches at their desks, and Inui Arihiko's carrying a sandwich and coming over to me.



"Yo Tohno!
Lunch, lunch."
"_"

.... What should I do?

Since morning, I haven't really had an appetite.

I don't feel hungry, so maybe I don't have to force myself to eat.

.... If I eat, I might throw it up again and cause trouble.

I should—

Alright, I'll eat.

turn to **212**

Alright, I won't eat.

turn to **213**

212

-Even still, I need to get at least some nutrition.

I'm already prone to passing out as it is; and if I don't push myself to eat, I'll probably just pass out.

"Sorry, go ahead and eat.

I gotta go buy food."

"Oh yeah?"

Guess I'll start eating without you."

I leave Arihiko happily unsealing his sandwich behind me as I exit the classroom.

I buy some bread and some milk, and then go back.

Arihiko and Ciel-senpai are already over at my desk by the window.



"Oh, Tohno-kun.
I'm joining you guys."



"Ah, no, no.
You don't have to mind much.
We're pretty happy when you can join us.
Isn't that right, Tohno?"
Is Arihiko that pleased just to be with Senpai?"

He happily asks me for agreement.

Well, for once we do seem to be in agreement.

"That's right.

You really helped me out by coming, Senpai.

I don't know what I would've done if I had to eat while staring at this guy's face."

I answer lightheartedly and take my seat.

Senpai's eating from a large lunchbox and Arihiko is long since finished with his sandwich.

"..... Alright."

I take a bite from my bread.

I still have no appetite, so I forcefully wash it down with some milk.

Arihiko holds a lively conversation with Senpai since they are both done with lunch.

They talk about the strange events like serial murders and whatnot, which really does not help my appetite.



"Really?"

They haven't found all those missing people yet?"



"It seems that way.

There was even another new report this morning.

Inui-kun, didn't you see the news this morning?"

"Nah, I don't have time to do anything in the morning so I didn't watch it."
"That's no good you know, staying up late at night.
You shouldn't walk around at night, there's some scary people out there."



"That's no problem.
I'm a scary person myself."



"Well, you might be right.
Inui-kun, you do seem like a shady character."
"Ahahaha." The two of them laugh.

.... Hm, Ciel-senpai might be serious, but Arihiko probably said that as a joke.

"Hahaha." Arihiko's eyes twitch as he smiles.
Anyway, I can't exactly ignore their conversation.

"—Senpai.
You mentioned a new report—what is it....?"



"In the news this morning, a young woman who went shopping last night—about our age—and she went missing.

Her house is close to the park, I heard."

"... Oh, close to the park."

As soon as I say that, the contents of my stomach threaten to rise up.

—Last night.

That unknown girl who just by chance was by the park, was destroyed by that irrational violence.

Missing might be a better description than dying, since she was devoured without even so much as a hair left.



"That makes her the ninth victim, no, the tenth?
Damn, what an amazing pace, all in a single month."



"Yes, but I hear last night's disappearance was a little different from the other ones.
The families of all the other girls who disappeared noticed it a short time later."



"By the way, you didn't watch the morning news either Tohno-kun?
Don't tell me you're not a morning person either?"
"... Hmm.
I wouldn't say I'm a morning person, but I'm not terrible in the morning either.
But, leaving that matter aside, I still won't be able to watch it for a while.
At my house, there's no TV."

Senpai and Akihiko stare blankly.



"No TV—Your house is.. that big mansion, right?"



"Heh, there's no way you don't have a TV in that mansion.
I won't let you say you don't have one in your room, being a student and all."
"No, there really isn't one.
My old man always said there was no need for such brainwashing machines.
There's a small one in Kohaku-san's room, but I'm not about to barge into a
girl's room in the morning."
If I want to get the news, I just have to rely on a newspaper.



"Tohno-kun, what do you mean by a girl?"



"You can't just say that and get away with it, Tohno."
They're both glaring at me.
I slap my hand over my mouth, but it's far too late.
"Uh, um—simply put, just that there's a servant at my house named Kohaku-
san."



"Huh, a servant?
 You're really lucky to have a girl around you at all times to take care of your every need."
 "That's not it!
 There isn't anyone to take care of the mansion, so we have to hire people to do it.
 Whether she's male or female is entirely irrelevant."
 "Oh reeeally?
 Hey Inui-kun, doesn't Tohno-kun sound real intimate with this Kohaku-san?
 "Yeah yeah, he looked so happy when he said her name.
 I wanted to ask before, but just what kind of a life does Tohno lead right now?"

They trade glances.
 "..... Ugh."
 I choke on the bread I'm eating.
 Arihiko, even Ciel-senpai with her cool glance, interrogates me with bizarre intensity.



"Tohno-kun, there is still plenty of time left.
 Please tell us all about your life at the mansion."
 She approaches with a smile that won't seem to let me get away.
 "....."

Just thinking about the twenty minutes or so I have left to live through this

makes my head spin.

turn to **214**

213

—I won't.
Skipping two meals won't kill me.

"... Mm, I'll pass.
Do what you want."
Seeing a vision of food with something red on it isn't something I want to do again.
To be honest, I'm already feeling bad looking at Arihiko's sandwich.
Because there are many bright red tomatoes in it.



"What's this?
You're becoming more and more unhealthy.
Is your new lifestyle not suiting you that much?"
"That might be it.
They complain about me being late when I wake up at seven o'clock and the curfew's at eight o'clock.
If I spend the night somewhere without asking, they interrogate me afterwards.
It's like a prison, right?"



"Isn't that alright?
It's a proper life.
Early to bed and early to rise, right?"

You won't be able to grow up to be a good guy if you burn out when you're young."

"I agree.

... But, you seem to lend the argument more strength than anyone else can."

As the ultimate counter-example, that is.



"Oh yeah?

You're pretty honest today.

Alright, alright, I'll split the sandwich with you."

"I said, I didn't want to eat.

Don't worry about me and eat; lunch'll end soon."

"Okay, down the hatch."

Arihiko holds his sandwich with both hands and begins to eat.

—And then.



"Hello everyone."

Senpai comes in with something that looks like a boxed lunch.



"Oh?
Senpai, I thought you always ate in the cafeteria?"



"No, I don't have a set lunch routine.
It just depends what mood I'm in."
Senpai takes out an boxed lunch wrapped up in a cute handkerchief.
But it seems just a little too big for a girl.
"... You mean you managed to get up early and make lunch this morning?"
"Yes, that's it.
I managed to wake up before seven this morning and.... wait a minute, what
are you making me say, Tohno-kun!?"



".... No, that's not what I meant, but.... Senpai, you're not a morning person?"



"Eh—?"

Ah, yes, I'm not.. not good at waking up early."

Senpai suddenly looks like a student being scolded by a teacher.



"My family owned a bakery, so we'd get up very early every morning.

But I'm terrible in the morning.

My father would always get angry when I was a kid."

What!?"

A bakery!?"



Me and Arihiko look at each other.

He must be imagining the same thing I am: Ciel-senpai kneading dough with those white finger of hers and baking it.



"My daily battle with my father lasted ten years, but in the end, he gave up and told me working two people's worth is better than trying to train me. Since then, I can wake up when I want to."

Ciel-senpai sticks out her well-developed chest.

"Oh, is that so?
I'm a little surprised; you seem so reliable."



"Yes, I always try hard to not make any mistakes in front of you.
But really, I'm more of a clumsy person."

Yeah, maybe she is a bit clumsy.

Come to think of it, I really started to get close to Senpai when I saw her, an upperclassman, all alone in the courtyard fixing those splints and helped her out.

A really clumsy person would never do something that wouldn't benefit them the least bit.

"I see.

—But, I like people that are clumsy.
I can relax better with them."

"Yup." Akihiko agrees next to me.

"So, since you're not a morning person, you usually eat in the cafeteria?"



"Yes, although I usually eat in the cafeteria, there are times when I make lunch. Aren't you two part of the cafeteria group?"



"Nah, it depends on what mood we're in too. When we were freshmen, my sister made me something, but Tohno here would always eat in the cafeteria or buy bread, so I end up doing what he does."



"I see.
So Tohno-kun is a person of many moods."



"Yeah, yeah.
Being with him will just drain you out, so be careful Senpai."



"That's true," Senpai agrees and she opens her lunch.
The round box is half rice and half side dish.
It's pretty much a normal lunch, but it seems a little large.



"Then, I'll start eating.
Is it okay if I use this person's chair?"
"A person who isn't here has their chair up for grabs.
I'm sure Takada-kun would love for you to have his seat, Senpai."
Takada-kun is a guy who sits next to me.
He's pretty plump, but a good guy.
Sometimes, he borrows money with a grace period which lasts about until the

end of eternity.

Senpai doesn't put her lunch on my desk, but puts it in her lap.
Next to her, Arihiko starts opening his second pack of bread while still standing up.
Next to these two, I stare aimlessly out the window.



"Huh?
Tohno-kun, are you not eating?"
"No, I thought I'd skip today."



"Not eat.... Won't that make you hungry?"
"No, not really.
I'm not hungry and skipping lunch doesn't affect me that much."



"Wow, that's amazing.
If I skip a single meal, I can't function.
I'd just collapse of hunger.
.... It's a little embarrassing, I always eat more than most people, and I still get hungry."



"Not at all.
Senpai, you've developed a lot more than other women.
I'm sure you have to eat a lot to maintain that large chest of yours."
Yeah, Arihiko speaks the truth.
To tell the truth, we both want her to eat more and grow more.



Is Senpai embarrassed or shy?
She makes a face I don't quite understand.
.... Well, I'm sure she's probably happy.



"But Tohno-kun, will you really be alright if you skip lunch?"

"I'll be fine.

Skipping meals during the day isn't that rare.

I only didn't eat breakfast, so I'll probably be fine until evening."



"Wow—Tohno-kun, your body will break down with that kind of lifestyle."

"It won't break.

This is more of a mental restriction.

.... Well, thanks to an accident long ago, my doctor told me it wasn't good to gain weight, so it's better for me to skip meals once in a while."



"Huh.

I guess even guys still think about their diet after all."

Senpai looks up at me for some reason, and after thinking a little bit, closes her lunch.



"Um, I just remembered I had something to do, so excuse me."
Gathering up her things quickly, she disappears like the wind.



"—Mmm, how cute."
Arihiko comments on Senpai regretfully while watching her leave.

setvar flgD + 1
turn to **214**

214

After class, the room quickly fills with the gloom of dusk.
The sun is sinking below the horizon.
There's no one else in the classroom.
I'm the only one who likes sitting here and doing nothing.

"——"

The room is painted red.

—I don't like watching the sunset.
It makes me think of blood, and reminds me of the events in the past few days.

"——"

Still, I don't particularly feel like going back home.
I stare blankly out the window.

Red.

Red, sunset.

"Ah—ow."

The old wound on my chest hurts.

The color red.
Something.. red.
Such as, human blood.
Lots of blood.. sticky, with a strong smell.

"—Gah."

It hurts.
My glasses are on, but, my head hurts.

Why?

Throbbing pain.
My head
Why?
My head.
Why?
Thro

b w why—

I start to pant heavily.

My breathing is ragged.

I'm horribly—getting worked up.

I'm irritated; There's something I can't stand, and I can't calm down unless I take it out on something—.

".... Is it—Tohno-kun?"



"Huh—Sen.. pai?"

Senpai has a very serious look on her face as she enters the room.

"I just heard a sound like someone knocking over desks.... was that you, Tohno-kun?"

"—Eh?"

I turn around.

Indeed, desks are strewn about and chairs overturned everywhere.

".... Ah... yeah, it seems so.

I guess I got a little irritated for no reason, um—"

Did I really do this?



"Geez, you can't do that.
I don't know what happened, but you shouldn't take it out on things."

Senpai starts to straighten out the desks and the chairs.
I wordlessly do so too.
"... Sorry.
I don't.. quite know myself."



"Hmm.
Tohno-kun, you're acting weird.
You were spaced out in the rain that time, and today you spaced out in the middle of all these jumbled desks."
"Yeah-yeah, I'm tired and it's making me act weird."
I take a deep breath.
.... Is it because I saw Senpai's face?
That headache and the irritation I had before vanishes like it was never there.
"Sorry, I've caused you trouble again.
I'll head out now, so see you tomorrow."



"Oh, Tohno-kun, are you going back now?"

Yeah, I nod.

As if nothing had just happened before, she gives me a hearty smile.



"What a coincidence.

I was just thinking that I should go back too.

Since it happens to work out, can I go back with you?"

"No, I really appreciate the offer, but.... isn't your house in the opposite direction?"

We can't exactly walk back together."

"I know, so we'll be together until the gate."

".... Well, in that case, my pleasure."



"Yes.

I have to get my things, so please wait a minute."

With light footsteps, Senpai runs out of the room.

It really was only a minute till she came back.



"Thanks for waiting.
Now then, let's go!"
She really is cheerful.
How should I say this?
Just seeing her drives away the clouded feelings I had earlier.
Having such a great person ask me to come with her, I ought to be punished if
I was still gloomy.
"... Okay, let's go.
But, it's a pretty short trip to the front gate."



"Ah, that's right.
We'll have to go as slow as possible to make it worth it."
Senpai starts to walk.
Following her, I leave the darkening classroom behind me.

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if flgD >= 1  
turn to 216  
turn to 215
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215

We walk out the gate.
From here, we have to go our separate ways.



"Well then, this is goodbye for now.
We got here pretty quickly."
.... I feel the same way.
I was really thinking it would be better if the school were a bit bigger.
"Well then, Senpai, see you tomorrow."



"Yes, let's meet at school tomorrow."

Smiling as she responds, Senpai disappears in the opposite direction.
After watching her go, I head down the street towards my house.

turn to **219**

216

I walk through the hallway bathed in sunset with Senpai.
While talking about pointless things, we walk as slowly as possible.

There's such a wonderful atmosphere here.
—Thinking back, I spent the night in Senpai's room.
Back then, my mind was filled with the fact that I killed someone, and after that, I forgot about it when I was with Arcueid.
.... If it wasn't for that one night, I don't think I would be here today as I am now.
She doesn't bring it up, but I wonder what she thinks about that night.
.... Did it feel like she was just lending a hand to a depressed lowerclassman?
Like picking up an abandoned puppy cast out in the rain?
".... Senpai, um—"



"Yes?"
Senpai looks over to me.
.... Right when I was going to ask about that night,

Guruuuuuuu.

My stomach interrupts, growling audibly.
No, not 'growling'.. it's more like a roar.
"..... Uhhh."



"....."

The silence is a little uncomfortable.

"... Tohno-kun, it seems you're hungry."

"—I guess so.

Geez, do I get hungry even when I don't have an appetite?"

I let out a sigh.

Looking at me, Senpai smiles.



"Of course.

Being human means you have to eat to live."

"No doubt.

... Come to think of it, I'm really starving."

... I hadn't realized it, but skipping breakfast and lunch really did take quite a bit out of me.

I don't think I can last until dinner, so I should buy some bread on the way back—



"Tohno-kun, here."
Senpai presents me a pouch of cloth she is holding.
I think it's her lunch.



"It's partly eaten, but is that okay?"
Blushing a bit, Senpai says this embarrassedly.
.... That's right, Senpai only ate half of her lunch today.
Finishing someone else's half-eaten lunch is a little embarrassing.
I—

No. I refuse to do something so embarrassing.

turn to **217**

I don't care. I'll nod.

turn to **218**

217

I can't go that far.
Senpai is probably saying it out of goodwill, but I don't want to let her see me like this.

"—No, I think I can make it.
Your words are enough to fill me up."



".... Is that so?
Tohno-kun, you haven't had anything all day.
Are you sure you won't collapse on the way....?"
"Let your heart not be troubled.
Someone like me who's always fainting sees it coming a mile away.
And today, my body says I'm perfectly okay."



".... Well.
If you say so, I guess it's alright."
Giving somewhat of an amazed sigh, Senpai continues walking down the hallway.

We walk out the gate.
From here, we have to go our separate ways.



"Well then, this is goodbye for now.
We got here pretty quickly."
... I feel the same way.
I was really thinking it would be better if the school were a bit bigger.
"Well, then, Senpai, see you tomorrow."



"Yes, let's meet at school tomorrow."

Smiling as she responds, Senpai disappears in the opposite direction.
After watching her go, I head down the street towards my house.

turn to **219**

218

Never mind that and just eat.
I believe kindness should always be accepted.
"—I'll take it.
I'm hungry, so if you don't mind, I'll eat it."
Yeah, even if it's a bit past the expiration date, I wouldn't mind.



"Then let's go to the tea ceremony room.
If we go there, I can get you some tea."

Senpai trots off down the hallway.

"Thanks for the meal."
I bring my hands together briefly and start to dig in to Senpai's lunch.
Munch, munch.
I eat without restraint while Senpai stares at me.
Munch munch.
Munch.
Munch.
Munch.
Munch.
Munch.
Munch.
Munch.
"—Mm."
I gulp some tea.
Senpai keeps watching me.
"Does it taste good?"
"Mm, it's cold and not very good."
.... I think that comment was a little too honest myself, but it's my personality,
so I can't change it.
Senpai gives a small laugh as she looks directly into my eyes.
"Tohno-kun, you have quite a philosophic outlook."
She says this kindly.

".... Huh?

I don't get you, Senpai.

Saying something like that all of a sudden."

"But it's true.

Normally, people wouldn't eat another person's half-eaten lunch like that.

But you don't seem to mind what others think of you, do you?"

"—?

Really?

I'm not that self-conscious."

I just live honestly.

But, if living life without caring what others think is philosophical, then this person is much more of a philosopher than I am.

If it was me—I could never mend the splints in the courtyard that everyone else ignores all by myself.

"In my opinion, I think you're more philosophical than I am, Senpai.

You're always living at your own pace.

It feels so good just to watch."

I speak openly.

Of course it was a compliment, but Senpai says "Oh, I see," and slumps in disappointment.

"Um.... Senpai?

Did I say something bad?"

"—Yes.

Because normally, that's what they call an old spinster.

I'm a girl, so hearing that is a shock."

.... Hmm.

For Senpai, that must mean she's acting old rather than being philosophical.

"Oh yeah?

So does that mean I'm acting like an old man now?

Well excuse me, I'm just a high school student bravely facing the dangers of life."

"Ah, but you can't deny it.

Because a sitting cushion and a cup of tea really suit you.

Always calm, you seem like a retired man."

Senpai giggles.

.... I wanted to hear I was more a guy that looks good in Japanese clothing, but if Senpai says a retired man, then maybe that isn't a bad thing.

"Oh.

Well then, fellow old-timer, how about we have a long chat over a cup of tea?"

"I'd love to keep you company, Shiki-san."

With a beaming smile, Senpai pours some tea into my tea cup.

An hour passes.

We talk together until five-thirty, then we walk out the gate before it closes and go our separate ways at the intersection.

setvar cielregard + 1
turn to **219**

219

I head up the road and draw near the mansion.
After a little more walking I see Hisui standing by herself at the front gate.

"....?"
I wonder what Hisui is doing?"
Tilting my head to the side, I head for the front gate.
Hisui realizes I'm here and bows her head.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
"—Ah, yeah—thanks, Hisui."
I can barely reply since I'm bewildered by the respectfulness of it all.
"Um—were you waiting for me to come home?"
"Yes.
Greeting the master is a servant's duty."
Answering very matter-of-factly, she doesn't even bat an eyelash.
"Um, Hisui, I'm truly happy you waited to greet me, but there's really no need to wait outside.
I'll come back on my own, so you can just greet me whenever you realize I'm back."



"——"
Hisui's face clouds slightly.
.... Oh, maybe..

Maybe she was waiting for me to return like this on Saturday and Sunday.
 "—Hisui, um—"



"I understand.
 Starting from tomorrow, I will await your return in the lobby."
 Hisui gives a quick bow and opens the mansion gate.
 Hisui turns around as she does so.
 *sigh*
 For some reason, the atmosphere isn't exactly conducive to conversation.
 Hisui closes the gate after I pass through, then she silently walks to the entrance
 to open the door and leads me into the lobby.

I get to my room.
 Akiha isn't back yet from her lessons, Kohaku-san is preparing dinner, and Hisui
 is cleaning the mansion.

"—Geez, there's nothing to do."
 Well, there's quite a mountain of studying, reviewing, and memorizing a student
 like me has to do.
 But, I just don't feel like doing anything.
 Suddenly, Arcueid's face flashes in my mind.
 Whether good or bad, it's probably just a reaction to the crazy two days I just
 had.
 Perhaps spacing out here in my room will be good, giving my mind and heart
 a break.

After eating dinner by myself in the large dining room, Kohaku-san treats
 my wounds and I go back to my room.
 Akiha didn't make it back in time for dinner.
 Her lesson was apparently going to last a while, so she was going to eat away
 from home.
 It's past ten at night now.
 It's a bit too early, but since I'm exhausted, I should sleep early tonight—
 setvar flgE + 1
 turn to **102**

220

—I can't do something that dangerous.

If I went into an alley like that, no one can come to help me.
There's something wrong with me wanting to go in there just because I heard a noise.
It is getting late and I should head back.

I return to the mansion without meeting anyone.
The lights around the mansion are all off.
Somehow, I hadn't realized I would be coming back so late.
Akiha—Akiha will surely be angry with me, I think as I put my hand on the heavy doors.

... There's no one in the lobby.
It is late after all.
Akiha, Hisui and Kohaku-san are most likely fast asleep in their rooms.

"... I couldn't find you after all, Yumizuka-san."
But I know she has to be somewhere.
Then—for sure, she will come to school tomorrow.

I return to my room silently so as not to wake Akiha and the others.
It's getting late.
To get ready for tomorrow, I have to hurry up and go to sleep.

... I feel as if someone is calling my name as I wake up.

"Mn....."
A little warmth returns to my body.
I look around suspiciously and see an unfamiliar figure by my bed.
"Oh—Hisui."



"Yes.
Good morning Shiki-sama."

Hisui bows.

"Ah, right—yeah, morning Hisui."



I get up as I answer.

This is my room, and just like yesterday, Hisui came to wake me up.

"Thanks.

I'll change and head to the sitting room, so you can go back to what you were doing."



"Yes.

Then I will be waiting in the sitting room."

Hisui bows her head and walks to the door.

Tap, tap, tap.

Her footsteps are louder than normal.

She reaches the door and then turns around.



"Shiki-sama, forgive me for asking such a question.
What time did you return last night?"

—Yesterday.

If I recall correctly, I went out looking for Yumizuka-san and returned after not finding her—

"... Sorry.

Something caught my attention and I came back late... Um, I will be prompt from now on so it would be great if you could overlook it this time..."



"... No, it is not necessary for you to say such a thing, Shiki-sama.

It is the duty of us servants to work in accordance with the schedule of our masters.



However, I humbly request that you at least contact us.
Whatever the circumstances, you should still be able to let us know."
"—You're right.
Sorry.
I'll keep my promise from now on."
"I understand.
Then please excuse me."

".... That was rare.
Hisui seemed pretty angry."
She's always so expressionless, it seemed she really gets angry when she does get angry.
.... As if I did something really terrible.
"—Well then, time to get up."
After changing out of my pajamas and into my school uniform, I head to the sitting room.

I find Akiha and Hisui there.
Kohaku-san is probably in the kitchen cooking my breakfast.



"Good morning, Nii-san."
Sitting on the sofa, Akiha greets me and looks at my expression.
".... Ah, morning.
Sorry about last night."
Returning her greeting, I head to the dining room.
There really isn't that much time for me to stay and chat with Akiha—and I myself don't really feel like talking to anyone at all.
"Nii-san, I would like to speak with you a little—is that alright?"
"Speak with me?
I don't really mind."
I sit on the sofa across from Akiha.



"This is cutting straight to the heart of the matter, but what were you doing last night?

Hisui says you returned late at night.

Nii-san, you know about our eight o'clock curfew, correct?"

Akiha asks me with a direct stare.

"Sorry for breaking the curfew.

A classmate of mine seemed to be having a lot of trouble so I went looking for her.... Well, all I ended up doing was walk around.

I apologize for being late, but it isn't a big deal."



"Just walking the streets IS something.

You are still a minor, so please do not wander out late at night.

Even if you weren't, there have been a lot of disturbances going on."

"... Maybe I am a minor, but I don't do anything dangerous.

I don't care for drinking or anything like that.

You can just relax.

And I'm a guy after all.

Walking around town at night isn't dangerous."



"What are you saying?"

Please say those kind of words after you can go a week without anemia.

I shouldn't have to say this, but you shouldn't strain your body.

You might plan on walking around energetically, but you'll end up collapsing all of a sudden.

What would you do then?"

"Ah——that may be true, but.."

Akiha seems to be worrying about me.

When I think about it that way, I start to feel that maybe last night was a little selfish—



"Goodness.

If you do that what would others think?

For the eldest son of the Tohno family to collapse late at night in town, the rumors would make me so embarrassed I couldn't even go to school."

"Uh——that may be true, but.."

.... Akiha seems to be worrying about herself.

I start to think I was stupid for thinking last night was selfish.



"Anyway, please keep the curfew tonight.
If you break it again, I will have to hand down a punishment on you as head of the household."

Akiha whirls around quickly and exits the room.
"... Punishment, Akiha?"
I think it was a joke, but she certainly sounded serious.
"Shiki-saaaaan, breakfaaaaast!"
Kohaku-san's voice rings out from the dining room.
I rise and head towards the dining room.



"Shiki-sama, around what time will you be returning today?"
"Yeah, today is Saturday so I'll be back early.
I don't know what Akiha will do if I get back late either."
Yeah.
To be honest, it's a little scary.
"I understand.
Well then, please be attentive and take care of yourself."



She gives her customary bow.

After Hisui sees me off, I leave the mansion.

—As I arrive at my classroom I look for Yumizuka-san.
 She isn't in the group of girls.
 She hasn't come yet?
 Or maybe—



"Yo.
 are you looking for something Tohno-kun?"
 The familiar face of my friend appears from the side like a crab.
 "Yeah.
 I'm in the middle of looking, so don't get in my way, Arihiko."
 "Oh reeeally?
 If you're looking for Sacchin, it's useless.
 It seems she'll skip school today too."
 Arihiko giggles meaningfully.... He seems to have seen right through me.
 ".... What's this Sacchin thing?"
 "Sacchin is Sacchin.
 Miss Yumizuka was taken in by the police last night and is now under house
 arrest.
 Takada-kun told me while he was eating chocolate."
 "Eh—Yumizuka-san returned home?"
 Something seems a little out of place.

"Hey.
If you don't believe me ask Takada-kun.
He seems to be one of Yumizuka's neighbors."
"_____"
I look around to my classmate nearby.
As usual, Takada-kun is eating chocolate.
He looks like he's doing his best impression of Santa Claus as he munches while walking.
.... Quite the interesting person for a side character.
".... No, I'll pass.
Takada-kun isn't one to spread rumors so it's most likely true."
"Yeah.
A lot of girls have gone by to visit her and Kunifuji went this morning to her house.... Well, it seems like Yumizuka will have a rough time for a while."

Arihiko returns to his chair with a difficult expression.

—The homeroom bell rings.

Still feeling a bit vague about it all, I wait for Kunifuji-sensei's arrival.

.... Our teacher Kunifuji didn't come.
Classes started without homeroom and the Saturday class ended quickly.
My classmates exit the room hastily.
Those with club activities go to the cafeteria while those without any hurry on home to spend the rest of their Saturday elsewhere.
"_____Well then."
There's no need to laze around here.
I should go back to the mansion and think about what to do from there.
I stand out of my chair.

—And then,

"Will Second Year, Third Class Tohno Shiki-kun please report to the Staff Room immediately."
Says the intercom announcement.
".... What's this?
I didn't do anything to be called up."
Tilting my head out of question, I leave the classroom.

—Come to think of it, maybe it is natural.
The school was bound to find out it I was walking around late at night in my school uniform.
My school is second-rate but still oriented towards attending university so there are a lot of troublesome rules.

.... After being sternly warned by the student guidance counselor, I end up writing an essay of apology.

"..... It's getting late, Kunifuji-sensei."
 I mutter to myself in the empty room.
 The teacher told me he would come back after an hour.
 It's half-past six already.
 It seems Akiha will scold me once more.
 "—Fine.
 I'll be heading back now."
 I announce this to the teacher who isn't here in an attempt to convince myself and stand up.

Of course, the classroom is empty.
 I walk over to my desk to take the bag in my hand and exit to the hallway.

"Good evening, Tohno-kun."

Suddenly, someone calls my name.
 "——!?"
 I whirl around instantly.

—In the dark, unlit classroom.
 Yumizuka Satsuki sits with her back to the blue moonlight.
 "Eh—Yumizuka, san?"



"What a coincidence.
 You are still here Tohno-kun?
 Don't tell me you were in the guidance counselor's room?"
 "Ah—yeah.
 Just a little unpleasantness there—"
 "I see.
 You know, I was called there about last night too.
 I was in the very next room."
 She smiles as she says so.

A gentle, carefree smile like before.

"_____"

So why is it?

For no reason, a chill runs up through my spine.

"I see.. it was you next door.

Huhu, the school rooms are narrow so you can somehow understand what is going on next door.

Your live body warmth or your breathing.. it would have been nice for me to enjoy it longer."

Our eyes meet.

Swaying.

Stretching.

This instability as if the floor was bending.



"But it's great timing.

I.. have a request for you Tohno-kun.

Is it alright?"

"Uh—sure, I'll do it if I can."

"Really?"

Then I'll ask.

Tohno-kun, can you go out with me?"

—?

Well, if that's it.. sure.

"Sure, do you have something you need to buy?"

I don't think there's too many good stores open right now though."



"....."
She looks at me blankly.
.... Huh?
It seems like I was a little off.



"Oh, that's not it Tohno-kun.
I'm not asking you to take me out shopping.
I'm asking you to go out with me like a lover."
Yumizuka-san giggles happily.
"Eh——"
After.. such a sudden confession.. my brain.. doesn't seem to work.. properly.
"Wait a second.
Yumizuka-san, I——"
I'm happy, but..
To be told this all of a sudden, I——

Well——no——problem——right?
"Yeah... there's, no problem.. I think."



"Really!?"

Yay!

Then I'll call you Shiki-kun from now on!

I'm so glad.

I was worried that you might hate me for saying that.

.... Yeah.

Maybe I didn't need to use the teacher to make sure you stayed late."

She mumbles.

I don't quite grasp what she said.



"Hey Shiki-kun.

I really used a lot of courage to tell you.

Did you know how scared I was, Shiki-kun?"

She looks at me directly.

Her eyes.

Why.. do her eyes look red—and as if I was asphyxiated, my brain stops working.

"—Yeah.

You did well, Yumizuka-san."

".... Yeah.

So, hey.

Maybe I should get a reward from you, Shiki-kun?

I've been waiting so long—I want you to do it, Shiki-kun."

"Do what?"



"Simple.
I want you to kiss me, Shiki-kun."

—This isn't good.

Somewhere in my mind, something screams at me in warning.

—So..?

I don't care about that.
If she—if Yumizuka-san wants it, what's wrong with it?
We are lovers—so isn't it normal?
"... Alright.
Don't move, Yumizuka-san."



I walk towards Yumizuka-san.
The dry sounds of my footsteps.
I walk in between the desks to draw closer to the girl by the window.
.... As I do,
I see the bodies of many female students collapsed in between the desks as if
they were hidden.
Blood flows from each of their necks.
But still—I couldn't care less about them.

—Yumizuka-san doesn't move.

Grabbing both her arms, I press my lips to hers emotionlessly.

"... Huhu.

With this, you are mine Shiki-kun."

Her whisper sounds incredibly evil.

"Ah——rghh...!?"

I collapse onto the floor.

A splashing sound.

I didn't notice it before, but the floor is splattered with blood.
Under the desks lie the discarded corpses of my classmates strewn about.

"Wha——"

I try to stand up using my arms but I fall back down again.

There's no strength in my body.

Heat.

The heat, suddenly turns cold.

"Relax Shiki-kun.

I won't make you like them.

All you have to do is listen to my voice just like this."

—Her cold voice.

I don't understand at all what she's doing.

Even though I don't understand anything, I know this is so wrong it makes me
nauseous.

"Ghh——!"

I strain my arms and legs as I crawl on the floor.

But even that was stopped with her voice.

"No.

You can't get away.

I won't let you get away.

.... C'mon.

First we have to expand my world.

You'll help me won't you?

You broke your promise to help me whenever I was in a pinch, so you have to
listen to whatever I say from now on."

She chuckles.

.... My distant heartbeat.

The fragrance of the blood drenching the floor makes me dizzy.

So, if I ever do wake up again, then..

I realized my body will never feel warm again.

In the moonlit classroom,
Yumizuka Satsuki slowly bites into Tohno Shiki's neck.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **441**

No.

turn to **1**

221

A hot, summer day.

A blue sky and large, large columns of summer clouds.
The wafting breeze.
The droning voice of the cicadas.

The voice of cicadas.

Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.

—So loud I want to die.
Cicada shells are lying in the clearing.
As if the sun is right by my side,
the clearing is roasting.

A hot midsummer's day.

As if the entire world became a frying pan.

waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.
Akiha is crying.
A child lies collapsed at her feet.
His white shirt is painted red with blood and he doesn't move at all.

I'm, looking down at that.
My hands are red, just like that child on the ground.
No, that's not it.
These hands are red with the blood of that child.
"Akiha—!"

The adults are coming.

"What in the—"

The adults take Akiha away.
The child lies there, dead.
Alone by myself, the adults press the hands which killed the child to the ground.

"Did you kill him—!?"

The adults are yelling at me.
They shout my name, the one who killed the child.
Those two syllables, shouting as if they went crazy.

Just those two syllables.
Those adults call me SHIKI, as my hands are stained in red.

"Shiki-sama, if you do not get up now, you shall be late.
Please, wake up."

.... Hearing my own name called, I awaken from a deep dream.



"Hisui..?"

"Yes.

Good morning, Shiki-sama."



Hisui bows deeply.

Autumn sunlight shines through the window; this is unmistakably my room.

"-Hi.. sui."



"Shiki-sama, are you feeling unwell?"

"Ah.. No, I'm fine."

.... I just had a terribly nostalgic dream.

But I can't remember the details that well.

"What was it.. I can't remember.."

"?"

Hisui tilts her head slightly.

.... Well, there's no point in telling Hisui.

The dream—what kind of a dream was it?

A dazzling white bright enough to bring tears to my eyes, and furiously gushing spots of red.

——Something.

SOMETHING, LIKE AN INAUSPICIOUS DREAM.

"... SHI.. KI.."

"Yes?"

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

".... It's nothing.

I'm sorry—I'll go straight to the dining room."

With a nod, Hisui walks to the door.
Clack, clack, clack.
Hisui's footsteps are louder than usual.
Just as she is about to leave the room, she turns back.



"Shiki-sama, forgive me for asking.

What time did you return last night?"

"Ah.. yesterday.. Quite late at night."

".... Shiki-sama, you said your return would be at four o'clock.

I assume the schedule changed?"

"—Ah."

I remember.

Yesterday morning, I told Hisui that she should expect me at four.

"I'm sorry.

Things happened, and I didn't make it back.

I will be prompt from now on so it would be great if you could overlook it this time...."



".... No, it is not necessary for you to say such a thing, Shiki-sama.

It is the duty of us servants to work in accordance with the schedules of our masters.



However, I humbly request that you at least contact us.
Whatever the circumstances, you should still be able to let us know."
"—You're right.
Sorry.
I'll keep my promise from now on."



"I understand.
Then please excuse me."

".... That was rare.
Hisui seemed pretty angry."
She's always so expressionless, it seemed she gets extremely angry when she does get angry.
.... As if I did something really terrible.
"—Well then, time to get up."
Pulling away the sheets, I get up.

—At that moment.

My body aches terribly.
"Guh..!"
The pain—it's not from the gash in my shoulder.
It's from a much deeper place, aching with my heartbeat.

"A—gah—"

Clenching the sheets, I somehow weather the pain.

"Ahhh—"

It fades away.

There's nothing lingering.

Perhaps just a sudden fit?

"... Chest.. wound."

I touch my chest over my cloth.

There is a great scar there, and even now that it has healed, at times it still hurts like it did just now.

The doctor said the physical wound is healed, but that the mind must be re-playing the pain over and over again.

Usually, the scar begins throbbing after I see a traffic accident or something dead.

The image of blood or death must make me recall the accident eight years ago.

"... Because of last night, I guess."

The red back alley.

And the normal, smiling face of Yumizuka.

"Guh—!"

My chest—hurts.

The image of Yumizuka doesn't leave my mind.

But I don't know what I should do, what I can do.

I can only live my everyday life.

"... Shi.. t.."

Swearing at myself, I roll out of bed.

After changing out of my pajamas and into my school uniform, I head to the sitting room.

Akiha and Hisui are in the sitting room.

Kohaku-san is probably in the kitchen cooking my breakfast.



"Good morning, Nii-san."

Sitting on the sofa, Akiha greets me and looks at my expression.

".... Ah, morning.
I'm sorry about yesterday."
Returning her greeting, I head to the dining room.
There really isn't that much time for me to stay and chat with Akiha—and I
don't really feel like talking to anyone at all.
"Nii-san, I would like to speak with you a little—is that alright?"
".... Alright.
But please make it short since I don't have much time."
I sit on the sofa across from her.



"Continuing last night's talk.. Nii-san, what were you doing yesterday?"
Akiha asks me with a direct stare.
"Nothing.
Just went for a walk in town.
I'm sorry for getting back late, but it's no big deal."
Since I don't want to lie to Akiha, I answer as evasively as possible.



"Just walking the streets IS something.
You are still a minor, so please do not wander out late at night.
Even if you weren't, there have been a lot of disturbances going on."

"Ah——"
Disturbances—the killer skulking around the town at night.
Why?
Why didn't I realize?

The killer that murders people and drinks their blood.
That phrase perfectly matches Yumizuka's behavior yesterday—



".... I shouldn't have to say this, but you shouldn't strain your body.
If you come back with an exhausted face like last night's again, I'll get worried.
If you're in trouble, please tell me.
I may not be able to do much, but if you could.."

—I don't want to think about it, but..
Yumizuka.
Yumizuka could be the killer terrorizing the town.



".... Nii-san?
Are you listening to me?"
"Eh—uh, yeah.
I'm listening."
I hear Akiha's voice.
But, the only thing in my mind is the image of Yumizuka from yesterday.



Akiha glares at me.

"So.

You can't talk about your situation, Nii-san?"

"Yeah.

It has nothing to do with you, Akiha."

Right now, I can think only of Yumizuka.

I want to be alone—and so I said that.

"You're going to keep going your own way, is that what you're saying, Nii-san?"

"....."

"I understand.

Well, please, feel free.

If that's what you want, Nii-san, I'll do the same."

Akiha stands, and walks out to the lobby.



"Shiki-sama?

Is this acceptable?"

"... Acceptable?

Is what acceptable?"

"I believe Akiha-sama is deeply concerned about you, Shiki-sama.

But I think it is difficult for her since she does not often talk about her feelings—

—"

"I know.

But right now, my head's full, and I can't.. I do feel sorry."

"....."

Hisui falls silent.
"Shiki-saaaaan, breakfast!"
Kohaku-san's voice can be heard from the dining room.
I stand up and head towards it.



"Shiki-sama, around what time will you be returning today?"
"Ahh.. since today's Saturday.. -No.
It'll probably be in the evening.
There's something I want to look for."



"I understand.
Please, take care until then."
She bows deeply.

After Hisui sees me off, I leave the mansion.

—There was no point coming to school.

Yumizuka Satsuki was treated as an absentee, and no one seemed to be the slightest bit concerned about her.
Time passed without my realizing it.
Perhaps Arihiko or Ciel-senpai came by sometime, but I don't really remember.
Noon comes, and school ends.
I have no idea.

I have no idea, but I still have to look for Yumizuka.

Go search for Yumizuka. turn to **223**

Search around the school. turn to **224**

Search around the city. turn to **225**

222

"Shiki-sama....!"

—There's a voice calling me.

"Please remain strong.
I shall bring you something to drink."

—I sense the presence receding.

Footsteps.
It makes me realize that it is morning now.

"—"

I open my eyes.
There isn't anyone else in my room.
I hear something ragged.
"... What is... that noise?"
Speaking, I realize that it was my own breathing.
"Hu... h?"
My body is drenched in sweat.
A tiredness suffocates me, as if I had just ran a long marathon.

"Kgggh...."

My head hurts.
... Because I saw that hideous dream.
Yumizuka painted with blood, and I, staring at her in envy.
A complete nightmare.
"... There's something wrong..."
I manage to say this much, still breathing hard.
Last night's dream still lingers in my head.
It really was a horrific nightmare.
I was just blanked out in my dream, as if I couldn't rouse myself from the nightmare if I tried.



"Shiki-sama...!"

And then,

Hisui rushes into my room.

"Hisui...?"

Did something happen?

You didn't even knock."

"Um... Are you awake, Shiki-sama...?"

"Yeah, I just got up.

Good morning, Hisui.

Thanks for coming to wake me."



"Um—yes.

Good morning."

Returning my greeting apologetically, Hisui approaches the bed.



"I have brought you something to drink.

You do not appear well, so please drink it."

Looking at it, it seems like she brought a drink on a silver tray like she did yesterday.

"...?"

I don't really feel bad or anything.

I slept soundly and I feel refreshed."

"But—"

Hisui stares at me.

"You seemed to be in a very poor state earlier.
Shiki-sama, does the scar on your chest not hurt?"
"No, not really.... Well, it may be because of that terrible dream.
I was really having quite a nightmare."

.... I feel dizzy just remembering it.
Hisui looks intently at my face.

".... I see.
Hisui, you woke me up."



".... Yes, I am deeply sorry."
"What are you saying?"
Thanks, Hisui.
You really helped me a lot."



I really do mean that from my heart.
If she hadn't woken me, I might still be trapped inside that awful nightmare.
"I'll change and go to the dining room.
Thanks for everything—and for giving me this drink.
Sorry about that."
"No, you do not need to apologize.
I will wait for you in the sitting room."

Hisui silently leaves the room.

To be honest, I really am quite moved.
I thought she was truly without emotions, but she may just be poor at expressing them.
She was so distressed over me having a nightmare, it makes me smile imagining her in such a hurry.
Maybe it isn't that hard to see Hisui's smile.
"—Well, time to get up!"
I throw off the sheets and get up.

—In that instant.

Pain explodes through my body.
"Gaaah.....!"
It's from a much deeper place, aching with my heartbeat.
"Ah—ggghh—"
Clenching the sheets, I somehow weather the pain.

"Ahhh—"
It fades away.
There's nothing lingering.
Perhaps just a sudden fit?
"... Chest.. wound."
I bring my hand over my chest.
There is a great scar there, and even though that it has healed, at times it still hurts like it did just now.
The doctor said the physical wound is healed, but that the mind must be re-playing the pain over and over again.
Usually, the scar begins throbbing after I see a traffic accident or a dead body.
The image of blood or death must make me recall the accident eight years ago.
"... Because of last night, I guess."
The red back alley.
And the normal, smiling face of Yumizuka.

"Guh—!"
My chest—hurts.
The image of Yumizuka doesn't leave my mind.
But I don't know what I should do, what I can do.
I can only live my everyday life.
"... Shi.. t.."
Swearing at myself, I roll out of bed.
After changing out of my pajamas and into my school uniform, I head to the sitting room.

Akiha and Hisui are in the sitting room.
Kohaku-san is probably in the kitchen cooking my breakfast.



"Good morning, Nii-san."

Sitting on the sofa, Akiha greets me and looks at my expression.

"... Ah, good morning Akiha."

Returning her greeting, I head to the dining room.

There really isn't that much time for me to stay and chat with Akiha—and I don't really feel like talking to anyone at all.

"Nii-san, I would like to speak with you a little—is that alright?"

"That's fine, but please make it short since I don't have much time."

I sit on the sofa across from her.



"Then I will get straight to the point.

Nii-san, where did you go last night?"

Akiha looks directly at me as she asks.

... Kohaku-san probably did keep it a secret, but I guess it wasn't possible to hide being gone for two hours.

"Nothing.

Just went for a walk in town.

I'm sorry for getting back late, but it's no big deal."

Since I don't want to lie to Akiha, I answer as evasively as possible.



"Just walking the streets IS something.
You are still a minor, so please do not wander out late at night.
Even if you weren't, there have been a lot of disturbances going on."

"—Ah."

Disturbances—the killer skulking around town at night.
Why?
Why didn't I realize it?
The killer that murders people and drinks their blood.
That phrase perfectly matches Yumizuka's behavior yesterday—



".... I shouldn't have to say this, but you shouldn't strain your body.
If you come back with an exhausted face like last night's again, I'll get worried.
If you're in trouble, please tell me.
I may not be able to do much, but if you could.."

—I don't want to think about it, but..

Yumizuka.
Yumizuka could be the killer terrorizing the town.



"... Nii-san?
Are you listening to me?"
"Eh—uh, yeah.
I'm listening."
I hear Akiha's voice.
But, the only thing in my mind is the image of Yumizuka from yesterday.



Akiha glares at me.
"So.
You can't talk about your situation, Nii-san?"
"Yeah.
It has nothing to do with you, Akiha."
Right now, I can think only of Yumizuka.
I want to be alone—and so I said that.



"You're going to keep going your own way, is that what you're saying, Nii-san?"

"....."

"I understand.

Well, please, feel free.

If that's what you want, Nii-san, I'll do the same."

Akiha stands, and walks out to the lobby.



"Shiki-sama?

Is this acceptable?"

".... Acceptable?

Is what acceptable?"

"I believe Akiha-sama is deeply concerned about you, Shiki-sama.

But I think it is difficult for her since she does not often talk about her feelings—

—"

"I know.

But right now, my head's full, and I can't.. I do feel sorry."

"....."

Hisui falls silent.

"Shiki-saaaan, breakfast!"

Kohaku-san's voice can be heard from the dining room.

I stand up and head towards it.



"Shiki-sama, around what time will you be returning today?"
"Ahh.. since today's Saturday.. -No.
It'll probably be in the evening.
There's something I want to look for."



"I understand.
Please, take care until then."
She bows deeply.

After Hisui sees me off, I leave the mansion.

—There was no point coming to school.

Yumizuka Satsuki was treated as an absentee, and no one seemed to be the slightest bit concerned about her.
Time passed without my realizing it.
Perhaps Arihiko or Ciel-senpai came by sometime, but I don't really remember.
Noon comes, and school ends.
I have no idea.
I have no idea, but I still have to look for Yumizuka.

The sun sets.
Even after running everywhere in town, there's no sign of Yumizuka Satsuki anywhere.

"..... Gah."
I bite my lip angrily.
.... But it's not anger over not finding her.
Two days ago.
I'm mad at myself for promising such a thing in the first place.

—Help me when I'm in a pinch, okay?

Yumizuka said that, and I answered lightheartedly.
I would help, as much as I could.

.... Such an irresponsible answer.
There's really nothing I can do.
She said it hurt.
I can't even find Yumizuka, painfully suffering in the cold darkness.
"_"

The sun is setting.
.... I don't want to admit it, but maybe I can only find Yumizuka after nightfall.
".... I told Hisui I'd be back in the evening."
Perhaps it's too early.
I'll go back to the mansion and calmly think this through.



"Welcome home, Shiki-sama."
Hisui was waiting in the lobby.
"I'm back.... Hisui, where's Akiha?"
"Akiha-sama has not returned yet.
Since she shall be late, we are to have supper first."
"I see.... I'll be resting in my room until dinner, so I'll head to the dining room when it's time."
"Yes.
Please rest until I call you."



I turn my back to the bowing Hisui and walk towards my room.

—After supper, I sit down on my bed.

The clock's hands show nine o'clock.
Since leaving the mansion after eight is forbidden, I cannot go outside any longer.

"....."

But, that's merely a rule.
If I feel like it, I can easily go outside.



—Bye-bye.
See you at school tomorrow, Tohno-kun.

.... What.... am I thinking?
It's just foolish.
I just can't comprehend what's happening to Yumizuka.
I do realize she is the vampire serial killer causing all these incidents in town.

But still.
I can not forget her last words she said in the sunset on our way home—

.... Before I realize it, it's almost midnight.
Lost in thinking about what I should do, I've passed some of the night wide awake.

".... Shiki-sama, are you awake...?"
.... Hisui's voice.
Why is she up this late at night?

"I'm up, but why, Hisui?"



"—Yes, I was unsure, but if you were awake, I thought that I should tell you."
"Tell me what?"
"Just a while ago, a call came for you, Shiki-sama.
The message was that 'I'll be waiting in the park.'
"Phone call.... This late at night?"
"Yes, the call ended before I could ask for a name, so I was unsure if I should
tell you, Shiki-sama—"
"No—that is...."

.... This doesn't require any thought.
That phone call had to have been from Yumizuka.

".... Thanks.
But, it's a little late, so I'll wait until tomorrow.
She's one of my classmates, so I'll see her tomorrow."



"That is not true.
There is something wrong with smiling like that with such a strained face."
"Stupid, I'm not lying at all.
I'm fine, I won't go out this late at night.
Akiha would get mad, and you would get in trouble, so there's no reason for me
to do that."

"....."

Hisui descends into silence.

The conversation between us dies.



".... Shiki-sama.

Please do not push yourself too hard."

".... Nah, I'm not pushing anything.

I'll go to sleep, so please go back to your room."

"....."



Hisui just looks at me.

"—Well, good night."

Not being able to endure her stare, I slam the door.

".... Sheesh.

I can't hide anything from Hisui."

I take my knife out of the drawer.

.... I don't intend to necessarily use it, but I just feel better with it by my side.

"—The park?

Why would she call me out at this hour—"

Muttering, I think back to those foolish tales.

Vampires can only move about during night time.

So supposing that's true, then Yumizuka didn't call me out at this hour.

It's more like if it wasn't this hour, then she couldn't call me at all.
"... Sorry, Hisui.
Even I think I'm stupid.
You told me not to strain myself, but I can't just sleep like this."
Apologizing to the empty room, I quietly leave the mansion.

pant—*pant*—*pant*
I rest my body, burning from all the running.
It's almost midnight.
The park located off of the main road.
Because of the serial killings these past several days, there's not a soul to be seen around here.
"....."
Thump.
My heart beats loudly.
My throat dries up from the tension.
If the phone call that Hisui received was from Yumizuka,
then she has to be waiting there for me.

The park is empty at night.
There isn't a sound under the the moonlight.
I don't know why, but a chill runs through me.

"———Sst."

The back of my head numbs.
A horrible chill, as if my body freezes to my fingertips.

I try to catch my breath.
In contrast to my cold body, my throat is scorching.
It's dry with thirst.
I put my hand in my pocket.
I just—wanted a blade in my hand.
"Why..?"
Just..
A faint headache.
A low temperature.
My mind is cool like ice.

Something is strange.
This park, it feels like something bad is around here.
"... Just what am I afraid of?"
I shake the headache off, and walk deeper in.

There's no one around.
A terribly dark and lonely place to meet someone.

There—someone is crouched.

Breathing raggedly.

Her face, pale white, as she scratches her throat in pain.

Without a doubt, it is Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Yumi.. zuka?"

Her figure is tormented.

Without a thought for what happened last night, I run towards her.



"Wait.. !"

Yumizuka stops me with just a word.

".... Wait, Shiki-kun.

I'm glad you came, but I don't want you any nearer right now.

Please, don't come any closer."

Her breathing looks painful.

Her body convulses as she speaks, as if she's about to collapse any second now.

"Don't be stupid!

I'm not going to leave someone looking as painful as you alone..!"



"No, I'm okay.. You came, so I'm fine now."

Forcing herself up, Yumizuka smiles at me.

".... What's going on, Yumizuka?

Why haven't you been home?"

What was that about, yesterday?
Why, that—" "
"Hm?"
That what?"
"That—you know what I'm talking about!"



"If you mean yesterday—well, you saw what happened.
I told you, 'I killed those people,' didn't I?"
She answers frankly.
.... It's almost as if she's laughing at my feelings of denial.
"Then.. the recent killings in town were all your doing, Yumizuka..!"
"I don't like to say it, but.. that's the way it is, yeah."
"What the hell do you mean, 'That's the way it is' ..!?"
"It's just the way it is.
I killed those people, and I'll keep on doing the same thing.
I can't just lie about it, can I?"
"Yumi.. zuka, you—" "
"Please.
Stop calling me that.
I'm calling you Shiki-kun, so it's only fair for you to call me by my first name
too."
"Wha.."
I take a deep breath.
Yumizuka is still like before.
Even though she acts like she used to—she says some pretty scary things.



"When I think about it, I look foolish.
 I could never talk to you like this, for all the years I watched you from afar."
 "Eh-Yumi.. zuka....?"
 "I was always watching you, Shiki-kun.
 Even before I was saved in that warehouse, I was always watching you.
 I'm.. really a coward.
 I always just agreed with the people around me, and smiled when it seemed right.
 Before I knew it, everyone was treating me like an idol."
 "So school wasn't fun for me.
 But that changed, after you talked to me in the second year of junior high,
 Shiki-kun."
 "Eh-?"
 "Nah.
 It's not something you'd remember.
 How can I put it.. You were always natural, never showing off.
 Probably you didn't even think about what you said back then."
 "___"
 What can I say.
 Just as Yumizuka says, I remember nothing.
 I don't know what I said to her, or even if I had talked to her back then.



"It's okay.
 Don't make a face like that.
 You were only hanging out with Inui-kun, so it was normal for you to ignore

other classmates."

"But that was okay.

I was happy just being in the same class as you, Shiki-kun.

It was my goal to talk to you and let you call me Yumizuka-san.

Now that I think about it, it was too small of a wish."

She recalls nostalgically.

Those ancient days.

.... Like she is remembering something that happened a long time ago.

"I.. was always watching you.

I knew you'd never notice me, but I watched you anyway."

"_____"

Well—to be honest, I'm happy, but..



"Do you like me, Shiki-kun?"

How can I answer her right now—?

I like her.

turn to **229**

I hate her.

turn to **275**

I can't answer.

turn to **276**

223

The sun sets.
Even after running everywhere in town, there's no sign of Yumizuka Satsuki anywhere.

"..... Gah."

I bite my lip angrily.

.... But it's not anger over not finding her.

Two days ago.

I'm mad at myself for promising such a thing in the first place.

-Help me when I'm in a pinch, okay?

Yumizuka said that, and I answered lightheartedly.

I would help, as much as I could.

.... Such an irresponsible answer.

There's really nothing I can do.

She said it hurt.

I can't even find Yumizuka, painfully suffering in the cold darkness.

"_"

The sun is setting.

.... I don't want to admit it, but maybe I can only find Yumizuka after nightfall.

"... I told Hisui I'd be back in the evening."

Perhaps it's too early.

I'll go back to the mansion and calmly think this through.

turn to **226**

224

—I'll search at school.

I know she's absent, but.. right now, this school is the only connection I have to her.

The sun sets.
Even after looking everywhere at school, there's no sign of Yumizuka Satsuki anywhere.

"..... Gah."
I bite my lip angrily.
.... But it's not anger over not finding her.
Two days ago, I'm mad at myself for promising such a thing in the first place.

—Help me when I'm in a pinch, okay?

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The sun is setting.
.... I don't want to admit it, but maybe I can only find Yumizuka after nightfall.
".... I told Hisui I'd be back in the evening."
Perhaps it's too early.
I'll go back to the mansion and calmly think this through.

turn to **226**

—I have no idea where she could be.
But let's search around the area where there are lots of houses and apartments.

The sun sets.
Even after running everywhere in town, there's no sign of Yumizuka Satsuki anywhere.

"..... Gah."
I bite my lip angrily.
.... But it's not anger over not finding her.
Two days ago.
I'm mad at myself for promising such a thing in the first place.

—Help me when I'm in a pinch, okay?

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I can't even find Yumizuka, painfully suffering in the cold darkness.
"_"
The sun is setting.
.... I don't want to admit it, but maybe I can only find Yumizuka after nightfall.
".... I told Hisui I'd be back in the evening."
Perhaps it's too early.
I'll go back to the mansion and calmly think this through.

turn to **226**

226



"Welcome home, Shiki-sama."

"I'm back.. Hisui, where's Akiha?"

"Akiha-sama has remained at school for certain formalities.

Since she shall be late, we are to have supper first."

"..?"

Certain formalities, huh.

Akiha's school probably has lots of formalities as it is a top tier school for young ladies.

"I'll go wait in my room till suppertime and I'll head down when it's ready."

"Yes.

Please rest until I call you."

I turn my back to the bowing Hisui and walk toward my room.

—After supper, I sit down on my bed.

The clock's hands show nine o'clock.

Since leaving the mansion after eight is forbidden, I cannot go outside any longer.

"....."

But, that's merely a rule.

If I feel like it, I can easily go outside.

—Bye-bye.

See you at school tomorrow, Tohno-kun.

I—

Go look for Yumizuka.

turn to **227**

I can't do something that dangerous.

turn to **228**

227

—I.. just can't let her be.

I know that looking for Yumizuka is dangerous.
No matter what her reason is, she did kill that many people.
But I can't let it go.
That way home in the sunset.
I cannot forget the last words she said.
".... I'll go.
Obsessing over it won't do any good."
I change clothes, and slip my knife into my pocket.
I tiptoe out the mansion, so as not to wake Akiha or the others.

.... The lights in the lobby are out.
It's a dark, lonely place; perfect for a secret departure.
Creak, creak.
I go down the stairs which creak only when they shouldn't, and walk quietly to the door.

—And..



"Nii-san?
You're going out, at this hour?"
Already in the lobby, Akiha speaks quietly.
"Akiha—so, you got back, huh?"
"Yes, just a little while ago.



But anyway—what are you doing, Nii-san?
 You've changed your clothes, so it appears you are going out."
 Akiha gazes intently at me.
 It's not a look of blame.
 She is merely gazing at me uneasily.
 "You're going to go out and get hurt again, like last night.
 Aren't you, Nii-san?"
 "... I'm sorry.
 A friend of mine is in trouble.
 I can't let it go."



".... I see.
 I'm sure you're going to go even if I stop you, Nii-san."
 "Yeah, but I won't do anything dangerous.
 I'm just going to check it out a bit.
 I'm sorry to cause trouble like this, when I've only just come home."
 Saying so, I begin walking out.

"Ah—"
 A soft voice comes from behind me.
 "Nii.. san."
 A weak voice, so unlike Akiha's usual tone.
 It's just like her voice from eight years ago—tinged with unease.
 "Akiha..?"



"You'll.. come back, won't you?"

"__"

Akiha's weak, vulnerable face.

It has none of its earlier coldness, but like Akiha's childhood face, it's close to tears.

"... What are you talking about?

I'm only going out for a moment.

You shouldn't make a face like that."

"I.. I know, but.."

"It's okay.

I'll come right back.

I'm sorry, Akiha; I've always been causing you trouble."

"Ah-Nii-san!"

Ignoring Akiha's voice behind me, I leave the mansion.

.... Outside, a moonlit night.

Perhaps because I saw Akiha's unsettled expression.

For some reason, I feel I may never return here.

I arrive at the shopping district.

If Yumizuka's anywhere, she'll most likely be here.

It's because the murder victims are found near this shopping district.

".... Damn it, what am I thinking..!"

I curse my own logic.

.... But, at least I'm more likely to find her here than anywhere else.

Putting all thoughts aside, I start to look around for Yumizuka.

.... How long has it been?

There's no sign of Yumizuka; not in the back alleys nor in the crowds.

pant—*pant*—*pant*

I rest my body, burning from all the running.

It's almost midnight.

.... It might be useless to keep looking around.
"Where has she gone..?"
I start walking again.
There's one place I haven't looked yet.
I'll give up after my body really can't move anymore—

.... Leaving the brightly-lit main street behind, I arrive at the park.
Because of the serial killings recently, there's not a soul to be seen around here.
"....."
Even though I can't imagine Yumizuka being here, it's the only place left to look.

"——"
The park is empty at night.
There isn't a sound under the the moonlight.
I don't know why, but a chill runs through me.

"—Sst."
The back of my head numbs.
A horrible chill, as if my body freezes to my fingertips.

I try to catch my breath.
In contrast to my cold body, my throat is scorching.
It's dry with thirst.
I put my hand in my pocket.
I just—wanted a blade in my hand.
"Why..?"
Just..
A faint headache.
A low temperature.
My mind is cool like ice.

Something is strange.
This park, it feels like something bad is around here.
".... A little more till I reach the center of this park."
I shake the headache off, and walk deeper in.

There's no one around.
A terribly dark and lonely place to meet someone.
There—someone is crouched.
Breathing raggedly.
Her face, pale white, as she scratches her throat in pain.

Without a doubt, it is Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Yumizuka—!?"

I guess there is the joy of finally finding her.
Not thinking about last night, I run towards her.



"Wait..!"
Yumizuka stops me with just a word.
"... Wait, Shiki-kun.
I'm glad you came, but I don't want you any nearer right now.
Please, don't come any closer."
Her breathing looks painful.
Her body convulses as she speaks, as if she's about to collapse any second now.
"Don't be stupid!
I'm not going to leave someone looking as painful as you alone..!"



"No, I'm okay.. You came, so I'm fine now."
Forcing herself up, Yumizuka smiles at me.
It seems like a show of bravado.
.... But I can't approach her.
I do at least understand that Yumizuka doesn't want me near her.
"... What's going on, Yumizuka?
Why haven't you been home?
What was that about, yesterday?
Why, that—"
"Hm?
That what?"
"... Damn it, I don't know!"

I really don't understand anything, Yumizuka..!"



"Really?"

You saw what happened yesterday.

I told you 'I killed those people', didn't I?"

She answers frankly.

.... It's almost as if she's laughing at my feelings of denial.

"Then.. the recent killings in town were all your doing, Yumizuka..!"

"I don't like to say it, but.. that's the way it is, yeah."

"What the hell do you mean, 'That's the way it is' ..!?"

"It's just the way it is.

I killed those people, and I'll keep on doing the same thing.

I can't just lie about it, can I?"

"Yumi.. zuka, you—"

"Please.

Stop calling me that.

I'm calling you Shiki-kun, so it's only fair for you to call me by my first name too."

"Wha.."

I take a deep breath.

Yumizuka is still like before.

Even though she acts like she used to—she says some pretty scary things.

"When I think about it, I look foolish.

I could never talk to you like this, for all the years I watched you from afar."

"Yumi.. zuka?"

"I was always watching you, Shiki-kun.

Even before I was saved in that warehouse, I was always watching you.

I'm.. really a coward.

I always just agreed with the people around me, and smiled when it seemed right.

Before I knew it, everyone was treating me like an idol."

"So school wasn't fun for me.

But that changed, after you talked to me in the second year of junior high, Shiki-kun."

"Eh—?"

"Nah.
It's not something you'd remember.
How can I put it.. You were always natural, never showing off.
Probably you didn't even think about what you said back then."
"_____"

What can I say.
Just as Yumizuka says, I remember nothing.
I don't know what I said to her, or even if I had talked to her back then.



"It's okay.
Don't make a face like that.
You were only hanging out with Inui-kun, so it was normal for you to ignore
other classmates."



"But that was okay.
I was happy just being in the same class as you, Shiki-kun.
It was my goal to talk to you and let you call me Yumizuka-san.
Now that I think about it, it was too small of a wish."

She recalls nostalgically.
Those ancient days.
.... Like she is remembering something that happened a long time ago.
"I.. was always watching you.
I knew you'd never notice me, but I watched you anyway."
"___"

Well—to be honest, I'm happy, but..

"Do you like me, Shiki-kun?"

How can I answer her right now—?

I like her.

turn to **229**

I hate her.

turn to **275**

I can't answer.

turn to **276**

228

—I don't know.

I was so intent on looking for Yumizuka until this evening.
But with nightfall, the events of last night suddenly appear fresh in my mind.
The dead bodies scattered about the alley.
Yumizuka, who said she killed them.
.... No matter what the reason, she killed them.
So I understand that staying out of it is the best choice.
"....."
I understand, but I can't cast aside my doubts.
What am I thinking?
It's just foolish.
I just can't comprehend what's happening to Yumizuka.
I do realize she is the vampire serial killer causing all these incidents in town.

But still,
I can't forget her last words she said in the sunset on our way home—

.... Before I realize it, it's almost midnight.
Lost in thinking about what I should do, I've passed some of the night wide
awake.

"... Shiki-sama, are you awake....?"
.... Hisui's voice.
Why is she up this late at night?

"I'm up, but why, Hisui?"



"—Yes, I was unsure, but if you were awake, I thought that I should tell you."
"Tell me what?"
"Just a while ago, a call came for you, Shiki-sama.
The message was that 'I'll be waiting in the park.'"
"Phone call.... This late at night?"

"Yes, the call ended before I could ask for a name, so I was unsure if I should tell you, Shiki-sama—"

"No—that is...."

.... This doesn't require any thought.

That phone call had to have been from Yumizuka.

".... Thanks.

But, it's a little late, so I'll wait until tomorrow.

She's one of my classmates, so I'll see her tomorrow."



"That is not true.

There is something wrong with smiling like that with such a strained face."

"Stupid, I'm not lying at all.

I'm fine, I won't go out this late at night.

Akiha would get mad, and you would get in trouble, so there's no reason for me to do that."

"....."

Hisui descends into silence.

The conversation between us dies.



".... Shiki-sama.

Please do not push yourself too hard."

".... Nah, I'm not pushing anything.

I'll go to sleep, so please go back to your room."

"....."

Hisui just looks at me.

"—Well, good night."
Not being able to endure her stare, I slam the door.

"... Sheesh.
I can't hide anything from Hisui."
I take my knife out of the drawer.
... I don't intend to necessarily use it, but I just feel better with it by my side.

"—The park?
Why would she call me out at this hour—"

Muttering, I think back to those foolish tales.
Vampires can only move about during night time.
So supposing that's true, then Yumizuka didn't call me out at this hour.
It's more like if it wasn't this hour, then she couldn't call me at all.
"... No matter how much I think about it nothing will get done."
Right now I have to go to the park.
I exit the mansion quietly to avoid Hisui's notice.

pant—*pant*—*pant*
I rest my body, burning from all the running.
It's almost midnight.
The park located off of the main road.
Because of the serial killings these past several days, there's not a soul to be seen around here.
"....."
Thump.
My heart beats loudly.
My throat dries up from the tension.
If the phone call that Hisui received was from Yumizuka,
then she has to be waiting there for me.

"....."
The park is empty at night.
There isn't a sound under the the moonlight.
I don't know why, but a chill runs through me.

"—Sst."
The back of my head numbs.
A horrible chill, as if my body freezes to my fingertips.

I try to catch my breath.
In contrast to my cold body, my throat is scorching.
It's dry with thirst.
I put my hand in my pocket.

I just—wanted a blade in my hand.

"Why..?"

Just..

A faint headache.

A low temperature.

My mind is cool like ice.

Something is strange.

This park, it feels like something bad is around here.

"... Just what am I afraid of?"

I shake the headache off, and walk deeper in.

There's no one around.

A terribly dark and lonely place to meet someone.

There—someone is crouched.

Breathing raggedly.

Her face, pale white, as she scratches her throat in pain.

Without a doubt, it is Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Yumi.. zuka?"

Her figure is tormented.

Without a thought for what happened last night, I run towards her.



"Wait.. !"

Yumizuka stops me with just a word.

"... Wait, Shiki-kun.

I'm glad you came, but I don't want you any nearer right now.

Please, don't come any closer."

Her breathing looks painful.

Her body convulses as she speaks, as if she's about to collapse any second now.

"Don't be stupid!

I'm not going to leave someone looking as painful as you alone..!"



"No, I'm okay.. You came, so I'm fine now."
Forcing herself up, Yumizuka smiles at me.
"... What's going on, Yumizuka?
Why haven't you been home?
What was that about, yesterday?
Why, that—"
"Hm?
That what?"
"... Damn it, I don't know!
I really don't understand anything, Yumizuka..!"



"Really?
You saw what happened yesterday.
I told you 'I killed those people', didn't I?"
She answers frankly.
.... It's almost as if she's laughing at my feelings of denial.
"Then.. the recent killings in town were all your doing, Yumizuka..!"
"I don't like to say it, but.. that's the way it is, yeah."
"What the hell do you mean, 'That's the way it is' ..!?"
"It's just the way it is.
I killed those people, and I'll keep on doing the same thing.
I can't just lie about it, can I?"
"Yumi.. zuka, you—"
"Please.
Stop calling me that."

I'm calling you Shiki-kun, so it's only fair for you to call me by my first name too."

"Wha.."

I take a deep breath.

Yumizuka is still like before.

Even though she acts like she used to—she says some pretty scary things.

"When I think about it, I look foolish.

I could never talk to you like this, for all the years I watched you from afar."

"Yumi.. zuka?"

"I was always watching you, Shiki-kun.

Even before I was saved in that warehouse, I was always watching you.

I'm.. really a coward.

I always just agreed with the people around me, and smiled when it seemed right.

Before I knew it, everyone was treating me like an idol."

"So school wasn't fun for me.

But that changed, after you talked to me in the second year of junior high, Shiki-kun."

"Eh-?"

"Nah.

It's not something you'd remember.

How can I put it.. You were always natural, never showing off.

Probably you didn't even think about what you said back then."

"——"

What can I say.

Just as Yumizuka says, I remember nothing.

I don't know what I said to her, or even if I had talked to her back then.



"It's okay.

Don't make a face like that.

You were only hanging out with Inui-kun, so it was normal for you to ignore other classmates."



"But that was okay.
I was happy just being in the same class as you, Shiki-kun.
It was my goal to talk to you and let you call me Yumizuka-san.
Now that I think about it, it was too small of a wish."

She recalls nostalgically.
Those ancient days.
.... like she is remembering something that happened a long time ago.
"I.. was always watching you.
I knew you'd never notice me, but I watched you anyway."
"..."

Well—to be honest, I'm happy, but..

"Do you like me, Shiki-kun?"

How can I answer her right now—?

set var flgK + 1

I like her. turn to **229**

I hate her. turn to **275**

I can't answer. turn to **276**

229

"—To be honest, I don't know.
But I can't just leave you alone."
.... Yes.
Since I talked to Yumizuka two days ago, she has never left my mind.
So that must mean..
".... Unlike your case, I don't feel like I've known you for years, but—"
Even though I knew it was dangerous, I still came here.
"I.. think I do.. like you."



"—"
Yumizuka looks at me, aghast.
I stare back at her.
"—No.."
She shakes her head.
She seems about to burst into tears.
"—I don't want that.."
".... Yumizuka.. san?"
".... Because that, that just makes me look—stupid.."

Still aghast, Yumizuka looks down as she murmurs.
if flgP >= 1
turn to **295**
turn to **296**

230

At lunch break, that guy who didn't even show up for a single class arrives.



"Yo Tohno!

Food, let's get some food!"

He's happy about something, being even more energetic than usual.

"Of course, food.

But you seem to be in a great mood.

Did something happen, Arikiko?"

"Yup.

I just asked Senpai if she wanted to eat lunch together, and she refused."

"....."

That's odd.

"Senpai" must be referring to Ciel-senpai, but this guy seems to get happy when his offer is refused.

"Hey, Arikiko, you have that sort of taste?"



"No, no, I'm not finished.

So I asked Senpai why not, and she said 'If Tohno-kun is there, then I don't want to come'!!

Uwahahahahahahaha!

Isn't that great, Tohno!?"

"....."

That's odd.

Why have I been friends with this guy since middle school?
"Oh man, she really hates you Tohno!
A rival's loss is my gain, so I'll treat you to lunch today!"
Arihiko happily slaps my back.
"... Well, I'm happy you're treating me, but Senpai was angry at me?"



"N?
.... well, after she asked 'will Tohno-kun be with us?' and I nodded, her face turned all red.
As soon as she heard your name, her face probably burned with anger."
".... Probably?
Isn't that a little different, Arihiko?"
"Maybe.
Maybe not."

.... Arihiko's story can't be trusted.
Certainly Senpai did seem angry this morning, but I don't know why she would be.
"... No way, she couldn't have realized what kind of dream I had."
If she could figure that out from that one conversation, she'd make a great detective.



"Hey, stop whining and let's go, Tohno.
There's only seats enough for half the people using the cafeteria."
"Ah—no, I—"

Yeah, I'll go with Arihiko to the cafeteria.

turn to **231**

No, even if she hates me, I'll go see Senpai.

turn to **232**

231

Senpai can't be mad at anything else other than the incident this morning.
 Senpai didn't seem angry this morning, but if she is angry, then I probably shouldn't go meet her.

".... Yeah, maybe I should just go to the cafeteria today."

"Yeah, do that.

C'mon, hurry up.

There's only enough space for half the people using the cafeteria."

Arihiko takes me by the arm and pulls me off.

I sit next to Arihiko and eat my lunch.
 My school's cafeteria has a television, and for better or worse for our education, they play back the morning news they recorded this morning.
 At any rate, the news they are playing back is talking about a drunk customer stabbing to death a convenience store employee, something that makes me not want to go to a convenience store for at least a few days.



"What a dangerous world we live in.

Indiscriminate serial killers, drunken people stabbing people.

A man can't even feel safe playing around at night anymore."

Arihiko seems like he is seriously watching the news.

".... Well, certainly it is dangerous.

But at least those serial killings won't happen anymore, so things should be like usual."

"Oh really?

Did they catch the serial killer?"

"No, they haven't caught him.."

—But Nrvnqsr is no longer in this world.

So the stupid title of the modern day vampire killings shouldn't be showing up in the news anymore and there will be no more of those meaningless killings.

"Anyway, those terrible incidents won't happen anymore; There won't be any more victims, and the streets will be back to normal."

"Hmmmh, I didn't know.

I guess I should watch the news more often."
Making a strained face, Arihiko earnestly stares at the news.

turn to **235**

232

"—I'll pass.
I'm going to buy some bread and eat by myself."
"Really?"
Then I'll go ahead."

Arihiko goes off to the cafeteria.
".... Well then."
I also get out of my chair and head over to the tea club room, where Senpai may be.

.... I stand before the tea ceremony room.
Of course, I bought some food for myself before I came.

Knock-knock.

I tap on the door.
I hear some scuffling inside and sense a person on the other side.
"Yes, who is it?"
I can hear Senpai's voice through the door.
"It's me.
Senpai, would you like to eat lunch with me?"
.... There's no answer.
"Senpai, I said lunch."
".... I'm not eating with you, Tohno-kun."
That voice doesn't sound happy at all.
I'm not sure what to do,
if flg1 >= 1
turn to **234**
 turn to **233**

233

".... Senpai, did I do something wrong?"

I ask her directly.

"....."

There's no answer.

I can feel her uneasiness through the door.

"Um, Senpai?"

Knock-knock.

I try again.

After a few seconds..

After a very uncomfortable silence, I hear Senpai's voice once more.

".... Not really, you're not at fault here.

I can't see you right now because of my circumstances."

"?"

What's are your circumstances, Senpai?"

"It's okay, so just please eat by yourself!

I'll calm down by the time school ends, so until then, I won't see you!"

"..... Uh."

Her scolding voice backs me up and I raise the white flag.

"I understand.

Then I'll go back to my classroom."

Telling her through the door, I leave the tea ceremony room behind.

turn to **235**

234

"I have some curry bread."

I pull out my secret weapon.

"Tohno-kun, do you think I can just be bought with food!?"

Senpai shouts from the other side.

.... Maybe this less than one hundred yen bread didn't work.

"....."

Geez.

I think trying to barge in would make her more angry, so I guess I should just go back.

—And then,



"Well, I guess I'll have some though."

She opens the door and stands in front of me.

"Se, Senpai-?"



"Come to think of it, I shouldn't be taking this out on you Tohno-kun.

Turning away a guest that came here would be a little rude."

With a red face, she mumbles something like an excuse.

"Senpai, does that mean, we can eat lunch together?"



"... Ummm, I don't mind if you take it that way.
If you like this room that much, then please come in."

Senpai goes into the tea ceremony room.
Following behind her, I walk inside.

I start to eat with Senpai.
Even though I got the impression that she was in a bad mood from Arihiko and her reaction back then, it certainly doesn't seem that way.
"... Senpai.
I heard this from Arihiko, but you're angry at me?
How come?"



"Eh-no, I'm not really angry at you.
It's more of an indirect thing... Maybe, it's more your insensitivity?"
"... Wait a sec Senpai.
You're normally a hard person to understand, but today you're even more so.
If you're angry at my insensitivity, that's fine, but what do you mean by 'maybe'?
Senpai, you don't understand how you feel?"



She sighs.

"I'm a little unsure.

I'm not usually concerned with myself."

Senpai almost sounds apologetic.

"—Probably, I don't like myself."

".... Senpai?"

Senpai sits in silence without looking at me.

After a short moment of silence, she suddenly glares at me.



"More importantly, Tohno-kun."

".... Yes?"

Straightening up, I look back into her eyes.

.... Since I know she's about to begin a very serious conversation.

"Uh... what is it, Senpai?"



"Could I have that curry bread?"

"Wh, what's with that all of a sudden!?
Didn't you just say you won't be bought out by food!?"



"That's a different matter.
Tohno-kun, are you trying to take back what you said earlier!?"

.... Senpai is really angry.
It was just a joke for me, but I guess she took it very seriously.
".... Yes, yes, I understand.
Please accept this, Your Highness."
I hand over the curry bread.
Giving that up, I only have some sausage bread left.



"Yay!" Senpai happily takes it from me.
 Is she a kid or something?



"Then I will give you some of this hamburger.
 Here you go," Senpai says as she gives me half of it from her lunch.
 "....."
 I think the difference in the barter exchange rate was a little high..

After we finish our meals, we pass the time while sipping tea.
 A perfectly tranquil passing of time.

It seems like she's not conscious of my presence, and I'm not especially conscious of her presence either.

Just, a calmness.
 Like two friends of the same gender, we pass the remaining break time like this.
 "Hey, Tohno-kun."
 "Yes?"
 "What is it, Senpai?"
 "I've been thinking about this for a while, but your glasses aren't used to correct your vision, right?"
 ".... Wow, you're amazing Senpai, bullseye.
 They're just for show."

"I knew it," Senpai nods.
 "Hey, Tohno-kun, could I ask a favor?"
 Senpai looks expectantly at my eyes.
 Not so much my eyes, but my glasses.
 "Just once, could you take off those glasses?"
 "_____"

That would be troubling.
 Taking these glasses off means I would see those "lines" and more importantly—
 I don't want to see the "death" of this person close to me.
 "I can't do that."

Unfortunately, I've never taken these off in front of others.
It's kind of like a vow, so I'll reject your request."
I answer clearly.
Senpai slumps disappointedly.
"Huh, if you say so, then I guess it's not possible."
"Yes, because these past eight years, I never—"

.... never took them off in front of other people, but.
"—"

That's right.
That ended.
With these eyes.
I saw the death of many, many things.

"——Tohno-kun?"



"Ah—yeah, what is it Senpai?"



"What do you mean, 'what is it?'" Suddenly spacing out like that, lunch break is almost over you know."

".... Oh, that's true.

I thought we had about ten more minutes."



"Yes, we did have ten minutes.

But you were just spaced out for that long."

Senpai gathers up the cups.

"Huh.... Was it really ten minutes....?"

While I'm still tilting my head in curiosity, I help Senpai tidy up the tea ceremony room and then leave.

setvar cielregard + 1

turn to **235**

235

Classes end again with plenty of time to spare.

Well—

Go back to the mansion.

turn to **236**

Go to the tea ceremony room.

turn to **237**

Go out into the city.

turn to **238**

236

I have nothing in particular to do, so I decide to just head straight back to the mansion.

Climbing the hill, I return to the mansion.
It's not even five o'clock yet.
There's still two hours until dinner, so I'll kill some time in my room—

turn to **239**

237

I hurry to the tea ceremony room.
Senpai has her hand on the door as I arrive.
"Senpai!"



"Ah, Tohno-kun.
Are you going home now?"
"No, I thought I'd talk with you a little bit.
You're going to have some tea now, right?
I was thinking of joining you."



"No, I'm going home now.
I have something to do, and this month club funding is getting a little low."
"—Ah.
I see, all those tea snacks were bought with club money."
.... But, come to think of it, a club that can buy snacks with its own funds has
to be wonderful.



"So I can't keep you company.... Tohno-kun, do you have any plans after this?"

"Me?"

No, not anymore."

"Well then, care to walk with me to the front gate?"

"Yeah, it would be my pleasure."



Senpai grins and nods, and walks by my side.

We decide to walk together for five minutes to the school gate.

Without any serious talk between us, we arrive at the school gate.

"Well then, see ya tomorrow, Senpai."

Raising one hand, I start off down the road in the opposite direction from her.



"Oh, please wait.

I have something I wanted to ask you, Tohno-kun."

"?

What is it?"

"Yesterday, you said there was someone that looked like me.

I kind got curious, so I wanted to hear a bit more about it."

Her eyes burn with curiosity.

.... But to me, that's not something I really want to recall.

".... Sorry, I don't want to talk about it.

It was just a mistake I made, so it's okay."

I look away from Senpai as I give a vague excuse.

"Is that so?"

Senpai quickly ends her questioning.



"But you saw that person late at night, right?"

.... Tohno-kun, I think walking around late at night like that is pretty dangerous.

Those serial killings have been continuing, you know?

If you meet that serial killer, that would be terrible, wouldn't it?"

".... Senpai, you're worried about me walking out late at night?"

"—Yes.

You're a good person, so you're the type that'll get easily tricked and put in danger."

Senpai looks like she is seriously worried.

"—Nn."

Yes, her concern makes me extremely happy.

"Thanks Senpai.

But it's alright, the one behind those incidents is gone."



"Eh?
Gone?
What do you mean?"
.... Crap, Nrvnqsr is a secret between just me and Arcueid.
I can't talk to Senpai about it, and besides, it's no use telling her about it.
"Um, yeah, that's right.
It is dangerous to walk around at night, really."



".... Anyway, from now on, please stop walking around at night.
You're a good student."
"Yeah, I know.
I'm not sure about being a good student, but I won't play around at night any-
more like you say."
"....."

Senpai stares at me.
—Does she not believe me?
She doesn't seem convinced.
".... I get it.
Then, I promise."
I stick out a hand.
"Senpai, I owe you one for that time, so I'll do as you ask.
So it's a promise."



"Um..... you want to, shake hands?"

"Yeah.

We're a bit too old for pinkie promises, so we'll shake hands."

"....."

After standing there a little perplexedly, Senpai takes my outstretched hand.



"I understand.

It's a promise, Tohno-kun."

She shakes my hand up and down.



"Well then, goodbye.

Let's meet again at school tomorrow."

Wrapped up in the sunset, Senpai disappears.
After watching her go, I decide to head home, too.

I walk up the road and back to the mansion.
It's not quite six o'clock yet.
There's still an hour until dinner, so I'll kill some time in my room—

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turn to **239**

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I don't feel like returning to the mansion directly, so I'll wander around the city for a bit.

—I arrive in front of the station for no apparent reason.

Ever since I was invited back to live in the Tohno mansion, I've been low on money, so I really don't want to spend any money here.

When I lived at the Arimas, Keiko-san would always give me some money for cleaning or tending the garden.... but now that I'm at the mansion, I don't think I can hope for that kind of income.

I'd like to do a part time job, but Akiha would never allow it.

..... *sigh*

Reflecting on my complicated situation, I let out a sigh.

Not doing anything, I watch the people passing by.

I pass the time like that for an hour until I realize how pointless it is.

"... What the heck am I doing?"

I don't know for sure myself.

Was I thinking that I would see someone with golden hair walking by if I watched all these people?

"... How stupid.

You'll never see Arcueid again, Shiki."

I stop leaning on the wall and head back to the mansion.

I walk up the road and back to the mansion.

It's not quite six o'clock yet.

There's still an hour until dinner, so I'll kill some time in my room—

turn to **239**

239

—Dinner is over, and it is now nighttime.
A rare event, Akiha, Kohaku-san, and Hisui are all in the sitting room, so I join them for some after-meal tea.



"Is that so?
I like the second one rather than the first one.
I think the taste is more refined."



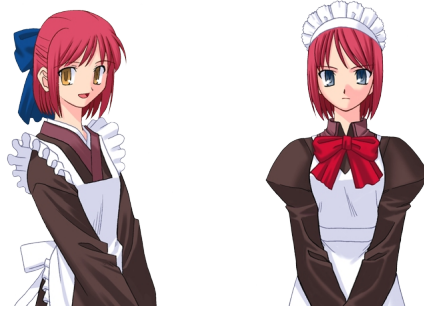
"It's a difficult choice.
The difference in taste is great, but everyone handles the different concentrations in varied ways.
But, Kohaku, you like Japanese tea better, right?
I think Hisui prefers english tea."



"Hisui-chan does not mind blands that much.
She may look sensitive, but Hisui-chan is—"



"Nee-san."



"—sensitive like she looks.
See, there isn't anything she can't do like cleaning or sewing, Shiki-san."
Kohaku-san suddenly engages me in conversation.



Hisui's glance seems.. somewhat scary too.



".... Why are you suddenly telling me that, Kohaku-san?"



"Because Hisui-chan is your servant.
You surely know about her sensitiveness, right?"
"Um, well—"
I quickly look over at Hisui.



"....."

.... Hisui stands there quietly with something like an air of attack around her.
"—No, I don't think she's that sensitive.
She takes care of things quickly even when I mess something up, and she doesn't
get angry like someone else when I come home late."





"Nii-san, don't you know it is perfectly natural for someone who breaks curfew to be scolded?"

"... I know, but isn't eight o'clock a bit too early?
I'm not a little kid, so let's make it like ten o'clock from now on."



"I refuse.
You don't have any reason to stay out that late anyway.
It's not like you have a cram school or a club to attend."

"..... Hmph."
I can't rebut her when she brings that up.
Someone free like me coming home late means that I'm out playing around.



"Shiki-san, it is as Akiha-sama says.

It's dangerous out there recently, so please don't go out at night, okay?"

"—Dangerous, you mean those serial killings?"

"Yes," Kohaku-san nods.

.... It almost makes me laugh.

The one doing that, Nrvnqsr, is no more.

But the only ones who know that are me and Arcueid, and other people are still frightened about the shadows of the dead killer.

"This morning they found another victim in the shopping district.

That's the eleventh victim you know, the eleventh victim."

".... Wow, eleventh?"

That's amazing, that's a baseball te—"

—Wait a minute.

"Kohaku-san!"



"Yes?"

"What you just said, is that true!?"



"Yeah, it's true.
It was in this morning's news.
It seems like it happened last night, but just like all the others, all the blood
was drained completely."

"Wha——"

That's, weird.
Because Nrvnqsr is dead.
How can someone who died two days ago kill someone the day after?
"No way——"
Did he not die?
.... No, that's definitely not it.
He definitely died.
So, how come—

"__"

Then maybe.
If the vampire roaming the streets disappeared, but these incidents are still hap-
pening..
Then, the only vampire left in this city is her—



"Good night, Shiki-sama."
".... Yeah, good night, Hisui."

The door shuts softly and I'm left in the room alone.
"....."
Another victim appeared.
Another victim, killed by a vampire.
"It can't be.... Arcueid, right?"
She said she doesn't suck blood, and more than that—I don't think anyone who acts that human could do that.
I only spent two days with her, but I can't believe she would do anything bad.
With her prettiness, her great smiling face, she couldn't have sucked someone's blood and discard them on the street.
"—But.."
But, there's been another dead body found.

".... I should just meet her once more and ask her about it."

Saying that aloud, I quickly act on it.
I take the knife I used to fight Nrvnqsr and sneak quietly out of the mansion.
Going out into the street, I start to search for Arcueid.

My lungs feel like they're going to burst.
I stop running and catch my breath.
My body which was running non-stop until now wheezes to try to suck in more oxygen.
My panting fills the air.
.... This is no good, I can't find her.
I ran down the street and to her place, but I still couldn't find her.
".... That Arcueid.... She's always around when you don't need her, but when you try to find her....!"
I speak those words selfishly.
It's been four hours.
It's almost midnight, but I still don't see Arcueid anywhere.

.... For some reason.
For some reason, I thought optimistically that I'd find her easily once I started looking for her.
I want to see her, and when we last parted, she said "See you later."
"Shit.... Where did you go, Arcueid....!"
For some reason, I'm getting very annoyed.
I keep thinking I'll see her soon but I don't.
This is killing me.
".... I... thought.... we'd see each other again....."
—?
What is that?
It's like... I'm in love with her.
"—But that—"

"—That's stupid."

Forcing a grim smile, I shake that thought from my mind.

"... I'll check out the park, and if I don't see her there, I'll go back."

Taking a deep breath, I walk to the park.

Two nights ago.

That park where so much happened, the park where I parted with Arcueid.

"—Hm?"

There's something different about the park.

"..... The lamp posts are off."

The lamp posts throughout the park are all turned off.

The moonlit park seems more solitary than usual.

"Hmm.... is it a power outage?"

I look around me.

.... Outside the park, the lights are all working.

The only lamps not working are within the park itself.

—Clang—

"Eh—What was that just now?"

I can hear something.

The clamor sounds like it's coming from a fight.

"—"

I'm curious.

There's no basis for this, but this late at night, if there's any sort of trouble going on, I think it has to involve her.

"..... Alright."

Trying as hard as I can to be silent, I head towards the source of the sound.

"—!"

I can see two figures facing off.

Someone is wearing dark black garments and I can't tell who it is.

But I can easily tell the other one.

White garments, and golden hair that can be easily spotted even in just the moonlight.

".... Arcueid....!"

Arcueid is being attacked by this black human shape.

That black human shadow is carrying something like a sword, and it isn't something like a simple fight.

Sword in hand, it jumps towards Arcueid.
Arcueid deflects the blade coming in towards her chest with her hand and lightly contacts the chest of that black shape.

In the next instant,
that sword wielding shape flies through the air like a soccer ball.

Th-thump, roll, roll, roll.

Falling down on the brick pathway in the park, it keeps rolling as if easing the fall.

No, to be more accurate,
it rolls right toward me.

"...?"

It's dark and I can't tell, but in front of me the shape stops rolling and regains its feet.

"Ku—!"

A sharp, cut-off voice.

"Haa... ah."

Fascinated by this display, I let out a breath of admiration.

Suddenly,

the sword-carrying figure ceases all movement.

"I'm seen—!?"

The figure finally seems to realize I'm here.

And then—it leaps towards me with sword in hand.

"—Eh?"

The cutting blade of the sword rapidly arcs towards my throat.

This speed.

This flying speed, this accuracy, surpasses that of Nrvnqsr's beasts.

The shadow's movement is as fast as Arcueid's when she was tearing apart Nrvnqsr's beasts.

The sword pokes lightly at my neck.

—Thump.

My heart accelerates to a feverish pitch.

I don't even have time to think of the danger or to evade; my thoughts are filled only with death.

The sword doesn't pierce my throat, but stops suddenly.



"Tohno.... kun—?"

"—Sen, pai."

Our voices overlap.

Both of our voices are drowned in disbelief—Ciel-senpai and I stare at each other in amazed shock.

"Shiki, get away from her!"

Arcueid's voice calls from far away.



"___"

Arcueid dashes towards us.

Senpai glares at me with eyes that seem to belong to another person—

—Like that, she turns around and runs off.

"Wh.... why?"

Senpai is completely gone.

That black figure, Senpai wearing those dark clothes.

.... That person who saved me two days ago when I was nearly killed by Nrvnqsr's crows.

But—Senpai, she said that wasn't her, so why—



"Shiki—!"

.... I suddenly realize Arcueid is in front of me.

"A-Ar, cueid—"



"Are you alright!?"

Did she do anything to you?"

Just like Senpai before, she looks at me intensely.

But that doesn't matter.

"Did she do anything to me...?"

I touch my neck that had a sword on it until now.

There's a light, sharp pain.

The finger that touched my neck is faintly painted red.

Senpai's sword has cut my throat only a few millimeters deep.

".... What is, going on?"

Why would, Senpai attack me?"

Why—really, why would she glare at me like that?"



"Isn't it obvious?
You saw us trying to kill each other.
She is someone who operates in complete secrecy, so she hates for an ordinary person like you to see what was happening."
Arcueid says that unbelievable statement.
"—Kill each other.... why?
How come—why would you and Senpai do something like that?"
Lost in pure shock, I can only manage those words.

In the first place, I didn't come here to ask that.
I wanted to ask her—Arcueid about something, which is why I was out here in the first place.
"... I don't know.
I only came to see you, so why—why are you and Senpai trying to kill each other?"



"Eh?
Shiki, you came to see me?"
"—Yes.
I had something I wanted to talk about, so I was just looking for you—so why did it end up this way?
.... I don't know.
My head is just spinning.
Please—could you tell me what's going on, Arcueid?"
"Well, I was just simply fighting with that person from the Church.

It isn't something that concerns you, so just forget about it Shiki."

"—It does concern me.

But first, what do you mean by 'the Church'?

Explain it so I can understand."

Arcueid doesn't answer.
She mulls it over until she nods.
"Sure, why not?"



"Since you're that worried, I'll tell you.
It really doesn't concern you though, do you really want to hear it?"
"Yeah.
No matter what it is, I won't mind."



"Oh?
How enthusiastic.
I'm actually a little curious about why you came to see me though."
"... Come on, please hurry.
I want to hear about that person."



"Hmph," Arcueid looks a little angry.
I don't even think about why she would look like that all of a sudden.

.... My throat still hurts.
Senpai—Ciel-senpai pointed a sword at me.
All I can think about is why Ciel-senpai would do that.



".... Fine, then I'll tell you.
The Dead Apostles are vampires that try the utmost to conceal their existence.
In order to live, they must suck the blood of humans, so victims will always
appear as long as they exist.
But there's not too many stories of people being killed by vampires, right?
Do you know why that is?"
".... Arcueid.
I didn't ask about vampires."



"Sheesh, I'm trying to explain it to you in order Shiki, so please answer, okay? Look, even when the vampires kill people, they try to hide it from the surrounding—society that people like you live in.

They seek to hide themselves and try as much as possible using magic and other things to camouflage their victims and make it appear natural.

Do you know why?"

".... Well, it's because humans aren't stupid.

If they find out monsters like that exist where they live, they'd attack them.

Even though humans are weak, they do have things like police.

If there are such thing as vampires, an effort would be made to protect people from them.

.... Then people would stop walking around at night like what's going on right now.

I think they try to hide themselves because that's inconvenient for them."



"—Well, I guess that's true, but police are only a law-enforcing group against humans.

We don't consider them at all.

But, it's correct to say that vampires hide their presence for the sake of self-preservation."

"Shiki, there is a natural enemy of the vampires.

A group of something like professional killers that now have the power balance in their favor.

.... It's true for other transcendent species, but especially for vampires, it is fatal for them to reveal themselves.

Even if a vampire made a secret kingdom in a village somewhere in the mountains away from all civilization, this natural enemy would definitely notice if victims keep increasing.

Vampires exploit the humans in secret, for no reason other than self-preservation. The vampires hide their dead victim's bodies, not out of fear of human society finding out, but in fear of these natural enemies discovering them."

"... Their.... natural enemy?"

She means someone that fights against vampires.

.... Like Senpai, who was wielding a sword against Arcueid.

"... So, they aren't human either?"



"What are you saying?"

Their natural enemy is without a doubt you humans."

"—?"

Natural enemies, us?"



"Yeah.

Starting from a long time ago, humans used many kinds of magic, the occult, magical ceremonies to create an organization and started to eliminate primates other than humans.

The greatest of these is Christianity—the pride of the Vatican, the Exorcists.

The Catholic Church always viewed "nonhumans" as impurities, but vampires are considered the most dangerous."

"There are many religious groups in the world, but the Catholic Church looks at vampires with more hostility than the rest.

You know, it's almost an obsession.
They are so insane, I don't even want to mess with them."
Arcueid lets out a sigh.



"You should know what I'm getting at by now.
The one who tried to kill you was a member of an elite organization that hunts heretics.
This group, the Burial Agency, is part of the Church.
They use their own strength rather than law to deal with contradictions to Christianity.
These hidden exorcists are more like professional killers.
Being the ones which crush contradictions, their existence is a shadow, and so they do not come out in front of people.
They are a section that should not exist within the organization called Christianity, so they kill all those that discover their existence indiscriminately."



"That woman—it seems she is now called Ciel, probably came here to hunt down the vampire in this city.
Her sense for the 'enemy' is far better than mine."
She says this in an irritated manner.

"....."

I don't have any words to say.
Senpai—is some sort of an exorcist who's hunting vampires—I just can't believe that at all.

Because Senpai has such a gentle, good nature,

she can't kill—she's not someone that can handle such things, unlike me.

"—That's a lie.
That's a lie, Arcueid.
Because Senpai's an upperclassman at my school.
So why would you say she's some member of the Church....!?"



"Hey now.
Shiki, you know her?"
Arcueid draws near as if telling me she won't allow that.

"Of course!
She's a third year at my school, I've known her since I was a first year—"

—Since I was, a first year?

"—Hu-h?"
.... Something's wrong.
Come to think of it, how long have I known her?
I don't even know which class she is in.
I try and remember—but I don't have any memories of her before that day
when I found her mending those splints.

—Thank you very much, Tohno-kun.

Because she smiled as she said it.
For some reason, I felt like I had always known her.
"—This can't—be true."

rst of all, the strangest thing is that..
Senpai was called "Ciel" like it was natural to be called so, but no one calls her
with a different name.
She was only called Ciel,
how come no one doubted such a name—?

"Arcueid—about Senpai... about that person, who is she...."



"Didn't I tell you?
She's a member of the Burial Agency.
She is a newcomer who entered only eight years ago, but maybe she has great
abilities.
She's an agent already having a seat in the perfect number, the Seventh."

"—"

I don't quite get what Arcueid is saying.

But, the number seven certainly is a perfect number.

A number isolated from the others.
In its solitude, it has nowhere to go.
Isolation, isolation.
Since it is perfect, the Apocrypha named with that number refuses reincarna-
tion.

.... I don't quite get it, but,
for some reason, those words repeat inside my head.



"... That's right, the members of the Burial Agency are highly skilled, so I guess it's easy for them to use suggestion against someone who can't even resist. That woman probably was deceiving you all in order to stay in your high school."
 "... Suggestion.... like hypnosis?"



"Yes, it can't be a very complex order. She probably used something simple like 'Don't doubt Ciel'."
 Yeah, that's it.
 I always felt something was wrong from the beginning, but as soon as I would see her again, those doubts would disappear. Feeling it is natural for her to be there, wasn't that one of Senpai's characteristics?
 "... I understand, but there's still something else. You said Senpai is a member of that Burial Agency, so why is she fighting you? They only fight bad vampires, right? So—there isn't any need for you two to fight, right?"

—They only fight.. bad.. vampires.

Such as, those that suck the blood of humans and cast their bodies away.
 "... Arcueid, you—"



"Hm?

What, did I do something?"

Arcueid looks directly at me.

.... I can't think it.

I don't want to think that this person, would ever suck human blood.

But the truth is, the incidents are still occurring.

Furthermore, Senpai, an exorcist from the Church, is trying to kill Arcueid.

"—Arcueid.

Don't tell me the killing yesterday was your doing?

That's why you and Senpai were fighting—"

I grit my teeth.

I speak those heavy, painful words as if confessing love toward a girl I like.



"Shiki, are you serious?"

"Even I don't want to believe it.

But then, who did it?

Nrvnqsr is dead already.

So.... that leaves, um, only.... you, right?"

.... I'm filled with regret as soon as I say those words.

I still like her.

She saved my life, and those two days were still a lot of fun.

So—I don't want to separate with her like this.

But, if she is the killer vampire, I—

—And then,

Smack.
My head is hit with a fist.



"Shiki, you idiot."
"Eh... Arcueid...?"
"I wouldn't normally let it be settled with just this, but since you look so pitiful,
I'll let that be enough."
Smiling, Arcueid hops back.



"Shiki, you're a great person."
"Wha—"
Having her say that so suddenly makes my cheeks flush.



"And in addition, you're so honest.
I like those things about you."
Arcueid smiles happily.
Seeing her like that—I can't imagine her sucking on someone's blood.
"Arcueid, so—"



"Yes.
I'm not the killer.
It's the work of some other vampire and not me."
"_____"

The knot in my chest disappears.
I see—I knew it, Arcueid didn't do those things.

"I see—it's the work of another vampire.

That's a relief... Wait, that's weird.

"Hold on Arcueid.

You said it's another vampire, but isn't it odd for vampires to come out one after another?"



"What are you saying?
 There aren't any new vampires."
 "—Wha.. But Nrvnqsr isn't alive anymore.
 There isn't anyone else that does something like that."
 "... Oh, I see.
 Shiki, you really made a big mistake."
 Arcueid gives an amazed sigh.



"You see?
 The serial killings you're talking about was always the work of just one vampire
 from the very beginning.
 So no new will come, and Nrvnqsr is unrelated to those incidents."

—Eh?
 Nrvnqsr is unrelated...?

"Wha—what do you mean?"
 "It's just like I said.
 ... You're normally pretty sharp, but you're lost at some points.
 Think back, Shiki.
 Nrvnqsr was a vampire, but did he ever suck human blood?"
 "Suck blood?"
 He ate humans and—oh."
 I see.
 Why didn't I notice such a simple mistake?"

The victims of the serial killings are found with their bodies drained of blood.
But Nrvnqsr was different.
He didn't leave any dead bodies behind.
He not only drank the blood, but also ate the meat, leaving no trace.
To prove it, the people eaten by him in the hotel were treated as missing people,
not killed people.
So—that means, it is something completely different.
"Wait.
Then what is the serial killing going on right now?
Just who is doing it?"



"That's a different vampire than Nrvnqsr.
To be more specific, that vampire is why I came here, and Nrvnqsr came here following me.
It's that sort of correlation."
"—Wha.. So the one you're after wasn't Nrvnqsr after all....!?"
"Yes, I didn't ever say he was my initial target.
I was his target, but he was never my target; my target is the one called the 'serial killer' in this city."
"Wha—"
I gasp in shock.
But—it really is just as she says.
She said her purpose is to kill vampires, so I just thought it was Nrvnqsr she was after—
"... So what is it?
Killing Nrvnqsr that night, was pointless.....!?"
"It wasn't pointless, you fought in my place.
Well, if you didn't kill me, you probably wouldn't have had to in the first place."
"——"
I feel a little dizzy.
"... In other words, those vampire killings had nothing at all to do with Nrvnqsr and it was the work of another vampire....?"



"Yeah, that's right.
But, that's my problem so you don't have to worry about it.
But more than that, hey."



With an extremely happy smile, Arcueid looks up at me as I still stand there in surprise.

"How was last night?
Who came?"
"Huh?"
What does she mean by last night?
I don't understand what she's talking about.
After all, I'm the idiot who mistook Arcueid's words and made such a stupid mistake, so of course I don't understand what she is saying, and—huh?

Did Arcueid ask me who came last night—?
".... Arcueid.
What do you mean by 'last night'?"



"Hm?
That's strange, I know I sent you a dream familiar."
"Wait, what's that dream familiar thing?"



"Um, it's like a familiar that lets you see a dream about what you desire the most.
You're a male, so I sent you a succubus.
Wasn't it a good dream?"

"I—"

A good dream?
That was..
I remember the realistic dream I had and my face turns red.

"You, that was your doing—!"



Arcueid grins even more.

—Crap.

If I stayed quiet this conversation would have been over, but since I reacted so strongly—



"Ah, so you did get it.

So, what kind of dream was it?

The dream familiar was supposed to take the shape of your greatest desire, so it felt really good, right?"

"What kind of dream?

That's—"

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Arcueid looks up at me full of amusement.
"Uh—"
She's acting like the Arcueid from last night's dream.

"It doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."
I look away from her and refuse.
But Arcueid keeps saying "Come on, come on," over and over.



"Come on, tell me.
You can at least tell me who you dreamed about."
She asks like a curious kid.
Every time I turn away she keeps jumping in front of me, saying "Come on,
come on."

.... This is pure torture.
She's as mischievous as last night's dream.
I bury my face in my hands.



"Hey Shiki, don't be quiet and tell me."
Arcueid keeps looking at me with those upturned eyes.
—I can't, God.
This is my limit.

".... You."
I hesitatingly let it out in a quiet voice.
"—Eh?
What about me?"
"Don't make me say it again.
I'm saying that it was you who came!"
I shout angrily as I look away.
Arcueid's eyes widen in surprise.



"M, me....?"
"Yeah, it's not a joke.
You came, and—"
There's no way I can finish.



"Ah—"
Now Arcueid looks away from me, looking very uncomfortable.

"....."
"....."
Neither of us know what to say.
The uncomfortable silence continues.
....
.....
.....

.....

..... *ahem*

I can't bear the silence any longer and force out that cough.

turn to **242**

241



—I'd die before I'd say it.

"Arcueid, it doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."
I look away from her and refuse.
But Arcueid keeps saying "Come on, come on," over and over.
"Come on, tell me.
You can at least tell me who you dreamed about."
She asks like a curious kid.
Every time I turn away she keeps jumping in front of me, saying "Come on, come on."

".... Please, just let it go.
There was something wrong with that dream.
.... Even now, that—"
I don't know why I saw that dream.
Arcueid says it's my greatest desire, but I don't want to think that's what it was.



"Oh, maybe it turned into a nightmare?
She does tend to write the story to her liking when fond of her target.
She's only a novice, so I guess it couldn't be helped."

Arcueid thinks aloud.

"....?"

Writes the story to her liking?

What do you mean?"

"I'm saying she interprets your desire in her own way.

That dream familiar I sent you is just a child, so she likes to play pranks."

"—I see."

.... That's a relief.

That's right, that dream—It couldn't have been what I wanted.

I let out a sigh of relief.

With this, my innocence has been proved but—

"Arcueid.

Why did you send me such a thing?

That's too much even for harassment."



"Hmph.

I wouldn't harass you.

I sent you the dream familiar to thank you for defeating Nrvnqsr.

I really am grateful to you, so I thought it'll be great if it made you happy."

"Thank me?—Well, I'm happy you were grateful, but.."

But no matter what, I'll pass on that sort of thanks.



"Oh come on.

Are you saying you can't accept a person's goodwill?"

".... Hey, you're not a person, you're a vampire, Arcueid."



".... That's.... true but."

Arcueid slumps her shoulders.

.... How do I say this.. Arcueid is very open in expressing her emotions.

Being happy, being angry, she changes her expressions so quickly—it's actually kind of charming.

.... I said she was a vampire, but..

she really does seem like a human; enough to even make me forget that fact.

turn to **242**

242

"Ah—the lamp posts are turning back on."
The previously dark lamp posts spring back to life.
The park lit only by the moonlight gradually becomes brighter.



"It seems that woman lifted her barrier.
It was supposed to prevent anyone from entering the park, but it seems like you
could pass right through."
"Hm?
You mean that power outage was Senpai's doing?"



"Yeah, it's one of their specialties, letting people stay away.
It really has nothing to do with us."



"By the way Shiki.
I wanna ask, but what do you think of Ciel?"
With a cold voice, Arcueid suddenly asks that.
"... About Senpai?"
"... Why do you ask about that, Arcueid?"
"Oh nothing.
I just hate that woman.
We were supposed to meet and exchange information, but I got irritated during the conversation and we ended up trying to kill each other."
"K-kill each other—why did you end up doing that!?"
In the first place, Senpai isn't a vampire.
Why did you try to kill Senpai?"



"That's my line.
She was the one who struck first!"
"—Eh?"

.... The one who struck first, was Senpai....?



"That's right.

She said 'I knew it was pointless, I just can't allow your existence', and then she attacked me.

She may look very calm, but all the members of the Burial Agency enjoy fighting.

You can't let her fool you too, Shiki."

"Wha—"

Enjoy fighting?

Does Senpai really—



"—Shiki.

You were fooled by her up to now, right?

So why are you saying things to help her out?

You know, she was tricking you, since you didn't know anything, and pretended to be a normal person.

Don't you feel a little angry at being used?"

Arcueid glares at me.

"....."

That is,

certainly I'm shocked that Senpai is different from normal people, kind of like Arcueid.

But, I don't feel like I've been tricked.

On the contrary, Senpai has helped me so many times.

"I—"

.... Even though I know about Senpai's identity now, I still think of her as Senpai.

Eating lunch with her, talking about stupid things with her and Arihiko, walking with her to the school gate, all of it is so much fun.

So—if I could.

It would have been better if I didn't find out about her.



"Shiki.

Whose side are you on, mine or that woman's?"

I feel pressure.

Her eyes are the source.

Now she isn't like a human, but more like an animal hunting its prey.

It seems Ciel-senpai is an unforgivable enemy for Arcueid.

That's why she glares at me with such fierce, hostile eyes.

As if saying, if I am her enemy's friend, I will be Arcueid's enemy as well.

".... Arcueid...."

I have trouble answering.

I—

I can't leave Arcueid alone.

turn to **243**

Senpai is dear to me.

turn to **244**

243

—How do I feel?
Certainly Senpai is dear to me.
No matter who she is, the time we spent at school together is precious to me.

But, even still—to me, Senpai is Senpai.
Friend or foe, man or woman, before all of that, I only feel that she is my dependable Senpai.
"....."



"Come on!
You can't fool me by being quiet, you know."
Arcueid continues glaring at me.
.... Come to think of it, no matter what kind of person Senpai is, this person is much, much scarier.
I've been forgetting, but she is a vampire, and she seems to lack knowledge of moral concepts.
—But, I am still attracted to her.

Even tonight, I was simply looking for her, but I was getting so frustrated when I couldn't find her.
It was, something like feeling worried about a loved one.
"Shiki, I'll ask you one more time.
Whose side are you on, mine or that woman's?"
Arcueid glares at me in irritation.
".... Hey now, isn't that already decided?
I'm still here.
If I was on Senpai's side, I would have gone after her."



"Um, in other words—what do you mean?"
Arcueid tilts her head to the side questioningly.
"What do I mean?"

—Why doesn't she just understand simple conversations?
If she's like this, unless I don't just say it directly, she'll never understand.
"You're pretty dense.
Saying I'm still here means that—"

Means what?
The fact that I'm attracted to her is an undoubtable truth.
But I know that is something I must not say.
No matter how beautiful she is, it still doesn't change the fact that she's a vampire.



"You're going silent again, what are you trying to say?
If you want to choose Ciel, then just say so!"
"I, I said that's not it!
I keep saying it, but why don't you understand....!?"



"How can I know!"

Being screamed at irrationally, she screams back at me irrationally.

"Fine!

Then I don't know you at all, Shiki!"

"Hey, hold on.

Where are you going?"

"It has nothing to do with you.

Don't follow me!"

Is she really that angry?

Arcueid walks away without even turning around.

"Wha—"

I stand in shock by myself in the park.

.... Arcueid got mad and went somewhere by herself, and I asked her what I wanted, so I know I should go back to the mansion.

.... But, my feet don't even move one step back.

My logic tells me where I should go, but my heart doesn't listen.

—It's been said a million times, but.

The feelings of love and hate, they have nothing to do with logic.

"—Man, geez!"

Damn it.

Why is it that I just can't leave Arcueid alone....!?

"Arcueid!

I said wait!"

Raising my voice, I chase after Arcueid who keeps on walking.

setvar cielregard - 4

turn to **245**

244

I.. despite all this—don't even want to think that Senpai is my enemy.

".... Senpai is my dear friend.
Enemy or ally, I can't label her like that."



"What is this?
Then what am I to you?"
"You—you're someone I can't leave alone, and um..."
I scratch my cheek.

Someone I can't leave alone—and I'm concerned about her in a completely different way than Senpai.
Even tonight, I was simply looking for her, but I was getting so frustrated when I couldn't find her.
It was, something like feeling worried about a loved one.
"—Ah."
.... No, there's no way that's true!
Certainly she is beautiful, but I—

"Look, just give it a rest!
Why do you ask me about that anyway!?"



"How can I know!"

Being screamed at irrationally, she screams back at me irrationally.

"Fine!

Then I don't know you at all, Shiki!"

"Hey, hold on.

Where are you going?"

"It has nothing to do with you.

Don't follow me!"

Is she really that angry?

Arcueid walks away without even turning around.

Her figure quickly fades into the distance.

"..... Ah."

Just where does she plan on going?

".... What is this, taking it out on me like that?"

Yeah.

She's the one who sent me that dream familiar, so I'm the one who should be angry."

".... Did I do something, to make her angry...?"

I don't know.

In the first place, there's no way I can understand how vampires think.

"——"

.... Arcueid got mad and went somewhere by herself, and I asked her what I wanted, so I know I should go back to the mansion.

.... But, my feet don't even move one step back.

My logic tells me where I should go, but my heart doesn't listen.

—It's been said a million times, but.

The feelings of love and hate, they have nothing to do with logic.

"——Man, geez!"

Damn it.

Why is it that I just can't leave Arcueid alone...!?

"Arcueid!

I said wait!"

Raising my voice, I chase after Arcueid who keeps on walking.

setvar cielregard + 3

turn to **245**

245

Surrounded by night, Arcueid walks down the street.
She looks straight ahead, her white figure with golden hair fluttering.
It bears a horrible resemblance to the first time I saw her.
No, or perhaps..
Perhaps it's like the time she faced off with Nrvnqsr.

.... For some reason I have a bad feeling about this.
"Hey, Arcueid!"



"___"

Arcueid continues to walk without turning around.
"I want to talk to you.
You can at least tell me what you're going to do."
"___"

Of course, Arcueid just continues walking without turning around.
.... It'd be miserable if I left it like this.
I decide to follow her silently for now.

The footsteps echo through the night air.

—And then,
Arcueid suddenly stops and turns around.



"Don't follow me.
Don't you understand it's troubling for a normal person like you to follow me
around?"
"—So tell me what you're going to do and I'll go back."



".... It doesn't concern you, so leave me alone."
Arcueid strides off once more.

.... Crap.
It seems like our wordless wandering is going to continue.

When we approach the main street, Arcueid freezes.



"—Found it."
"Eh..... ?"
Her voice is cold, like a totally different person's.
"—Ah."
.... A chill runs up my spine.
Even from behind, I can feel the hostility manifesting itself in her.
"Arcueid—What, are you—"
I can't even finish.
It's clear what she intends to do without saying anything.
Without a doubt, there is nothing but the pure, unadulterated intent to kill.
"Hey—what are you, thinking....!?"

"—"

Arcueid doesn't answer.

Her eyes are fixed solely on a man in a business suit walking by.



"Shiki.

Take off your glasses and look at that person."

"That person—you mean that business man?"

"Hurry.

If you want to know what I'm doing, then leave the questions for later."

"—Alright.

I don't like to look while in town, but—"

I take off my glasses.

"... Gah."

Instantly a light headache springs forth.

In exchange for the pain, I can see "lines" running all along the walls and the ground.



"Another question, Shiki.

You only see "points" on living things, right?"

"Eh—?"

Yeah, that seems to be true.

Things like buildings only have lines."

... I saw them back during the time in that hotel, but at the cost of a headache that almost caused me to pass out.

"Right, since you are a living being, you can't comprehend the death of inanimate objects.

So in order to "see" the death of inanimate objects, you must first connect to a circuit of the same orientation as them.

To "see", you have to "comprehend" them first.



"Then another question.

Shiki, how does that person look to you?"

"—?"

It'll just be the same as always—



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"—!?"

Without thinking, I step backwards.

.... What is that?

Certainly, all humans have "lines" on them.

But they only have countable amounts and they also look like geometric patterns.

But—what is that?

There are "lines" running all through him.

Those "lines" are all over him like blood vessels.. so much that I can't even make out his appearance.

"—Gah."

I want to puke.
Those, black "lines"—scribbles making a human shape.. everywhere throughout it, I can see "black points" that look like they are flowing blood—



"Shiki, how does it look?
I was hoping it would look normal to you."
"——"
I can't answer.
Right now—it takes all my strength just not to vomit.
"—I see.
How unfortunate that you can even see death on that thing."
"Yeah... it's not, normal, but.... I can, still see, the lines...."



"I knew it—you can even kill The Dead.
The fact that they don't have any life has no meaning for you.
Something that moves, something that breaks, you can stop it completely without exception—You're more of a monster, Shiki."
"Eh——"



"As you saw, you can't call that thing human anymore.
It's a vampire that deceives death by sucking the blood of other people."
Arcueid quickens her steps.
She walks straight towards the man.
"Hey, Arcueid—"
"Stay there Shiki!"
Did that young man realize Arcueid was there?
He starts running towards a back alley.
Arcueid strides silently.
Underneath the moonlight, she disappears into that alley.

—Thump.

The sound of my heartbeat is awfully close.
It's not even real late at night.
Even though I'm in the midst of a bustling shopping district, I can't sense anyone besides myself.

—THUMP.

My glasses—I have to put on my glasses.
If I don't do that, I'll see terrible things.
I'll see something so terrible that everything I've seen so far would be nothing in comparison to it.

—Th, u, mp.

But my body won't move.
My eyes that can see this patchwork world look towards that alley in fascination.
"_____"

Suddenly, sounds vanish.
And the presence of other people,

the sound of the wind,
and the smell of the dirt.

All of it freezes.

—GI
Under the frozen moon.
A bizarre noise sounds from the other side of the wall.

—GO.

No way I can see it,
I can't hear anything.

—A sickening sound

But I can see it.
My eyes definitely see the sound of death and death crashing.

"Gah—"
My vision turns crimson.
Why—do my eyes see "death", something that shouldn't be able to be seen?
"—"
My glasses.

I have to put on my glasses or I'll go insane.

I hold back the rising gorge in my throat and use my shaking hand to put on my glasses.

Sound and light return.
Now that I'm calm, I glance around and see nothing out of the ordinary in the shopping district.
The bustling of many people passing by.
The brightness of a store's decorated show window and the sound of rushing car engines.
I'm panting excessively.

I can hardly breathe.
Even though I put my glasses back on, I can still feel a lingering remnant of that "death" and it makes me sick.



Arcueid comes out of the alley.
There isn't even a trace of her previous hostility and she seems to be in a good mood.

"Ar—cueid....?"



"Huh?
Oh, I see.

I guess you really did stay here."
"Stay here, you...."
I can't go home after seeing something like that.



"Huh, what's wrong, Shiki?
You don't look very lively."
"—Don't worry about it, it's just my anemia.
More importantly Arcueid, what was that all about?"
I look at Arcueid as I grab her arms.



"Wh—Shiki, what are you doing all of a sudden?
If you're hurt, I can take you to your house."
"No thanks, I'm fine, so tell me what was that person?
You've shown me this much, so if you say this has nothing to do with me, I'll
punch you, Arcueid....!"
I approach her, ignoring the fact I can barely breathe.



"_____"

Arcueid's expression instantly turns serious.
But, I have no intention of backing down.
After a brief stare-off, she gives a sigh.



"Fine, you're awfully persistent, Shiki."
"..... Well forgive me for being so persistent."



"Idiot, that was a compliment.
-Then, shall we go somewhere else to talk?"
"Somewhere else?
Why?"



"You want me to tell you about it, right?
So not here, let's go back to the park.
Shiki, can you walk?"
"Oh... D, don't make fun of me.
This anemia is just an everyday thing."

"Awwww," Arcueid says regretfully as she smiles and starts to walk.
I walk behind her and resist the urge to pass out.



"Well, as you wish, Shiki, let's talk about anything.
If you want to ask something, feel free."
"Then I'll ask, but just what was that guy earlier?
You said he was a vampire, was he what you were after?"



"No, he certainly is part of my target, but putting The Dead back into the grave

isn't my goal.
I only got him because he was a minion of my 'enemy'.
If I left him alone, he would kill more people to increase his power."
"... Arcueid.
Um, could you explain it so I can understand?
I don't even know if that guy was even human or not."



"Oh.
I guess I never really did explain to you in detail about vampires.
Nrvnqsr was sort of an aberration amongst the vampire race, so I didn't really need to explain it at that time."
"...?
What is a normal vampire then?"
"What I mean is what you all think of vampires.
Immortal, never aging, sucking human blood, turning that human into a vampire, being destroyed by sunlight, all of that.
My 'enemy' is that old type of vampire."
"... Um, so you mean this 'enemy' of yours is the one behind all the recent serial killings?"



".... I suppose.
But the killing of all those people by sucking their blood might be the work of
"The Dead" like the one you saw earlier.
Shiki, you remember how Nrvnqsr's body was made of all those familiars, right?"
"—Yeah, that's not exactly something I can easily forget."



"The Dead are like that.
When humans have their blood sucked by a vampire, they can also receive some of the vampire's blood.
They die, but remain in this world as a servant of the vampire.
They are called The Dead and they are like the vampire's familiars.
Ah, maybe it's easier to understand if I use the word zombie.
It's closer to the voodoo belief in Haiti where the white serpent-god Damballah is invoked to control a dead body, but let's just say a dead body that moves is a zombie, okay?"

—Yeah, I can visualize it better that way.
"I get it, so that man was killed by a vampire, who uses him as a zombie?"



"Yes, yes," Arcueid nods happily.
"—I'm still confused though.
Why would a vampire do that?
Killing people—not letting them die but controlling them, what bad taste."



"You're right, those vampires do have bad taste. But that's something only the Dead Apostles do. Those that were always vampires from the very beginning do not do such things."

"—?"

Always vampires from the very beginning?

"—I remember.

You said there's two types of vampires, those who were vampires originally, and those who were humans.

.... When I heard that before, it kind of stuck in my head, I thought it was a little odd.

So what exactly do you mean by those who weren't originally vampires?"

"Simple, I'm just saying that Dead Apostles used to be humans.

They either gained immortality through magic or became servants of the True Ancestors that sucked their blood.

.... Shiki, you said it was bad taste to use killed humans, but that's just the least of it.

There are other vampires who think up of worse games."

"—A game—what is that?"

You guys kill for fun, and use their dead bodies as toys....!?"

".... I won't deny that.

For vampires, "amusement" is the same as breathing.

For those who were once human but gain imperfect immortality, their greatest enemy is boredom.

They didn't have a reason to become immortal to start with, so once they gained immortality, they lost all kinds of greed.

Their goal was immortality itself, so I guess that's just the way things are."

"—They're bored so they want to play?"

Don't be ridiculous.

Isn't it enough that they won't age or die?

Do they really need anything else?"

"That's what I said, they got everything they wanted.

After that, there is no meaning to existence.

As soon as someone realizes they have no value—that their life is stopped, then their meaning of existence disappears too.
 Immortality is also another word for death."
 "So they started to wear down and they started to create their own amusement, as if to tell themselves they could have fun as long as they lived.
 —That's their beginning.



"They copy humans and see themselves in a game as lords of a castle expanding their territory.
 I guess you could call it a country of The Dead.
 It seems they got more enjoyment out of that than they expected."

.... She speaks as if she was talking of other people.
 Arcueid should be one of those, but she certainly doesn't seem like she has that sort of hobby.
 "Well, we'll change the topic, but the Dead Apostles were originally human. There are a few cases where they became vampires through their own magical research, but the majority of them were humans who had their blood sucked. They are immortal, but they can't last forever.
 They can only be immortal if they drink the blood of others.
 Didn't I say their immortality was imperfect?
 If they can't feed on humans then their immortality is gone."
 "But, if they openly fed on humans, then the existence of "vampires" would be revealed.
 Even if they don't, just by being there, they distort the world around them. That would attract the attention of agents of the Church, like Ciel."
 ".... Um, so you mean that vampires can't do what they want?"
 "Yes, if they break their agreement with the Church and move about freely, they would be immediately discovered and annihilated.
 So the majority of the Dead Apostles make subordinates that can bring them blood as they sleep.
 Sucking blood and giving the dead body some blood of their own, they create their minions who do their work for them.
 We simply call those "The Dead."
 ".... Hmm.... So what you killed before was kind of like a soldier for the Dead

Apostles?"



"Not so much a soldier as a puppet.
The Dead Apostles control the dead bodies by skipping the process of becoming a vampire.
The Dead are completely connected to their parent vampire.
In order for them to survive, they attack others to eat their flesh, but more than half of that energy goes to their master.
Like a queen bee nourished by the worker bees, the Dead Apostles can use The Dead to increase their power while they sleep."



".... My 'enemy' can't be found easily because he's using a lot of The Dead.
He only dirties his hands once.
After that, he simply controls The Dead while he sleeps and expands his territory.
—They say many bodies are found in the recent supposed serial killings, but those are actually just failures.
To tell the truth, there are over a hundred victims in this city.
But only a small amount, the ones discovered, are the victims in the news."

"Wha—"

Over a hundred—?
There are that many that had their blood sucked?
And all those people suck the blood of others to make them into monsters like

themselves, like that wandering, lifeless thing earlier—

"..... That's ridiculous."

Three days ago.

I remember how all those people in the hotel were killed for no reason.

I was there but I didn't see it, so I can only visualize and can't really tell what kind of violence it was.

It's still the same.

I can't fathom the existence of vampires that suck human blood, just to increase their own territory.

—Just,

without reason, without even recognition, if someone close to me died liked that, how would I act?

I don't want to imagine it, but just a bit.

I imagine Akiha being drained of blood and discarded like trash.

"K—"

What makes me mad—is that this worst case scenario could happen at any minute in this town and I didn't even have a clue about it before.



"I knew you would be angry, Shiki.

.... I didn't want to talk about it, because for the prey—for you guys, this is an inexcusable evil.

This is not something you want to hear, is it?"

".... That's right.

After hearing this, I don't know what to do now."

.... That's right.

There's no way I can live in peace like I did until now, knowing that someone I know may become a victim tomorrow.

Since I found out about it,

I have to fight this vampire just like I did Nrvnqsr.

"..... Da—"

Such a fight.

Do I have to fight again like that when it almost makes me go insane?



"Oh, Shiki, you're making that face again.
You can relax.
Even though the avowed enemies of the vampires do not have a presence in this country, I'm still here.
Didn't I say earlier my purpose was to execute vampires?"
I don't know where that heavy atmosphere went because Arcueid instantly becomes cheerful.
"Yeah, I remember.
.... But, you're a vampire too, right?
Why do you side with us humans?"
"I'm not really siding with you humans, but I'm doing it because I don't have anything else to do."
"___?"
She doesn't have anything else to do?
I still don't understand her.
"Well, doing that does bring the Dead Apostles after me, but you beat Nrvnqsr who was pursuing me, didn't you Shiki?"



"So now I can go back to the original plan and defeat my 'enemy'.
You can go back to living your normal life now, and you don't have to associate with me anymore."
She smiles as if she is happy about something.
"....."



"Shiki?

Why are you making that troubled face again?"

"Because I'm troubled.

This is something that involves the city I live in."



"I said you shouldn't worry.

In two or three days it'll all be over, so there won't be any more victims."

Yeah, honestly, I don't want to be involved.

—But, saying that line..

Shouldn't I, the one actually living in this city, say that line instead of Arcueid?

".... Arcueid.

Um, can I ask a question?

This 'enemy' you speak of, is he strong?"

"Well, he should be many times superior than The Dead earlier.

I haven't met him this time, but he has been latent for eight years so maybe he's a Class Five by now."

".... Class Five?

I don't get it, but does that mean he's stronger than Nrvnqsr?"

"Not a chance.

Nrvnqsr was special.

He was a pure, supreme vampire that would be difficult to defeat even with my full power.

Compared to him, this enemy is pretty weak."

"—Oh.
Then—there's no way you'll be defeated."
I breathe out in relief.



"Hm, who knows?
A few days earlier and he wouldn't be a problem, but now I'm just recovering.
The possibility that he has more power is actually high."
"... Recovering?
Are you sick or something, Arcueid?"
"Yeah, I still have the effects from when you killed me and I don't think I'll be
fine for at least a few more days."
"—Ah."

That's right—the reason why Arcueid is weak.. it isn't anyone's fault but mine.



"But it's okay.
I'll defeat him for sure even if it kills me, so you don't need to worry about this
city."
"... Idiot, the one I'm worried about is you."



"Eh?"

Why are you worried about me, Shiki?"

Her eyes display true confusion.

.... Well, of course I'm worried.

I was relieved to hear that this enemy was weaker than Nrvnqsr, because I thought there would be no chance of Arcueid being defeated.

Arcueid..

I don't even want to imagine Arcueid getting hurt.

"....."

It really is weird.

Why—why can I not leave her alone?

Certainly I have the responsibility to bear for killing her.

I also feel guilty that she is weak right now because of that.

But, even if that wasn't the case, I still couldn't leave her alone.

—I thought about it before too, but....

as expected, this might have nothing to do with logic.

.... More than the fear that I may even die..

The emotion that I want to help Arcueid is much stronger.

"About what we talked about before, Arcueid."

"About what?"

"You know, about whether I was Senpai's or your ally."



"Wait, please hear me out.

You know, um—you certainly don't have any common sense, you're selfish, and you're hard to handle."



Arcueid looks at me with a sour expression.
Ignoring it, I let my true feelings out.

".... But, well, it really isn't boring when I'm with you.
I like you.
So, can I see it out until you defeat this enemy What I mean to say is that,
I won't be Senpai's ally, but yours.."
I steal a glance at Arcueid's face.



"——Really?"
Looking very surprised, she hesitantly returns my gaze.
".... Well, yeah.
Even I think there's something wrong with me, but I'm already a part of this.
And, I can't just overlook the problems going on in the city I live in."
"So, you mean—"
"Yeah.
If you're still weak, and if you say you need my power, I'll work with you.
.... Um, I might be just a burden, but.."



"Yeah—!
If you help me, there's nothing we can't do—!"
.... Her face beams brilliantly and she seems extremely happy.



"But, is it okay?
Shiki, you may have to face death again."
"I'm ready.
And, I think that's why I have these eyes to begin with.
—When I was a child, someone told me this.
That if I have the power others do not, I should do things that others cannot.
I think this is that kind of thing."



"Oh?
.... I don't really know your circumstances."



"But, that sounds good."
.... Arcueid is in an incredibly good mood.
And being with her puts me in a good mood as well.
"But, what do we do now?
Do you want to search for more of The Dead like before?"



"Yeah, I think that's all we can do for now.
The one before was the twelfth, so I don't think there's much more.
The parent vampire will have to come out once they all are destroyed, so we
have to hunt the remaining ones for now.
Is that still okay?", she asks.
"Anything is fine, I'm just with you.
If you lead, then I'll follow.
—Well, shall we start again?"
"Ah, no, that's good for tonight.
They usually follow a fixed route, and the other Dead will probably not be out
tonight.
Since they are fewer in number, I don't think he'll let them all come out at
once."
"—Oh really?
But, doesn't that mean this 'enemy' will try to hide The Dead from you, Ar-
cueid?"
"Basically.
But since this 'enemy' is a vampire, he needs to steal the blood and energy of
others.

So, even though he knows I'm searching for them, he has to send The Dead out to get the minimal blood he needs."

—*sigh*

Then, the minimal Dead he sent out was that man from before, huh.

"So, searching further tonight will be useless, I think."

"... Well, I don't mind.

It is tedious though."

"Yeah, hunting vampires is tedious work.

We have to find the coffin of this 'enemy' somewhere in this city, so it won't be easy."

Arcueid lets go of my hand and jumps back softly.
"Arcueid....?"



"Let's say goodbye for tonight.
We'll meet tomorrow.

With her dance-like steps, she watches me as she gets farther away.

"Tomorrow—wait, where should we meet....!?"



"Here's fine.

The time—yeah, around ten o'clock should be fine."

With a smile, she makes that promise.

"Good night, Shiki.

I'll see you here tomorrow!"

And,
waving her hand, Arcueid disappears.

—I get back to the mansion.
It's about one-thirty in the morning.
The mansion is completely dark.

"..... This can't be good."
I put my hand on the mansion gate.
Ka-chang.
A sturdy chain holds it closed.

"—Dang.
I shouldn't cut this."
I think a bit.
Then, I decide to climb over the gate.

.... I'm exhausted.
After sneaking over the wall like a thief, I quietly make my way to the doorway.
The gate was locked, but the door isn't.
"... It must have been Hisui."
I give a sigh of thanks.

So as not to wake Akiha, Kohaku-san or Hisui, I sneak my way through the mansion.

"——Whew."
Letting out a breath, I lay down on my bed.
"....."
My promise to Arcueid.
Maybe it's fate, but you've gotten yourself tangled up in trouble again, Tohno Shiki.

"—Could I help it?
I just can't leave her alone."
Or maybe I didn't want to leave her alone?
"Well... I do like Arcueid."
But is that love?
I don't even know my feelings.
At any rate, it looks like I'll be helping Arcueid once again starting tomorrow.
So for now, I shouldn't think of anything else but getting a good night's sleep—

—I can't sleep.
If I close my eyes, so many things come to mind.
About Arcueid.

About this vampire lurking the streets.
.... About the black-clothed Senpai.
"___"
.... I can't sleep.
At times like this, reading is good.
I know there was a book I was reading before---

The first feeling was rather one of pity.

Not anger, not despair.
Just, I thought everything before my eyes was pitiful.
(Of course, the most pitiful thing is myself.)
Life which breaks down without limit.
Daily life which fades without limit.
Time which is forgotten without limit.

Everyone only falls.
And yet everyone still struggles desperately to continue existing, and when they judge that it is not possible, they continue to reproduce.
Continuing to reproduce.
In the end, even that dies, but there is no recompensation.
Of course, it is not those who die who are not recompensated.
We had no hope to begin with.
What is not recompensated are the attempts.
The noble wish, the yearning for eternity which everyone longs for yet can not achieve.

I have no interest whatsoever in the things that break down.
If I could see death and understand it, maybe I'll take a bit of an interest.

A repetition nearly impossible to measure, yet this wish repeats itself.
I thought to replace this almost-comical cycle of wishes with one pure thing.

There is no need to state the method.
A wish becomes a result after it is granted.

I lived solely for that reason.
It could not be termed "conviction".
Just, the first word I learned happened to be "eternity".

.... Oh?
So you intend to get the eternity closest to you?
Of course not.
They are only a species that age slower and die harder.
I am becoming one of them only because this body has reached its limit.
If I am to go farther on, it will take time in this body.
It's ironic that you, the one that goes after eternity, hurries with things.
So you plan on leaving here tomorrow?
I'll leave the Burial Agency to you.
In the first place, there is only one empty seat for the priesthood.
I used up all my father's inheritance getting this far, so it is about time I quit.
.... Well, that's fine.
So you are going to complete your magic theory.
I have no intention of leaving here, and I can't live with you.
Well, fortunately, I am a woman.
I'll quickly bear a child and tell it all about you.
Oh?
What will you tell it, Narbarek?
Let's see.
I'll tell it something like—After around a hundred years, another newcomer Dead Apostle will appear.
It is pointless to take notice of him, so ignore him.
No, you wouldn't need to wait a hundred years.
Just like here, I will rise quickly to the top.
This body will become the most superior vampire, so ten years will be enough.
How foolish.
Even if it is you, you would need at least a hundred years if you start over from The Dead.
Their world's intensity is nowhere as nice as ours.
Using direct methods, then you would be right.
But if I become the strongest vampire from the very beginning, their world's rules will not apply to me.
.... What do you mean by that?
It is simple.
As a priest of the Church, you certainly know that Dead Apostles' powers are affected by the True Ancestor that sucked their blood.
Therefore—the solution is very simple.

If I wish to become the strongest Dead Apostle,
this blood of mine,
it must be sucked by the strongest of the True Ancestors—

turn to **246**

246

I'm watching a dream.
A vague dream without any particular significance.

Do I like her?

I don't know my true feelings, but I can't deny the reality that I'm always concerned about her.

Do I like her?

.... I don't know.
It's just that when I was completely lost within myself, she helped me.

If she wasn't there,
I may have just died under the pouring rain.

—I don't know.
That's why I have to ask.
Why she is doing this.
Why her eyes are so devoid of any emotion—
"—Shiki-sama."
.... I can hear Hisui's voice mingling with the morning light.
"—Shiki-sama, it is time.
Please wake up."
Her inflectionless voice awakens me.



"——"

As soon as I wake up, terrible things enter my vision.
I get a headache like I was just shot in the head.
"Ah—"
I almost lose my just awakened consciousness.
Before I fade away completely, I quickly grab my glasses.



"Shiki-sama...?
Are you not feeling well?"
"... No, that's not it.
It's just my anemia acting up."
Lightly shaking my head, I clear my head of what I was seeing.
"More than that, good morning Hisui.
Thanks for waking me up."
Sitting up in bed, I do my best to smile naturally.
"No, this is my duty.
There is no need for you to thank me, Shiki-sama."
"Maybe, but I am grateful.
You are infinitely better than an alarm clock."

I stand up.
It's not yet seven o'clock—about ten minutes earlier than I usually get up.

"... Hmm, breakfast?
I'll be there soon, so please go ahead of me."



"Shiki-sama, about that, um—Akiha-sama is waiting for you in the sitting room. It seems she has some questions for you."

Hisui says this with some difficulty.

".... Some things she needs to ask?"

.... Is she in a bad mood....?"

".... Yes.

Akiha-sama seems to have realized that you left late last night, Shiki-sama."

".... Ah."

I blurt that out without thinking.

Last night, I went to look for Arcueid and came home late.

".... Uh-oh.... I thought no one noticed."



"Yes, I also thought that I was the only one who noticed."

Hisui answers solemnly.

"....?"

Hisui, you realized I left....?"



"Oh...."

Hisui looks very apologetic.

"I see, you knew.

No wonder the mansion's entrance was open."

"..... Yes."

Hisui answers reluctantly.

"Thanks, it was a big help.

And, thanks for going out of your way to do that."

"But Nee-san realized too because of that.
Nee-san and I have two-hour shifts watching the mansion.
And she found out about me unlocking the entrance—"
.... I see now.
Kohaku-san is Akiha's servant, so she would have leaked it to Akiha about last night.
"Hisui, there is no need to apologize.
It was my fault that I was walking around at night, so I should take the blame.
I'm still very happy that you left the door unlocked."



"—"

Hisui just looks at me.
".... Hm?"



".... It is nothing.
As soon as you change, please go to the sitting room."

Still looking like she wants to say something, Hisui exits into the hallway.
".... Dang, I'm going to get scolded by Akiha again."
I mutter to myself as I change.
If I have time for that—there's still something important I have to do instead.

".... That's right, I have to talk to Senpai—"

"___"

I get the headache again.

It faded when I was talking to Hisui, but as soon as she left, it started hurting again.

"Gh... crap, this—doesn't look, like it will end, soon...."

I bear the pain as I collapse on the bed.

.... It doesn't ease up.

Throb, throb.

A pain like I'm being stabbed in the head.

.... It makes me completely forget what I was thinking about earlier.

Come to think of it, eight years since that accident, I've always had to deal with my broken body.

Dizziness, headaches, and anemia occurring unexpectedly.

I can't count how many things I had to give up because of that.

The doctor said it was a miracle just surviving it.

Just being able to live is a miracle, so putting up with various pains is perhaps necessary.

.... These broken eyes.

Sensei, who was able to alleviate these eyes, told me to treat that miracle very importantly.

.... Those words.

Did she mean that human life is not so much precious as it is not returnable, so I should treat it carefully?

These past few days, I've seen the deaths of many people.

Too easily.

Lives ending so easily, it's almost comical.

If it is something that ends so easily, doesn't it mean that it was only worth that much from the beginning?

If that's the case, it is meaningless to view life as precious.

..... H, uh?

Why, Since when,

am I, did you start,

thinking like that?

.... *sigh*
The headache finally stops.
"... Maybe I saw too much blood.
What a horrible thought."
I take a deep breath.
lling my lungs with fresh air, I clear away the unpleasantness.
"—I should hurry up and go to school."
I should go and see Ciel-senpai.
Enduring the slight pain lingering in my head, I leave my room.

I go down the stairs and into the lobby.
Next to me is the hallway that goes down towards the sitting room.
In front of me is the front door that leads outside.
"....."
What should I do?
Akiha is waiting in the sitting room, but I want to hurry up and see Senpai.

No, let's go to the sitting room. turn to **247**

More than that, I should go to school. turn to **248**

247

—But still, I can't ignore Akiha and go right to school.
 I want to find out about Senpai right away, but first I should explain to Akiha about last night.

Akiha is the only one in the sitting room.
 Kohaku-san is in the kitchen, humming away.



"....."

Akiha doesn't say anything when she sees me and sips her tea quietly.
 "Good morning, Akiha."
 Resisting the urge to go to school, I greet her as naturally as possible.
 Akiha's eyebrow twitches as she places her teacup down and slowly looks at me.



"Good morning Nii-san.
 It was quite late when you came home last night, wasn't it?"
 ".... No, not really.
 It was at most a little past one o'clock, quite normal for a healthy young man in high school to be up, right?"
 "I see.
 My bedtime is also past midnight so I was up at that time.
 But I would come home much earlier than that."
 "Yeah, even I was home earlier, wasn't I?"
 I just had something to do, so I was out for a little bit—"



"Without permission?"

You acted like you were out doing something you felt guilty over."

"Uh..."

Her stare is pure ice.

.... This is the second time, and I'm sure even though Akiha looks calm, she is quite angry.

"-Nii-san.

I don't know what went on at the Arima house, but here the curfew is eight o'clock.

It is a rule that must not be broken.

The gate will be locked after that, so please don't climb in like a robber."

"Oh—you knew?"

".... The surveillance camera showed me quite clearly.

It is a good thing Kohaku-san realized it was you and turned off the alarm system because otherwise you would probably be detained right now, Tohno Shiki."

".... Oh.

I should thank Kohaku-san then.

And, um, Akiha, I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have kept quiet about it."



".... If you understand, then it is fine.

Please make sure you observe your curfew from now on.

I will overlook it this time."

"... About that, Akiha."

"What is it?"

"... This is a little hard to say.

I. have something to do tonight too.

I don't know when I will be back, but I'm not going to do anything bad—"



"_____"

Her gaze sharpens.

"Kohaku!"

She suddenly stands up.

Kohaku-san comes in from the kitchen.



"Yes, what is it, My Lady?"



"I will be going to school, get the preparations ready."

"Huh?"

But I have not yet made Shiki-san's breakfast."



"You can leave this person alone.
It seems he can do everything by himself."



Akiha strides towards the lobby.

Kohaku-san sighs.

"... Shiki-san, you should not make Akiha-sama so upset.

You are her big brother, so please treat her better, okay?"

Saying that, she walks after Akiha.

The teacup sits, still steaming.

..... *sigh*

I know it's my own fault, but I won't have any breakfast today.

But, it is convenient in a way.

It is now just seven o'clock.

If I run to school now, I should be able to get there around half past seven—

I make it to the gate.

It's about half past seven.

"....."

I stand and wait for Senpai by the gate.

It probably looks a little strange to the other students walking by, but I don't really care.

"....."

Senpai doesn't show up.

The school gate is flooded with students as they arrive.

There's only about five minutes before the gate closes.

But Senpai still does not come.

"....."

She—might not come today.

Yesterday, I saw all that happened, so she might not come today, or tomorrow, or the day after—

—Thump.

"..... Ah."

Thinking that, I feel a little faint.

I shake my head to clear it of terrible thoughts.

.... And then,

someone pats me on the shoulder from behind.



"Tohno-kun, what are you doing here?"

"Se, Senpai....!?"

"Yes."

Senpai nods.

"R, really....!?"

But yesterday, you were—"

Mph.

Before I can finish, Senpai puts her hand over my mouth.



"Tohno-kun, not here.
Let's go behind the gymnasium."
Senpai gives her usual smile as she keeps her hand over my mouth and pulls my arm.

"..., ...!"
I try to tell her to stop, but I can't speak.
She forcefully pulls me away.

—The school bell rings overhead.
.... Homeroom has begun.
Furthermore, no one else is around.



"Yes, no one can hear us here."
Senpai finally releases me.
Jumping back, I face Senpai directly.
"You want to talk about last night, right?
If there's anything you want to say, please go ahead, Tohno-kun."
Senpai speaks calmly.
As if what happened last night was not a big deal.
".....!"
But it was a big deal for me.
Her attitude right now makes me mad.
"So that really was you last night....!?"

"Yes.

I did say your name back then too, so it's impossible to hide it any longer."

".....!"

I grit my teeth.

.... I didn't expect an apology or anything, but still—

if flgC == 0

if flgI == 0

turn to **249**

if flgI >= 1

turn to **251**

if flgC >= 1

if flgI >= 1

turn to **250**

if flgI == 0

turn to **252**

248

—No, I have to find out about Senpai.
I don't have time to eat this morning.



"—Shiki-sama?"

Hisui comes from the sitting room.

She must have come to check on me since I did not show up after a while.

".... Sorry.

I'm going to school, please tell Akiha I'm sorry."



".... Please wait Shiki-sama.

You do not look well.

Are you sure you are feeling well....?"

"—I'm fine, just a little headache.

Well, I'm off.... Sorry, I'm being selfish again."

.... I say something really selfish and open the door before she can respond.

I reach the school gate.

Since I ran from the mansion, it's not even half past seven yet.

"....."

I stand and wait for Senpai by the gate.
It probably looks a little strange to the other students walking by, but I don't really care.
"....."
Senpai doesn't show up.
It's past seven thirty already.
Ten more minutes pass by.
The school gate is flooded with students as they arrive.
There's only about five minutes before the gate closes.
But Senpai still does not come.
"....."
She—might not come today.
Yesterday, I saw all that happened, so she might not come today, or tomorrow, or the day after—

—Thump.

"..... Ah."
Thinking that, I feel a little faint.
I shake my head to clear it of terrible thoughts.
.... And then,
someone pats me on the shoulder from behind.



"Tohno-kun, what are you doing here?"
"Se, Senpai....!?"
"Yes."
Senpai nods.
"R, really....!?"
But yesterday, you were—"
Mph.
Before I could finish, Senpai puts her hand over my mouth.



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"..., ...!"

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".....!"
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Her attitude right now makes me mad.
"So that really was you last night....!?"

"Yes.

I did say your name back then too, so it's impossible to hide it any longer."

""!

I grit my teeth.

.... I didn't expect an apology or anything, but still—

if flgC == 0

if flgI == 0

turn to **249**

if flgI >= 1

turn to **251**

if flgC >= 1

if flgI >= 1

turn to **250**

if flgI == 0

turn to **252**

249

".... Why?

Why were you doing those things?"

"Why?

I do it because it's my job."

Saying that, she looks directly at me.

"I am here to execute vampires.

So—in the worst case, I cannot leave you like this now, Tohno-kun."

"Wha—"

Being stared at with those emotionless eyes, my heart skips a beat.

"Let me ask you, Tohno-kun.

Why you are associated with a vampire like her?

Depending on your answer, I will—"

It feels like the air has literally frozen.

—I thought I would be asking the questions, but our positions have been reversed.

But I don't know what Senpai will do if I don't answer, and a chill runs through me.

"Now, tell me.

Why you—Tohno-kun is with that vampire."

"Ah—no, no Senpai, that's not it.

Certainly I did agree to help her, but that's already over.

But yesterday, I thought Arcueid was the one behind the serial killings, but that couldn't be right, so I went to ask her and—"

I tell her all about last night.

Senpai listens to it all silently.

How I met her accidentally, how she explained to me about the vampire in this city, how I teamed up with her to save the city, and everything up until now.

turn to **253**

250

"... But.... but, you said that wasn't you!"
"What wasn't?"
"Three nights ago!
I asked if you were the one that helped me that night in the park, and you said it wasn't you....!"



"That was a lie."
Succinctly.
Senpai simply says so.
"... Um.... a lie, Senpai?"



"You didn't keep the promise we made.
You told me you wouldn't go out at night anymore."
"..... Uh."
She stares at me.
I start to feel like the bad guy all of a sudden, feeling guilty about what I did.



"I made the promise with you so something like this wouldn't happen.

Is that how little a promise with me means to you, Tohno-kun?

That makes me sad."

"Ah—no, that's not it.

About last night, I thought Arcueid was the one behind the serial killings, but that couldn't be right, so I went to ask her and—"

I tell her all about last night.

Senpai listens to it all silently.

How I met her accidentally, how she explained to me about the vampire in this city, how I teamed up with her to save the city, and everything up until now.

turn to **253**

251

".... Why?
Why were you doing those things?
"Why?
I do it because it's my job."



"More importantly, Tohno-kun, you were lying when you told me you would not go out at night, right?"
She grins as she says this.
"Oh...."
I did promise her that, but—



"You didn't keep the promise we made.
You told me you wouldn't go out at night anymore."
"..... Uh."
She stares at me.
I start to feel like the bad guy all of a sudden, feeling guilty about what I did.



"I made the promise with you so something like this wouldn't happen.

Is that how little a promise with me means to you, Tohno-kun?

That makes me sad."

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How I met her accidentally, how she explained to me about the vampire in this city, how I teamed up with her to save the city, and everything up until now.

turn to **253**

252

".... But.... but, you said that wasn't you!"

"?"

"What wasn't?"

"Three nights ago!

I asked if you were the one that helped me that night in the park, and you said it wasn't you....!"



"That was a lie."

Succinctly.

Senpai simply says so.

".... Um.... a lie, Senpai?"

"I lied for your sake, Tohno-kun.

I have to seal the mouth of any ordinary person who finds out my true identity.

Tohno-kun, you don't like pain, right?"

Senpai says such an unbelievable thing with a rather bright and cheerful voice.

"Seal the mouth, um...."

"To put it simply, dead people can't talk.

.... Um, I think I put it too simply."

"Uh—"

I step back without even thinking about it.

Senpai sounds like she is only half-joking.



"So, I cannot let you go free depending on what you tell me.

Tohno-kun, just what is your connection with that woman?"
My heart almost stops as those emotionless eyes stare at me.
—I thought I would be asking the questions, but our positions have been reversed.
But I don't know what Senpai will do if I don't answer, and a chill runs through me.

"Ah—no, that's not it.
About last night, I thought Arcueid was the one behind the serial killings, but that couldn't be right, so I went to ask her and—"

I tell her all about last night.
Senpai listens to it all silently.
How I met her accidentally, how she explained to me about the vampire in this city, how I teamed up with her to save the city, and everything up until now.
turn to **253**

253



"—I understand.
So you teamed up with her to defeat the vampire in this city.
Right, Tohno-kun?"
"Well, yeah, that's how it is."



".... I can't believe it.
Tohno-kun, do you really believe in vampires?"
"Wha.... what are you saying Senpai?
Even you, you're one of the Church's exor—"

Senpai puts a finger on my lips.

"Don't worry about me.
Isn't the problem more about you, Tohno-kun?"
"Me?"
I don't have any problems."



".... You have no self-awareness, it seems."

Senpai gives a troubled sigh.

"I have a question.. just how much did she tell you about?"

"How much.... well, only that a vampire is in this city sucking people's blood."

"So in other words, you don't know about her or this 'enemy' she is after."

".... Well, I haven't heard about it."



"I see.

Then, I will tell you about it."

".... Wow, that's amazing.

You know about that, Senpai?"



"Well, you know, I am a member of the Church, so of course I know that much!"

"Oh, that's right.

.... Sorry, I kind of forgot.

Ahahaha."
I attempt to laugh it off.



"Geez.
I'm trying to be serious here, so please pay attention!"
I nod in assent.
"... Huh?
But, isn't that a secret?
Arcueid, um.... she said you were all incredibly secretive."



"Yes, it really isn't something to talk about, but today is special.
There isn't anyone watching over us or anything, so as long as you don't tell anyone, then it will be okay."
"... Um.
What will happen if I tell someone else about you, Senpai?"



"Yes.
I'll just do exactly what you are thinking of, Tohno-kun."
Senpai gives that frightening response with a smile.



"Well then, I'll keep it very simple.
Tohno-kun, how much was explained to you about vampires?"
"—Just about how there are two types, and how Dead Apostles are the vampires that suck human blood.
But I think I know what kind of monsters they are."



"That's true.
Tohno-kun, you did actually defeat a vampire."
"Haha, but you did help me at the very end—S, Senpai!"



"Yes.
I watched you annihilate "Chaos".
When I came, "Chaos" was already dying though."
"_____"

I'm surprised.
Then Senpai knows about my eyes—?



"It was terrible.
That woman made you do such a thing.
If she had a conceptual weapon to defeat 'Chaos', she should have used it herself.
After seeing your bloody body, I thought I should punish her then and there."



"You too, Tohno-kun.
Even if you were given a weapon that can kill vampires, what were you thinking fighting that thing?
Does she have a hold over your weakness or something?"
Still looking surprised, Senpai complains aloud.
"... Um, Senpai?
What's this weapon that can kill vampires?"



"What do you mean?
I'm talking about that knife you have, Tohno-kun.
... Oh, I guess she wouldn't tell you about it.
It's not good for her either."



"Let's see, vampires have the ability to recover from most injuries they receive. With ordinary outside force... I mean normal weapons. With such things, you cannot cause wounds greater than the speed of their recovery.
To kill a vampire, you need an outside force greater than their speed of recovery, or something that nullifies their ability to recover.
This ability of theirs, the curse of restoration—actually isn't treating the wounds. Instead, it is a reversing of time to restore the damaged body part back to its original state.
An occult artifact which nullifies this effect is called a conceptual weapon."
"....."
Senpai cheerfully says all these things I can't understand too well.

"In short, a magical weapon.
We usually lift their curse looking into their human past, so we do not usually use them.
But for those that were not originally human, we use them, kind of like a secret weapon.
Your knife, is it not an anti-vampire weapon she brought?"
"Ah—eh?"



"Or is it a family treasure?
.... Hmm, but it would be strange for the Tohno family to possess an anti-demon weapon."
Senpai ponders aloud.
.... I don't know what she's thinking, but it seems she has no idea about my eyes.
"—Um, Senpai?
Where did our conversation about vampires go?"
"—————"
With a start, Senpai stops mumbling to herself.



She smiles as if to hide her embarrassment.
.... As usual, her personality is hard to understand.



"Let's get back to the main subject.
Please listen carefully, Tohno-kun."
"Yes, please keep it short."



"It seems you already know about how there are the True Ancestors and the Dead Apostles.
So it is very simple.
The 'enemy' she is after is a Dead Apostle, nicknamed 'The Serpent'.
Among the Dead Apostles, he is considered a heretic, a special vampire."
"... This vampire is not as strong as 'Chaos', whom you defeated.
But, he is more difficult an opponent than this 'Chaos' in a way.
Since he comes back to life even after he dies."
"... Um, Senpai.
Vampires are immortal, so isn't it natural for them to come back to life after dying?"
"You eliminated 'Chaos', right?
Even if they are vampires, if you destroy their body and soul, they will be vanquished.
If you kill a vampire, they will die.
But 'The Serpent' is a vampire who has conquered even this."
"Tohno-kun, are you familiar with the cycle of reincarnation?
It is part of Buddhist doctrine, so I would think a Japanese would be quite familiar with it."
"... Yeah.

It's that thing where when someone dies, they are reborn again as another human."



"Yes, exactly."



"In other words,
The vampire named 'The Serpent' has made this cycle of reincarnation his own.
That's what I mean when I say he comes back to life even after he is killed."
"Reincarnation—you mean if he dies he will start over again as a baby....?"



"Yes.
While 'The Serpent' is alive, he chooses his next host and when it is born, he transmits all of the information of his 'self'.
'The Serpent's' information stays deep within the baby until it matures, or until it gains sufficient intelligence.

As soon as that baby has the intelligence to succeed 'his self', the baby becomes a new vampire that is the 'Serpent'."

"—Wait a minute.

What's that?

Don't tell me that he does surgery on it while it's in the mother or something like that."

"No, it's not anything medical.

Because the instant his body is destroyed, he reincarnates into the body he chose as his next host.

"I said all of his information earlier, but to say it simpler, think of it as his 'soul'.

It wouldn't be quite correct to say his soul propagates through the air and takes over someone's body, but it's similar to an electro-magnetic wave.

In this case, the human brain is what does the transmitting and the receiving.

His exceptional point is that he took this soul, which is incalculable and something that disperses as soon as it leaves the envelope of the body, and processed it as something that could be transmitted."

"....."

Her words don't seem quite real.

I do understand what she is saying.

This serpent guy is reborn as a baby when he dies and this baby turns into this Serpent vampire when it becomes an adult, but....

".... If I believe your story, it means that he will never die.

It's not immortality, but it's worse than that.

Being killed and reborn as someone else, that's like living forever."

"Yes, exactly.

It was eight hundred years ago when 'The Serpent' first became a Dead Apostle.

Since then, 'The Serpent' has been reborn seventeen times.

Every time, Arcueid Brunestud has killed him."

"Arcueid did....?"



"Yes.

To her, 'The Serpent' is a special vampire.

.... Well, 'The Serpent' has a special meaning to me as well."

".... But, even if he dies he will just be reborn, right?

So—killing him over and over is pointless, isn't it?"

"—Yes.

He is killed by her, reincarnates, and killed by her again.

That cycle has repeated itself over and over.

.... If Arcueid had the power to kill not the 'body' but the 'meaning', then this probably would not be happening."

Senpai looks down a little and she seems to be gritting her teeth.

.... I don't know why.

However, it seems that Senpai also has some grudge against the "enemy" like Arcueid does.

".... A vampire that is reborn every time it is killed...."

That's Arcueid's and Senpai's "enemy".

".... Senpai.

This Serpent guy, what kind of a guy is he."

"He was originally a man, but that can change depending on the body he reincarnates into.

The troublesome part of this Dead Apostle is that they are all hard to find.

Because he is properly born as a human baby, and has parents.

"The Serpent transforms into a vampire only when he reaches the age where he can do everything at a satisfactory level.

Until then, that human shows no hint of being a vampire.

But once 'The Serpent' awakens, he uses the relationships he gained until that time to blend perfectly into society.

I heard that the Church detects the 'Serpent's' presence usually after a whole town is turned into The Dead."

.... I see.

For example, if this serpent guy were reincarnated in me, he would live as Tohno Shiki even after he becomes the serpent.

Unless he makes a big mistake, he would be free to suck blood without people realizing it.

—That is.

".... Scary.

Of course those around him are in danger too.

But that human whom he reincarnated into, he would just disappear after maturing, right?

One moment that person is living normally and the next moment he suddenly turns into 'The Serpent'.

That's very frightening."

".... Yes, but it isn't like two people sharing one body.

The human baby is still 'The Serpent'.

Depending on its environment, it's either a good or a bad person.

.... But even that disappears the instant 'The Serpent' awakens.

To sum it up, once 'The Serpent' dies, he is reborn into the next body, and once that body gains intelligence, it gains the previous life's self and becomes a

vampire."

".... That's, strange.

Even if he did reincarnate, that baby is still human.

So, even if it does gain the self of a previous life, the body shouldn't turn into a vampire, right?"



"Reincarnation isn't the transmitting of personality, it is the transmission of a soul.

So the personality differs every time depending on their families and upbringings.

But the soul itself does not change.

Once bitten by a True Ancestor, not only is the body forever soiled, but the soul as well.

What changes the body is the soul.

'The Serpent' transmits all his information called his soul, so when 'The Serpent' awakens, the body becomes one of a vampire but—"

"Yeah, but.."

"As you said, just that is too weak.

So he selects his next host while he is alive.

The family he is born into must meet two conditions, the first being one of wealth.

Being born into a family of high social standing, property and money makes it easier to make the whole town into vampires later on.

"And there is another, this is the important one, but amongst normal people like us, there are also people that carry special powers.

Not like magic, which is a mystic power that can be learned, but rather special abilities from birth.

—Such people are normally called Demonic Children or psychics.

"These special abilities are genetic, so they are inherited—passed on by blood.

He chooses those families that have 'something not human' in their lineages.

A family with wealth and influence, and inhuman power.

Those are the requirements for his host."

"..... This serpent vampire, he seems to be quite prepared."



"Yes, since he is a serpent, he has a very slithering intellect."

"....."

There's something.

Something about this story I don't like.



"Tohno-kun?"

That was just a joke, but are you listening?"

"Eh—?"

Ah, yeah, it wasn't very funny."



Senpai goes quiet.

But—I really don't feel like laughing right now.

Why do I suddenly feel so down.....?

".... But, I understand now.

That's our enemy, right Senpai?"



"—No.

Arcueid Brunestud's and my enemy.

There is no need for you to worry about 'The Serpent', Tohno-kun.

So please don't go with Arcueid any longer.

Either I or that woman will destroy him.

There is no need for you to face any danger."

"Danger—look, isn't just living in this city dangerous enough?

Even you, even Arcueid are fighting to protect this city!

So I can't overlook this either."

"—No.

She isn't thinking about this city.

She is only after 'The Serpent' for her own reasons."

"Tohno-kun.

The Dead Apostles were once human.

There are two ways for them to become vampires.

Either they would have their blood sucked by the True Ancestors, who were originally born as vampires,

or they change their own bodies through their magical research in their quest for immortality.

'The Serpent' had his blood sucked by a True Ancestor to become a Dead Apostle.

Do you understand?

'The Serpent' was a victim of the True Ancestors, a race beyond ours."

Senpai stares at me.

Those emotionless eyes tell me what she is going to say next.

"... Don't tell me, that True Ancestor was...."

"Arcueid Brunestud.

The royalty of the True Ancestors who made her only mistake eight hundred years ago.

She is the one who made 'The Serpent'."

"Eh—"



".... From the very beginning, the True Ancestors were an existence far separated from ours.

The Dead Apostles certainly are vampires that wield immense ability, but that ability is only an extension of human capacity.

Because they have managed to attain a long life, they are able to develop their abilities, and manage to refine it to those 'super' abilities as a result.

In other words, anyone can develop abilities equal to the vampires if they have a long time."

.... Yeah, I think I've read that somewhere.

They say immortality, but being a vampire isn't something that great.



"But the True Ancestors are different.

From the moment they are born, they possess power beyond human comprehension.

From the beginning, these True Ancestors are an existence closer to the world than humans.

"We humans have flourished this much by isolating ourselves from nature.

While we receive blessings from nature, we steal from it, and even if nature is destroyed, we will not be destroyed.

We became the most superior race on this planet probably because of this one sin only we humans carry."

"We can no longer be a part of nature.

In its place, we have gained ways to even destroy nature, this whole planet.

However, from the nature's perspective, this is evil.
The world itself is a form of life, so it has the will to protect itself from us.
But it does not have senses.
So—it creates a presence, separated from nature like us, to remonstrate us."

.... Senpai is weird.
Nature doesn't have a will of its own.

Yeah, it can't—but, can it be that we just can't feel it?

Nature, the earth, possesses a will.
That is why it still exists and tries to stay beautiful.
The problem isn't that we can't feel it.

It's that the standard of what nature thinks is beautiful and the standard of what humans believe is beautiful are the same.



"An existence which the world created to sense for it.
These are what we usually call spirits.
They are a transcendental species existing on another plane different from the remaining spirits of animals in the present world.
The True Ancestors are one type of these spirits.
They are born with the purpose to punish humans, so they only see humans as evil.
Much as we think vampires who prey upon humans are evil, they view humans who prey upon nature as evil."

But that's funny.
Then why can't they exist unless they feed on us humans, the evil existence?



"—Humans are only enemies to the True Ancestors.
As part of nature, no, as those whose power is linked to nature itself, their power has no limits.
.... In the long history of the Church, there are only a few records of fighting against the True Ancestors.
They get their powers from the world itself.
Therefore in order to kill them, a conceptual weapon with the power to kill the world is needed.
.... Of course, such a weapon does not exist.
So that means their 'death' cannot be caused by external factors."

That night.
She said in that hotel.
That if I had tried to kill her during nighttime, these eyes would not even have been able to see her death.

In other words.
It means she cannot die.



"Do you understand, Tohno-kun?
Arcueid Brunestud is pursuing 'The Serpent' in order to recover her power he took away from her.
It's not for the sake of any humans.
I don't know why she is weakened now, but if she regains her power—she will not need your help, Tohno-kun.
When that happens, do you think she will let you leave safely?"
"..... Of course she would.
Because—she doesn't have any reason to hurt me."
"She is a vampire.
She isn't like the Dead Apostles who suck blood in order to prolong their own life.
Look, Tohno-kun.
If the True Ancestors didn't suck human blood, vampires would never exist in the first place.
They—can survive without sucking human blood, but they still do suck blood because they have the urge to do so, and make humans into an existence outside of human nature.
I can't let some ordinary person like you be with her."

—Senpai's talk ends like that.

I—it might be because of my dizziness, but it seems like everything she's talking about is totally unrelated to me.



"Tohno-kun.
Does that show you how dangerous she is?"
"Yeah, well, I get the gist."
"So please don't cooperate with her anymore, okay?"
"I—"

I can't do that.
I can't consent to what Senpai is saying.
Because Senpai doesn't know Arcueid.
She doesn't know how good of a person she is.



"—Tohno-kun."
Senpai groans.
But, even if she makes that face, I can't lie to myself.
".... Sorry, Senpai.
I also have my reasons, so I want to help her.
It's true that I don't know what she'll do if I turn against her.
But it's also true that I just can't leave her alone."



"... Please don't say stupid things.
Tohno-kun, you're just a normal boy.
So—you shouldn't do such dangerous things."
"... Yeah, I'm grateful for your concern.
But, there are some things that I want to protect if I can.
Such as this city, and my peaceful time with you at school, Senpai.
... Well, even though you ended up protecting me."
"... But, it is just too dangerous.
You were nearly dead when you fought with 'Chaos'....!"
"Isn't that alright?
Besides, if Arcueid is really that strong, shouldn't defeating this serpent vampire be simple?"



"I'm telling you that she is the dangerous one!
Please open your eyes already!
She isn't human.
You don't know when she'll suck blood, she is more of a monster than the Dead Apostles....!"
"Wha—"

.... I know.
I know that Senpai is really worried about me.
But—I can't allow those words.
"—Just stop Senpai.
She isn't a monster.

You shouldn't say those things when you haven't even talked to her."



".... That is true.
But she is a vampire.
Please understand that....!"
"No, that's wrong...!
Look Senpai, Arcueid doesn't suck blood.
She told me herself, and I don't think she is lying.
I don't know how these other True Ancestors are, but Arcueid is different.
Just her, she is definitely—"



"Definitely, what?
Look, even if she isn't dangerous, it's dangerous enough for you to fight.
You can't recover from injuries like she can.
If you get wounded, you will die...!
What I can't forgive is she knows this and still lets you fight.
It's like she's just seeing you as a tool, Tohno-kun!"

Senpai screams this last part.
.... I know.
I understand she is right.
But, because I understand—her voice annoys me.
".... Shut, up."
"Tohno.... kun?"
"—Just shut up Senpai!

Arcueid doesn't see me as a tool at all....!
You don't know—you don't know anything about her, you just think she's some
sort of monster, so you have no right to say any of that....!"
"Please calm down.
I know I don't know very much about her.
But there is a possibility that she could be deceiving you—"
"Shut up!
Weren't you the one deceiving me!?"
"..... Ah."

Oh—crap.
Why, did I?
Why did I—say that, terrible, thing?
"..... Senpai, I....."
Said too much.
But I can't say it.
Her expression looks very fragile.
And it looks like it's going to break down the moment I say something.



"You're right, you know.
You're right now that you mention it."
"Sen..... pai?"
"Yes, that's right.
I have been deceiving you Tohno-kun.
So there's no reason for you to believe me."
She suddenly smiles as if her previous expression never existed.
There's no trace of it being faked.
Even though it has to be fake.
I can't see anything but a true smile.
"I apologize for taking your time.
Um, Then—I'll just disappear now."
"—Eh?"

The wind rushes by.

In that very instant,
Ciel-senpai disappears from right before my eyes.

It's now lunchtime.
The room gets loud, and my louder friend appears.



"Tohno, where are you eating today?"
"..... Wherever.
I don't care if it's here or the cafeteria."
"Alrighty, then lets have some bread.
If we're here, Senpai might come.
I'll go buy some, any requests?"
"... As long as it's not curry bread, then anything's fine.
Oh, and some milk."
"Roger."

Arihiko walks out of the classroom happily.



"Here you go, two curry breads and some milk.
Thanks for waitin'."
"....."

I told him anything but curry bread, but I guess that had the opposite effect.
I thank him and toss him some money.

I start to chew on my curry bread.



"Hey Tohno, did Senpai come?"

I shake my head no.

"Damn.

Maybe she's in the cafeteria today."

"Arihiko, she won't come anymore."



"Whaaat!?"

Did you get in a fight with her!?"

"That's not it, but she doesn't like me anymore.

I'm sorry Arihiko.

If you see her, tell her I'm sorry."

.... I really do feel it now that I mention it.

I hurt her badly.

She won't come see me ever again.



"What's this Tohno?
Are you telling me sorry for asking her out without asking me?"
"—If that was the case, it'd be much better."

Yeah, if it was sorry or goodbye, there would be some hope left.
Certainly, I think that was a pretty bad thing to say.
".... But, 'I'll just disappear'?
That's too much, right Arihiko?"

I say this and put my head down on my desk.

Classes are over.
It's a Wednesday so the rest of my classmates run out of the room as soon as classes end.

It's a Wednesday like any other, but I don't feel like doing anything.
Even if I went to the tea ceremony room, Ciel-senpai probably wouldn't be there.
"___"

As lifeless as The Dead, I go back to the mansion.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
Hisui greets me as soon as I get back to the mansion.

Even though Hisui was waiting for me this whole time, I can't even bring myself to greet her and I make my way to my room.

After dinner, I return to my room.
There's still a little time before I'm supposed to meet Arcueid.

—Please don't say stupid things.
Tohno-kun, you're just a normal boy.
So you shouldn't do such dangerous things.
"....."
Senpai was just worrying about me.
In the end, is it just that I chose Arcueid over Senpai?
".... Why don't you understand your own feelings, Shiki?"
I ask my reflection in the window glass.

"—Tch."
My light headache returns.
Recently, I've been having more headaches.
Up until now, the effects of my anemia have only been dizziness.
It probably changed to these headaches because I've started taking off my glasses and seeing "death".

".... It's time."
It's the time I promised to meet Arcueid.
No matter what Senpai said, I have to keep a promise I made.
Putting my knife in my pocket, I exit my room.

I go outside.
There were never many people around the mansion to begin with, but because of all these serial killings, it is unnaturally quiet.
It's not even ten o'clock yet, but the emptiness makes it feel more like past one o'clock.
—*sigh*
It is well into October and the wind is starting to blow colder.
Fall is nearly over as well.
I walk down the empty street holding these sentimental thoughts.

I make my way around the mansion wall.
Past here and down the hill is the park where Arcueid is waiting.

—And then,
I see a black figure leaning on the mansion wall.
A woman clothed in black stands not to block my way, but just to watch me go by.



"Where are you going this late at night?"
 Senpai doesn't even look at my face as she says this without the slightest inflection in her voice.
 "Sen, pai—"
 I freeze dead in my tracks.
 I can't look at her face either.

I feel uneasy about what happened this morning, so I can't bring myself to directly look at her.
 "Even after I said all that, you're still going to see her, Tohno-kun?"
 "... It can't be helped.
 I can't leave her alone, and I can't ignore the vampire in this city either."
 "—I see, you've got a point there."

She closes her mouth.
 I pass her figure on the wall.
 "Sorry, Senpai... about a lot of things.."
 "Please don't worry.
 You weren't mistaken."
 I hear her voice behind me.
 It doesn't seem like she intends to stop me from seeing Arcueid at all.

I guess Senpai has completely given up on me.
 "Well then, I'll be going."
 "Yes, please do as you like, Tohno-kun."
 I can still only hear her voice.
 Yet, I walk away from the mansion without even turning around.

Tap, tap, tap, tap.
 The footsteps echo in the night along the residential street.

Tap, tap, tap, tap.
 The footsteps echo in the night along the residential street.
 They aren't the footsteps of a heavy man, but of a much lighter body.
 In addition, I'm wearing sneakers so they don't make such sounds.

Only shoes with a hard bottom can make this sound.
For example, shoes like high-laced boots.

.... Actually, I don't even need to give an example.
Without a doubt, those footsteps belong to high-laced boots.

I stop.
The footsteps cease at the same time.

"....."
This isn't any good.
If I just ignore her like this, we'll reach the park soon.
I should just go out and say it.
I turn around.
"—Hey, Senpai."



"Yes?"
".... Um, is your house this way?"
"No, it's in the completely opposite direction.
You went there once, Tohno-kun, did you forget already?"
"No, I remember.
I just didn't have that much confidence in my memory."
"You should, because my house is that way."
"Oh, that's right," I say with a smile.
"Yes, it is," she says, returning my smile.
"Well then, I'm going this way."



"Yes, please do as you wish, Tohno-kun."
Still smiling, she seems to be seeing me off.
.... But, for some reason.... I have an incredibly bad feeling about this.
"____"
I suck in a deep breath.



"What's wrong, aren't you going?"
Senpai asks.
In that instant, I dash down the street.

I start to pant heavily.

This far.
Running full strength this far, she couldn't have followed me—



"Tohno-kun, going wild like that is dangerous you know."

A hand pats my shoulder from behind.

"Uwaaaaa!"

I instinctively jump back.

Senpai stands behind me as if it was perfectly natural to do so.

"Wh, why are you following me, Senpai!?"

"Well, I feel uneasy leaving you by yourself."

She speaks very matter-of-factly.

"Ah, uh."

I don't even know how to respond.

I don't know, but I should—

Say it bluntly.

turn to **254**

Say it calmly.

turn to **255**

254

I should just tell her directly to go home.
"Senpai, you don't have to worry about me so please go back.
Things will get ugly if we go on like this."



"Huh?
Ugly?
What do you mean by that?"
.... She doesn't even seem to be listening to me.
"—Look, why don't you listen to me?
Senpai, didn't you say I could do as I wanted?
So why are you still getting in my way!?"
"Like I said, please do as you wish.
I'm also just doing as I wish myself."

Still smiling, Senpai walks ahead of me.
"Hey—Senpai!"



"Huh?
What is it, Tohno-kun?"
"What is it!?"
Do you enjoy troubling me like this!?"



She smiles.

.... It seems she really does enjoy it.

".... I get it.

I understand that you're quite a mean person, but let me off the hook for today. If you keep following me, things will not only be dangerous for me, but for you as well."

"Oh really?

I'm not really following you or anything."

"Eh—?"

"I simply have something to do in the park.

I don't know where you are going, Tohno-kun, but if you're not going to the park, then this is where we say goodbye."

turn to **256**

255

"—Wait a minute.
Senpai, didn't you say I can do as I wish...?"



"Yes, please do as you wish, Tohno-kun."
Senpai nods and smiles.
"... Good, I wasn't just imagining it.
Then, this is goodbye.
You shouldn't be following me anymore."



"Huh?
I'm not really following you or anything."
"—Um, Senpai?"



"I simply have something to do in the park.
I don't know where you are going, Tohno-kun, but if you're not going to the
park, then this is where we say goodbye."

turn to **256**

256

"——"

I see.

Certainly, I don't really have the right to say anything about that.

I don't have the right, but—

"Look, just don't go!

Arcueid is in the park!

You know how she detests you, right?

So I can't let the two of you meet!"



"Oh?

Are you worried about me?"

"Of course, I don't want to see the two of you fight.

I'm begging you, please just go back!"

"—Oh.

I see, you're not worried about me, but you're worried about her, right?"

Looking off into the distance, she completely ignores what I say.

.... For some reason,

it seems she is doing all this intentionally because she enjoys teasing me.

".... Senpai.

Don't tell me, you're still carrying a grudge from this morning....?"

She just smiles and doesn't say anything.

.... She's angry.

That face is unmistakably carrying a grudge.

".... I get it, everything this morning was completely my fault.

I'm sorry.

So—"

"If you tell me to go back because of that, I'll beat you down Tohno-kun."

"..... Huh?"

"Tohno-kun.

We're still fighting right now.

It seems I'm still angry, so it isn't easy to just talk calmly."

"Um.... Senpai?"

"If you went back, we could make up, but I know that's impossible.



So this conversation is meaningless.
There is no need for you to apologize.
I'm not concerned with what happened this morning."
She looks at me with those eyes devoid of any emotion.
"My duty is to hunt down vampires.
Anything else is trivial."

Senpai walks into the park.

"Hey—Senpai!"

She crosses through the park.
As expected, she's heading right towards where Arcueid is waiting.
"Wait a minute.
Why are you so angry, Senpai!?"



"—I'm not angry.
How about yourself?
If you come with me, won't she misunderstand things?"
"Misunderstand—misunderstand what?"
"Don't you like her?"
Then, I don't think you should be with me, someone who is her enemy."
"Wha.... it's not like I like her...."

I can't say for sure though.
I don't know for sure what I truly feel, but I'm sure I am attracted to her.



"You really can't lie even to yourself, can you?
I think you are far too honest."
For a brief instant, her mask reveals a sigh.
"But, it really is better if we separate here.
We are no longer friends, and if Arcueid were to see us—"

"Hm?
What would happen, Ciel?"

"—!"

We both turn around towards the voice behind us.
There we see—Arcueid, who seems to be in a particularly bad mood.



-28 0
"How surprising.
I came because I heard Shiki's voice and I find you here.
Didn't we already share our information yesterday?
I don't believe you have anything to do with me anymore."



-28 0



"Yes, I don't have anything to do with you anymore.
I was just pointing things out to him."
"Oh really?
You intend on stealing my partner?"
"... That sounds good too.
I still owe you from that one injury you gave me."



-28 0



The situation is critical between the two of them.

As the one standing between them, I can't just watch.
.... Looking at this problem, our relative locations are Senpai, me, then Arcueid.
And if the two of them fight, I would be right in the middle of it.
"You two, why are you glaring at each other?
Your goal is the same, so calm down and...."



-28 0



"Be quiet Shiki!"



-28 0



"Please be quiet Tohno-kun!"

"———"

.... I failed.

I tried to talk to them but it doesn't seem to have worked.



-28 0



"-Fine.
Shiki seems to care for you, so I will let you go.
I won't attack you so just disappear."
"... That's surprising.
Is he that important to you?
I didn't think Arcueid Brunestud could be concerned with anything other than
killing vampires."



-28 0



"——"
"For you, controlling humans comes easily.
It would be better for you to just make him your servant if you wanted help,
Arcueid, but why haven't you done that?"



-28 0



"—Don't joke about such things.
Shiki is my partner.
Even if I don't do that, he still says he will help me."
Arcueid looks away uneasily.
That murderous intent seems to have disappeared.
"—Arcueid.
Don't tell me, you.."



-28 0



-28 0



"You—really want to suck his blood?"

Cling.

From Senpai's direction I hear the sound of solid metal.

".... I see.

I was surprised you were interested in humans, but that does not really matter.

If you desire the blood of humans, then there is only one thing to do."

Cling.

The sound springs forth from her hand.

Numerous swords, like long nails, are there.

".... Hey, Senpai....!?"



-28 0



"Tohno-kun, please back away.
Just now, I have confirmed that she truly is a vampire.
Even if she is a True Ancestor that cooperates with the Church, once she desires
blood, she becomes our enemy.
Before any victims appear, I will terminate her here."



-28 0



"—You really do speak nonsense when people do not answer you, Ciel.
Very well, if you want to die, then I will grant your wish and kill you.
It's not often I get to kill the same person twice."
Her eyes flare with the intent to kill.
Senpai receives Arcueid's stare in her fighting stance, swords at the ready.

Freezing.
The air feels like it is freezing, and I can hardly breathe.

—This isn't good.
They really will kill each other like this.
"... Wait you two, please.
I said to calm down....!"
Ignoring the tension in the air, I yell out.



-28 0



-28 0



"_"

"_"

For an instant, they both stop.

After that, the sound of two feet kicking the earth.

—My shout must have triggered the start.

The white and black figures crash into each other as if they were two magnets of opposite polarity.

The fight between the two of them is beyond me.
Arcueid's body movement isn't something I can track with my eyes.

All I can see is a white blur running through the night.
What's surprising is that Senpai does not even back off seeing Arcueid's speed.
It's not like Senpai moves with Arcueid's amazing speed.
But she accurately deflects Arcueid's blazing attacks while standing on the ground.

As a third person looking on, their strengths are equal.
However, just like Senpai said, Arcueid's power seems limitless.
No matter how amazing Senpai is, her power is not something that goes beyond a certain point.
In contrast, Arcueid seems limitless.
In the beginning, Senpai was overwhelming her, but Arcueid matches her quickly and is now easily surpassing her powers—

The fight is quickly decided.
Senpai's body flies lightly on the air and strikes the ground rolling, like a piece of trash.



"Ka—"
Senpai lets out a cry and stands up.
But that is a useless thing to do.

Senpai's body seems to be shot out by an invisible cannon and flies into the air once more, and hits the ground.
She lies there, not moving.
Blood flows along the park's brick pathway.

"Sen—pai?"
There's no response.
She seems unconscious.
Arcueid runs towards her—without any mercy, with terrible eyes seemingly bent on slicing Senpai's neck.
"—Ah."
I can't speak.
There can be no mistake that Arcueid intends to kill her.

And Senpai can't defend herself.

"_____"

turn to **257**

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I can't.
I can't allow that.
"—Stop it, you stupid idiot....!"

I frantically run towards Senpai.
Arcueid suddenly stops in front of her.



"Shiki!"
Arcueid's murderous intent instantly vanishes and she returns to her original look.
She seems completely taken aback that I was protecting Senpai.



"Why?
How come you're protecting her....!?"
".... Didn't I say it earlier?
Senpai is a very dear person to me.

Even if it's you—I won't allow you to go on."
I tighten the grip on the knife in my pocket and glare at Arcueid.



".... Shiki, you—"
Her eyes are bathed again with hostility.
"Step aside and I'll forgive you this time.
Now.
Stop defending her and don't wield that knife against me."
Her crimson eyes waver like burning candles.

Her intent to kill is about to be directed towards me instead of Senpai.

I gulp.
My mind is warning me that it's over if I don't step aside at once.
But, even still—
"..... I can't.
I won't pull back until you say you won't do anything to Senpai."



"—Step aside, Shiki!"
"No, you step aside, Arcueid....!
Didn't you tell me that you don't kill humans?
Or, was that just a lie....!?"



"—No, I don't kill humans.
But I honor those who surpass human capacity.
So I don't mind killing them as something that is my equal.
Such as you, or that woman right there."

A step.
Arcueid comes closer.
"I see—you're wielding that knife against me again."

Another step.
She draws closer.
"I forgave you the first time.
But I don't think I can forgive you the second time.
... In the first place, I don't think I can be hurt with your knife.
Even with your Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, you shouldn't be able to see
my death right now."

From directly in front of me,
her golden eyes enter my vision.

"—Ah."
My heart feels like it's stopped.
A chill races up my spine.
This crushing despair that feels like everything is bearing down on me is far
greater than anything during my fight with Nrvnqsr.

... I can't, do anything.
This is—what it means, to fight, Arcueid?—



"Shiki, this is your last chance.
While I can still think, get back.
I don't want to lose the first person I've liked, just because of that woman."

—The chills collect in my neck.
Arcueid is in the perfect position to kill me.
If that arm moves, she can rip off my neck before I could use my knife.
Even still—this is wrong.

".... Why, I just don't understand, Arcueid.
Why are you such a horrible person only to Senpai?
I know you're not the most aware of moral principles, but you're not one to
speak about killing people so easily....!"

"Shiki—"
Arcueid's hostility starts to lessen.
She walks away from the both of us.



"I see.
If you support her this much, then I don't know you."

"A—Arcueid...?"
"Just be careful, Shiki.
That woman you are protecting, she isn't the person you think she is."
"What—what are you saying?"

"Hmph.
You can be tricked and get your blood sucked by her.
So long!
Don't come crying back to me!"
Arcueid walks away without even looking back.
The only ones left are me and the wounded, collapsed Senpai.
"—What was she?—"
Saying such stupid things.
Senpai would suck my blood...?

"—What a, ridiculous, lie."

That sounds like..

"—Senpai is a vampire or something."
Saying that, I laugh aloud.
Because that isn't possible.
Senpai walks around during the day.
Well, Arcueid is a vampire that walks around at daytime, but even she gets weak then.
But for Senpai, she doesn't change whether it's night or day.

rst of all, isn't Senpai a member of the Church?
It's contradicting for a vampire to be in an organization whose purpose is to terminate vampires.

"—!

More importantly, Senpai!"
I turn around to check on Senpai.
The ground was soaked in blood , so I have to get her to a hospital.....

"..... Eh?"

The blood—has disappeared.
Her black robes that were painted red with flowing blood are now spotless.



"—"

Senpai stands up as if nothing even happened and she looks completely unharmed.

"Senpai—what is going on?"

".... Tohno-kun.

Why did you protect me?

Didn't you know she really almost killed you?"

Her eyes have no emotion whatsoever.

With those vacant eyes, like a lifeless doll, she doesn't even hear my question.

"You ask why?"

Because you were going to die.

Anyone would do the same thing in that situation."

"Even if it means getting yourself killed?"

Tohno-kun, dedication isn't throwing away your life.

Giving up your life to save others isn't dedication or sacrifice, it's just self-love.

Why—did, you—"

Her voice is very stern.

She admonishes me severely.

"You only did that so you would not regret it later.

And you are satisfied with just that.

.... To be blunt, it is very troublesome for me.

Idealism is a fine thing, but please don't involve me in your selfish justice."

"Wha—what do you mean?"

I just didn't want you to die, Senpai....!

Are you, are you saying that's troublesome!?"

Are you saying it would be alright if Arcueid killed you like that—!?"

"Yes.

It is my life, so it has nothing to do with you.

.... It's too miserable being allowed to live because of the mercy of a vampire."

"—!"

I'm pissed.

Partly because she rejected me even after I protected her.

But, more than that—

"Don't be ridiculous....!"

What—what do you think your life is!?"

Don't you see?

If you die, it's all over!

No matter what horrible, awful things you've done, if you don't keep on living, it will have all been a lie!

You have to keep on living.... you have to keep on living because there's nothing else.

So what if you're miserable?

That's far, far better than not being able to feel that at all.....!"

"—That's right.

You are someone who tasted death eight years ago.

That's why—you can be content with such a simple way of thinking."
 Her eyes are completely vacant.
 She speaks without looking at me, like she can't even see herself.
 "How happy you must be.
 I cannot say such words."
 She steps back as she speaks.
 "... Tohno-kun.
 What she said before is true."
 "Wh.... why are, you, even saying..."
 "Like Arcueid said, I cannot be called human.
 Didn't you see it, Tohno-kun?
 All the blood which was spilled disappeared like it was never there."
 "That's—"
 "It's fine.
 I am a monster.
 I am not a vampire, but my body, it isn't like that of a normal human."
 Senpai looks down as she speaks.
 "... What.... are you saying Senpai?
 Not a body like a human's?
 You seem normal to me...!"
 "Even if it's like this?"

Senpai slowly takes her sword and places it against her neck.

"Se, Senpai...!"
 I don't even have time to stop her.
 With a clean sound, it slices into her neck.

Splat.
 As if painting my very eyes, fresh blood sprays everywhere.

Drip.
 Drip drip.
 Drip drip.
 Drip drip.
 Drip.
 It's beautiful.
 Captivating my vision, even my whole consciousness, the blood seeps into her
 black garments.
 Underneath her robes,
 Senpai's white skin is probably mixed with those beautiful crimson lines—

A drop of blood flies forth and lands on my finger.
 It releases me from my momentary captivity and returns me to reality.
 Before me is Senpai's blood-soaked figure.

"Senpai...!"
I quickly dash towards her.
"There is no need to panic.
See, look at it."
She stops me and points to her neck.
.... The wound is already gone.
And all the blood that was there before has vanished too.
Like a video being rewound, everything returns to the way it was before.

—That was,
strange, and something like the word "rewound" truly describes it, not healing
or regeneration.
"....."
I can't speak.
After seeing that—I'm not crazy enough to tell her that she is still normal.
".... That's how it is.
If I could've helped it, I didn't want for you to know, Tohno-kun."
Senpai gives a sad smile.

I
don't know what to say.
".... Just like you said, Tohno-kun.
I was deceiving you this whole time.
So it can't be helped if you get angry at me."
"..... Ah."
But, I can't blame her.
Something like that—even I wanted her to hide it from me forever.
I wanted her.... to stay like the old Senpai.
"But, I do not regret what happened this morning.
I was really happy that you said it was a fun time together and that you wanted
to protect me if you could."
"—Sen, pai."
But, those were,
really, peaceful times I wanted to last forever.

"Farewell."

To the very end she gives her perpetual smile and disappears before my very
eyes.
"_____"

My mind is in complete disarray.

I can't follow after her.

Arcueid said that Senpai was a vampire.

Senpai didn't deny it, and even showed me proof, and after saying farewell, she vanished.

Even if it was a lie.

Even if it was a lie that could easily be seen through, if she simply said it wasn't so, things would have been fine.

I can't forget her sad face.
Senpai, who was that good of a person,
just an upperclassman at my school,
I didn't want to know she was such a different person.

—Farewell.

Her last words.

There's no need to think about what it meant.

I knew about her and I even hurt her.

But still, she came to see me.

But, that's all over.

I don't—want to believe that I'll never see her again.

"—No, this isn't happening."
My head doesn't seem to be working.
It's just in shock.
It's so shocked that it can't tell why it's in shock.

I leave the park with my uncertain memories and faltering steps.

—THROB.

—Throb.

—THROB.

—Throb.

.... I'm incredibly, exhausted.
This headache is killing me.
More than anything else, without thinking about Senpai, or Arcueid or anything
at all.
I just want to go to sleep.

A hot, summer day.

The blue sky and large, large columns of summer clouds.
The breeze wafting by,
and the droning voice of the cicadas.

The sound of cicadas.

Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.

—So loud, I want to die.
In the clearing, the discarded shells of the cicadas.
As if the sun is right next to me,
the clearing burns with an intense heat.

A hot midsummer day.
As if the entire world became a frying pan.
waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.
waa, u, uwaaa.

Akiha is crying.
There's a child collapsed at her feet.

His white shirt is painted red with blood and he doesn't move at all.
Looking down at him,
my hands are red, just like that child on the ground.

No, that's not it.
These hands,
are red with the blood of that child.

A grassy plain hidden from the sun.
Raised only by the moonlight, proud white flowers.

Under the transparent moon.
A lone woman of pure white.
Not even knowing words.
Not even aware of her self.
Only treated as a method of killing.

The white woman stained in fresh blood is completely free of injury.
The crimson saturating her dress is only the blood of her enemies.
The only time she is allowed is this brief amount of time after her blood-stained
homecomings.
What waits for her after that is only a sleep she cannot wake from herself.
.... The white girl does not even know her fate, and just looks up with distant
eyes at the moon.

—I thought, I saw eternity there.

Is it an illusion?
It probably is.
But I don't care.
The fact that her figure has eternally seared into my memory is truly—

I feel like I had a nostalgic dream and I wake up from my slumber.

"Ah—"
As if I wasn't breathing before, I suddenly take a huge breath.
That makes me wake up completely.
"....."
I'm in my room.
After that—after my separation with Senpai in the park, I must have somehow
returned to my room.

"—Ciel, Senpai—"

I can't forget her face.
Why didn't I say anything back then?
I was still attracted to Arcueid even though I knew she was a vampire.
So even if Senpai was a vampire, I shouldn't have been that surprised.

.... I should have laughed.
If I laughed like it was a joke, she probably would have laughed with me like always.
".... No.
I—"
I really wanted her to stay as Senpai.
The uneventful, but peaceful and fun time I spent with Senpai at school was very precious.
"—Damn."
But, that's all over.
She will never come to school as Senpai ever again.
".... What should I do?"
I don't know.
I wanted to search for the vampire's lair and kill him, but I can't even look for him by myself.
I've cut my ties with Arcueid, and me and Senpai are fighting right now.
.... No, I won't even be able to see Senpai again.
"_____"

I put on my glasses and get out of bed.
It's past eight o'clock in the morning.
It's long past my usual breakfast time, but today is a school holiday.

"Hisui... isn't here?"
Her familiar figure standing in front of the door like a shadow is missing.

"M..."
Once again, my light headache returns.
In addition to my new, unfamiliar life at this mansion, the events of the past few days were very stressful.
..... *sigh*
I let out a deep breath.
I don't know what I should do, but I have a lot of things I have to do.
If I'm worried about Senpai, I can just go to her apartment.
"—Alright.
If anything, first comes breakfast."
You can't work on an empty stomach.
Shaking the sleep from my brain and body, I head towards the sitting room.

Hisui is in the lobby doing something.
She must be doing some redesigning because she's carrying a chair.
"Hisui."

As if suddenly realizing I am here, she walks quickly towards me with her usual soft footsteps.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
 "... Yeah, good morning.
 Sorry for selfishly waking up whenever."
 "I am sorry for not being there when you woke up.
 Please forgive me."
 Hisui silently bows her head.

.... After going out last night and not even remembering how I came back to my room, being apologized to like this makes me feel like a horrible person.
 "There's no need to apologize, I just woke up whenever I wanted to.
 It's okay if you want to complain."
 Like now, unless she's strict on me, my spirit might waver a bit.
 "Shiki-sama...?"
 "Ah, it's nothing, don't worry about it.
 Anyway, I want to eat some breakfast, is it already made?"
 "... Nee-san is outside.
 If you want to eat breakfast, it is already prepared in the dining room."
 "Oh.
 I'll go eat then.
 Sorry for interrupting your work."
 After saying I'd see her later, I head towards the dining room.

After finishing breakfast, I return to the lobby.
 I should go back to my room and change even if I decide to head to Senpai's apartment.

"—Ow!"
 My toe bangs into a chair.
 "... Ow.
 Why the heck is a chair here...."
 That's right, it's the chair Hisui was carrying earlier.
 Since it usually isn't here, I just banged into it walking normally without think-

ing.

".... Dang.
I must be really out of it to hit such a thing."
I give a sigh.

—But, Hisui is Hisui.
Why does she have to put a chair here?
What was she thinking in the first place to put a chair where people walk by?

.... The toe I banged on the chair still hurts.
It's an excessive pain.
A pain that would have been never there if the chair was never here.

—How annoying.
I was supposed to see Senpai, so why is this suddenly getting in my way?

This chair is an incredible annoyance.
Why is such a thing here?
It never should've been here.
If it wasn't here, I never would've stubbed my toe.

I get mad and kick the chair.
Throb.
As soon as I do that, the toe I kick with hurts even more.

Throb, Throb.
Throb, Throb, Throb.

"——Why you!"
What a, bothersome, thing.

Disappear.
This chair is an eyesore.
This chair.
This chair.
This chair.
This chair.
This chair.
This chair.
This chair.
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This chair!
This chair!



"Shiki-sama....!?"

"—Huh, Hisui?

Why are you rushing here, all of a sudden?"

I say that, truly surprised.

.... I'm breathing heavily.

My chest heaves up and down.

I feel like I just ran a marathon.

"Huh?

.... Why am I so out of breath?"

I gasp hungrily for air.



"Shiki-sama—what, are you saying?"

"Eh, what—why are you looking at me like that?

Did something happen?"

".... Shiki-sama, are you saying you do not know what you were doing....?"

"What I was doing?

But, I wasn't really doing anything—"

"Gah—"

My headache returns.

I shake my head to get rid of it and suddenly realize what lies at my feet.

What lies there are....

the shattered remnants of the chair.

"—Eh?"

Thump.
My heart pounds harder.
"—I—did this?"



"—Yes.
That is the result of you holding the chair and smashing it against the floor
many times."
"Wh——"
Why?
Why did I, do that?
I did think that my toe hurt from running into the chair.

But why did I go that far—why did I get angry over something like that and
break it like a kid having a tantrum....?



"Shiki-sama, are you feeling well?
If you are sick, I can call a doctor."
"—No, it's nothing.
It's really nothing.
Sorry Hisui, I.... just felt strange."

I step back from her.
I step back from the pieces of the chair I just destroyed.

"Shiki-sama, please calm down.
Breathing like that is not good for your body."
"I'm fine, leave me alone!
I want to be alone, just let me be....!"

I shout that out and run up the stairs.
I passively note that I seem to be running away from her.

I return to my room and throw myself on my bed.

Once again.
My temple starts to hurt once more.
Throb, throb.
As if a new heart had emerged in my brain, my head pounds painfully.
"..... Kkk."
It hurts.
It hurts.
It hurts.

This pain probably caused my earlier violent behavior.
Having to see "death" so much these past few days is messing up my brain.
rst—I need to calm down now.
As long as I keep my glasses on, this headache shouldn't get worse.
"..... What am I doing?
..... I have to go see Senpai... quickly."

But, if I see her while I'm like this, I'll only hurt her.
I have to calm down.
Quietly.
If I just sit here quietly, my headache will go away.

....
.....
.....
..... See?
It's disappearing.

My room is very quiet.
In this room only with the ticking of the clock, I should be able to calm down quickly.

Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

..... The ticking of the clock.

Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

..... Can't you be quiet?

Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

..... Hey.

Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.
Tick.

..... I told you to be quiet.....!

—It stopped.
With a crash, the clock stops.
"—It's quiet."
Yeah, that's better.
Now I can go see Senpai.

I walk out the front door.

The sky is painted a brilliant blue.
I walk towards the gate.
At that moment, I hear a noise from the garden.
".....?"
That's odd.
Hisui was in the lobby picking up the pieces of the chair.
Kohaku-san is outside, and Akiha is at school.
.... There shouldn't be anyone else here at the mansion.

I arrive in the garden.
.... Come to think of it, most of the time we spent playing was in the garden.
Since coming back here, I've been busy with many things so I haven't had a chance to walk around the garden.

Rustle.

That sound again.
It seems like someone just walked through.



"Huh?
Hisui...?"
It's Hisui.
.... It seems she doesn't realize me, but Hisui is making her way towards the woods.
She doesn't seem to notice me.
Does she have something to do?
She enters the forest.
"?"
A bit curious, I follow her from a slight distance.

—And.

Where Hisui headed to, there seems to be a small clearing.

"..... There's a clearing there....?"

Tilting my head to the side, I try to remember, but for some reason, my memory is a bit vague.

In the forest of the mansion, I can see a clearing as if the trees were cut there.

—No, "can see" is not quite right.

If you walked by normally, you probably would never notice it.

If Hisui didn't walk there, hidden enough by the surrounding trees as it is, I would never have noticed even if I lived here all my life.

".... There's a clearing there?"

.... If so, we probably did play there as kids."

To say the least, I don't remember ever playing with Akiha in the clearing.

—I feel like I've never, been there, before.

"....."

After thinking for a bit, I decide to go into the clearing.

.... The clearing doesn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.

There's no sign of Hisui, who entered before me.

"What's this—just an empty place."

I walk to the middle of the clearing.

This clearing really is just an empty space.

The perfectly level, open ground.

The deep woods enclose the area.

The voice of the cicadas.

And the strong, summer sunshine that feels like it could dissolve—

"Eh.....?"

Summer, sunshine—?

"Ou—ouch....."

The wound on my chest starts to hurt.

Like / stabbing.

This pain / that feels like / a kitchen knife stabbing my chest.

Chiiirp.

Chirp Chirp.

Chiiirp.

Chirp Chirp.

Chiiirp.

Chirp Chirp—

—From somewhere, I can hear the voice of cicadas.

But, it's autumn now.

—The summer sunshine that bathes everything in white.

The columns of summer clouds in the far off sky.
I can practically see the voices.
At my feet, there are the discarded shells of cicadas.
Discarded shell.
Someone's—discarded shell.

"——....."

—I'm getting angry again.
I finally calmed down earlier, but I'm feeling annoyed again.
I have to meet Senpai.
I have to hurry up and meet her and tell her I wouldn't care even if she was a vampire.

....
.....
.....
.....

..... but, what is the truth?
Could I honestly say I could smile like I did before with her even if she's a vampire—

.... Someone's crouched silhouette.
The approaching footsteps of a young girl.
The columns of clouds in the far sky.
The discarded shells of cicadas.
When I realize it,

there is,
my body pierced through the chest and killed.

And looking down at my corpse in surprise,

is my figure as well.

"Ah—gg."
My chest hurts.
I feel like vomiting.
My wound has healed a long time ago, but why does it hurt so much?

My chest is broken.
The old wound opens, blood flows forth from the opening.

—What is this?
My wound, it hasn't healed at all.

It hurts.
I'm scared.

—I'm assailed with dizziness.

This is,
The impulse called Death.

My consciousness sinks.
My wound hurts.

I hear the sound of my own body collapsing on the ground.

.... I can hear voices talking.

"Akiha-sama, are you not going to call for a doctor?"
"Don't be stupid, Hisui.
There's no way I could do that, since Nii-san's wound isn't normal..!"
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping on the bed.

I planned to say "Yo!" and get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My chest doesn't hurt anymore, but my body is as heavy as lead.
All I can move are my eyes and mouth.



"Just what in the world were you trying to do, Hisui?
You know not to let Shiki go near that place....!"



"Please.... forgive me."



"This can't be solved by apologizing.
You were assigned to serve Nii-san to avoid this kind of situation.
So what were you doing..!?"
Completely different from her usual manner, Akiha gives full vent to her anger.
In comparison, Hisui is accepting the scolding silently, looking down.
.... I'm not sure how this all came about.
But I can at least tell Hisui is being yelled at because of me.



"Answer me, Hisui.
What were you doing and where were you all day long?"

Hisui doesn't answer.
The air grows tenser between them.
Biting her lip, Akiha takes a step towards Hisui.

.... Even I understand that Akiha intends to hit her.
Hisui seems to know this as well, but she just stands with her head hung in shame, ready to receive it.
"—Hold on, Akiha."



"Nii-san—You're awake!?"
"Yeah, you were so loud, I woke up."
"Ah....."



Akiha looks away uncomfortably.

Hisui still keeps looking down, not even trying to look at me.

"You know, you shouldn't let it out on Hisui.

I don't know the circumstances, but this has to do with me collapsing, right?

It's not her fault, I just collapsed on my own."

I strain hard and somehow manage to lift the upper half of my body off the bed.

But that's all I can manage, and I don't think I can even move an inch more.

But since Hisui is depressed, I have to force myself to act as fine as possible.

"... Honestly, getting into a fight over me.

Even if you look like an adult, you're still a child."



"But.. you completely fainted, Nii-san.

You were out for more than ten hours, and nothing like this has happened before.

If—you never woke up, what would I have done...!?"

"Idiot, don't say things like that.

Wasn't this just anemia?

.... Huh?

It's ten o'clock already!?"

"... Yes, You have been unconscious since noon."

Akiha speaks hesitantly.

"_____"

All the strength drains from my body.

I must have slept that long since then.

I wasn't able to go to Senpai's apartment and just slept the time away.
"... Man, I haven't passed out this long since elementary school.
Oh yeah, I did pass out often back then, since I wasn't used to living at the
Arimas and I was stressed out."

Everything is still woozy like I'm still dreaming.
Blanking out, I stare at the ceiling as I remember some of my past.



".... That is true.
It has only been a week since you came back here.
Nii-san, you must be exhausted."
"-Yeah.
I felt that today."
"Didn't you?
So please just rest today.
Your health is weaker than most people's, so your body gets tired unless you
take a day off sometimes."
She looks at me with a serious expression.
"....."
.... Just like she says.
I should just forget everything.
I shouldn't think about Senpai or vampires and just rest, or I'll really tire out.
Going on a rampage like that and smashing that chair, there must be something
wrong with me.
"... Yeah, like you say, I'll just go to sleep."
I lie back down.



"Really...?
You're not going to sneak out of the room later?"
"What, you don't trust me?"
.... I guess not.
Because, these past few days I've been ignoring her and leaving.



"Hisui, tell Kohaku that Nii-san is awake.
Nii-san, what about dinner?"
".... Oh yeah.
No, tell Kohaku-san I'm sorry, but I don't think I can eat right now.
I'm just going to go to sleep."
".... I understand.
Then Hisui, tell Kohaku that."
Still looking downcast, Hisui nods and leaves the room.
.... Well then.
Lying down in bed, I start to feel sleepy again.
Like this, I bet I could fall asleep in a minute..

—But, before that.
"Akiha.
There's a place like that in the garden?"



"Yes.
When we were children, we used to play there often."
"Oh.
For some reason, I don't remember it well."
.... Yeah.
I really did forget all about it.
"And one more thing.
.... It's a weird question, but when we were kids—wasn't there another kid
with us?"
"Huh?"
She tilts her head, like she doesn't understand what I'm saying.
.... I guess so.
There couldn't have been another kid.
That was just a dream.
That clearing.
Myself as a child, killed by someone who looked like me.
There's something wrong with that.
If that's true, what am I doing here right now?
"No, it's nothing.
Just talking about a dream."
"Is that so?
Then, goodnight Nii-san.
Please rest well."
"Yeah, I will."

The instant I answer her,
I fall asleep almost as if I just passed out again.
turn to **258**

258

I'm in a dark place.
Eight years since I awoke.
I've been holding my breath in darkness the whole time.
I don't even know why.
That has long since been worn away.
Here, there is only darkness.
But, I know there is something I have to do.
I don't know why I live.
But I know my purpose.
The chains which held me are all gone.
There is nothing holding me back.

All that's left,

is killing you.

Tweet.
Tweet tweet.
Chirp.
Chirp.

Is the window open?
I can hear the voices of small birds coming from the garden.

A cool breeze brushes my face.
The brilliant sunlight hits my eyes.
A quiet, delicate tinge.

A gentle, morning visit.

Morning?
It seems I slept until now after Akiha treated me.
My body still feels a little heavy.
But still I feel much better than last night.
Opening my eyes, I get up.

"Ugh....."
I feel like throwing up instantly.
I still have my anemia from yesterday?
My chest hurts and I feel sick.



"Please excuse me."

Hisui enters my room.

She must've thought I was still asleep because she seems surprised to see me up.

"Good morning.

It seems you have awakened, Shiki-sama."

"__"

For some reason,

Hisui's reaction annoys me.

"Morning.

Breakfast, right?

I'll be there soon, so just get out.

I'm going to change."



".... Yes, please excuse me."

"....."

No matter how poor of a mood I'm in, letting it out on Hisui like that.. there's something wrong with me.

"__"

I feel sick.

Even if I go to school like this, I won't be able to do anything.

".... Maybe I'll just stay home."

But, I have to go.

If I go to school, I may see Senpai again.
.... She may not be the "Senpai" I want—but she may still be there.

"—Whew."

Taking a deep breath, I settle down.
Managing to resist my dizziness, I leave my room.



"Oh, Nii-san.
.... Good, morning."
.... As soon as I enter the sitting room, Akiha greets me hollowly.
".... Yeah, morning.
You're up early Akiha."
"I am always up this early but.... Nii, san?"



".... Are you alright?
Your face still looks pale.
If you do not feel well, you can stay home—"
"No, I'm fine.
I'm better, so you don't need to worry."
I answer her quickly and pass right by.
I head to the dining room since I'll probably collapse if I don't eat.
"See ya.
Isn't it about time for school?"



"..... Yes.
Then, I will be going now."
Speaking hesitantly, she stands up quietly.

Akiha exits the sitting room.
After watching her go out of the corner of my eye, I enter the dining room.

I leave the mansion and head for school.
My limbs are still heavy, and with a feeling like I'm in someone else's body, I go down the hill.

It's seven-forty.
The gate becomes congested with students hurrying to class.

"....."
I don't think Senpai will come, but is waiting here better than waiting in my classroom?

Wait here.	turn to 259
Go to the classroom.	turn to 260
Go behind the school.	turn to 261

259

"...."

I'll wait here.

I don't think Senpai will come.. but maybe she'll come to school like she did yesterday.

—It's about time.

At about ten minutes before homeroom, the main gates are closed.

"...."

Senpai is not coming.

Sighing, I head towards the classroom with heavy steps.

turn to **262**

260

"...."

No, I get the feeling that I won't be able to see Senpai by waiting here.
If Senpai doesn't feel like seeing me, she'll leave as soon as she sees me.
I should go to the classroom first and think about what to do.

turn to **262**

261

"....."

No, I have a feeling that I won't see Senpai if I wait here.
If Senpai doesn't feel like seeing me, she'll leave as soon as she sees me.
.... If that's the case, she won't come to school through the front gate.

".... If she even comes, it'll be through the back gate."
I rush to the back of the school with this thought in mind.

—*sigh*
No one is here.
Not even students coming to school through the back gate.
.... But, I still wait for Senpai who for sure isn't coming.

The chime sounds once, telling me that the gate closes.
.... Senpai didn't come.
I should go back before homeroom starts.

turn to **262**

262

Homeroom is about to start, but it is still very rowdy in the classroom.
I take my seat by the window and set down my bag.



"Hey, mornin'.
You're looking pretty bad today."
"... Sheesh.
Everyone looks at me and says the same thing.
Do I look that sick?"
"Eh—?
.... Yeah, come to think of it, you look normal.
I don't know, but you look really down, Tohno."
"..... Down, huh?
.."
Certainly my spirits are low.
Ever since Senpai said farewell, my body has been heavy and both my mind
and body are knocked out.
"—Arihiko.
Did you see Senpai today?"



"Huh?
Senpai?
Which Senpai?"
"Which?"

.... the only Senpai we both know is Ciel-senpai."
"Shiel-Senpai?
.... Who's that?
Are there any foreign students at our school?"

—My mouth hangs open in amazement.

".... Arihiko, you...."
I manage to stammer this out in my confusion.
But, nothing else comes out.



"You okay Tohno?
Just spit it out.
As long as it's not asking for money, I'll help you out."

Arihiko is acting like he always does.
Just like always, he completely does not remember about Senpai.

".... Nah, it's nothing.
Sit down, class'll start."
"Oh, it's that time.
Well, later."

Arihiko goes back to his own seat and the teacher arrives.
Homeroom starts, followed by physics, the first period class.

—I watch it like a movie on a screen.

Senpai.. really disappeared.
Not just from my sight, but the person known as Ciel-senpai is gone completely
without a trace.
Arihiko doesn't remember her.
.... I'm sure no one else does either.
That farewell, this is what it meant.
"_____"

The movie in front of me continues playing, showing a teacher using white chalk on a blackboard.

Nothing seems real anymore.

Once classes are over and break time begins, that person will never come again, ever.

During lunch, we will never sit in the tea ceremony room and spend the time aimlessly over lunch.

.... Somewhere.

I had a thread of hope, but that is gone as well.

I've lost Ciel completely.

I still haven't—haven't done anything.

Haven't told her anything.

We spent time eating lunch together on a nice day such as today.

That was, a distant, precious dream—

I realize the number of my classmates in the room is dwindling.

—It seems it's now lunch time.

"....."

I don't feel like doing anything.

I feel sluggish, so I'll just—

Space out here in the classroom.

turn to **263**

Go eat some lunch.

turn to **264**

turn to **263**

if selected == 2

turn to **264**

263

—I'll just stay in the classroom.

Senpai isn't there no matter where I go.
No matter what I do, she won't come back—

The end of the day homeroom session is over.
My chatting classmates get out of their seats.
After staring at them blankly, I get out of my seat to go back to the mansion.
—Back to the mansion.
But it's not like there's anything if I go back.

"....."
I know I can never reach her, but I can't give up.
"Damn it—what the hell should I do....!"

Voicing my thoughts angrily, I leave the classroom.

.... I look up and find myself in front of the tea ceremony room.
Even though she won't be here, my legs walk in on their own.

"——Ha."
Of course, no one is here.
I wasn't expecting anything, but when I'm hit hard like this, my vision seems to waver.

The world starts to spin around me.

Instantly, it happens.

The ground shakes.
I think to myself it's a large earthquake—but I realize it's not the ground shaking, but the impact of my body hitting the floor that I felt.
"Ah—eh?"
I can't speak well.

Panting.

The gasping breaths can be no one else's but mine.

But I don't feel bad.

It's more like I don't feel anything, like I have no sense of feeling at all.

The sound of frantic breathing.

Even though I'm not exhausted, my throat painfully gasps for air.

I don't feel anything.

I feel like the collapsed body here isn't mine.

The sound of gasping.

Something's—weird.

As I lie breathing wildly on the floor, blood spreads out on the tatami mats—

"—Gah."

Suddenly,

a stabbing pain fills my chest.

turn to **267**

264

—Nothing's going to get done if I just rot here.

Besides, I'm not in the best health right now, so if I don't eat I'll really collapse.

"Guess I'll go to the cafeteria."

Thinking aloud, I get up from my desk.

The big rush must be over because there isn't a line.

The tables are mostly full of students already eating.

I glance around the room to see if there are any seats left.

—And then,



.... I see someone who looks like Senpai.

"—Haha."

I laugh loudly.

Mistaking someone for Ciel-senpai because there's a small resemblance.. I truly am beat.

I know I'm beat, but I can't take my eyes away from this person that looks like her.

This person that looks like her sits at the table slurping up udon.

It's curry udon too.

Even her food resembles what Senpai would eat.

"—Ah."

Actually, it is Senpai.



"—Senpai!"
I dash with all my strength towards Senpai.
"——"

Senpai looks up at me, then glances away quickly.
She's clearly avoiding me.
But, that doesn't matter.
"Senpai, why are you here....!"
I blurt that out because I can't even think of anything else to say.



"Why am I here?
I'm a student here, you know.
If I don't eat during lunchtime, I'll collapse."
"No, that's not what I mean, but—"

I don't know what to say.
My brain just stopped functioning.
She looks away from me as if she wants to complain.
"I thought it was strange for you to be here.
Just yesterday, you said farewell, so I thought I would never see you again—"



"Yes, because it was getting late.
Students should go back home at that time, yes?"
Simply.
With a straight face, she says this outrageous punch line.
"Wha—"



"Or, Tohno-kun, are you saying people like me shouldn't come to school?"
Her eyes, that were so devoid of emotion yesterday, look directly into mine.

.... A student like me?
That's what she said.
I don't know if she's really a vampire or not.
But she healed from that fatal wound quickly, so she has to be something more
than human, like Arcueid.
You just can't say that's human.
But still.
To me, she is a very dear person.
I still don't know exactly what kind of feelings I have for her.
But with just half a day.
It was only half a day, but just thinking she wasn't in my world anymore made
me feel like reality was nothing I should care for.
So—for me, she is someone I can't lose.
".... Senpai, I—"
I'd be lying if I said all of it, but I don't care.
Even if she is the same as Arcueid, Senpai is still Senpai.

That is an absolute truth I believe in.
Yes, I should say those words I couldn't say last night.

However, before that..



"Fine.
I cannot help it if you hate me, Tohno-kun.
But this is my daily life, so no matter what you say, I decided to do as I please."

She speaks directly.
"You don't have any complaints, right?" Senpai says and stares at me.
"..... Huh?"
Of course, no complaints here.
I feel like such an idiot worrying about it so much.
The strength drains from my body.
But more than that, I can't help but feel really happy.
"... Yeah, of course I don't have any complaints.
Because up until now, I was ignoring all your warnings and doing as I pleased
too, Senpai."



"That is acceptable.
Then, let's shake hands."
She sticks out her hand.
I don't know what she's thinking, but I take her outstretched hand.

Senpai shakes it up and down.



"Yes, then this is a sign that we have made peace.
Let's stay this way, okay Tohno-kun?"
She flashes a full, truly happy smile.

With that, she stands up, taking her tray as she walks away.

.... I don't know where, but she seems to be heading somewhere.

"Ah—"

After putting her dishes in their place, she exits the cafeteria.

.... That's fine.

I'm happy that she is still here at school, and that we've made up but—can I
let things go about Arcueid, and that vampire we're hunting?

I guess so.

turn to **265**

No, it does matter.

turn to **266**

265

".... Oh well.
We're finally friends again, and if I talk to her about Arcueid, she'll probably get angry once more."
For now, I have to maintain this relationship.
I watch Senpai as she leaves and then dig into my meal.

The end of the day homeroom session is over.
My chattering classmates all get up from their seats.
"—Well then."
I should wait here a bit and see what happens.
Senpai might come here, and even if she doesn't, I can go to the tea ceremony room.

It doesn't seem like Senpai is coming.
I guess I just have to go to the tea ceremony room.

My legs quickly exit the classroom and head there.

—Well, meeting Senpai means there are a lot of things we have to talk about.
About the vampire in this town, and about Arcueid.
Even though I know it will be painful to talk about them, I still get excited at the chance to be with Senpai again.
I start to breathe hard—

I dash down towards the tea ceremony room.

There isn't anyone here.
It seems like she hasn't come here yet.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.

.... I think I got too excited.
Sitting down on the tatami mat, I catch my breath.
.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*.

My heated body doesn't cool off that easily.
I painfully gasp for air.
My body is drenched in sweat, and I feel terrible.
My panting fills the air.

There's—something weird.
I've been resting for a while, but my breathing is getting worse.
In the first place, why is my body tired after only running this little distance....?

"—Gah!?"

Suddenly,
a stabbing pain fills my chest.
turn to **267**

266

".... This can't be good as it is.
Senpai, hey!"
I hurry after her.



"Oh?
Tohno-kun, fifth period will start soon you know.
You should hurry back to class."
"Idiot, the same goes for you.
Why are you out here in the courtyard—"
.... I see.
She's only pretending to be a student, so she doesn't really need to go to class.



"Hehe, that's right.
I will be late to fifth period too.
I thought I would skip the rest of class, but maybe I should seriously attend
class after all."
Senpai smiles happily.
".... Senpai?
Don't tell me, you've been taking classes....?"



"Of course I was!
I wouldn't be dressed like this if I wasn't!"
.... She seems quite angry.
"—Ha, haha."
"Hey, what's so funny, Tohno-kun!?"
"No, it's just—so happy and so angry, I knew that you really were Ciel-senpai
after all."
I really am happy.



".... Huh?
I am me, but why would that make you laugh, Tohno-kun?"
"Ah, it's nothing.
More importantly, Senpai.
About, um.
Arcueid—"



"—Ugh."

In a flash, Senpai looks up at me with emotionless eyes.

.... It's hard to speak.

It's hard to speak, but this is why I came after her.

".... Please listen to me without getting angry.

You told me to stop, but I just can't leave this vampire thing alone."



.... Uh-oh.

Her emotionless eyes seem to become tinged with anger.

".... Anyways, I can't just ignore this vampire.

But I kind of broke up with Arcueid because of yesterday, and I can't do anything without help.

So—if you're looking for this vampire, can I help you?"

.... Senpai is quiet.

She takes a deep breath.



"I refuse."
And says so with a smile.
"You refuse?
Why!?"



"Of course I would!
Tohno-kun, don't you remember almost being killed by her!?
Hunting vampires means being in continual danger of death.
I will not let you be involved in such a thing, Tohno-kun!"
"—I know, but I'm saying I'm prepared for that!
I might not look like it, but I've experienced many near-death situations.
I can at least protect myself!"



".... Um, Tohno-kun.
How can you say that?"

I will admit that you have very good athletic abilities.
Even though you have a weak constitution, your body itself is excellent."
Slumping her shoulders, Senpai says something very surprising.
"... R, really?"
The tension seems to disappear, and I blurt that out in response.
"Yes.
Tohno-kun, you got naked when you spent the night at my house.
I saw you then.
Not flabbiness, but tight muscles.
You were far away, but I thought your body was very well-formed."
"... Naked—But I, didn't get naked."
"Did you forget?"
Tohno-kun, did you not change before you entered the bath?"
Ah, that's right.
Certainly I did take off my clothes and had her wash them for me—
"Senpai, I didn't know you were someone who likes to peek at people who are changing."



"—Eh, no, that was, just an accident, I, um, happened to see it, and was a little curious, and thought maybe it would be alright.."
Her face turns a deep red as she stammers her excuses.
... I guess she's remembering what she saw that time.



"Geez, look!
No matter how good your body is Tohno-kun, ordinary people cannot stand up

against a vampire."
Oh, that's why she doesn't want me to fight.

"I see.
Then, it's no problem."
I take off my glasses.

I take out my knife.

My headache starts to flare up.
Resisting that, I cut an appropriate "line" on a nearby tree.



"Tohno-kun, that—"
"... That's how it is.
Sorry, but my eyes aren't normal.
Arcueid told me I can see the 'death' of things, and they're called something
like the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception."
Her eyes widen as she takes it all in.



"—I, see.
So it isn't the knife that's special, but it's you, Tohno-kun."
"... Not special.

It's just a side effect of an accident I had."
"—That is why she was so interested in you.
Your eyes have too much power for an individual to have."
She suddenly seems drained of all energy.



".... Certainly, with that kind of power, it is more dangerous to leave you alone Tohno-kun.
And even if I did refuse, you would probably search for the vampire yourself anyway, and he—couldn't afford to ignore you."
"Senpai...?
You mean—"



"Yes.
I do not want you to be involved, but it's too late.
I cannot deny that you have any connection to this any longer."
"So, it's okay if we go after this vampire together?"



"Yes.

I am prepared to do that."

Senpai extends out a hand.

But I can feel it's different than when we shook hands in the cafeteria.

"___"

Of course, I take her hand.

Our hands meet briefly, and the handshake is over.



"This makes us a team now.

I am counting on you Tohno-kun, so please count on me.

From now on, the two of us will hunt down the vampire in this city."

She speaks with a gentle smile.

As I nod wordlessly, the chime sounds, signaling the end of lunchtime.



"After classes, please come to the tea ceremony room.
We can talk more then."

Senpai runs towards the school building.
I'm late too, so I run as well.

The end of the day homeroom session is over.
My chattering classmates all get up from their seats.
I usually just linger until the chaos has passed over, but today I stand up with everyone else.

I quickly walk out of the classroom.
I head for the tea ceremony room.
A lot has happened between Senpai and me, but it really turned out well.
I'm glad to be able to help her, and I can be more assured than I was fighting by myself.

But, more than that—I'm excited just to have the chance to be with Senpai once more.

I breathe hard—

I dash towards the tea ceremony room.

There isn't anyone here.
It seems like she hasn't come here yet.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.

.... I think I got too excited.
Sitting down on the tatami mat, I catch my breath.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*.

My heated body doesn't cool off that easily.
I painfully gasp for air.
My body is drenched in sweat, and I feel terrible.

My gasping fills the air.

There's—something weird.
I've been resting for a while, but my breathing is getting worse.
In the first place, why is my body tired after only running this little distance....?

"—Gah!?"

Suddenly,
pain fills my chest.
if cielregard ≥ 9
turn to **268**
 turn to **267**

267

"Tsss, ah.....!"
 My body falls with a crash.
 "Ah, ah, ah.....!"
 My entire body is convulsing.
 It, hurts.
 My chest, my chest is, burning,,,,,!

"—,—,aaaah.....!"
 My mind is drifting away.
 My fingers claw at the tatami mats in pain.
 I pull and rip at the mats.
 But, it doesn't stop the pain.
 "Hagh, gah, ghaaaaa....!"
 Pain.

Pain.

Pain.
 Such pain, is frightening.
 "U, ugh, kuaaaa.....!"
 I can't bear it.
 If it lasts another second,
 then, it would be better, just to die—!

"Fine.
 I'll grant your wish, Shiki."
 "—Eh?"
 I lift my head off the floor.
 Before that.

Before that.
 My pain disappears.
 I don't feel pain anywhere.
 I don't even feel heavy.
 I don't even feel.. alive.
 "—"
 I try to say something, but my throat doesn't move.
 There's nothing.
 No pain,

no sensation,
not even, freedom.

"—!"

I don't know what's going on, so I try to get up.

My body doesn't even twitch.

It's not that I'm tied down, nor is it that my entire body is numb.

If I have to give a metaphor,
it's like my body is already dead, but my mind is mistakenly still lingering in
my body.

"——"

Of my five senses, only my sight is still alive.

.... the room is dark.

It's night outside already.

"—"

I can't move my face, so I move my eyes.

"—Oh?"

I thought you had completely disappeared, but you're awfully persistent, Shiki."

I can hear a voice I shouldn't be able to hear.

"—!"

I glance around the dark as best as I can.

There,

I see something I don't know about.



14 0

"—"

Who is that?

I've never seen him.

I've never seen him—but I feel like, I've known him from a long, long time ago.

"What's this?

How mean of you, Shiki.

You've been looking for me for so long and when I come out, you don't remember me?"

With an amused laugh, he stares at me with blood-shot eyes.
 "___"

My mind, the only thing still working, freezes.
 He didn't say it yet,
 But—I know he is a vampire.
 That he is the "Serpent" Senpai and Arcueid are looking for.



14 0

".... No, that's wrong.
 Certainly I am the vampire known as the Serpent of Akasha.
 But to you, I'm not the Serpent, but rather, SHIKI, right?"



14 0

—Man, how cold of you.
 You make me look stupid for thinking about you all these eight years."
 —?
 SHIKI?
 Eight years?
 What is that—?
 "—Did you really forget Shiki?
 Was the old man's hypnosis that good or—did you lose your memory after
 dying once?
 Shit, either way, what a waste!
 Do you understand!?
 These eight years, I've waited these eight years!"

I've waited for this instance where I could steal everything from you, the one who killed me!

But what use is it now if you don't remember!?"

"___"

What is, he saying?

I—killed him?

"That's right!

If you've forgotten, then remember.

The three of us were always together, right?

In the Tohno mansion.

Akiha and you, and I would play in the garden together.

Before I became like this eight years ago that day!"

—I, can't remember.

Certainly—it seems like there was another kid with us back then.



14 0

".... You can't remember?

And we were such good friends too."

He grits his teeth.

His whole body quivers with emotion as if he was brimming with vexation.

"—Geez.

Was I the only one in pain?

That's terrible, Shiki.

I was always locked away by my old man, but I could always sense you.

Haha.

Because I was using your 'life'.

Even though we're not connected by blood, we're connected by our souls."

"That's why you—I wanted you to have a terribly gruesome end."

How unfortunate, he says.

"What I wanted to say is this, Shiki.

I'm your brother.

But you and Akiha seem to have heartlessly forgotten that."

"___"

My.... Tohno Shiki's, brother.....?

"—If you've forgotten, then there's nothing to talk about.
Your painful death is the goal of this body... of Tohno SHIKI.
I've gone along with that this long, but it's time to lower the curtain.
Even for me—to have two bodies with one life is not very efficient."
The voice nears.
I'll be killed like this.
.... No, I say I'll die, but maybe I'm already dead.
My arms and legs can't move.
My eyes, my ears, my nose don't work.

That's why there isn't even any pain.
I am killed so vaguely that I don't even realize it.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **431**

No.

turn to **1**

268

"Tsss, ah.....!"
My body falls with a crash.
"Ah, ah, ah.....!"
My entire body is convulsing.
It, hurts.
My chest, my chest is, burning,,,,,
"—,aaaaah.....!"
My mind is drifting away.
My fingers claw at the tatami mats in pain.
I pull and rip at the mats.
But, it doesn't stop the pain.
"Hagh, ghah, ghaaaaa....!"
Pain.
Pain.
Pain.

Such pain, is frightening.
"U, ugh, kuaaaa.....!"
I can't bear it.
If it lasts another second,
then, it would be better, just to die—!

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Before that,
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I don't feel pain anywhere.
I don't even feel heavy.

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"—"
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If I have to give a metaphor,
it's like my body is already dead, but my mind is mistakenly still lingering in
my body.

"—"

Of my five senses, only my sight is still alive.
.... the room is dark.

It is already night outside.

"—"

I can't move my face, so I move my eyes.

—, —, —,

Something.

I hear something nearby.

But I can't really hear anything.

It seems something is wrong with my ears since I can't even hear my own breath-
ing.

Just,

I feel like I can dimly hear a pained voice calling my name.

"—Oh?"

I thought you had completely disappeared, but you're awfully persistent, Shiki."

I can hear a voice I shouldn't be able to hear.

"—!"

I glance around the dark as best as I can.

There,

I see something I don't know about.



14 0

"—"

Who is that?

I've never seen him.

I've never seen him—but I feel like, I've known him from a long, long time ago.

"What's this?"

How mean of you, Shiki.

You've been looking for me for so long and when I come out, you don't remember me?"

With an amused laugh, he stares at me with blood-shot eyes.

"—"

My mind, the only thing still working, freezes.

He didn't say it yet,

But—I know he is a vampire.

That he is the "Serpent" Senpai and Arcueid are looking for.



14 0

"... No, that's wrong.

Certainly I am the vampire known as the Serpent of Akasha.

But to you, I'm not the Serpent, but rather, SHIKI, right?"



14 0

—Man, how cold of you.

You make me look stupid for thinking about you all these eight years.

Hey, don't you feel the same way Ciel?"
He says that while looking at me.
"—!"
Senpai.
Is Senpai here?
But where?
I can't see her, nor do I sense her presence.
If she is here, then why isn't she doing anything about him?
In front of me.
Right now, our enemy is in front of me.....!



14 0
"You shouldn't ask Ciel something she can't do that much about.
Right now, she isn't in a condition to really show herself in front of others.
Well, in the first place—I don't think you can really see anything right now."

Another sound.
Something.
I can hear the sound of something tenaciously, almost madly clawing the tatami mats.



14 0
".... Hey, didn't I tell you not to pay attention to that....!?
Look Shiki, the only thing you should see is me.
The only thing you should hear is my voice.

The only existence you should acknowledge is mine.
The only one that lets you live is me.....!
Finally, at last, I've met you here, so don't think of anything other than me—!"
—A sharp sound.
From the hand of the man before me—this vampire called the Serpent, I hear
a sickening sound.
And then, I hear a faint, pained gasp.

—no, ku-n
I can't quite make it out.
"—Did you really forget Shiki?
.... Was the old man's hypnosis that good or—did you lose your memory after
dying once?
Shit, either way, what a waste!
Do you understand!?
These eight years, I've waited these eight years!
I've waited for this instance where I could steal everything from you, the one
who killed me!
But what use is it now if you don't remember!?"
"—"
What is, he saying?
I—killed him?
"That's right!
If you've forgotten, then remember.
The three of us were always together, right?
In the Tohno mansion.
Akiha and you, and I would play in the garden together.
Before I became like this eight years ago that day!"

—I, can't remember.
Certainly—it seems like there was another kid with us back then.



14 0
"... You can't remember?"

And we were such good friends too."
He grits his teeth.
His whole body quivers with emotion as if he was brimming with vexation.
"—Geez.
Was I the only one in pain?
That's terrible, Shiki.
I was always locked away by my old man, but I could always sense you.
Haha.
Because I was using your 'life'.
Even though we're not connected by blood, we're connected by our souls."
"That's why you—I wanted you to have a terribly gruesome end."
How unfortunate, he says.

That sound again.
The sound of someone clawing at the tatami mats.



14 0
".... What an annoying woman.
I stole this life.
This was mine since eight years ago!
You think I can just give it back to Shiki?
In the first place, I would die without it.
Ciel, are you telling me to die?
How cruel.
Just be quiet and stay dead right there."

Another piercing sound.
The clawing noise stops.



14 0

"—Hmm, where were we?

Ah, that's right.

We were talking about how deep our bonds were.

What I wanted to say is this, Shiki.

I'm your brother.

But you and Akiha seem to have heartlessly forgotten that."

"___"

My.... Tohno Shiki's, brother.....?



14 0

".... Well, I'll keep it at that.

Shiki, you've heard from Ciel about me, right?

A reincarnating soul.

A vampire that returns to life after it dies."

His eyes narrow.

His mood turns different from before.

His soft, almost human personality starts to disappear.

"This is my eighteenth reincarnation.

You know about my requirements for the new reincarnating body, right?

A family that carries power within its blood and has influence in society.

There's no need to say what fits those requirements.

During the seventeenth time—my previous self chose the Tohno bloodline.

Choosing the Far East was just a whim.

Maybe I just wanted a change of scenery from my previous incarnations."

"I was killed by the princess and my eighteenth self was reborn as Tohno SHIKI. I had no complaints about his body. His intelligence and development advanced rapidly and the weather in this country was comfortable."



14 0

"—But, that was as far as it went.

'The Serpent'—Well, Roa made a mistake in that the power of the Tohno bloodline was too great.

Akiha and I, we're only half human after all.

The other half is as much a monster as Roa, which those of the Tohno line must resist throughout their lives.

But, some people are weak, which stops them from resisting.

It is the duty of the head of the Tohno household to kill those who succumb to this inversion and are no longer human but—"



14 0

"To sum it up, I lost.

Normally, Roa wouldn't awaken until I become an adult.

But—since you and I are connected, you can understand, right Shiki?"

"Two wills cannot exist in one body.

It's possible if the other personality stems from a person's will, but a completely different will cannot enter.

What happens when it can't?

Simple.

The vessel, the brain, cries out.
Headaches occur.
Suddenly, without reason, without meaning."
"___"
Head.... aches...., don't tell me—



14 0
"That's right.
Your headaches have flowed from me to you.
Didn't I say so earlier?
I am using your life.
We are two people using the same life.
So—if I can move like this, then you end up as immobile as a corpse.
What kills a will is another will.
My will to live is stronger than yours."



14 0
"... Well, but you are still amazing.
I'm using your strength trying to kill you.... But that's strange, why are you still alive?"
As he tilts his head, he really does look perplexed.
.... I'm the one who wants to tilt my head questioningly.
Why is he using my life, and what in the world is he?
My mind is brimming with questions.
"... It seems you still don't understand, Shiki.

I told you, the only thing that can kill a will is another will.
In other words, killing the will does not kill the body.
The Roa inside of me was another will besides my own.
Eight years ago that summer day.
Roa killed the will of Tohno SHIKI."

"__"

Like I said, I'm Tohno Shiki, right?



14 0

"Yeah, you are Tohno Shiki.

A true impostor who became the eldest son of the Tohno household in place of me, who succumbed to inversion."

"__"



14 0

"Listen up.

.... I even liked you Shiki.

Me and my old man didn't get along either, and you were a good guy.

We really were good friends.

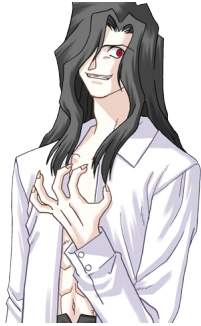
Of course I loved Akiha too.

But I couldn't allow her to grow more attached to you."

.... w, wait.

What, what is he saying—

".... Yeah, I remember that feeling from that time.
Everything turned crimson and I started to hate everything.
The voices of the birds, the leaves on the trees, everything became bothersome
to me, and I destroyed whatever I came across.
"Eight years ago, Shiki.
In that courtyard, Roa killed my will.
Normally, it would have been all over when Roa awoke.
But the Tohno family is special.
As soon as my reason was lost, my body succumbed to inversion.
I guess it's what you call an inversion impulse, but you do what you always
thought was taboo.
I guess deep in my heart, I was jealous of you.
In the end, I killed you because you were there."



14 0

"Man, there never was a pleasure greater than that time!
Piercing your chest with this hand and feeling your heart as you coughed up
blood.
I thought I was born again!
It felt so wonderful, I stood there wanting to play with your dying body even
longer, but I was pushing my luck.
While I was eagerly trying to rip out your heart, someone informed the old man.
That bastard, he rushed over and killed me!
Me, his real son!
Shit.
I guess cruel fathers do exist.
A father like that can't complain when he's killed by his own son, right, Shiki!?
Well in the end—I felt pretty good."

—Blood.

In that courtyard.

The bloody corpse of a child.



14 0

"—Yes, you finally remember Shiki....!

That's right, I'm the one who killed you!

But you lived through it and took over my place as Tohno Shiki....!

My old man, that bastard—he locked me away like trash in an underground cell after killing me.

Because he couldn't have it known that his eldest son was dead, he took you, his adopted son, and replaced me!"

I——was adopted?



14 0

"Yeah.

The old man used you after your miraculous recovery.

Fortunately for him, we were kids.

We didn't doubt the fact that we were actual brothers—and you were pretty screwed up from that incident.

My old man deceived you and Akiha with a simple lie and made you forget about me, the true Tohno SHIKI!"

—No one, was there.

After that accident.

Why was I all alone like that?

In other words, that means—

"Yes, it's because no one needed you.

Well, in order to protect the image of this family, you were treated as Tohno Shiki.

—Yeah, but I did need you.

Because thanks to stealing your life, I was able to survive when my old man killed me.

For that, and only that, I thank you, Shiki."

.... I don't understand.

So why?

Why am I still alive then?

"Who knows.

I'd like to know that myself—but, it really doesn't matter.

Because you're going to die here anyway."

Saying that,

He—Roa stands up slowly.

"—Your painful death was the goal of this body.... of Tohno SHIKI.

I've gone along with that this long, but it's time to lower the curtain.

Even for me—to have two bodies with one life is not very efficient."

The voice nears.

I'll be killed like this.

.... No, I say I'll die, but maybe I'm already dead.

My arms and legs can't move.

My eyes, my ears, my nose don't work.

—There is nothing left.

I don't want to just accept what he says.

.... But I don't care about anything anymore.

My eyes that can see "death", because my body is already like a dead body.

In the end, I was just an impostor.

And on that summer day eight years ago, I was already dead—

"—Tohno-kun—!"

.... But, I can hear a voice.

A sobbing voice.

An incredibly sad, almost shouting voice.

—Did my eyes get used to the darkness?
Or, did my will force my eyes to open?
I finally grasp what it was this bastard was sitting on while he gave his long speech.

"—Damn, you regenerated again?"

Roa's legs stop.

He turns around toward Senpai.

"Didn't I tell you to stay dead?"

You really are an eyesore."

With a piercing sound,

Roa takes one of Senpai's swords and thrusts it into her body.

"Aug.....!"

Her pained voice.

Her nails dig into the tatami mat.

Clawing, and clawing.

Her nails are almost peeled off, and her breathing is like a combusting engine.

But still.

".... Tohno, kun.....!"

Clawing and writhing.

She frantically continues to call out my name as I lie there collapsed like a cut puppet.

".... Annoying woman.

Didn't I tell you no matter how many times you call out his name, Shiki won't hear you?

Right now, he's just a living corpse.

He can only hear my voice.

.... No, not even my voice.

He only knows my will because of the connection of life between us.

How can you not understand that fact?"

More piercing sounds.

The swords pierce Senpai's body.

"Ts—!"

Her body twitches in response.

Even still—Senpai continues to call out my name, as if she was a broken record.

Tohno-kun.

Tohno-kun.

Tohno-kun.

With her pain-filled, sobbing voice.

"_____"

I could hear it.

.... I definitely heard it from before.

But I probably didn't listen to half of what she said.

Even as she spit out blood.

She kept calling out to me who was just lying there like a thrown-away, broken doll.

"—An immortal body?

How foolish.

If you had this much power you could have defeated me."

The sound of stabbing again.

"But for such a guy you laid down your swords.

I'm disappointed, Elesia.

Thinking a piece of trash like you is actually my daughter makes me sick....!"

Thrust.

Thrust.

Thrust.

As if he's lost his mind, he keeps stabbing Senpai over and over again.

Her defenseless back.

Her shoulders.

Her legs.

Her throat.

Her bloody arms outstretched towards me.

Mercilessly stabbing.

Despite this.

Her lips keep on calling my name.

.... I can't hear it.

I can't hear it anymore.

It's not that my ears are no longer working, but her throat is already dead.

But she still keeps calling out to me.

As if she is wishing I'll be able to move if she continues on like that.

"_____"

To be honest,
I don't understand why she would go that far.
"—St—"

I'm almost going insane.
Watching her be stabbed for my sake makes me almost insane.
"—op."

But, I don't move.
No matter how frustrated I am, I can't move.
No matter what I do—no matter what I do, this body doesn't move....!



14 0
"—Wonderful.
A simple hatred that is almost lethal.
It was just an instant, but I felt your will directed against me.
You may want to kill me—but this isn't something to be mad about."

He pulls out a sword.
Senpai's body sinks toward the floor.
Before that can happen, he pulls her up by the hair.



14 0
"Look boy, let me teach you something.
No matter how limitless the regenerative ability of a vampire is, it lasts only

when they are alive.
Their immortality is only as long as they are alive.
Once they die, their powers of recovery cease immediately.
Vampires are only difficult to kill, not immortal, but—"Splat.
A black sword springs forth from Senpai's chest.
Her chest breaks apart.
Roa impales her heart from behind.
"Tsaaah.....!"
The throat that died moves.
Spewing forth with blood, her body writhes in agony.
"But—the amazing thing about this woman is.
Even if she dies completely, it isn't her but time itself that restores her body.
Do you understand?
After she dies, without anyone's help, even her own, this world itself returns it back to normal in order to rectify a contradiction.
For example—just like this!"
Roa's amused voice lifts in delight, and at the same time.
With a sickening sound,
a black sword springs out from Senpai's forehead——

Her head.
From behind.
With that thin, sharp sword.
While she was living, her brain was pierced—
"Hyahahaha, isn't it natural for a pierced brain to bring death!?
Look Shiki, she's flailing about like a fish on a hook!"

Full of amusement,
Roa loses himself in amusement.
"But look.
Even though the light in her eyes faded, her heart is starting to beat again.
.... Shit, what a fucked up life.
It makes us, the ones living with only one life, look foolish."

He swings his arm.
As if she really was a piece of trash, Senpai's body slams into the wall.

That was it.

That's enough.
I don't care what happens.
I don't care if I go crazy.

I don't care if people call me a murderer.
I'll

"See, I'm cute compared to her.
This is a monster that comes back from nothing even if you kill every last bit
of her, every last cell of her.
Is killing something that doesn't really die really a sin...!?"

Heeheehee!
A high, ill-sounding laugh.
Roa throws the sword in his hand towards Senpai as if he was playing darts.

Splud!
That is the signal.
With that, all rational thought splinters away.

"_____"
I stand up.



14 0
"Bastard, how can you move—!?"
"____"

There's no need to say it.
The one with the stronger will uses the life, right?
Then—up until now,
I never thought this strongly about anything before.



14 0

"This can't be!
Am—am I weaker than you...!?"

Roa.
I'm going to kill you.

In the darkness,
My knife crosses against his claws.
His movement is almost blindingly fast.
But, my body follows him.

My arms move as if they belonged to someone else.
My eyes persistently, accurately look at just his "lines".
My entire body burns.
My brain feels like it is on fire.
Just like—when I first saw that golden-haired princess of the vampires, my body
is like something else.
"Keh—!"

Roa springs away.
One of his legs.
His upper right arm.
His left collarbone area.
I have already cut through the "lines" there.
The price is my right arm.
Roa first took my arm holding the knife.

So, if he destroys my remaining left arm, it would mean my loss.

In this situation, losing means certain death.



14 0

"—I don't believe it.

A match for me, a vampire.

.... your eyes, they are perhaps more appropriate for me than this body."

"—"

"If you don't realize it, then that's fine.

This story is a boring one not even worth talking about."

With a shuffle,

Roa increases the distance between us.

".... It's a very old story.

The last of a fool who obsessed over living forever.

Just wondering who it was that actually won that."



14 0

"—To live forever.

That was the miracle that Roa dreamed about.

I decided that an everlasting cycle of rebirth is eternity.

But that is no different than a continuation of a single bloodline.

If there is such a thing as a power that Roa, who accepted death, can earn at the end of his reincarnation—instead of the power that steals the lives of others like vampires.

.... I just thought the power you have, the power to see death, was an appropriate end for me."

His body lowers a bit.
"I just had that ridiculous idea!"

His arm reaches out.
I slice through it instantaneously.



14 0

"Gah—!"
Roa runs away.

I follow after him.
His movements are many times faster than mine.
But, that doesn't matter.
Just killing.
I don't care about anything else.
In reality,
I've already killed one of his legs, and his speed is reduced.
As he runs away,
He braces his hand against the wall and glares at me.



14 0

"Shit!

—Do you intend to fight yourself, Shiki?"

"____"

"Don't be silent....!

You're me.

I am SHIKI, and you are Shiki.

We are the same type of being.

It doesn't matter if that bastard Roa existed or not.

.... I was originally a creature eating human flesh.

As a child, I had this urge to eat human flesh.

Even though that has changed to drinking blood, if Roa hadn't entered my body, I would've certainly become a human eating monster."

"—But, that's the same for you.

Like I enjoy eating human flesh, you enjoy killing others!

Remember the urge you had when you first saw that woman, the ecstasy of killing with that knife!"

"____"

The urge I had when I first saw her—

That was—when I killed Arcueid.



14 0

"Yeah, that's right.

No matter how much you pretend to be a good person, that's something you can't excuse.

You wanted that woman and did the thing that got you the most excited.

What can you call that other than being a killer?

You and I are the same—we are both abnormal people living in the same place."

"____"

.... Shut up.
If I hear his voice any longer, I'll go crazy.



14 0
"Yes, the same.
So why are you trying to kill me?
It's just that Roa entered me!
If Roa entered you instead, our positions would've been reversed....!
But you're going to kill me!?
You're just hurting yourself....!"
Roa screams.
These past eight years.
The monster who made his lair in this city, feeding off the blood of countless
people screams.
"—I'm not you.
You're just a killer."
"Idiot, you don't understand, do you?
I thought so too, at first.
That I'm sane.
That even if Roa's will is here, I thought it would be fine.
But, it wasn't.
You're the same.
You, like me, will end up as a killer, Tohno Shiki!"
He laughs.
"Isn't that right?
I know that's inside you too.
You know, that impulse is not something that flows from me to you.
Just admit it, killer.
Your inversion impulse is nothing more than what you wish for....!"
"——"

I ready my knife.
I don't want to hear his voice any longer.
I focus my gaze on him.



14 0

All that's left is to slice them.
 "... I see.
 You're trying to kill me, Shiki."

He pulls back.
 That's his final move—

"But, don't you ever wonder which one of us was really killed?"
 "—"

Suddenly,
 I halt my attack.
 "Yes, in the end, both of us died in that place.
 So—I might be the one killed by Roa, and you might be the Tohno SHIKI taken
 over by the Serpent, right?"
 "Hey Shiki.
 Didn't you ever think about it this way?
 That you just have not realized it, but you were already insane a long, long time
 ago!"

——That,
 That can't be true—can it?
 "Ha—!"

I get kicked into the wall from behind.

"Gah...!"
 What is this?
 Being distracted by such stupid words.
 My remaining left arm becomes shredded and painted in blood.
 I can't move it one bit and my knife clatters to the floor.

And—in front of me, Roa stands with his furious, blood-shot eyes.



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"—Idiot, that's not it at all.

I'm Roa.

You had that inverse impulse because you were connected to me subconsciously."

He grins.

Roa takes a step forward.

"Bye Shiki.

It's been fun!"

With that, he swings his knife-like claws downward.

"_____"

There's no pain.

Just the sound of splashing blood.

"You bitch—!"

Roa's voice rings out.

In front of me, Senpai's body takes the full force of Roa's claws.

"_____"

I can't think of anything.

No, there's no need to think.

I scoop up my fallen knife with my mouth.

My teeth tighten around the hilt.

I dash into Roa, almost like I was collapsing into him.
I slice the "line" running diagonal from his shoulder.

"Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

He screeches like some demonic bird.
Running away from Senpai and me, he jumps directly into the window, and falls out.

The glass shatters and he falls outside.

"I won't let you get away—!"

I run to the window.

"Damn.....!"

But of course, I can't jump from the third floor.

Under the moonlit night.

As if he didn't receive a fatal wound by just having his "lines" of death cut,
Roa runs away like a beast.

"—"

.... I can't chase him.

From here, I can't chase him.

But, it seems like there's no need for that.

Under the moonlight, Roa's running figure stops.
There isn't one person outside, but two.
One, the beast-like figure of Roa.
One, the sublime, white figure of the vampire princess.

—The fight lasted only an instant.

Roa screams as he dies and fades to ash.

"—Ar... cueid."

She stands there composed and looks up at me, then disappears before my eyes.

"Hha—Ahh."

.... I'm exhausted.

My body collapses on the floor.

Leaning against the wall, I sit down.

"Ga—"

The knife falls from my mouth.

From my elbow down, my right arm is shattered, twisted and split.

Roa's claw marks remain gouged into my left shoulder and my left arm hangs,
unmoving.

I feel like a squid or an octopus with both my arms just hanging there.
"... Sen.... pai."
I look down the hallway.
I look down to where Senpai had collapsed when she protected me earlier.

And there,



"Sen—pai, your wounds are okay?"
"Yes.
A wound like this will heal quickly."
I cannot make out her face since it's dark.
But I thought it looked paler than usual.

"Gah—!"

—Thump.

Headache.

—Thump.

This headache,

—Thump.

because I still see these "lines",

—Thump.

I have this headache.



".... Tohno-kun?

What's wrong?"

"Nothing—it's just—my head, hurts."

I manage to reply as I bear the pain.

My hands.

If I could move them, I could hold my head and maybe calm down.

But, they don't move an inch.

"—Probably because you saw too much death.

.... Tohno-kun, you were pushing yourself too much.

Trying to defeat Roa by yourself was being reckless."

".... It's not reckless.

You were the one being reckless.

Why—did you let him do that to you?"

"He just.... caught me off guard...."

"—Idiot, I, heard all of it."

.... I heard how Senpai threw away her swords to protect me.

".... Going through that just to protect me, was stupid."
Going through that, and just calling out my name, there's something wrong.
".... I suppose.
No matter what I did, you revived by yourself.
I guess I was.. just doing useless things."
"____"
Not—that's not it at all.
".... But, I heard you."
"Tohno-kun...?"
"Your voice, I know I heard it.
You kept calling my name—so it made me realize that I was still alive."

So,
what saved me wasn't my desire to kill Roa.
But it was just.. Senpai's voice.



"Ghh—!"
"Tohno-kun—!?"
Your wounds, do they hurt?
Please wait, I'll heal them...!"
".... No, it's not, really my arms...."

This headache is terrible.
The pain isn't coming from outside, but feels like it is shooting out from inside me.



"... It's a reaction from seeing too much 'death'.
 Suddenly overworking your brain like that probably caused too much blood flow."
 "... I, know that, but."
 "Look, your power is very dangerous to you, Tohno-kun.
 Seeing that which should not be possible to see puts a huge strain on your body, and your blood vessels will not be able to handle the flow of your blood.
 Seeing the 'death' of something close to you... like humans shouldn't be a problem, but seeing the 'death' of things that don't naturally have a 'death' is extremely dangerous."
 "... Yeah, that's okay though Senpai.
 Roa... is now dead.
 I don't have to see any more 'death'—"

"So, I don't have to see them.
 ... Senpai, do you know where my glasses are?"



"—Huh?"
 "My glasses... without them, I see these lines all the time.
 If I don't have them, I'll go crazy... they're probably in the tea ceremony room, so could you please get them for me?"
 "Tohno-kun, what are you saying?
 Your glasses are definitely—"



"... I understand.
I'll go get it right away, so please close your eyes.
If you use them much longer, it will be really bad for you."
"—Yeah, I'll do that.
Thanks."
I close my eyelids.

After only a few moments,
I can feel Senpai's fingers on my face.
"Here you go, it's all okay now.
Please open your eyes, Tohno-kun."

"Ah..."
The lines of death are now gone.
My headache disappeared as I closed my eyes—and I can now see Senpai's face
clearly.
"Thanks Senpai.
Now it's back to normal."



"What are you saying?
There's still some work before you return to normal, so please keep still."
She says that and sits down besides me.

"—Hmm, these wounds really aren't that bad.
I'll be able to heal them right away, so please hold on just a little longer."

Senpai carefully reaches out and holds my twisted arm.

"Nn—"

There's an almost tickling, warm sensation.

My cold arm begins to warm up again, and the numbed pain returns after that.

"Oww."

"If there's pain, it lets you know you are alive.

Now, let's take care of your left arm."

With a light step, she moves over to my left side and puts her hand on my shoulder.

"... Amazing, my left arm is already healed!"

"It isn't amazing, this is my normal profession, so it is only natural I can do that."

.... Her normal profession?

Is she a nurse or something?

Well, I don't think a nurse could heal a shattered arm like that in a matter of minutes though.

"... Hey Senpai."

"—Yes?"

"Senpai, just what kind of person are you?

Come to think of it, I don't really know anything about you, Ciel-senpai."

The fingers over my wounds suddenly stop.

But, it was only a momentary reaction.

"I'm the same as you Tohno-kun.

I also, have not had this body from birth.

I also was close to death... no, I am someone who died and came back to life.

And it just became a habit for me to come back to life."

Is she joking?

She gives a pained smile.

"... What do you mean?

If you die, you normally can't come back, right?"

"What I am saying, is that I was not normal."

"Not normal... like, Arcueid?"

"....."

She doesn't respond.

Is she done?

Senpai stands up.



"There, all finished.
How is it, can you move?"
"....."
I lift my hands and move them around.
My fingers can move at will, and there is only a little pain.
"Yeah, no problems.
.... Thanks, Senpai.
I'm just always helped by you."
Senpai doesn't answer, she just smiles.
"Then, let's go back.
There's no need to be here any longer."

Senpai starts to walk away.
.... Picking up my fallen knife, I follow her out of the school.

.... The two of us walk to the gate under the moonlight.
Senpai doesn't say anything.
Looking at her back, I think reluctantly about things I don't want to consider.

Roa is gone.
Arcueid is also gone.
Their purpose was to eliminate Roa, so Senpai has no reason to stay here any longer.
"....."
.... This is serious.
I knew it all along—but I never thought this would come so quickly.

I want Senpai to stay here.
I want her to stay—but it isn't just my problem.
"....."
I steal a glance at Senpai's face.
What,
What does Senpai plan on doing...?

And then,

Senpai suddenly stops walking.



"Tohno-kun."

She looks directly at me with eyes devoid of any emotion.

".... What is it, Senpai?"

"About what we were talking about before."

"Before—about how you're like Arcueid?"

She nods.

Still staring me in the eye, she starts to speak.

"Tohno-kun.

If I was a vampire, what would you do?"

"Wha—"

My mind goes blank.

I don't know what she wants to hear.

Still—

".... Senpai is Senpai.

Even if you are a vampire, that wouldn't change."

Her expression remains the same.

Just for an instant,

I think she smiled sadly.

"I am the same as her.

Just like she is a vampire who has had no experience, I just might be a vampire who has no sense of self."

She speaks as if it was a monologue.

"....."

I'm at a loss for words.

.... I don't know what to say to that.

So, just like before, I can only say what I really feel.

".... That's fine."

"Eh?"

"I said, that's fine.

Even if you are a vampire, I still like you Senpai."

"Wha—"

Senpai stands there in complete amazement.
Realizing what I just said, I blush furiously and look away.
"Anyway!
That's all I want to say.
C'mon, let's go back, Senpai!"
Trying to hide my embarrassment, I pull myself to reality.

Go back.
Where is Senpai going to return to?
"——"
I suddenly feel terrible.
I'm afraid to look at her face and can't turn around.
"—Tohno-kun."
From behind me, Senpai's voice calls out.
Her quiet, emotionless voice.
"... What is it?"
I answer without turning.
"You know why I came to this city, right?"
"—Yeah.
Unfortunately, I know.
You came to kill Roa."
"... Yes.
But, I haven't told you why yet.
I really meant to tell you in the tea ceremony room, but things ended quickly."
"... That's true.
It was kind of disappointing.
But, wasn't you chasing Roa part of your duty in the Church?"
"... No.
The place I'm in doesn't really have much work.
Even when there is, it's only a few times a year I get called there.
So this time is my own judgment.
Not because of the orders of the Church, but I came here through my own will."
"... Your, will?"
"Yes.
I came here only because of my own circumstances.
I want to die as a human, so I've been chasing Roa.
He is the reason my body has become like this."

.... wants to die.
Wants to die?—
"... For that sole reason, I have kept on living like this.
But, that is all over now.
.... These past five years.

Was it a long time?
Was it a short time?
I don't know."
Her emotionless voice stops.



She jumps directly in front of me.
"So I have to thank you, Tohno-kun.
My work here is done now.
All that's left is for me to take responsibility for all my actions."
"... Senpai, you mean—"
She's going to leave?
"Thank you so much for everything until now.
It has been a long time since I've been this happy.
So, let's finish with a handshake."
Senpai puts out her hand.
I wordlessly accept it.

A handshake where we only grip our hands tightly.

"Then this is where we part.
Um, even though I'm not going to be here, please stay friends with Inui-kun.
I wanted to be a student like you and Inui-kun."
"And, and please don't take off your glasses too much.
Strange power has a tendency to attract strange things.
You were fine this time, but I do not know what will happen the next time."
"... Yeah.
I know, someone taught me that a long time ago.
In the first place, I've only recently began to take them off with everything that
has been happening."
"I see.
That is a relief."

Her fingers pull back.
With the handshake over, she pulls back slightly.
"Then this is farewell.

It would be nice to meet again someday."
"__"

I can't reply.
I couldn't even stop her.

I return to the mansion.
It's past nine at night.
.... An hour past curfew.



"Ah, Shiki-san.
You have come back late today."
She might have been in the sitting room until now, as Kohaku-san comes out
to greet me.
"I'm back.
Sorry about that."
"No, as long as you are back safely it is okay.
I will go make dinner, so please wait in the sitting room."
"Ah—is Akiha there?"

.... Not because I broke curfew—but after hearing what Roa said, I don't think
I can talk to her now.



"No, she is now in her room, so you can be rest assured."

".... No, that's not it, but.... hey Kohaku-san.

In this house, did you ever hear of me and Akiha having another brother?"

"I don't think so.

Why do you ask, Shiki-san?

Did something happen?"

"—No.

I just heard something about me maybe having a brother, and I wasn't really sure."



"You and Akiha-sama are the only two siblings.

I have worked in this mansion since I was a child, so it can't be a mistake."
She smiles happily.

"—Eh?

Kohaku-san, you've been working here since back then....!?"



"Yes.

We were just apprentices, but Hisui-chan and I would help around the mansion.
It did happen a long time ago, so it is natural that you do not remember."

Is she getting nostalgic?

She continues to smile as she heads back to the sitting room.

"....."

Just what was he saying?

"—I guess it doesn't matter anymore."
Muttering to myself, I walk towards the sitting room.

.... I lie down in bed.
Pulling the sheets over me, I stare blankly at the ceiling.

—It's over.

I still have my wounds and my memories, but it's all over.
Now I can return to my peaceful life as a high school student.
No need to think about killing or being killed anymore.
Just forget.
Forget about everything, and from tomorrow—

"——"
.... I can't.
There's no way I can forget.
"Damn—it."
But, I can't do anything about it.
From the beginning, Senpai and I have always lived in different worlds.
"....."
.... Just go to sleep.
I'll be able to take it tomorrow.
I'll sleep now, so I can calm down—

.... I can't sleep.
My chest is still bothering me.

"..... Oh well."
I choose a book of English sentences to read so I can drift off to sleep.

1976.
I was born as a child of a shopkeeper from a remote countryside village in France.
I looked like my mother, who was oriental, so I grew up feeling a little out of place wherever I went.

But all the townspeople were great people and would greet me with bright smiles.
To be able to face those smiles, I lived my days honestly and positively.

Helping my dad, going to school, falling in love like normal.
That was my life and I never doubted my happiness.

It was truly a very short time until my sixteenth birthday.

That came suddenly to my body.

Such as when I would be playing with children.
For no reason, I wanted to snap their necks.

Such as when I see a poor beggar by the road.
It seemed so funny, I wanted to stab him with a knife.
.... There was no reason for those feelings.
I could not talk to anyone about it, so I started to lock myself away in my room.
My dark passions came forth from within me.
It's not like I had two personalities or someone came inside me.
rst of all, I don't believe in such unscientific things.
My feelings are the small destructive passions everyone has.

Like yelling at your dad after coming to wake you up after you stayed up all night.

Like feeling angry when you walk along a rainy street and a car passing by splashes you with water.

Such small feelings I feel for an instant solidify inside of my mind and take over.

That's why.
I knew I would do something terrible if I stayed like this.

I could only lock myself away in my room.
I could only not see anyone and do nothing.
.... That way, I wouldn't hate anyone, and I wouldn't have those feelings.

—But, that was a mistake.
Imprisoned in my room, my mind was grinded away, and I eventually passed my limit.
That day.
After I was completely replaced, what I thought about was how thirsty I was.
I took my weakened body out of my room.
My parents ran to me, as I came out the room for the first time in few months.
Greeting my worried parents with a smile, I killed them.
It really was quick.
With my weakened body, I bit into their necks and sucked their blood.
After sucking out their blood and life, I stood back up.

"—Has it been a hundred years?
This body is very fascinating."

That was my voice that I had never heard before.
My lips shaping a smile, what used to be me hugged itself.

—What kind of coincidence was it?

Originally, the family I was born into was one that I choose beforehand.
But my previous self was destroyed by the "princess" before I could decide that.
I could only fill the condition that the one I'm reincarnated into has a physical potential, resulting in an imperfect reincarnation.
As a result, I was born into a body with a high potential, but into a normal family without any high social standing.
It will be difficult to take over this town without having people notice.
But, I was not disappointed.
In fact, I was filled with happiness.
Certainly it would take a long time for a normal family to gain power.
Seizing power socially would be difficult with this self.

But in exchange for that inconvenience.
I found a truly excellent body.
Until now,
I had always tried to balance the body and the family standing.
Consequently, I was never able to find a truly excellent body.

However—the body this time carries many more Magic Circuits than any of the bodies before—and this body had the same potential as my original.
I cursed my calculating self up until now.
Things like social standing, they could always be set up later.
But the quality of the body is something natural that cannot be added later.

After my seventeenth reincarnation, I finally realized that truth.

My self that finally awoke naturally started to control the people around me like water soaking into the ground.
Not in the wild manner I had done so previously, but rather in a way that didn't spill as much blood.
The reason is horribly cruel.
The reincarnated will called myself cannot exist by itself.
All I can do is tell the will "I want to do that."

I am the one moving this body, but the method, the process was determined by my mind which has grown along with this body.
In other words—my will is from the body I am reincarnated into, but my consciousness still remains from my original self.

I have my consciousness, and I have my past memories.
As I sleep, I could only dream of nightmares which I would do myself.
I still remember.
The sensation of biting into my parents' throats.

I took the townspeople who always greeted me, one by one.
as if melting them slowly from their feet, I continued to humiliate and mutilate
their souls.

Within just a month.
I held their lives in my fist and played with them however I wanted to.

I wanted to go crazy.
I wanted to entrust myself completely to insanity.
But if I did that, I would commit even more sins than before.

That's why I kept on.
Trying to preserve my sanity, I tried to minimize the damage I did.

If there was such a thing as a relief..

It was that the end to this nightmare arrived quickly.

That white woman came on a night with a crimson moon.
I didn't know.
But I knew who she was.

After our fight, the white vampire princess killed me.
Since I had already prepared myself for the next reincarnation, I once again reincarnated, leaving my corpse behind.

The white princess left and my body was taken to the Vatican.

turn to **269**

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"——!"

I wake up with a start and kick off my sheets, sitting up in bed.

"Wha——"

I wipe the sweat rolling down my face.

Maybe I saw a bad dream.

I am drenched in sweat.

I don't remember seeing a nightmare.

.... Was it because of that book I read?

I think I saw something a little bad, but I don't remember what it was.

.... Well, a famous doctor did say it is the nature of dreams to fade away, so I shouldn't try so hard to try to remember it.

—Knock-knock.

A polite knock sounds.



"—Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"Mm, morning."

I return her greeting and stand up.

Hisui places the uniform in her hand onto the desk and shuffles quietly back towards the door.

"Please head to the dining room once you are finished changing."

"Yeah."

Thanks as always."

After giving an affirmative answer, Hisui exits the room.

"..... Huh?"

After seeing her face I completely forgot what it was I was thinking about.

".... Geez."

Was I always this forgetful?"

Tilting my head in curiosity over myself, I change into the uniform.

The knife is on my desk.
The knife from my adopted father that I have always been carrying in my pocket
these past few days.

—I probably won't have to use that anymore.

".... That's right.
They're gone."
Arcueid, Ciel-senpai.
The horde of beasts called Nrvnqsr, and the vampire called Roa.
All of them are no longer here.
"Maybe what I forgot was something about that."
There isn't anything waiting for me at school.
Senpai is gone—so it probably won't be fun anymore.
But, that was how I lived my days up until now.
I only lost something that I gained recently.
Everything I had before then still remains.
—*sigh*
If I think about it that way, I can manage without Senpai.
I could never forget her, but I could manage.
Fooling myself with that, I open the door.

Then,
let's go to school like I've always been doing—

It's seven-fifty.
The gate at the front of the school is crowded with students.
Since it's Saturday, there are bright faces everywhere.

"....."
I wade through the sea of sunny faces as a cloud of gloom.
No matter what I tell myself, the fact that Senpai is gone weighs heavily on
my—
"—Eh?"
I can't believe my eyes for a moment, but there's no doubt.
Ciel-senpai is walking towards the school.
"Se, Senpai—!?"
I shout her name without even thinking and she turns towards me.



"Oh, Tohno-kun.
Good morning."
She gives me a bow.
"Good morning?
Didn't you go back....!?"



"No.
I would never go back leaving you here."
She speaks with a brilliant smile.

Never go back leaving me here?

Even though there are students all around me, I feel myself blush furiously.
"—Um, that is...."



"Yes, what is it?"

"Can I, take those words, for what they sound like?"



"Yes, I leave it up to your imagination, Tohno-kun."

She nods and gives a radiant smile.

"——!"

I can't breathe.

Not because of the pained tension I had felt up until now, but because of the burning happiness that now wells up inside of me.

If no one was around, I'd shout out "Alright!" at the top of my lungs.

"Senpai!"

I grab her hand.

"So, you mean you won't go anywhere, right!?"

You'll stay here at school forever, right!?"



"Um, if I stay at school forever, I'll become an old lady.

I am a third-year student, so I have four months left until graduation."

"But, you'll stay here, right?"

You won't leave like you said yesterday, right?"



"Yes.
I'll stay till the end now."
"Alright—!"
I let go of her and manage to stop myself.
I want to run around the ground for many laps.
As if I won a lottery, I'm feeling really high.



No, this feels far, far greater than that.
I feel like laughing out loud.
I can't even bear to just stand here and do nothing.



"Tohno-kun, you should hurry or you will be late."
"—Oh.
That's right.
Later Senpai!

See you at break!"

waving a hand to Senpai, I go towards the school building.
Smiling to myself, I run as fast as I can to class.

—First period is over.

I have ten minutes until next class.

"—Alright."

The instant I raise myself to go look for Senpai's classroom,



"Huh?"

Where are you going, Tohno-kun?"

—Senpai comes here ahead of me.

"Ah, nowhere, I was going to see you.

I always wait for you, so I thought I'd go see you this time."



"I see.

That makes me very happy, but you don't know my class, right Tohno-kun?

It's third year class B, please remember it."

"Oh really—so you really do take classes.

Well-done, well-done.

I see you do more than just drink tea in the tea ceremony room."



"Yes, I do manage to follow classes—"



"Hey, wait a minute Tohno-kun!

You think I'm really like that!?"

"—Uh."

I can't really deny that.

"Ah, sorry.

But Senpai, you said there were no members of the tea ceremony club, but I thought that it might have never existed in the first place."



Senpai stands there and grows quiet.

".... Huh?"

Don't tell me there really wasn't?

It's just an unused Japanese-style room?"



"—Hmm.

It seems like I do not understand what you're talking about."

Ciel-senpai turns her gaze out the window and stares blankly.

"... No, that's fine.

No matter what you've done, you're not a bad person.

So I don't think you'll cause anyone trouble, but can your power of suggestion do such a thing?"

"I already told you, I don't know what you mean, so I can't answer that."

"___"

Still in my seat, I stare up at Ciel-senpai.

The silence lasts for about a minute.



"... You're pretty persistent, Tohno-kun."

"Not really, I was just thinking how blue your eyes were."

"....."

Ciel-senpai gives a sigh as if admitting defeat.



"I said it already, but the power of suggestion isn't that convenient. Suggestion isn't so much able to change your perceptions of things as it is more like making you look away. So even if I told you that you really liked curry when you hate it, it would not work."

".... Really?"

"So you can't make someone do what they don't want to?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's still many ways to make you eat curry, Tohno-kun."

"For example, I wouldn't tell you that you really like curry."

"Instead, I could tell you that you would die if you didn't eat curry—"

"I get it, I would eat it even if I hate it."

".... I see, then you can do anything with that."



"No, it is really difficult to set the stage for such a thing as the resistance would be great."

"There are many people that are difficult to forcibly use suggestion against, so all I can do is to suggest something like, 'Do not doubt what I say.'"

".... Yeah, Arcueid said something like that too."

"—I see."

"By the way, Senpai."



"Yes?

What is it?"

"Yeah.

Senpai, you really love curry, don't you?"



Ciel-senpai just smiles and does not answer.

Her slight expression makes it impossible for me to see if she is denying it or affirming it.



"Well, it is about time.

I'll see you again after classes are over, but is your body okay, Tohno-kun?

Your arms are working fine?"

"Yeah, it doesn't even hurt anymore.

I can come to school thanks to you."

I bring my hands together and give her a bow of thanks.

"I see, then how is your headache?

It seemed like it really hurt yesterday."

"My head is okay too.

Besides, if I have my glasses on, there's no problem."

"I see.

Hearing that makes me feel much better."

Ciel-senpai heads towards the hallway.
She suddenly stops as if she forgot something and turns around.



"I forgot to ask.

Tohno-kun, are you feeling well?"

"—Yeah, I'm fine.

Thanks to you, all my troubles have disappeared."



"That's good.

If anything strange happens, then please do not hesitate to tell me.

Here's my phone number."

"—Eh?"

She hands me a slip of paper with her phone number on it and quickly leaves the classroom.

".... Her.... phone number?"

I stare down at the paper in surprise.
I'm sure she told me this because she's really worried about last night, but....
"... This is lucky, but is it good that things are going this smoothly?"
.... It's pitiful if I say so myself.
Maybe it's because I'm a small town person by nature, but I can't honestly be happy about my good fortune like this.

After homeroom is over, the classroom suddenly erupts into its usual chaos.
It's not quite noon yet.
It's always like this after Saturday class.
The students rushing back home or eating in the classroom before they go to their club activities mix together and create chaos.

Standing up from my seat, I prepare my things while waiting for Senpai....
and then,
I'm not sure when he even came to school, but Arihiko appears with a suspicious smile on his face.



"Let's go play, Tohno."
.... Without anything else, he tells me what he wants to do.
"... You seem pretty direct today.
Did something bad happen to you?"
"Oh, nothing.
I just wanted to hang out with my good friend for no reason."

.... It's all too suspicious.
"No way.
I bet you were laid off by someone or something like that.
I'm going home with Senpai today, so I don't have time to spare for you."
"Senpai?
You mean Ciel-senpai?"
His eyebrows lift in surprise.

"... Yes, but.... Arihiko, you remember about Senpai....!?"
"Whatd'ya mean?"

She's who I'm after, how could I forget her?"
Arihiko makes his proclamation as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

"....."

I see.
Since Ciel-senpai came back to school, everything is back the way it was.



"Oh, it's Senpai!"
Arihiko points happily to the door.



"Thanks for waiting.
Good afternoon, Inui-kun."
Ciel gives a succinct bow.
"Shall we go back now?
Or maybe go to the tea ceremony room?"
"Let's do that.
If we leave now, we have to part at the gate.
I want to talk to you some more, so while we have tea, we can—"
"—!?"
Someone punches me unexpectedly from behind—



"Hey."

"..... It's you, Arihiko?"



"Yeah, it's me.

I'm not one to open my mouth about these things very often, but since that was too much back then, I'll tell you."

Arihiko looks at me and Senpai with sad eyes.



"?"

Ciel-senpai and I look at each other.

"Um, you two.

It is a Saturday, so why do you use it like that?

There are far more fun places to go to than the tea ceremony room!"

With a greatly exaggerated movement, he points out the window.



"... Um, where?"
"Outside the window."
Well, I think he's talking about outside."
I answer Ciel-senpai's question.



And then,
Arihiko whacks me again.



"Tohno, are you really trying to make a fool of Senpai?
Look, it's Saturday.
It's still before noon.
And we're students!
So why can't you come up with an idea such as going into town with all these conditions!?"

"—Mph."

Idiot.
I've thought about that already.
I did, but—



"?"

I steal a glance at Ciel-senpai.
I get the feeling that rather than roaming rowdily around the city, she would feel more at ease just sitting quietly in a park or something, so I can't ask her that.

If I did ask her to go hang out in town, I think she would probably say no—



"I see.
Then shall the three of us have fun?"
"..... Senpai?"



"Isn't it alright?"

I don't have to worry about anything anymore, and I bet it'll be fun to go with the three of us."

"Ah—yeah, if you want to, then I'd be happy."



"Yes.

Inui-kun, you're okay with this too, right?"

"_____"

He simply nods up and down.

.... I bet he didn't expect things to turn out this way.





"Then it's decided.
Um, what shall we do for lunch?
Shall we eat at our houses or the three of us together?"
"Hm, we always eat at school, so let's put the money for lunch to play.
Me and Arihiko are pretty poor, right?"



".... Uh.... I, could maybe borrow some money from my sister."

.... It seems Arihiko really wants to go out and eat with Ciel-senpai.
"—How about Senpai?
Is there some place you want to eat?"



"No, I don't.... usually eat in front of others.."
"I see.
You eat more than normal, so I bet it'll be expensive."



"Th, that's not it!
What are you saying, Tohno-kun!?"

.... I just recalled the data I collected during our lunches in the tea ceremony room until now, and just gave a personal opinion.



"I agree with Inui-kun.
Let us all go out to eat.
There is a place by the movie theater called Ahnenerbe that I heard has great strawberry pie."



"Oh, you know your places, Senpai!
The owner of that cafe is a master of Italian cooking!"

.... Why does Arihiko know so many rumors and useless information?



"Then let's meet in front of the movie theater in half an hour.
Is that alright, Tohno-kun?"

"—Um.

You know it takes half an hour to get to my house, Senpai."



Senpai already starts to disappear down the hallway.

"Yeah, be late, Tohno.

If you want to, I wouldn't care if you didn't come till tomorrow!"

Arihiko stands up and dashes out of the classroom.

.... This all worked out rather strangely.

".... Oh well."

I still get to hang out with Ciel-senpai.

Bag in hand, I also rush back to my place.



"Oh?
Shiki-san, you're back early today, aren't you?"
"Yeah, I'm back Kohaku-san.
I'm in a hurry, so see you later!"



"Shiki-sama?
You have returned?"
"I'll be leaving right away, so don't worry about lunch!"

"Alright, fifteen minutes!"
I set a new record from my school to back here.
Throwing my bag on my desk, I change out of my uniform.
After that, I fly out of my room again.

From the mansion to the main street is farther than the mansion to the school.
To be honest, it's not a distance I can make in fifteen minutes.
She knew I lived uphill, but she still made that impossible deadline.

"—Damn, maybe she might be a bit mean."
I grumble as I shoot down the stairs.

—Throb.
"—Eh."

—Throb.
Suddenly, without warning.

—Throb.
Everything turns red.
"—Shiki-sama!?"
.... I can hear Hisui's voice.
I hear fast footsteps.
.... Hisui seems to be in a hurry more than usual.
"Shiki-sama, are you hurt!?"
I can hear her voice, but I can't see her.

—Throb.
I just have this headache.
"Calm down Hisui-chan.
Falling down the stairs just means a little bruises here and there, so there is no need to call a doctor.
But his body is very hot.
He may have fell down the stairs due to a fever, so please get his bed ready."
"I understand.
Nee-san, about Akiha-sama..."

"That's true, if it doesn't turn out to be a big deal, we don't have to tell her. There is some medicine in my room, if you please."

Hisui disappears with quick footsteps.
I—



"Shiki-san, are you conscious?"
"... Kohaku.... san?"
"Yes.
Shiki-san, you took quite a tumble down the stairs.
Fortunately you do not have any serious bruises, but you seem to have a fever.
You seem like you were going somewhere, but please just rest for today."

Kohaku-san puts her hand on my shoulder and manages to make me stand up.
"Nah—I'm fine, I don't need to rest.
I ran all the way here, so I was just out of breath."



"That won't do!
How can you say that with such a pale face, looking like you'll throw up?
I was told by your physician to monitor your health closely.
I can't let you take such risks."
"But, I made a promise—"
"If you want to tell them you can't make it, I can go tell them."

If you keep pushing yourself, I'll have to take out my syringes and give you shots."

.... As if she wants to keep me here, she stands in front of me.

—Throb.

I have a headache.

I—

Kohaku-san is in the way.

turn to **270**

It's like Kohaku-san says.

turn to **271**

—Even still, I can't break my promise.

"Tss—!"

I feel like spikes are being driven into my head.

Bearing that, I manage to walk forward.

"You mustn't, Shiki-san!

If you go out like that, we will get in trouble with Akiha-sama!"

Kohaku—san, tries, to get in my way, to stop me from leaving.

"—"

.... I can understand why.

Even if I go out with this headache, I might very well collapse somewhere.

That's why she wants me to stay here.

But I won't listen.

".... Shut.... up."

Why?

For no reason at all, I thought.

I thought that if I didn't see Senpai now, I'll never see her again normally.

"If you made some sort of promise, I will go and tell them for you, so please go back to your room and—"

"Shut up!

I'm telling you to get out of my way....!"

"Ah—"

I violently push her away and dash towards the door.

"You shouldn't, Shiki-san....!"

I ignore her voice and resist the urge to puke as I run.

I just run.

As if chasing down my promise with Senpai,

as if running away from something I can't see,

I propel my body down the street as it is on the verge of collapse.

—The street is full of people.

The hot sunshine.

The saturation of activity is painful to watch.

Why do they do this?

Like unthinking insects, ones with intelligence still group up without any theory to solve.

"——"

.... Everything gets hazy.

Is it because of this nausea?
I feel like I.. am not me.
"—Sen, pai."
I look around me.
Where is—she?

My mind is dizzy and I can't find her.
—Still can't find her.
With all these people,
I can't find her.
All this randomness.
Nothing,
Feeling like everything is pointless,
a dizziness that....



"Oh, Tohno-kun.
I'm surprised you actually made it here on time."
"Sen.... pai?"

—It's the first time I've seen her in regular clothes.

".... Um, I was being a bit mean earlier.
Sorry for making you run here and be exhausted like this."

—She gives a quick bow of the head.
"—"

That's silly.
She shouldn't worry about that.

"Oh, Tohno-kun—!?"

.... Uck.
I feel sick.

But I'm glad I came.
I got to see Senpai in her normal clothes, so I have to bear this dizziness, and we have to have fun together—

—When I wake up, I'm in a bed.
"Huh—?"
Moving my head, I look around me.
This is my room, and it's night outside.
Hisui is here, and she must have been watching over me as I slept.



"Shiki-sama, have you awoken?"
"... Hisui.
Why am I here?"
My arms and legs don't respond.
Moving just my neck, I look at Hisui.
"Shiki-sama, you collapsed outside.
Your friend from school called here and carried you back to the mansion."
"—Oh.
That means, I"
Pushed aside Kohaku-san like that, and lost consciousness.
"... I'm an idiot.
I can't possibly face Kohaku-san now."

Another headache arrives along with my regret.
... My body seems to have gotten a little better, but my headache doesn't go away.
"... Hisui.
What, happened to me?"



"Please relax, Shiki-sama.
It does not seem to be serious.
Nee-san has prepared some medicine, so if you seem to have a headache, please
drink it."

Hisui carries a silver tray with some water and the medicine Kohaku-san
prepared.

But, I don't feel like drinking it right now.
"... Yeah.
If it gets terrible, I'll drink it.
Please put it over there."
turn to **272**

271

—Certainly, if I went to see Ciel-senpai with this headache, I'd just be a bother.

"... That's, right.... I haven't even had a chance to rest from last night.
I guess I pushed myself a little."



"Then please rest.
Shiki-san, can you walk by yourself?"

"Ah—no."
It seems impossible right now.



"That's right, oh, Hisui-chan!
Carry Shiki-san to his room."



"Eh—Nee-san, but—"



"Hisui-chan!
Shiki-san is sick, are you just going to abandon him like that?"
"Ah—"
"I will allow it for today, so take him to his room."



".... Yes.
Sorry for saying such selfish words,"



"As long as you understand, it's fine.
Did you find the medicine?"



"... Um, you had too many medicines, is this the fever medicine?"



"Ahaha, that's used for something else.
Shiki-san is still conscious, so we don't need to use medicine that would stabilize
him."



"It seems his fever is from being too tired, so I'll make some medicine.
Hisui-chan, please take care of the rest."



Kohaku-san swiftly disappears towards the west hall—where her room is.



"Shiki-sama, I will take you to your room."
With an "excuse me", she lends me her shoulder.

Thanks to Hisui's help, I manage to get up the stairs.
On the way, even more than my terribly throbbing headache, Hisui's incredibly embarrassed face burns into my memory.

—In the end,

I lie down in bed, drink the medicine Kohaku-san made, and entrust her to pass on my message to Ciel-senpai who is waiting at the movie theater.

"..... Gah."

My headache doesn't stop.

As if in exchange, my body did seem to cool down.

turn to **272**

272



"Thanks to the goodwill of Makihisa-sama, Nee-san received training in pharmacy.

Until Makihisa-sama passed away, she also was consulted in maintaining his health."

Hisui's face returned to its usual lack of expression and tells me things I didn't even ask about.

"Gh.....!"

Sharp pain stabs through my head.

Even though I'm in this much pain, she seems to be tending me without even batting an eyelash.

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

I'm the one in pain, not her.

If she acted like she was in pain or had a clouded expression, it would be troublesome.

"Gh—!"

"Shiki-sama, are you still in pain?"

"—Sorry Hisui."

"Yes, what is it?"

"You're an eyesore, so please leave.

I can't sleep with you here."

She looks over at me as I lie in bed.
A soft gaze that tells me she's worried.

.... To be honest, it's annoying as hell.
"I'm fine.
It's not that bad, that's why I'm resting here by myself.
Go back to your room, Akiha."



"—Nii-san, what are you saying?
It's already dinnertime you know.
I came here to tell you that."
.... Dinner....?
Oh, is it that time already?
But I'm not very hungry, and I don't feel like eating anything.

"I don't have an appetite, so I'll skip dinner.
I'm fine, so go away for today.
I don't feel good."



".... I understand.
Please get your rest.
But Nii-san, if you are awake, please turn the lights on in your room.
Your eyes will go bad in the dark."
"—I'm fine.
I can relax this way."

"....."

Even though her eyes tell me she wants to say more, she leaves the room.

"....."

I'm so irritated.

Hisui's reactions, Akiha's worried eyes, they all seem to treat me as something fragile.

Isn't this like always?

It's not like I'm coughing up blood or sucking up blood, so why can't they just leave me alone?

—Grit.

In the darkness, I hear myself grinding my teeth.

"....."

My nerves are fraying, I know that.

If I stay awake like this, I'll become completely depressed.

I'm not tired, but I have to sleep.

I go out to the main street.

The date has changed about two minutes ago.

The dead of night on Sunday.

No one is walking the streets.

Did I mistake the time?

If I started walking around an hour earlier, I wouldn't have had to work so hard.

Dragging, walking.
What makes this dragging sound,
isn't my walking,
but something else.

The time was right.
If I started walking an hour earlier, I never would have been able to walk like
this.

Dragging,
With one hand gripping the woman's hair, I continue to walk.
Long hair.
Because she looked like Akiha, I chose this woman.
Not her face, but I liked her hair.

I let go of her hair.
Unconscious, she collapses to the ground.
I did not kill her.
I didn't eat dinner, so I want to make it as appetizing as possible.
I've heard somewhere that the blood of the dead is cold and tastes terrible.
I have no complaints about her unblemished neck.
Gripping my knife in one hand, I draw my mouth closer—

After seeing that dream, I wake up.
"——!"
I wake up from my sleep and my mind starts to clear.
My throat is horribly parched and my entire body feels excited.
"What—kind of dream...."
was I watching?
I can't believe it.
Leaving at night, knocking a woman I don't know unconscious, and dragging
her to an alley.
That's just plain wrong.

Because it was in a dream, it is okay, but I'd have to be crazy to do that in reality.
My panting fills the room.
I have to catch my breath.
Rubbing my eyes, I take a deep breath.
... After that, I don't think I can go back to sleep.
Turning on the light, I decide to read a book until morning.

My eyes, gradually,

get used to the dark.

"———Wha..."

I gasp.
This isn't my room.
A back alley.
Knife in hand.
In front of me,
lies an unconscious woman I don't know.

"Ha———"

What,
What am I doing?

Isn't this a dream?
Isn't this what I dreamt before?

"———"

It has to be a dream.
Because I've never even wanted to do such a thing before.
Attacking some woman I don't know,
running my knife along the "lines" all over this supple body,

wanting to see the red, red blood coming from the chopped pieces, no way—no way?

Yeah, there's no way I want to do it.
But, for no reason—I'm thinking, that I have to do it.

Take her apart.

Take her apart.

Take her apart.

Take her apart.

If I do that,
I can be released, and become something unable to be bound by anyone.

Come to think of it,
there was someone that said something like that before.

—You're the same.
You, like me, will end up as a killer, Tohno Shiki.

"..... up!"

—Just admit it, killer.
Your inversion impulse is nothing more than what you wish for—

"Shut.... up!"

But, what is this?
Just what is this?
Why am I doing this?
And even after realizing this, why am I still trying to press my knife against her neck?

If this isn't a dream, and if this is reality,
doesn't that mean I'm crazy, like I thought earlier?

My fingertips shake crazily.
It's just sliding a simple metal piece, but I can't do it.
pant *pant* *pant*
I'm scared.
If I don't lock the door quickly, it will come in.
Some unknown thing will come in.
"Gh.....!"
I have to, lock the door.
I can't let it come in this room.
I can't let it leave this room.
But why?
I don't know.
I don't know, but I continue to try and lock the door wildly.

I try all night to lock the door.
But no matter how long I try, I can't even lock the door.

That's when it hits me.
I've been crazy all along.

if cielregard >= 11
turn to **273**
turn to **274**

It becomes morning and I finally manage to lock the door.

pant *pant* *pant*

My beast-like panting fills the room.

My head hurts.

It seems I dropped my glasses somewhere.

Seeing the "lines" all over my room, I feel nauseous.

pant *pant* *pant*

I feel so sick, I cut all of them I see.

I feel just a little better.

Only during the instant I cut things apart does my heart feel at ease.

But the more I cut, the thirstier I get.

pant *pant* *pant*

I know what I'm thirsty for.

I'm thirsty for everything.

Everything I see is pissing me off.

They look miserable.

I can't forgive that they are living meaninglessly even though they have death built in them.

Why don't they die?

They all have an end they can't escape, so why do they still exist like that?

If it will end anyway—where is the meaning in existence?

Everything I see is ghastly.

But if I close my eyes, all I can remember is the sensation of killing.

The sensation of a hard, unbloodied blade,

softly uniting with pulsing flesh.

There can't be a greater stimulation for a human than that.

A terrible sensation that almost makes me want to bite my tongue off.

It doesn't matter if it is a positive or negative feeling.

Especially in my case.

Because my first was the the best beyond all belief, it's hopeless.

.... Arcueid.

The pleasure I got from severing her body into seventeen pieces still burns in my brain and won't go away.

Those beautiful body parts.

The appearance of a human, but with a tenacious life that surpasses far beyond that of people.

The enjoyment I had from the killing has faded.
That time, I didn't kill Arcueid, but I must've killed my brain instead.
pant *pant* *pant*

I want to destroy everything,
kill everything.
I know that's wrong, but I don't think I can hold it in.
My body is filled with excitement; I'm about to go insane.
"Shiki-sama, are you awake?"
"—!"

I can hear Hisui's voice from the other side of the door.
"Shiki-sama, it is not good if you keep the door locked.
If you are awake, please open the door."
"..... Op.... en.....?"
Open the door?
Open the door and let Hisui inside?
—You must be kidding me.
If that happened, I don't know what I would do.
Like this—if I stay alone like this, lying in bed with the curtains shut, I can
stave off the desires that threaten to overtake my mind.
That's why, if Hisui comes in here, I'll—
"—Shut up!
Leave me alone!"
I scream at the door.
"... Shiki-sama?
Are you not feeling well?"
"I said leave me alone...!"
I'm fine, so just leave me alone...!"
If she—came in this room, something I couldn't take back would happen.

"....."
After a deep silence, I hear her footsteps.
Quietly, she walks away from the door.
pant *pant* *pant*

—Now it's safe.
Thinking that, I calm down just a little.
I should—I should just read a book to unwind.
"H—uh?"
The book that was always beside my pillow isn't there.
The book written in English I definitely can't read it, but it was a way to
kill time.
I search but I can't find it.

I can't find it.
I frantically try to remember what the cover looked like.

But I can't.

pant *pant* *pant*

"The book—the book."
Come to think of it,
Why did I even put that book by my pillow?
I don't know.
I don't even remember bringing it here.
I don't know where I brought it from.
In the first place—did that book even exist?

.... Really, you may have not realized it.
.... I remember Roa's irksome voice.
That book—those contents.
The book I read when I couldn't sleep.
Was it maybe just a dream of mine dreaming that I was awake and couldn't sleep?

.... But you were already insane a long, long time ago....!
Roa said such words.
DREAM—dream.
But, I don't see those kinds of dreams.
In the first place, I don't have that strange knowledge inside of me.
There's no reason for me to have that dream.
That, isn't my dream.

You may have not realized it.
"—Shut, up."

pant *pant* *pant*

Then what is that?

Since when the hell did I start having dreams that belonged to another person?

You and I are connected, Shiki.

"—Shut up, you're dead."

You're already dead, you bastard, so stop your incessant calling out.

I'm—different from you.

I'm not a killer.

I'm just confused by all the after-effects.

Since Ciel-senpai came back, I won't allow myself to go mad over something like this.

—Yeah, I also thought so at first.

Even if this Roa came in—

"—I told you to shut up....!"

pant *pant* *pant*—

.... I breathe heavily.

The sunlight pisses me off.

My throat.

My throat is so dry, I'm about to go insane.

"Shiki-sama....!"

What are you doing, Shiki-sama!?"

I hear Hisui's voice across the door.

.... I can't even answer.

Words.

I can't even remember, my words.

What fills my head,

What fills my head,

is just lust.

I want to violate, violate any female.

I start to lust crazily.

"Uwaaaa—!"

My head.

I bang my head against the wall.

Over and over, as if I was trying to split it.

But still—the thought of me slicing apart Hisui doesn't disappear from my brain.

Bam.

Bam.

I hit my head on the wall.

As if she was trying to compete with it, Hisui knocks harder on the door.

turn to **277**

274

Day 11

It becomes morning and I finally manage to lock the door.

pant *pant* *pant*

My beast-like panting fills the room.

My head hurts.

It seems I dropped my glasses somewhere.

Seeing the "lines" all over my room, I feel nauseous.

pant *pant* *pant*

I feel so sick, I cut all of them I see.

I feel just a little better.

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pant *pant* *pant*

Then what is that?
Since when the hell did I start having dreams that belonged to another person?

You and I are connected, Shiki.
"—Shut up, you're dead."
You're already dead, you bastard, so stop your incessant calling out.
I'm—different from you.
I'm not a killer.
I'm just confused by all the after-effects.
Since Ciel-senpai came back, I won't allow myself to go mad over something like this.

—Yeah, I also thought so at first.
 Even if this Roa came in—
 "—I told you to shut up....!"

pant *pant* *pant*—

.... I breathe heavily.
 The sunlight pisses me off.
 My throat.
 My throat is so dry, I'm about to go insane.
 "Shiki-sama...!
 What are you doing, Shiki-sama!?"
 I hear Hisui's voice across the door.
 I can't even answer.
 Words.
 I can't even remember, my words.
 "Shiki-sama, please open up, Shiki-sama!"
 I hear her voice across the door.

.... Her voice almost sounds like it was in another language.
 So far away.
 "Ah—gh."
 This isn't good.
 I, don't have the confidence to face Hisui like usual.
 "Shiki-sama, did something happen, Shiki-sama.....!"
 She knocks on the door.
 ".... Shut.... up...."
 I desperately place my hands over my ears..
 " "

.... I can't hear Hisui's voice anymore.
 Just like this,
 I have to lock myself up in my room so I can't see Hisui, Akiha, or Kohaku-san—

It's now ten in the morning.
 Hisui gave up and went back.
 Akiha and Kohaku-san came and took turns knocking but I ignored them.

Twelve o'clock.
 I'm hungry.
 But, I'm still fine.

I pull the sheets over me and hug my shaking body.

Two o'clock.
.... I'm dying of thirst.
I've lost all sense of time.
It feels very calm.
But as if I was taking stimulants, my body wants to rage around.

Four o'clock.
.... More knocking.
A name being called out.
Whose voice is that?
Whose name are they calling?
I can't tell.

ve o'clock.
It slowly starts to get dark.

Six o'clock.

Seven o'clock.

Eight o'clock.

—Someone, comes by.

"Shiki-san, I've brought you dinner.
You haven't had anything since this morning, so you'll collapse you know."

Kohaku's voice.
She knocks on the door.

"Geez, if that's how it is, I'll get you to at least eat."
A rattling sound.
Not knocking, but the sound of a lock opening.
"Huhuhu, time to use my secret weapon, the master key!"
"—Ah."

The lock unlocks.
.... The door opens.
It's too late.
Even if I send her away, she's already come inside.

—But still.
I can't even do the action called "eating food".
It will get me too excited, and it will smash the remaining "Tohno Shiki" within
me to pieces.
.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

I breathe hard.
Somehow.
I have to resist it.



"Shiki-san, I'm coming in.... wh, what happened?"
Still smiling, she looks in surprise at the room lying in shambles.
.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

Her cute face devoid of fear.
Her completely unguarded, defenseless figure.
Her red hair—and her delicious looking skin.
"Shiki-san...?"

This is strange, how did all of this happen?"
Still smiling, she draws closer to where I lie curled on the bed.

—————Hurry.

No.

—————Hurry.

No.

—————Hurry.

Stop it.

—————Hurry.

Shut up.

—————Hurry.

I don't want to.

—Hurry.

I

"Run—away.."

Using the very last vestiges of my will, I manage to let those words out.



"Eh?"

I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you, could you please say it again, Shiki-san?"

But it's working against me.

Concerned, she draws closer to my bed.

To my/TO MY,

body/BODY,

her face/HER FORM,

draws closer/INVITES ME,

in.

Her white fingers touch my shoulder lightly.
 Her fingers pulsing with blood.
 Her light body warmth.
 Small fireworks explode in the back of my head.

"Kya—!"
 I hear a scream.
 My hand wraps around her throat.
 "Hwa—ha, a, h—"
 My breathing is out of control.
 What.
 Am I.
 Trying.
 To do?
 "Shi... ki, sa—"
 Her voice cuts off.
 Not caring, I grip harder.
 Grip.
 The bones in her neck creak.
 "St,o—!"
 A small tearing sound.
 Her fingers dig into my arm.

She must be getting frantic, being on the verge of death like that.
 Her nails push through my clothes and into the meat of my arm.
 "Ah—ch."
 Pain.
 Well, not as much pain as Kohaku must be feeling.
 But blood flows.
 It runs down from my arm and onto my hand grasping Kohaku's neck.
 "Ha—ha."
 Painted deep red.
 Her unresisting neck is now running with blood.
 I can't really feel her anymore.
 Just the fact that she'll die in a few seconds..
 "Haha—ha."
 It seems so funny to me, I start to laugh.
 It hasn't even been a minute since I grabbed her neck.
 She won't die of suffocation.
 But here, by my hand.
 "Ha, haa, ha."
 For no reason, suddenly.
 "Hahaha, ha—ha, ha, ha."
 Like a simple appliance.

"Ahahahahahahahahahahaha!"
She'll die by having the bones in her neck break.

In an instant,
like being freed from demonic possession, the heat disappears.

Before my eyes is the bloodied body of Kohaku-san.
My hand is grasping her neck and any second now—

"——!"
I quickly let go.
Without a sound,

Kohaku-san falls to the floor.
"Uu... ha, ——"
Kohaku-san breathes painfully with her eyes closed.
"Kohaku—san."
... She's alive.
Just a little longer.
If I kept going just a little longer, I would have—
"Uu..., u, u...."
... She's crying.
Collapsed on the floor, not able to move, she's crying.
Looking down.
Her kimono is covered with white fluid.

That, is my semen.
I—by doing that, was released from whatever it was inside me?
"—Ha."
I can't believe it.
While one hand was choking Kohaku-san, my other hand—was reveling in the
pleasure of killing something?

—Thump.

It, isn't over.
I'm still fully erect, and more than that, I am not satisfied myself.
I'm so thirsty.
I've—done such a terrible thing to Kohaku-san, but it doesn't seem to end.
The truth is, my regret is fading even now as I look at Kohaku-san's neck.

Her white neck.

Put my teeth at her throat and.

—I want, to suck, her blood.

"—What is this?"

I broke apart.

"What the hell, what am I—"

I broke apart.

Did I break down?

"Why—"

Outside.

I have to go outside.

If I stay here, I'll kill Kohaku-san.

If I stay in the mansion, I'll kill even Akiha and Hisui.

So before those urges come again, I have to disappear.

"What, am I, doing?"

A place where no one is.

I have to go to a place where no one is or I'll go crazy again—.

—I leave the mansion.

My ragged breath pours out of my dry throat.

".... A.... haa.... ha.... ah."

How did, this happen?

My mind is going, blank.

I can't remember.

Such as how to breathe, how to think properly, balancing the movement of my arms and legs, I have to think about it or I can't do them properly.

"Ah...., ha...."

.... I don't have any place in mind.

Just, for no reason whatsoever.

I want to see golden moonlight.

—The lines won't disappear.

The wavering in my vision worsens.

The night city is shrouded in a white fog, as if it was a city that died thousands of years ago.

There's no sign of anyone else.

A cocoon that's like a spider's web is everywhere on every building.
It's terribly quiet.
Like a dead city at the bottom of a vast ocean.

In that illusion, I still walk.
Overhead, the large golden moon shines radiantly.
Is it the mercy of the moon?
My headache has disappeared and my head is in a daze.

Under the moon.
As if under a spell, I continue walking.

I walk down the dead city blanketed in darkness.
I can feel the knife in my pocket.
.... I can't believe it.
Even without thinking about it, I seemed to have put it there.

Probably,
so that at any time, I can kill someone.

Night hangs over the park.
In the middle of my hazy vision, there is one figure that looks clear.
"____"
For some reason, it seems like the other "me" wanted this.

The moonlight is strong.
Under the light as bright as the sun.
There, Arcueid stands dressed in white.



"It's been a while.
Isn't it a wonderful moon tonight, Shiki?"
"-Arcueid.
Didn't you go back?"



"No, I haven't fulfilled my objective yet.
I can't go back before then, can I?"

—Effortlessly.

Arcueid looks at me with crimson eyes.

"Ts——"

My breathing stops in my throat.

An unnatural pressure, nothing like when I confronted Senpai.

"Arcueid.... What are, you—"

Planning to do.

But I couldn't finish.

.... My vision wavers.

Inside my head, someone other than me continues to scream.

Almost like a beast howling at the moon.



".... Hmm.

You're not running away, so you're prepared?"

Her red eyes stare at me, as if she is looking at a hated enemy.

"A——"

I can't breathe.

My throat doesn't move.

If I do such extraneous movement—she would tear it out at that moment.

"Then I'll kill you, but do you have any last words?"

"——"

I'm so scared I can't even speak.

But, if I could speak—I want to ask her why she wants to kill me.

"Eh—?"

No way, I can't believe it.

You haven't realized it yet?"

With a giggle, Arcueid takes a step closer.

The dry sound of her footsteps echoes through the park.

"I was also deceived.

I didn't think you were Roa."

Saying that,

she shows just a brief moment of pity.

Then, her eyes light up with pure delight like a happy child.

Snap.

Something cracks in my head.

It was a definite, most terrible, already nonfunctional, desperate crack.

"Wha——"

My voice leaks out.

What.

What is she saying?



"So how is it, Shiki?

How does it feel to have Roa inside you?"

The white vampire princess speaks with a kind voice as she stares with hostility.

"I—I."

I don't know about this Roa guy.

What's inside me is only this inexplicable urge to destroy things.
 Like trying to kill Kohaku-san without any reason, and getting pleasure out of seeing it.
 That's, all—
 "Oh—"
 In other words.
 That black, sudden impulse.
 That's Roa?
 "—No.
 That, can't be true."



"You can't play dumb.
 In the first place, Roa was made into a Dead Apostle by me.
 It's very easy for me to tell where the person is who stole my power."
 "—That's, a lie."
 Saying that, I fall into despair.
 With those words—I can't even deceive myself.
 "I don't know why.
 There have been seventeen reincarnations before this, but this is the first time this has happened."
 She doesn't look like she intends to take another step forward.
 No, there's no need.
 The distance between me and Arcueid is about seven meters.
 But even if it was ten times that, Arcueid could chop off my neck instantly.

 This is well within her range.

—Thump.
 A rumbling starts.
 Is that my instinctual reaction to life-threatening danger?
 Or—is that the ferocity of Roa residing in my brain?
 ".... Ar.... cueid."
 I put my hand in my pocket.
 The hard sensation of my knife gathers up my splintering consciousness.



"It seems you finally admit it, Shiki.
 You feel the Roa inside you too, right?
 Back then, the instant Roa's reincarnated body was killed, he transmitted himself into you.
 I don't understand how it happened."
 Crimson, eyes.
 Being stared at by them, my headache returns again.
 Thump, Thump.
 Inside my head.
 The vampire called Roa, is wanting to emerge.
 "_____"
 It hurts.
 Just having Arcueid say his name enrages the memories of this guy in my brain.

Throb.
 Throb.
 Thro——b



"You're pretty composed.
 You're in front of me and not even running away.
 I thought you would run away the instant you saw me."
 ".... I. won't do, that.
 Why, would I have, to run away?"
 Resisting the pain in my head, I reply.
 "—Hm?"

I'm surprised you can still bluff.
I really thought over half of you was taken over by Roa already—I see, that's how it is."
Her voice sounds happy.
.... I don't know what's making her so happy, but it seems she still has some humanity left in her.



"I've changed my mind.
If you do as I say, I won't kill you.
How's that?"
Arcueid looks at me as she says this, happiness coloring her voice.

—Another headache.
Inside my head, Roa screams at me not to trust this woman.
".... What do you mean?
Don't you want to kill Roa?
Then.... there's no way you'll let me go, right?"



"Yes, once I decide something, it will be done.
I will get at Roa for sure."



"But Shiki, the Roa inside you is very weak.
He probably can't take away a person's will unless he's born into their body.
He somehow managed to transmit himself to you, but that was all he could do.
The Roa who was just trying to escape couldn't establish control over you.
He is only able to live as your dark side."

".... That,"
Does that mean Roa's will is almost nothing in me...?
"Arcueid, that—"



"Yes.
There's no need for me to kill you if that's the case.
I'm fine just having the power Roa stole from me working under me."
"—?"
There's no need for me to be killed is what she's saying.
So why did she come to see me?
Why—does she look at me with those serious eyes?
".... I don't understand.
What are you trying to say, Arcueid?"



"I am telling you to become my servant."
"——Eh?"

—She doesn't seem like she's joking.
When Arcueid and Senpai were fighting, she said it was just a joke.
".... What?
That wasn't a joke?"



"No.
I like you.
So isn't it natural for me to want you by my side rather than to kill you?"

—Snap.

With that line, my headache pounds more than it ever has before.
Roa.
The guy inside my head rages against her words.
.... I don't know if that comes from delight or from deep jealousy.



"If you are willing to become my servant, I will stop Roa from consuming you. I don't think you even need to think about it, seeing how Roa will consume you like this."

"... You say it so simply, but how do you intend to stop this Roa inside me?"

"Huh?"

The only one who can stop Roa is you, Shiki.

But that method would mean your death.

My method is simply strengthening you.

As long as your will is stronger than Roa's, then it doesn't matter how much he rages in you, right?"

Something bursts in my head again.

Roa keeps raging.

Don't let her fool you, he rages.

This woman wants to make you her puppet.

... I don't intend to give in to that impulse.

But, I agree with Roa.

I want to stay as myself.

To become Arcueid's servant to get away from Roa is getting my priorities wrong.

And, in the first place,
there is Ciel-senpai.

If I go to school tomorrow and talk to her about it, I bet she can come up with a solution to this—.

"....."

Gritting my teeth, I resist the pounding in my head.

I take off my glasses,

and get my knife from my pocket.

I take the blade out and hold it at eye level.



"—Shiki."
"I refuse.
Sorry, but I won't be yours to possess."



"I see.
Then, I guess it'll just have to be by force."

A hard footstep cracks through the air.

"You killed me once, so I always thought I should pay you back."

Her white figure rushes forth with a gust of wind.

—In that instant,
the fight begins.

Clang!
Her claws meet my knife.

Under the golden moon, even if she is my enemy, her figure is still beautiful.

Clang!
We repel each other again.
To be honest, I can't even see her movements.

Clang!

We repel each other once more.
Arcueid isn't serious at all.
But still, it should be easy for her to rip off my arms and legs.

Clang.

We repel each other again.
My body moves without thinking.
My arms and legs, this body, with just the intention of not dying, fend off
Arcueid's claws by itself.
"Tch—"
My lips curl in irony.
I don't want to admit it, but it seems my body has become beyond that of a
human's.
In the dead of night, it seems Tohno Shiki has become like SHIKI, probably
able to easily jump off the third floor of a building and be just fine.
Cl, ang.
But, this is it.
From the very start—I knew I couldn't win against Arcueid.
First of all, I can't see any "lines" on her.

I have no way of hurting her.
Arcueid said it once.
That during nighttime, there is nothing which can cause her death.
Clang.
She hits my knife.
With just a swing of her arm, I fly through the air.

"K—!"

I manage to land on the ground and ready my knife.
No matter how much I look, I can't see any "lines" on her.
"Damn it.
What nonsense you are....!"
—Yes, I am so right.
In the deep night without the mercy of the sun,
facing the princess of the moon is too reckless.

"Ha—ah, ha."

My throat is burning.
My heart feels like it'll explode.
I realize that since I saw her tonight, I was under the pressure of her crimson
eyes and I haven't been able to breathe well.



"Have you realized it yet?"

She isn't even out of breath.

Even though I'm gasping for air and my heart feels like it'll stop, she's completely relaxed.

"Damn—What about you, have you cooled your head—"

Trying to control my breathing, I step back from her little by little.

.... Arcueid isn't fighting me seriously at all.

She doesn't have the pressure like Roa or Nrvnqsr, I never thought I would feel this much difference between us.



"Oh well.

It seems you won't understand until you die once, Shiki."

She gives an impatient sigh.

Arcueid stands directly behind me.

"Gh—!"

I hear a sound from behind my head.

—There's not even time to blink.

She effortlessly pushes me to the ground.

Her body pushes up against my shoulders.

I'm down.

In an instant, without me knowing what's going on, Arcueid has pinned me down.

"_____"

Arcueid glares at me without speaking.
Her body weight against my shoulders.
She stops as if hesitating over what to do with me.

"_____"

I gasp.
But, it might have been just her silence.

"_____"

This close.
Now that we are so close—I may be able to see it.
—I stare at her body.

The core of my brain screams in protest.
Completely unlike the pain of my headache before—as if it really were tearing
itself apart.

"_____"

But it's no good.
I can't read the "death" from an existence like Arcueid.
Daytime might be different, but at night, she is close to being a perfect life form
that doesn't even carry the concept of death.

".... What do you intend to do with Roa, Arcueid?"

You said you wouldn't kill me, but as long as I live, Roa will still be alive."

"I don't care about a diluted Roa.

.... Yes, that's why I could have let you go, Shiki."

"—Oh, you don't have to hold back, go ahead and let me go.

Don't worry about me and go home, back to your daddy."

"But you know, isn't it natural for me to take back my own power?"

And more than anything else, I do like you."

Squeeze.

The body weight on my shoulders becomes even heavier.

"More than killing you and destroying Roa, I want to take you in."

So, I won't kill you,
her red eyes seem to say.

"I can't believe it, but it seems I really like you.

That's why I'll save you.

I won't suck your blood, and I won't do anything you won't like."

So please listen to what I tell you, her red eyes say.

—Those are, without a doubt, her true feelings.

But, I can't listen.

She might be not on guard right now as the perfection is fading from her body.

".... Shiki.

Or do you, hate me?"

Her eyes look straight at me.

I look at her face while being pinned down.

Sincerely.
 —So strongly it might burn my brain.
 "... I don't hate you Arcueid."
 "Really?"
 She sounds very happy.

.... My forehead is burning.
 As my brain throbs horribly, I definitely—

See just one "line" of death.
 "Still, I have no intention of becoming your puppet....!"
 "——!"
 Her eyes brim over with anger.
 But before that,
 I slice through the "line" on her neck.

"Ah——"
 Fresh blood spilling from her neck, Arcueid collapses.
 Slipping out from underneath her, I get away.
 "Ha—Ah."
 I am out of breath.
 I'm not hurt, but I can't run in this state.
 It's Arcueid, she should be able to heal such a wound and will come to attack
 me again—

"Ar... cueid?"
 She doesn't even move.
 Blood flowing over the ground, her white body is covered in vermillion.

—No way.
 Did I, kill her?
 "Wha—Arcueid, are—"
 Stopping my legs that tried to flee, I try to rush towards her body, but gasp.

One arm.
 One of her arms on her collapsed figure.... like a spider's leg, stands up on the
 ground.

In that instant,
 the whole world freezes over.

"I Wi ll"

pant.

pant.

pant.

.... From her neck spills her blood, and her breath.
Her arm tenses.

"Ki ll, Yo u,"

pant.

pant.

pant *pant*.

pant.

pant

.... The vermilion blood continues to flow.
Her body lifts slowly from the ground.

"I Wi ll"

Heavy, rapid breathing turns into laughter.

.... Her white body stained in blood.
She raises her face.
I can see her eyes gleaming between her golden hair.
Her eyes are pitch-black.
And in them,
glows a fierce, fiery red.

"I will kill you."

pant.
pant.
pant.

pant.
pant.
pant.
ha.
a.
ahahaha, ha.

Hahaha, ahahaha,

Ahahahahahahaha hahahahahahaha—!!!!

"Ar—cueid."
Her eyes are looking at nothing.
She tries to lift herself up with one hand, but every time, she collapses back
down to the ground.

She slips on her own pool of blood, and each time, her body gets redder.
Over, and over.
She tries to stand up, slips, and falls.
.... It seems as if she's enjoying that cycle of failure.

"Ju st, wait."

"———"
I can't move.

Her voice, her figure, her will—flows compulsorily into my head.

My will is flowing, fusing, merging.
The whole world spins around me.

In the middle of it all, her image dominates.

That's right.
I have never felt such shame before.
I have never been so disgraced.

—That's, why it's funny.

I can't even imagine how much pleasure I'll get when I take this anger out on you, Shiki.

Destroy.
Destroy.
Destroy.
Slowly, completely, gently beyond comparison, cruelly to the point of numbness, I'll violate your life.

That's right.

The instant I tear off your limbs, rip open your chest and pull out your intestines, biting into your neck as you ask for mercy, chewing through your eyes and spreading your brains on the ground like butter——!

"Just wait, I'll kill you soon...!"
Smiling, laughing insanely, Arcueid wallows in a sea of her own blood.
"—"

I can't move.
This isn't good.
Even Roa can't move.
If I stay here, I really will be killed.
I have to escape.
It doesn't matter where, if I don't get away from here quickly, I will get killed.
"Ah, Ah——"
Wet, dripping sounds.
In the pool of her own blood, Arcueid laughs insanely.

"A ah, ah——"
 The blood spraying from her neck.
 Her slashed, fatal wound.
 Does it hurt that much?
 As if to mitigate the pain, she is chewing through her stomach, her arms, tearing herself apart.

"AAAAAaAAAAA!"

—I run.
 Thoughts of where and how don't even enter my mind.
 I am driven by fear, and I run away from this killing chamber.

pant—*pant*, *pant*—
 I run to this place without even realizing it.
 "Ghaa—ah, ah."
 I'm out of breath.
 I'm so exhausted I can't take another step.
 "Ts—ah, ha, ah."
 But my legs keep moving.
 I'll be found in this place.
 I have to go inside and hide myself until morning or I'll die.
 Even while I'm resting like this, I bet she's looking for me—

I take off my glasses and cut the lock on the school gate with my knife.
 "Ah—kk."
 Opening the door, I walk inside the school grounds.

"Ha..... ah."
 I fall to my knees as soon as I get to the school grounds.
 I brace myself off the ground using both my hands.

"....."
 My whole body is hot.
 I have to hurry inside the school building, but my legs won't move.
 More than my body, my heart and mind are completely worn out.
 This headache that won't stop.
 This Roa inside of me.
 ... And, the white vampire princess that continued to laugh insanely.
 "—Gg."
 Gorge rises in my throat.
 My mouth tastes bitter.
 I haven't eaten anything today, so all I can vomit is my stomach acid.
 "Ha—ah."
 Still on my knees, I collapse headfirst onto the ground.
 "Why... did it end up, like this?"

Breathing painfully, I give up trying to lift up my face.
.... Even if she finds me, I don't care.
I can't escape anyway.
Away from Arcueid, or from Roa who is inside me.

Since that's the case—waiting here quietly for the end is easier for me.

"—?"

It suddenly gets darker.
The sound of footsteps.
I didn't realize it since I was face down, but someone is coming.

Under the moonlight.
Did that person darken the sky with her shadow?
"Are you trying to repent, Tohno-kun?"

Ciel-senpai asks in a cold voice.

"—Senpai?"

.... I lift my head in amazement.
I don't know why she's here.
But, I wanted to rely on something right now, and I lift my face to meet the
night air.

"—Eh?"

—But this.

—This Ciel before me,
she isn't the one that I know.
Her bare arms have the tattoo of a cross on them.
Her cold eyes, as if watching someone she doesn't even know.
.... Senpai bears an uncouthly weapon with an aura of coldness that doesn't
suit her.
"——Ah."
.... I know this.
Inside my brain, I know what weapon this is.
That has to be—what's called the Seventh Holy Scripture, one of the apocrypha

that must never be removed from its resting place.

"Sen—pai?"

"As I expected, you were Roa after all, Tohno-kun."

With her frigid eyes,

Senpai speaks with a voice that is equally cold.

"—"

I start to feel a shiver up my spine.

For no reason.

No, my instincts and my brain work full force to tell me the danger, and I jump back.

"——"

Still with her mouth shut, she takes a step towards me with that ominous weapon.

.... She has no openings whatsoever.

If I run away hastily,

if I show my back to her, I know that thing will pierce my heart and I will disappear without the opportunity for reincarnation ever again.

.... Even though I don't even have that knowledge in my memories.

"—Senpai.

Why are you doing this too—?"

"I understand.

Roa is already surfacing, right?

Then it is too late already."

Lightly,

she takes another effortless step forward.

That figure looks like—

"—What are you doing, Senpai?

You look like—you're, going to kill me."

"——"

She doesn't answer.

She just stares at me like she's trying to find out where she can aim to kill me quickly.

"—Sen, pai."

She's serious.

She seriously, plans to kill me.

—Creak.

My nerves feel the imminent death before me.

My spine is screaming and the back of my neck is numbing.

But—more than this fear of death,
I can't believe why this person is saying such things.

"—Why?"

I don't know.

"Senpai, you said you stayed here for my sake."

"——"

With a start,
Ciel-senpai's legs stop.

She looks at me and grins.

"Your goodness really is a rare treasure.

It is a good thing to trust people, but if you were a little more composed and thought about it clearly, you could have maybe got away."

"Eh—"

"First of all, didn't you ever think about why I came to this school in the first place?"

I didn't do it just because I wanted to, you know."

"——Sen, pai?"

"You knew my goal was to destroy 'The Serpent'—Roa.

Coming here to this school was because I knew Roa's reincarnated host was here.

But since I didn't know for sure, I needed to check things out for a while."

"Wait a minute, what in the world are you—"

What is she babbling about?

I don't know.

I really can't understand what she's talking about.

She ignores my bewilderment and keeps talking.

"... I told you before, Tohno-kun.

Roa has requirements for the family he decides to reincarnate into.

If you think the other way around, you just have to look for families with those traits.

When you know that, finding him is very simple.

It's easy to find families that have special abilities passed down through their blood once you do a bit of research.

In this city, there is only one family that fits Roa's requirements.

So—I knew from the beginning who Roa was."

"—Wha—"

That's strange.

If she knew from the beginning, she could have killed him or caught him right then....

From the beginning?

She knew, who it was....?

"Yes.

Look, don't you realize it now?

You know, Tohno-kun.

I came to this school to catch you from the beginning."

"_____"

Wait.

I just want, her to, wait.

"But, a little mistake happened.

.... I was watching you from afar so as not to stimulate Roa inside you, but I concluded that you might not be Roa's new reincarnated host.

But, the eldest son of the Tohno family had to be what Roa reincarnates into.

There is no mistake in that, so what had to be a mistake was you, Tohno-kun."

Ciel-senpai speaks matter-of-factly.

I—can't say anything.

"Looking into it, you were fatally wounded eight years ago and adopted by your relatives.

What happened afterwards was exactly as Tohno SHIKI said two nights ago.

I don't know what happened in the Tohno family eight years ago, but you were killed by that kid called SHIKI.

No, it's more like your life was stolen.

As a result, you became connected to SHIKI who was Roa's host."

A direct voice, without emotion.

I don't know this Ciel-senpai.

Or is this..

Is this the true Ciel, and the kind person I knew up until now was all just—

"Up until now, there should have been times where Roa's memory would flow into you through SHIKI.

He is a vampire that manipulated the shapeless thing called a soul.

For Roa, you two who shared one life were a finely crafted double existence.

"That's why—when SHIKI's body was destroyed, Roa didn't need to reincarnate.

He still had a place to run to: you."

Cold.

As if hating her enemy, she detests me.

"But, it's all over now.

I wasn't prepared to finish it so suddenly that one night, but tonight is different.

I really am fortunate in a way.

If Arcueid had destroyed Roa, he probably would have reincarnated again."

.... I can't.

Believe this.

That—that..

"—That's not, true."

"Go ahead, please keep on denying it and play dumb.

That makes my job easier.

Still—"

A metallic rattle sounds from the weapon.

"It doesn't change the fact that I can finish you off easily no matter what

you do, Roa."

"_____"

Her laughing voice causes me to finally understand.

.... She isn't lying.

.... Her eyes aren't looking at "me".

.... Her feelings never did have anything to do with "me" from the beginning.

".... What is this?"

Then, then from the very beginning, you always thought of me as Roa?

Senpai.

Being friends with me was all just.....!"

—I can't say it.

I can't finish the sentence.

If I do that, I feel like everything will turn into a lie in that instant.

"Of course.

After SHIKI was destroyed, the only reason why I stayed in school was because Roa had not disappeared.

Since Roa is a student here, it's more convenient for me to stay."

I would never go back while leaving you here.

Senpai said that with a smile.

That wasn't, for my sake.

She stayed here just to search for the still-living Roa.

That is the only reason why she gave me her phone number.

"—Ha."

Then, that too.

"Haha—"

And those times, too.

"Haha—ha."

And when she saved me that one night, too.

"Ah..... ha, ha."

And, those sad eyes, too.

"Haha—ha."

.... That's right, Shiki, this is nothing at all.

These memories—they are nothing at all.
 I just thought I loved her.
 And that she loved me back.
 What a joke.
 They were all just an illusion made from a play.

—All of it.
 All of it was a fairy tale made up of lies—
 "—I understand.
 But, Senpai.
 How did you know Roa was still alive?
 How, how did you know Roa reincarnated into this Tohno Shiki?"



"Of course I knew.
 Because it's about myself." Senpai says something I can't understand.

As if saying there's no need to talk anymore,
 Ciel's hands lift up that weapon.
 The Seventh Holy Scripture.
 The weapon that the reincarnation-denying Church created.
 A scriptural canon inscribed with every possible impeachment of reincarnation
 criticism.
 It's an item that is scripture yet an apocrypha.
 A weapon, yet a scripture at the same time.

If I'm hit by that, my soul itself will disperse into nothingness.
 "——"

The bayonet rises up.
 The tip comes towards me.
 But slowly.
 If it is Ciel—she should be able to pierce me without me even noticing it ever
 happened.
 "Ah——"
 There's no time to think.

—Instantly, I fall forward.
I felt from before that if I turned and ran, my heart would be shot from behind.

"Hya—!"

Her sword flies past my head.
It seems really slow.
I evade her attack, move right beside her, and—

"—!"

The instant I tried to run forward, Senpai's movement changed drastically.
In an instant, with a speed that makes her seem to have literally disappeared,
she swings her weapon horizontally.
The rush of the wind fills my ears—and for some reason, I am standing many
meters away from her.



"——"

She clicks her tongue and glares at me.

"Ow....!"

My left arm hurts.
"What... Huh—!?"
I'm surprised.
From the elbow down, my arm is broken.
Not broken normally, but my lower arm is bent in the shape of a triangle.



"—Sacrificing your arm to save your head?
If you didn't do anything, I would have ended it painlessly for you."
"Wha—"
Even though I didn't notice it, I must have broken my arm defending her attack.
"Aren't you going to pull out your knife?"
She looks at me with a bored expression.
.... She's looking down at me.
She looks down at me as if saying she could kill me at any moment.

"Gg....!"
Pain.
Pain shoots from my arm to my brain.
The blood from my broken arm seems to flow like poison into my nerves.
Sharply.
Just with that, my mind fills with a white blankness.



"——"
She continues to look at me with those cold eyes.
"You—!"
You break my arm, and you still act that way!?
Do you know how much this hurts!?
Making such a fool of me.
Making such a fool of me!
Making such a fool of me——!
"If that's how you're going to be, Senpai——"

I grip the knife in my pocket.

"I'm not just going to stand here helplessly—"

The hard feeling of metal.

"—and let you kill me."

With a quick snap,
I take out the blade of my knife.

"—Are you stupid?"

Instantly,
her body, explodes.

—No, that's not right.

She crouches down low to the ground—almost like a lizard, and runs up towards me in a flash.

She closes the distance of six meters in a flash.

She's not in my vision at all.

Her whole body is below my knee-height, and explodes upward from there.

A thud.

From right beneath me, her bayonet accurately shoots directly for my throat.

"Ga—ah!"

I gasp.

Pain, is there pain?

Yes, I can still feel pain.

"Ha—ugh."

Conscious, am I conscious?

Alright, I still have that.

"A, aaaaaa.....!"

My body.

My body—is not okay.

A dripping sound.

It's coming from my left shoulder.

Looking at it, it's already a waterfall of blood, which pours straight down.

Just now.

The bayonet didn't hit my throat, but my left shoulder.

"A, Aa, Aaaaaah!"

It hurts.

It hurts so much the word pain doesn't come close to describing it.

"Haa, aaa, aggggg——!"

But, I'm alive.

Still, I'm alive.

My body.

My body is away from her again.

I smell a whiff of gunpowder from my shoulder.

"A, Aah, ah."

Just now.

The instant that bayonet pierced me, she must have pulled the trigger.

I was blown away by that, and there's distance between us again.



".... To happen twice, that must mean it's not a coincidence.
With that much blood pouring out, not dying from shock must already be a sign that your body has begun to change."

Ga-chang!

A metallic sound.

The sword on the end of that weapon changes into a new one.

The sword that shot me just now falls—and turns into pages of a book and scatters.

".... That's.... ridiculous."

But that ridiculous thing is really frightening.

That—just touching me carries a fatal poison.

Death.

I'll die.

Without a doubt, I'll be killed.

Will I die?

Is that what I'm scared of?
I don't know.

"Ah, gg.....!"

My shoulder is burning.
Hot, it's so hot, as if my entire body will burst into flames.
She readies her weapon once more with another metallic clang.
.... Twice.
Withstanding that twice can be nothing but a miracle.
The next time will certainly—

I imagine that bayonet piercing me right in the face.
That's more repulsive than frightening.

Death is.
No matter how it happens, something useless, dirty, and disgusting.
I like myself—so I don't want that to happen.
Is that why I'm scared?
I don't know.
Come to think of it—I was always able to see "death", but I never thought
about "death" at all.
No, that doesn't really matter right now.
pant, *pant*, *pant*—
I have to escape.
I don't want to die, so I have to get away.



"—You won't take off your glasses?"
A simple, plastic voice.
Those words.
I gasp at their meaning.
Because taking them off means I would see Senpai's "lines".
If that happens, I might kill her—
"Wha—What are you, saying, Senpai....!?"



"——"

A chill runs through me.
 The air suddenly becomes saturated with a murderous intent.
 "... I can't spend any more time with you.
 Please just die already."

Her figure plunges low again.

—She's coming.

Even though I know she's going to run towards me again, it's hard for me to even see her.

—I can only think of escaping.
 If I don't want to be killed—escape is my only option.
 Fortunately, our distance is almost ten meters.
 If I run as fast as I can, I can make it to the school building.
 Maybe I might be able to do something if I can get into a less open space—!

"——"

My back.
 Something—pierced, my back.
 "Aa—ah."
 My body falls forward.
 Just a little more.
 And it was just a little more before I could enter the school building.
 "Kk——"
 I lift myself up with one arm.
 What sticks through me is one of those swords that looks like a nail that Senpai was using before.
 "Why—you.....!"
 I must be numbed to pain, and I pull out the sword skewering my back from behind.
 Since it penetrated through me, I got mad and pulled it out from my chest.

"Alright.....!"
Now I can escape inside....!
"What do you plan on doing by escaping, Tohno-kun?"

Before that,
I hear Senpai's voice from behind me.
"You still don't understand?
How fast do you think you just ran here?
Why are you still alive after receiving that fatal wound?"
"St——"
My mind begins to white out.
Don't let her trick you.
Don't let her trick you.
Hasn't she been deceiving you all along?
Don't listen to her anymore.
If you listen, you'll die.
Ignore her.
Don't accept it.
Even if it is the truth, this body can only reject it—
"—Stop, it."
"Geez, there's nowhere for you to run to.
You can only fight or be killed.
But if you can't fight, you can only die."
Her footsteps.
With the sound of footsteps, Senpai approaches.
"——!"
I leap.
My back, my shoulders, my arm are all almost dead, but I leap as if it was nothing.

—I can't even believe it myself.
Still breathing wildly and with a speed that matches Senpai, I run into the school building.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*——
I run.
Without thinking, just wanting to escape, I continue running.
pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*——
But I'm at my limit.
Is it because I'm out of breath or is it that my wounds won't let me move my arms and legs anymore?
Whatever it is, it doesn't matter.
My breathing becomes more forced.
At the end of the hallway.
Coming onto a wall aimlessly, I fall.
I fall on my back, and try to get back up, and feel foolish for doing so.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, I lean my back against the wall.

Throwing back my head, I take a big breath of air.

"—The moon."

Looking up, I can see the moonlight through the window.

Is it because I'm so exhausted?

Everything I look at seems vague, as if everything was covered in a mist.

Vagueness.

Does that mean it is indefinite?

The same as me.

The same as the person called Tohno Shiki, indefinite.

".... Ou.... ch...."

My shoulder throbs in pain.

If I was as definite as this pain, maybe this wouldn't have happened?

I'm starting to not understand.

I always thought I was Tohno Shiki.

But that was a different person, and they tell me I'm just an adopted son from somewhere.

Being adopted means I should have memories of before I came to the Tohno mansion, but there's nothing.

I... really, I only have the memories of Tohno Shiki.

In the night sky is the solitary moon.

"—"

It's incredibly.. strange.

Why didn't I realize it until now?

Tonight is so—

.... In the end, just what was I?

It's stupid not knowing anything about myself and just disappearing like this.

Everything is so vague, it's stupid.

A world where I can see death.

A vision where I can perceive death.

That day eight years ago.

I was able to meet Sensei and was able to live normally.

I can still declare that it was proper to meet her.

".... But, Sensei.

I, guess I, was someone, who shouldn't be alive."

.... I should end my life while some part of me can still think that.

But I can't do it.

I can't kill myself.

Even if it is pointless, even if it is a mistake, I want to keep on living.

If I die, everything will become a lie.

I want to keep on living.

No matter how wrong it is, no matter how many things I have to lose, I want to keep on living.

Only her.
If only I had Ciel-senpai with me.
I wouldn't care what else I had to lose.

I can hear her footsteps.
.... She's coming.

"..... Can I only fight?"

Mumbling, I feel a chill.
I can't do such a thing as fight Senpai.
I said that out loud just on a whim.
But, "Slice her apart".
From in my head, from deep inside my brain, as if trying to seep itself into my mind, the same words keep repeating over and over.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
If you want to stay alive, slice her apart.
If you don't want to die, slice her apart.
Slice apart the person who deceived you.
Slice apart the person trying to kill you.
Just do it already—slice apart the person getting in my way.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
SliceSliceSlice SliceSliceSlice, Slice, apart, slice, apart, slice, slice, slice, slice, sliceslicesliceslice slicesliceslice slicesliceslice sliceslice sliceslice sliceslice sliceslicesliceslice—!!
"Shuuuuut Uuuuuup!!!!!!"

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

"Shut.... up, you're always....!"

—*pant*.... *pant*, *pant*.

.... My headache thins.
I can't hear that voice anymore.
But, in place of that,
Now, Senpai probably knows where I am because of my scream.
"....."
I grip my knife strongly.

—Are you going to fight?

Have a fight to the death with that person?

.... I can't think clearly.
My nerves feel numb, as if they were burned off a long time ago.
I fought Arcueid and sliced her neck.
I somehow managed to escape, but Ciel was waiting for me.
"Ha.... haha, ha."
It's a little disappointing.
I never thought it would be like this.
I escape and escape, but a worse situation awaits me.
It's like a joke.
Since when did I—get lost on this hopeless path—

"Ah—gg.....!"
The headache runs through me like a knife through my brain.

"Ha..... a, ah——"
I can't breathe properly.
My vision wavers.
.... It looks like I'm really done.
My head starts to rage again.
But still, I don't want to die.
If I don't want to die—there's only one thing to do.

The footsteps get louder.
Her shadow grows larger.

—Aren't you going to take off your glasses?

Even knowing what it meant, she said that.
In that case.

—Everything.
All of it should turn into illusion.

I stand up as I strongly grip my knife.

The footsteps get even louder.
I sense the enemy coming closer.
All the time, someone's voice echoes in my brain.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart. Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
"U—"

Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart—

"Shut up."
Using my willpower, I force the voice in my head to be quiet.
"This is, what I decided."
Slice—
"I don't need you to tell me what to do."
her—
"If you don't want to be killed by Ciel."
apart—
"Just shut up until it's over, Roa."
—

The voice disappears completely.
The footsteps, and her approaching shadow.

—Ciel appears before me.



"—You finally decided to fight."
 Her voice seems almost relieved.
 "That's good.
 Now there is no sin for either of us.
 Now that we are both trying to kill each other, our sin will die.
 Now there is only punishment for the one who lives."
 Since we are both trying to kill each other there is no sin?
 Her words are part of a world I can't understand.
 "I see.
 Then is that punishment for the one that's left alive atoneable?"
 "Yes.
 Something that is atoneable is what we call punishment.
 If it is called punishment, there is no reason for it not to be atoneable.
 The only thing that does not disappear is the sin.
 So—we don't want to carry that burden, do we?"
 Saying that,
 she takes another step forward.
 "—Then, killing you here isn't a sin, Senpai?"
 "Yes.
 I will kill you, so it is okay for you to kill me, Tohno-kun.
 Our conditions are equal."
 Another step.
 "_____"
 That's, not right.
 Certainly I am getting killed, so I'm killing her back to protect my own life.
 But to say there's no sin—what would happen to Ciel?
 From the beginning, she came here with an unrequited will to kill.

That is—
 "Farewell.
 Let us lower the curtain on this ridiculous play."
 The last step.

Her readied bayonet shoots toward my heart.

Before then,
I lunge forward and aim for the "point" on her right lung.

—I didn't think I could kill her.

It's only natural for her to pierce my heart before I get within knife range.
That's why I was surprised.
I easily dodged her blade and was able to pierce her "point" with ease.
"—Sen, pai."
It looked like she accepted my knife on purpose.
"I made you.. kill.. me."
Her faint, weak voice on the verge of death.

"That was, my, greatest sin."
Sounding like she's crying, she uses her remaining strength to stab me with her bayonet.

"—Ga, hu."
My blood flow reverses through my lanced heart.
Coughing up blood, I collapse onto the ground.

Before my eyes,
the body of the one who died slightly ahead of me lies on the floor.
"—How—"
Did you, know?
"—foolish."
Did you know from the beginning—that if there was such a thing as sin, it would only be for you?
"Ha—ah."
The sensation in my limbs fades away.
My consciousness, too.
It will be seconds before I bleed to death.
The instant I was stabbed,
I had a vision of something like an old book, scattering and crumbling away page by page.

Probably, with that, the thing called Roa was dispersed.
"....."
I can't think.
From the very beginning, she planned to give her life to take mine.

Did she think that was her punishment?

—How foolish.
There's no—meaning in that.

"—Still."
I was sad that she died before she apologized to me.
If she could have apologized to me, then I bet she would have felt some relief...
But, she couldn't even say that.
Since she knew it was something that wasn't atoneable by apology, she didn't
apologize to the very end.

That determination.
It makes me angry that I made her go that far.
"What.
In the end—"
I liked her?
Until the very end.
Feeling sad like this until my own death, she was that dear to me.
"—Tss."
I cough weakly and spit out blood.
It's all over.
Staring dazedly at the moon, with these strange thoughts, I drift off to slee—

!
turn to **1**

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"—I'm sorry, but, I can't have any special feelings for you."
I answer clearly while looking her straight in the eye.



"—I.. see."

.... Both Yumizuka's voice and body tremble.

"....."

.... I can't think of anything else to say.

Maybe this makes me a horrible person, but those are my true feelings.

I never had any special feelings for my classmate Yumizuka Satsuki.

I'm only here because what happened on the way home two days ago left such
an impression on me, I couldn't just forget about it—



".... Yeah, I knew that.

I guess that's why things turned out this way.

.... It's okay.

Since you say that, I'll be honest to myself too, Shiki-kun."

if flgP >= 1

turn to **295**

turn to **296**

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"Yumizuka—I.."

I.. can't answer.

Maybe this makes me a horrible person, but those are my true feelings.

I never had any special feelings for my classmate Yumizuka Satsuki.

I'm only here because what happened on the way home two days ago left such an impression on me, I couldn't just forget about it—



"I thought so.

You never even knew I existed, so you couldn't have fallen in love with me."

if flgP >= 1

turn to **295**

turn to **296**

277

pant, *pant*, *pant*—

I see.

This impulse.

This impulse that tries to drive me insane while leaving me conscious.

This is,

This is Roa.

But why?

I was always sane.

Until I came back to this mansion, I really was normal.

I hear heavy knocking on the door.

But I can't open it.

If I open it, it will be completely over.

"Ah—"

I finally understand.

That dream was the memory of the Roa one generation before mine.

Locked up in her room, killing both her parents, ruling over her town as a vampire, the final memories of someone I don't know.

"——"

.... There's no way out.

This is not a problem that can be solved by killing myself.

This is nothing that can be helped.

I understand that previous person's feelings.

Even if I die, the only thing to die would be my will.

Then the will of Roa would take over my body completely.

If that happened—things would get much worse.

"Ha—haha, ha."

.... In the first place, I don't have the slightest intention of killing myself.

"Shiki-sama, please open up, Shiki-sama!"

I hear her voice from behind the door.

.... It almost sounds like it was in another language.

So far away.

Just one.

It's just one sheet of wood between us.

But it seems as far away as the moon and the stars.

It's now ten in the morning.

Hisui gave up and went back.

Akiha and Kohaku-san came and took turns knocking but I ignored them.

Twelve o'clock.
.... I'm hungry.
But, I'm still fine.
I pull the sheets over me and hug my shaking body.

Two o'clock.
.... I'm dying of thirst.
I've lost all sense of time.
It feels very calm.
But as if I was taking stimulants, my body wants to rage around.

Four o'clock.
.... More knocking.
A name being called out.
Whose voice is that?
Whose name are they calling?
I can't tell.

ve o'clock.
It slowly starts to get dark.

Six o'clock.

Seven o'clock.

Eight o'clock.

—Someone, comes by.

"Shiki-san, I've brought you dinner.

You haven't had anything since this morning, so you'll collapse you know."

Kohaku's voice.

She knocks on the door.

"Geez, if that's how it is, I'll get you to at least eat."

A rattling sound.

Not knocking, but the sound of a lock opening.

"Huhuhu, time to use my secret weapon, the master key!"

"—Ah."

The lock unlocks.

No, I have to turn Kohaku-san away.

turn to **278**

I'll just have her leave the food in here.

turn to **279**

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.... The door opens.
 It's too late.
 Even if I send her away, she's already come inside.

—But still.
 I can't do the action called eating food.
 It will get me too excited, and it will smash the remaining "Tohno Shiki" within
 me to pieces.
 *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

I breathe hard.
 Somehow.
 I have to resist it.



"Shiki-san, I'm coming in.... wh, what happened?"
 Still smiling, she looks in surprise at the room lying in shambles.
 *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

Her cute face devoid of fear.
 Her completely unguarded, defenseless figure.
 Her red hair—and her delicious looking skin.
 "Shiki-san....?"
 This is strange, how did all of this happen?"
 Still smiling, she draws closer to where I lie curled on the bed.

—————Hurry.

No.

—————Hurry.

No.

—————Hurry.

Stop it.

——Hurry.

Shut up.

——Hurry.

I don't want to.

—Hurry.

I.

"Run—away."

Using the very last vestiges of my will, I manage to let those words out.



"Eh?"

I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you, could you please say it again, Shiki-san?"

But it's working against me.

Concerned, she draws closer to my bed.

To my/TO MY,

body/BODY,

her face/HER FORM,

draws closer/INVITES ME

in.

Her white fingers touch my shoulder lightly.

Her fingers pulsing with blood.

Her light body warmth.

Small fireworks explode in the back of my head.

"Kya—!"

I hear a scream.

My hand wraps around her throat.

"Hwa—ha, a, h—"

My breathing is out of control.

What.

am I.

Trying.
 To do?
 "Shi.... ki, sa—"
 Her voice cuts off.
 Not caring, I grip harder.
 Grip.
 The bones in her neck creak.
 "St, o—!"
 A small tearing sound.
 Her fingers dig into my arm.

She must be getting frantic, being on the verge of death like that.
 Her nails push through my clothes and into the meat of my arm.
 "A—ch."
 Pain.
 Well, not as much pain as Kohaku must be feeling.
 But blood flows.
 It runs down from my arm and onto my hand grasping Kohaku's neck.
 "Ha—ha."
 Painted deep red.
 Her unresisting neck is now running with blood.
 I can't really feel her anymore.
 Just the fact that she'll die in a few seconds,
 "Haha—ha."
 Seems so funny to me, I start to laugh.
 It hasn't even been a minute since I grasped her neck.
 She won't die of suffocation.
 But here, by my hand.
 "Ha, haa, ha."
 For no reason, suddenly.
 "Hahaha, ha—ha, ha, ha."
 Like a simple appliance.
 "Ahahahahahahahahahahaha!"
 She'll die by having the bones in her neck break.

In an instant,
 like being freed from demonic possession, the heat disappears.

Before my eyes is the bloodied body of Kohaku-san.
 My hand is grasping her neck and any second now—

"——!"

I quickly let go.
 Without a sound,

Kohaku-san falls to the floor.

"Uu... ha, —"
Kohaku-san breathes painfully with her eyes closed.
"Kohaku—san."
.... She's alive.
Just a little longer.
If I kept going just a little longer, I would have—
"Uu..., u, u...."
.... She's crying.
Collapsed on the floor, not able to move, she's crying.
Looking down.
Her kimono is covered with white fluid.

That, is my semen.
I—by doing that, was released from whatever it was inside me?
"—Ha."
I can't believe it.
While one hand was choking Kohaku-san, my other hand—was reveling in the
pleasure of killing something?

—Thump.

It, isn't over.
I'm still fully erect, and more than that, I am not satisfied myself.
I'm so thirsty.
I've—done such a terrible thing to Kohaku-san, but it doesn't seem to end.
The truth is, my regret is fading even now as I look at Kohaku-san's neck.

Her white neck.
Put my teeth at her throat and.

—I want, to suck, her blood.

"—Haha."
I broke apart.

"Aha, ahaha."
I really broke down.

I'm done.
No longer—do I have the confidence to stay sane.

"Ahaha, hahaha, ha."

Outside.

I have to go outside.

If I stay here, I'll kill Kohaku-san.

If I stay in the mansion.

I'll kill even Akiha and Hisui.

So before those urges come again, I have to disappear.

"Ahahahahaha!"

A place where no one is.

I have to go to a place where no one is or I'll go crazy again—

turn to **280**

279

.... The door opens.
It's too late.
Even if I send her away, she's already come inside.
I guess I can at least let her leave the food.
I haven't had anything since breakfast.. so I'm starving.
I'm dying of thirst.
My body is burning up.
I just have to..
do something about this urge.. or I'll go insane.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

I breathe hard.
Hurry.
I have to take it out.



"Shiki-san, I'm coming in.... wh, what happened?"
Still smiling, she looks in surprise at the room lying in shambles.
.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*....

Her cute face devoid of fear.
Her completely unguarded, defenseless figure.
Her red hair—and her delicious looking skin.

Hurry.
Hurry.
Hurry.

"Shiki-san...?"
This is strange, how did all of this happen?"
Still smiling, she draws closer to where I lie curled on the bed.

Her white fingers lightly touch my shoulder.

I can feel her blood singing through this brief, tiny contact.
 And her warmth.
 Small fireworks explode in the back of my head.
 Hurry.
 Hurry.
 Hurry.
 If I don't find a release for this burning inside of me, I'll go crazy.
 If I don't get rid of this boiling impulse, I'll lose my mind.
 Now.
 Now.
 Now.
 Anyone will do.
 So it doesn't show any sign of its original form, I have to destroy, destroy, de-
 stroy, destroy, destroy, destroy, destroy, destroy, destroy, destroy—

"Kya..!"

I hear a scream.
 My hand wraps around her throat.
 "Hwa—ha, a, h—"
 My breathing is out of control.
 But.. there's no more pain.
 Fine.
 Right now, I feel fine.
 "Shiki-sa.. n—"
 Her voice cuts off.
 Amazing.
 She can still breathe.
 I squeeze harder.
 "S.. to—!"
 I hear a small tearing sound.
 Her fingers dig into my arm.

"Kk—"

Ow.
 Her nails are tearing through my clothes.
 pant—*pant*—*pant*
 Amazing.
 You're amazing Kohaku—you're so cute.

Becoming this frantic—your face turning red, tears running down your cheeks,
 saliva spilling past your lips.
 Begging for more like this is just too cute.
 "Ha—ha, haha."
 I was wrong.
 I was so wrong.
 "Kohaku... san."

That's right.
I can't be doing THIS,
to.. Kohaku.. san.

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.....!

Shut up.
That's not what you want, is it, Shiki?
Treating her like this is definitely wrong.
You can't break a great woman like this so simply.
She still has her arms and legs.
There are plenty of ways for a man to get pleasure from a woman.

I let go.
Kohaku's limp body crumples to the floor.
She raggedly gasps for air.
"Ha—haha, ha."
Face-down on the floor, her ass stares up at me invitingly.
"Haha, ha."
I press down on her back.
She tries to escape, but I hold her fast.
"P.. please—please stop, Shiki-san!"
With one hand I press on her back, and with the other, I pull up on her hips.

Lifting her kimono, I bare the lower half of her body.
"—!"

Kohaku tries to pull away.
I don't care.
She can't escape.
I squeeze her naked ass.
It feels soft.
She must be incredibly tense.
Her anus looks like a tightened fist.
Her no longer hidden pink slit is tightly throbbing.
pant, *pant*, *pant*

There's no need to caress her.
I penetrate into her with my erected organ, not caring if I tear through her.

"Hya...!!"
Kohaku's voice.
Some foreign object is entering her dry passage.
She can't be feeling any pleasure.
There should only exist pain.
"St.. Stop—no, stop it, Shiki-san....!"

She tries to crawl forward to escape.
But that only makes it worse for her.
Moving her body makes her inner muscles contract.
All she accomplishes is making her tunnel suck me deeper inside.

My breathing fills the room.

Deeper.
I thrust in so deep I can almost feel her womb.
"Ah—, n—!"
I can barely hear her voice.
It looks like she's trying to hold her voice in.
Hands clenching painfully against the ground, she does her best to resist crying out.
"A—Ah.....!"
I begin to stroke her.
And hear a sound like dripping, dirty water.
The insides of Kohaku that were resisting up until now slowly dampen.
This vague wet sensation, and the definite sensation of her trying to suck me in.
The heat inside of her increases.

My harsh panting turns to laughter.

I keep stroking her.
At some point Kohaku started to lift up with her hips.
Just like a dog in heat, I insert, pull out, and insert again.
The rhythm of the wet, sloppy sounds filling the air definitely fits the image of rutting animals.

"Ah—gg, Shiki-sa.... you mustn't—" She speaks in a stifled voice.

Haha, hahaha.

I see.
She's still concerned about Akiha and Hisui?
That's funny.
Even though your body wants this, you're still thinking that clearly, Kohaku?

pant, *pant*, *pant*, ah.

"—Shiki-san, why are you.... please, stop it....!"
Her entire body is tinged red with lust, even her ass feeling it, and she still calls out that name!?

Ha, haha, hahahaha, ha.

I breathe heavily.
Her body feels so.. exceptional.
This sharp burning pleasure isn't coming from my balls, it almost feels like it's coming from deep within me.
Really, this is such a great pleasure.
As if someone is stabbing me from behind, my body lurches forward and my shaft shoots deeper.
Her body, unlike her conscience, frantically joins my movements.
Her wet insides are an insulated space without even a bit of free room.
The more I move, the more she squeezes me.
Her insides squeeze me with different movements, none being the same.

Ha, haha, ahahahaha.

There's something wrong with her body.
It's the first time I met a woman I would regret killing.
There's no end to this sensation.
There's no end to the pleasure.
The brimming juices flow all over the floor, my body, and Kohaku's ass.

Even reaching that opening above her mound.

Aha, hahahaha.

A stretching sensation.
I slip a finger into her anus and wiggle it around.
"Hwa, ha—!?"
She cries out for the first time.
Her movement suddenly changes.

Her body tightens around me.
Hot.
Hot, hot, hot.
Her body feels so good it makes me want to laugh out loud.
I twist my finger.
Stretching her open, I push it further inside.
"N, ah—!"
She shudders and sobs at the feeling.
Haha, hahaha.
There's something wrong.
There's something wrong.
There's something wrong.

Burning.
The swirling impulse within gathers noisily in one spot.
"Shi.. ki-sa.... please.. stop.. it."

I wrench myself away from her bottomless depths.
Her flesh slaps noisily together almost in complaint.
I pull back until I can see everything.
A clear fluid spills down.

pant, *pant*, hahahaha, ha.

It's a little quick, but let's end it.
I'm more than prepared.
I thrust my finger in her ass all the way in.
"Ngu—!"

Kohaku's body stiffens at the unpleasant sensation of something foreign invading her body.

That's no hiding the way she acted with my shaft inside of her.

Her insides squeeze me even tighter.

Using all my might, I thrust into her once more.

"——!"

Kohaku's body convulses.

She moves around to escape the pain.

pant, *pant*, haha, ha.

I don't care.

Suddenly, I let go of everything that I've been holding in for so long.

Releasing it all.

I feel it shooting deep inside of her.

pant, *pant*, *pant*

It's releasing.

The burning impulse inside me is going away.

Kohaku lies squirming on the ground, but what do I care?

With dead eyes, her hips still twitch, making her look really pathetic.

I like watching that.

pant, *pant*, *pant*

I breathe harder.

pant, *pant*, *pant*

Something is.. funny.

pant, *pant*, *pant*

And I start to laugh.

I have to go outside.
If I stay here, I'll kill Kohaku-san.
If I stay in the mansion.
I'll kill even Akiha and Hisui.
So before those urges come again, I have to disappear.
"Ahahahahaha!"
Quickly.
A place where no one is.
I have to go to a place where no one is or I'll go crazy again—

setvar flgJ + 1
turn to **280**

280

I leave the mansion.
.... What the hell is going on?
Even though there's no one around, I can feel the presence of people.
Buildings.
From the houses around me, I sense people.
pant—*pant*—

With all these people here, I won't be able to hold back again.
Somewhere—I have to go somewhere without any people around or I'll never
be able to calm down.
Where no one is.
Where there's no residences nearby.

.... Somewhere, where even if I go crazy again, I won't cause anyone any trouble.

.... *pant*.... *pant*.....
There's no one else in the park.
There's no houses nearby.
.... No one's supposed to be here, but I still can't calm down.
No matter how far away they are, there are houses all around here.
I can see the lights of town in the distance, too.
"It doesn't, exist."
Yeah, it doesn't exist.
There's no place in a city where you can't sense any presence of humans.
There's really no place where I can truly be alone in this civilized city.
"Damn—it."
All around me.
So many people all around me.
If I walk just a little, I can catch all the prey I want.

"Shut—up."
My head hurts.
Even though I finally don't see the "lines" anymore, I'll start to see them again
like this.
"—Eh?"
Wait, Shiki.
Isn't this strange?
Because it's not like I was seeing these "lines" because I was excited.
Those "lines" are things I can't help but see when I don't have my glasses on.
So even if I'm calmed down, I would still see them if I don't have my glasses on.
But I have dropped my glasses—
"—They're.. here."
I bring my fingers to my face and find out my glasses were there all along.

In other words,
Even if I wear the glasses Sensei gave me, I cannot control my eyes anymore.
"Ha—haha."
I am hit with the truth.
Just like Roa said, I just didn't realize that I was already insane.
That night.
Ever since that time when I wanted from the bottom of my heart to kill that bastard who was disgracing Ciel.
"... Oh... then, the headache from that time was...."
The headache from when I was fighting Roa.
When I saw those "lines" of death even when I don't remember taking off my glasses, and when I got Ciel-senpai to go find them for me.

Since that time, I—even when I wore my glasses, regardless of what my intentions, I've been able to see those "lines".
"... Senpai... knew."
No, she probably just didn't tell me.
So as not to worry me, she lied to protect my mistaken perceptions.
"... I see... Sen... pai."
She told me to talk to her if anything happened.
I've already memorized her phone number.
"Phone—"
There's a payphone nearby.
But—what am I going to do by calling her?
No one can heal my body.
Even Ciel-senpai can't heal what's inside me.

I can't let her see me like this.

turn to **281**

But still, I want to hear her voice.

turn to **282**

281

"——"

.... I can't do it.
I don't want her to see me like this.. like a killer.
No one can save me.
I can't ask anyone for help.
This impulse.
There can only be one way to eliminate this "Roa" inside of me.
Like that previous person I saw in that dream.
I can be killed by that white vampire princess, or— in order to prevent any
more victims from appearing, I can lower the curtain on myself.
"—Kk."
.... No, not yet.
There's still some of me remaining.
I haven't killed anyone yet.
So—there has to still be a way.
I can't end here.
The vampire in this city is gone.
And Senpai is still here.
I became happy, like in a dream.
So—I can't wake from this dream yet.
As long as I live.
As long as there are pieces of me remaining, I have to look for a way to do
something about this monster inside of me—

turn to ??

282

But, I want to see her.
 I want to hear Ciel-senpai's voice.
 The only one who I can talk to, the only one who will listen to me.
 If she is there, then I can remain as Tohno Shiki.

"....."

I turn the dial.
 After three rings, I hear the receiver pick up and Ciel-senpai's voice.

"Hello?
 Who is it?"
 "....."
 It's strange.
 Her voice seems.. so warm.
 "Hello?
 Hey, can you hear me?"
 Her questioning voice.
 I've only been there once, but I can imagine her holding the phone in her room.
 "....."
 I can't speak.
 I don't know what to say.
 I knew I shouldn't have called.
 I can't get this person involved.
 I should—just hang up without saying anything.
 "Tohno-kun?
 Is that you, Tohno-kun?"

"Ah———" "
 Hearing my name, I suddenly want to cry.

"..... Yes."
 I slip out a response.
 "Ah, I knew it was you, Tohno-kun.
 Why are you calling this late?"
 "....."
 I tell myself to stop.
 I tell myself to make up some excuse, tell her I'll see her tomorrow and hang up.
 But, I can't seem to do that.
 "Senpai, I, I think I'm not going to make it."
 I speak in a fading voice.
 "——Tohno-kun?"
 It sounds like her voice froze.
 "Tohno-kun, what do you mean?"

What's wrong?"
"—I mean, I can't make it.
I tried to resist it.
But, it was useless.
Like he said, it seems like, I'm just a killer."

And a really bad one, too.
Even now, if I let my guard down, I want to slice my knife through Akiha's or Hisui's throat.
Not just someone off the street, but people close to me—My sanity is about to crumble away, I'm at the point of thinking such things.
"... What should I do?
I can't kill myself.
I've never been taught how to kill myself."
"... And, where are you right now?"
"In the park.
I wanted to go where there aren't any people, but there's too many houses nearby.
I'm, going crazy."
"... I understand.
I'll head to the school so let's meet there.
There's no houses nearby, so won't it be quiet?"
"—That's right—at school, there won't be anyone there."
"Alright?
Please wait at the school grounds."

The line cuts off.
"——"
I exit the phone booth.
Senpai—I can see Ciel-senpai.
I don't think anything will change when I see her, but I still want to see her.

"—Gha, agh."
My body starts to get hot again.
Hoping I won't meet anyone on the way to school, I leave the park with uncertain steps.

The school is dead quiet.
There's no houses nearby, so it's very quiet around here.

pant—*pant*, *pant*—
I take off my glasses and cut the lock on the school gate with my knife.
"Ah."
.... I can't believe it.
Even without thinking about it, I seemed to have put my knife in my pocket.

Probably,
so that at any time, I can kill someone.

"Ha..... ah."

I fall to my knees as soon as I get to the school grounds.
I brace myself off the ground using both my hands.

"....."

My whole body is hot.
But, I don't feel like I am not me anymore.
Probably,

by violating Kohaku-san,

the impulse momentarily subsided.

"—Gg."

Gorge rises in my throat.
My mouth tastes bitter.
I haven't eaten anything today, so all I can vomit is my stomach acid.

"Kohaku—san."

It isn't something forgiven with a mere apology.
So, I can't apologize.
How can I offer my atonement to her from now on?
That conversation so many days ago.
When Ciel-senpai helped me while I was in the depths of despair after I killed Arcueid.
That person—she told me that there weren't people who sinned and people who did not sin, but there are only people who can and who cannot atone for their sins.

But, what should I do?

My committed sin, the wounded mind, can it be atoned for—

"—?"

It suddenly gets darker.
The sound of footsteps.
I didn't realize it since I was face down, but someone is coming.
Under the moonlight.
Did that person darken the sky with her shadow?
"Are you trying to repent, Tohno-kun?"

Ciel-senpai asks in a cold voice.

"—Senpai."

.... She, really came.

I want to see her face, so I lift my head like I'm looking up at the night sky.

"—Eh?"

—But this.

—This isn't,
the Ciel that I know.

Her bare arms have the tattoo of a cross on them.
Her cold eyes, as if watching someone she doesn't even know.
.... Senpai bears an uncouthly weapon with an aura of coldness that doesn't suit her.

"——Ah."

.... I know this.

Inside my brain, I know what weapon this is.
That has to be—what's called the Seventh Holy Scripture, one of the apocrypha that must never be removed from its resting place.

"Sen—pai?"

"As I expected, you were Roa after all, Tohno-kun."

With her frigid eyes,
Senpai speaks with a voice that is equally cold.

"——"

I start to feel a shiver up my spine.

For no reason.

No, my instincts and my brain work full force to tell me the danger, and I jump back.

"——"

Still with her mouth shut, she takes a step towards me with that ominous weapon.

.... She has no openings whatsoever.

If I run away hastily,

if I show my back to her, I know that thing will pierce my heart and I will disappear without the opportunity for reincarnation ever again.

.... Even though I don't even have that knowledge in my memories.

"—Why?
I just—"
I just.. wanted to see Senpai again.

"I understand.
Roa is already surfacing, right?
Then it is too late already."
Lightly,
she takes another effortless step forward.

That figure looks like—
"—What are you doing, Senpai?
You look like—you're, going to kill me."
"—"

She doesn't answer.
She just stares at me like she's trying to find out where she can aim to kill me quickly.
"—Sen, pai."
She's serious.
She seriously, plans to kill me.

—Creak.
My nerves feel the imminent death before me.
My spine is screaming and the back of my neck is numbing.

But—more than this fear of death,
I can't believe why this person is saying such things.
"—Why?"
I don't know.
"Senpai, you said you stayed here for my sake."
"—"

With a start,
Ciel-senpai's legs stop.

She looks at me and grins.
"Your goodness really is a rare treasure.
It is a good thing to trust people, but if you were a little more composed and thought about it clearly, you could have maybe got away."
"Eh—"
"First of all, didn't you ever think about why I came to this school in the first place?
I didn't do it just because I wanted to, you know."
"—Sen, pai?"
"You knew my goal was to destroy 'The Serpent'—Roa.
Coming here to this school was because I knew Roa's reincarnated host was here.

But since I didn't know for sure, I needed to check things out for a while."

"Wait a minute, what in the world are you—"
What is she babbling about?
I don't know.
I really can't understand what she's talking about.
She ignores my bewilderment and keeps talking.

"... I told you before, Tohno-kun.
Roa has requirements for the family he decides to reincarnate into.
If you think the other way around, you just have to look for families with those traits.
When you know that, finding him is very simple.
It's easy to find families that have special abilities passed down through their blood once you do a bit of research.
In this city, there is only one family that fits Roa's requirements.
So—I knew from the beginning who Roa was."
"—Wha—"
That's strange.
If she knew from the beginning, she could have killed him or caught him right then....
From the beginning?
She knew, who it was...?
"Yes.
Look, don't you realize it now?
You know, Tohno-kun.
I came to this school to catch you from the beginning."

"_____"

Wait.
I just want, her to, wait.
"But, a little mistake happened.
.... I was watching you from afar so as not to stimulate Roa inside you, but I concluded that you might not be Roa's new reincarnated host.
But, the eldest son of the Tohno family had to be what Roa reincarnates into.
There is no mistake in that, so what had to be a mistake was you, Tohno-kun."
Ciel-senpai speaks matter-of-factly.
I—can't say anything.
"Looking into it, you were fatally wounded eight years ago and adopted by your relatives.
What happened afterwards was exactly as Tohno SHIKI said two nights ago.
I don't know what happened in the Tohno family eight years ago, but you were killed by that kid called SHIKI.
No, it's more like your life was stolen.
As a result, you became connected to SHIKI who was Roa's host."
A direct voice, without emotion.

I don't know this Ciel-senpai.

Or is this..

Is this the true Ciel, and the kind person I knew up until now was all just—

"Up until now, there should have been times where Roa's memory would flow into you through SHIKI.

He is a vampire that manipulated the shapeless thing called a soul.

For Roa, you two who shared one life were a finely crafted double existence.

"That's why—when SHIKI's body was destroyed, Roa didn't need to reincarnate.

He still had a place to run to: you."

Cold.

As if hating her enemy, she detests me.

"But, it's all over now.

I wasn't prepared to finish it so suddenly that one night, but tonight is different.

I really am fortunate in a way.

If Arcueid had destroyed Roa, he probably would have reincarnated again."

.... I can't.

Believe this.

That—that..

"—That's not, true."

"Go ahead, please keep on denying it and play dumb.

That makes my job easier.

Still—"

A metallic rattle sounds from the weapon.

"It doesn't change the fact that I can finish you off easily no matter what you do, Roa."

"_____"

Her laughing voice causes me to finally understand.

.... She isn't lying.

.... Her eyes aren't looking at "me".

.... Her feelings never did have anything to do with "me" from the beginning.

".... What is this?

Then, then from the very beginning, you always thought of me as Roa?

Senpai.

Being friends with me was all just.....!"

—I can't say it.

I can't finish the sentence.

If I do that, I feel like everything will turn into a lie in that instant.

"Of course.

After SHIKI was destroyed, the only reason why I stayed in school was because Roa had not disappeared.

Since Roa is a student here, it's more convenient for me to stay."

I would never go back while leaving you here.

That's what she told me once with a smile.
That wasn't, for my sake.
She stayed here just to search for the still-living Roa.
That is the only reason why she gave me her phone number.
"—Ha."

Then, that too.

"Haha—"

And those times, too.

"Haha—ha."

And when she saved me that one night, too.

"Ah..... ha, ha."

And, those sad eyes, too.

"Haha—ha."
.... That's right, Shiki, this is nothing at all.
These memories—they are nothing at all.
I just thought I loved her.
And that she loved me back.
.... What a joke.
They were all just an illusion made from a play.

—All of it.
All of it was a fairy tale made up of lies—
"—I understand.
But, Senpai.
How did you know Roa was still alive?
How, how did you know Roa reincarnated into this Tohno Shiki?"



"Of course I knew.
Because it's about myself." Senpai says something I can't understand.
"... About yourself...?"



"Yes.
The one who sought out the Tohno family and chose it for the next host was me.
.... Well, unless Roa's consciousness awakens, I couldn't tell that it "appeared", so it wasn't that useful of a memory, though."
"Senpai, what—are you saying?"
"What am I saying?
It's an old story.
It's a story from eight years ago, but there was a girl like you who didn't know anything.
She was sixteen years old when that impulse began to stain her.
.... But before that, there was nothing.
She didn't have any special power like you did, Tohno-kun.
She really did live a normal life without knowing anything.
"Helping out her father, going to school.
Terrible at waking up early but always helping with the store in the evening.
She really did think she would carry on her father's work."

"Eh—"
Just now.
Scenery I have never seen before flashes in my head.. yet I feel like I have in

fact seen it somewhere.
Her story—feels like it's very similar to that dream I saw.



"But, her dream wasn't fulfilled.
With her own hands, she destroyed the happiness that was there naturally.
Because she was Roa's reincarnated host."
"Her body had great ability and Roa was pleased.
She tried so hard to resist it just like you, but it was useless.
In the end, she drank the blood of her father and mother and slowly killed the townspeople.
That child, maybe she went crazy then."
"You understand, right, Tohno-kun?
You can't stop it.
"Stop" or "You shouldn't" doesn't even enter your thoughts.
Isn't it strange?
—Even though you still have your conscious awareness."
"Se—n, pai.
Don't tell me, that story is,"
"But that nightmare came to an end soon.
That woman in white came and pierced her heart."

—Yeah, I know.
So the girl died, and Roa reincarnated as Tohno SHIKI.
But, that's.
"But, that girl, she couldn't stay dead."
Quietly.
Almost laughingly, she says this.
"Her dead body was taken to the Church and preserved as a sample of a vampire returning to human form.
.... But, though I don't know what kind of fate it was, her body was a special body, and had an abnormal reviving ability.

One day three years later, even though she shouldn't have, she came back from the dead.

.... It's strange, isn't it?

Even though it was just a discarded shell of Roa's soul, it still came back to life.

"After that, things were.. difficult.

The Church viewed the child as heresy and killed the child, but no matter how many times they killed her, she wouldn't die.



.... I'm sorry, can I complain a bit?

That girl, she underwent an entire month of life only being killed.

Every single day, without even a single moment of rest, she came back to life only to be killed once more.

Every day, all day."

"..... What.."

A body that can't die.

Flesh that will return to its original state no matter what happens.

Roa, the vampire reincarnated as Tohno SHIKI, said that about this person.

.... It seemed so painful.

Senpai healed no matter what wound she received, but every wound she got caused her face to contort in pain.

Every day of that?

Every day, all day without a single pause, living to be killed and coming back again....?



"And then, the people of the Church finally realized this was too strange. All the problems that no one can deal with or solve are handed to the place called the Burial Agency.

There, she was taught what happened to her.

".... In short, she was a contradiction.

She was a human born as Roa.

Even though the personality of her first fifteen years was hers, the name of her soul was Roa.

While she was herself, she was also Roa.

So, it is a contradiction if the girl called Roa is dead when Roa is alive.

The progeny of the existence Roa.... this daughter of Roa cannot die before him.

"Whenever this world has even a slight error, this world corrects it to preserve itself.

So—that child, as long as Roa's soul still exists, will exist for all eternity.

No one else but the world itself "fixes" the error automatically.

"The clergy said the child was 'outside the cycle'.

As long as Roa lives, it will forever be stopped.

She cannot die of old age since she cannot age, and even if she was burnt to ashes, time would reverse itself to return it to its original state."

"Such a monster.. it usually would have been sealed away forever, but she happened to inherit the magical knowledge of Roa.

The clergy of the Burial Agency said she would be useful and brought her into the Church.

"Five years since then.

She chose to discard her name and live as one who hunted vampires.

—More than Roa's master Arcueid, I can tell where Roa's soul exists.

The reason.. I don't even have to tell you, right?"

"——"

Right, it doesn't need to be said.

But, I don't want to admit such a thing.

"I said it before, Tohno-kun.

Ciel's goal is one thing and one thing only."

—I want to die as a human—

I didn't understand what those words meant then.

But now.

Now—can I understand at least a bit of it?

"—I can't."

It's almost regretful, but I can't.

I can't understand that feeling of wanting to die.

As long as I'm alive—I'll think about wanting to die, but I would never truly mean it.

But, that's all Senpai wishes for.

A way of thinking which was transformed into that.
 A life that makes you wish only that.
 I don't know yet.
 With my own hands.
 I don't know the pain of killing the ones close to me with my own hands even
 while still conscious.
 And I don't ever want to know it.
 But this person has lived through it.
 So—is that why she just wants to die?
 "That's.... that's wrong."
 "It's not."
 I simply want to die as a human."
 Her voice sounds cold.
 "..... I."
 I can only nod.
 Both her wish,
 and her pain, I understand.
 "..... I don't want it."
 I don't like my treatment or Ciel's wish.
 I don't want to think this is reality.

But, time waits for no one.
 With a metallic rattle,
 the agent called Ciel steps forward to kill me.

As if saying there's no need to talk anymore,
 Ciel's hands lift up that weapon.
 The Seventh Holy Scripture.
 The weapon that the reincarnation-denying Church created.
 A scriptural canon inscribed with every possible impeachment of reincarnation
 criticism.
 It's an item that is scripture yet an apocrypha.
 A weapon, yet a scripture at the same time.

If I'm hit by that, my soul itself will disperse into nothingness.
 "——"

The bayonet rises up.
 The tip comes towards me.
 But slowly.
 If it is Ciel—she should be able to pierce me without me even noticing it ever
 happened.
 "Ah——"
 There's no time to think.
 I——

Escape forward.

turn to **284**

Escape backwards.

turn to **283**

283

—I jump back instantly.

With just lightly jumping back,
I increase the distance between us to many meters.
"Eh—?"
The one who's surprised is me.
Weapon still at the ready, Senpai pursues me emotionlessly.
"—!"
I run towards the school's front gate.
My body is almost frighteningly light.
I run as if slicing through the wind.

Even if Senpai's athletic abilities far exceed those of a human's, she can't chase me if I'm like this—

—And then.

My body stops suddenly.
No matter how much I try to move forward, my legs won't budge.
"—Wha—"
When I turn around, there is a sword pierced right there.
A thin, nail-like sword is pierced into the ground at my feet.
The sword is piercing my shadow, which seems to be the reason why I can't raise my legs from the ground.
"Why.... you...!"
I gather up all the strength in my legs.
But no matter how hard I try, they don't even move one millimeter.

—And there.



"How careless.

Even if you were to run away, I bet there was a better way to do so."

The member of the Burial Agency nicknamed "Bow" appears.

"Sen—pai."

"I can't allow you to leave as your body has transformed into a vampire already. Here—I will exorcise that soul."

The sound of her footsteps.

Like the sound of a condemned criminal walking up the thirteen steps of the gallows.

"—Farewell.

At least, with this—"

She speaks in a small voice, almost inaudible.

She plants the point of the weapon against my heart and pulls the trigger.

A brief explosion.

"G—hu."

I cough up blood.

After a flash of light that seems to blow apart my brain, inside my disappearing self, I see my soul, being scattered away, like the pages, of an old book.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **433**

No.

turn to **1**

284

—I fall forward.

I felt from before that if I turned and ran, my heart would be shot from behind.

"Hya—!"

Her sword flies past my head.

It seems really slow.

I evade her attack, move right beside her, and—

"—!"

The instant I tried to run forward, Senpai's movement changed drastically.

In an instant, with a speed that makes her seem to have literally disappeared, she swings her weapon horizontally.

The rush of the wind fills my ears—and for some reason, I am standing many meters away from her.



"—"

She clicks her tongue and glares at me.

"Ow....!"

My left arm hurts.

"What.... Huh—!?"

I'm surprised.

From the elbow down, my arm is broken.

Not broken normally, but my lower arm is bent in the shape of a triangle.



"—Sacrificing your arm to save your head?
If you didn't do anything, I would have ended it painlessly for you."
"Wha—"

Even though I didn't notice it, I must have broken my arm defending her attack.
"Aren't you going to pull out your knife?"
She looks at me with a bored expression.
.... She's looking down at me.
She looks down at me as if saying she could kill me at any moment.

"Gg...!"

Pain.
Pain shoots from my arm to my brain.
The blood from my broken arm seems to flow like poison into my nerves.
Sharply.
Just with that, my mind fills with a white blankness.



"—"

She continues to look at me with those cold eyes.
"You—!"
You break my arm, and you still act that way!?
Do you know how much this hurts!?
Making such a fool of me.
Making such a fool of me!
Making such a fool of me——!
"If that's how you're going to be, Senpai—"

I grip the knife in my pocket.

"I'm not just going to stand here helplessly—"

The hard feeling of metal.

"—and let you kill me."

With a quick snap,
I take out the blade of my knife.
"—Are you stupid?"

Instantly,
her body, explodes.

—No, that's not right.
She crouches down low to the ground—almost like a lizard, and runs up towards
me in a flash.

She closes the distance of six meters in a flash.
She's not in my vision at all.
Her whole body is below my knee-height, and explodes upward from there.

A thud.

From right beneath me, her bayonet accurately shoots directly for my throat.

"Ga—ah!"
I gasp.
Pain, is there pain?
Yes, I can still feel pain.

"Ha—ugh."
Conscious, am I conscious?
Alright, I still have that.

"A, aaaaaa.....!"
My body.
My body—is not okay.

A dripping sound.
It's coming from my left shoulder.
Looking at it, it's already a waterfall of blood, which pours straight down.
Just now.

The bayonet didn't hit my throat, but my left shoulder.

"A, Aa, Aaaaaah!"

It hurts.

It hurts so much the word pain doesn't come close to describing it.

"Haa, aaa, aggggg——!"

But, I'm alive.

Still, I'm alive.

My body.

My body is away from her again.

I smell a whiff of gunpowder from my shoulder.

"A, Aah, ah."

Just now.

The instant that bayonet pierced me, she must have pulled the trigger.

I was blown away by that, and there's distance between us again.



".... To happen twice, that must mean it's not a coincidence.

With that much blood pouring out, not dying from shock must already be a sign that your body has begun to change."

Ga-chang!

A metallic sound.

The sword on the end of that weapon changes into a new one.

The sword that shot me just now falls—and turns into pages of a book and scatters.

".... That's.... ridiculous."

But that ridiculous thing is really frightening.

That—just touching me carries a fatal poison.

Death.

I'll die.

Without a doubt, I'll be killed.

Will I die?

Is that what I'm scared of?
I don't know.

"Ah, gg.....!"

My shoulder is burning.
Hot, it's so hot, as if my entire body will burst into flames.
She readies her weapon once more with another metallic clang.
.... Twice.
Withstanding that twice can be nothing but a miracle.
The next time will certainly—

I imagine that bayonet piercing me right in the face.
That's more repulsive than frightening.

Death is.
No matter how it happens, something useless, dirty, and disgusting.
I like myself—so I don't want that to happen.
Is that why I'm scared?
I don't know.
Come to think of it—I was always able to see "death", but I never thought
about "death" at all.
No, that doesn't really matter right now.
pant, *pant*, *pant*—
I have to escape.
I don't want to die, so I have to get away.



"—You won't take off your glasses?"
A simple, plastic voice.
Those words.
I gasp at their meaning.
Because taking them off means I would see Senpai's "lines".
If that happens, I might kill her—
"Wha—What are you, saying, Senpai....!?"



"——"

A chill runs through me.
The air suddenly becomes saturated with a murderous intent.
"... I can't spend any more time with you.
Please just die already."

Her figure plunges low again.

—She's coming.

Even though I know she's going to run towards me again, it's hard for me to even see her.

—I can only think of escaping.

If I don't want to be killed—escape is my only option.

Fortunately, our distance is almost ten meters.

If I run as fast as I can, I can make it to the school building.

Maybe I might be able to do something if I can get into a less open space—!

"——"

My back.

Something—pierced, my back.

"Aa—ah."

My body falls forward.

Just a little more.

And it was just a little more before I could enter the school building.

"Kk——"

I lift myself up with one arm.

What sticks through me is one of those swords that looks like a nail that Senpai was using before.

"Why—you.....!"

I must be numbed to pain, and I pull out the sword skewering my back from behind.

.... Since it penetrated through me, I got mad and pulled it out from my chest.
 "Alright.....!"
 Now I can escape inside....!
 "What do you plan on doing by escaping, Tohno-kun?"

Before that,
 I hear Senpai's voice from behind me.
 "You still don't understand?
 How fast do you think you just ran here?
 Why are you still alive after receiving that fatal wound?"
 "St——"
 My mind begins to white out.
 Don't let her trick you.
 Don't let her trick you.
 Hasn't she been deceiving you all along?
 Don't listen to her anymore.
 If you listen, you'll die.
 Ignore her.
 Don't accept it.
 Even if it is the truth, this body can only reject it—
 "—Stop, it."
 "Geez, there's nowhere for you to run to.
 You can only fight or be killed.
 But if you can't fight, you can only die."
 Her footsteps.
 With the sound of footsteps, Senpai approaches.
 "——!"
 I leap.
 My back, my shoulders, my arm are all almost dead, but I leap as if it was nothing.

—I can't even believe it myself.
 Still breathing wildly and with a speed that matches Senpai, I run into the school building.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*—
 I run.
 Without thinking, just wanting to escape, I continue running.
 pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*—
 But I'm at my limit.
 Is it because I'm out of breath or is it that my wounds won't let me move my arms and legs anymore?
 Whatever it is, it doesn't matter.
 My breathing becomes more forced.
 At the end of the hallway.
 Coming onto a wall aimlessly, I fall.

I fall on my back, and try to get back up, and feel foolish for doing so.
.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*
Sitting cross-legged on the floor, I lean my back against the wall.
Throwing back my head, I take a big breath of air.
"—The moon."
Looking up, I can see the moonlight through the window.
Is it because I'm so exhausted?
Everything I look at seems vague, as if everything was covered in a mist.

Vagueness.
Does that mean it is indefinite?
The same as me.
The same as the person called Tohno Shiki, indefinite.
"... Ou.... ch...."
My shoulder throbs in pain.
If I was as definite as this pain, maybe this wouldn't have happened?
I'm starting to not understand.
I always thought I was Tohno Shiki.
But that was a different person, and they tell me I'm just an adopted son from somewhere.
Being adopted means I should have memories of before I came to the Tohno mansion, but there's nothing.
I... really, I only have the memories of Tohno Shiki.

In the night sky is the solitary moon.
"—"
It's incredibly.. strange.
Why didn't I realize it until now?
Tonight is so—

.... In the end, just what was I?
It's stupid not knowing anything about myself and just disappearing like this.

Everything is so vague, it's stupid.
A world where I can see death.
A vision where I can perceive death.
That day eight years ago.
I was able to meet Sensei and was able to live normally.
I can still declare that it was proper to meet her.
"... But, Sensei.
I, guess I, was someone, who shouldn't be alive."
.... I should end my life while some part of me can still think that.
But I can't do it.
I can't kill myself.
Even if it is pointless, even if it is a mistake, I want to keep on living.

If I die, everything will become a lie.
I want to keep on living.
No matter how wrong it is, no matter how many things I have to lose, I want
to keep on living.

Only her.
If only I had Ciel-senpai with me.
I wouldn't care what else I had to lose.

—For that sole reason, I have kept on living like this.
But, that is all over now.
These past five years.
Was it a long time?
Was it a short time?
I don't know.
"... Liar."
I don't want to hear those words.

—I have to thank you, Tohno-kun.
My work here is done now.
All that's left is for me to take responsibility for all my actions.
"... Li, ar."
Yeah.
But, maybe there was some truth in there, too.
Because even though she deceived me, not even once..

—Thank you so much for everything until now.
It has been a long time since I've been this happy.
So, let's finish with a handshake.
"... You, big liar."
Not even once did she lie to me.

—Even though I'm not going to be here, please stay friends with Inui-kun.
I wanted to be a student like you and Inui-kun—

"....."

But that person herself was a lie.

I can't even think that smile could really be a lie.

But, this is what reality is.

.... Ciel is a lie, and she was staying near me only so she could kill me.

I was fooled.

She did not love me at all.

And when she helped me when I was completely lost, too.

And the time we spent during breaks for no reason, too.

All of it was just to confirm if I was Roa or not.

I grit my teeth.

I grit my teeth hard.

".... Damn it."

I scratch the wall in frustration.

Yes, I was tricked.

Ciel got closer to me, calculating everything.

".... Even still."

Feeling pain in my heart, I scratch the wall.

.... Yes, I was tricked.

But, still—

"—I, can't hate Senpai."

There's no way I can hate her.

Even if it was all a lie for her, I really enjoyed it.

No matter what, that's still true.

It was only less than two weeks since I met Senpai, but—I really was happy.

".... Damn it—"

That's why I can't hate her.

But that's an illusion only for me.

That's why I regret only that.

My vision wavers.

Outside the window lies the white night.

It's quiet here, almost like the bottom of a deep sea.

Wavering quietly.

Everything is fake, an illusion that disappears when you approach it.

Like a mirage you can never grasp.

I can hear her footsteps.

.... She's coming.

"—Kill her?"

Inside my head, I hear those words.
If you don't want to die, slice her apart.

If you think you're not mistaken, slice her apart.
Just slice her apart already!

Slice her apart.
Slice her apart, Slice her apart, Slice her apart, Slice her apart, Slice her apart,
Slice her apart, Slice her apart, Slice, slice, slice, slice, slicesliceslicesliceslicesliceslice—
—

"——"

.... It looks like I'm really done.

My head starts to rage again.
But still, I don't want to die.
If I don't want to die—there's only one thing to do.

The footsteps get louder.
Her shadow grows larger.

—Aren't you going to take off your glasses?

Even knowing what it meant, she said that.
In that case.

if flgJ >= 1
turn to **286**

Take off my glasses.

turn to **286**

Don't take off my glasses.

turn to **287**

285

turn to **286**

286

—Everything.
All of it should turn into illusion.

I stand up as I strongly grip my knife.

The footsteps get even louder.
I sense the enemy coming closer.
All the time, someone's voice echoes in my brain.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart. Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
Slice her apart.
"U—"

Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart
Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart Slice her apart—

"Shut up."
Using my willpower, I force the voice in my head to be quiet.
"This is, what I decided."
Slice—
"I don't need you to tell me what to do."
her—
"If you don't want to be killed by Ciel."
apart—
"Just shut up until it's over, Roa."
—

The voice disappears completely.
The footsteps, and her approaching shadow.

—Ciel appears before me.



"—You finally decided to fight."
Her voice seems almost relieved.
"That's good.
Now there is no sin for either of us.
Now that we are both trying to kill each other, our sin will die.
Now there is only punishment for the one who lives."
.... Since we are both trying to kill each other there is no sin?
Her words are part of a world I can't understand.
"I see.
Then is that punishment for the one that's left alive atoneable?"
"Yes.
Something that is atoneable is what we call punishment.
If it is called punishment, there is no reason for it not to be atoneable.
The only thing that does not disappear is the sin.
So—we don't want to carry that burden, do we?"
Saying that,
she takes another step forward.
"—Then, killing you here isn't a sin, Senpai?"
"Yes.
I will kill you, so it is okay for you to kill me, Tohno-kun.
Our conditions are equal."
Another step.
"——"
That's, not right.
Certainly I am getting killed, so I'm killing her back to protect my own life.
But to say there's no sin—what would happen to Ciel?
From the beginning, she came here with an unrequited will to kill.

That is—
"Farewell.
Let us lower the curtain on this ridiculous play."
The last step.

Her readied bayonet shoots toward my heart.

Before then,
I lunge forward and aim for the "point" on her right lung.

—I didn't think I could kill her.

It's only natural for her to pierce my heart before I get within knife range.
That's why I was surprised.
I easily dodged her blade and was able to pierce her "point" with ease.
"—Sen, pai."
It looked like she accepted my knife on purpose.

"I made you.. kill.. me."
Her faint, weak voice on the verge of death.

"That was, my, greatest sin."
Sounding like she's crying, she uses her remaining strength to stab me with her bayonet.

"—Ga, hu."
My blood flow reverses through my lanced heart.
Coughing up blood, I collapse onto the ground.

Before my eyes,
the body of the one who died slightly ahead of me lies on the floor.
"—How—"
Did you, know?
"—foolish."
Did you know from the beginning—that if there was such a thing as sin, it would only be for you?
"Ha—ah."
The sensation in my limbs fades away.
My consciousness, too.
It will be seconds before I bleed to death.
The instant I was stabbed,
I had a vision of something like an old book, scattering and crumbling away page by page.

Probably, with that, the thing called Roa was dispersed.
"....."
I can't think.
From the very beginning, she planned to give her life to take mine.
Did she think that was her punishment?

—How foolish.
There's no—meaning in that.

"—Still."
I was sad that she died before she apologized to me.
If she could have apologized to me, then I bet she would have felt some relief...
But, she couldn't even say that.
Since she knew it was something that wasn't atoneable by apology, she didn't

apologize to the very end.

That determination.

It makes me angry that I made her go that far.

"What.

In the end—"

I liked her?

Until the very end.

Feeling sad like this until my own death, she was that dear to me.

"—Tss."

I cough weakly and spit out blood.

It's all over.

Staring dazedly at the moon, with these strange thoughts, I drift off to sleep—

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **434**

No.

turn to **1**

287

Then—What do I do?

"No.... way."

I bring my slightly trembling fingers up to my glasses and throw.

Clang.

The dull sound echoes through the hallway.

"There's no way I can do that!"

I shout angrily at the other person inside my head.

It's the first time I ever wanted to kill myself.

Clang.

Clang.

The hard object rolls along the floor.

.... I don't see any lines.

What I threw away was my knife.

I won't take off my glasses.

.... I'll never do that.

It's just that, since I didn't have confidence in myself, I threw away my knife.

If I kept holding it, I know I would've done something worse than me dying.



"....."

And then, she arrives.

Neither her emotionless eyes nor that foreboding weapon change.

She stops in front of me as I sit on the ground.

How come?

She doesn't finish me off.

We just both stare at each other aimlessly.

"—I have one question."

The tip of her bayonet aims at my chest.

"Why didn't you take off your glasses?"

Why—didn't you even try to fight me once?"

".... It's simple."
It's just that the thought never crossed my mind.
"I can't do such a horrible thing to you, Senpai."
"Horrible?"
.... Are you stupid?
I am going to kill you.
I am not your Senpai.
I told you everything was a lie, and you still don't understand....!"
.... Her voice sounds irritated.

—She's really.. angry.

I realize that even though her face is calm, her arms and legs are literally shaking with anger.
".... I know.
Senpai, you were deceiving me up until now.
This person called Ciel-senpai never existed from the beginning.
I understand that."
"If you understand, then why....!"
".... It's okay.
Even if "Senpai" is a lie, it doesn't matter.
I really had a lot of fun.
The time we spent together may not mean much to you, but it was very dear to me."

.... That's why it's okay.
Even if it's all a lie to Senpai,
the fact that I was saved by that is still true.
"—That's why it's okay."
These past two weeks really were fun.
But, if I hate you here, I'll lose even that.
Even if it's a lie to you, that's only half of it.
As for my half, I want to make it real, until the very end.

.... Although exchanging my life for that might be a comical wish.
"—For that.. for that you are going to throw away your life?
Such a wish, your wish is something that small?"
".... I see.
Maybe it is, kind of small."

—But, right now, that is the second dearest thing to me.
I can only think of one wish other than that.
"—I have seen many people, but,"
She takes a step forward.
"This is the first time I've met someone as stupid as you."
Senpai places the tip of her bayonet right up against my heart.

"____"

"____"

.... How come?

She doesn't pull the trigger.

The eyes looking at me are completely empty.

.... Those emotionless eyes that Senpai shows me.

That doesn't mean she's a cold-hearted person, but..

Simply—She can't deceive herself, so in the end, I suppose all she could do was just kill her emotions.

"____"

Yeah, I finally realized it.

That whenever she showed those eyes, she wasn't fooling me—she was fooling herself.

".... You're not going to kill me, Senpai?"

"—I forgot.

In the end, I still must hear your confession.

I am a member of the Church after all."

".... Oh.

I don't have anything to confess, but can I ask something?"

"—Yes.

Please make it short."

".... Yeah, it'll be quick.

It's just, I was wondering why you look like you're going to cry."

Like a jolt,

I think Ciel's body trembled.

"—I'm, not, crying."

Certainly her face is stone cold as she denies this.

.... Hearing that, I even tilt my head to the side.

But, all the same, I—

".... But you still look like you're about to cry.

I don't know why though."

"That's just your imagination.

I don't feel anything."

"—The only emotion I have is the desire to die as a human.

There's nothing else."

She says this with her emotionless eyes.

It's.. terribly sad.

Knowing she's lying right now is just too ironic.

".... How terrible.

Even to the end, you're going to lie to me, Senpai?"

"____"

There's no response.

As if she was frozen, she doesn't move.

"—What about you?"

You're lying.
I don't think your wish is to be killed here by me, right?"
"... Of course.
Because if you die, there's nothing.
I've already experienced it once, so I understand that.
.... To tell the truth, I want to live.
But I don't want to just live."
.... Yes, I don't want that.
Even if I manage to keep living, there's nothing for me after that.
The person called Tohno Shiki would die and would do things just like this
person experienced.
But, more than that.
If I live here, that means Senpai will be gone.
I would not be able to bear living like that.
"... Senpai, everything was fun up until now.
The times I spent with you and Arikiko weren't bad.
Even during breaks when you came, it was fun, almost like a dream.
.... That's probably what my wish is.
It can't ever be granted, but—I really wanted that kind of life to continue."
"You still don't understand?
I already said it was all fake."
"Yeah, but still—it really was fun."
The instant I say that, my heart calms down.

It's okay if it's just an unreachable illusion.
I don't care if it was a mirage that never existed in the first place.
No, maybe because it was an illusion—Even now, the times I spent with Senpai
feel so dear to me.
No matter what, I can't escape now.
Then—if I can just keep watching that dream, then it would be such a great—



"H—how,"
Foolish, she says.
And she slightly moves her bayonet.

It sticks into my chest.
 Just a little bit.
 It only goes into me slightly, like a fingernail's depth.
 Her eyes have stopped.
 All that's left,
 is for her to take another step and it'll all be over.
 "_____"

But that final step doesn't start.
 Bracing the bayonet, she stares at me with her emotionless eyes.
 She grits her teeth painfully.
 "..... I see."
 It must be too difficult for her to do it while I'm looking at her.
 More than anything else, I also don't want to see this person's face on the verge
 of tears.

So I won't trouble her anymore.
 I decide to close my eyes and accept my end.

—Thump.
 My heart quivers.
 Even though I'm prepared, the nausea and chills don't go away.

—Thump.
 Thump, Thump.
 Thump, Thump, Thump.
 "_____"
 My throat is burning.
 My fingertips shake uncontrollably.
 I know.
 I know this is the best way, but still—I'm just scared.
 —*pant*, *pant*, *pant*

I frantically try to hold my breath that tries to spill out.
 She simply has to move ten centimeters forward and I'll turn into a mere lump
 of flesh.
 Even though I'm supposed to be ready for this, my fearful heart is scared of
 disappearing without a trace.
 —*pant*, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

All I do is frantically close my mouth, and try to accept my fate.
 It would probably hurt if I get stabbed in the chest.

I'm scared of not being able to think like I am right now.

"U—ah."

Sweat beads on my forehead.

But still, I don't want to speak.

If I quietly let everything end,

Senpai probably won't have to feel guilty.

"—Ss."

I hear a gasp.

"Why—"

A forced voice.

"Why, how?"

The sword sticking into my chest quivers.

"How can you not hate me?"

No.

What's quivering is Senpai's voice.

"I, I am trying to kill you....!"

I've deceived you until now, I've betrayed you, and mercilessly hunted you down!

Why does your face look so peaceful....!?"

Tap.

With her sword still in place, she takes another step towards me.

"Answer me....!"

I am going to kill you.

Without any regards to your own will, just a one-sided murder....!"

Then, you won't be compensated unless you hate me, right....!?"

Senpai questions me with burning intensity.

.... Quit it.

I'm working so hard to resist this fear, but if I answer now, my feelings might flow out.

"Or are you really just that stupid....!?"

I'm exterminating you as a dirty vampire, so why—"

.... Didn't I tell her it was nothing earlier?

"—Because, it isn't your fault, Senpai."

".....!!!"

Slice.

The tip of the blade cuts into me further.

It must have broke the skin because fresh blood seeps over my chest.

"Ss—Ah, u..... gh!"

—Sharp pain.

The wound isn't even deep.

But just the slightest penetration by the Seventh Holy Scripture causes my mind to shatter.

"AH—a, Ah.....!"

My body shakes uncontrollably.

The blood in my body reverses flow and I almost cough up blood in my pain.

"—It hurts, right?"

I can actually terminate you without making you feel pain, but I'm hurting you like this on purpose.

.... Unless I enjoy this, we won't be able to call it even for all the time I had to spend with you until now."

She seems to be speaking with difficulty.

The bayonet plunges deeper.

"Hya—ah!"

The pain causes sweat to pour out from me.

I feel like my insides are going to flow out through my mouth.

"See, don't you hate me, Tohno-kun?"

So please hate me....!

Tell me I betrayed you.

Tell me it would have been better if you never trusted me.

If you don't—I won't be able to kill you....!"

Her voice shakes as she says this.

.... But, that's just strange.

It's better if I don't hate her, but she still wants me to hate her.

It's like she's telling me that being the bad guy like that, is her punishment.

"Ah..... Ah."

But, that is an impossible order.

There's no way I can hate her.

I just can't hate this person who looks like a child on the verge of tears.

".... You can't be serious.

I can't hate you, Senpai."

"St—stop it please....!"

Why, why are you saying that till the very end....!?"

I'm the one who's to blame, and you're just a victim....!"

"....."

.... Isn't Senpai a victim too?

And no matter what, I'll be taken over by Roa soon.

Before that, before I make mistakes like Ciel-senpai did, I have to kill Roa.

There isn't any other way to vanquish Roa than my death—so it just can't be helped.

".... It's okay.

It's not your fault.

More than that, I'm sorry.

Sorry to make you do this, Senpai."

"St—op."

Stop it, she says in a quiet voice and her bayonet pulls from my chest slightly.

"No—I, I—can't, let Roa escape."

The tip of the Seventh Holy Scripture wavers.

.... But, that should end soon.

"I can't—allow that, Tohno-kun."

A grinding sound.

Senpai grits her teeth and stops the Seventh Holy Scripture.

The tip of it points at my heart.

"——"

I hear her suck in a breath.

Even with my eyes closed, I can feel her finger gripping the trigger.

Click.

Right before the hard metallic sound,

"Thank you.

Even if it was a lie—it was good having you as Senpai."

In the end, I say what I wanted to tell her the most.

"..... U, u."

—I can, hear a voice.

"Uah.... ah, aah, ah."

—Sobbing.

I can hear a voice that sounds like a crying child.

"Uwah.... ah.... ah, ah."

—A loud thud.

The metallic pile falls to the floor.

A bayonet sticks into the wall behind me like a spear.

—Hic.

Hic.

A pained voice.

I realize who that voice is coming from and I open my eyes slowly.

"——"

There isn't the Senpai that was there just now.

The one I see standing before me is just a girl crying painfully.

Her hands are empty.

The Seventh Holy Scripture lies fallen on the floor.
 The bayonet that should have pierced my heart is thrust by my side.
 "... U.... uwaah, ah, aah....!"
 Senpai just cries.
 I don't know what she's sad about, but she cries so painfully I expect her to cough up blood.
 "..... Sen, pai."
 I call out to her.
 "... That's not fair.... Tohno-kun, it's, not, fair....!"

Hic.
 Her throat convulses as she shouts like a spoiled child.

".... Saying.... Saying such a thing, isn't fair....!
 Why, why can't I....!"

Her tears course down her face.
 "I can't.... Even though I can even kill myself at any time, if you say that to me, I can't....!"

She seems ashamed to see me.

"Saying thank you like that—I can't, let such a happy person die like that—"

She covers her face with her hands and continues to weep.

".... Senpai.
 Seeing you cry makes me troubled."
 Because I won't know what to do.
 "Uu.... uu, uwaaaaaaah....!"
 My words might have been the wrong choice, as Senpai cries even louder.

"Geez—why are you doing this all of a sudden....!"
 I don't even understand why I did that.
 But, I can't leave this person who's crying in front of me, so I pull her to me and embrace her.

—We collide with a thud.

Senpai collapses against my chest and continues crying as she stifles her voice.
 "..... I'm, sorry....!"

—I'm sorry.

With a quivering voice, she says this over and over.
 "_____"

.... What is this?
Then, the real lie was the Senpai up until now.
Finally, I get to meet Senpai.
It was about an hour after I called her, but I feel like I've waited for so long.
".... You don't have to apologize, Senpai."
I just wanted to do so, and I embrace her with my still functional right hand.
"Ah——"
A voice like something stretched was just snapped.
Senpai finally stops crying.

.... Thump.
Thump.
I can hear the heartbeat of the person across from me like my own.
"....."
It's awfully quiet.
I can't find the right words to say.
But staying like this—just hearing her heartbeat is good enough.

—What I really wanted.
What I really wished for was just a small thing.
Like this, it was just fine having Senpai like she is.
".... Senpai.
Your body is warm."
".... No.
The one who is warm is you, Tohno-kun.
I am a very cold person.
I—did such terrible things to such a nice person."
.... No, Senpai.
I'm not kind.
Even now, I just want to touch you, Senpai.
I just—want to stay like this forever.
".... It's okay.
I'm still alive, so it's okay.
If.... we can keep doing this, it's okay."

I died once a long time ago.
After that, I realized how much happiness it was just to be alive.
A world where death can be seen.
A world where I can see death.
Every time, things that are easily lost.

But, that's why—being alive is happiness.
To feel that, being able to feel Senpai's warmth like this, is an exceeding happiness by itself.
"—Senpai.
You are really dear to me."

"....."

"I don't want to die.

I want to live as much as I can, and I want to be with you like this, Senpai."

rmly,

I grip her hands.

"So I want you to live.

Please.... please don't say your wish is to die."

"....."

There's no answer.

Thump, Thump.

Just the beating of her heart through our skin.

"..... No, that can't happen."

Suddenly,

she speaks in a crying voice.

"... That's the only thing that kept me going until now.

I could die.

If Roa disappeared, I could die.

I must die.

That's why I could bear everything so far.

Because I killed my father and mother, because I killed everyone, because I became like this, and because I tricked you and tried to kill you—I, without delay, I have to die."

"... Why do you have to die?

Certainly you've done a lot of painful things, but that wasn't your fault, Senpai...!"

"You say that, but I did them all with my own hands, Tohno-kun."

"No...!"

The one who's at fault is Roa.

There's, no reason you have to die, Senpai!"

"—But, there's no reason for me to live either."

Saying that,

Senpai gives a mirthless laugh.

"... I know.

I know I don't have the right.

I, did so many horrible things."

But why?

She asks with a quivering voice.

"I don't deserve to be happy.

That's why I never thought of it, that's why I never even dreamed of it....!"

But, but why—"

Thud.

Like a crying child, Senpai beats her hand against my chest.

"So why—now, do I see,"
this sinful dream?

She buries her face deep in my chest as she says this.

".... It was so fun.

Even though I knew it was all a lie and I'm just playing out the life where I'm having fun, I thought it was fine the way it was—it was so much fun, I didn't want it to end even if I knew it was all a lie.

An almost dream-like happiness that I wanted to always last just one day longer."

.... I see.

What we wanted, what we wished for, was the same after all.

"—But, that selfishness can't be allowed.

I have to kill Roa quickly and receive my punishment.

I have no right to live a normal life like you, Tohno-kun.

Such a thing, I understand without you saying it.

If I'm wishing for such a dream and I can't even kill you, I can't do anything but disappear.

There's no longer a reason for me to stay here."

Senpai speaks with an anguished face.

".... Farewell.

I was, really happy to hear you thank me."

Senpai pulls back from me.

The heartbeat I felt up until now cuts off.

.... This person has told me farewell so many times.

Even that time.

With a smile, she said it as if it was very important to her.

—Farewell.

I really did want to be a student like you and Inui-kun.

.... Really, why didn't I ever realize it?

She would always say those simple things,

as if they were a distant dream for her.

"—No.

It's not a dream."

"Eh—kya....!"

I pull Senpai's body back towards me.

Less out of love and more out of sorrow, I draw her close.

"To, Tohno-kun, that's enough—"

"No.

I won't be fooled by your lies anymore, Senpai."

I hold her close to me as she tries to escape.

"If you want to continue, then go ahead and do so.
 What you're talking about is definitely not a dream."
 "That.... that's impossible."
 "Why?
 After all, it really happened in reality.
 It's a way of life that if you wish for it, it will come back.
 Please don't call such simple things like that a dream."
 "... It's impossible.
 I've hurt you so much, Tohno-kun, it's too late to go back."
 "Oh, that's okay.
 I don't mind, so you shouldn't either.
 See, I think I got to experience something as rare as truly being chased by the
 one I like."
 I try to sound as jokingly cheerful as I can.
 "....."
 Senpai is silent.
 "And tonight, you looked really cool.
 Those clergy robes are good too, but your outfit tonight really suits you too.
 I was lucky to see it."
 "....."
 Senpai is silent.
 "Senpai, you look different without your glasses.
 You were handsome, and you looked older."
 "....."

.... As expected, Senpai is silent.
 _____*sigh*

Not matter what I say, Senpai does not answer.
 I try as hard as I can to soften the mood but fail miserably.
 I don't know what else I can say.

".... Senpai, say something.
 Or you don't want to talk to me now?"
 "....."
 Senpai doesn't answer.
 She just pats her forehead on my chest.
 Softly, like a murmur,
 "..... Idiot,"

.... is what she ends up saying.
 ".... Tohno-kun, you're an idiot.
 I, I'm not the person you think I am, so how can you be so nice?"
 "Because I don't want you to cry.
 I want you to laugh; I want you to cheer up."
 ".... But, I don't have the right.

I don't have the right to receive your kindness."
"....."

—A right to receive kindness.
I didn't have such a thing either.
But, still—the one who laughed it off and told me that I didn't need such a thing, was her.
"I don't know.
I don't know your circumstances, and honestly I don't care.
I'm not being kind to you for your sake, so don't worry about it."

That time.
After I killed Arcueid and when I could only think of killing myself, just like what you said to me that time.
".... Um, well.
I think I'm doing this because I want to be kind to you.
Your circumstances have nothing to do with this.
It may be a bother to you, but just think of yourself as having been caught by a mean-spirited underclassman and give up."
Harder,
I hold her even more strongly to me, and press our bodies together.
"Ah—Tohno, kun."
"I don't know about your sins.
I like you—I love you Senpai, that's why I'm being kind to you.
Everything else doesn't matter.
I just want to be happy with you.
—I want to be with you forever, so I don't want you to die."
"But—I, I—"
".... But still.
Still, if you say you don't want to be happy, that's fine too.
I'll just do what I want, and no matter how much you might hate it, I'll be by your side and make you happy...!"
"So—please, don't say farewell anymore."
Saying that, I bring my hands to her face.
"Shiki—kun."
After she says this faintly..
Completely naturally, our two lips come together.

"—Mm."
.... Our lips separate.
Ciel-senpai lets her arms fall to the side and pulls back from me.
"....."
.... The hallway is silent.
Seeing the blue moonlight faintly shading the world jolts me back to reality.
"Ha... ah."
I just.. made a big fool of myself.

Even though there's no way out even for me, it's meaningless to embrace her.
But, I couldn't refrain from doing so.
If I could, I wanted to stay like that forever.
"Tohno-kun.
Is it okay to say that?"
"—Sorry, I wasn't thinking.
I don't even know what to do with myself—and I was saying such haughty words."
"That's not what I'm saying.
I'm asking you if you really can make that sort of promise with me."
The weakness she had in her voice has disappeared completely.
".... Of course.
I'm like this, but as long as there's a piece of me remaining, I'll always love you, Senpai."
"Please don't say irresponsible things.
If you're going to make me happy, you have to stay as Tohno-kun."

.... That's true, but it won't happen.
I can't even trust if I'll be myself by the time tomorrow comes.
".... Sorry.
I, I'm hopeless.
Senpai, when I get to a point where I can't turn back, at that time—"
"—I will not let you die."
She declares.
She strongly interrupts my words.
"I will not let you die.
I won't let Roa have you."
"Senpai, but—"
"I will protect you.
I will save you, no matter what.
So—please do not say that."
Senpai quickly stands up and with a serious face, tends to my wounds.



".... It seems they have already healed.
It's nighttime, so your body is more like that of a vampire's right now.

Um, thanks to that, you were not killed.
Maybe we should give Roa some thanks."
.... Trying to lighten the mood or something, Senpai gives a joke that isn't exactly easy to reply to.
"Tohno-kun, can you stand by yourself?"
"I can stand, but—Senpai, is there really a way to save me....?"



".... I can't say for sure, but if I go back to the Vatican, there might be a way. Um, unlike before, they had a sample, me, to research on, so they should have researched into how to seal Roa's soul while leaving the reincarnated human's consciousness."
"—What's that?
If there was such an easy way, then why—"
".... Tohno-kun.
Certainly the Church may be able to help you, but what awaits you may be hell.
To the people of the Church, you and I are both heretics.
You will get the treatment in return for helping their research.
.... Although if you stay quiet about your eyes, you may not be treated like a lab specimen like I was, but—"
"—In other words, it'll really hurt?"



"—Yes.
And if they still could not heal you, you would be treated as a vampire.
.... I don't want you to experience those terrible things worse than death.

That's why, I—"

"... It's okay, Senpai.

Right now, we're at a dead end.

If there's even the slightest chance, then we have to go wherever.

... And no matter how it turns out, I won't complain, Senpai."



"—No.

I won't let anyone hurt you.

Please trust me on that."

"... Yeah, I trust you, Senpai."

... I say that, but being a real small-town person, I'm actually kind of worried

about things like my passport and airfare.

"But what are we going to do?

Are we going to the Vatican right now?"



"No, I will treat you for tonight.

Roa is a vampire, so when it becomes morning, he will calm down.

... It would be simple if it was just a matter of taking you to the Vatican, but

your problem is something that should be kept low-profile.

Just like with me, you are something that should not exist, so you have to go

to the hidden part of the Church.

But, to take you there, I have to get some permission.

Even if we were to minimally purify you, there aren't any places in this city

where we could do that.

There is only one place where we can purify you in our way in this country, so

I have to take you there first."

"Hmm.

So, are you saying we're going to the Church tomorrow morning?"

"No, it's not that simple.

For an unbeliever like you to enter the Vatican, there is a long and frustrating approval process.

So, tomorrow, I will go to the church in this country so that you can get a temporary permit.

".... And, that may take a number of days, so please wait in my room until then.

I will place a blockade against vampires in my room, so you should be able to last against Roa for a week or two there."

".... Your room—you mean, I'm staying in your room!?"

".... Um, Tohno-kun.

Your life is in danger, so please put up with it.

Oh, you can at least let your sister know, but please don't tell her the details."

".... Well, it's not like I can tell her in the first place—"

"Then shall we go?"

We have to separate the Roa inside of you to start off."

She grabs my arm and starts to walk.

.... There really is no trace of her weakness before.

But, it is a forced cheerfulness.

Senpai really doesn't want me to be worried, so she's forcing herself.

".... Thanks, Senpai."

I speak in a low voice so she won't hear me.



"Here we are.

It is a small place, but please make yourself at home."

"Ah.... yeah.

Um, sorry for intruding."

Being quite aware that I'm entering a girl's room this late at night, I walk in.

Ciel-senpai's room hasn't changed a bit.

"Senpai, so, what do I do now?"



"Well, first we will temporarily silence the Roa inside of you, Tohno-kun.
 Well, I say that, but my place itself is holy ground, so the advancement of
 Roa's consciousness will be greatly slowed just by staying here."

"—Oh?

Then I'm safe as long as I stay here?"

"Yes, if we were to just stop Roa's mind from invading yours, this room should
 be enough, but...."

"Hm....?"

Her cheeks flushing red, Ciel-senpai hesitates as if she wants to say something
 more.



".... Senpai?

What's wrong, is there another problem?"

"No, it's not what I would call a problem, but it can be dangerous to your life."

".... Senpai.

If it's dangerous to my life, wouldn't that be very, very important?"

"Well you're right, but um.... If I say directly, Tohno-kun, is there any part of
 your body that feels strange?"

"Feels strange?

Well, I do have inhuman strength right now."

".... That's not what I mean, but don't you feel like, 'this is really hot!', or like,
 'I need to let it out!' or something like that?"

"Eh—th, that is—"

.... Well, that urge to destroy was certainly in me until recently.

And I did that horrible thing to Kohaku-san.

".... No, I'm fine.

Since I entered this room, I haven't heard that guy's voice once.

Just like you said, it looks like he'll calm down if I'm in here."

"But that is the mental side of your problem, not your body."

"—?"

Ciel-senpai still hesitates like she has to say something rather difficult.

.... I have no clue.

I sit down on the floor to rest for now.

"Hey, you don't need to stand, sit down.

You must be tired after all that."

"....."

Without answering me, she looks deep in thought.

And then.



"Tohno-kun, please take a shower."

"—Huh?"

"Because, like you just said, all that's happened, so it's strange if you don't wash yourself and calm down."

"Well—but.."

"No buts, Tohno-kun.

You used my bath once anyway, so please don't hesitate."

Ciel-senpai pulls on my arm forcefully.

"H, hey Senpai, I said it isn't good....!"

She won't listen to me.

She drags me to the changing area and forces me to take a shower.

Of course, by myself.

Ciel-senpai is waiting for me in her room.

".... How did this happen?"

I resign myself to showering.
 As Ciel-senpai said, my body is filthy.
 There's mud all over my arms and neck and my body reeks of sweat.
 "I see.... I locked myself in my room since yesterday.
 And it was like I was horny all that time too...."

....?
 Horny, um—that's odd, I'm still standing very erect right now too....?
 "Huh—huh?"
 I'm not really excited or anything, so how come—it's so erect down there?
 "Wait a minute, this is weird—!"
 It's full of blood ignoring anything I tell it.
 "—Don't tell me—"
 Since last night.
 Urged by Roa's consciousness, since I attacked that woman on the street, I—I've
 always been like this?
 "....."
 I feel terrified.
 That's bad.
 I'm supposed to be safe from Roa's will inside of Ciel-senpai's room, but it seems
 like my body isn't calming down.
 ".... Hey.
 Staying erect for a long time, um, maybe, isn't that a bad thing?"
 No, not "maybe", but "definitely".
 In the first place, being stiff for an hour hurts, so if I stay stiff for an entire day,
 that's just wrong.
 "—I guess I have to?"
 I speak aloud, and get shocked.
 So, I've been stiff all day.
 And since this can't be good, I'm going to whack off in Ciel-senpai's bathroom?

"I don't—believe it."
 I can't do such an embarrassing thing....!
 This is the bathroom, so if I did something she wouldn't find out, but still, this
 is too miserable..
 But, being erect for a whole day is seriously bad.
 I think it was calm after I attacked Kohaku-san, so it hasn't been a whole day,
 but still—
 "—Geez!
 Even though I was almost killed by someone I liked until just now, why do I
 have trouble over such stupid stuff!?"
 Screaming out won't solve anything.
 I give up and decide to let it out.

"....."
 I leave the bathroom.



"Ah, you're all clean now.
You really did take a long time, do you like taking baths, Tohno-kun?"
"—No, that's, not it, but.."
I hardly have the strength to answer.
I—did such a thing that made my dignity literally wash down the drain, but still—
"So, how was it?
Could you let it out yourself, Tohno-kun?"
"Eh—Senpai, you mean, um...."



She sighs.
"I knew it.
If you've, um.... held it in so long, it might not be possible to release it unless it is Roa's will."
"——"
Ciel-senpai starts to blush and my cheeks flush red as well.
Hold it in.... it's a little troubling if she says that directly.
"Ah..... uh....."
But like Ciel-senpai said, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get the fire out of me by myself.
In the end, I gave up trying to let it out and left the bathroom.
"I'll come out honestly.
This isn't a situation where embarrassment should stop me.
As you say Senpai, my body is strange right now.

I swear, but I'm not thinking of any perverted things.
Um, I'm not, but, my body, just by itself, has a hard on and—" I can't really say that I'd rot staying up like that.
"See, didn't I tell you to tell me if your body was strange anywhere?"
"—!
Then, you were asking about this before....!?"
"Yes.
Tohno-kun, you may not have realized it yourself, but you are pretty excited. I was able to calm your mind, but we have to calm down the body too, or Roa will be able to take over."
"I see.... Hey, tell me those kind of things clearly.
I feel so stupid not even realizing it until I was naked!"



"If I could say it clearly, it wouldn't be difficult!"
—Oh.
That's right.
Of course she can't say it clearly, because Ciel-senpai is a girl.
"Sorry.
But what should I do?
I tried to do something about it, but it just won't calm down.
It's like my mind and body are two completely separate things.
My body feels like it's not mine, and I can't even get in the mood for it—"

Geez, to say it frankly, it's like I have no sensitivities whatsoever!
.... It would be easy if I could say it out loud like that, but I can't say that sort of thing to Senpai.



"... I know.
Tohno-kun, I brought you here to heal your body.
Um, I knew it would be impossible just by yourself.
Um.... I was the same way a long time ago, too."

She speaks hesitantly.
I see... Ciel-senpai also had the experience of Roa taking over her body.
So she knew this was going to happen to me.
"Senpai, then you know what I should do....?"
"Of course.
.... Um, well.
Your mind right now is somewhat disconnected from your body.
So, more than yourself, um.... someone else's skin, someone else helping you,
will make you feel better."
"_____"

Instantly.
As soon as I hear her words, my mind goes blank.
"... Someone else helping me... um, Senpai?"



"That's what I mean.
You may be unwilling to do it with me, Tohno-kun, but please bear it.
It is a technique to calm the soul, so it isn't sexual.
So, please don't be so embarrassed."
"Ah..... h."
After she says it so directly, I don't know how to respond.

"Then, Tohno-kun, please wait in the room.
I also have some preparation to do."
"Wait?"
"... Senpai, are you going somewhere?"
"Yes, I will also take a shower.
I don't want to do it with all this paint on my arms."
Even though she tells me not to be embarrassed, she also blushes.
"Senpai, this.... um, we really shouldn't."
"It's fine, so please wait in the room!
I'll prepare myself and go, too....!"

Senpai dashes off to change and slams the door.
"Ah—"
There's no time to stop her.
Either way, I can't do anything unless I calm this thing down.
I know it's taking advantage of her, but I'll have to take her goodwill for now.
I convince myself like that and as I enter her room,

".... Oh, Tohno-kun?
Um, well, do you object to me wearing glasses or anything...?"

I hear her voice from the other side of the door.
"?"
Glasses.... Senpai, why are you asking that?"
"Well, um.... I know there are those kind of guys who, care about that sort of thing."
She sounds very embarrassed.
".... Glasses, huh?"
"... Senpai, really is concerned about the weirdest things."
... But, her blushing face by the doorway is just too cute.

Well, as for me—

I like Senpai's natural look. turn to **416**

Senpai isn't Senpai without her glasses! turn to **417**

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.... No, I don't feel like it at all.
I know Kohaku-san just wants me to feel good, but I can't forget about Yumizuka right now.

These past two days.
After I've seen so much of other people's blood, I can't be welcomed by them.

"Sorry.
I'm really happy that you asked, but I just don't feel like it right now—"

—Thump.
Thump.

"Hu—h?"

—My head is pounding.

Suddenly.

—Thump.

I feel, very dizzy.

"Hey, Nii-san—!"
.... I can hear Akiha's voice.
But that doesn't stop it from getting worse.
"Hang in there, Nii-san....!"
Her voice becomes very distant.
.... Sheesh, I really am pretty pathetic.
Just thinking about Yumizuka and what happened, I lose consciousness like this—

—My house is this way.

Saying that, she went down a different path.

—Thanks.

She probably said that since I was there for her until the very end.

—Sorry.

She probably said that since she knew I would carry this regret from now on.

—So it's okay to forget.

It felt like she whispered those words in my ears.

—Isn't that just a false happiness?

In a dream I dreamed about, I dreamt those selfish words.

If I can just forget, it will be very easy for me.
But I can't forget.
I neither liked her nor hated her, but,
I think I shouldn't forget her smile.
And more than that,
as long as this scar remains on my neck, I can't forget—

"Ah—"

When I come to, I'm lying in my room.
While I was sleeping, Akiha must have been watching me because she is there
in front of me.

"Aki, ha?"



"Have you awakened?
Goodness, suddenly collapsing like that, what happened, Nii-san?"
"I see.... did I pass out?"



"Yes.

You slept for seven hours since then, Nii-san."

"—Oh.

I haven't been sleeping enough recently, so this must be a reaction to that."

Saying that, I stare up at the ceiling.
My head is still dizzy, and I don't feel like talking with Akiha right now.
... All the same, Akiha is not bothered by this and she quietly tends to me.
"... Akiha?"



"Yes?

What is it, Nii-san?"

"—Um, well.

Isn't this boring for you?

I'm fine, so you can go back to your room if you want."



"Are you saying I'm bothering you?"
"No, that's not it at all.
I was just thinking that maybe you were a little bored."



"It is boring, but I can stand it.
This is something I'm doing in my own interests, so there is no need for you to
worry, Nii-san."
"..... Hmm."
Then—I guess that's alright.

Time passes.
It's past seven o'clock.
Seven hours since then.
Has Akiha been tending me this long?
Akiha silently takes my temperature.

.... Ah, I remember now.
That had to have been more than eight years ago.
Akiha came to watch over me after I caught a cold or something like that.
It really was a terrible cold; even breathing was painful.
The black-haired girl sat by my pillow, holding my hand and just staring at me.
Tatami and the shouji.
The cool winter air.
In the dark tatami mat room, the young figure of Akiha watching me on the

verge of tears.

".... I'm a little relieved."



"Eh?"

Did you say something Nii-san?"

".... Yeah.

I was just thinking there is a little bit of the old Akiha in you.
It's not really anything, but it makes me pretty happy."
I give Akiha a gentle smile so naturally, it almost surprises me.



"That is fine, but you haven't changed at all Nii-san.
Causing so much work for others.. please act more properly."
Akiha looks away and complains.
Understanding she is just embarrassed, I start to feel even happier.



"... Sheesh, why are you smiling like that?
If you have this much energy, I guess you don't need me to take care of you."
"No, that's not it.
I just remembered something from a long time ago.
Akiha, in that tatami room—"

—Tatami room?
What is that all about?
I understand Akiha taking care of me, but why was it in a tatami room and not my room?
Something.
There's something not quite right.
"Akiha.
Is there a room with tatami in this mansion?"



"No, there are no Japanese rooms in this mansion."
"Yeah, you're right.
It's nothing.
I just thought it was odd, don't worry about it."



"Hm?

What is so odd about not having a Japanese room?"

"Oh, you know.

This mansion is so big, I thought maybe there was at least one."



"There is a detached Japanese-style building, however."

"Eh—?"

—Now that she mentions it, of course.

In the middle of the forest in the garden, there was a Japanese-style mansion.



"... Goodness, you really have become more energetic.

I think I will only be in the way if I stay longer so I will return to my room."

Standing up from the chair, Akiha goes to leave the room.

"Thanks, Akiha.

Sorry for making you stay here this whole time."



"Please don't worry about it.
Starting tomorrow, your daily life will become more like this."

".....?"

After saying something I don't quite understand, Akiha exits the room.

—I turn off the lights and rest in bed.
Thanks to Akiha taking care of me, I feel more relaxed.
At this rate, I should be able to dream peacefully for the first time in days.

I take a deep breath and slowly close my eyes.

.... Right before I fall asleep,
the memory of being tended by a young Akiha surfaces freshly in my mind.

The dark Japanese-style room where no one came to see me.
Did she sneak away from Makihisa?
Akiha snuck in and cried as she held my hand.
"I'm sorry," she was saying.
I didn't know why, but the black-haired young girl kept repeating "I'm sorry"
over and over.

—I remember.

About the proud eldest daughter of the Tohno family who was the only one
to care for me.

"....."

The young girl always crying in the dark Japanese room.

I bit my tongue in frustration while being dizzy from fever.
I wonder why she was crying.
If it was me,
I would never, never let Akiha cry.

.... I'm sorry.
.... I'm sorry, Shiki-nii-san.

Her tears were simply beautiful.
Since that time, I vowed to be her real brother—

"Nnn——"
I wake with a sudden ache.
"... Morning?"
The clock says it's just past six-forty.
The weather outside the window is perfectly cloudless.

"Ow——"
Pain runs through me once again.
Not my head or chest, but apparently on the side of my neck.
"... That's odd.... I've never had pain there before."
I put my hand on my neck, but there's no blood.
The wound from Yumizuka's bite is already closed.
"... Maybe I have a fever."
Am I just worn out?
My body feels heavier than normal.

"Shiki-sama, are you awake?"
Accompanied by a knock, I hear Hisui's voice.
"Yeah, I'm up, so you can come in."



"Yes.
Please excuse me."
With a bow, Hisui enters the room.



"Shiki-sama, how are you feeling?
If you feel bad, please do not hesitate to tell me."
Hisui stares over at me as I lie in bed.
.... It seems she is still really worried about me collapsing so suddenly yesterday.
"I'm fine, there's nothing wrong with me.
I collapsed yesterday because I've been pushing myself recently, but that won't happen again."
Yumizuka—The vampire does not exist anymore.
Therefore, I won't have to walk the streets late at night like I did these past few days.



"If you say that is the case, then—"
I don't know what else she is worried about, but she looks at me uneasily.
"—Well, thank you for worrying about me."
I jump out of bed.
"As you can see, I'm just fine.
I'll change real quick, so please go ahead of me to the sitting room."



"... As you wish.
Well then, please excuse me."

Hisui places my fresh clothes down and exits the room.
"... What was that all about?
Do I look that pale?"
My face reflecting on the window glass looks pretty normal to me.
Anyways, I should hurry up and change, then head to the sitting room.



"Ah."
I run into Akiha in the lobby.
I guess she's going to school as she's holding her bag.
... For some reason my entire body starts to heat up as soon as I see her face.



"Good morning, Nii-san."

"—Y, yeah.
Good morning, Akiha."
Thump.
My chest starts to hurt.



"Wow.
Is something special going on today?
You're up a full twenty minutes earlier than usual, Nii-san."
"No.. I just had a bit of a bad dream, that's all.
Just a whim, don't worry about it."

.... I don't understand what I'm saying.
Is it because of my dream?
Suddenly remembering her young face, I can't look at Akiha directly.



"Nii-san?
Your face is red.. do you have a fever?"
"No, it's not that—"
"....?"

For some reason I just can't return her gaze.
She lifts an eyebrow suspiciously and comes near me.



"Excuse me."
She brings her hand to my forehead.
"Ah—"
Thump.
My heart beats.

—Akiha's palm is not any different from back then.

Cold, soft fingertips.
Thump.
Thump.
Her fingers touch me for only a matter of seconds, but my heart strangely begins to pound harder.
If I were to glance down, her face would be right there.
.... Her thin, strong eyebrows which show her strong will.
.... Her clear black pupils with her matching long, black hair.
It really is a beauty unrelated to the name Tohno Akiha.

—Thump.
My heart beat.

I can just imagine how red my face has become.
"Hey—Akiha."
If she doesn't pull back, it'll be troubling.



".... It seems you don't have a fever."
She pulls her fingers away and backs off slightly.



"Just in case, I'll have Kohaku prepare some cold medicine.
Please wait in the sitting room, Nii-san."

With that, Akiha goes up to the second floor.

The hands of the clock reach seven.



"Sorry to keep you waiting.
I have cold medicine and water, so please drink it after breakfast, okay?"
"Ah..... Kohaku.. san."
My shoulders slump.
I'm really glad Kohaku-san brought it, but I was expecting Akiha to bring it,
so I'm a little disappointed.
"Thanks, Kohaku-san.
Where's Akiha?
I think it's a bit early for her to go to school.."



"No, since there were some formalities to take care of, Akiha-sama left for school earlier.

And, you know what, Shiki-san?"

Kohaku-san looks into my face with a smile.

"Wh.. what?"

Did I do something again?"



"Yes.

I was wondering what you did to Akiha-sama just now.

It's been such a long time since I have seen Akiha-sama this happy.

I'm curious, really curious."

".... Um, I didn't really do anything to make her happy.... In fact, it's more like I'm the happy one—"

.... But, Akiha did seem to be in a good mood, didn't she?

She was smiling when we ran into each other, and for Akiha to take my temperature just isn't like her at all.

It would've been fine just to leave that to Kohaku-san, so that was odd enough.

"Shiki-san?"

Does anything ring a bell?"

"No, sorry.

She definitely did seem in a good mood, but I don't think it was because of me.

In the first place, I don't understand Akiha right now at all.

She is different than she was eight years ago."



"Oh really?"

Well, I personally think you are a bit dense at times, but let us leave it at that."

"Well then, please eat breakfast, Shiki-san.

It is waiting for you in the dining room."

"Uh, yeah.

Thanks as always."

I give her a quick bow of the head and go to the dining room.



"Ah, Shiki-san.

What you said earlier was mistaken."

"... Eh?

Mistaken?

What was?"

"Akiha-sama has not changed one bit from the past.

I think the one who is making Akiha hard to understand is you, Shiki-san."

Leaving me with a phrase loaded with meaning, Kohaku-san disappears towards the lobby.



"Shiki-sama, what time will you be returning today?"

"Hm, in the evening.... I don't have anything special to do, so I'll be back by four."

"I understand.... I will no longer be able to wait for you here, but please call for me if you need anything when you return."

".....?"

Unable to wait by the gate.. what does she mean?



"Please have a safe journey, Shiki-sama."

"Yeah, I'm off."

Raising a hand to the bowing Hisui, I exit the front gate of the mansion.

Since I woke up early, I can take my time going to school.
I walk leisurely down the road to school which I normally jog down.

I walk slowly and arrive at the gate ten minutes before it closes.
It's the time when all the students not participating in clubs arrive.
In a high school prepping for general entry like mine, the only clubs practicing in the morning are the athletic clubs.
It's only natural for the school gate to be this crowded.

"Ah, Senpai."

I see Ciel-senpai walking a little bit ahead of me.

"Senpai!"

I call out to stop her.



"Ah, good morning, Tohno-kun.
It's rare to meet you by the entrance here."
"Yeah.
I saw you from behind so I ran up to meet you.
Do you always come at this time?"



"Yes, I am bad at getting up early so I always just barely make it.
Did you oversleep today?"
"No, I actually woke up earlier.
You know, I normally make it right as the gate is about to close."
"Wow, you mean you're a late riser, Tohno-kun... huh?"



I might have something on my face as Senpai stares right at me.

"Um—Senpai?"

"Tohno-kun, did something happen over the weekend?"

"No, not really.

Why do you ask, Senpai?"



"Oh, it's nothing.

I was just playing around.

Please forget about it."

"?"

I'm a little bewildered.

—And then,

at that moment, I see a familiar face running vigorously from the entrance.

"That's Inui-kun."

Senpai says this calmly.

"Yeah, it's Inui."

I try answering her calmly.

Senpai and I don't even think the actions of the rampaging Arihiko as he dashes towards us are odd at all.

In other words, we're used to it.

"Tohno !"

A cloud of dust kicks up behind him.

He doesn't stop.

Even though we are right in front of him, Arihiko launches a drop kick in my direction without even pausing.

Crash, roll, roll, roll, thud.

"....."

I can't.. believe it.

This guy, this person throws a kick full-force into me and we suddenly crash into the ground and roll three times.

"....."

I get up and shake off all the dust from my clothes.



Arihiko also stands up and pats his uniform.

"Arihiko."

"Tohno."

After a three second interval, we face off directly.

Ready.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

"You have a sister!?"

Both of us shout simultaneously.

——W, what?

".... Wait a second.

How do you know I have a sister?"



"Uwaaa, you do have one after all!"

Arihiko holds his head in his hands, and twists his body.

.... It's so ridiculous looking, I would deny knowing him even if he owed me a million yen.

"Hey, cut it out Arihiko, please.

We'll end up being the laughingstock of the school."



"Screw that, I don't care!"

Arihiko looks up with a glare.



"You traitor!

I'll call you Onii-san someday!"

Leaving such an incomprehensible parting shot, Arihiko runs off.

Not towards the school building, but to the front gate.

".... What's he doing?"

There isn't even five minutes until homeroom starts.

Nothing about him is understandable.

Anyways, it seems like I won't run into him for the rest of the day.

During the break after second period, Arihiko suddenly returns.

"Hm.

After thinking about it for a while, I had no reason to go home."

Saying so, he calmly takes his seat.

Leaving him alone, I stare blankly in my seat and wait for third period to start.
But—the classroom seems odd today.

Every break, all the guys leave the room, and come back with happy looks on their faces.

"?"

.... I'm a bit curious.



"Hello, Tohno-kun.

Do you mind?"

"Huh?"

It's break time, Senpai, is it okay to come to my classroom like this?"



"Yes, being here is much more fun than being in my classroom."

She smiles happily as she says this.

Arihiko sits at his desk unaware of Senpai's arrival.

It is quite the ideal situation.



"But the second year classrooms are pretty noisy too.
The third year boys have also been making a fuss and I imagine the fourth floor
is overcrowded by now."

".... Huh?"

The third year boys making a fuss?
About what?"



"Oh, you're not making a big deal out of it.
Well, there is no reason for you to go look, Tohno-kun."
"....?"

.... I don't quite understand, but it seems there is no reason for me to go
look.

"What do you mean?
Go see what?"



"The new first year transfer student.
All the boys in every class are taking turns to go see her.
Apparently the hallway outside her classroom is very crowded.
She's awfully popular."
Transfer student...?
Hmm.. in other words, that's where all the guys in my classroom went too.
"—Oh?
So that means she's really cute, this new transfer student?"



"I don't know, but that's what I've heard.
They say a girl in the first year transferred from a famous ladies academy."
"... I see.
For someone to transfer at this time of the year, there must be some strange
circumstances."
"You thought so too, huh?
But it seems like a waste.
Why is she transferring from the distinguished Asagami Ladies' Academy to go
here?"
"Hm?
What a coincidence.
My sister is also a first year student at—"
"—Wait a minute.

There's something not quite right about this whole conversation.
Senpai sounds like I know this transfer student already.



Please don't mind.
Starting tomorrow your daily life will become more like this.



Since there were some formalities to take care of, Akiha-sama left for school earlier.

"—No way."
I'm shocked.
I'm shocked, but that's the only conclusion I can draw.



"Tohno-kun?"

I can't hear Senpai's voice anymore.

I look over at Arihiko's desk and he has an especially evil grin on his face.

I walk purposefully over to his desk.

"Arihiko."



"Oh?"

What could it possibly be, Onii-sama?"

"... I'll punch you for saying that."



"H, hey, can't you take a joke?"

What is it, is there a reason you would talk to a commoner like me?

Hyahahaha!"

Arihiko laughs.

"Reason?"

Well, I do have a reason this time."

"Arihiko, can you tell me the name of this new transfer student?"



"Man, you should know without me saying anything, right?"

Yes, her name is Tohno Akiha.

Your younger sister.



Geez, you even kept it a secret from me.

I would've found out quickly since she's that hot.

I really doubted our friendship this time."

"... No, there's never been that sort of illusion between us, but I see."

Totally drained, I answer and return to my seat.



"Tohno-kun?"

Senpai is speaking, but I just don't feel like responding.



"... Hmm.
You seem to be having trouble, so I will go back."

Senpai walks out of the room lightly.
Akiha has transferred to my school.
"—What is she thinking?"
Muttering aloud in astonishment, I fall into my chair.

Third period starts and English class begins.
The sound of fluent English goes in one ear and out the other.
My head is only full of thoughts about Akiha right now.
This English is just noise to me.
"___"
As always, Akiha is Akiha.
If she's going to transfer to my school, couldn't she at least tell me?
No, more importantly, she transferred to my school when there's no advantage
for her to do so—

"Ah—"
Pain again.
Sharp pain in my neck.

I fall onto my desk.
This is bad.
I can hardly move.
Is it anemia again?
Then it's just as always.
It's normal.
It'll pass.
I'm in class.
I have to recover.
Look, the English teacher is reading aloud.

The blackboard.
Chalk.
Chalk dust.
English.
The sound of chalk scraping.
Teacher.
Teacher.
Adult.
Podium.
The creaking podium.
Desk.
Thirty-six desks.
Student.
Students.
Thirty-six students.
Three days ago there were thirty-seven.
Window.
Sky.
Schoolyard.
Sun.
Unpopular.
Lonely.
Cold.
Frightened.
Uneasy.
Something.
Desire.
Desire.
Desire—

"Tohno-kun!
Hey, are you alright, Tohno-kun!?"
My eyes open wide at the sound of the teacher's voice.
.... Sweat rolls down my forehead.
My body is cold, my breathing is ragged.
"What is it, Tohno-kun?
If you are not feeling well, you can rest."
"Ah, no, I'm fine.
It has passed."
".... I see.
Well, don't push yourself.
Your grades are good so it is acceptable to take an occasional rest.
Your progress will be satisfactory even with some handicaps."
.... The English teacher's words lack a little consideration for the other students.
I once again declare I am fine and resume class.

At lunch, the classroom gets frantic.
 sigh
 I take a deep breath.
 I've been hot since this morning.
 Maybe I caught a cold.
 My whole body feels languid.



"What, Tohno?
 Are you still sticking around here?"
 "... Yeah.
 I don't feel too well today.
 I can't go to the cafeteria, so can you please get me something?
 I'll have the usual."
 "No, I don't mind, but is that alright?
 Your dear sister seems to be having trouble in the cafeteria."
 "—Ah."
 That's right.
 She's always been at a ladies academy so she wouldn't know anything about
 how a normal "school cafeteria" system works.
 I can distinctly imagine Akiha standing in the cafeteria not knowing what to do.
 —Damn, I can't leave her like that.

"Ah, Tohno!
 Wait up!
 I'm coming too!"
 I dash out of the classroom.
 Close behind me, Akihiko follows a bit more energetic than usual.

Akiha stands aghast in the center of the crowded cafeteria.
 She looks as if she does not know what to do.
 "—Geez.
 What is she doing?"
 I hurry over to Akiha.
 "Akiha."



"Nii.. san."

In that instant,

I see her face on the verge of tears and my chest starts to hurt.

"—C'mon, over here.

You don't like crowds, right?"

"Ah—yes."

Not wanting to see her almost crying face a second longer, I strongly pull Akiha out of the cafeteria.

"Here, you should be able to relax now.
I'll go buy us some lunch, so just sit at this bench."



".... Yes.

I apologize for the trouble, Nii-san."

"—It's alright.

I'll hear about it later.

Arihiko, I'm going to get lunch so take care of Akiha, okay?"



"W, why are you asking me all of a sudden!?"
Look, I'll go buy lunch and you keep your sister company, Tohno."
"....?"
What's the matter Arihiko?
Aren't you going to call me Onii-san?
I'll tell you right now, but I won't give you a chance like this in the future."
I whisper to Arihiko.
He whispers back, maintaining our secrecy.
"R, right, but I can't be with her alone all of a sudden.
If it was any other woman I'd agree, but your sister is just too high class."
".... Hm?"
This isn't like you at all.
Are you scared of Akiha?"



"Yeah.
To be honest, I am.
Since she is the type I've never went against, I'd like to concentrate on getting information in the first round."

.... Why is he always this funny at strange times.
"Alright.
Then can you go get lunch for the three of us?"



"Leave it to me... Um, what does your sister want?
I'm too scared to buy her ordinary cafeteria bread."
"... As if I would know.
She transferred here, so curry bread and coffee milk will be good enough."
"—Roger.
I'll be back in five minutes."

Arihiko returns to the building in a dash.



"You seem to be very good friends with him, Nii-san."
.... Huh?
Where did all her vulnerability go?
She's suddenly back to normal.
"Yeah, we get along specially well... M, more importantly, Akiha!"
"Please don't yell like that.
People around us are surprised."
"Wha—"



"More importantly, can you answer me?
That person, what is he to you, Nii-san?"
.... What is he?

He's just an unwanted but inseparable guy who's been with me since middle school—no, that's not what we're talking about.

setvar flgH + 1

Ask her why she transferred to this school.

turn to **309**

I should introduce Arihiko.

turn to **310**

Was she pretending to be naive until just now?

turn to **311**

289

"Hey.
Good morning, Akiha."



"—Good morning, Nii-san."



"Good morning, Shiki-san.
Breakfast is ready in the dining hall.
Please eat up."
In contrast to Akiha, Kohaku-san greets me with a cheerful smile.
"Ah, thank you very much.. It looks like you're having your after-meal tea.
Have you already finished breakfast, Akiha?"



"Of course."

I don't care when you get up, Nii-san, but please at least make some time for breakfast.

Having breakfast after seven is a sign of sloppiness."

"... I think having breakfast at seven is pretty normal.

What time do you get up, Akiha?"



"I get up at five in the morning.

What about it?"

"....."

.... Wow.

I don't know why she gets up so early, but it was so perfect a time to get up that I have no room to retort.



"Besides, your school is thirty minutes from here on foot, isn't it?

Please don't be late to a school that's so close by.

It'd be an embarrassment."

".... Urgh."

Akiha's words are filled with thorns that stab at me.
But as it's the truth, there's no opening for a counter-argument.
setvar akiharegard + 1
turn to **192**

290

—I awaken to brilliant sunshine.

"..... Mmmn."

I climb out of bed and look out the window.

The weather out the window is beautiful, truly fitting for a Sunday.

.... That is,

there isn't a cloud in the sky, as if trying to tell me everything that happened yesterday was just a dream.

"..... Is it morning?"

My chest hurts.

The unmatched clear sky greets me, as it always does.

But, that fact just hurts me too much.

That girl.

The girl who disappeared last night will never be able to experience a morning like this again—

"Shiki-sama, are you awake?"

.... That voice brings me back to reality.

".... What is it, all of a sudden.. ?"

Being regretful, is that hypocrisy?

"Shiki-sama?"

Are you awake, Shiki-sama?"

Knock-knock, comes a hesitant sound at the door.

I am back in my room.

No matter how much regret I feel, I wake up just like always.

As long as I live, I can't escape reality.

No matter how much I regret it.

".... Yeah, I'm up.

Come in."



"Please excuse me."

The door opens with a clink and Hisui enters.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

Did she come to get my change of clothes?

She's carrying a clean set.

"Morning, Hisui.

Um, has everyone had breakfast already?"

".... Shiki-sama.

Forgive my rudeness, but did you check the time since you woke up?"

"Eh-?"

The time?

It's still morning—"

The clock claims it's just past twelve.

"Ehhh-?"

Wh, why does this clock say it's noon already?"

"I think the clock is not the one who has the time incorrect, Shiki-sama.

I came to wake you many times this morning, but you did not open your eyes even once."

"....."

.... Was it really that deep of a sleep?

Not just my mind, but my body suffered heavy wounds, I suppose.

"I see, sorry.

You came to wake me up.. just what was I doing?

.... Ah, it was a late night, but I still shouldn't have slept in like that."



"No, you do not have school today, so sleeping in was an option, but—Shiki-

sama, you intend to go out again tonight?"

"Eh—No, not, at all.... Ah, more importantly, I wonder how Akiha is.

I think she was up late last night too—"

"Akiha-sama woke up at her usual time this morning."

Hisui looks like she wants to say something more, but she answers my question.

".... Oh.

She really is different from me, leading that disciplined lifestyle."

.... I think back to what happened last night.

While I was still in a dazed stupor over what happened with Yumizuka, Akiha took care of me without asking any questions.

After that, um.... it's a little embarrassing, so I don't want to remember it.

"Hisui, is Akiha still here?"

She's an awfully busy person, so does she have a routine on her day off?"

"Yes, she does have plans during her day off, but today she is still in the mansion."

".....?"

She has plans, but she's still here....?"

"I don't quite get it, but.... Well, I'll get changed, so please head to the sitting room ahead of me."

"Yes.

Well, please excuse me."

As usual, Hisui glides away without a sound.

"Ah, Hisui."



"Yes?"

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Yeah, I forgot to say something.

Thanks for coming to wake me up.

It's a little late, but.. good morning, Hisui."



"—Yes.
Please have a nice day, Shiki-sama."

Staring up at the ceiling, I let out a deep breath.
About Yumizuka Satsuki.. That's something I can never forget, for the rest of my life.
But, I will not let that control my life.
I have a home to return to.
Akiha is here for me, and I have an ordinary life to live.
To protect all of that, I betrayed her.
So—if I can't protect that, then everything will have been a lie.
"—Is that just sugarcoating it?"
Maybe all I can do is deceive myself.
Well, Hisui is waiting.
I should change quickly, and go back to the normal life waiting for me in the sitting room—

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa, Kohaku-san is keeping her company, and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"Good morning, Shiki-san."
"Morning, Kohaku-san.
Sorry to be a bother, but could you fix me something to eat?
I'm a little hungry from all that sleeping."



"Yes, right away.
I will get it ready, so please wait a little bit."

Kohaku-san quickly patters away towards the dining room.
That leaves Akiha and Hisui, who is standing wordlessly like a statue.
".... Yo, Akiha.
G'morning."



"....."
Akiha just looks at me with a dissatisfied look on her face and doesn't return my greeting.
"..... Uh."
I knew she'd be upset about last night.
I know I deserve it since I embraced her like that last night—
"Akiha.
Last night, was—"



"Nii-san.
Sleeping in this late.. just what were you thinking?"
"Eh—um, well, I.. sorry."



".... Geez, I'm not mad about that.
It's your day off, and you've chosen to sleep in until now.
It's your laziness that angers me!"
With a "hmp", Akiha angrily turns her face away.
.... Well, it may just be my imagination, but "peevisly" is a better word than
"angrily".
"Well, I couldn't help it.
I got in late last night, and my body was just tired."



"You brought that on yourself.
No matter what the circumstances, please obey the rules of this house."

"..... Erk."

I hate to admit it, but since she went to sleep the same time I did, and still woke up early, I really can't counter her argument.



"Besides, Nii-san.

Shouldn't you let Hisui wake you up in the morning?

I'll let you go today because of last night, but you always laze around in bed too long, Nii-san."

"... Um, Akiha.

Maybe it's not my place to say, but it's not like I'm sleeping in because I want to."



"What?

So how come you always sleep in until the last minute every morning?

You don't know how I feel when I wait for you until the last minute, and—"



"Akiha-sama."



"Ah—"

".....?"

Where did the dire, threatening atmosphere go?

All of a sudden, Akiha descends into silence.

"Hey, Akiha.

I said so before, but waking up past seven o'clock in the morning isn't intentional.

Even I would like to get up earlier, but my body doesn't listen to what I tell it. If you want to help me wake up earlier, please buy me a really powerful alarm clock.

I'm sure that'd get me up."



".... Uh, Nii-san?"

This may be a stupid question, but did you ever tell Hisui what time you wanted her to wake you up?"

"—Ah."

That's right, I forgot such a simple thing as that.

"Oh yeah.

Hisui comes every morning to wake me, so it's alright for her to do that.

So.. Hisui, could you please wake me up at six-thirty each morning?

It would really help me out...."

I swing around to face Hisui.

She stares right back at me.



"I refuse."

"Eh?"

"Forgive me, but I refuse to wake you up, Shiki-sama."

"Well, um—"

I don't know what to say.

The shock put my brain on hold.

Looking at the situation, Akiha is also gaping at Hisui in surprise.



"Wha—"



"Hisui, why can't you wake up Nii-san?"



"I am unable to undertake things I cannot do.
I do not think I am able to wake up Shiki-sama with my own power."
"—Unable?
Why not?"
I unthinkingly enter their conversation.
Hisui continues staring at me.



"These past three days, all my efforts were fruitless.
Shiki-sama, do you remember how many times I called your name this morning?"
"No, I don't remember—I woke up from your voice?
I thought I woke up by myself...."



"That means there is no memory of me even calling out.
—Akiha-sama, that is the situation."



"Oh, I see," Akiha says and looks over at me teasingly.
.... How do I say this.... it would seem my standing here has just been lowered quite a bit.



"In short, you have tried repeatedly to wake up Nii-san, but there isn't even the slightest reaction on his part—that's how it is, Hisui?"



Hisui nods silently.

"....."

I nod silently as well.

.... I see.

The truth is, Hisui has already been trying to wake me up early in the morning.

I don't want to say it myself, but I must be really good at sleeping in.



"..... Nii-san.

Why are you looking so proud of yourself?"

"Nothing.

I was just surprised by how daunting it is to wake me."

".... Hmm.

I understand.

Hisui, just like before, please try and wake up Nii-san as much as you can."



Hisui nods in assent.

It seems like the conversation is finished.

In the end, it may be just me waking up whenever I feel like it again.



"Hey, by the way, Hisui?"

"Yes, what is it?"



"Um.

Does Nii-san really not wake up?

Even if you call his name, he doesn't respond?"



"—Yes.

Shiki-sama's sleep is very quiet, and he sleeps like a statue."

.... Like a statue?
What?



"Oh?
Nii-san has a great sleeping posture, huh?"



"No, that is not it—how do I say it.. um, Shiki-sama is like a completely different person when he sleeps.
I have never seen such a peaceful sleeping face, so when I first saw him, I thought that he had passed away, I—"



"So it is not quite that he is hard to awaken, but that it seems very rude to do so, so I can not help but be very gentle.
Once Shiki-sama is about to wake up by himself, warmth returns to his white face, and I know he will wake up soon, but—"

Looking down, Hisui talks about how I look when I sleep.



"....."

.... I can't help but feel embarrassed.

Come to think of it, a sleeping person is completely defenseless, and after listening to that explanation, I flush as red as if she said she saw me naked.

Hisui descends into silence, and Akiha is obviously trying not to look in my direction.

"....."

The air has become a little, heavy.



"Thanks for waiting!"

Shiki-san, breakfast is reaaadyyy!"

A bright voice saves the situation.

"Th, thanks.

Well, I'll eat up!"

"Yes, please take your time eating."

Turning my back to Kohaku-san's smile, I head to the dining room alone.

After I eat lunch, Akiha and Hisui are still in the sitting room. It wouldn't be good to ignore them and go back to my room, so I sit on the sofa across from Akiha.



"Here, Shiki-san.
You prefer green tea, right?"
Kohaku-san places an after meal cup of tea on the table beside me.
"Yeah, thanks.
If you don't mind, then."
"No, not at all.
This is your home, so please relax a little more."
Kohaku-san must be trying to make me feel more comfortable here because she takes good care of me.
"... Geez.
I'm thinking I'm already used to this place.
Do I still look a little strained?"
"Yes, just a little bit.
Your shoulders seem a little tense.
I wouldn't say you should be like back then, but you certainly can relax a bit more."



"Kohaku, you shouldn't spoil Nii-san.
He's been living like a sloth at the Arimas' house so long, it's probably good for him to be a little tense just at first."



"Heehee.
Akiha-sama, you are really strict with Shiki-san, are you not?"



"I don't want to be strict.
It's just that he is always so spaced out, I have to watch out for him."

"..... Huh?"
I'm a little surprised.
When Akiha talks to Kohaku-san, there isn't any hint of her usual coldness.
Maybe it's because they're so close in age, but they seem to be really good friends.
"....."
I glance over at Hisui.



Since Akiha dismissed all of the other servants except for Hisui and Kohaku-san,

I think Hisui must be trusted by Akiha as well.
But, since Kohaku-san is her complete opposite in personality, I have a feeling that there isn't much talk between Hisui and Akiha.
"May I be of service, Shiki-sama?"
Hisui realizes I was looking at her and asks me if there is anything she can do.
"No, it's nothing.
I was just thinking that you're really calm."
"—Yes.
It is something that Makihisa-sama taught to me."

She answers very distinctly.
.... The answer is so distinct, I can't continue the conversation.
"....."
I get a little uncomfortable and go silent.
It seems Kohaku-san and Akiha are still talking.



"Shiki-sama, is it okay if I ask a question?"
"Eh—ah, yeah.
What is it?"
"It seems like you departed the mansion last night again, so I would like to inquire if you had some usual, scheduled routine to take care of every night."
"Ah—no, I don't have anything like that.
The past two days were just something special."
I steal a glance at Akiha's face as I say this.



Akiha is just quietly watching the two of us.

.... It would appear neither Hisui nor Kohaku-san know about my run-in with Akiha last night.

"It's alright, Hisui.
I won't go out late at night anymore.
Besides, I'm not a kid anymore, so it's not like there's any danger in going out at night."



-2 0

"You say that, but Shiki-sama, you are the eldest son of the Tohno family.
Please refrain from doing anything careless."



-2 0



"Yes, yes, just as Hisui-chan says."

Your personal physician told me that you should not strain yourself.
 Besides, you have anemia.
 "That's true, but it has nothing to do with going out late at night.
 If I can't walk by myself, I shouldn't be going to school either, right?"



-2 0



"Well, yes.
 But during the day it is bright outside and people could help you, right?
 But at night it's different.
 There's been all these vampire murders recently, so if you go outside and col-
 lapse, what do you think will happen?"
 "Ah....."

Without thinking, my body shudders.
 Killer vampire.
 The killer indiscriminately killing people on the streets at night.
 Last night, the classmate I killed with my own hand.
 ".... No, it's okay, Kohaku-san.
 There isn't a vampire out there anymore.
 Those incidents.. they won't happen ever again."
 Because Yumizuka Satsuki.. is no longer in this world.



"Oh?
Is that true, Akiha-sama?"



"I haven't heard anything about it.
The one to ask is Nii-san, since he seems to know something about it."



"Oh yeah, there was a victim from your high school, Nii-san.
Year 2 Class 3 is your class, right?"
"Eh....?"
"There wasn't a victim from my class."



"Ah, Shiki-san, you didn't see the news this morning. Last night, they found a large quantity of blood from someone named Yumizuka Satsuki in an alley off the main street. The blood seems to have been there for a while, but from the amount of blood there, they say she is more than likely dead."

"——"

.... My heart starts to throb violently. The fact that Yumizuka Satsuki is dead, I know that better than anyone else. But when they say she's dead, it sounds like, "you killed her, didn't you?" to me—



"—Nii-san?
What's wrong, you're really pale."

"——"

.... I can't say "I'm alright."

Her death.
I am sad that her death was publicized in reality and could not stay as something just in my heart.

"....."

I said I wouldn't regret it, but a shadow envelops me as soon as I think about her.

—And then.



"Everyone, let's have a welcome party tonight!"
Kohaku-san suddenly makes a loud announcement.
"—Huh?"
Akiha and I say the same thing aloud, and even Hisui tilts her head.

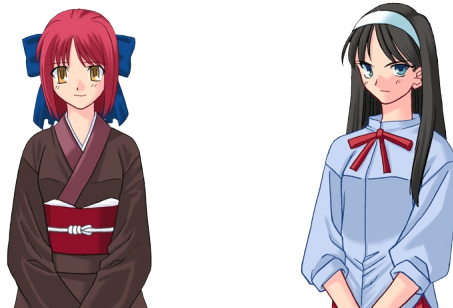


"A welcome party for Shiki-san!
Everyone is here, and we haven't even celebrated Shiki-san's arrival yet.
So, tonight should be Shiki-san's welcome party."
"Right?" Kohaku-san looks at me and smiles.

"....."
.... Crap.
I must have looked really depressed.



"Akiha-sama, is that acceptable?
If you allow it, we can start the preparations right away."



"Yes, Nii-san has finally come back and we haven't even done anything.
I think it's a good idea, but.. Hisui?
You agree, right?"



-2 0



"Ah—yes, if it is acceptable to Shiki-sama, I do not think it will be a bad thing."

The three of them turn to stare at me.
I—

No, I really don't feel like it.

turn to **288**

Of course I agree.

turn to **300**

291

In the sitting room, Akiha is on the sofa, Kohaku-san is keeping her company, and Hisui is standing by the wall.



"Good morning, Shiki-san."

"Morning, Kohaku-san.

Sorry to be a bother, but could you fix me something to eat?
I'm a little hungry from all that sleeping."



"Yes, right away.

I will get it ready, so please wait a little bit."

Kohaku-san quickly patters away towards the dining room.
That leaves Akiha and Hisui, who is standing wordlessly like a statue.
".... Yo, Akiha.
G'morning."



"....."

Akiha just looks at me with a dissatisfied look on her face and doesn't return my greeting.

"..... Uh."

Like Hisui warned me, she seems angry about last night.

Telling me in the morning that leaving late at night is forbidden only to find me leaving late at night.

It's only natural for her to be angry.

"Akiha.

Last night, was—"



"Nii-san.

Sleeping in this late.. just what were you thinking?"

"Eh—um, well, I.. Sorry."



".... Geez, I'm not mad about that.
It's your day off, and you've chosen to sleep in until now.
It's your laziness that angers me!"

With a "hmph", Akiha angrily turns her face away.
.... Well, it may just be my imagination, but "peevishly" is a better word than
"angrily".
"Well, I couldn't help it.
I got in late last night, and my body was just tired."



"That is entirely your fault.
Staying out until way past midnight.. Just what kind of lifestyle did you have
when you lived with the Arimas, Nii-san!?"
"Uh.... I had a strict curfew there, too.
I wasn't allowed to leave at night, and...."



"Oh, so that's it.
At the Arimas' house, you followed the rules, but you come here and break
them?
.... In other words, you won't even follow my simplest request?
In that case, I may have to resort to corporal punishment."
The fury of her intent also flows through her eyes.
.... How do I say this?
She has to be joking, only she doesn't sound like she's kidding, and it's pretty
frightening.

".... Corporal punishment, Akiha?
You're starting to frighten me."



"That was just an example.
Staying up real late like that and just sleeping until you feel like getting up?
Of course I should be very strict."
Akiha gives an audible groan.
.... I hate to admit it, but she is right.



"Besides, Nii-san.
Shouldn't you let Hisui wake you up in the morning?
It is a good thing today is Sunday, but you always, always laze around in bed
too long, Nii-san."
".... Um, Akiha.
Maybe it's not my place to say, but it's not like I'm sleeping in because I want
to."



"What?"

So how come you always sleep in until the last minute every morning?
You don't know how I feel when I wait for you until the last minute, and—"



-2 0

"Akiha-sama."



-2 0



"Ah—"

".....?"

Where did the dire, threatening atmosphere go?
All of a sudden, Akiha descends into silence.

"Hey, Akiha.

I said so before, but waking up past seven o'clock in the morning isn't intentional.

Even I would like to get up earlier, but my body doesn't listen to what I tell it.
If you want to help me wake up earlier, please buy me a really powerful alarm clock.

I'm sure that'd get me up."



-2 0



".... Uh, Nii-san?

This may be a stupid question, but did you ever tell Hisui what time you wanted

her to wake you up?"

"—Ah."

That's right, I forgot such a simple thing as that.

"Oh yeah.

Hisui comes every morning to wake me, so it's alright for her to do that.

So.. Hisui, could you please wake me up at six-thirty each morning?

It would really help me out...."

I swing around to face Hisui.

She stares right back at me.



-2 0



"I refuse."

"Eh?"



-2 0



-2 0



"Forgive me, but I refuse to wake you up, Shiki-sama."

"Well, um—"

I don't know what to say.

The shock put my brain on hold.

Looking at the situation, Akiha is also gaping at Hisui in surprise.



-2 0



"Hisui, why can't you wake up Nii-san?"



-2 0



"I am unable to undertake things I cannot do."

I do not think I am able to wake up Shiki-sama with my own power."

"—Unable?

Why not?"

I unthinkingly enter their conversation.

Hisui continues staring at me.



-2 0



"These past three days, all my efforts were fruitless.

Shiki-sama, do you remember how many times I called your name this morning?"

"No, I don't remember—I woke up from your voice?

I thought I woke up by myself..."



-2 0



"That means there is no memory of me even calling out.
—Akiha-sama, that is the situation."



-2 0



"Oh, I see," Akiha says and looks over at me teasingly.
.... How do I say this.... it would seem my standing here has just been lowered quite a bit.
"In short, you have tried repeatedly to wake up Nii-san, but there isn't even the slightest reaction on his part—that's how it is, Hisui?"
Hisui nods silently.
"....."
I nod silently as well.
.... I see.
The truth is, Hisui has already been trying to wake me up early in the morning.
I don't want to say it myself, but I must be really good at sleeping in.



-2 0



"..... Nii-san.

Why are you looking so proud of yourself?"

"Nothing.

I was just surprised by how daunting it is to wake me."

".... Hmm.

I understand.

Hisui, just like before, please try and wake up Nii-san as much as you can."

Hisui nods in assent.

It seems like the conversation is finished.

In the end, it may be just me waking up whenever I feel like it again.



-2 0



"Hey, by the way, Hisui?"
"Yes, what is it?"



-2 0



"Um.
Does Nii-san really not wake up?
Even if you call his name, he doesn't respond?"



-2 0



"—Yes.
Shiki-sama's sleep is very quiet, and he sleeps like a statue."
".....?"
... Like a statue?
What?



-2 0



"Oh?
Nii-san has a great sleeping posture, huh?"



-2 0



"No, that is not it—how do I say it.. um, Shiki-sama is like a completely different person when he sleeps.
I have never seen such a peaceful sleeping face, so when I first saw him, I thought that he had passed away, I—"



-2 0



"So it is not quite that he is hard to awaken, but that it seems very rude to do so, so I can not help but be very gentle.

Once Shiki-sama is about to wake up by himself, warmth returns to his white face, and I know he will wake up soon, but—"

Looking down, Hisui talks about how I look when I sleep.

"....."

.... I can't help but feel embarrassed.

Come to think of it, a sleeping person is completely defenseless, and after listening to that explanation, I flush as red as if she said she saw me naked.

Hisui descends into silence, and Akiha is obviously trying not to look in my direction.



-2 0



"....."

The air has become a little, heavy.



"Thanks for waiting!

Shiki-san, breakfast is reaaadyyyy!"

A bright voice saves the situation.

"Th, thanks.

Well, I'll eat up!"

"Yes, please take your time eating."

Turning my back to Kohaku-san's smile, I head to the dining room alone.

After I eat lunch, Akiha and Hisui are still in the sitting room.
It wouldn't be good to ignore them and go back to my room, so I sit on the sofa
across from Akiha.



"Here, Shiki-san.
You prefer green tea, right?"
Kohaku-san places an after meal cup of tea on the table beside me.
"Yeah, thanks.
If you don't mind, then."
"No, not at all.
This is your home, so please relax a little more."
Kohaku-san must be trying to make me feel more comfortable here because she takes good care of me.
"... Geez.
I'm thinking I'm already used to this place.
Do I still look a little strained?"
"Yes, just a little bit.
Your shoulders seem a little tense.
I wouldn't say you should be like back then, but you certainly can relax a bit more."



"Kohaku, you shouldn't spoil Nii-san.
He's been living like a sloth at the Arimas' house so long, it's probably good for him to be a little tense just at first."



"Heehee.
Akiha-sama, you are really strict with Shiki-san, are you not?"



"I don't want to be strict.
It's just that he is always so spaced out, I have to watch out for him."

"..... Huh?"
I'm a little surprised.
When Akiha talks to Kohaku-san, there isn't any hint of her usual coldness.
Maybe it's because they're so close in age, but they seem to be really good friends.
"....."



I glance over at Hisui.

Since Akiha dismissed all of the other servants except for Hisui and Kohaku-san, I think Hisui must be trusted by Akiha as well.
But, since Kohaku-san is her complete opposite in personality, I have a feeling that there isn't much talk between Hisui and Akiha.



"May I be of service, Shiki-sama?"

Hisui realizes I was looking at her and asks me if there is anything she can do.

"No, it's nothing.

I was just thinking that you're really calm."

"—Yes.

It is something that Makihisa-sama taught to me."

She answers very distinctly.

.... The answer is so distinct, I can't continue the conversation.

"....."

An uncomfortable silence ensues.

As if sensing this, Kohaku-san starts up a conversation.



"Shiki-san.

Is it okay if I ask a question?"

"Eh—ah, yeah.

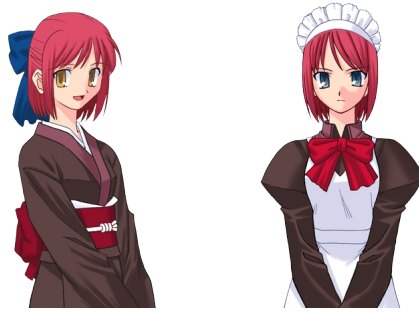
What is it?"

"It seems like you left last night again, so I was wondering if you had some usual, scheduled routine to take care of every night."

"Ah—no, I don't have anything like that.

The past two days were just something special."

I look over at Hisui.



She just quietly watches the two of us.



"It's alright, Kohaku-san.
I won't go out late at night anymore.
Besides, I'm not a kid anymore, so it's not like there's any danger or anything."



"Oh!
Are you still saying that sort of thing, Shiki-san!?
Hisui-chan, don't you feel the same way?"



"It is as Nee-san says.
Shiki-sama, you are the eldest son of the Tohno family, so please refrain from doing anything careless."



"See, even Hisui-chan is angry.
You are anemic, so you shouldn't strain yourself, you know?
I was told this by your personal physician too, Shiki-san."
"... Well, that's true, but it has nothing to do with going out late at night.
If I can't walk by myself, I shouldn't go to school either, right?"



"It does have something to do with it.
During the day it is bright outside and someone could help you, right?
But at night it's different.
There's been all these vampire murders recently, so if you go outside and collapse, what do you think will happen?"

"Ah....."

Without thinking, my body shudders.
Just hearing someone else use the word "vampire" like this really reminds me that it was Yumizuka killing those people.
"... No, it's okay, Kohaku-san.
There isn't a vampire out there anymore.
... Those incidents, they won't happen ever again."
Because Yumizuka Satsuki.. is no longer in this world.



"Oh?
Is that true, Akiha-sama?"



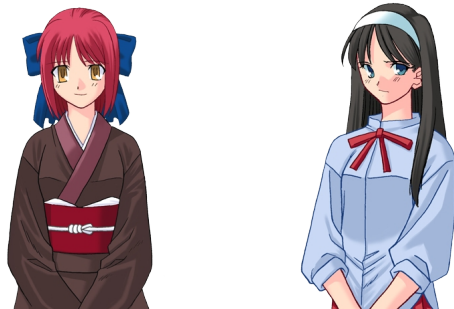
"I haven't heard anything about it.
The one to ask is Nii-san, since he seems to know something about it.
Oh yeah, there was a victim from your high school, Nii-san.
Year 2 Class 3 is your class, right?"
"Eh....?"
There wasn't a victim from my class."



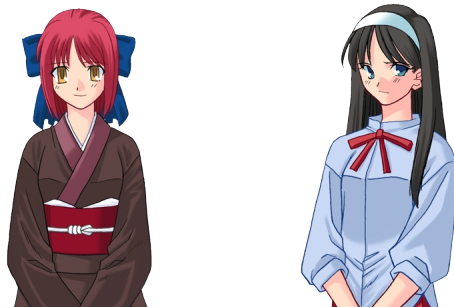
"Ah, Shiki-san, you didn't see the news this morning. Last night, they found a large quantity of blood from someone named Yumizuka Satsuki in an alley off the main street. The blood seems to have been there for a while, but from the amount of blood there, they say she is more than likely dead."

"——"

.... My heart starts to throb violently. The fact that Yumizuka Satsuki is dead, I know that better than anyone else. But when they say that she's dead, it sounds like, "you killed her, didn't you?" to me—



"—Nii-san?
What's wrong, you're really pale."
"—No, it's, nothing—"
My mood starts to sink.
Thanks to Hisui, my heart was able to be calm, but with just this conversation, I almost collapse.
Is my heart really this weak?



"Everyone, let's have a welcome party tonight!"
Just like that,
Kohaku-san makes an announcement in a loud voice.



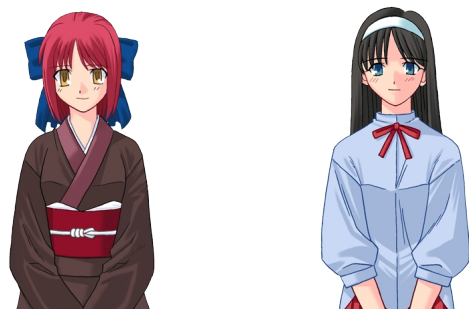
—Huh?
Akiha and I say the same thing aloud, and even Hisui tilts her head.



"A welcome party for Shiki-san!
Everyone is here, and we haven't even celebrated Shiki-san's arrival yet.
So, tonight should be Shiki-san's welcome party."
"Right?" Kohaku-san looks at me and smiles.
"....."
.... Crap.
Why are Hisui and Kohaku-san so able to read my feelings?



"Akiha-sama, is that acceptable?
If you allow it, we can start the preparations right away."



"Yes, Nii-san has finally come back and we haven't even done anything.
I think it's a good idea but.. Hisui?
You agree, right?"





-2 0



"Ah—yes, if it is acceptable to Shiki-sama, I do not think it will be a bad thing."

The three of them turn to stare at me.
I—

if kohakuregard \geq 3
turn to **300**

No, I really don't feel like it.

turn to **396**

Of course I agree.

turn to **300**

292

The room feels empty without Ciel here.
It's past seven in the morning.
My body still feels tired after everything that happened last night.
Monday.
Normally, it would be time for me to go to school, but Ciel firmly told me not to leave this room.
It's better if I don't go anywhere until Ciel returns.
.... Having to tell Akiha I won't be coming back for a while.
.... And to Kohaku-san.
It can't be forgiven, but the fact that I have to apologize to her.
It's painful to leave those two things aside, but right now I think dealing with Roa takes priority.

"....."
I pull the sheets over my head.
Resisting the tightness I feel in my chest, I fall asleep once more.

—Has your goal changed?
No, the goal itself has not changed.
I aim for eternity.
I tried to seek out eternity for no reason.

That was, really a pure, undefiled will.
Changed.
I've changed.
My goal.
The goal of attaining eternity has been degraded to a means to an end.
How ugly is this.
I understand so myself, yet I cannot change my heart.
That woman.
Because of that woman.

Because of that woman—I became impure.
But, what should I do?
The human species does not have the power to live for a thousand years.
Mentally and physically, a human vessel cannot resist the wearing down of time.

Even if you gained an immortal body as a vampire, you cannot stop the aging of the mind.

You can stop the aging, but that is only a halt.

There is no meaning to a mind which has stopped.

I have to exist with the purity of my essence preserved.

Unless I can be like that—I won't reach that woman.

As expected, I will use the method of reincarnation.

Restarting from birth, being myself, and dying once more.

In this cycle, I can exist while preserving the purity of my self.

What I regret is that I've lost my original purity.

I, like those other pitiful wretches, am wishing to continue existing as my self as it is right now.

It was the first time I knew hate.

Because everything, it was a downfall which would have never occurred if that woman did not exist.

"... That... woman...?"

I remember a strong will and wake up.

"That-woman?"

—Throb.

"Ou—ch."

——Throb.

"... This... woman, I know...?"

————Throb!

"Gah—!"

—What, is, this, headache?

It isn't, it isn't, natural...!

"Ah... gh...!"

I hold my head with both hands.

It hurts.

I've never felt pain like this before.

My head.

My head feels like it's being hit with a hammer.

"G—gah.....!"
Sto, sto, p
If this, if this keeps up, it'll split apart.

My head, will, shatter apart——

"Gi——!"
My body convulses.
It hurts.
Won't it, ever, stop?

"Hya——"
It hurts so much that I smash my head against the table.

A shattering sound.
The glass table breaks into pieces.
Blood flows from my forehead.
But, it doesn't hurt one bit.
More than that, this headache that comes for no reason, is far more——

"——,t"
Unbearable.
I can't even pass out.
How many seconds?
How many minutes?
How many hours, will this, pain last?

"—He,lp."
It hurts.
Trying to do something about it, I stab my hand with my knife.
It's no good.
It doesn't, hurt at all.

"——"
Ciel... Ciel-senpai, has not come back yet.
I look at the clock and it isn't even noon.
It hasn't even been an hour since I woke up.

There is, another twenty hours until tomorrow morning.
Just knowing that almost makes me go insane.

"——"
Throb, throb, throb.
I don't even know how long I withstood this pain.
I passed my limit long ago.
With all this pain, I'll die long before Ciel comes back.

"——Gah."

If I'm in this room, this headache will stay.

Outside.

I have to go outside or I'll go insane.

"I——can't."

Ciel told me not to leave this room.

But——If I stay here, I'll die before Roa takes over me.

"I'm saying——I can't."

My legs head towards the door.

For no reason.

I really wanted to see the golden moon.

——The lines won't disappear.

The wavering in my vision worsens.

The night city is shrouded in a white fog, as if it was a city that died thousands of years ago.

There's no sign of anyone else.

A cocoon that's like a spider's web is everywhere on every building.

It's terribly quiet.

Like a dead city at the bottom of a vast ocean.

In that illusion, I still walk.

Overhead, the large golden moon shines radiantly.

Is it the mercy of the moon?

My headache has disappeared and my head is in a daze.

Under the moon.

As if under a spell, I continue walking.

Night hangs over the park.

In the middle of my hazy vision, there is one figure that looks clear.

"——"

For some reason, it seems like the other "me" wanted this.

The moonlight is strong.

Under the light as bright as the sun.

There, Arcueid stands dressed in white.



"It's been a while.
Isn't it a wonderful moon tonight, Shiki?"
"—Arcueid.
Didn't you go back?"



"No, I haven't fulfilled my objective yet.
I can't go back before then, can I?"

—Effortlessly.

Arcueid looks at me with crimson eyes.

"Ts——"

My breathing stops in my throat.

An unnatural pressure, nothing like when I confronted Senpai.

This is—the pressure that I feel being confronted as her "enemy".

"——"

I can't breathe.

My throat doesn't move.

If I do such extraneous movement—she would tear it out at that moment.

"Stupid Shiki.

This wouldn't have happened if you didn't side with that woman."

Arcueid shows just a brief moment of pity.

Then, her eyes light up with pure delight like a happy child.



"So how is it, Shiki?

How does it feel to have Roa inside you?"

The white vampire princess speaks with indescribable enmity in her voice.



Feeling the danger that sends chills up my spine, I clearly realize the situation.

—Standing before me is Arcueid, who is trying to kill me.

Our distance is—about seven meters.

Damn it.

With an opponent like this, you can't even feel safe with a hundred meters, but she is only seven meters away.

"—What kind of nonsense are you saying?" I confirm that the knife is in my pocket and play dumb.

"It's useless you know.

In the first place, Roa was made into a Dead Apostle by me.

It's very easy for me to tell where the person is who stole my power."

—I see.

Come to think of it, Ciel said it before.

That Roa became a vampire because he had his blood sucked by Arcueid.
"I don't know why.
There have been seventeen reincarnations before this, but this is the first time this has happened."
She doesn't even move one bit.
There's, no reason for her to come closer.
Because, this is well within her range.
.... Crimson, eyes.
Being stared at by them, my headache returns again.

Throb.
Throb.

Inside my head.
The vampire called Roa is wanting to emerge.
"Certainly, I can sense Roa.
Back then, Roa must have transmitted himself to you.
I really don't understand why though."
"_____"
.... It hurts.
Every time Arcueid says his name, the memories of this guy rage in my brain.

Throb.

Throb.

Thro—b.

—Where.. was it?
Deep in the mountains, an old castle.
The figure of a solitary girl bound there.
Only that is burned into this man's soul, which has already become only a memory.

I. don't understand.
Even though she was a True Ancestor, she was not even told the meaning of her own existence, and was only used as a tool to hunt fallen True Ancestors.

She herself does not receive any wounds whatsoever.
The girl painted only in the crimson blood of her enemies.

Not knowing words, the woman was just looking up at the moon as if she

was some sort of an idiot.
Overhead, the huge golden moon.
In that withering courtyard, only her figure was distinct.

He felt her figure was beautiful.

For the first time since he was born.
Probably, no definitely, the only time in his life.

—Michael Roa Valdamjong fell in love with that white woman—

"——"

This is the first time.
Not an impulse, but truly Roa's heart.
The only remaining emotion.
Roa's personality had long died, but it continues to exist without disappearing,
that eternal memory.
"... I, see."
That's why—he hated Arcueid so much.
The woman who stole his purity.
Just an instant.
He only saw her for an instant, but his heart was stolen.

That hated True Ancestor that caused his purity to fall.
That existence.
He hated everything about that white vampire princess.
"... What a mistake."
What a mistake it was.
Roa hated her so much that he reincarnated so many times and always waited
for Arcueid to come pursue him each time.
For that, he did anything.
He deceived Arcueid, fooling her when she didn't even know she was a vampire,
and let her suck his blood.

Becoming a Dead Apostle of Arcueid, he used her power to destroy the re-
maining True Ancestors, and waited for her.
Why did he not understand?
The hate that caused him to reincarnate and wait for Arcueid.
That isn't hatred.
The man called Roa was so pure, he didn't even understand his own emotions.
To think about someone else so much it makes you go almost crazy.

That feeling is very similar to hatred.
But, merely a single word.
If this man called Roa could have been told his feeling was love, he wouldn't
have made this mistake—

"....."

—For just an instant.

No, for a long time.

I saw the dream of the instigator of it all, the man who reincarnated to stay in
the "present".



"You're pretty composed.
You're in front of me and not even running away.
Or, did you already give up, Shiki?"
"Give up?"
What am I going to give up about?
I won't lose to Roa.
Tomorrow, for sure—"
Ciel will return.
So until then,
I can't let myself be killed by Arcueid.
"—Hm?
I didn't think you could still bluff around.
I really thought over half of you was taken over by Roa already—I see, that's
how it is."

Her voice sounds happy.
.... I don't know what's so enjoyable, but it seems she still does have those kinds
of human feelings.
Then, if I can do something.
Maybe there will be a chance to run away—
".... I don't know what you think you understood, but I'll settle the thing with
Roa myself.
I won't lose to Roa.
If you say you want to kill Roa, then I'll kill him myself for you.

So, you can just—"



"I won't listen if you tell me to go back.
 You intend to get the help of the Church, right?
 I refuse to let them seal away Roa.
 Shiki, I want to eliminate Roa so I can get back my power.
 So, you know?
 If I don't do it myself, it would be meaningless."
 "—Then, no matter what—"

You're going to kill me, Arcueid?



"But Shiki, the Roa inside you is very weak.
 He probably can't take away a person's will unless he's born into their body.
 He somehow managed to transmit himself to you, but that was all he could do.
 He is only able to live as your dark side."
 "..... Eh?"

Does that mean that Roa's will is almost nothing in me....?

"Arcueid, that means—"

"Yes.

There's no need for me to kill you if that's the case.

I'm fine just having the power Roa stole from me working under me."

"—?"

She's saying there's no need for me to be killed.

So why did she come to see me?
Why—does she look at me with those serious eyes?
"... I don't understand.
What are you trying to say, Arcueid?"
"I'm telling you to become my servant."
"Wha—"

—She doesn't seem like she's joking.
When Arcueid and Senpai were fighting, she said it was just a joke.
"... What?
That wasn't a joke?"
"No.
I like you.
So isn't it natural for me to want you by my side rather than to kill you?"

—Snap.

With that line, my headache pounds more than it ever has before.
Roa.
The guy inside my head rages against her words.
.... I don't know if that comes from delight or from deep jealousy.
"If you are willing to become my servant, I will stop Roa from consuming you.
I don't think you even need to think about it, seeing how Roa will consume you like this."
"... You say it so simply, but how do you intend to stop this Roa inside me?"
"Huh?"
The only one who can stop Roa is you, Shiki.
But that method would mean your death.
My method is simply strengthening you.
As long as your will is stronger than Roa's, then it doesn't matter how much he rages in you, right?"
Something bursts in my head again.
Roa keeps raging.
Don't let her fool you, he rages.
This woman wants to make you her puppet.

—*sigh*

I take a deep breath.
.... I won't believe Roa's words.
But, even I can understand.
The Arcueid now is slightly different from the one I knew.
Certainly what she says might possibly stop Roa.

But—a heart strong enough to resist these headaches means a heart that is so strong that it won't feel anything.

I take off my glasses.
I take the knife out of my pocket.
I take the blade out and hold it at eye level.



"—Shiki."
"I refuse.
Sorry, but I won't be yours to possess."
Because Ciel is going to come back.



"I see.
Then, I guess it'll just have to be by force."

A hard footstep cracks through the air.

"You killed me once, so I always thought I should pay you back."

Her white figure rushes forth with a gust of wind.

—In that instant,
the fight begins.

Clang!
Her claws meet my knife.

Under the golden moon, even if she is my enemy, her figure is still beauti-

ful.

Clang!

We repel each other again.
To be honest, I can't even see her movements.

Clang!

We repel each other once more.
Arcueid isn't serious at all.
But still, it should be easy for her to rip off my arms and legs.

Clang.

We repel each other again.
My body moves without thinking.
My arms and legs, this body, with just the intention of not dying, fend off
Arcueid's claws by itself.
"Tch—"
My lips curl in irony.
I don't want to admit it, but it seems my body has become beyond that of a
human's.
In the dead of night, it seems Tohno Shiki has become like SHIKI, probably
able to easily jump off the third floor of a building and be just fine.
Cl, ang.
But, this is it.
From the very start—I knew I couldn't win against Arcueid.
First of all, I can't see any "lines" on her.

I have no way of hurting her.
Arcueid said it once.
That during nighttime, there is nothing which can cause her death.
Clang.
She hits my knife.
With just a swing of her arm, I fly through the air.

"K—!"

I manage to land on the ground and ready my knife.
No matter how much I look, I can't see any "lines" on her.
"Damn it.
What nonsense you are....!"

—Yes, I am so right.
In the deep night without the mercy of the sun,
facing the princess of the moon is too reckless.

"Ha—ah, ha."

My throat is burning.

My heart feels like it'll explode.
I realize that since I saw her tonight, I was under the pressure of her crimson eyes and I haven't been able to breathe well.



"Have you realized it yet?"
She isn't even out of breath.
Even though I'm gasping for air and my heart feels like it'll stop, she's completely relaxed.



"Geez, you really are stubborn.
If you had that much strength, you should have went ahead and killed Roa."
"Wha—what, are, you, saying?"
Gasping for air, I manage to suck in air.
"Kill, Roa?"
That means.. to kill myself, right?"
... Well, to fight and kill myself rather than running away may indicate a strong heart, but..
"You don't seem to understand.
Shiki, your eyes do not kill the body, but the meaning.. existence itself.
The death of things, those "points" are not something that kills the body.
It does not mean you are killing their life.
That kind of power is very common in this world.
"Shiki, your unique eyes, they kill the meaning of things.
What is destroyed is the existence.
The extinguishing of life is only a side effect that comes afterwards.

With your power, it is possible to kill the soul without harming the body.
Usually, a body without a soul will cease to live, so it is like suicide.
"But that's different for you right now, right?
Because you have two souls in one body.
Well—it's always the case that the weaker one loses.
You do seem to be about even right now with Roa.
I suppose there is a high probability that you both will disappear."
"Eh—hey, wait.
What do you....."



"No, I won't wait."

"Gh—!"

I hear a sound from behind my head.
Her body pushes up against my shoulders.
I'm down.
In an instant, without me knowing what's going on, Arcueid has pinned me down.

"——"

Arcueid glares at me without speaking.
Her body weight against my shoulders.
She stops as if hesitating over what to do with me.

"——"

I gasp.
But, it might have been just her silence.

"——"

This close.
Now that we are so close—I may be able to see it.

——I stare at her body.

The core of my brain screams in protest.

Completely unlike the pain of my headache before—as if it really were tearing itself apart.

"——"

But it's no good.

I can't read the "death" from an existence like Arcueid.

Daytime might be different, but at night, she is close to being a perfect life form that doesn't even carry the concept of death.

"... What do you intend to do with Roa, Arcueid?"

You said you wouldn't kill me, but as long as I live, Roa will still be alive."

"I don't care about a diluted Roa.

... Yes, that's why I could have let you go, Shiki."

"—Oh, you don't have to hold back, go ahead and let me go.

Don't worry about me and go home, back to your daddy."

"But you know, isn't it natural for me to take back my own power?"

And more than anything else, I do like you."

Squeeze.

The body weight on my shoulders becomes even heavier.

"More than killing you and destroying Roa, I want to take you in."

So, I won't kill you,

her red eyes seem to say.

"I can't believe it, but it seems I really like you.

That's why I'll save you.

I won't suck your blood, and I won't do anything you won't like."

So please listen to what I tell you, her red eyes say.

—Those are, without a doubt, her true feelings.

Obey Arcueid.

turn to **293**

Don't obey Arcueid.

turn to **294**

293

.... I remember the times I spent with Arcueid.

The first time I saw Arcueid, I was certainly insane.
I don't know what caused that impulse.
But still, there is something I can be sure of.

I, Tohno Shiki, the instant I saw that white vampire, had my heart stolen.

Even though she's a vampire, a True Ancestor, she's still innocent.
She lacks common sense and was the one who got me involved in this mess.
.... Even though I killed her, she forgave me with a smile.

.... An unknown image of the past.
The parasitic ghost of Roa's attachment to Arcueid Brunestud.
Even if it influenced me, I—

"This is your last chance, Shiki.
Do as I say."
Arcueid's voice is shaking.
"————"

Her voice filled, with fear of rejection, tells me.
The most important person to me is Ciel.
But, that doesn't mean I can hate this person.
Holding Ciel dear to me is true, but my fondness of Arcueid is also true.
It has nothing to do with Roa's influence.
As Tohno Shiki, I am attracted to her—

".... Shiki.
Or, do you really hate me that much?"
".... Don't be ridiculous.
If I could hate you so simply, things wouldn't have turned out this way."
I apologize to Ciel in my head as I say that.
"—Eh?"
Arcueid tilts her head.
"Wait Shiki.
What, what does that mean?"
.... This idiot.
Damn it, she just won't understand unless you say it directly.
"—Arcueid, I"
.... Sorry Ciel.
I'm about to say something I shouldn't.
"I, can't hate you.
I'm probably—attracted to you."

"_____"

Arcueid's eyes narrow.
After a tense pause,

"——Really?"

She asks in a drained voice.

".... Hey now.

It's useless to lie in this kind of situation.

I don't want to admit, but I'm attracted to you.

Ever since I met you, I've always been attracted to you."

"_____"

Arcueid's face brightens.

Her hands which were pinning me down let go and she happily tries to get up.

"But, I still can't do as you say."

"_____"

She freezes instantly.

She takes her hands which were letting go and puts them on my arms again.

"Shiki, what do you mean?"

If you like me, why can't you listen to what I say?"

Or are you saying you can't trust what I say?"

".... I believe you.

You have a lot of secrets, but you never lied to me.

And if you say it's possible to do something about Roa, then it's probably true."

"You understand.

Then what's wrong?"

Don't tell me, you don't want to get rid of Roa's power?"

She stares at me, dissatisfied.

.... Geez.

No matter what situation we're in, I guess she'll always be a bit off.

".... Hey, I'm just an average guy.

I wouldn't want this power even if you asked me to take it.

If I could, I want to throw it in a trash can right now."

"?"

Then why don't you want this?"

If you become my servant, you can bring down Roa right away.

.... Shiki, you're being weird."

"You're the weird one.

Look, Arcueid, I'm attracted to you, but the one I like the most is someone else.

That's why I'll never—become yours."

"——Oh?"

I see.

Shiki, you're still saying that woman is better."

Arcueid's voice turns cold.

.... This is bad.

I think I really got her pissed.

"That's fine.
I don't mind if you like someone else.
Shiki, you're the first person I've ever liked.
So if you like me even just a little bit, then nothing else matters.
So even if you don't think about me the most, I don't mind.
Because if you're my number one, isn't that enough?"
Cold eyes shine over her smile.
A mixture of chilling coldness and innocence.
"—But that woman is different.
If she's the one to take you from me, it's better if you hate me.
.... Aw man, in the end, I guess I do have to use force.
You may hate me for this, but if I do this, you'll never be able to leave me."
Arcueid bites her lip after saying that.
Drip.
A bead of red blood forms on her lip.
"Hey—Arc, wait....!"
I yell out, sensing some kind of danger, but Arcueid looks down and pretends not to hear me.
I try to free myself, but I'm not in time.
Like that—

—Arcueid's lips press onto my mouth.

"Mmph——!"
This isn't a kiss.
Arcueid is just, trying to get me to drink her blood.
"——!"
Something tells me this is really bad and I resist frantically.
But her arms grabbing mine are strong, and, um.... the sensation of her lips feels so good, my struggles grow weaker and weaker——

"You..... filthy thiiiiinnnnnnngggg!!!!!!!"

—And then,
my whole world suddenly jolts.

"——Eh?"
When I open my eyes, I see Arcueid's body flying through the air.
Arcueid was hit directly by countless swords that came flying through the air,
and she flew right along the brick pathway and disappeared into the trees.
"——Eh?"
I look down the opposite direction from where Arcueid disappeared to.



"——Crap."

I see Ciel-senpai's there, her shoulders shaking.

——I can feel the heat of her glare.

Staring at me like I was her enemy, Ciel walks over with sharp footsteps.



She smiles and stretches out her hand out to me.

I grab her hand and manage to stand back up.

".... Um, Ciel.... Senpai?"

You're, back already."

"Yes, I was worried about you, Tohno-kun, so I hurried back.

But when I came back to my room, I was surprised.

I told you not to leave the room, but you weren't there."

"Uh, there's a big reason for that, and it's a long story——"

"Then please, go ahead.

I don't know what you were doing with Arcueid, but I'll at least listen to your excuse."

".... Senpai.

I'll say this now, but it isn't what you think.

I didn't do anything with Arcueid.

What you're thinking is, just a false accusation."



"I see.
So you're saying that there's nothing going on, and it's all just a misunderstanding on my part?"
"Yeah!
Alright, way to go Ciel-senpai!
I knew you'd understand right away!"
I raise my hands in the air and cheer.



"..... Erk."
Being glared at, I lower my hands.



".... Oh well.
Unfortunately, taking care of her takes priority right now.
But Tohno-kun, I'll definitely ask you about this later on."
She looks away from me and towards the thick trees.

"———!"

Even I can feel something straining forth from that direction.

Chill.

An uneasiness like an unseen poison is starting to fill the air.

".... Please get away, Tohno-kun."

Ciel walks toward the bushes where Arcueid disappeared into.

"Get away?"

Ciel....!"

I can't listen.

Before, Ciel and Arcueid fought in this park.

Even at that time, Ciel didn't stand a chance against her, so I can't let her fight with Arcueid alone.

But, I don't want to even think about me and Ciel both attacking Arcueid.

"Wait, Senpai....!"

Arcueid didn't do anything.

She's not a bad vampire, so——"

".... Tohno-kun.

When it comes to vampires, good and evil do not matter.

They are an existence that must be eliminated once they mix into human society.

And, it's already too late.

She intends to kill us already."

"Th——"

Before I can say, "That's not true,"

Arcueid's figure appears, swaying like she's sowing the seeds of death.



"—Another surprise attack?"

Not so much you being unoriginal but just having a sick personality instead."



"You talk too much.

Against an opponent who emerges unscratched where normal vampires would have been killed six times over by these Black Keys, any method should be fair. It's sickening to have a monster like you comment on my personality."

Sparks are flying between the two of them.
.... That isn't a metaphor, but the air really is charged.
Arcueid's hostility invades the air so much that the simple act of breathing burns my lungs.
Ciel-senpai is similar, and it seems her robe is more bulky than usual.
.... It seems she's prepared for total war this time, and it looks like she's hiding all sorts of freaky weapons under there.



"—Oh?

I wondered what you did going back to the church, but bringing out the Black Barrel?

I guess the rumor of you giving boring knowledge to Enhance was true."



"It doesn't concern you.
 Well, since you will be sealed here, there won't be anything that will concern you ever again."



"_____"

.... Arcueid's arm lowers.
 She's serious.
 The next instant, she'll probably attack Ciel.
 Ciel would fight back.
 No matter who wins, I already know someone is going to get hurt.

"_____"

I, can't let that happen.
 I couldn't stop it before.
 But now, this time, I have to stop it.
 I am the one who brought this situation on.
 Ciel-senpai and Arcueid.
 If I think they are both very important to me, then..

"..... You, stupid idiots."

I have to stop them even if it costs me my life.
 The air vibrates.
 Arcueid is looking directly at Ciel's neck.
 Before, then,

"——Wait!"

I throw myself between the two of them.



-28 0

"You're in the way, be quiet Shiki."



-28 0



"You're in the way, please get back Tohno-kun."

I'm pierced by both of their gazes.

"——!!"

A headache and chills.

They both really think that I'm in the way.

My spine screams as I bear the full brunt of their enmity.

What's more, my headache worsens.
.... It's in reaction to seriously gazing at the lines of death.
.... And Roa's reaction to me trying to kill Arcueid, perhaps.
"Stop it you two.
There's no need for you to fight."



-28 0



"Don't be ridiculous.
There never was a reason in the first place.
Just get back Shiki.
Even if it is you, I won't let you go if you get in my way."
"Just like she says.
This does not concern you, Tohno-kun.... Even if you stay there, we're going to
fight anyway."
They're not listening to a word I say.
.... Well.
I was prepared for that, anyway.
".... I see.
Then it can't be helped.
If you're going to fight no matter what, then I'll have to do it myself."



-28 0



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"—Eh?"

"It can't be helped if you don't listen to what I say.

If you two intend to kill each other, I'll have to stop you, even if I have to kill."
Gripping my knife strongly, I stare at the world almost hard enough to fry my brain.

Thump.
My brain throbs as if it turned into another heart.

Bathed in an agony where sucking in my breath seems to break every bone in my body, I stare at the "death" all around me.



"To, Tohno-kun.....!
You shouldn't.
If you use your eyes like that, the blood vessels in your brain will explode....!"
"—I can't help it.
If I don't do this—I can't stop Arcueid."



-28 0



"....."

In contrast to the panicking Ciel, Arcueid just stares at me with cold eyes.
 Damn it, Arcueid standing like that, it seems like she knows I, can't, see,
 any, of, her, lines.



-28 0



"—Of course.

You just risking your life won't let you see any points of "death" on me.
 Well, you may be able to find some lines, but that's meaningless as well."
 "..... Why you.. You're not cute at all."

"——"

.... Crap.
 I'm, going to, pass out.



"If you understand, then stop.
 If your consciousness dies, then Roa will take over.
 If that happens, then not even I can help you, Shiki."
 I can hear Arcueid's voice.
 All the same, I've decided to stop them.
 Such a thing can't—

Stop me.
 "Tohno-kun—you can see lines on Arcueid!?"
 Suddenly,
 Ciel-senpai's voice calls out.
 "Tch——"
 Arcueid clicks her tongue disappointedly.
 Ciel-senpai rushes towards me ignoring Arcueid who just stands there.



"Tell me.
 Tohno-kun, you can see lines on Arcueid!?"
 I nod to Ciel's frantic question.
 "Good——then you can be helped, Tohno-kun....!
 I gave up hope, but with this, we can really separate Roa from you....!"

The hostility I sensed from Senpai disappears.

.... Thank God.

I don't know why, but it seems like Ciel stopped fighting Arcueid.

".... I see.

Senpai, you found a way to eliminate Roa from inside me at the church."

"A——"

Her enthusiastic voice cuts off.

Ciel looks down, then raises her head.



".... No, there was no way to help you at the church.

I came back this early because it was a dead end."

"——"

I gasp automatically.

Because, that means the only thing left for me is to be consumed by Roa.

"But, Tohno-kun.

If you can see that which can cause Arcueid's death, then it is a different story.

Roa is Arcueid's Dead Apostle.

Even if he is separated right now, his connection to Arcueid as the source of his power does not change.

So—if you are able to destroy Arcueid, then Roa will have to get weaker."

"Wha——eh?"

I can't quite grasp what she says right away.



Arcueid just stands there, listening to the conversation between Ciel and me.



"By myself.. no, even with a treasure of the Church I cannot destroy Arcueid, a True Ancestor.

The best I can do is to seal her away.

But, if you can see those causes of death on her, then it is a different story.

Tohno-kun, lend me your power.

If you help me, even I can kill Arcueid....!"

"————"

My breath stops in my throat.

Me?

Help kill Arcueid?

Me.

She's saying I have to help kill Arcueid so I can save myself from Roa?

"—No.

I can't do that."

"———Eh?"

Their voices overlap once more.



"Wha—What are you saying, Tohno-kun....!?"

If you don't do that, Roa will take over!

And, weren't you looking for her lines to kill her....!?"

.... No, you got it wrong, Senpai.

".... Ciel.

I don't want to kill Arcueid at all.

I just wanted you two to stop fighting, and this was the only way I thought I

could stop it."

"That, that.... may be true, but....!"

If you do not kill Arcueid, you will disappear, Tohno-kun!

I, I don't want that....!

Why....?

Are you saying Arcueid's life is more important than your own!?"

"....."

Senpai is right, but,

".... I don't know, but I can't hurt Arcueid.

.... Sorry for being selfish, Ciel.

I can't hate her.

That's why.... even to save myself, I can't kill her."

".... Tohno-kun.

You, like her?"

"—Of course not.

I love you, Ciel."

That's no lie.

There's only one person I hold the most dear.

"....."

Ciel closes her mouth as she hangs her head.

.... I don't sense any hostility or enmity from her at all anymore.



Now, if I can get the person staring at me with a sour expression to go away, everything will be just fine—

".... Arcueid.

Please, can you give up?

I will definitely take Roa.

.... I don't know how long I'll remain, but at the very end, I'll—..



"Pierce your point of death and 'kill' Roa?"
 Arcueid reads my mind.
 "I refuse.
 The very end means Roa will have almost taken you over completely.
 Do you think you can kill yourself in that situation, Shiki?"
 "U——"
 She makes some cutting remarks.
 "Then what're you saying I do?
 Go tell you once Roa starts to consume me?"



"No, you don't have to go through all that trouble.
 It'll be all fine if you just kill yourself right here."

Easily,
 with her usual expression, Arcueid speaks cruelly.
 "Wha, what are you saying!?"
 Such a thing I would not allow even if Tohno-kun accepted it....!"
 "H-hey, Ciel....!"

I hold back Senpai who tries to attack Arcueid.
 "Arcueid, maybe that is the best thing for you—but can you just let it go?"



"Nope.

You understand that's the best way too, right Shiki?

So I won't wait.

If you don't kill Roa right now, things will get difficult later on."

"Nnggh, nnngh, nnn....!"

I desperately hold on to Ciel who goes wild in my arms.



".... Well, I wanted Shiki to drink more of my blood, but with Ciel here, it's a little difficult.

So I will compromise.

Didn't I say so earlier, Shiki?

That if you became mine, you could rid yourself of Roa right away.

It's already more than half done, anyway."



"Wha.... Tohno-kun, you drank some of Arcueid's blood!?"

Breaking free, Ciel-senpai glares at me.

"Ah—uh, well, when Arcueid was pinning me down earlier, she forced me to... is there a problem with that, Senpai?"

"Y, yes!

It's a huge problem!

With that, you're pretty much under her influence!

If you have her blood inside you, you'll be just like an extension of her, like an arm or a leg....!"

"Eh——Then, you mean—"

"Yes, no different than a Dead Apostle who got his blood sucked!"

I look over to Arcueid.



-28 0



"Hehe "

.... Why that little.... Smiling like that, no wonder—

"A, Arcueid....!"

Is this what you mean by using force!?

What part of this is not doing something I won't like!?

You've sucked my blood, you big liar....!"



-28 0



"Eh-, you got it all wrong.
I didn't suck your blood.
I just gave you some of my blood, so that's why you didn't turn into a Dead
Apostle."



-28 0



"It's the same thing...!
To have your blood inside someone means they cannot disobey you...!
And if you go too far, your genetic information as a True Ancestor will invade
and destroy his human genetic information.
If it's your blood, only a little would destroy a human body, right!?"



-28 0



"How rude, I won't make such sloppy mistakes.
In the first place, Shiki's body is already invaded by Roa and is almost a vampire's body anyway.
In this case, I think my blood helps.
"... Besides, Shiki won't listen to what I say.
With only one drop of blood, it'll only take him some willpower to refuse my orders.
Besides, I didn't suck Shiki's blood, so his body is his own.

You know already, right?

A vampire makes a target their own by sucking their blood and mixing it with their blood."



-28 0



"B-but still, you forced Tohno-kun to drink your blood...!
What in the world were you thinking...!?"



-28 0



"It's obvious, right?
I made it so that Shiki can beat Roa even if Shiki and Roa die at the same time.
Now, Shiki is under my influence, you know.
Even if Roa and Shiki are equal, if I give Shiki backup, it's only natural that
Shiki will survive.
"Ah———"
Ciel-senpai's mouth opens in shock.



-28 0



"Do you understand?
You said you'll help Shiki, but my method is much better than yours.
Come on, if you understand, then hurry up and get away from Shiki."
"Uh—Ah, uh."
Ciel-senpai's mouth opens and closes.
.... It seems things have taken a sudden twist.



-28 0



"Well, to be honest, I was thinking about not telling you about it.... but, I think it might be alright. Earlier, Shiki said he liked me.



-28 0



Let's see.
If Shiki says he likes me more than Ciel, I'll help out this time."
Arcueid smiles.
Not at me, but at Ciel-senpai.
"N———"
Ciel-senpai's shoulders start quivering furiously.

—And,
Hold on a second.
"N—No, not, not a chance...!
Even without your help, I'll somehow save Tohno-kun!
I'll let you go for tonight, so just go back...!"



-28 0



"Hmm.

I suppose I can go back, but then Shiki will disappear.
So you're saying it's okay if Roa takes over Shiki as long as Shiki's body remains?"

—My, body is.

"D, Don't be stupid!

I want Roa to be destroyed more than you do.

I can't bear Roa taking away the person I hold the most dear anymore!"

"Then, it's simple.

Shiki just has to promise he likes me more, and Roa will be destroyed completely.

I think that's fulfilling both our goals."

—My body's feelings, are starting, to fade away..

"Those are two completely different matters!

In the first place, there's no reason for us to trust you.

I wont let Tohno-kun walk such a tightrope like killing himself.



-28 0



Then——"

_____.



-28 0



"You look like you'd rather kill me.
Anyway, with Shiki the way he is now, you can't.
Roa's invaded his mind enough already, so it's easy to see that if you stress him

any further, his mind will collapse."

_____.
"That's——"



-28 0



"If Shiki didn't strain himself to stop us, he might have lasted for a few more days, but the way he is now, he can't resist Roa for long. Take a look, he's desperately resisting a headache right now. Like that, tonight would be——, huh?"

-



-28 0



"Hey Shiki.
Don't tell me you're already at your limit!?"
"Eh——To, Tohno-kun!?"

Awareness.
I still have my awareness.
My body.
My body can still move.
So why.. don't I feel like I'm alive?

I'm losing my grip on reality.
Tohno Shiki is fading away.

"—Tohno-kun, hang in there, Tohno-kun....!"

Ciel's voice.
Even though she's holding me, I can't feel her at all.

"Shiki, if you can hear me, hurry.
There's no time to hesitate or think things over."

Arcueid's voice.
Her hand grabs my palm.

What's there, is my knife.
"You said it before.
That at the very end, you'll kill Roa with your own hands.
If you're ready, you have to kill him now.
You're the only one who can kill him, so it's meaningless unless you kill yourself
while you're still there."
".....!
You can't, Tohno-kun.
If you do that, you will just die...!
If you just focus, if you can resist that headache, you can come back, Tohno-
kun....!"

—That's, right.
I was already prepared.

Thump.
Roa's mouth is already right there.
Before that—I stare at my body.
That "point" exists right on my scar.

.... Come to think of it, SHIKI said something like that.
What kills a will is another will.
"Stop—please stop....!
You can't be sure what Arcueid is saying is true, so why—!?"

—Yeah, I understand why Ciel's worried.
But, what Arcueid says is the truth.
Because she never lied to me even once.

I place the knife on my chest.
 If there are two wills in one life,
 then with one death, with a simple calculation, only one will die.
 Well, I think that's too simple, but I'll believe it.
 Even if it doesn't turn out like Arcueid says, no matter what, Roa will consume
 me eventually.
 Then—I'll kill you right here.
 Your reincarnation is at an end.
 What I see is my death, and the death of Roa's soul.
 "_____"
 After I sense someone gasping,
 Squeeze.
 Someone grips my hand hard.
 "_____"
 I can hear someone speaking softly.
 Hot blood courses through my body and I feel someone embracing my back.

 I see.
 This is nothing.
 I'll probably, definitely survive no matter what happens.
 I believe firmly, and I strengthen my grip around my knife.

—Roa, if what kills a will is a will, then..

You are alone, and there are three of us.
 There's no way we can lose—!

Walking down the usual road and after entering the usual alley, I come out
 to a strange place.
 I never knew this place was on the way back from school to the mansion.
 A clearing.
 There's no walls around, but I don't feel anyone else around here.
 It's so quiet that it feels like this is the only place in the world, and in it, some-

one sits on a bench reading a book.

"_____"

A man with long, golden hair and small, round glasses.

With deep, chiseled features and golden hair, there's no doubting that he's a foreigner.

Despite his very set features, there is an atmosphere of softness to him.

Even though he looks cold-hearted, his eyes seem gentle.

.... It's probably because of that.

So, I talked to this strange person.

After looking up, he asks me what I want.

I inquire what he was doing.

With a smile, he says that just like it appears, he is reading a book.

I then ask if it is interesting.

With a terribly kind smile, he declares that nothing is interesting at all.

He stands up.

He leaves the old book that he was reading on the bench.

I call out to him.

I tell him he forgot his book.

Over his shoulder, he says that he is done reading it.

The pages of the book are flipping.

Even though there is no wind.

The pages unbind, and page by page, they fly far away as if they were disappearing into nothingness.

As if hiding in the paper storm, the man's figure starts to fade away.

I ask where he's going, but he just responds that he never was anywhere to begin with.

There is only an observer which reads the book.

If the book ceases to exist, the observer also ceases to exist.

At last, all the pages fly away and the book becomes nothing.

The man's figure is obviously nowhere to be seen.

If that's the case, it's no surprise the memories which do not belong to me of this place also disappear.

The book carrying the memories of long reincarnation disappears.

And the vampire called Roa gracefully dies after eight hundred years.

—Well, what happened from there?

A small noise wakes me up.
Creak.
Creak.
Creak.
A sound like a burglar quietly opening a window.
After that, footsteps come toward me.

"Shiki-
It's morning, get up-"

Someone shakes me.
"....."
Resisting my headache, I slowly open my eyes.



"Morning-!
It's great weather today, Shiki!"
"..... Arcueid, you.."
Holding my still-sleepy head, I look at the trespasser in front of me.
Arcueid acts as if it was completely normal for her to be here, and I'm surprised
at myself for feeling the same way for a brief moment.



"Hm?

What?

If you have something to say, you should just say it.

You're always looking so troubled recently."

"... Hey, whose fault do you think that is?

It's because you do things that make my head hurt starting early in the morning and cause me to have stress when I shouldn't have any.

In the first place, if Senpai finds out, she'd kill me before she kills you.

Really."

Or to say, if Hisui came in right now, Akiha would kill me before Senpai would.



"Ahaha.

In that case, you'd finally be breaking up with Ciel, right?

But that's okay, I'll take responsibility and take you with me."

She laughs like it's funny.

Of course, I'm not laughing at all.

"... You, you're actually serious."



"Of course.
I don't joke that often."
"—That's true.
Your existence itself is like a joke."



"Hey!
That's being discriminatory.
You're so nice to everyone else, so why do you only say such things to me?"
She looks me right in the eye.
"Ah——"
.... I'm a bit troubled.
As usual, Arcueid is without hesitation, and doesn't take a man's heart into consideration.
"O-of course.
You can't be kind to someone who sneaks in no matter how many times you tell them not to.
C'mon, get out.
I'm going to change."

Looking away from Arcueid who's directly in front of me, I stand up on the other side of the bed as if running away from her.

—And then,

Knock-knock.

The sound echoes through the room.

"Shiki-sama, have you awakened?"

Hisui's voice.

The clock—says it's ten minutes before seven.

"Crap.....!"

Arcueid, hurry, get out the window.....!"

I hurry to the window and motion her to come to the window.

But,



Arcueid just looks at me like she wants to say something and stays in the center of my room.

"A, Arcueid....!"

Please, just get out....!"

"....."

She's not listening.

"Shiki-sama?

You are awake, are you not?"

"Uwaa!

Wait!

I'm changing, so just wait....!"

"Changing?"

I have your school uniform here, however."

"Uh, no, that's not it—anyway, just wait!

I'll be done soon, so please wait!"



.... Uh.
I guess she didn't like me saying it'll be done soon as Arcueid starts to look angry.

"You... what are you dissatisfied about, Arcueid...!
I can't do anything if you just selfishly come here and get angry.
If you have something to say, just say it."
I yell at her, but quietly.

—And then,



".... Because, you don't play with me recently.
So I thought I should trouble you a bit."
Arcueid says quietly.
".... Hey now.
I told you, students have these things called exams and are busy until they are over.
Once I'm done, I'll spend a whole day with you so can you leave for now?"
"Really?"
You'll do that before Ciel?"
"Uh... I'll try.."



"Yay!
It's a promise, okay?
Then, I'll be waiting outside....!"

With a light hop, Arcueid jumps out the window.



"Please excuse me."

Hisui enters as if she was merely trading places.

"Shiki-sama....?"

I heard some voices speaking, did anything happen?"

"Eh—No, I was just musing.

Sorry if it was confusing..."

Poem yet to be titled.. that wasn't very amusing..



"....."

She stares at me wordlessly.

Arcueid is coming here practically everyday, so Hisui might be catching on.

"My, look at the time.

I'll hurry up and change and go to the sitting room, so please go ahead of me, Hisui."



"..... I understand.
Then please excuse me, Shiki-sama."

With a succinct bow, she exits the room.
.... *sigh*
I guess it's only a matter of time before she finds out.
I have to somehow tell Arcueid to not come to my room at least in the morning—
-



"Good morning, Nii-san."
As soon as I enter the sitting room, Akiha greets me with a bit of an edge to her voice.
"Morning Akiha.
.... You're really taking your time this morning.
I thought you needed to leave soon in order to be on time."
Akiha's ladies' boarding school is in the next prefecture.
I didn't realize it until recently, but Akiha won't make it to school on time unless she leaves thirty minutes before me by car.



"Nii-san, did you forget what I told you last night?
Winter break started yesterday for me.
Since I go to a private school, it is on a different schedule than yours."
"—Oh."
Now that she mentions it, she's in her normal clothes.
Meaning, I'm the only one who's busy.
"If you understand, then please go to the dining room.
Your breakfast should be prepared already."
"Okay.
Then I'll go right away."
I leave behind Akiha, who's already on break from school, and walk into the dining room.

After breakfast, I return to the sitting room.



Akiha stares at me coldly, as if she is in a terrible mood.
"Akiha....?
Did something happen?"
"No, not really.
Just while you were eating, a guest came for you, Nii-san."
"A guest....?
This early?"
"Yes.
It seems she came to pick you up, an upperclassman from your school.
I have her waiting at the entrance, so you should probably hurry."

She glares at me.

.... It seems like it wasn't my imagination that Akiha is in a sour mood.

No, more than that, it has to be Senpai who came here....

"—I wonder what happened?

For Ciel-senpai to suddenly come pick me up today?"

I'm sure I'll find out when I see her.

"Well, I'm off.

I have a test today, so I'll be back past noon."



"I'll look forward to it.

When you come back, I want to hear your story about this Ciel-senpai."

Giving an empty, scary smile, Akiha watches me leave.



"Oh, good morning Tohno-kun."

Just like I thought, the one waiting for me is Ciel-senpai.

"Yeah, good morning.... wait, Senpai, why did you come to pick me up today?"

I ask her a perfectly natural question.

.... Well, it also is an excuse for Hisui, who's watching things from behind.



"No, I don't have much of a reason.
If I had to say, I just had a bad feeling."
"... I see.
I'm happy that you worry about me, but it is a little troubling."
Well, I think about how I should introduce her to Akiha.
I'm not sure why, but I have this premonition that Akiha and Ciel-senpai won't
get along at all.
.... No, I'm pretty sure of it.
"Well, shall we go?
We don't have that much time."
Nodding yes, Ciel-senpai and I start to walk.



"We await your return, Shiki-sama."

Hisui sees me off past the gate.



"I'm surprised.
Tohno-kun, you have such a cute maid see you off every morning."
"Yeah, but it doesn't really mean anything.
I tell her not to, but Hisui is just very conscientious about seeing me off, that's all."
"Hmm.
Hisui-san really is dedicated.
But your family must be really rich to have maids."
"....."
Ciel is awfully nosy.
Was she talking to Hisui while I was eating breakfast?
"Senpai.
I'll ask, but did you talk about something with Hisui?"



"Yes, I heard a lot of things about you from Hisui-san.
About how you indulge your sister, about how cute and spaced out you are in the morning, this and that."
".... What do you mean?
I don't really indulge Akiha."



"Oh, just like Hisui-san said.
She said you would definitely say in response that you don't indulge your sister."
"Uh... Not just Kohaku-san, but even Hisui thinks that way?"
.... Sheesh.
I don't really mean to indulge her, but they both seem to think so.
"Well, whatever.
I guess this is some sort of fate, so do you want to come by my house after school?
My sister is on break, so I'll introduce you to her."
"—Yes.
I would also like to meet your sister, Tohno-kun."
She smiles softly.
But, that smile quickly fills with hostility.



".... Ciel-senpai....?"
"_____"

Still keeping her sharp glance, Ciel is looking around us.

There——



"I was waiting, Shiki!"
Arcueid tackles me from behind.



"Oh, you fell down.
How shameful.
If you leave yourself so open because it's the morning, this is what happens."
"....."
That's mistaken.
That's terribly mistaken.
Even if you're ready for it or keeping an eye out for it, nobody can survive being
hit full-force from behind by a speeding motorcycle.
"....."
I stand up and dust myself off.

——And now.
"What are you doi——"



"What are you doing—!!"
At the same time,
Ciel-senpai screams loudly right beside me.



-28 0
"Oh?
You're here too, Ciel?"



-28 0



"Of course.
Don't pretend like you didn't notice.
You were sneaking behind us for a while, so there's no way you didn't notice me."



-28 0



"That's rude, I really didn't notice.
Because it doesn't really matter to me and Shiki if you're here or not, right?"
.... In other words, she was just ignoring Ciel-senpai completely.



-28 0



"... You really don't learn a thing, do you?
Tohno-kun is going to school, so please don't bother us.
In the first place, there's no reason for you to stay in this country, right?
Roa is gone and there's no more Dead Apostles here.
There's over ten Dead Apostles running around on the loose, so you should go
ahead and go after them."



-28 0



"Yes, I plan on doing that without you telling me.
But I have to take Shiki with me then, so I have to reel him in first."



-28 0



"R, reel him in!?
Tohno-kun won't do any more dangerous things!
Please stop involving Tohno-kun in your selfish circumstances!"



"Let's go Tohno-kun.
You'll turn weird like her if you hang around this vampire too long."
Grabbing my hand, she starts to walk down the hill.



"Oh?
I don't care what you say about me, but Shiki's problem isn't anything you can decide.
It doesn't matter what you think, but he doesn't hate me.
If he says he'll help me, then you'll be the one getting in the way."
"_____"
Ciel freezes in her tracks.



".... Tohno-kun.
Don't tell me, you plan on helping her?"
.... Uh-oh.

Being stared at by those emotionless eyes is troubling.

"No.. I never.. made that promise."

"Then please refuse her.

Actually, you should tell her not to associate with you anymore."

".... Um, Senpai?

Do you really think I should do that?"

I whisper in Ciel's ear.

"Of course you should.

If you tell her directly, even she would—"

"Do you think she'd go back?

You may have forgotten, but I was saved because of Arcueid.

.... So, I don't know how to say it, but.... I can't really be hard on Arcueid."



"That—That may be true, but.."

Ciel looks away, disappointed.



"B, but I still don't want that!

Tohno-kun, we.... w-we're lovers, so please don't let other women seduce you....!"

Turning red to the tips of her ears, Ciel-senpai states it directly.

"———"

Since she is so direct, I'm embarrassed but happy, and turn red as well.

Despite that,



-28 0
"Oh?
You're pretty controlling, Ciel."
There's still one that's open.



-28 0



"C-can't I?
It's not like there's a rule against me chaining down Tohno-kun with my feelings."



-28 0



"Is that so?"

I don't really care if Shiki likes someone else.

If Shiki likes me, then the rest is my problem.

I don't mind if he likes someone else too."

"Wha——"

Ciel shakes her head in response to Arcueid's words.



-28 0



"Well, I won't speak for you.
To say that I don't mind him just liking me comes with the condition he'll be mine in the end.



-28 0



In that regards, Shiki likes me, so maybe I'm the same as you, Ciel.
Ahaha, I guess just loving him won't be enough soon."
"Gah.....!"
I cough out loud hearing that.
A, Arcueid, saying that with a smile—
"Y-you can't do that!
In the first place, Tohno-kun and I, we, um.... made love already, so there's no room for you....!"



-28 0



"Made love?

You mean connection between your bodies?

.... Oh, I see.

Shiki likes those kinds of things?"

With a smile full of meaning, Arcueid looks over at me.

"_____"

I feel a chill run through me.

The instant I have a bad feeling about this, Arcueid grabs my arm, and—

Without saying anything further, presses her lips to mine.

"N, nn, nn——!"

I try and resist.

Ciel watches it all in shock.

"Nn, n—n,——"

Thump.

My pulse.

.... This is completely different from that time when she tried to get me to drink her blood.

This really is a kiss to express love.

".... Mm.... mm....."

Before I realize it, I answer her insisting tongue with my own.

Thump, Thump.

Our matching breathing and pulses make me not care about anything.

.... I can't, believe it.
Ciel is in front of me, but, what, am I, doing—

Arcueid steps back.
"N—haa.....!"
I suck in my stopped breath, and I was excited by such an awful thing.



"See, it's easy.
Ciel, you're pretty stupid to feel like you're insured by doing something anyone can do.
What are you thinking, trying to go against me with just one act of love?"

With a big grin, Arcueid laughs as Ciel-senpai starts to shake.
.... Even I can understand.
Ciel-senpai is about to explode no matter who's nearby.
"Hey Shiki, standing there's a little dangerous."
Arcueid grabs my arm.
Like that, she dashes down the hill, pulling me with her.

"Wa——wait, you airheaded vampire——!"
With a frightening sound that makes me scared to turn back, Ciel-senpai runs after us.
"Ahaha, Ciel is seriously angry, Shiki!"
Still holding my arm, Arcueid runs cheerfully.
.... Well, I don't know what'll happen if Ciel catches up to me right now, so I should probably just keep running until she calms down.....
———*sigh*
With Arcueid grabbing my arm and having Ciel-senpai chasing us furiously, I can't help but let out a sigh.
Probably, my life from now on would be like this forever.
But, well, I guess I was prepared for this.
Ever since Ciel-senpai became precious to me, but I was still attracted to Arcueid, I think I vaguely knew things might end this way.

"To, Tohno-kun!
Why are you running away with Arcueid—!?"
Circling her arms furiously, she chases after us.
.... It's only a matter of time before she catches up.

—Well then.

Before that, I have to find a versatile and effective way to calm Ciel down.
Because from now on,
I'll be in this situation over and over and over and over——

gsetvar clearciel + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar clearcielgood + 1
!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **435**

No.

turn to **1**

294

But, I can't listen.
She might be not on guard right now as the perfection is fading from her body.
"... Shiki.
Or, do you hate me?"
Her eyes look straight at me.
I look at her face while being pinned down.

Sincerely.
—So strongly it might burn my brain.
"... I don't hate you Arcueid."
"Really?"
She sounds very happy.

.... My forehead is burning.
As my brain throbs horribly, I definitely—

See just one "line" of death.
"But, I have to refuse.
The one I love is Ciel, and not you, Arcueid...!"
"——!"
Her eyes brim over with anger.
But before then,
I slice through the "line" on her neck.

"Ah——"
Fresh blood spilling from her neck, Arcueid collapses.
Slipping out from underneath her, I get away.
"Ha—Ah."
I am out of breath.
I'm not hurt, but I can't run in this state.
It's Arcueid, she should be able to heal such a wound and will come to attack me again—

"Ar... cueid?"
She doesn't even move.
Blood flowing over the ground, her white body is covered in vermillion.

—No way.
Did I, kill her?
"Wha—Arcueid, are—"
Stopping my legs that tried to flee, I try to rush towards her body, but gasp.
One arm.
One of her arms on her collapsed figure... like a spider's leg, stands up on the ground.

In that instant,
the whole world freezes over.

"I Wi l l"

pant.
pant.
pant.

.... From her neck spills her blood, and her breath.
Her arm tenses.

"Ki ll, Yo u,"

pant.
pant.
pant *pant*.
pant.
pant

.... The vermillion blood continues to flow.

Her eyes are looking at nothing.
She tries to lift herself up with one hand, but every time, she collapses back down to the ground.

She slips on her own pool of blood, and each time, her body gets redder.
Over, and over.
She tries to stand up, slips, and falls.
... It seems as if she's enjoying that cycle of failure.

"Just, wait."

"_____"

I can't move.
Her voice, her figure, her will—flows compulsorily into my head.

My will is flowing, fusing, merging.
The whole world spins around me.

In the middle of it all, her image dominates.

That's right.
I have never felt such shame before.
I have never been so disgraced.

—That's, why it's funny.

I can't even imagine how much pleasure I'll get when I take this anger out on you, Shiki.

Destroy.
Destroy.
Destroy.
Slowly, completely, gently beyond comparison, cruelly to the point of numbness, I'll violate your life.

That's right.

The instant I tear off your limbs, rip open your chest and pull out your intestines, biting into your neck as you ask for mercy, chewing through your eyes and spreading your brains on the ground like butter——!

"Just wait, I'll kill you soon....!"
Smiling, laughing insanely, Arcueid wallows in a sea of her own blood.
"—"
I can't move.
This isn't good.
Even Roa can't move.
If I stay here, I really will be killed.
I have to escape.
It doesn't matter where, if I don't get away from here quickly, I will get killed.

"—Ah."
But my legs won't move.
Maybe they know.
That no matter where I run, she'll kill me.

"Tohno-kun!
What are you doing?
This way!"
—That voice.
That voice frees me from fear's grip.

"Senpai...!?"



"Just hurry up....!
Before she recovers, hurry!"

"Ah—"
Ignoring my bewilderment, she grabs my arm and starts to run.

"Hey.... Senpai, why—!?"



"It doesn't matter.
I'm the one who wants to ask!
Tohno-kun, you unfaithful cheater!
After I told you not to leave your room, why did you go meet Arcueid!?"
"—" "
No, this isn't the time to be calling me an unfaithful cheater.
"Senpai, that's not it.
Um, I'm sorry for leaving the room.
But I couldn't resist it, so I went outside and Arcueid was there—"
"—Geez, I'll hear your excuses later.
Now, we have to hurry!"

Ciel keeps running.
.... This direction.
It seems like she's heading for the school.

After running here, Ciel finally stops.
"—Senpai, what the hell is going on?
I understand why we got away from Arcueid, but why did we come to the school?"



".... Here, nothing else will get destroyed.
Please go into the school building ahead of me."
"Wha—why?"

".... Arcueid is coming.
Please escape, Tohno-kun."
"_____"

Arcueid is coming—Is she going to chase us this far?
".... I don't think that'll happen.
Certainly, she was pretty screwed up that time, but.... um, please listen without getting angry.
She really is a good person.
I overdid it earlier and she got pissed, but if she recovers and calms down, she should—"
"—It's useless.
In the first place, Roa, who is her enemy, is inside of you.
And in addition, you wounded her that much.
.... Right now, she's turned into a bloodthirsty vampire.
She probably won't turn back to the Arcueid you know until she kills you."
"Wha—"
".... She'll be done healing soon, I imagine."
She mutters, and grabs my arm.
"—We might have a bit of a chance inside the school building.
In any case, to protect you, I have to settle it with her once and for all."
"Ci.... el?"
"When she is active, her subordinate Roa also gets active.
To suppress Roa, we must let her sleep or fend her off.
So, defeating her here is killing two birds with one stone."

"Let's go," she says as she pulls me into the school building.

At night, the hallway is illuminated only by the moonlight.
"....."
I think back to the events of last night.
It seems I have no good memories whatsoever of my school at night.



"Please go up to the second floor, Tohno-kun.
Fighting her is my duty."
"No."

This is my responsibility, so you go up to the second floor, Senpai.
 I'll settle this."
 "... Tohno-kun.
 I'll get mad."
 Ciel glares at me.
 But she seems to be getting more timid than angry.
 "Um.... Senpai?"
 "Tohno-kun, you know about my body, right?
 No matter what happens, I won't die.
 But a trivial wound could be fatal for you.
 Certainly you might be able to defeat Arcueid using your eyes, but before that,
 she would just shred you apart."



"Tohno-kun, didn't you even say it yourself that you'll make me happy?
 So I beg of you, please don't die here."
 "But—Senpai, by yourself, you can't—"



"Don't belittle me please.
 I've already exterminated scores of vampires before.
 When it comes to defeating vampires, there's no one better than me."
 She strikes a confident, gutsy pose.

.... But.
 I see the tips of her fingers shaking.
 Is she scared?

Even for her, who has exterminated numerous vampires.
No, because she has, she knows Arcueid isn't a normal opponent.
"... No, Senpai.
Even still, I—"
I don't want to leave Ciel by herself and run away.
Before I can voice that thought, she presses a finger to my lips and stops me.



"Tohno-kun, you shouldn't say that.
Please, listen to my selfishness.
For once—For once, I want to protect you out of my own will.
If I don't do that, I'll never be able to face you with a smile from my heart."
.... She says that with tears brimming in her eyes.

".... Tohno-kun.
I came back this early because it was no good."
"____"
"There isn't a way to help you at the church.
The only thing there was were ways to try to use Roa to their advantage, and
there wasn't anything that could help you as his host."
"—I, see.
Oh well, it can't be helped.
It's not something for you to cry about, Ciel-senpai."
"No....!
If only I, I was better, I could have found something more, but I couldn't....!
That's why—the only thing I can do now is to slow Roa's advance.
.... It hurts.
Even though I know the pain you're going through, I'm only selfishly thinking
that I want you to be by my side as long as possible—!"
"____"
I don't want to see her cry.
I embrace her so I won't be able to see it.

"Tohno—kun."
"It's okay.
I want to be with you as much as I can too.

No matter how much it hurts, I'll fight Roa until the very end.
.... You weren't being selfish.
I'm the one being selfish."
"But—But, that....!"
"Don't get me wrong.
I don't intend to lose to Roa.
Before, Arcueid said something weird."
So, maybe—there just might be a way left.
".... Ciel.
I won't lose.
But, my chances of stopping Arcueid are slim.
That's why, I leave it to you.
You're unbeatable against vampires, right?"
"—Yes.
Thank you, very much."
Ciel's arm around my back tightens.
As we hold each other, I try to put my lips onto hers.

Then, Ciel hops back like a rabbit.



"—We can't kiss.
If you do such a thing, I'll be too happy and wouldn't be able to concentrate.
So let's just keep it as a hug for now."
".... Yeah.
Then I'll go away, but if you get in trouble, just call out for me.
I'll come right away."

Ciel nods silently.
I—put my trust in her and turn around.
"Please wait."
"....?
Did you forget something?"
"Yes.
.... Um, tomorrow, let's go play.
The three of us with Inui-kun, we will make up for that one time."

She says so with a fleeting smile.

—I'm glad.

I'm glad that our promise meant so much to her.

"—Yeah.

Then it's a promise."

I stick out my hand.

"Yes, please keep it this time."

Ciel's hand touches mine.

After a vigorous shake, she pulls back.



"—Now please stay away.

Her recovery seems to have completed just now."

"Yeah."

Nodding, I really turn my back to Ciel this time.

—It's quiet.

I walk up to the second floor while holding my knife, and take a deep breath.

.... I believe in Ciel.

If she says she'll protect me, she'll definitely do so.

".... Idiot."

But, I feel the same way too.

Just like she told me that she'll protect me, I want to protect her too.

That's why, I'm going to go back there right away.

Even Arcueid should have an opening when she's fighting Ciel.

In that instance,

I'll give everything I have.

".... I'll deal with you later.

Okay, Roa?"

I speak to myself as I look up at the moon.

—After I fend off Arcueid.

I have to walk a tightrope with a very low chance of succeeding.

There's no guarantee I'll survive.
 And in the first place, I don't even know if "this method" will work.
 But, there's nothing else to do.

—If you have that power.

Some one told me before that there is a meaning behind having such a power,
 and a time will come when I will need that power.

".... Yeah, that's right.

This is probably my duty, Sensei."

.... I'm prepared.

Now I just have to figure out how to get Arcueid—

"—!?"

The building shakes.

A large crash.

An impact like a dump truck slamming into the building at full speed.

"—No, way."

The building is still shaking.

It hasn't even been a minute since Ciel said Arcueid was done healing.

From the park to here, such a distance.

She came in just that amount of time—!?

.... That's, different.

That severity is entirely different from the Arcueid I know.

"—Senpai!"

Who cares about taking her opening right now.

Without thinking, I run with all my might.

—It's, a nightmare.

Ciel and Arcueid are in the hallway.

In reality, that's all there is.

That's all, but my legs freeze.

This air.

The air isn't normal.

Everything.

Everything, it's difficult to breathe as this whole place is filled with Arcueid's
 vampiric will, like I'm inside some living thing.

In the middle of it all, the fight between Ciel and Arcueid ended really easily,
 so one-sided.

"—Sen, pai."

It's far.

Across a seemingly infinite span, Ciel is almost killed by Arcueid.

.... Ciel is almost dead, and she doesn't seem to see anything but Arcueid.

.... Arcueid's arm reaches for Ciel's chest.
With a sickening sound, she tries to rip out Ciel's heart.

That's, too much.
Even if she says she won't die—pulling out her heart while she's still alive is too much.
"Stop.....!"
Arcueid turns around.
She looks like she's staring at an insect.

"——Ah."
Just that causes me to forget that I'm alive.
"Oh, you're here too?
Wait there, I'll be finished soon."
Saying that, Arcueid destroys Ciel.
She snaps Ciel's neck as she repeatedly tears her body apart with her other arm.
"Pretty stubborn, huh.
I guess you won't die unless Roa is killed, Ciel."
Slash.
Splat.
A cycle like she said she experienced at the Church, a cycle of reviving and dying.
"If I take in Roa, you have to continue living until I die.
In order for you to die, you'd have to kill Roa with the Holy Sword of Reincarnation Criticism prepared by the Church."
"... So.... what?"
Ciel painfully responds, half-conscious.
"Is that alright with you?
Roa's death means your death.
If you destroy Roa, your body would return to a normal, boring human body."
"... That's.... what, I.... wish for."
"I see.
How pitiful.
Your wish won't be granted.
I'm going to take Roa back this time for sure.
By slicing apart that lump of flesh over there hundreds of times....!"

"——!"
Ciel's body convulses.
Arcueid rips out Ciel's heart.
Even still, Ciel revives and coughs up blood.
"——Arc.."
Something snaps.
My headache rages.
I feel sick.

"You shut the hell up—!"
I slam my head into the wall.

Look.
This isn't the time to pay attention to him.
I can't let her lay even one more finger on Ciel.

Look.
Give your brain a strain that could burst your blood vessels, and look.
Look.
Look.
Look.
Look at the "death" that would kill that vampire—

"Why—!?"
I almost go crazy.
The death of animals.
The death of plants.
I can even see the death of the air before me.
But Arcueid has nothing which can cause death on her.
.... Before, someone told me that True Ancestors are a perfect life just by being in this natural world.
They are an extension of nature, so they can draw as much power from the source called Earth.
That's why they won't die.
They have no limits.
"Oh—"
So that means..
They are only perfect in this natural world.

—Look for it.
It has to exist.
If I can see the death of everything, the "point", has to exist somewhere.
I was mistaken.
There are no causes of death on Arcueid.
In that case—first, I have to take that which makes it so—

I found it.
It's far away, but I can't allow any more of this.
"Arcueid—!"



Her hand stops.
"Follow me.
I'll kill you out there."
Saying that, I jump out the window and onto the school grounds.

—In the center of the ground.
It's far.
Can I make it?
Arcueid pursues me with light footsteps.

It's far.
It's far, but I'll strike first this time—

"Hah—"
I reach the middle of the school ground.
Arcueid comes straight at me.

Before that,
I take my knife and stab the large "point" at my feet, the "death" of the very
world around me.

A distortion.

With this, it's over.
Everything around here.. I "killed" the nature that Arcueid draws all of her
power from.
"—You've thought well, Shiki!"
Arcueid comes towards me.
Her body is filled with death now.
"Alright——!"
I can do it.
I can kill Arcueid like this—But before I confirm my victory.
"Go——ugh."
Blood pours from my mouth.

"Eh....?"

.... Probably because her movements were so fast.
I just couldn't believe it, and I didn't feel pain, or shock, or anything.

The slicing sound finally reaches my ears.
The sound of blood pouring forth.
Looking down,
Arcueid's claws pierced through my chest before I even realized it.

"——Ah."

I feel faint.
Everything starts to fade away quickly.
Her arm has thrust through my chest, impaling me.

That..

That is a fatal wound for a normal human being.

"Ha——"

But, I won't die just yet.
With the way I am now, I'll still be able to live for a bit longer.
.... From my ankles, the pitch-black shadow of death starts to creep upwards.
"Ah..... ah."

I don't care.
I forcefully swallow the blood pouring from my mouth, and I slice the "line" on her chest with one hand.

"Gh.....!"

Arcueid's, voice.
I can, barely hear it.
My head, my head is fading.
Is it the pain from Arcueid piercing my chest?
Or is my brain about to burn out from being strained to the limit?

.... Well, whichever it is, it doesn't change the fact that my death is coming.

I start to feel faint.
But, before that—with this knife, I have to cut her line.
".... Disappear, you vampire——!"
"Don't fool around, I won't die with such a thing!"
Her hands grab my head.
But faster than Arcueid's hands trying to squeeze my head, I slice my knife down to her thigh.

"Just go away....!
I'll take Roa with me.

Without your help, I'll kill him.
So disappear.
I don't want to fight you....!"
"What are you saying—You're the one who refused me!"

Her grip increases.
The sound of my skull fracturing.
"I'll kill Roa right here.
I told you I won't go back unless I do so!"
"You—you, stupid woman—!"
My knife swings again.
With a slice, I cut off her arm.
Her white arm falls to the ground.
Arcueid staggers back.
As soon as I see that, I crumble to the ground.

Like a puppet with its strings cut, I collapse on my rear end.



"Shi, ki—"
.... I, hear Arcueid's, somewhat hesitating voice.

"——"
I can't, speak well.
cough
If I move my throat, the only thing that pours forth is red blood.
"Shi—ki."
.... Fading.
The pressure and killing aura Arcueid was exerting is fading away.
Is it because of her wounds?
Or is it because the wounds she gave me were so terrible?

She is returning to the Arcueid that I once knew.
"—Thank, God."
I don't know what's so good.
But, I.

"Hang in there, Shiki...!
 If you become mine, that wound will be nothing...!"
 She reaches out to me.
 "____"
 With a hazy mind,
 I lift my hand and stop her.
 "Why...?"
 Shiki, you'll die like this, you know?
 Look—I'll forgive you for earlier, and I won't worry about Ciel either.
 I, I don't want you to die Shiki...!
 So—please, please become mine, Shiki...!"
 Back and forth.
 Even though I can barely breathe, I shake my head no.



".... I don't understand.
 If you die, Roa will just reincarnate.
 Even you hate Roa, right?
 If you die like this, he'll just take over your body."
 "____"
 Oh yeah.
 Certainly—I can't let that happen.
 But, if I just follow Arcueid, I think the same thing will happen.
 Even if Arcueid sucks my blood, like what happened to Roa, and I gain the
 willpower so I won't lose to Roa..

.... In the end, Roa will not disappear by his own will unless Arcueid turns
 to acknowledge him.
 ".... No.
 I can't do what you say."
 "Why?
 Do you really—really hate me that much, Shiki?"

.... Don't be crazy.
 Even as a lie, I can't say—

".... Please.
I know how you feel, but please forgive him.
Roa simply wanted for you to like him.
For that, he reincarnated over and over, and was looking forward to your arrival
each time.
.... But, he's a human.
He's not an existence that can live for a long, long time like you do."
.... Yes, for humans, immortality is too far away.
Roa believed his method of reincarnation would let him exist forever.

But, even that had its limit.
Because that method was the same as making "descendents" which shared his
same past and goals, but not creating another "self" for him.
".... Roa is as good as gone now.
He is just an existence which does the same thing over and over because of his
past.
—So, I have to end it for him."



"Shiki—you're already.."
.... Sanity returns to Arcueid's eyes.
The deep crimson of her eyes thins to red.
Her golden hair flutters underneath the moon.
There, is the Arcueid that I liked.

I look up at her as if staring at the moon.
.... Sorry, Ciel.
I can't help but think she's incredibly beautiful.

Those red eyes, those resolute, yet friendly eyes, her white slender curves, even
the gash I just gave her on her chest that is welling up with blood.

Everything about her, she really is—Arcueid really is beautiful.
That's why it's so unfortunate.
The vestiges of my chest tighten at the thought that it has to end like this.

.... Damn it.
If only Arcueid had returned to sanity just a bit faster, none of this would have had to happen.



"I see, Shiki.
You're.... already one with Roa?"
"....."
I don't know.
Just—all of this was too much.
Right now as I speak, my memories are disappearing.
Ciel said something like that.
That if I tried too hard to see something that should not be seen, my blood vessels will burst and that I would lose my mind.



".... Shiki, you idiot.
Are you saying you'll let Ciel kill you?"
"—Of course not.
But I'm already like this thanks to you.
I probably can't hold on for long."
"....."
Arcueid looks down at herself.
Her chest, and the large slash wrought by my knife.



"I don't believe it.
Until now, I've never met someone who could wound me this much."
There is a faint glimmer of resentment and regret in her voice.
"... It really is too bad.
But, it looks like I'm at my limit as well.
I need to return to my castle quickly to heal this wound."
"—Right.
So, you should just hurry and get out of here."

"....."

She doesn't answer.
It probably wasn't even a brief pause.
Just, for that instant,
It's probably that I wanted to treasure the last moment before we parted.



Arcueid gives an amazed sigh.
"You're such a mean guy.
You say mean things until the very end.
But, you know what?"



"I liked that about you, Shiki."

Saying that,
with a smile to the very end, her body disappears like fading mist.

"I see—we were the same after all."
Thinking that aloud, I look up at the moon.
In the end, it really was just a brief moment, but we both returned to the relationship we had when we first teamed up together.
"—!"

I, really liked her.
It had nothing to do with the Roa inside of me.
Just, she attracted me.
That's why, parting like this after we were fighting only moments ago, is too painful.

Why did it turn out like this?
Our relationship—I don't think we made that many big mistakes.

"Gh—ho."
The blood doesn't stop.
I try to breathe, but blood just flows forth from my mouth like a pump.

.... I'm, almost gone.
Arcueid should have taken it easy on me.
If I get such a big hole in my chest, even a half-vampire like me can't be saved.

"—Tss."
Thump.
It's not my heart.
The beating of my heart has long since stopped.
The only pulse remains in my head.
It's probably because I strained myself too hard to get Arcueid back.
I—Tohno Shiki begins to fade and Roa becomes stronger.

.... My body, is almost completely dead.
After I die, Roa will take over.
Even though I can't, Roa would probably find a way to heal himself.

If that happens—I would make the same mistake Ciel did.

"—Sorry."
That's all I can say.
Thu, mp.
I, really, can't, keep, conscious.
Before that—I look at myself.
The "point" is on my scar.
The "point" of my death, of Roa's death.

—Tohno-kun, you said it yourself.
That you'd make me happy.
So please, don't die here.
"——"
That's why, all I can do is apologize.
I can't ask for forgiveness.

Even though I wanted to do so much, it turns out that I won't be able to do anything for her.
Then at least, in the very end.
I should release her, from her terrible fate.
——*sigh*
Taking a deep breath, I place my knife on my chest.
The "point" is at the tip of my knife.
All that's left is for me to push.
Just that.

——Stop.

.... I can hear a voice.

It has to be a hallucination.

..... Tohno-kun.....!

A crying voice calls out from the school building.
Looking up, I see a fully healed Ciel running towards me.

———Stop it.

"....."

.... If I see her face, I will lose my resolve.
Probably, I'll feel sorry and be unable to finish this.
That's why, before she comes.
I strengthen the power in my hand.
The knife slides silently into my body.
With just that.

—St—

The voice disappears.
An old book.
I thought I saw a illusion of it disappearing page by page into the darkness.

With that.
I was able to fall into the deep darkness I fell into years ago.

Tohno-kun, Tohno-kun....!

—I hear, a voice.

Tohno-kun.... why....!?

—See?
Just as I thought.

.... No.
I don't want this...!

—If I heard this crying voice,

Why...!?
You said you wouldn't die...!

—I knew I would regret it—

—It was,

a hospital room that somehow seemed nostalgic.
"..... Ah."
I let out a breath.
"..... I'm, alive."
My chest moves up and down as I breathe.
A comfortable breeze blows in through the open window.
The yellow curtains sway playfully in the wind.
The fresh blue sky is enough to take my breath away.
The air is warm, like a spring day.
"I'm... alive."
I look around as I speak to myself in amazement.
There's no one else in the spacious room.
I'm lying in bed with an IV in my right arm.
There's a large bandage on my chest—
"..... What's this?"

I take out the IV and remove my bandage.
There's nothing under the bandage.
All there is is just my chest.
Having a bandage there means there's a wound there, but there's not a trace whatsoever of anything.
.... I tilt my head to the side questioningly.
Did I do something to get a wound on my chest?



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"——"

I look over to the open door.
From the empty hallway, some unknown child peers into the room.
"....."
Before I can call out, the child walks away somewhere.

——What was that just now?

"——Something."

I feel like, I forgot something.

"Tohno, I'm coming in."

The door gets knocked and Arihiko walks into the room.



"Yo, you're up?"

Good, good.

We really couldn't talk much yesterday, but you seem a lot better now."

He cheerfully walks over to the side of the bed.

"... Arihiko.

What are you doing?"

"Huh?"

What am I doing?

I'm here to check up on you.

You asked me that yesterday too.

You must still be out of it."

"Check up?—on who?"



"I'm sure your head would space out after sleeping for two months, but don't keep asking me the same things you asked me yesterday.

It's about your body, so didn't the doctor tell you about it?"

Saying that, Arihiko takes a seat in a nearby chair.

"..... Eh?"

I get even more confused, and I hold my head.



"Oh, the doctor didn't say anything?

You've been here for a long time, you know."

".... Yeah.

Well, I kind of figured that out, but...."

".... Hmm.

The doctor did say you might not know what's going on.

Well, I guess it can't be helped.. I guess it's more friendly for me to tell you than having a doctor tell you."

Crossing his arms and nodding to himself, Arihiko looks me in the eye.

"It was two months ago.

You were found collapsed on the ground at school."

"..... Ground....."

—Why is it?

Now that he mentions it, I feel like I know something.

"It seems the track and field club found you during morning practice.

They come at around five o'clock in the morning, so they say you must have collapsed there during the night, but what's the truth?"

"Um—Even if you ask, I don't know.

rst of all, you say I was collapsed on the school grounds, but I never even go near there."

"Right.

Well, anyway, you were found there collapsed.

You weren't hurt or bleeding so you were taken to the clinic because they thought it was your anemia.

But you never woke up.

So we called your house and then you were brought to this hospital.

You've been in a coma for about two months since then."

Arihiko tells me an amazing story.

"A coma for two months—that's usually.."

"Yeah, even the doctor seemed to have thrown in the towel.

To be in a coma for even a week means you're a vegetable.

Then, yesterday, you just woke up and said "Yo, Arihiko".

I thought my heart would stop.
Ahahaha!"
He laughs heartily.
"Well, you were always the kind who could have died any moment anyway.
So since I was thinking you'd be like that forever, it surprised me even more."
"... Arihiko.
I'm in that kind of situation, and you're saying pretty mean things."
"It's fine, 'cause you healed.
But it was quite the amazing time while you were a vegetable.
Even though they said you had no hope of recovery, Akiha-chan came and visited you every day.
Senpai would come there at that time too, so it was really hard to be here."
Arihiko gives a meaningful laugh.
.... Wait, wait a minute.
"Wait Arihiko.
What's with that 'Akiha-chan'?"
"Akiha-chan is Akiha-chan.
It's your younger sister and every time we see each other here, our relationship gets closer and farther."
"... Akiha.... so, she came to visit me."
.... hearing that, I remember about Akiha.
Like Arihiko said, I must still be out of it.
It's like I forgot about everything outside of this hospital room.
.... Well, I remember whenever he tells me about it, so it doesn't really matter.
But I feel really light and feel like something's strange.
"... You met Akiha?
.... Sorry Arihiko.
She's pretty up-tight, right?
She says some harsh things sometimes, but please overlook it."



"'Pretty'!?
'Sometimes'!?
Amazing, Tohno.
I never thought you were that great of a guy until now!"
Sitting in the chair with his arms still crossed, he laughs out loud.

Arihiko is like he usually is.
 To be honest, I don't know what happened to me, but his infinite supply of cheerfulness does calm me down.
 —*sigh*
 Leaning back on the bed, I take a deep breath.



"Oh, it's about time for your examination.
 Then I'll see ya' later.
 I was going to bring Senpai along, but she said she wouldn't come because she knew she was going to see you at school."
 "Eh.... Sen, pai?"
 "Yeah.
 We've been taking turns seeing you.
 Well, yesterday you woke up and hugged her right away, so she kind of got angry and said she wouldn't come here anymore.
 She was angry, so you should think up an excuse or something."

Saying that, Arihiko leaves the room.
 "..... Senpai?"
 I can't, quite remember.
 To me, there's only one person who I call Senpai.
 The person's name, face, and personality, I know them all.

So why?
 Why do I feel like I shouldn't think deeply about this Senpai?

I feel light.
 It's probably because I've been asleep for two months and my body doesn't move at all.
 I feel like, something is missing.

—Come to think of it, there's one other thing that's strange.
 I remember seeing this hospital room before.
 But, if my memory serves me correctly,
 that hospital room from eight years ago has to have been long gone by now——

The following day, I return to the mansion.
Probably because I was asleep for so long, it feels like forever since I've been back at my own house.

".....?"

Before I go to the door to the mansion, I take a walk in the woods and come out to a strange place.

"....."

.... I never knew it.

I never knew there was a Japanese style building like this here.

"——!"

I hear a commotion behind me.

I whirl around and see—



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some kid just standing there.

"——"

.... Did he get lost?

He seems quite detached, almost like a ghost or something.

It's just, on his chest.

That scar on his chest showing through his kimono is terribly—



"Shiki-san, what are you doing?"

"Eh—Kohaku, san?"



"Yes, I came to greet you.
I was waiting for you by the doorway, but you headed towards the garden instead.
I was a little surprised."
As usual, Kohaku-san has that cheerful smile.
"... Well, I was just walking around.
Kohaku-san do you know who that kid is?"
"Huh?
A kid?
What do you mean?"
It seems like Kohaku-san didn't see that kid.
"No, if you didn't see him, that's fine.
Shall we go back?
Akiha's probably waiting."



"Yes, Akiha-sama didn't say anything, but she was pacing back and forth in the lobby all morning.
I'm sure she is anxiously waiting for you, Shiki-san."
"—Oh.
Then I should hurry up or who knows how mad at me she'll get."



"Yes, let's hurry, Shiki-san."

Kohaku-san takes my hand and we run to the mansion.
—As we leave,
I felt like someone called me, and I look back at the Japanese style building.



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.... Is it an illusion?

The kid just stares as we run towards the mansion, as if he wanted to say something.

Even if something does seem missing, the life of Tohno Shiki returns to normal.

I'm back at the mansion, Akiha scolds me, Hisui wakes me up in the morning, and after eating the breakfast Kohaku-san made, I leave the mansion.

—There's something missing.

Without being able to remember what it is, I get to school.



"Yo, morning.
 You can come back to school now?"
 Arihiko greets me cheerfully.
 "I heard you had to rehabilitate for a while.
 I see, for you to come to school like this must be because of that."
 Arihiko gives a meaningful laugh.
 "I understand.
 It's only a month until graduation.
 That means you can be together for only a bit longer."

....?
 "... What do you mean?
 Together, with who?"
 "With who!?"
 Of course you and—"
 Arihiko cuts off.
 I hear quick footsteps.
 Underneath the bright, early spring sunshine.
 Breathing quickly, she appears before me.



"Good morning.
 Great weather today, isn't it, Tohno-kun!"
 She gives her usual smile.
 "—Sen, pai."
 I gasp.

That's right.
Why, couldn't I remember about her until now?



"Tohno-kun?
Um.. I said good morning.."
"Ah—yeah, good morning, Senpai."
I reply awkwardly.
She seems a bit puzzled and tilts her head.



"Geez.
You finally got out of the hospital but you're not cheerful at all.
I was so looking forward to seeing you again."
"Looking forward to....?"
Why can't I remember?
Did something happen?
I feel like something very important happened between the two of us, but I can't remember.
All I can remember is that she's a third year upperclassman who took a liking to me and Arihiko for some reason, and that we would spend lunchtime together.

.... I can't remember.
I can't remember anything else.
It's like I forgot about everything else because it was so sad or difficult that I cut the unneeded memories away.



"Geez, Tohno-kun, did you forget our promise?" Senpai looks at me disappointedly.

—Promise.
Promise.
An important, promise—



"Hey, you said that the three of us would hang out in town.
But, you collapsed the day before that and had to go to the hospital."

She looks like she really was looking forward to that little thing.
So I didn't care about anything else.

"... That's right.
Yeah, that's right."



"Yes.
Please don't forget it this time, Tohno-kun."



"No, you can go ahead and forget, Tohno.
Then Senpai and I can have fun by ourselves."
.... Arihiko repeats what I heard sometime before.



"That won't do!
We may not have a chance to do this again, so this time it has to be the three
of us!"
She seems unusually angry.



"Th, that's not true.
We're still students, so we can always hang out."



"Yes, certainly you and Tohno-kun will have lots of free time, but I will be very busy starting in spring.
The university I plan on attending is a little far, so it will not be easy to come back here."



"Ah.
That's right.
Senpai, you—"
Arihiko stops mid-sentence.
I don't understand what she's talking about though.



"Yes, after I graduate, I plan on going overseas to study.
It's always been my dream to become a master at crafting cakes."

—With such a smile,

Senpai says something outrageous.

"... Senpai.
Then, you won't be staying here...?"



"Yes, I'll stay here.
My house is here, so I don't plan on going to live over there.
I can't exactly leave my father alone either.
But the person I will be studying under is very strict, so I won't be able to come back for at least three years...."

——What?

"But, it's always been my childhood dream.
The place I'm going to work as a live-in employee is a craftsman for the king.
Normally non-relatives are not allowed to work there, but he told me I had great talent, so I am able to go there."
Senpai happily speaks of another world I didn't even know existed.
"Oh—that's, great but."

—She'll be gone for three years.. why?



"Yes, thank you very much.
Three years is a long time, but you can wait that long, right Tohno-kun?"
Senpai gives a faint smile to hide her embarrassment.



"Now don't be unfaithful because I'm gone, Tohno-kun. You have a tendency to get swept away easily, so really, I want to take you with me."
Senpai sighs.
"Eh—Um, Senpai?"



"But, that just can't be. You're still a student, and it would be impossible to convince Akiha-san in a year or two. So this time I will just trust you and leave for three years."
.... Senpai declares this fiercely.
Arihiko takes this all in with his mouth hanging wide open.



"So.
This may be the last time the three of us get to play together. So this time, please let me make a good memory out of it."

She sounds truly happy as she says this.

—Throb.

It feels like, the scar on my chest hurts.



"Tohno-kun?

What's wrong?

Grabbing your chest like that, are you still hurt?"

"Ah-no, not really.

My chest was never injured, so it's just your imagination."

As I answer, it feels strange.

It's like, something is inconsistent.

The first bell rings.

Morning homeroom is about to start.

"Then I'll come again at lunch break, okay?"

Senpai disappears towards the school building.

Before she can do that, I ask her a question.

"—Senpai.

Your father, what kind of person is he?"



"Eh?
Tohno-kun, you know my father, don't you?
My family has a bakery at the nearby town and you came to buy from there
before.
My father said you were such a pleasant young man too."
She sounds truly happy as she says this.

"—————"
... Now that she mentions it, I think it did happen.

—But, that's wrong.
Senpai.
There is no way your father can be alive.



"Tohno-kun?"
Senpai calls out to me.
Everything suddenly turns colder.
"You realized it, Tohno-kun?"

She asks me, somewhat sadly.
"—Yeah, I did."
I say that as tears fill my eyes.

—I wish I never realized it.

Then—I could have continued to live happily in this world where no one gets hurt.

"Amazing.

Normally, people never realize it.

Usually, they ignore all the inconvenient inconsistencies."

"—Yeah.

Even if it was a little strange, if I was happy, I should have ignored it."

"That's right. To be not able to lie about such things, you really are honest."

.... Senpai.

The girl who looks like Senpai, says this with incredible sadness.

"_____"

I really feel sorry, and regret tightens in my chest.

But, it really couldn't be helped.

My school life from before.

The Ciel-senpai that seems like she's lived in this town.

The Tohno Shiki who survived that wound without a single scar on his chest.

.... These days similar to the original days without a single moment of unhappiness.

—That, was just too happy.

and I knew this was a dream.



"Geez, you are always like this Tohno-kun.

Even though you overlook so many trivial things, you realize the one thing that you really wish you wouldn't.

But, that is one of your good traits, I suppose.

But still—"

She looks at me regretfully.



"You should have at least overlooked it this time."

.... Senpai disappears.
And so does the world.

It disappears in the same way.
—And, everything disappears.
The world returns to the way it should be.
I died.

No, if I was dead, I even wouldn't have seen such a dream, so I might be on the very verge of death then.

Well, anyway—it's certain that this has to be quite close to "death".
"____"

.... Strangely, I'm not afraid.
No matter if I'm already dead, or about to disappear, or have already disappeared,
Right now, that person is more important to me than myself.
"..... Sen, pai."

That person who was smiling before me earlier.
Ciel, who has so happily told me this fairy tale.
Without pain or suffering, a completely ordinary life, a story as she wanted.
No sadness at all, just a very common-place life, a radiant world.
To me or Akihiko, it was a completely boring repetition of days without any value.
That, that boring thing was.

"—To her, it was an unfulfillable dream."
Thinking aloud, I feel sad.
I selfishly ended my life.
I didn't think deeply about what would happen afterwards.
If this was what her dream was, then no matter how terrible I become or how pitiful I become,

Maybe I should have stayed beside her, being helped by her and protecting

her.

"That is the wish of the person called Ciel.
It is not the wish of you yourself as Shiki, so you don't need to worry about it,
right?"

—Eh?

"Tohno Shiki has acted on what he thought was the best choice.
You don't need to burden yourself with what Ciel wants.
If you do that, you will be burdened by someone else's dream like earlier."

—Although there's no one else than me here anymore, I can hear someone
else's voice.

"Yeah.

You woke yourself from the dream, so there is nothing else here besides Shiki.
I see, you can use your brain a little, Tohno Shiki."

—Then, you are.

"No.

I don't want you to get the wrong impression.

Roa was killed by you already.

In the first place, if Roa still existed, then there would be no way you could
exist.

Even though you are already dead."

—I don't, quite get it.
Then what am I, right now?
"Let's see, maybe you're on a verge of losing yourself?
The time you stabbed yourself and the time you died.
I think this is that brief moment in between the two."

Something snaps.

I see a projection of the familiar hospital room.
"A thing called a dream cannot be something completely unknown.
Any story, is only an extension of what that person knows.
So, the dream you saw has some truth about reality.
Such as—"

—Like becoming a vegetable without gaining consciousness?
"Yeah, that at least is true.
After you stabbed yourself, you were still left without waking up.
This instant is really just a small gap of time between the two.
When you wake up from this dream—you will simply be comatose, not even
able to dream."

—Then, what will happen to Senpai?
"I don't know.
But shouldn't you think about yourself more than other people?
It won't be bad, so just close your eyes again.
This time, try not to wake up.
If you do that—then you can watch that happy dream again."

—I don't understand.

Who are you?

"Hey.

That doesn't really matter.

If you wake up, you won't even be able to to dream, you'd just become a 'pile of organs', you know?

So, it's just better to sink back into that dream.

You really did well.

It is too bad for that person Ciel, but you and I also had horrible luck.

So, I think we could at least see a happy dream, you know?"

—So, who are you?

"... Hmm.

You just said that earlier yourself.

Since you woke up from that dream, there's nothing else here besides Shiki.

So, I must—"



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"—probably look like this."

—Ki.... d....

"Hey, excuse yourself.

I'm a year older than you, you know.

Tohno Shiki is only eight years old, right?

With that in mind, I have existed for almost nine years."

—Then, you are....

"That's it.

I was cast away until now, but since you fell into the same place, I called out to you.

But, it's not like we're actually separate people.

We are the same existence, after all.

Even if you forgot, you are the Shiki that is the extension of me.

But in my case, I am your foundation but not your past, so I am just trash.

Well, it is difficult to talk about it, so let's just leave it aside."

—I don't understand.

Then what does that trash want to make me do?

"That's what I've been saying.

I'm warning you not to wake up.

You, I mean Tohno Shiki's reality is nothing more than spending the rest of your life in a coma.

If you awake to that, you won't even be able to dream.

Even though you could manage your body, your brain would not function.

"In other words, death.

Not death to your existence, but the death of your will.

In that situation.... you wouldn't need to die, right?

Even if you woke up, you can't live in reality.

I'd be much happier if you just watched a dream about reality here."

—.... what is that?

Even if I just slept the rest of my life, dreaming selfishly isn't fun at all.

"That's true.

You can either wake up to reality and face the death of your will or you can stay here and dream.

No matter which, there really isn't much of a difference.

If you wake up to reality and die, you wouldn't trouble yourself like this.

If you call that happiness, it probably is many times happier."

—Wha....

".... But, I want you to dream.

We have the same name, but the dreams we can see are different.

My dreams are usually about that day, or the days I had until I was nine years old.

That may be happy, but there's no future for Shiki there.

Such as getting older, having a person you like, living busily every day."

"My reality, my knowledge, the future I can imagine from that is so small and hopeless that I can't even imagine those things.

But, your dreams were different.

What is normal scenery for you looks brilliant to me, even if they are just dreams.

.... But with my limited years, I can't even think of your dreams by myself."

—.....

"If you can't stand your selfish dream, then I can help a little.
I can let you remember the other things you forgot that happened in the past.
If we work together to fool each other, we can see a somewhat happy dream."

—.....

".... It seems you don't like that.
I guess once you realize the truth, you have to wake up.
But, your reality is already over.
Certainly dreams can't compare to reality.
But still—if you try, I think you can at least become a bit happy, right?"

—.... No.

Wouldn't we be the only ones becoming happy there, Shiki?
"..... You are stupid.
It's simple to be happy by yourself.
If you start to think about others, it gets much more difficult.
As a result, even what's good or bad becomes too difficult to figure out.
And in reality, you and I never did anything wrong.
But this is how we ended up, right?
See, that's the person you are Shiki.
You've only had things stolen from you, so you shouldn't worry about making others happy."

—That may be true.

But, still, I made a promise not to leave her alone.
If everything before, if everything right now, if all of it is a dream—I have to wake up.
"Even if there might be nothing for you if you wake up?"
—Because she's waiting.
I have to go back.
Even if it means my death—I promised I'll be there where she's waiting.
".... I see.
Then, this is goodbye.
I couldn't leave you alone, so I lent you a hand.
But, like I thought, you don't need me now.
.... All the same, it really was fun.
I was able to see a good dream that maybe my future could be like that."

—What, what's this?

Shaking my hand all of a sudden.
That's just weird.
"Ahaha, I even felt weird.
But, it can't be helped because I can't give you it unless we do this.
Even though we are the same, if we are parted this much, we need an image to

"merge".

Well, I guess it's useless for me to tell you because you've even forgot about that."



60 0

—Hey.... You, you're disappearing.

"You're starting to form shape.

Well, it's about time for our goodbyes.

I'll forget about you, so please forget about me.

Now—It's meaningless to go back to the Shiki before becoming Tohno Shiki."

—.

"Oh yeah, about her.

I like her too.

So I agree on the fact that she's more important than you.

But you know, if that's the case, never do something stupid again to make her

cry, okay?"

—And, he disappears.

No, maybe died would be closer in meaning.

.... I feel a strange pain.

Missing, something I won't be able to get back.

I feel sad about something.

Even though I tried to remember,

I didn't quite grasp that it was nostalgia.

"....."

My consciousness returns.

I wake up from a moment's dream.

If that dream disappears and I disappear,

the only thing waiting for me is death.

—Aimlessly.
The morning light shines.
My mind is hazy.
I still can't think of anything.
My body is collapsed.
My head—is on something soft.

—That's strange.
I should have woken from that dream already.
I open my eyes.
I see, her crying face.

"——"

.... I just reach out my hand and touch her cheek.
Her tears course down my fingers.
Without a doubt, these warm tears are real.

"——"

.... She doesn't say anything.
Neither do I—I do not feel that words are necessary.
I just feel her warmth against me.
—Thump.

In the night sky, the moon still hangs from the time Arcueid disappeared, and
my chest is covered in blood.
But, that gaping wound has closed.
Did she heal me or did that wound never exist in the first place?

.... Well, if I'm alive.
That's just a trivial matter since I am able to exist here right now.
"... Tohno-kun.... Can you, understand me....?"
Her shaking voice.
"... I'm surprised.
Senpai, you're really crying."
"—Yes.
I've never felt like this ever before."
"Haha, isn't that a bit much, Senpai?"
I ramble with my hazy head.
I feel spaced out.
There's no headache.

There's no pain.
I don't know what happened to Roa or what happened to me.
All I know is Ciel is here with me in the morning light.
..... *sigh*
What happiness.
What I want is all right here before me.
".... Thank goodness.
I can keep my promise."
I say that after a long sigh.
"What are you saying?
Aren't we supposed to go with Inui-kun and hang out today after school?
So we really don't have time to just sit here all day, do we?"
She speaks and gives a mischievous smile like before.

"—I see.
Then I should get up.... Ow....!"
As soon as I try to get up, my chest stabs with pain.
"Oh, don't move yet....!"
It was a big wound, so you should stay like this for at least another hour."
".... Ciel.
You really contradicted yourself.
You know that, right?"
"Oh.... yes, it seems so.
I seem to have lost my mind since you woke up."
She gives a deep blush.
".... Aw, man.
I'll be bored if I have to stay like this for another hour."
All I can move is my arms.
And she should get tired from having my head on her lap for an hour.
".... Sorry.
Doesn't this tire you out?
You can let me sleep on the ground—"
".... Geez, what are you saying?
I'm doing this out of my own will, so please indulge my selfishness."
Her cheeks turning even redder, she continues to look at me.

".... And, if I stayed like this, I thought you might do it...."
"Ah——"

—I remember.
Come to think of it, I think we made a promise like that before.
".... Yeah.
I want to do so too."
Saying that,
I reach out to her face with my only free arm.
She quietly lowers her face.

—Our lips meet, deeply.

After what feels like an hour, we separate.
"_____"

.... I'm speechless.
Just, at last, for real,
I feel like I've woken, from a long sleep.
".... First, good morning Ciel."
"Yes.
Good morning, Tohno-kun."
Since her smiling face and her tears are more glorious than anything on this earth,
I relax and close my eyes.

"Eh....?
Tohno-kun, Tohno-kun...!?"
"M—Sorry, Senpai.
I want.... to sleep a little longer."
.... I really felt relaxed and all my tiredness returned.
If I can, I want to sleep in Senpai's arms but I don't think that's possible.
".... You can just put me somewhere.... so when classes start, wake me up."
"—Hmph."
She sounds a little disappointed.
But, really—I'm sleepy right now.
"—I understand.
Then I'll carry you to my room, but is it okay?"
"Eh.... Isn't that bad?
We'll miss school if we do that."
"It's okay, let's skip for today.
Besides, there are a lot of things I want to ask you about, Tohno-kun."
—And then,
I feel myself being lifted.
"Hey—Senpai, the clinic is fine, we don't have to go to your room....!"
"Denied.
Tohno-kun, you have to tell me what you did with Arcueid when I wasn't there."
Ciel smiles as she holds me.
There's enough intensity to almost banish all traces of sleepiness away.
"Then, let's go.
The sun is just rising, so if we hurry, no one will see us."
"Senpai, that's why the clinic is much bet—uwaaaah!"

With a light stomp, Ciel takes a huge leap.
I feel weightless, like I'm floating in space.
At this rate, we really will be at Ciel's apartment soon but—

"..... Whew."

I feel like I really have fallen in love with a surprising person.

But, I'm more than prepared.

Even though I've settled the problem with Roa, Senpai has her own problems as well.

I don't think we can return to a peaceful life.

But, even still—I've decided to be with this person already.

No matter what happens in the future, we'll get through it together.

"That's right—Shiki."

I whisper to the person in my dream.

Well then, first thing's first—I have to start seriously thinking about what I should tell her about Arcueid—

gsetvar clearciel + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar clearcieltrue + 1
!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **436**

No.

turn to **1**

295



"Ah—"

Yumizuka's body trembles.
Breathing painfully, she falls to her knees.

A choking sound.
Squatting on the ground, Yumizuka coughs heavily, and she spits out a lump of blood.

"—Yumizuka!?"

This time, I do rush near her.

"Yumizuka, are you okay?"

Yumizuka..!"

I put my hand on her heaving shoulder.

"Ah—"

I feel a chill.

Even through her clothes, I can feel the coldness of her body.

"Stupid, you're freezing!"

What are you doing out in the open on a night like this!"

"—Shiki, kun.."

Her voice is hollow as she says my name.

Yumizuka collapses against me.

As she pants, her warm breath brushes my skin.

"Yumi.. zuka?"

"It's okay if you don't like me, Shiki-kun.

Because, I really didn't understand you at all until now, either."

Yumizuka speaks as she coughs.

"It's alright, don't talk..!"

I'll take you to a hospital..!"

"But, I understand now.

Who you are, and what you want to do.

I really understand now.

Because—"

"Eh—?"

"Because, I became like you, Shiki-kun—!"
Saying that, Yumizuka sinks her teeth into my neck.

"Ah—"

Fading.

My consciousness is fading.

Yumizuka's fangs dig into my neck.

"——"

I'm being drained.

As if all the life in my body is liquified and sucked out.

Without strength, there are no thoughts.

So, my consciousness is not fading.

It is simply being destroyed.

"——Ah."

There are no thoughts.

I know I'll die if I stay like this, but I can't even—.

All the same.

From somewhere beyond my mind, my blood begins to boil.

"Yumizuka—!"

Both my arms push her back out of pure reflex.

She falls right on her behind.

"What are—"

I stand up.

But, I can't.

I'm so exhausted I can barely even lift an arm.

Yumizuka sits, as if in a drunken stupor.

"Ah—"

I can't see her face clearly.

Everything dims as my consciousness fades.

I can't control my body either.

All that exists is the pain in my neck.

Blood gurgles forth.

Yumizuka's teeth marks remain in my neck.

And through those two deep holes, something black is being poured into my body—

In my veins.

Somewhere beyond my reach, the black thing violates my whole body.

As a small piece of the black thing goes through my veins, my body burns inside.

"Ah—guhhhh!"

A pain, a pain as if my spine is about to be ripped out.

"Haa—arghhh!"

In pain, I claw at the ground.
But there is no relief.
I cannot move since Yumizuka has drained everything out of me, and the pain pours into me like a black snake.
I cannot move, so the black thing crawls and twists as it pleases inside me.
"Haa—ah, ah—"
I clutch at the ground.
With glazed eyes, Yumizuka.. looks at.. me.
"Yumi.. zuka.. what have you..!"
"It's okay, it only hurts at first.
rst it hurts, but when the blood mixes, it should die down."
"Don't worry, I won't kill you.
I poured my blood in properly, so you won't collapse and crumble away like those failures last night.
You will only look at me from now on."
Yumizuka whispers joyfully.
"What are—you talking about.. Yumizu.. ka—"
"I'm saying that I'm making both of us the same, Shiki-kun.
Sucking people's blood instead of eating normal food, nocturnal, unable to walk under the sun.
You're going to be a different creature."

.... What is, that.
Ridiculous, that's just like—
"Yeah, like a vampire.
I didn't really understand how I became this way either.
Two nights ago, I went out to check the rumor that you were walking around in the shopping district every night, and then when I came to I was lying down in that back alley.
Back then, I thought it was just cold, dark, and painful."
"But it's strange, after a while, after my body has changed completely, I understood a lot of things.
My body hurts because it's being destroyed very fast, and the sunlight acts like a catalyst for that.
And if I want to stop the destruction, I need the genetic information of the same type of living organism as myself."
"Yeah, I didn't understand the logic that well, but it was plain enough what I had to do.
I was cold, and it was lonely by myself.
I didn't want to disappear, so I just grabbed a random person and sucked his blood.
And you know what?
It was really delicious!
The pain went away and I thought I could do anything."
"But, it was so nice that before I realized it, it was all gone.
The man was all shriveled up, like a mummy, and I felt really bad.

I thought to myself that I was turning into a monster, both in mind and body.
—But, I had to do it in order to live.
Like I said, I didn't kill them because I hated them.
I suck blood the same way you people eat animals.
So I decided not to think about it too deeply."
"Wha—"
What.. is this?
Is it okay to kill other people in order to live?
That.. I..
"But, it seems I've become a proper vampire.
Tonight's meal was quite fun.
Until now, I've been sucking blood since I was cold and in pain, but now that
I'm getting the hang of sucking blood, it's becoming more interesting.
You understand, don't you Shiki-kun?
You are a much better killer than I am."
"Wha—"
What..
What are you talking about, Yumizuka.
"I was always watching you.
So, I know your gentle side and your scary side.
I never talked to you because I didn't understand your scary side."
"But, I understand now.
You're the same as me.
It doesn't matter if you like or hate people.
You could kill anyone, right?"
"Don't—be ridiculous."
I've never even once had that thought.
"I'm not being ridiculous!
I never understood the fragile air about you, but now my body has changed,
and I can understand.
Shiki-kun, just you being there is flirting with death.
There are natural-born killers in this world, but even among them, you are the
best."
"You know, I was really happy yesterday.
It was the first time I was happy after becoming this way.
Because I finally understood you, Shiki-kun.
I never really knew you before.
Shiki-kun, you're the same, right?
You see someone, and for no reason, your heart throbs, and your throat goes
dry."
"That's—a lie, that feeling—I've never."



"___"

I can't say.. I never had it.

"See?"

A pure homicidal impulse, without the influence of emotion.

Your fragile side, which I always wanted to understand."



"I forgot to say one more thing.

A vampire is someone whose blood has been sucked by a vampire, right?

That's true, you know.

To be precise, the person whose blood has just been sucked dies.

Vampires pour their own blood into their victim as they drink to turn them into their own.

So what was in your blood back then was my blood."

Standing up, Yumizuka says this with satisfaction.

"... So, this is.. your.. blood, huh?"

The black thing that still defiles my body.

It's not even a mouthful, but it still causes unbelievable pain, enough to drive me to madness.

"Well, I guess that's long enough.

Stand up, Shiki-kun."

I hear Yumizuka's command.

The pain fades.

Feeling returns to my limbs, and I can finally stand up.



"—Good.
From now on, we'll always be together, Shiki-kun."
"..."
"Now, come here.
Come by my side, hold my hand, and make me feel better."
She holds out her hand.

—Thump.

My heart pounds, and my legs begin to move.
But they don't move forward.
They move backward.



"Shiki... kun?"
Yumizuka's voice is perplexed.

—Thump.

My heart throbs.
My throat becomes dry.
Every nerve in my body recognizes the person in front of me as an enemy.
I start to breathe harder.
This feeling.

Desperately, I endure the poison of Yumizuka's blood and the boiling impulse arising in my body.



"Why..?
Hey, why aren't you doing what I tell you to do..?"

Thump.
My heart beats.
Is this the impulse Yumizuka was talking about just a while ago?
Thump, Thump.
My heart beats loudly,
as if it was repeatedly ordering me to kill.. to kill.

"Shiki-kun, you—"
"Think straight, Yumizuka."
Yumizuka looks at me as I breathe painfully.



"Why—!?"
Why didn't my blood work..!?"
"... I don't know, but it does feel like there's some mud in my body."
That should be Yumizuka's vampire blood.
If a mouthful of it could make me feel this sick,
I can't even imagine what pain it must be for Yumizuka, whose body is filled
with it.

.... It hurts, she said.
At last, I understand what she meant.
".... Let's stop, Yumizuka-san.
It doesn't help you to do this.
You're sick.
We have to get you to a hospital, and return your body to the way it was."
.... I don't want the girl who cares for me to be suffering anymore.
But she glares at me with eyes filled with hate.
"—My blood is definitely mixed with your blood!
So you should already be part of my body..!
Could it be, someone else has control over you already..!?"
"Like I said, I don't understand, Yumizuka.
All I understand is—you saying that it's dark, cold, and lonely.
All I remember is your smiling face two days ago, telling me to help you whenever you're in a pinch."

.... To be honest, I don't know what kind of creature a vampire is.
But you have to kill and suck blood to live, and if you're still in pain, then I have to try to get you back the way you were.
".... Yumizuka.
You said it hurts."



"Yeah.
It still hurts even now.
My blood vessels are still the same as they were when I was human, so just the flow of blood hurts.
Delicate and weak, as they burst easily.
But if I drink a lot more human blood, my blood vessels will be just fine."
"You said, it's painful."
"Yes.
My heart is in pain.
I have to take people's blood in order to live.
I don't feel like it's a crime but it hurts.
I'm painfully afraid that the person I was is going to disappear."

But, I wouldn't be so scared if I'm not alone."

"You said, it's cold."

"Yeah.

I'm so cold, I feel like my fingers will freeze off.

But I don't think it's bad.

I just can't feel warmth anymore."

"You asked for help, desperately."



"I want help, but it's already too late.

I can't go back to who I used to be."

Yumizuka says, smiling just as she did back then.

"Why—why did you end up that way.."



"Why?"

That's what I want to know.

When I woke up, I had this body and just had this thirst for human blood I needed to fulfill.

It would have been so much easier if I just died instead."

"But, I guess it can't be helped.

Like people eat animals to live, I have to eat people too."

"Wha—what is that..!"

What are you talking about..!

Why are you saying such things, Yumizuka—"

Unable to accept the facts, I just shout.

"—"

Yumizuka is silent, and only shakes her head.

"Why..!"

Are you saying you can't laugh and walk and talk normally again like before?

It.. it was only two days ago..!"



".... That's right.

Just two days ago, I was a creature on your side.

It was like a dream.

I understand now that I've lost it.

—Yes, it was really like a dream.

I would give anything to go back."

"Then—"

"But it's impossible.

I can't go back.

I have to live on like this.

Cold, painful, alone."

Yumizuka looks down.

Her cold body trembles.



"—Help me, Shiki-kun."

A faint voice escapes her throat.

"I'm scared.

It's really cold, and I'm alone no matter where I go.

So please, help me."

.... I understand.
I remember the trifling promise I made on the way home from school two days ago.

"—Yeah.
I'll do whatever I can."

.... Really.
To change you back into the old Yumizuka Satsuki, I'll do anything.
But..
Her answer is very different than mine.



".... Ahaha.
Oh, Shiki-kun, you're still thinking about turning me back?
.... Honestly, you're so kind.
It's a great contradiction for someone who loves to kill to be so gentle about everything else."
Yumizuka chuckles happily.
"I told you, it's impossible.
You can't help me like that, Shiki-kun."
"Wha—then, then what should I do..!"
There's nothing else I can do.
I want to help you, there's nothing I can do..!"
"That's not true.
There is something you can do to help me, Shiki-kun."

Saying so, Yumizuka steps forward.

—Thump.
A chill runs through my back, sensing the danger.
"—How can I help you, Yumizuka?"

"It's easy.

You just have to become my friend..!!"



"Ch—!"

Red, piercing eyes stare at me, and I can't breathe.

—This is bad.

I realize it, but my legs are not moving.

"Friend, wha—"

"Then I won't be alone, and I won't be cold or scared.

No, if you will be mine, I'll be much happier than I ever was as a human—!"

—THUMP.

My heart beats even faster.

Yumizuka reaches out with her arm, straight for my neck.

Her speed is like a bullet.

But somehow, I see it perfectly—or I felt like I saw it perfectly and I drop to the ground.

"—Guh..!"

I twist my head desperately, and throw myself to the ground.

With a whoosh,

Yumizuka's arms pass over my head.

"Haa—ah."

"—Can't be."

The target and the attacker.

We gaze at each other in amazement.

"Yumizuka, you—"



"Shiki—kun?"

Yumizuka looks down at me, aghast.

I—I know I have to run away, but my body is still frozen.

Thump.

My heart rings like a bell.

My hand grabs the thing in my pocket, in spite of my paralyzed mind.

Yumizuka doesn't move.

Only her eyes change, from surprise to delight.



"... I get it.

I thought it would be simple to get you into my possession, but—"

Thump.



"Tonight will be quite entertaining, won't it, Tohno-kun?"
 Her red, piercing eyes are hungry for blood.
 Her arms extend brutishly, mercilessly.

Every hair on my body stands on end.
 Before I'm torn apart,
 my hand takes the knife out from my pocket.

Thump.

"—Eh?"
 The movement of my arm is faster than my voice.
 With a swish, the knife slices through Yumizuka's thigh.

"Kyaaaaa!"
 Yumizuka screams shrilly.

—I look in shock at my arm.

There is the bloody knife that sliced open her leg.
 "..... Ah."
 My senses return.
 My body moves.

—Before I realize it,
 I am fleeing from Yumizuka as I tremble.

I breathe wildly.
 I just run.
 "Why—why did I—"
 I don't know.
 I don't understand why or how I stabbed her.
 Thump.
 My heart rings out.

And before I knew it, I had sliced her leg with my knife.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*—!

Yumizuka's blood flows over the knife.

The feeling of tearing flesh remains in my arm.

"Why—"

Really, why did I do such a thing?

I only—I only wanted to help Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Guh—"

Somehow, remembering her face makes my heart beat louder.

Fear and excitement.

Yumizuka is trying to kill me.

My heart pounds in response to the danger.

I, Tohno Shiki, cannot compete with that creature.

It's like apples and humans.

How can the ones getting eaten oppose that which eats them?

It's already like that.

Just as Tohno Shiki eats a tomato with no opposition.. for Yumizuka Satsuki,

I am no different from a tomato.

If she finds me..

If she catches me, she'll kill me.

So, I am running away.

I run, and feel that I'm still alive.

I run through the night.

For now, I just run.

—For what?

That's clear.

Because if I don't I'll be caught.

I feel the presence of Yumizuka Satsuki behind me.

The presence, which felt like a needle before, gets larger and looms menacingly behind me.

pant *pant* *pant*—!

I run to escape.

But who am I running from?

.... It was a beautiful smile.

The smiling face of Yumizuka Satsuki remembering her days at junior high school was truly gentle.

"Sh.. it..!"

Such a thing, how could such a thing happen..!?
Yumizuka became a monster which kills people, and drinks their blood—

"—!?"

Suddenly something hits my back, and I'm knocked to the ground.

"U—gh—uh..!!"

Since I fell over running, my body is covered with scrapes.

But my back hurts far more right now.

With the impact on my back like that from a weapon, breathing becomes impossible.

"What—"

I start to say it, but the words vanish.

Something falls onto the ground next to me.

The thing that just smashed into me is rolling.

"Per.. son.."

It was some guy, arms and legs twisted.

"—Ah."

Blood flows from the man's body.

Red blood flows over the asphalt, staining my body red.

It's..

a human body without a head.

"Ohh, I didn't mean to hit you.

My reflexes have improved, but I guess it's a problem if my aim is too accurate."

A delighted voice comes from behind me.

"Ah—"

Still on the ground, I look behind me.

What I see there,

is Yumizuka Satsuki walking, with a human head in one hand.



"I'm sorry, Shiki-kun; it hurt, right?"

I just tried to surprise you by throwing it ahead of you."

As she apologizes, Yumizuka tosses the severed head away.

"Yumizuka, what was that—"

"Hm?"

Oh, this?

I ran into him while I was running after you.

He was being a little noisy so I ripped off his mouth.

I tasted a little of his blood, but drunk people's blood tastes so nasty.

Shiki-kun, you should only choose young and healthy bodies too."

Speaking pleasantly, she approaches with a smile.

It's nothing like the smile from back then.

Bye-bye, she said.

There are no similarities with the person who waved and departed back then.

"You—really don't think anything of killing people, Yumizuka?"



"I don't.

Talking humans and edible humans are different.

Even you make a difference between human friends and friends to be killed, right Tohno-kun?"

"I didn't think so at first.

Last night, I really hated myself too.

But, I had to drink blood, to ease the pain.

So I killed a lot of people.

Each time I killed someone, my body stopped hurting and my heart hurt more."

She stops for just a moment.

For a moment, Yumizuka Satsuki looks down sadly.

"But, I came to understand.

Right now it will still hurt a bit, but even that will fade.

Because—beyond the guilt of killing people, the wonderful feeling of taking their lives away was many times stronger.



I told you, didn't I?
That I will be like you, Shiki-kun.
Don't worry, I'll become a splendid vampire who enjoys killing, just like you."
Yumizuka approaches with a smile.

"—That's a lie."
I say so, only to realize that even that is a lie.
It's such a poor lie that even I can't be deceived.

—It's hopeless.
She's hopeless.

Yumizuka Satsuki cannot be saved.
Even my remaining reasoning lost to that sole conclusion.
"——"

I stand up, grasping the knife tightly.
She's going to suck my blood anyway.
I don't plan on losing my life and becoming one of those vampires.
So.
There was only one thing to do from the beginning.
"—Yumizuka, I.. can't save you."



"That's not true.
If you just cooperate, we'll be happy together."

"—"

No.

That's a twisted happiness, Yumizuka.

"But.

I made a promise.

—so I have to help you in some other way."

Saying so, I take off my glasses.

An ache floods my head.

For the first time,

I accept this vision in order to kill someone.

"—I see.

Well, I'm glad you're motivated, Shiki-kun.

But it's too late.

This race is already over."

"—!?"

"Gah—!"

—What, what just happened..?

In an instant, Yumizuka disappears, I see her face beside me—and at that moment, something slams into my side.

"Ha—a, guh..!"

.... My back hurts.

Such a simple attack and I am slammed into the wall of a building?

"Kuh—!"

Grasping my knife tightly, I somehow manage to stand.

"Oh, you can still move?

You're relatively strong, aren't you, Shiki-kun?

Since you were always troubled by anemia, I thought you were weak."

Yumizuka's voice draws nearer.

pant—*pant*, *pant*

Breathing—my breathing is rough.

What is this?

I have made a serious mistake.

"It's useless to expect anything from that knife.

To me, you look as if you're stopped.

Even if you had a gun, it would be useless."

Her laughing voice is full of amusement.

"—Ghaa—ah."

That's, the mistake.

I can see the lines along which things break, but I'm just a human who can see that.

If my opponent is many times faster than me, like Yumizuka, I can't even touch those lines.

"Kuh—"

In other words,
against her, it's useless even if I can see these lines.



"—Ohh.

Well, it can't be helped.
I'm going to be a little rough.
Don't worry, if your head and heart are intact, I can do something."

"Kuh—"

With a crash, everything becomes black.
Yumizuka's hand grabbed my arm.
And threw me like that..
Like a soccer ball, I was thrown and I fall to the ground on my back.
"Ah—ghh—!"

—I can't see.
My body is in such pain, I can't see anything.

"Hey now, you shouldn't be sleeping there, Shiki-kun...!"
"—!"

I roll to the side quickly.

Right where I was before, Yumizuka's arms pound the ground.

The sound of asphalt breaking apart reaches my ears.

"Ha—kk....!"

I force my numb body to move.
My vision is still pitch-black.
All I can feel is Yumizuka's presence.
"..... You....!"

Standing up and facing her presence, I raise my knife.
"I said it was useless.

Why can't you just accept it calmly, Shiki-kun!?"

Her presence nears.
Thump, the sound of my heartbeat.
It might be because I can't see anything, this time I easily slip through her grasp.

"——No way."

Yumizuka's surprised voice.
I know her back is facing me.
But since I can't see her, I can't do anything.
From there—a hostile, killing presence growing stronger.
"Why you—I said, don't move!!!"
Her voice.
Impending death.
I blindly swing my knife to meet them.

"Kyaa—!"
The sound of rending flesh.
I just sliced her arm.
"Cra—Yumizuka, are you okay....!?"
Saying so, I hate how stupid I am.
Why am I worrying over someone trying to kill me—?

"——Ah."
My body.. floats.
I am hit from the front and fly through the air.

"Ah——"
My vision returns.
Is it because her attack was so strong?
"... Back... alley."
It seems I flew all the way to the back alley wall.
I feel the hard wall against my back.

"—Ah."
My consciousness starts to fade.
Still, Yumizuka mercilessly presses forward.
"Liar——!"
Her voice full of hate, she swings her arm towards me.
"....."
I can't move.
Since I can't move, all I can do is be killed.

"..... Eh?"

The wall shakes.
Yumizuka's arm only pounded the wall next to me.



"Liar—!
You said you'd help me when I was in a pinch!"

Again, she starts to break areas away from me.
"Why?
Am I not good enough because I became like this?
But I couldn't help it....!
I didn't become like this because I wanted to....!"
Bam.
Bam.
Like a child throwing a tantrum, she keeps screaming.
".... It hurts so much, it is so painful, but why won't you help me, Shiki-kun!?
You promised to help me, so why—"

Bam.
Bam.
Her forlorn, anguished voice.
In this situation where she could kill me any time..
For some reason, my fear of impending death starts to fade away.
"Shiki-kun—if you could be by my side, I could even bear this pain.
Why, why can't you accept me....!?"

.... How, foolish.
Her words weren't ones of hate directed at me.
Yumizuka Satsuki was only crying this whole time because she can't help it—

—Her voice dwindles away.

Only able to move my fingers, I look at her.
.... How come?

Yumizuka looks at my unmoving body as if she was surprised.
.... As if,
she was waking from a nightmare, and regretting what she's done.
"—Shiki-kun, I... never, meant to—"

Her voice is trembling.
.... I guess she's calmed down, but her voice still sounds like she is about to cry.
"..... It's..... okay."

—You don't need to blame yourself like that.
Even if your mind and body turned into a vampire.
In the end, you're still just a pitiful victim.
In any case, I can't move.
Yumizuka, if you say you are so alone, in so much pain, and so cold,
then there is only one thing that I can do.
".... It's okay, Yumizuka-san."
"Shiki.... kun?"
"You can suck my blood if you want.
It's a promise.... I'll be with you, okay?"
I think my voice was kinder then I ever was.
After hesitating, she quietly kneels by me and holds me.
"—Is it, really okay?"
Her voice is mingled with hesitation and happiness.
".... What?"
You came after me because you wanted to do that, right?
Why are you hesitating now, Yumizuka-san?"
"But—I really want to, but—"

—If I do that, I really will be hopeless—

That last line barely escapes her lips.
"....."
.... How ironic.
Certainly she has become a vampire.
Yet in her most important part, a human heart remains.
Because her heart remains, Yumizuka Satsuki still feels pain over being a vampire.
Being human.
As long as that part remains human, she will be in pain.
"—It hurts, doesn't it?"
So it's okay.
I can't help you.
So shouldn't we just do things your way?"
"..... Shiki..... kun."
She nods.
Then, she brings her lips to my neck.

"Ah——"
Disappearing.
The remaining heat in my body fades away quickly.

Quiet.
Such a quiet death.

I don't have any power to break free.
The "lines" in my vision should disappear soon too.
turn to ??

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"Ah—"

Yumizuka's body trembles.
Breathing painfully, she falls to her knees.

A choking sound.
Squatting on the ground, Yumizuka coughs heavily, and she spits out a lump of blood.

"—Yumizuka!?"

This time, I do rush near her.

"Yumizuka, are you okay?"

Yumizuka..!"

I put my hand on her heaving shoulder.

"Ah—"

I feel a chill.

Even through her clothes, I can feel the coldness of her body.

"Stupid, you're freezing!"

What are you doing out in the open on a night like this!"

"—Shiki, kun.."

Her voice is hollow as she says my name.

Yumizuka collapses against me.

As she pants, her warm breath brushes my skin.

"Yumi.. zuka?"

"It's okay if you don't like me, Shiki-kun.

Because, I really didn't understand you at all until now, either."

Yumizuka speaks as she coughs.

"It's alright, don't talk..!"

I'll take you to a hospital..!"

"But, I understand now.

Who you are, and what you want to do.

I really understand now.

Because—"

"Eh—?"

Yumizuka's arm tenses.

With amazing strength, she digs into my shoulder.

"Because, I became like you, Shiki-kun—!"

Saying that, Yumizuka sinks her teeth into my neck.

"Ah—"

Fading.

My consciousness is fading.

Yumizuka's fangs dig into my neck.

"—"

I'm being drained.

As if all the life in my body is liquified and sucked out.

Without strength, there are no thoughts.

So, my consciousness is not fading.

It is simply being destroyed.

"——Ah."

There are no thoughts.

I know I'll die if I stay like this, but I can't even—

Kill this woman.

All the same.

From somewhere beyond my mind, my blood begins to boil.

"Yumizuka—!"

Both my arms push her back out of pure reflex.

She falls right on her behind.

"What are..—"

I stand up.

But, I can't.

I'm so exhausted I can barely even lift an arm.

Yumizuka sits, as if in a drunken stupor.

"Ah——"

I can't see her face clearly.

Everything dims as my consciousness fades.
I can't control my body either.
All that exists is the pain in my neck.

Blood gurgles forth.
Yumizuka's teeth marks remain in my neck.
And through those two deep holes, something black is being poured into my
body—

"Ah—guhfff!"
A pain, a pain as if my spine is about to be ripped out.

"Haa—argfff!"
In pain, I claw at the ground.
But there is no relief.
I cannot move since Yumizuka has drained everything out of me, and the pain
pours into me like a black snake.
I cannot move, so the black thing crawls and twists as it pleases inside me.

"Haa—ah, ah—"

I clutch at the ground.
With glazed eyes, Yumizuka.. looks at.. me.
"Yumi.. zuka.. what have you..!"
"It's okay, it only hurts at first.
rst it hurts, but when the blood mixes, it should die down."
"Don't worry, I won't kill you.
I poured my blood in properly, so you won't collapse and crumble away like
those failures last night.
You will only look at me from now on."
Yumizuka whispers joyfully.
"What are—you talking about.. Yumizu.. ka—"
"I'm saying that I'm making both of us the same, Shiki-kun.
Sucking people's blood instead of eating normal food, nocturnal, unable to walk
under the sun.
You're going to be a different creature."

.... What is, that.
Ridiculous, that's just like—
"Yeah, like a vampire.
I didn't really understand how I became this way either.
Two nights ago, I went out to check the rumor that you were walking around
in the shopping district every night, and then when I came to I was lying down
in that back alley.
Back then, I thought it was just cold, dark, and painful."
"But it's strange, after a while, after my body has changed completely, I under-

stood a lot of things.

My body hurts because it's being destroyed very fast, and the sunlight acts like a catalyst for that.

And if I want to stop the destruction, I need the genetic information of the same type of living organism as myself."

"Yeah, I didn't understand the logic that well, but it was plain enough what I had to do.

I was cold, and it was lonely by myself.

I didn't want to disappear, so I just grabbed a random person and sucked his blood.

And you know what?

It was really delicious!

The pain went away and I thought I could do anything.

"But, it was so nice that before I realized it, it was all gone.

The man was all shriveled up, like a mummy, and I felt really bad.

I thought to myself that I was turning into a monster, both in mind and body.

—But, I had to do it in order to live.

Like I said, I didn't kill them because I hated them.

I suck blood the same way you people eat animals.

So I decided not to think about it too deeply."

"Wha—"

What.. is this?

Is it okay to kill other people in order to live?

That.. I..

"But, it seems I've become a proper vampire.

Tonight's meal was quite fun.

Until now, I've been sucking blood since I was cold and in pain, but now that I'm getting the hang of sucking blood, it's becoming more interesting.

You understand, don't you Shiki-kun?

You are a much better killer than I am."

"Wha—"

What..

What are you talking about, Yumizuka.

"Didn't I say it before?

I was always watching you, so I know your gentle side and your scary side.

I never talked to you because I didn't understand your scary side."

"But I understand now.

You're the same as me.

Hey Shiki-kun.

Even you were thinking you wanted to kill someone, without love or hate having anything to do with it."

"Don't—be ridiculous."

I've never even once thought that.

"I'm not being ridiculous!

I never understood the fragile air about you, but now my body has changed, and I can understand....!

Shiki-kun, just you being there is flirting with death.
That's the kind of person you are.
Like me, someone who has to kill people.
Your need to kill others is the same as the need to breathe, right?"
"You know, I was really happy yesterday.
It was the first time I was happy after becoming this way.
Because I finally understood you, Shiki-kun.
I never really knew you before.
Shiki-kun, you're the same, right?
You see someone, and for no reason, your heart throbs, and your throat goes dry.
Seeing red blood, you enter a stupor like you were drunk from alcohol, right?
Stealing the life of others, extinguishing the life of others, isn't it so exciting?
So fun!"
"That's—a lie, that feeling—I've never."

"—Ah."

That was, something only in a dream though.
But I can't say.. I never had it.

"See?"

A pure homicidal impulse, without the influence of emotion.
Your fragile side, which I always wanted to understand."



"I forgot to say one more thing.
A vampire is someone whose blood has been sucked by a vampire, right?
That's true, you know."



To be precise, the person whose blood has just been sucked dies.
Vampires pour their own blood into their victim as they drink to turn them into their own.
So what's in you right now is my blood."
Standing up, Yumizuka speaks with satisfaction.

".... I see.
This is, Yumizuka-san's—blood, then."
.... The black thing that still defiles my body.
It's not even a mouthful, but it still causes unbelievable pain, enough to drive me to madness.

If that's the case,
This blood.
This foreign pollutant swimming in my body.
I can't see it.
But, with my "eyes", that would—

rst,
Because of my crawling on the ground, my glasses have fallen off.
The lines.

I can see the point of that.. foreign substance.

Then kill,
I stab the point with my knife.
I thrust the knife into my body.
But it doesn't cut any of my flesh.
What is killed is not me but this foreign object.



"Now, it's been long enough.
Stand up, Shiki-kun."
.... I hear Yumizuka's command.
The pain fades.
I can control my arms and legs again, and I can finally stand up.



"—Good.
From now on, we'll always be together, Shiki-kun."
"....."



"Now, come here.
Come by my side, hold my hand, and make me feel better."
She holds out her hand.

—Thump.

My heart pounds, and my legs begin to move.
But they don't move forward.
They move backward.



"Shiki... kun?"

Kill.

Yumizuka's bewildered voice.

—Thump.

My heart begins to scream.
My throat becomes dry.
Every nerve in my body recognizes the person in front of me as an enemy.

Kill.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*

This feeling.

It's as if my thoughts belong to a completely different person.

I can't resist the impulse flowing out within me.

—My mind/is growing/hazy.

"Why...?"

Hey, why aren't you doing what I tell you to...?"

Kill.

Thump, Thump.

My heart beats loudly,
as if repeatedly ordering me to kill.. to kill.

"Shiki-kun, you—"

"... No, Yumizuka—"

She looks at me as I breathe painfully.



"Why-!?"

Why didn't my blood work....!?"
"... I killed your blood.
So, I will not become your partner."



"Wha—"
The eyes staring at me are filled with surprise.

Kill.
"... Please disappear, Yumizuka.... I don't understand why, but.... if you remain here, I—"

Kill.

"I—"

Kill.

"I don't want to kill anyone—"

——My mind/is/inverting.



Yumizuka's eyes burn black.
Like a needle, the sharp intent to kill.
Tohno Shiki's body—separates itself from the mind and will of Tohno Shiki.
I lick my lips as I pick up my knife.
"Oh, you're serious now, Shiki-kun."
"—————"
I can't speak.
Nothing.
The thought of responding doesn't even occur.
My field of vision shrinks to nothing.

"Liar.
You said.. you'd help me."

I don't know anything about that.

".... Fine.
If you won't cooperate, I'll kill you first.
There'll be plenty of time to give you my blood after that....!"

Well said, for a miserable failure.
.... I can only hear the voice.
There are no thoughts.
My body kills the body of Yumizuka in return, who is trying to kill my body.

A sensation of spurting.
My right arm holding my knife is heavy and my left arm is burning.
The burning on my left arm is from the flowing blood.
Yumizuka's nails tore through my clothes and made the blood flow.
Maybe thanks to the bleeding, my burning blood cools down.
My ferociously pounding heart starts to calm.

But, I start to realize,
I pierced Yumizuka's heart with my knife, and am now holding her as if I am embracing her.

"Wha——"

This is, a continuation of my nightmare.
Without knowing it,
I killed Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Wh.... y"

Yumizuka's body up against mine is frigid.
There was never, never any warmth to begin with.
Her body is like pure ice, and isn't doing anything but embracing mine.
"..... Yumi.. zuka."
My fingers holding the knife shake uncontrollably.
Shallow breathing fills the air.
Mine, and hers.

"What——have I done?"

I didn't want to kill her.
I didn't even have a single thought of hurting her, so why—!?
"Shiki.... kun."
I hear Yumizuka's voice right next to my ear.
She's probably going to voice her grudge.
She asked me to help her.
But all I did in response was to kill her without even thinking.

"..... I'm.. so happy."

But,
Yumizuka, with a gentleness like she were having a dream, said those words.
"Wh, y?"
".... Because.. this was the first time you ever seriously looked at me.
That's why I'm so happy.
That makes me.. your first time, Shiki-kun."

——Thump.

".... I'm so sorry.
They say only death can cure a fool; but in my case, it seems even death couldn't cure me——"

——Thump.

".... Yumi.... zuka?"

——Thump.

There's no reply.
With a dry sound,
her body crumbles to ashes as if it was never there to begin with.

—What happened?

That's right.

—I could not, understand.

That's fine.

"Ha—ah."

.... I breathe harder.

Knife still in hand, the contents of my stomach rise to my throat.

"Ah—ghaa—aah—"

.... How come?

There is regret over killing her.

There's also guilt.

But, above all else—I can't rid myself of this feeling.

"Aah—ghaa—gah—"

What a shock.

If you call this pain pleasure, then this has to be the greatest pleasure in the world.

That's what I think as I feel this blood pulsing throughout my body.

.... That's the kind of person you are.

Like me, someone who has to kill people to live.

—She..

.... Your need to kill others is the same as your need to breathe.

—She said killing others was fun, she proudly said that to me.

"—No."

No, that's wrong.

I cannot accept that.

If I accept that, I could never live as myself again.

"—I'm different.

I'm different from you, Yumizuka."

There's no power in my denial.

My whole vision wavers.

Here—if I stay here any longer, I'll go crazy.

.... I have to go back.
Back to my world.
I need to hurry back to the normal life of Tohno Shiki, or else I'll be engulfed
by this poison.

"——Gaaah."
Trying to stifle the sharp pain in my head, I start to walk away.

if hisuiregard >= kohakuregard
turn to **298**
turn to **299**

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..... Cold.

Were you bearing this much cold all by yourself, Yumizuka?

Even as I said sorry—and pitied you, I didn't understand your pain at all.

But, that's over.

Tohno Shiki will soon disappear, and everything will end.

—My heartbeat gets farther away.

My body warmth, everything that is living, ceases.

A familiar sensation.

That summer day eight years ago, a hatching cold.

THUMP

After screaming loudly, my heart stops.

And everything.

Everything that is Tohno Shiki disappears.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **442**

No.

turn to **1**

The door opens with a creak.
 With a heavy body and dulled mind, I make it back to the mansion.
 My footsteps drag behind me.
 The moonlight illuminates my figure, making it look like an exhausted ghost.
 "_____"

.... My left arm hurts where Yumizuka wounded me.
 The bleeding has stopped, and the gradual lessening of the pain tells me it
 couldn't have been too deep.
 "_____"

I reach the stairs.
 I don't even care about treating my wounds.
 Right now, I just want to stumble back to my room and sleep like a rock—

I wake from a long sleep.
 The sunshine from the window looks closer to mid-day than morning.
 It must be because of how late I got back last night.
 It seems I've overslept.
 "....."
 Dragging myself up from bed, I look down at my hand.
 —The sensation of how I stabbed Yumizuka remains.
 Two nights ago.
 When I met Yumizuka and saw that hideous dream.
 "... If only yesterday... was just a dream."
 But wishing it won't make it so.
 I've no clue why or how Yumizuka became a vampire, and I couldn't do any-
 thing to help her.
 —No.
 Once Yumizuka had become like that, there was probably no way for anyone to
 help her.
 She was already dead.
 All I did was return that corpse somehow moving about as if it were a living
 thing back to being a dead body.
 That's the only way I can think of it.

But, still—

"Please excuse me, Shiki-sama."
 With that voice I have become accustomed to, Hisui enters the room.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama.

How are you feeling today?"

"Hm.... ah, I slept well, so I don't feel bad at all."

"Is that so?"

Hearing that makes me feel very relieved."

.... Even though she says that, I don't see her even relax her shoulders, or give any other indication of it.

"....."

But, I feel relieved as well.

Because of what happened last night, the long night is over.

Because I don't have to enter that unnatural world any longer, my heart can relax.

".... Thanks, Hisui.

You've always come to check up on me from early in the morning, right?

Your concern means a lot to me."



"—Not at all.

It is my duty to be concerned with your welfare."

There is a hint of happiness in Hisui's expression.

.... Moreover, I feel like I've been somewhat rescued.

While I've been sleeping in bed like this, Hisui came as always to wake me up.

With just that trivial thing, I honestly feel like I have returned to my normal life.



"Um.... Shiki-sama, this is somewhat difficult for me to say, but.. can I?"

"....?"

Difficult to say?

If it's about me sleeping in till noon, I really can't do anything but apologize."



"No, that is not what I meant, but it is perhaps related to when you went to sleep."

Hisui fidgets with her fingers as she struggles to come up with the right words.



".... Um, I did not say anything, but Akiha-sama found out about last night."

"Eh.... about last night.... what?"

"I mean when you left late last night, Shiki-sama."

"Oh—"

I unconsciously turn my eyes away from her.

I thought I'd managed to slip away undetected, but I should have known Hisui

would still find out.



"Shiki-sama, your return late at night has gained the attention of Akiha-sama, so I believe you will be asked to explain yourself sooner or later.

She is in the sitting room and may be angry, so please be prepared."

"..... I see.

Oh well, I can't complain, since it was me that went out past curfew."

"About that, will it be occurring again?

I cannot stop you, but if you continue doing such things, I must tell Akiha-sama."

"—No, nothing like last night will happen again.

Everything... has ended last night.... There won't be any phone calls anymore."

—Yes.

It really has ended.

With these words, it truly is over.

Yumizuka Satsuki is no more.

The vampire skulking the streets has vanished.

I, with my own hands, sent away a classmate who said she liked me, for all eternity.



"....."

Hisui looks at me with a painful expression on her face.

.... Geez, if Hisui is making that sort of face, then I must look terrible right now.

"—Well, I should get up sooner or later.

Hisui, is Akiha still here?
She's an awfully busy person, so does she have a routine on her day off?"



"Yes, she does have plans during her day off, but today she is still in the mansion."
".....?"
She has plans, but she's still here....?
"I don't quite get it, but.... well, I'll go and get changed, so please head to the sitting room before me."
"Yes.
Well then, please excuse me."

As usual, Hisui walks away without a sound.

—But, I forgot something really important.

"Hisui."



"Yes?
What is it, Shiki-sama?"
"Yeah, I forgot to say something.
Thanks for coming to wake me up.
It's a little late, but good morning, Hisui."



"—Yes.
Please have a nice day, Shiki-sama."

Well then.
I should hurry up and change, and head to the sitting room.

turn to **291**

The door opens with a creak.
 With a heavy body and dulled mind, I make it back to the mansion.
 My footsteps drag behind me.
 The moonlight illuminates my figure, making it look like an exhausted ghost.
 "_____"
 My left arm hurts where Yumizuka wounded me.
 The bleeding has stopped, and the gradual lessening of the pain tells me it
 couldn't have been too deep.
 "_____"
 I reach the stairs.
 I don't even care about treating my wounds.
 Right now, I just want to stumble back to my room and sleep like a rock—
 "Eh.....?
 Nii-san.....?"

—And then.
 From the middle of the stairs, I hear Akiha's voice.
 "..... Akiha?"
 I raise my head.
 In front of me—I see Akiha who has just now made it to the bottom of the
 stairway.



"Ah....."
 Akiha is silent.
 Something about her appearance is a little strange, but I don't even care right
 now and continue stumbling up the steps.
 Right now I should just go to my room.
 So I have to keep going up the stairs.
 I dazedly make my way past Akiha's still figure.
 I have to get up the stairs—



"H... Hey, please wait, Nii-san!
Just where did you go this late in the evening?"
"_____"

Who knows?

Besides, what is Akiha doing standing here at this hour anyway?

Trying to glide down the stairs as quietly as possible, it seems like she was going to go outside just now.

"... It doesn't have anything to do with you, Akiha.

I'm going to my room, so don't bother me."

"Bother, I—"

Akiha gasps and cuts off mid-sentence.



"Nii-san, you look—"

Her previously shocked eyes become calm.

"Your left arm is injured, right?"

Your clothes are pretty dirty too."

"... Don't worry about it.

It doesn't even hurt anymore."



"It doesn't hurt?
That can't be true.
You look like you could collapse at any moment, and there's blood clotted all over your left arm.
Goodness, just what in the world were you doing, Nii-san?"
"....."
I can't answer, and only avert my gaze.

I couldn't possibly explain everything that happened tonight, and more than that—I don't ever want to talk about Yumizuka to anyone.
".... Nothing much.
I was just walking around and got sucked into a little drunken brawling."
Answering simply, I climb past her.
But with a pull,
Akiha places her hands on my shoulders.



"Nii-san, I'll get mad."
With a weak voice, Akiha looks directly at me.
"....."
With her face like that, I become even more unable to tell her what really happened.
"——"
"....."
Just like that, time passes without either of us speaking.
.... After some minutes pass, Akiha lets out a breath and drops her shoulders

in resignation.



"Fine.

I will let it go."

Akiha grabs my uninjured right arm and heads towards the sitting room.

"... Hey, Akiha.

I wanna go back to my room and sleep."

"No.

I won't ask you any more about it, so you have to let me treat your injuries, okay?

So come this way.

I can't help but be worried if you go to sleep looking like that."

Still holding on to my arm, she drags me with her to the lobby.

"....."

Oh well.

This is just how it is.

I resign myself to doing as Akiha says.

—The treatment was quite simple.

I guess it was really not that bad to begin with.

After applying some disinfectant and wrapping the wound in gauze, my treatment is over.

After finishing that simple care by herself, Akiha takes a towel soaked in warm water and wipes my face.



"All finished.

This uniform is done for, so we will have to get a new one prepared tomorrow."

"....."

.... My mind is still numb.

Akiha really hasn't asked me any questions about what happened and simply took care of my injury.

I'm a little surprised.

I thought she would let Kohaku-san or Hisui take care of it, but Akiha did it all with a smile.

.... Her gentleness is completely different from the way she was these past three days and I think back about Akiha from long ago.



"Nii-san?

Hey, it's all finished, so please go back to your room.

Didn't you say you would rather go to sleep than keep me company?"

She may still be resenting my words from earlier because she sounds very dissatisfied.

"....."

There's still something wrong with my brain, but I do understand how much Akiha worried over me.

".... Yeah.

Thanks, Akiha."

Is it because I'm still woozy?

I let my true feelings show.



"Eh—"

Akiha's face turns red and she shrinks away from me.



"—Oh?

I, I don't think it was anything to thank me for.

You would help me if I was hurt, right Nii-san?"

"That may be true, but it makes me happy."

Stuttering, I finally realize it.

I am quite emotionally detached right now, but I honestly am happy that—
rather than Kohaku-san or Hisui, Akiha was the one that treated my wounds.



"D—don't say such stupid things, please hurry back to your room.

Or are you hurt somewhere else?"

Akiha says so and shifts her gaze.

"—?"

Nii-san, your shoulder.. there's blood."

Akiha places her hand on my shoulder.

She peels back my shirt.

My exposed shoulder, and neck.

Yumizuka's bite marks and dried blood are still there.

"Nii-san, this——"

In that instant,

the air freezes.

"....."

The fang shaped wounds on my neck.

I don't know how to even begin to explain that and descend into silence.

"——"

Akiha slowly leans her body towards mine.

"... Nii-san.... there is still.... blood flowing, here."

Her voice is terribly taut with strain.

The grip of her hand on my shoulder becomes stronger.

Her body stops in a position somewhere between touching mine and not.

"... What should I do.... We should, stop the bleeding, right——"

Her voice sounds delirious.

"—Akiha?"

I call her name while assailed by an unspeakable disquiet.

"Nnn——"

There's no reply.

But instead,

I feel a warm sensation along my neck.

"Wha....."

My voice fades away.

Akiha's face is right next to mine.

.... The sensation of rubbing.

.... A contact.

Wetness.

"Aki..... ha... ?"

.... My numbed sense of reason can't grasp what's going on.

A hesitatingly touching tongue.

The red tongue that fearfully touches my neck.

Shaking.

The shaking fingers that embrace me, the warmth of Akiha's body.

"Aaaa——,"

.... Akiha is licking the blood dribbling down my neck.

But, it really isn't anything to be alarmed over.

It's just like what you would do as a kid to stop the bleeding.

But it feels so sweet, I can't say anything.

Akiha must think the same way, as she just—for no reason, brushes her teeth

against my wound.
—All of a sudden.

A sound comes from the lobby.



"——!"

Akiha pulls back.
"I—I'm so sorry, Nii-san——!"

Her face a pure red, Akiha runs away.
"Wha——"
Left by myself in the sitting room, I reach my hand up to my neck.
Her warmth is still lingering there faintly.
"... She didn't have to run away."
I murmur to myself and shake my head.
Licking the wound like that, I did a lot of that as a child.
I did that to Akiha and Hisui when they got hurt.
.... But, that's just an act from child-like purity, only done as a child.
Both of us grown up like this now and being the opposite gender.
We can't really use that method anymore.
"... What was she doing?
.... She was acting pretty strange."
.... Well, I guess I'm also strange right now.
As if in a dream, I can't recall what exactly happened.
Even what Akiha and I just did, I feel like it'll all be a dream tomorrow morning.

.... And I reach my room.
I lurch to my bed and collapse.
"——Nnn."
Tiredness closes in around my brain.
My exhaustion is more in my body than my mind.

My body must be trying to halt everything in order to quickly heal its exertions. Before that, I take a deep breath and trace my fingers along my neck once more.
"..... Ah."
I'm a little surprised.
The two fang marks.
The blood really was stopped by Akiha's lips—

I wake from a long sleep.
The sunshine from the window looks closer to mid-day than morning.
It must be because of how late I got back last night.
It seems I've overslept.
"....."
Dragging myself up from bed, I look down at my hand.
—The sensation of how I stabbed Yumizuka remains.
Two nights ago.
When I met Yumizuka and saw that hideous dream.
"... If only yesterday... was just a dream."
But wishing it won't make it so.
I've no clue why or how Yumizuka became a vampire, and I couldn't do anything to help her.
—No.
Once Yumizuka had become like that, there was probably no way for anyone to help her.
She was already dead.
All I did was return that corpse somehow moving about as if it were a living thing back to being a dead body.
That's the only way I can think of it.

But, still—

"Please excuse me, Shiki-sama."
With that voice I have become accustomed to, Hisui enters the room.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama.

How are you feeling today?"

"Hm.... ah, I slept well, so I don't feel bad at all."

"Is that so?"

Hearing that makes me feel very relieved."

.... Even though she says that, I don't see her even relax her shoulders, or give any other indication of it.

"....."

But, I feel relieved as well.

Because of what happened last night, the long night is over.

Because I don't have to enter that unnatural world any longer, my heart can relax.

".... Thanks, Hisui.

You've always come to check up on me from early in the morning, right?

Your concern means a lot to me."



"—Not at all.

It is my duty to be concerned with your welfare."

There is a hint of happiness in Hisui's expression.

.... Moreover, I feel like I've been somewhat rescued.

While I've been sleeping in bed like this, Hisui came as always to wake me up.

With just that trivial thing, I honestly feel like I have returned to my normal life.



"Um.... Shiki-sama, this is somewhat difficult for me to say, but.. can I?"

"....?"

Difficult to say?

If it's about me sleeping in till noon, I really can't do anything but apologize."



"No, that is not what I meant, but it is perhaps related to when you went to sleep."

Hisui fidgets with her fingers as she struggles to come up with the right words.



"... Um, I did not say anything, but Akiha-sama found out about last night."

"Eh... about last night... what?"

"I mean when you left late last night, Shiki-sama."

"_ _"

I unconsciously turn my eyes away from her.

I thought I'd managed to slip away undetected, but I should have known Hisui would still find out.



"Shiki-sama, your return late at night has gained the attention of Akiha-sama,

so I believe you will be asked to explain yourself sooner or later.

She is in the sitting room and may be angry, so please be prepared."

"..... I see.

I got it; I'll be prepared."

.... But, if it's about last night, then Akiha definitely knows about it already.

.... And after that, it was Akiha who took care of me when I was in a complete stupor.

"About that, will it be occurring again?

I cannot stop you, but if you continue doing such things, I must tell Akiha-sama."

"—No, nothing like last night will happen again.

Everything... has ended last night.... There won't be any phone calls anymore."

—Yes.

It really has ended.

With these words, it truly is over.

Yumizuka Satsuki is no more.

The vampire skulking the streets has vanished.

I, with my own hands, sent away a classmate who said she liked me, for all eternity.



"....."

Hisui looks at me with a painful expression on her face.

.... Geez, if Hisui is making that sort of face, then I must look terrible right now.

"—Well, I should get up sooner or later.

Hisui, is Akiha still here?

She's an awfully busy person, so does she have a routine on her day off?"



"Yes, she does have plans during her day off, but today she is still in the mansion."

".....?"

She has plans, but she's still here....?

"I don't quite get it, but.... well, I'll go and get changed, so please head to the sitting room before me."

"Yes."

Well then, please excuse me."

As usual, Hisui walks away without a sound.

—But, I forgot something really important.

"Hisui."



"Yes?"

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Yeah, I forgot to say something.

Thanks for coming to wake me up.

It's a little late, but good morning, Hisui."



"—Yes.
Please have a nice day, Shiki-sama."

Well then.
I should hurry up and change, and head to the sitting room.

turn to **291**

300

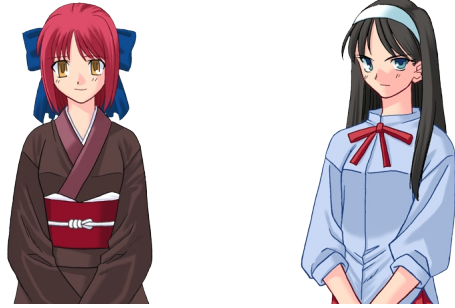
.... Yeah.
I've decided not to have any regrets, and I don't want Kohaku-san to worry about me.
"I'm in favor.
I'm not about to turn down my own welcome party, am I?"



"It's decided!
Well, then, I'll prepare the food.
Hisui-chan—can you take care of my work for today?"



"That will be fine.
Sweeping the lobby and the east building?"



"Well then, I shall.. what should I do, Kohaku?"



"Akiha-sama and Shiki-san should rest in their rooms.
I'll prepare dinner early to make time for the party, so if you have anything you need to do, please try and be done by then, okay?"

Kohaku-san goes into the kitchen, Hisui out to the courtyard.



"Well then, I'll go to my room."

So.
What should I do?
if flgP >= 1
turn to **303**

Go and help Kohaku-san.

turn to **301**

Go and help Hisui.

turn to **302**

301

To be honest, Kohaku-san has the hardest job because she has to prepare the feast for the four of us.
I don't think I can be that much help in cooking, but I'll go see Kohaku-san.

The kitchen has already become a battlefield.
On each counter there is a mountain of ingredients, and I get the urge to turn around and go back as soon as I enter.



"Shiki-san, is there anything I can do for you?"
Kohaku-san peeks her head through.
"... No, I was thinking maybe I could help or something—"
But, it seems like I've entered a world where I shouldn't be.



"Ah, that really helps.
To tell the truth, I was thinking of going to ask you for some help."
"R, really...?"
But, I don't really have any cooking skills, so I'm unsure if I can even help,
Kohaku-san."



"Not at all, it is something anyone can do.
Come on, please lend me a hand."

Kohaku-san takes my hand and pulls me with her.
"....."
Not really understanding what's going on, I end up helping Kohaku-san.

.... After calming down a bit, I realize that the kitchen is actually pretty small for a mansion so large.
They probably had a much bigger galley when there were many people living in the mansion, but with just Akiha, Hisui, Kohaku-san and I, they had this smaller kitchen prepared.



"Here, please wash your hands and use this apron."
I don't know whose tastes this is a reflection of, but she hands me an apron that says "Quiet Unsociable Person" on it.
"I'll start you off with a simple task, Shiki-san.
When it's all done, I have another task just for you."

Kohaku-san is in a good mood.
—First, I have to take the shells off all these shrimp.
Whick, whick, whick.
The sound of a knife lightly hitting the cutting board.
Nnnnn .

Kohaku-san's humming fills the kitchen.

....
.....
.....

She must be immersed in cooking because she doesn't say much.

As for me, I actually enjoy peeling the shrimp, and keep on peeling the skin.

"——"

.... You know, this really brings back memories.

Before the incident and before I left the mansion, I played like this several times with Kohaku-san and Akiha.

We were young then, and we didn't even think about how we were of the opposite gender.

We were just in this spacious mansion, and all we knew was the continuous fun of every day.

We played around so much, we forgot about all the things that bothered us before.

.... Or maybe.

Maybe, in order to forget the bothersome past, we tried to pass our days with as much fun as possible.



"Shiki-san, you really have taken a liking to peeling those shrimp, haven't you?"

"Eh?"

No, not really, why do you ask?"



"Because you look like you're having so much fun.
You know Hisui-chan, her eyebrows would always be so scrunched up by the time she gets done."
"Really?"
I'm surprised.
She looks like the type that would do it without complaint."



"Yeah, for some reason, Hisui-chan is poor at cooking.
But she is really great at cleaning and arranging things."
"Is that so?"
I always felt that both you and Hisui could do anything."



"If that was true I would be very happy.
But both Hisui-chan and I are merely normal, so we have our faults too.
Hisui-chan's sense of taste is a little strange, so even when she makes things that she thinks are delicious, for Akiha-sama or I, it tastes really strange."
I see, so that's why Hisui doesn't cook.
Hisui's sense of taste is a little odd; Kohaku-san... what's her fault, I wonder?
".... Well, come to think of it, you and Hisui are different in your own ways.
Kohaku-san, you were always cheerful, while Hisui stayed in the mansion back then."
"Oh, did I look that cheerful?"
I thought I was always watching you all though."
"Yeah, I remember.
You would always run around with us, but you would tell us to stop doing dan-

gerous things and look out for us."

.... Ah, I really do remember.

Playing tag in the courtyard of the mansion.

Trying as hard as we could to catch my old man's carp in the pond.

"Hey, remember that time, the time where we left the mansion from the gate, right?"

We didn't know the way to get back, and you ended up calling the mansion and one of the mansion's servants had to come pick us up."



"Yes, and after that Makihisa-sama really did yell at you.

Everyone was playing with you, but somehow you ended up being the only one. We did so many things, but in the end, you always saved Akiha-sama and me from getting in trouble."

She giggles as she speaks aloud nostalgically.

".... What's this?"

Talking about old times, I really feel like I have returned now."

That's right.

I really don't have too many memories of this mansion, but talking about old times honestly makes me feel nostalgic.

But, my memories aren't just happy ones.

".... But, I did treat Hisui poorly."

.... That girl who was always in the corner of my heart.

In the end, I was never able to have a true conversation with that girl by the window.

".... That girl, she was always watching us from the window.

Always, it struck me.

That lonely face looking down, I always thought it would be great if she could come and play."

But still, before I left the mansion, she gave me that one parting gift.

"That's right.

She was always shy even then, so I never knew what she was thinking.

I always thought if Hisui-chan was happy, it wouldn't matter what happened to me."

"Oh?
Kohaku-san, you really are a good older sister."
I'm feeling happy, so I give an answer like that.

"Ah."

All of a sudden,
with a short sound, Kohaku-san lifts her hand.
I can see she cut her finger with the kitchen knife.
"Ko, Kohaku-san, your finger....!"
"Eh?"
After I say that, she seems to have realized she cut her finger.



"Ah, that's true."
"That's true'?"
Hey, Kohaku-san!?"
I don't believe this.
Even I could see that the cut is really deep, but Kohaku-san is still slow-paced.
"How embarrassing.
I am supposed to be such a good chef.
Ahaha!"
Kohaku-san gives her normal laugh.
"This is no laughing matter.
We have to take care of it right away....!"
"It's fine.
It isn't life threatening or anything."
"But doesn't it hurt?
It's cut pretty bad!"
"No, not at all.
If I think it doesn't hurt, then it won't hurt.
If I think this isn't my finger, and that it's just a finger of some doll, then I
won't feel pain, right?"
"Wha—"
With a smile, Kohaku-san says something pretty outlandish.
Well I'm sure if you think that way, it won't hurt as much, but you can't get

rid of it all.

"Look, let's just get it taken care of!

I'm a little weak when it comes to blood, so if I have an anemic fit right here, it'll be your fault, Kohaku-san....!"

"I see, then I should take care of it right away.

Well then, Shiki-san, excuse me for a moment."

The whole time her smile never cracks, and giving me a bow with her head, she leaves the kitchen.

turn to **304**

302

Kohaku-san has a lot to do, but I'm sure Hisui is much busier.
I should try and pay Hisui back for everything she's done, so I'll go help her.

I head out to the lobby and run into Hisui right away.
She must be tidying things up, because there's a cloth and a feather duster at her feet.

"Hisui, can I have a minute?"



"Shiki-sama?
Did you not return to your room?"
"No, I won't.
You and Kohaku-san seemed so busy, I feel bad just lounging around and doing nothing."
"....."
Hisui just looks at me silently.



".... Shiki-sama.
I do not believe this is the case, but are you asking me if you could help me with my duties?"
"—Uhhh."
She struck first.
"What do you mean?"

Isn't it alright?
Cleaning this huge mansion by yourself is hard, so let me help just a little bit,
please?"



"You say that, but there is not so much that I require assistance.... Actually, I
can say that since Nee-san is not here, I have an easier time."

"?"

Huh?

Cleaning is easier.. when Kohaku-san isn't here?"



"Ah-no, well, I mean-that....."

Did she accidentally let something slip out?
She looks down as she stammers for an excuse.
.... It's something I don't see everyday, so I smile at her.



".... Um, Shiki-sama.
What I said just now.... Nee-san, um..."
Flustered, she tries to tell me not to tell Kohaku-san.
"Oh, so what you said right now can't be told to Kohaku-san.
I see, I got it."
I have to tell Kohaku-san about it.



".... Shiki-sama.
Um, I think you should try not to show what you are thinking."
"Hm?"
I'm not really thinking anything at all."
"....."
Hisui just looks at me.
.... Perhaps what she said just now might be more of taboo for Kohaku-san
than I thought it was.
"I understand; I won't tell her, so please stop looking at me like that."



".... I remember now.
Even long ago, you would always do pranks and tease others for no reason.
Are you perchance planning on doing something devious like you did back then,
Shiki-sama?"
"No, not really.
I just wanted to see how your face looked if you were a little distressed, that's
all."



"....."
.... Crap.
Why do I blurt out the truth like that?



"Shiki-sama.
I still have duties remaining to finish, so if you have free time, please go help
Nee-san."

As you say, I am very busy so I can not keep you company."

Hisui turns away and starts to clean the flower vases.
.... It seems that even though I wanted to help, I made her angry.
".... Um, Hisui?"



"Yes, what is it?"

But Hisui still responds courteously, so I think she's really nice.
"About before—ah, if you don't want to answer, you don't have to.
Well, Kohaku-san is always sweeping in the courtyard, and she doesn't really clean in the house that often.
Does it have anything to do with what you said earlier?"



"Eh.... Yes, it, is related, somewhat...."



"Please do not tell Nee-san.
She is rather self-conscious of her lack of ability."
"?"

Lack of ability?

Kohaku-san doesn't lack in ability; she's a wonderful cook, and knows so much about medicine, right?"



"That is, um.... everyone has things suited and not suited for them.
Nee-san really seems to enjoy herself when cleaning, but she is too rambunctious and is very dangerous when she tries to do cleaning and maintenance in the mansion."

"—Dangerous, Hisui?"

Putting it that way, is.."

That doesn't seem to fit Hisui either.



"Shiki-sama, you do not understand, so it is easy for you to say that.
Nee-san has tried to excuse the breaking of several items all in the name of cleaning, and not just ten or twenty times.

If she becomes serious, her cleaning becomes more like a whirlwind.

She has that sort of.. talent."

As she speaks, I can almost see a fiery aura form around Hisui.

.... It seems that she has been the victim of Kohaku-san's cleaning many times.

".... I see.

I'm—quite surprised."



"... Yes.

Nee-san knows about it too.

After Akiha-sama and I discussed it, we decided and told her it was better for her to work outside in the garden or do other non-cleaning chores.

She was very down and disheartened back then."

"... Well, if she did break things and was told not to clean, I guess she would be a little disappointed..."

Um, I still can't quite picture that happy Kohaku-san looking down.



"So, please do not discuss cleaning indoors with Kohaku-san, Shiki-sama.
If Nee-san doesn't do that, then she is really fine—"



"Yes?

Did you call me?"

"!!!"

Hisui and I both freeze.
Speak of the devil.. Kohaku-san walks in from the kitchen.



-2 0



"Nee-san-is there something you need?"



-2 0



"Yes, I needed another hand, so I thought maybe Shiki-san could come help me."

Smiling, Kohaku-san faces me.

"But, it seems I was too late.

Shiki-san, please continue helping Hisui-chan."



-2 0



"Nee-san.

Shiki-sama is not really helping me at the moment."

Hisui responds very matter-of-factly.

.... Well, that's how it is.



-2 0



"Ah, is that so?
Then Shiki-san, are you free?"
"—That's right.
If you need another hand, I'll lend you one.
But, I'm not sure if I'd be any help.
I don't ever cook or anything."



-2 0



"Not at all, it is something anyone can do.
Come on, please lend me a hand."



-2 0
Kohaku-san takes my hand and pulls me with her.



-2 0
"_____"
Hisui watches it all silently.

.... The kitchen is smaller than I expected.
They probably had a much bigger galley when there were many people living
in the mansion, but with just Akiha, Hisui, Kohaku-san and I, they had this
smaller kitchen prepared.



"Here, please wash your hands and use this apron."
 I don't know whose tastes this is a reflection of, but she hands me an apron that says "Quiet Unsociable Person" on it.
 "I'll start you off with a simple task, Shiki-san.
 When it's all done, I have another task just for you."

Kohaku-san is in a good mood.
 rst, I have to take the shells off all these shrimp.
 Whick, whick, whick.
 The sound of a knife lightly hitting the cutting board.
 Nnnnn .
 Kohaku-san's humming fills the kitchen.

 She must be immersed in cooking because she doesn't say much.
 As for me, I actually enjoy peeling the shrimp, and keep on peeling the skin.

"——"
 You know, this really brings back memories.
 Before the incident and before I left the mansion, I played like this several times with Kohaku-san and Akiha.
 We were young then, and we didn't even think about how we were of the opposite gender.
 We were just in this spacious mansion, and all we knew was the continuous fun of every day.
 We played around so much, we forgot about all the things that bothered us before.
 Or maybe.
 Maybe, in order to forget the bothersome past, we tried to pass our days with as much fun as possible.



"Shiki-san, you really have taken a liking to peeling those shrimp, haven't you?"

"Eh?"

No, not really; why do you ask?"



"Because you look like you're having so much fun.

You know Hisui-chan, her eyebrows would always be so scrunched up by the time she gets done."

"Really?"

I'm surprised.

She looks like the type that would do it without complaint."



"Yeah, for some reason, Hisui-chan is poor at cooking.

But she is really great at cleaning and arranging things."

".... Oh?"

I seem to have heard, something like that, before."

Yeah, just now, actually, and from Hisui.

" Well, come to think of it, you and Hisui are different in your own ways. Kohaku-san, you were always cheerful, while Hisui stayed in the mansion back then."

"Oh, did I look that cheerful?"

I thought I was always watching you all though."

"Yeah, I remember.

You would always run around with us, but you would tell us to stop doing dangerous things and look out for us."

.... Ah, I really do remember.

Playing tag in the courtyard of the mansion.

Trying as hard as we could to catch my old man's carp in the pond.

"Hey, remember that time, the time where we left the mansion from the gate, right?"

We didn't know the way to get back, and you ended up calling the mansion and one of the mansion's servants had to come pick us up."



"Yes, and after that Makihisa-sama really did yell at you.

Everyone was playing with you, but somehow you ended up being the only one. Shiki-san, no matter how much you got yelled at, you always said it was your own fault.

.... Oh it is so nostalgic.

We did so many things, but in the end, you always saved Akiha-sama and me from getting in trouble."

She giggles as she speaks aloud.

".... What's this?"

Talking about old times, I really feel like I have returned now."

That's right.

I really don't have too many memories of this mansion, but talking about old times honestly makes me feel nostalgic.

But, my memories aren't just happy ones.

".... But, I did treat Hisui poorly."

.... That girl who was always in the corner of my heart.

In the end, I was never able to have a true conversation with that girl by the window.

"... That girl, she was always watching us from the window.

Always, it struck me.

That lonely face looking down, I always thought it would be great if she could come and play."

But still, before I left the mansion, she gave me that one parting gift.



"That's right.

She was always shy even then, so I never knew what she was thinking.

I always thought if Hisui-chan was happy, it wouldn't matter what happened to me."

"Oh?

Kohaku-san, you really are a good older sister."

I'm feeling happy, so I give an answer like that.

"Ah."

All of a sudden,

with a short sound, Kohaku-san lifts her hand.

I can see she cut her finger with the kitchen knife.

"Ko, Kohaku-san, your finger....!"

"Eh?"

After I say that, she seems to have realized she cut her finger.



"Ah, that's true."

"That's true'?"
Hey, Kohaku-san!?"
I don't believe this.
Even I could see that the cut is really deep, but Kohaku-san is still slow-paced.
"How embarrassing.
I am supposed to be such a good chef.
Ahaha!"
Kohaku-san gives her normal laugh.
"This is no laughing matter.
We have to take care of it right away....!"
"It's fine.
It isn't life threatening or anything."
"But we can't just leave it alone!
Geez, cutting it like that, doesn't it hurt....!?"
"No, not at all.
If I think it doesn't hurt, then it won't hurt.
If I think this isn't my finger, and that it's just the finger of some doll, then I won't feel pain, right?"
"Wha—"
With a smile, Kohaku-san says something pretty outlandish.
Well I'm sure if you think that way, it won't hurt as much, but you can't get rid of it all.
"Look, let's just get it taken care of!
I'm a little weak when it comes to blood, so if I have an anemic fit right here, it'll be your fault, Kohaku-san....!"
"I see, then I should take care of it right away.
Well then, Shiki-san, excuse me for a moment."

The whole time her smile never cracks, and giving me a bow with her head, she leaves the kitchen.

setvar hisuiregard + 1
turn to **304**

303

.... I guess if I tried to help Hisui I'd just get in the way.
Since Akiha's actually home for a change, I guess I'll pass the time talking to her.

"Akiha, you here?"
"Eh—Ni, Nii-san..!?"
Hurried sounds can be heard from within.
"I just wanted to talk for a bit, if that's okay?"
"Ah—yes, please, come in."
I put my hand on the doorknob.
Thinking about it, this is the first time I've ever been in Akiha's room.
"..... Hmm."
I open the door a bit tensely.

"Uh—"
.... I guess the room is exactly what I was expecting.



"What is it, Nii-san?
Is it something important, to make you come to my room?"
"Nah, not at all; I just felt like talking for a bit.
If you're busy, I can come back later."



".... Well, I am busy, but.. I can put that off, to make time to talk with you."
Akiha tidies up the notebook on her desk.

"Oh, you were doing homework?
Then, I should go; I shouldn't interrupt your studies."



"No, I was just about to start, so I can leave it for tonight.
It's fine, so please sit down.
I shall make some tea."
"Alright, but no tea, thanks.
I wouldn't want to spoil my appetite today."



"Ah, t-that's true.. Then, I'll do the same."

Akiha sits on the chair of her desk.
I lower myself into a suitable chair, and glance around Akiha's room.
It's an amazing room, but of course it's not really my type of place.
I haven't even been able to settle into my own room, and it has just the bed
and the desk; if they'd given me a room decked out like this, I might have fled.
"Hey, Akiha."



"Yes?

What is it?"

"Um, it's just something I've been wondering about for a while.

Why did you call me back?

The old man died, and while I am the eldest son, that doesn't seem like much of a reason."



"What do you mean, not much of a reason?"

This is your home; it's only natural for you to come back here.

There doesn't need to be a reason."

"Well, that's true, but.. don't you have a grudge against me?"

I left you here for eight years."



"Yes, of course I have a grudge.

It was father's fault you were sent to live with the Arimas, but it really made

me mad that you didn't send even a single letter during that time."

"Uh—no, that was.."



"That was what?"

Come on, Nii-san, what is it!?

You come in here to remind me of things I almost forgot!

Do you enjoy making me angry that much?"

"No!

Of course I didn't do it to make you angry.

The thing about the letter, I didn't do it because that old man forbade me to do it, so—"



"I know that!

I'm angry because you brought it up!"

"—Ah.

I'm sorry, I just wondered.

I shouldn't have mentioned it."



"Indeed.

Please don't talk about such trifling matters."

With a sound of annoyance, Akiha looks away.

.... Really, what am I doing?

After I took the trouble to come and talk to Akiha, why am I talking about such unimportant things?



"Well, I guess it's like you to carry such small matters forever.

Kohaku said so too, right?

This is your home.

You should be more relaxed."

"Yeah.. I think I'll get used to it, gradually.

But—"

"But, what?"

"Well, no, it's just.. there's no nostalgia.

I remember life in the mansion, but I'm confused, because none of this matches my memories.

Well, I guess I've been away for eight years, so it's natural."



"Hm?
What's with that expression?
Like I said, I don't have anything against the mansion.
Don't worry, I don't want to leave or anything."
"Ah—yeah.
I'm glad, but.."

Akiha looks away for some reason.



"Nii-san, I have a question I forgot to ask, too.
It's.. about the injury from your accident eight years ago."
"Hm?
Injury from the accident.. you mean, the wound in my chest?"
"Yes.
Kohaku said it hasn't completely healed yet, but.. does it still trouble you?"
"Hm.. I don't know.
The actual wound itself healed ages ago, but there's some unstable organs that got damaged.
I heard that some of those would heal in time, but some would stay unstable.
.... I guess my incessant anemia is the result of that, in addition to some emotional damage from the accident."

"Does it.. um, hurt, Nii-san?"
Akiha murmurs a question, looking away.
".... Nah, it doesn't hurt anymore."

I just feel a little dizzy when I wake up, no worse than that."
Well, perhaps it hurts occasionally in the dead of winter.
"The dizziness has faded lately, and I'm sure the anemia will go away in a few years.
Anyway, it's nothing to worry about.
There are people out there with wounds they won't recover from for twenty years, so my wound's nothing in comparison."
Akiha says nothing, still looking away.
"....."
Damn.
The atmosphere has become heavy again.
"....."
Akiha is completely motionless.
".....?"
Somehow, it seems unnatural.
"Hey, Akiha!?"



"Ah—Nii-san?"
Akiha looks up.
She lacks all vitality, as if she was passed out until now.
"What's wrong, do you feel bad?
If you do, you should lie down.
I'll go back to my room."
"Nn—no, that's not it.
I was just.... listening to you, I was remembering about the past—"

Akiha's body shakes.
She almost falls off her chair, but she remains in it somehow.



She takes a halting breath.
"Akiha, you're really acting strangely.
You should lie down."



"—No, it's alright.
It's not as bad as yours, but I get easily dizzy too.
.... I was just thinking about the accident eight years ago.
Your wound was so deep, and there was so much blood coming out of it—that's
why I felt so bad."
".... I see.
If that's so, but don't push yourself.
If you feel bad, please tell me."



"Of course.
I would do that without being told."

It's alright; unlike yours, my dizziness is purely mental."
Akiha answers me clearly, completely recovered.



"It's almost time, isn't it?
Kohaku will call us soon, so you should go back to your room."
"Ahh, five o'clock already?
.... Well, I'll go back to my room, but Akiha, don't push yourself.
It doesn't do any good not to speak up when you're suffering."



"Oh?
It's not like you to be so concerned about me, Nii-san.
Maybe I should do so once in a while."
"Dummy.
It's just an occasional thing.
I'll see you later."

I open the door.
Akiha's room is at the very end of the west wing, a good fifty meters from my room at the end of the east wing.



"Ah—Nii-san."

"Hm?"

What is it?

Did you forget something?"



"No, it's not that, but....."

Akiha falls silent, unable to find the right words.

But the eyes gazing at me—

".... I'm sorry.

It's nothing."

—seem like they are apologizing to me.



"I'll see you in the dining room later.

I won't get angry whatever you do today, so don't worry."

"Ahh, that's a relief.

Since Kohaku-san cooked us a feast, I was hoping we might be able to forget about table manners today."

With that, I leave Akiha's room.

setvar akiharegard + 1

turn to **304**

304



"Well then, a toast to Shiki-san's homecoming.
Everyone, please take whatever you would like to drink."
Kohaku lines up drinks in front of us, with a full smile entirely free of malice.

Most of the drinks didn't happen to be juice or anything like that, but proper alcoholic beverages.

"... Uh, Akiha?"



"Hm?"

"What is it, Nii-san?"

.... There's a gurgling as Akiha fills her glass with a tawny liquid, then adds a little orange juice.

"Tha.. that wouldn't be whiskey, would it?"

"It would.

Is there something wrong?"

"It would' ..?"

Akiha.."

Um, aren't we all too young to be drinking..?"



"This is your welcoming party.
We have to have alcohol, don't we?
Or.. Nii-san, you're weak when it comes to alcohol?"
Akiha seems.. somehow delighted.



"Ah, Hisui-chan.
That's unusual, not juice today?"



"....."
Seeming a little shy, Hisui silently pours wine into her glass.



"See, Nii-san?
Even Hisui is drinking.
Surely you don't intend to be the only one drinking juice?"
"..... Geez.
You really want to get the most out of this party, don't you, Akiha?"



"Yes.
I don't usually like parties, but today is an exception."

—Huh.
Well, it can't be helped.
A lot of alcohol isn't good for my body, but a little bit should be okay.
The weakest drink laid out on the table is—the wine, it looks like.



"Well then, everyone, raise your glasses, please?
Cheers!"

With a clash, our glasses come together.
Kohaku tosses hers down in a single gulp, Akiha takes her time, and Hisui sips hers quietly.

.... Oh man, I'm not responsible for this.

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    if flgP != 0
turn to 305
    if kohakuregard > hisuiregard
if clearhisui != 0
turn to 307
    turn to 306
```

305

—And..

In less than an hour, Hisui falls asleep and Kohaku-san carries her to her room with a smile.

"....."

Not being used to alcohol, my mind is a little fuzzy.

Akiha sits nearby and is still drinking eagerly.

It doesn't bode well for the rest of the evening.

".... Akiha, you really have some tolerance, don't you."



"Oh?"

I'm not drinking it straight up so I think it is about normal."

.... Um, that's not the point..

I'm saying she's pretty used to drinking for being a minor.



"Geez, making that face again.

Please get at least a little drunk, Nii-san.

Kohaku prepared all this to cheer you up, so isn't it meaningless if you don't?"

"Ah, that's right.

.... Yeah, I have to thank Kohaku-san for her consideration.

Thanks to that, I do feel a bit better."



"What are you saying?
You don't look happy at all.
If alcohol doesn't make you feel better, isn't there nothing left?"
"Wow, that's a little bold.
Saying nothing is left if alcohol doesn't work.. isn't that mistaken?"



"It cannot be helped if you do not wish to speak to me, Nii-san.
If you would talk about last night, I wouldn't ask for the help of alcohol."
"____"
I see.
Just like Kohaku-san, Akiha is concerned about me.



"But, I can't ask, right?
I already promised no longer to ask about it."
".... Sorry.

I'm just a big burden to everyone."



"Well, as long as you understand it is alright.
—Um, as you say I seem to be a little drunk, so I will go outside."

She says "drunk", but her steps are firm as she exits the dining room.

Following Akiha, I go out to the courtyard to get some fresh air.
It is still before six o'clock.
The red sun paints the sky.
"... Still the afternoon?"
There's no one else around.
I thought Akiha was going to be here but I guess we missed each other.
"... Red sunset?"
Until now, the red sunset reminded me of fresh blood.
But today,
it reminded me of her final smile as we parted on the road home.

.... Throb.
A stabbing pain in my chest.

Does the scar on my chest hurt?
Or is my heart in pain from regret?
I can't tell the difference.
Only that my chest hurts.
As if it was bleeding.

"Gah——"
Dizziness assails me.
Because of the alcohol and the pain in my chest,
such a small, insignificant thing causes me to lose consciousness—

.... My house is this way.
Saying that, she went down a different path.
.... Thanks.
She probably said that since I was there for her until the very end.

.... Sorry.
She probably said that since she knew I would carry this regret from now on.
.... So it's okay to forget.

It felt like she whispered those words in my ears.
.... Isn't that just a false happiness?
In a dream I dreamed about, I dream such selfish words.
If I can just forget, it will be very easy for me.
But I can't forget.
I didn't like her nor did I hate her, but,
I think I shouldn't forget her smile.
And more than that,
as long as this scar remains on my neck, I can't forget—

"Ah—"
When I come to, I'm lying in my room.
While I was sleeping, Akiha must have been watching me because she is there
in front of me.
"Aki, ha?"



"Have you awakened?
Goodness, suddenly collapsing like that, what happened Nii-san?"
"I see.... did I pass out?"



"Yes.
Thankfully, you woke up quickly.
I'm sorry for forcing you to drink like that."
"No, that has nothing to do with this.
I just collapsed on my own."

Saying that, I stare up at the ceiling.
My head is still dizzy, and I don't feel like talking with Akiha right now.
... Even still, Akiha is not bothered by this and she quietly tends to me.
"... Akiha?"



"Yes?
What is it, Nii-san?"
"—Um, well.
Isn't this boring for you?
I'm fine, so you can go back to your room if you want."



"Are you saying I'm bothering you?"
"No, that's not it at all.
I was just thinking that maybe you were a little bored."



"It is boring, but I can stand it.
This is something I'm doing out of my own interest, so there is no need for you
to worry, Nii-san."

Then—I guess that's alright.
Time passes.
It's past seven o'clock.
Seven hours since then.
Has Akiha been tending me this long?
Akiha silently takes my temperature.

.... Ah, I remember now.
That had to have been more than eight years ago.
Akiha came to watch over me after I caught a cold or something like that.
It really was a terrible cold; even breathing was painful.
The black-haired girl sat by my pillow, holding my hand and just staring at me.
Tatami and the shouji.
The cool winter air.
In the dark tatami mat room, the young figure of Akiha watching me on the
verge of tears.

".... I'm a little relieved."



"Eh?"

Did you say something Nii-san?"

".... Yeah.

I was just thinking there is a little bit of the old Akiha in you.

It's not really anything, but it makes me pretty happy."

I give Akiha a gentle smile so naturally, it almost surprises me.



"That is fine, but you haven't changed at all Nii-san.

Causing so much work for others.. please act more properly."

Akiha looks away and complains.

Understanding she is just embarrassed, I start to feel even more happier.



".... Sheesh, why are you smiling like that?
If you have this much energy I guess you don't need me to take care of you."
"No, that's not it.
I just remembered something from a long time ago.
Akiha, in that tatami room—"

—Tatami room?

What is that all about?
I understand Akiha taking care of me, but why was it in a tatami room and not my room?

Something.
There's something not quite right.
"Akiha.
Is there a room with tatami in this mansion?"



"No.
There are no Japanese rooms in this mansion."
"Yeah, you're right.
It's nothing.
I just thought it was odd, don't worry about it."



"Hm?"

What is so odd about not having a Japanese room?"

"Oh, you know.

This mansion is so big, I thought maybe there was at least one."



"There is a detached Japanese-style building however."

"Eh—?"

—Now that she mentions it, of course.

In the middle of the forest in the garden, there was a Japanese-style mansion.



".... Goodness, you really have become more energetic.

I think I will only be in the way if I stay longer so I will return to my room."

Standing up from the chair, Akiha goes to leave the room.

"Thanks, Akiha.

Sorry for making you stay here this whole time."



"Please don't mind.
Starting tomorrow your daily life will become more like this."

".....?"

After saying something I don't quite understand, Akiha exits the room.

—I turn off the lights and rest in bed.

Thanks to Akiha taking care of me, I feel more relaxed.
At this rate, I should be able to dream peacefully for the first time in days.

I take a deep breath and slowly close my eyes.

.... Right before I fall asleep,
the memory of myself being tended by a young Akiha freshly surfaces in my mind.

The dark Japanese-style room where no one came to see me.

Did she sneak away from Makihisa?

Akiha snuck in and cried as she held my hand.

"I'm sorry," she was saying.

I didn't know why, but the black-haired young girl kept repeating "I'm sorry" over and over.

—I remember.

About the proud eldest daughter of the Tohno family who was the only one to care for me.

"....."

The young girl always crying in the dark Japanese room.

I bit my tongue in frustration while being dizzy from fever.

I wonder why she was crying.

If it was me,

I would never, never let Akiha cry.

.... I'm sorry.

.... I'm sorry, Shiki-nii-san.

Her tears were simply beautiful.
Since that time, I vowed to be her real brother—

turn to **308**

—See?
I told you so.



.... What's bad you say?
Hisui was bad.
Kohaku-san and Akiha seemed to be already used to drinking alcohol, but as far as Hisui is concerned, it was her first time seriously drinking.
Still, she drank to keep me company, trying hard to finish her glass.
And this was what happened.
"Um, Hisui..?
There's no reason for you to force yourself to drink like that."
"....."
Hisui nods.
And then, she takes the glass to her lips and she looks around aimlessly.
.... No matter how much I try to stop her, Hisui keeps sipping out of her glass.
.... I don't really understand it, but perhaps Hisui has taken a liking to alcohol.
—And then..
"Ah....."

With that, Hisui curls onto the sofa like a cat.



"Ahaha.
You can't be doing that, Hisui-chan.
If you sleep there, you'll catch a cold.
Come on, Akiha-sama, please don't complain."
With a smile, Kohaku-san talks to the sleeping Akiha and Hisui.
.... It seems Kohaku-san is drunk too.
".... It really was your first time, wasn't it, Hisui?"
"Yes.
Hisui-chan has always been pretty weak with alcohol.
Usually, she takes a sip and she turns completely red.
Ahaha!"
Kohaku-san laughs brightly.
".... It seems like we have quite a problem, don't we?"
"Yes.
Hisui-chan always turns down alcohol, but since Shiki-san offered, she pushed herself.
She is normally not very sociable, so I guess she at least tried to keep you company.
Isn't my sister so cute!?"
Bam-bam, Kohaku-san slaps my back.
.... Kohaku-san is quite drunk too..

"I guess this wraps up the night.
Akiha is hammered and Hisui is all curled up."



".... Hammered.. what is that?
 Nii-san, please don't use words, that I can't, understand...."
 Akiha complains in a murmuring voice.
 It seems that Akiha doesn't like things she doesn't understand.
 That's all good, but it seems when she's drunk, she doesn't understand anything.. consequently, she has turned into a complaining machine..



"Well then, I will carry Akiha-sama, so Shiki-san, could you please take care of Hisui-chan?"
 "Eh—wait a second Kohaku-san.
 I can't touch Hisui.
 I just brushed against her earlier and she hit me."



"—That's right.
 Now that you mention it, Hisui-chan is a little obsessed about cleanliness.
 Even just holding hands with a man will cause her to throw up.
 If you hold her, I suppose there would be a problem."
 ".... Just holding hands and throwing up....?"
 That goes beyond just being obsessed with cleanliness.
 I thought she was strange eight years ago, but Hisui—
 "But, if Hisui-chan is sleeping, then it will be okay.
 Well, Akiha-sama, let's go back to your room."

"What?
 Wait, Kohaku-san!"

.... She doesn't respond.
With Akiha over her shoulders, she disappears out of the dining room.
What she left behind..
A mountain of uneaten food, a mountain of empty bottles, and the contentedly sleeping Hisui, who is breathing softly on the sofa.

It truly is autumn.
Sleeping there like that, she will certainly catch a cold.
".... Is it okay to touch Hisui like this?"
But, it can't be helped.
.... I don't have any bad intentions, and I do have to get her up to her room.
".... Sorry.
You can be mad at me later."
I lift up the sleeping Hisui.

"Ah...."
With just that, my heart begins to pound.
".... Light."
Just like I thought, Hisui is very light.
Her delicate body fits in my arms.
Softness and the warmth of her body.
".... This isn't good.
I have to take her to her room quickly or I'll be the one in trouble."
So as not to wake Hisui, I slowly carry her out of the dining room.

I turn the doorknob to Hisui's room, and I stop, stunned.
"—No way."
It's locked.
"The key.. must be in Hisui's pocket, right?"
This is bad.
No, it's just reaching my hand in her pocket, but it's bad.
If I did that, who knows where my mind will go.
".... Oh well, that's how it is."
Fortunately, both Hisui's room and my room are on the second floor.

-So,
I came back to my room with Hisui still in my arms.
"There we go."
I place Hisui on my bed.
I guess she really pushed herself drinking alcohol, as she does not wake up.

".... Well.
What should I do now—"

"Huh?"
Am I that tired from carrying Hisui?
I fall to the carpet.
"Umph—"
It seems like the alcohol is having an effect on me too.

Suddenly, I start to feel very dizzy.
".... Well.. whatever."
I hadn't really planned on doing anything anyway.
Even if I go to sleep on the floor like this, I don't think anyone will complain—

—Something seems.. very familiar.
An old Japanese-style room.
A dark room.

—That is,
that's an extremely old memory.
When I was very young, I wasn't used to the new people that took me in, so I
locked myself up in my room.

I didn't care for anything; I didn't want to talk to anyone.
Always, always alone, and I wanted to be swaddled in the cradle of my happy
memories.
Even if I knew there would be nothing like that for me ever again, I still wanted
to do so.
Knock knock, came a sound.
".... Who is it?"
"It's me."
Ah, she came again.
That girl around my age was knocking on the door again.
"Shiki-chan, let's play.
You'll get moldy if you stay in a place like that."
"I don't wanna.
I don't like going outside."

Hugging my knees, I huddled in a corner of the dark room.

.... That girl came every day.
She would always knock, never getting tired of it.
She would never force me out, so she would not open the door, but just continued to call my name.
"Why won't you come outside?"

Because there's no one that I know outside.
Everyone hates me outside.

"That's not true.
Everyone wants to like you, Shiki-kun."

Yes.
I knew that, but I couldn't believe it.
Because my father went outside, and—

And.
He was torn to pieces.
"... I see.
No wonder you can't trust anyone."

Yeah, that's why I will always stay here.
I don't want any more scary things happening.

"But, you will just be by yourself all the time.
Being by yourself is no fun."

Even if it's no fun, it is better than being scared.
"That's, that's not fun at all.
Then, Shiki-chan, you can believe in me."

.... You say I can believe in you.
That's a little backwards.
Don't people normally say, "I believe you?"

"It's okay!
Shiki-chan, you can trust me and come out!"

.... Fine.
But, believe.. what should I believe in?

"Simple.
Even if everyone hates you, I will still like you, Shiki-chan.
Because I like you, I always come and ask you to play."

..... Is outside, fun?

"Yeah!
It's much, much more fun than being by yourself—!"

—And then, I went outside.

Come to think of it,
that was my first memory as Tohno Shiki—

—A bright light floods my consciousness.
As I open my eyes, the morning light shines through the window.

"..... Nnn."
I wake from my dream.
.... I don't quite remember it, but I remember vaguely watching a dream.
It was very nostalgic.
The smell of tatami—is that what it was?
"Huh?"
That's strange, even though I'm awake, I still smell a nice scent.

"N—Shi..... ki....."
I hear a voice by my ear.
".... Eh?"
Sensing something beside me, my dozing eyes fly open.

"..... ssssst!"
I frantically stop my surprised shout.
I don't know why, but Hisui is sleeping in my bed.
A-And that's not all.
At the same time, leaning right up against me, is her completely unguarded
sleeping face.
"Ah—"
Tense as I am, I can't say a thing.

My sleepiness disappears in a flash.
".... What's going on?"
Moving just my neck, I glance around.
.... Without a doubt, this is my room.
Hisui lies there, breathing softly.
".... Let's see, yesterday we.."
I try to remember what happened yesterday, but that's not important.
Hisui's breathing is on my chest.
.... Her peaceful, sleeping face.
For now, just being able to see that so closely, makes me not care about anything else.
"....."
I'm completely absorbed.
It's not that I didn't realize it before, but Hisui is really pretty.
It's not that she just has a beautiful face.
Rather, her graceful atmosphere, I can't help but think that it is pretty.
"..... Hisui."
If I could, I would like to stay this way forever.
But that can't happen.. Besides, unless Hisui wakes up soon, there will be a lot of trouble.
".... Hisui.
Hey, Hisui."
.... I call, but she doesn't seem to wake up.
"Hey, it's morning.
Isn't it time to get up?"
I gently shake Hisui.
"Hisui.
Wake up, Hisui."
"U.. nh."
Hisui's fingers start to twitch.
Hisui's eyelids slowly open, like melting ice.

"..... Mm."

Waveringly stretching out her arms, Hisui wakes up.
She looks around the room rubbing her eyes for a few seconds.
Hisui finally grasps the fact that she is in my room, and the fact that I am right in front of her.
"Kyaaa!"
Hisui jumps up from the bed.



"Shi, Shiki-sama, why am I—"

"I. I can't explain it very well, but do you remember about last night?"

"Eh—about last night?"

Hisui starts to think.

And all of a sudden, Hisui's cheeks turn red.

"You remembered?"



"Yes.... I caused you a lot of trouble, Shiki-sama."

With flushed cheeks, Hisui looks right at me.

".... Sorry about that.

I went to your room, but it was locked and I couldn't enter.

I thought you could sleep in my room while I went to get Kohaku-san, but the alcohol got to me and just like that, I fell asleep."

.... Yeah, that's exactly how I remember it.

But that's odd, last night I thought for sure..

".... That's odd, I thought that I went to sleep on the carpet, but.. sometime during the night I must have got on the bed.

Ah, I wasn't thinking of doing anything weird to you, Hisui!

I just now woke up too....!"

"....."

Hisui stares at me silently.

"I, I mean it!

I didn't have a choice, Kohaku-san had to take care of Akiha, and I couldn't just leave you alone like that!

.... I apologize for holding you, and I was ready for you to get mad at me for doing that!"

Trying to answer Hisui's direct gaze, and I try my utmost to explain.

"....."

Hisui doesn't answer; she just looks over her clothes and nods.



"It appears that way.

My clothing does not appear to be tampered with.

You are innocent, Shiki-sama."

"Good—"

I breathe a sigh of relief.



"And I think the one who placed you on the bed.. was me.

I woke up once during the night and saw you sleeping on the floor.

I did not want you to catch a cold, so I remember getting you to sleep on the bed."

"Eh.... for real?"

If that's true, then that would explain why I was in bed, but why was Hisui sleeping on the bed too?



".... Please forgive me.
 I, I was still a little drunk, and I thought that since there was a bed in front of me, I wouldn't need to go back to my room.."
 Embarrassed, Hisui explains what happened.
 "I-I see.
 Certainly, that's how you think when you are drunk.
 Hahaha."
 I start to laugh for some reason.
 Embarrassed, Hisui drops her shoulders.
 Why is it?
 Even though I was only sleeping next to her, I get so conscious of Hisui, I am unable to say anything clearly.
 "A, anyway, let's just keep this a secret between us.
 If Akiha knew about it, she'd get angry, and if Kohaku-san knew about it, she'd just tease us about it relentlessly."



"—Yes.
 If Shiki-sama will allow it, then it will help me as well."
 "Yeah, sorry Hisui.
 If I was more responsible, this thing would never have happened."
 I say sorry and bow my head to her.
 Nothing did happen, but it's still a fact that I carried a girl to my room and slept next to her.
 No matter what Hisui says, I think I'm responsible.



"Not at all, it is my fault.

If I was more responsible, then you would never have had to worry about any of this, Shiki-sama."

"No, it's okay.

Anyway, I just want to apologize.

.... I'd actually feel better if you say something like 'Shiki-sama is a jerk.' You have every right to, although I don't think you'd say something like that."



"Ah.. Yes.

That kind of order, would be very troubling."

"Wouldn't it?

So let me apologize.

If you don't let me, then I will never trust you with anything again."

"....."

Hisui just stares at me, deep in thought.

".... Shiki-sama is.. really clumsy, are you not?"

Hisui says this in an awfully kind voice, different from before.



"Well then, I'll say Shiki-sama is at fault this time.
I will have to let you make up for this sometime, so please do not forget."
"Eh—Hisui, i?"
"If you will please excuse me.
Shiki-sama, please hurry to the sitting room or you will be late."

Hisui gives a perfect bow and exits the room.
"___"

I just remained there on my bed, mouth open and in stunned silence.
"..... She smiled."
For that instant, it seemed like time itself had stopped.
"_____"

This isn't good.
This is really not good.
All she did was smile, but why am I so stunned—?

I go to the sitting room and see Hisui standing there.
Akiha has already eaten breakfast and is drinking tea, and it seems that Kohaku-san is in the kitchen.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
You're up very early this morning, aren't you?"
"Hm?"
Ah, this morning there was a little trouble.. I stop short and steal a glance at Hisui's face.



"Well, I just happened to wake up early today.
But you're pretty impressive too, Akiha.
To still wake up this early as drunk as you were yesterday."



"Of course.
You should always drink considering the next day, so there is no reason to over-
sleep because of it."
"Really.
But you were pretty hammered last night.
Maybe you have more breakdown enzymes than a normal person, Akiha.
If that's so, I'm a little jealous."



"Nii-san, what are these, 'breakdown enzymes'?"

"Well, I'll make it short.
After alcohol enters the body, I guess it changes to some kind of poison.
The poison is processed by the liver by these enzymes that break down the alcohol into water.
The amount of enzymes in each person is different, and Japanese people tend to have less than others.
You can say those that have less enzymes have to moderate a little."
Akiha looks impressed.



".... I am a little surprised.
You seem to know quite a bit, Nii-san."
"No, not really.
I just have a bad friend that drinks a lot, that's all."



"Is that so.
It seems like you were not drinking that much last night though."
"That's because I'm one of those people that have to moderate.
Since my bad friend simply downs his drinks, I have to always stay sober to take care of him."
By the way, this bad friend I'm talking about is no other than Inui Arihiko.



".... Hmm.

I don't really understand it, but it seems like your private life is very fun indeed."

"Why that all of a sudden?

Why do you bring that up?"



"Nii-san, your face seemed so happy just now.

You didn't show that face last night."

"Uh—"

Well, it is true that last night was more surprising than it was fun.

"Shiki-san, breakfast is ready!"

With excellent timing, Kohaku-san's voice cuts in.

"Ah, I'll be right there!

.... Well, I gotta go, Akiha."



"....."

After finishing breakfast, I head to the sitting room to find Akiha gone.
"Huh..?"
Hisui, where is Akiha?"



"Akiha-sama left for school right after you went to the dining room, Shiki-sama."
"Oh yeah, Akiha's school is far, isn't it?"
"... Well, I shouldn't be standing around either."



"Yes, I will bring you your bag right away."

Hisui disappears towards the lobby.
"....."
I stare listlessly behind her.



"Hee hee.
Shiki-san, what happened last night?"
"Wha.. what do you mean, Kohaku-san!?"



"Oh my, I see you're blushing.
Something must have happened, didn't it?"
"Eh—no, nothing happened at all.
Go ahead, ask Hisui."



"Is that so?
It seems like you have become pretty good friends with Hisui-chan."

Kohaku-san tilts her head to the side.
.... I became good friends with Hisui?
That's something I'd like to hear about myself.



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"Shiki-sama, I have your bag ready.

Please get ready to leave the mansion as you do not have much time left."

"Yeah, I'm coming.

Later, Kohaku-san, see you this evening."



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"Yes, I look forward to it."

"I'll come right back today, so I'll be back around four o'clock.
Oh, and you don't have to wait here."



"I understand.
Please be careful on your way, Shiki-sama."
"Thanks.
I'll be going now, Hisui."



waving a hand to the bowing Hisui, I dash down the street.

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—The drinking continues.

I don't know how this happened, but it looks like the "Tohno Shiki Welcome Party" has turned into just a drinking party.

Akiha might be used to drinking, as she gulps down her glass as if she's drinking water.

Kohaku-san slowly drinks with Akiha while refilling Akiha's cup.

Seeing that their faces still look normal, I'm guessing they don't show drunkenness on their faces.

.... Incidentally, Hisui sits on the couch dizzily after drinking just one sip.

".... Akiha really has quite a lot of tolerance."

Looking at the smiling Akiha and Kohaku-san, I gulp down my glass.

It is just water, as I only drank a mouthful of alcohol during the toast.

I take a bite of the smoked salmon on the table.

It is exquisite.

In the Tohno house, even the snacks are first class.

"..... Mmm."

Even though there might be a lot of problems, it is pretty enjoyable right now.

To be blunt, Akiha and Kohaku-san's conversation is outright boring.

It's as if they were just discussing how the sun rises in the East and sets in the West.

Despite that, it all seems rather charming seeing them laughing at those kinds of conversations.



"....."

On the other hand, Hisui is holding the glass she used during the toast and gazing vacantly.

Whenever I look away from Hisui, the glass becomes a little more empty.

.... She seems to be enjoying herself, too.

I sneak another bite of food.

I'm pretty weak against alcohol, so I prefer to eat the finger food instead.

.... And.

".....?"

What happened?
Akiha stands up and walks over to me.



"Nii-san.
You've only been eating, you aren't going to drink any?"
Akiha looks at me a little dissatisfied.
"... Now look, I don't care if you get drunk, but you shouldn't try to make others drink at your pace.
I'm not used to drinking a lot, so if you want to drink with someone, Kohaku-san can—"
I try to point over to Kohaku-san, but..
She isn't there.
It seems like she went to get some more alcohol from the kitchen.



"Well excuuuse me!
I'm not the slightest bit drunk."
Raising her glass with one hand, Akiha leans forward.
"... I see.
Since Kohaku-san isn't here...."
I guess she's messing with me since she has no one to talk to.



"Kohaku doesn't have anything to do with this.
 We are talking about why you are not drinking."
 "... Well, I have been drinking."
 "That's a lie.
 I, haven't had a chance to pour you anything.
 I was drinking so that you could relax, but all you have been doing is munching
 away at the food Kohaku made.
 You haven't even had one glass, right?"
 Akiha pouts.
 Is it just me or is her step a little unsteady?
 "Akiha, I just have to ask, are you drunk?"
 "Don't be ridiculous.
 I'm not drunk at all.
 You will be dead drunk long before I will."
 "... You are dead drunk."



"Hurry up and finish your glass.
 I will listen to whatever you have to say when you are done."
 She points commandingly at my glass.
 Except her finger is wobbling all over.
 "... Akiha, I've said this before, but you really are drunk."



"Sheesh—!
You really are persistent.
I told you I'm not drunk!"

Akiha yells and wobbles back.
.... Her own voice causes her to get dizzy, so what part of that isn't being drunk?
".... Oh well.
Have a seat, we can chat a bit, I suppose."
I pat the sofa next to me.



"Ah.... yes, I'll sit."

Akiha sits down on the sofa.
I don't know where all her bossiness disappeared to, but she just meekly sits down.
"....."
"....."
For some reason, I suddenly don't feel comfortable.
"..... Hmm."
Resigned, I pick up my glass.
I take a light gulp.
The unfamiliar alcohol burns my throat; it doesn't taste good at all.
I feel the ground dip beneath me, as if I was feeling dizzy from my anemia.
"....."
But, I can't say that this feels bad, either.

I might as well just finish it off, so I down the rest of it.



".... I'm surprised.
You may have said differently before, but you sure seem to like drinking, Nii-san."
"What do you mean?
I'm not a big drinker or anything."
"It doesn't look like it.
You were drinking that rather happily."

Akiha leans over and takes a bottle from the table.



"I'll water it down, but do you have any other preferences?"
Akiha pours me some whiskey without asking.
Common sense demands that I stop her.
But she seems so happy, I throw aside any thoughts of common sense.
".... Please water it down a lot.
Otherwise, I won't be able to drink it."
"As you say.
Well, then let's start, shall we?"
Akiha happily fills my glass.
"..... Man, I don't even drink this much when I'm with Arihiko."
I lean back on the sofa.
I down the glass with my neck tilted so far back that I can see the ceiling.
I drink what Akiha poured me slowly without letting my mouth go from the

glass.

"—Phew.

Well, are you satisfied, princess?"

I place the empty glass on the table.



"That's the way to do it.

I have to take points off for not drinking it fast, but it's still a passing grade."

"You're pretty strict.

That was my new record, you know.

You told me to drink it, so I pushed myself."

"Really?"

This is pretty rare, you keeping me company like this, Nii-san."

She chuckles.

Pouring herself another glass, she downs it.

—My heart beats loudly at the sight of her face.

She looks so mature when she is drinking.

She closes her eyes and tilts her head back.

Seeing her white throat voluptuously gulp down the alcohol, I forget about being drunk.

"—Aaah."

Akiha lets out a deep breath.

The glass is empty.

.... She says under her breath something to the effect that it is delicious.

"....."



"?"

What is it, Nii-san.

Is there something on my face?"

"Ah—nothing, it's nothing."

Without thinking, I pick up my glass.



"Another one?"

This time, we'll have something a little bit stronger."

Akiha fills up the glasses again.

.... I didn't really want another glass, but I suppose it won't hurt.

"..... Mmm."

Trying to imitate Akiha, I drink it all in one gulp.

It wasn't that much alcohol, but I shouldn't have drunk it that fast.

My head starts to spin and I fall back on the sofa.

"Nii-san—?"

Are, are you alright....!?"

"Ah, I'm fine.

I just got a little dizzy, but I'm not drunk.

I think I'll rest for a little bit.

You go ahead and have fun."

Laying back on the sofa, I stare aimlessly at the ceiling.

Even though I feel completely drained, I feel incredibly good.

".... I'm sorry.

I.. forced you to drink too much."

Akiha's voice sounds very sad.
"No, maybe it was a little much, but it feels good.
I drank it because you drank it so deliciously.
I guess the result is alright though.
So, go ahead and keep drinking.
Once I settle down, I'll join you again."
"—Okay.
If you say so, I will wait until you are done."
I hear the sound of something pouring.
As expected, she pours another glass and drinks it.
"....."
.... That's odd.
This isn't anything much, but—I feel incredibly relaxed here.
"..... Alright!"
Taking a breath, I get up from the sofa.



"Nii-san?
Are you feeling better?"
"I'm fine.
I'll keep you company a little bit more."
I give her my glass.
Smiling, she pours me another drink.
This time, I decide to drink at my own pace.

.... Time passes by.
Hisui has fallen asleep on the sofa.
Kohaku-san never did come back from the kitchen.
The only ones still moving about are me and Akiha, but I am pretty drunk, so
I wouldn't necessarily call myself moving about.
But still, I want to keep Akiha company until Kohaku-san returns.



".... Nii-san.
 You are very kind today."
 Akiha says this suddenly, in a small voice.
 "—Eh?
 Kind?
 Me?"
 "Yes.
 Normally, you are a very cold person.
 Acting kind like this is very rare, isn't it?"
 "..... Really?
 I don't really know, but maybe I am cold."
 ".... Oh, Nii-san, you don't understand yourself very well.
 You are a very kind person, but at the same time, you are very cold.
 Because you make no distinction between people.
 You don't have anyone that you like the most, no matter if you hate them or like them.
 Nii-san, you like and forgive everyone."
 ".... But that is very cruel to the people who want to be closest to you.
 For you, everyone is the same.
 Me, Kohaku, Hisui.. we are all the same for you.
 That isn't kindness.
 Like an old dog that knows its time of death is near, you simply don't want to leave anything behind.
 You were like that back then, but now, how do you say it.... you seem very dangerous, and that makes me uneasy."
 Downcast, Akiha continues to speak, almost as if she was thinking aloud.
 Her glass is empty.
 She doesn't fill it, and her quiet voice echoes in the air.
 ".... Hey.
 I just thought that you were maybe inconsiderate and very lonely.. I was just thinking something stupid like that.
 There isn't anyone you hold dearest in your heart.
 Maybe you lost that person a long time ago.
 Back then, I thought that if you just liked me, that would be fine.
 At least there wasn't anyone you liked the most, so that was good enough.

.... But now, it is--"



"Thank you for waiting!
More food and more drink!"
With a smile, Kohaku-san returns.



"Ah...."
Akiha suddenly swallows her words, and with a sigh, pours herself more to drink.



"Hey, Nii-san, please drink some more as well.
It's just me drinking now."
Taking the bottle that Kohaku-san brought, she pours some more drink into my
glass.
"No, I've had enough.
I've had twice as much as normal, so please let me pass on this one.

If I do drink more, I really will end up in bad shape."

"What are you saying?

You haven't even had a bottle yet.

It's way too early to say you've had enough.

You said you'd drink with me, right?"

"Come on," she says and holds out my glass.

But, I really am at my limit.



"Now, now, Akiha-sama.

You do have to realize that Shiki-san does not have the same tolerance as you do, Akiha-sama.

Shiki-san, you should say no or you'll be in trouble.

Akiha-sama doesn't get drunk no matter how much she drinks, so if you keep drinking with her until she's happy, you'll end up drinking until dawn."



"Wait a minute, Kohaku!

You make me sound like some sort of an alcoholic!"

Angrily, Akiha takes another drink.



Even though she drank a lot, it seems like that's her first glass.
.... No matter what Akiha says, Kohaku-san seems to be right.
".... Sorry, Akiha.
I really have to stop now.
You know my doctor says I shouldn't drink too much, right?"



Akiha descends into an apologetic silence.
".... That, is true...."
"Don't look so sad.
I can still keep you company until you're done drinking.
How's that?"
"....."
She nods, but doesn't quite look satisfied.



"Well then, I will pour your drinks, Akiha-sama.

See, Shiki-san is still here, so isn't everything okay, Akiha-sama?"



"I, guess... certainly having Nii-san keep me company is rare enough. I will let it go this time."

Akiha holds out her glass to Kohaku-san.
Smiling, Kohaku-san serves Akiha another drink, who starts to sip it slowly.

It has gotten pretty late.
Hisui woke up eventually and we talked about unimportant things.
It's probably the fault of the alcohol, but I don't remember what we talked about at all.
Just meaningless, warm conversation.
Because I wasn't used to that kind of stuff, I settled into an insecure comfort, like hanging from a silken thread.
It's probably because of that.
On one hand, I thought it would be nice for this to continue, but on the other hand, I wanted a little time to myself.
And all of a sudden.



".... Nii-san....?"
Akiha, with eyes full of anxiety, looks up at me.
"What is it?
Are you feeling okay, Akiha?"
"No.... that's not it."

I just got uneasy all of a sudden.
.... Hey, Nii-san.
You won't go away again, will you?"

"No.

.... I don't know what will happen in the future, but I've decided to stay here for now."

.... At least until I've finished school, and until it seems that Akiha can manage by herself.



—But.

That would imply that I would leave sometime.

"Stop, I don't want to hear those words.

This is your house, so no matter what happens, it is best for you to live here, right?"

After saying this, she downs her glass.

.... An amazing sight.

As if drinking down her uneasiness, she empties her glass.

Gulp, gulp.

Her cheeks are faintly flushed, showing that she has a buzz.



Akiha sighs.

".... Why do you always make me feel so uneasy, Nii-san?"

She must be drunk, as she stares at me blankly.

——.
Seeing that,
my heart starts to beat faster for no reason.
".... Are you listening?
As long as you are here, I am fine, but you always, always....."
Her eyes look straight ahead.
Her cheeks are red and her eyes are glazed.
This—all seems very erotic.

.... Maybe it's because I'm drunk as well.
She is my sister, so why—
"..... Aki, ha."
".... N.... Nii-san, I.... feel, strange...."
She speaks aimlessly, as if she was someone else.
If this keeps up, I—



"Akiha-sama, your glass is empty.
I'll pour you some more, okay?"
"Ah.... yeah, thanks, Kohaku."
Kohaku-san pours her another drink, which she downs promptly.

—And then.



All of a sudden, Akiha looks very serious.
".... Akiha?"
".... That's odd, I seem to be drunk."
She massages her temple with her fingers.
"Seem to be drunk?"
.... You've been drunk for quite a while."
"What are you saying?"
I'm drunk, so of course I won't make sense."
She places her glass on the table quickly.
"That's strange.... I just got started."

Saying that,
she collapses towards me.
"H, hey, Akiha....!?"
What are you—"

That is pretty obvious though.
"..... Hey."
There is no response.
Her breathing tells me that she is happily asleep.



"Huh?"
This is rare indeed.
I have not seen Akiha drunk in years."
Kohaku-san smiles amusedly.
".... Kohaku-san."

What do you mean?"



"Well, Akiha-sama does not usually get drunk.
But when she drinks over a certain limit, I guess all the alcohol hits her, and she falls asleep.
So for Akiha-sama, being drunk is the same as going to sleep.
I don't know if that is good or bad, but if Akiha-sama got drunk like most people, wouldn't that be scary?
Shiki-san, could you imagine a rampaging Akiha-sama?"

.... Kohaku-san paints a very frightening mental image.
Deciding not to answer, I look at Akiha's sleeping face.
—Akiha is sleeping contentedly.

She is leaning with her whole body up against mine.
I can feel her breathing and body warmth.
.... I remember that strange feeling I felt before.
She must have been completely drunk, because she seemed like a totally different person.
I can't deny that I was utterly flustered.
Having her sleep so contently against me puts me in a daze.
Without a doubt, she is very beautiful.
I couldn't believe she was my sister when I met her after eight years.
But that doesn't mean anything.
All I can think is that looking at her resting up against me is a good thing.
Without a doubt, she is my sister.
One of the reasons I came back to the mansion was to protect Akiha—



"Shiki-sama, if Akiha-sama sleeps like that, I believe she might catch a cold."

"Eh—ah, that's right."

It is October, so we shouldn't let our guard down—"



"I will take Akiha-sama up to her room."

Hisui hoists Akiha over her shoulders and exits the room.
The only ones left are me and Kohaku-san—



"Well, if Akiha-sama is asleep, then we should end this party."

I will take care of tidying things up, so please return to your room, Shiki-san."

I nod.

I really do want to help, but I'm a little too drunk for that.

If I helped in this condition, I'd probably just get in the way.

"N.... Sorry, Kohaku-san."

Please take care of things."



"Just leave it to me, please.
Good-night, Shiki-san."

—I go out to the courtyard to clear my head of some of the alcohol.

The breeze is a little cool, so it feels good against my hot skin.

"—This is bad.
I really did drink too much."
All that drinking gave me a headache, and I start to feel a little dizzy.
.... I'll probably have some nightmares tonight.
Well, that is just something I have to face after drinking.
Akiha seemed really happy tonight.
One or two nightmares is a small price to pay for that.
Sitting down on a chair, I take a deep breath.

"——Hm."

The night breeze blows against my skin.
.... There is nothing but silence.
All the other houses are far from the Tohno mansion.
Doing this, I feel like I'm in a mansion in the middle of the woods, and I almost
forget that I am a normal student.
An empty, weak atmosphere.
A soundless scenery, of stagnation.
The small fragment of memory, about a garden.

There is no one there.
No father to yell at us,
no one to tie us down and lock us away,
Or even that person who curses Tohno Shiki..

A long time ago, it all wore away, declining into something worthless.

"_____."

Thinking about these rambling ideas, my eyelids start to droop more and more.

"Shiki-san, if you sleep there, you'll catch a cold."

—And.

That voice jars me from my sleepiness.



"... I am sorry, Shiki-san.

I guess it would have been better if you didn't drink anything tonight."

Kohaku-san says this with her usual smile, looking at me.

... It seems that Kohaku-san must have guessed I came here to cool off.

"I guess I got a little carried away.

Not thinking about your health, I forced you to do too much.

It was very tough, wasn't it?"

Kohaku-san apologetically keeps her distance.

... What is this?

This doesn't seem like the normal, cheery Kohaku-san.

It was my decision to drink, so she shouldn't feel bad about it.

"... Geez, this isn't like you at all, Kohaku-san."

I look at Kohaku-san, but she is still looking apologetic, so I sleepily gaze into the forest.

"It wasn't tough at all.

Akiha was so happy, and it was fun.

Kohaku-san, you're just thinking about it too much."

Staring blankly into the forest, I try to make my voice sound as gentle as possible.

.....

.....

.....

.....

A brief silence ensues.

Suddenly, like a rabbit poking its head out of a bush, Kohaku-san comes into view.

"Kohaku-san?"

"Ah, so you are awake, Shiki-san.

You got so quiet all of a sudden, I thought you fell asleep."

She says this, scolding me.

It sounds like she wants to tell me that I shouldn't sleep here.

"... I'm fine, Kohaku-san.

I'm awake, so don't worry.

I'll go back to my room once I'm done cooling off, so you can go back inside."

"Mm, I refuse.

I wanted to cool off as well, so I will keep you company until you are done."

With her usual smile, Kohaku-san looks longingly at the fallen leaves in the forest.

"... Well, if you feel like it, then that's fine, Kohaku-san."

Kohaku-san doesn't answer, and she walks over the leaves, which crinkle as she takes each step.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Silence ensues again.

"... Thanks, Kohaku-san.

It was really fun today."

I really do mean it.

"What do you mean?

Today wasn't something you should thank us for."

"... Maybe, but it really was fun.

Come to think of it, it was the first time we did something like that, and I finally felt like part of the family."

... It isn't like we didn't do things like that when I stayed at the Arimas.

It's just that when I lived there, I didn't ever want to be a bother, and I couldn't concentrate on having fun like today.

"Family?"

Tilting her head to the side, she asks in a soft voice.

For a very brief instant, it looked like Kohaku-san removed her usual mask, but she returns to her usual self.

"But Shiki-san, as long as you stay at the mansion, you won't ever have the family you are dreaming about.

All your relatives shun you and your only ally is Akiha-sama.

That means that your life here will be very painful."

... What she says is correct.

Eight years ago, I was treated badly enough to get me out of this house, so it's natural that they still think badly of me.

".... Well, I'm prepared for that, but it doesn't really matter.

Akiha put up with it for eight years.

I'm her big brother, so I should be able to put up with it easily."

Those eight years.

Since she was little, Akiha had to endure a very strict upbringing.

Compared to that, my relatives disliking me really isn't that much.

"I see.

Akiha-sama is really lucky, having a brother that thinks so much of her."

"I don't know.

I don't think I'm a good brother to Akiha."

Still smiling, she continues to giggle.

.... Seeing her laugh so much makes me feel a little embarrassed.

"But, that is strange.

Thinking only of Akiha-sama and not thinking of yourself like that."

"——Eh?"

"You too, have lead a bad life.

Being disinherited and sent away, there had to have been some hard times for you, too.

And when you finally start to really get along with the Arima family, you come back here.

You were made to leave a normal family that suited you the most, due to a mere whim of the Tohno house."

"....."

I don't even know how to respond.

That morning three days ago.

I remember the face of Keiko-san standing in the doorway as we parted.

I didn't want to see that always steadfast person smile so sadly.

Like Kohaku-san said—I left a big part of me behind that was so attached to them when I left—

"See, Shiki-san.

Don't tell me that you never thought of that?"

"——"

No, that's something I shouldn't think about.

".... Kohaku-san.... why are you—"

I wanted to ask her why she was bringing all this up now.

I wanted Kohaku-san, Akiha and Hisui to think that I came back here because I wanted to.

"Shiki-san."

I hear her voice.

I can't ignore her voice, so I look up.

"You know it, too.

You would have been happier staying with the Arima family."

—That.
But, why is she—

"Why?
Why did you come back to the mansion now, when there is only unhappiness waiting for you here?"

—Why is she saying that—with that almost crying face—
"....."
I can't answer.
I just stare at Kohaku-san, as if I was in some sort of a trance.

"... You're mean, asking me to talk about such difficult things."



"I am sorry.
I guess I must be drunk as well.
Saying such things, there must be something wrong with me."
She is smiling.
... Smiling like that, it makes it seem like she didn't even ask me something so serious.
"... Kohaku-san.
About that subject earlier, isn't it natural for me to come back here to my own home?
I couldn't leave Akiha all alone, and I couldn't burden the Arimas forever."
"So, that is your reason for coming back."
Kohaku-san seems like she understands.
—But, that is a lie.
There is another reason—something more important than Akiha.
"Shiki-san?
What is it?"
"... Oh, it's different, Kohaku-san.
Really, there is another important reason."
"Really?
Does that mean it is a secret?"

".... I don't know.

It isn't that it's a secret, but it's an important memory I have that I don't want to talk about.

I borrowed something when I left here, so I came back to return it."



"_____"

.... But, it seems like Hisui doesn't remember it, though.

I get up from the chair.

"I've cooled down, so I'm going back to my room."

Raising a hand, I exit the courtyard.



Kohaku-san just looks at me, dumbstruck.

I collapse on the bed.

It's probably the fault of the alcohol, as I start to feel very sleepy.

"....."

It's probably because I said those words to Kohaku-san.

I start to think about the promise I made eight years ago.

—You can never come back to this mansion ever again.

I still remember the time when my father said those words to me, and my feelings as I left my room.

That time when I realized that I would be all alone, just like I was before I met Sensei.

Not being able to keep my promise with Sensei, I guess I became empty inside.

That time, the girl I spoke with only once.
 that was my only saving grace.
 I don't know what kind of magic was in those words.
 "Give it back, okay?" Just those words.

But to me, those words meant so much back then.
 I—always thought those words were important.
 Well, it seems that Hisui forgot she ever said them though.
 ".... Oh well, it can't be helped.
 It was just a promise we made as children."
 It is a shame, but it really can't be helped.
 Eight years is a long time.
 Actually remembering a promise from your childhood is stranger than forgetting
 it, I suppose.
 ".... Well, I should sleep."
 Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes.

—I sink into a deep sleep.

—I feel the heat and my body wakes.

Roasting.
 My throat is burning.
 My blood is evaporating.
 The roasting must be leaving scars all over.
 "—"

Roasting.
 I can't think clearly.
 I feel the dirty presence of someone else in my room.
 Burning.
 I decide to leave my room.

—The clock says it is past midnight.
 The burning won't stop.
 /Confusion.
 Thump, Thump.
 My heart pounds.
 /Sexual excitement.
 The whole world pulsates in unison.
 /Delusion.
 Burning.
 Crimson.
 /Fuel tube.
 Exploding.
 Multiplying.

/The black wings of insects.
It's as if my eyes,
/Blood of mad desire.
have a pulse.
/Type, different death.

I enter the darkness.
My exploding heart scourges me forward.
More and more.
Thump Thump,
Thump Thump.
The beating that makes my existence pale in comparison.
My heart doubles, burning my single body with their fierce pulsation.

Now, time to fulfill her wish..

—And then,
there were the corpses of strangers in front of me.
"—One, two, three people..."
I count aloud.
I point out each one with my finger, my red finger.
No.
Both of my hands seem painted red.
Of course, there isn't any paint anywhere around me.
The only thing here is the flayed spaghetti (with meat sauce, of course) of three
dead bodies.
On the ground—is my knife, engraved with "Nanatsu Yoru".
"..... This means..."

It doesn't even require thought.

"..... I, did this."

I pick up my knife.

.... I can't believe it, but what's done is done.
Now that I realize it, my once burning body has cooled down.
Now that I'm done, I should go back to the mansion.

"—Kk.

Someone's coming."
Someone comes down the pathway.
Great.
This place is already overflowing with spaghetti, and now I have to make some more meat sauce on top of that.
The footsteps approach.
The dark shadow becomes a little clearer.
"____"
I grip my knife.
That shadow enters the alley.

Kiin!
The sound of metal clashing.

—I can't believe it.

Without any indication at all, that shadow totally intercepted my attack.
The enemy also uses a knife.
Our attacks cancelled each other's fatal strikes to the throat.

"—That's surprising!"
Our voices overlap in the darkness.
We both put away our knives at the same time.

"I didn't expect to see my kind here after coming back.
It's my first time seeing a killer."

He laughs as he says this.
A pure laugh without any bad intentions.
It's like the laugh of a boxer that finally cut weight and steps into the ring to face his greatest lifetime rival.

Probably,
I have the same smile on my face.
"—Heh."
He snorts as he turns around.
We walk out to the main street.

"This looks like a good spot.
It's a bit odd for two grown men to be standing about, isn't it?"
I sit down on the sidewalk.
As if he just thought of something, he keeps walking.. to the vending machine.
"Hey, gimme some money.
I don't have any."
I'm not exactly rich right now, but I give him the biggest coin I have.

"I always wanted to try this."
He says this happily and buys two cans of coffee.
"Catch."
"Alright."
I get the change and a can of coffee.
He sits by my side and takes a drink out of the can.

.... For some reason, I think this is all I've been doing all day.
".... Yuck.
I don't think cigarettes and coffee are that great.
I wonder why adults even drink these things?"
"They're training their endurance.
Being an adult is pretty hard work."
"Ah, I see.
You're pretty smart."
He chuckles, delighted.
I take a drink as well.
.... I can't help but agree with him.
They must be awfully suicidal, wanting to drink something that tastes like poison.
"Well, anyway, you're a pretty awful guy.
How could you just suddenly strike at someone's throat like that?"
"You're one to talk.
You were trying to kill me too."
"Is that so?
Well, what's done is done.
We're both alive, so we'll call it even."

.... Well, he's right.
We both tried to kill each other, so even if one of us died, we'd still be even.
As a competition, that sounds right.
Even though he keeps saying it is disgusting, he keeps happily drinking the coffee.
".... Well, this isn't bad once you get used to it.
This feels like a get-together of bad boys kicked out of society."
He says so, killing his smile.
"Really?
Well, you wanna smoke?"
We'd look more like the bad boys that way.
"Ah, I'll pass.
They numb the brain.
If you want to remain pure, you shouldn't take any poison."
".... So says the guy drinking coffee."
"What's with you?
You're pretty nit-picky for a killer.
Humans eat poison everyday, so isn't this alright?"

You have some tolerance against it too, right?"
He laughs loudly.
I feel the exact same way, so I take another sip.

I speak with him for another hour.
We ramble about nothing as we watch cars go by.
The most pointless thing was probably our special powers.
My eyes that can see death.
His body that dies with great difficulty.
We began by discussing their principles.
".... I see.
Well, does that mean you can kill the five senses?"
He says such nonsense.
"I can't do that.
I can't kill something so vague that needs an expression to be understood."
"Not at all.
Look, if you wanted to kill sight, kill the eyes.
Hearing, kill the ears.
I can do at least that much..
But you're different.
You can kill things without crushing them.
The moment you see those lines, you can kill.
Not the object, but its very meaning.
That's why—something beyond the five senses, like the sixth sense.... spirit
and emotion, you should be able to kill those things too."
"..... Hmm."
.... Well, he has a point.
My eyes themselves are an aberration.
Using logic to understand them is a mistake from the start.

.... Then can I kill that too?
That apparition that I saw once in my childhood.
That haunting thing called Crimson Red Vermillion.
"But, that seems hard.
If I do that, I don't know how much longer I could stay sane."
"Yeah.
It's like trying to calculate as a god using the mind of a human.
You'd cripple yourself for sure."
He says this as he walks toward the vending machine again.
"Hey."
Still looking at the vending machine, he holds his hand behind him towards me.
I toss him a coin, which he catches skillfully and uses to buy another can of
coffee.
After drinking this, he turns to me again.

"It really has been a long time since I talked to another person."

That's really weird.

".... That's strange, were you stranded on an island somewhere?"

"Huh?"

I'm still stranded on this island.

It seems I'm out of alignment with society.

They say someone who kills people for no reason is just crazy.

There's really no way someone like me, who's out of tune, could have a conversation with someone in tune."

".... Hmm.

So we're out of tune?"

"Yeah.

It's not a matter of who's off tune.

Those out of tune with society are the ones out of tune."

"Really?"

Maybe society is the one out of tune instead."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I said.

Didn't you say that just now?

It's like majority rule.

The views of the minority that aren't the same as the views of the majority are said to be "unusable" and rejected.

It doesn't matter who is right or wrong.

If you don't fit in, you're left out, regardless of if you are right or wrong.

The term 'out of tune' doesn't follow universal rules."

"—Heh, so are you trying to say that killers like us aren't evil?"

".... Who knows?"

I don't know about good or evil.

But if you think about it logically, we aren't the ones out of tune.

.... Let's see, how about using boxers as an example?

It doesn't have to be boxers, but it is an easy example to understand."

"Boxers, their job is to punch people.

But not just to punch people.

They painfully cut weight, and train everyday to skillfully punch people.

To effectively punch others, to efficiently defeat others.

They diligently work on it everyday, like sharpening a blade.

What do you think of that?"

".... Huh.

There are people like that.

And?"

"No, that's all.

They just punch each other, but they don't kill their opponents.

Sure, some could die from accidents, but it isn't considered murder.

Isn't that incredible?"

"—You mean it's okay to kill?"

"No, no.
You aren't supposed to kill.
But you could.
Isn't that a huge contradiction?
That's not all, because a boxer's fist is considered a weapon, they aren't allowed to fight outside the ring."
"... This is incredible.
They know a boxer's fist is a weapon, so why is there such a profession in the first place?
If it's a weapon that can kill, they should abolish it.
Killing is wrong, killing is wrong.
But this world is full of tools to kill.
Even the law allows it.
But they say it's not alright to kill; this can only be considered chaos.
If common sense is what is thought of as good by a majority of people, then we aren't out of tune.
If there is anything out of tune, it's this world."
"... All that said, I don't necessarily hate boxing.
There are a lot of professions out there, but there aren't any others where you can be so stoic about your objectives.
You strengthen yourself by cutting yourself off from all temptations.
Humans are interested in strength they can easily comprehend.
That's why competitions will never go away.
Of all of these competitions, the ones people like the most are where the contestants hurt each other.
Admiration of the strong.
A mindset that can only be drawn towards strength.
That is probably a very healthy mind.
As guys like him and I can think only of results, our colors might be similar, but our shapes should be completely different.
Something you can concentrate on and forget yourself.
That doesn't become an individual's free will.
Those that worship education, those who immolate themselves in art, those who advance themselves in business.
If an individual could decide that, then this world would be a pretty puzzle that could be understood.
But this puzzle is full of holes.
Pieces are missing, and a lot of pieces don't fit.
"I see.
You like to talk a lot, don't you.
I had a friend like that once.
How do I say this.... well, he didn't have anything, which is why he looked like he didn't want anything.
To me, he seemed very isolated.
Isolation is just another name for loneliness, right?"

That is why it bugged me."

".... Hmm.

Didn't want anything?

What about you?

Is there something you want?"

".... I don't know.

I think I used to, but I can't remember now.

What about you?"

"Everyone wants something, but I haven't found anything worth dreaming for. A fire within me that caused me to lose my mind—tonight was maybe my first time feeling that."

"Hahaha.

That means you're a killer too."

".... I don't know.

I can't be sure yet.

What about you, is killing fun?"

"—Are you stupid?

If it was fun, I'd be doing it non-stop.

There isn't any reason.

Once you start, you just get hooked."

.... I see.

I think I understand a little bit.

In other words, it's not a matter of liking or disliking the murder.

It's a matter of when he does kill someone, whether he can devote himself to that action.

That's probably the difference between being in or out of tune.

"Hey, didn't you ever take apart a radio when you were a kid?"

"Ray Dio....?"

I never killed any one like that."

"—Right, thanks for being a moron.

To be honest, that was a joke.

Animate objects and inanimate objects are completely different.

Maybe people like us should be doctors instead."

"A doctor?

I hate medicine.

When you get a shot, don't you feel yourself getting diluted?

It's like you're becoming a puppet, right?"

.... Is that so?

I have my own doctor, so I take medicine like it was nothing.

"—Ahh, it really was a lot of fun."

He stands up.

And—with empty eyes, he looks down at me.

"—Well.

We don't need two of us in this town, right?

Two lions in a cage this small won't even be able to mark their own territory."
 He looks like he is going for his knife.
 The inorganic reek of murder.
 He really does want a fight to the death.
 "You shouldn't."
 I say quite naturally.
 "Why?"
 "Well, as a living creature, you're stronger than me, but.."

—If it's a fight to the death.

"I'm superior to you."
 "____, ____"
 He grinds his teeth.
 After a twitching smile,
 "Ha.... aha, aahahhaha....!!"
 He laughs extremely loudly.
 "What?"
 Was it that funny, killer?"
 Hee hee hee, heeheehee.
 The man continues to laugh.
 Just when I thought I'd just have to leave him, he stops laughing and looks at me.

"—You're right, you know."

Saying that, he starts to walk away.
 "I guess this is a good opportunity.
 Now that someone like you is here, I should probably leave town."
 "... I don't really intend to take your place."
 "No, no, it's useless.
 You got hooked tonight, right?
 Then it'll be the same tomorrow.
 You won't be able to endure, even for a day.
 Well, I hope we won't meet again."
 Raising a hand, he disappears.
 "____"
 Hearing that we wouldn't meet again, I get a little sad.
 At my feet, there are about ten cans of coffee that he drank.
 In other words, he'll never pay me back for these.

—I make it back to my room.

It is almost dawn.
 I should just forget everything and go to sleep—

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"Nnn——"

I wake with a sudden ache.

".... Morning?"

The clock says it's just past six-forty.

The weather outside the window is perfectly cloudless.

"Ow——"

Pain runs through me once again.

Not my head or chest, but apparently on the side of my neck.

".... That's odd.... I've never had pain there before."

I put my hand on my neck but there's no blood.

The wound from Yumizuka's bite is already closed.

".... Maybe I have a fever."

Is it because of the alcohol last night?

My body is heavy and I feel like I have a fever.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"Ah, morning Hisui.

Did you sleep well last night?"



"—Y, yes.

Please forgive me for my unsightly behavior last night."

"That's right, you went to sleep.

It's okay.
I fainted afterwards anyway which was probably worse."



"Thank you for your kind words.
After you change, please head towards the dining room."

She must still be very embarrassed about last night and leaves somewhat flustered.

"Hisui.. maybe.."

Maybe it's possible for her to be easily embarrassed.

I thought she was basically expressionless at first but when you look at her closely, she gets embarrassed and mad a lot.

"... Next time I should try to make her laugh really hard."

I don't know how I would do that but there's no doubt Hisui's smile would be very cute.

"—Hey, Hisui's smile would look just like Kohaku-san."

.... A boring conclusion.

I quickly change and head to the sitting room.



"Ah."

I run into Akiha in the lobby.

I guess she's going to school as she's holding her bag.

.... For some reason my entire body starts to heat up as soon as I see her face.



"Good morning Nii-san."

"—Y, yeah.

Good morning Akiha."

Thump.

My chest starts to hurt.



"Wow.

Is something special going on today?

You're up a full twenty minutes earlier than usual, Nii-san."

"No.. I just had a bit of a bad dream, that's all.

Just a whim, don't worry about it."

.... I don't understand what I'm saying.

Is it because of my dream?

Suddenly remembering her young face, I can't look at Akiha directly.



"Nii-san?
Your face is red.. do you have a fever?"
"No, it's not that—"
"....?"

For some reason I just can't return her gaze.
She lifts an eyebrow suspiciously and comes near me.



"Excuse me."
She brings her hand to my forehead.
"Ah—"
Thump.
My heart beats.

—Akiha's palm is not any different from back then.

Cold, soft fingertips.
Thump.
Thump.
Her fingers touch me for only a matter of seconds, but my heart strangely begins to pound harder.
If I were to glance down, her face would be right there.
.... Her thin, strong eyebrows which show her strong will.
.... Her clear black pupils with her matching long black hair.
It really is a beauty unrelated to the name Tohno Akiha.

—Thump.
My heartbeat.

I can just imagine how red my face has become.
"Hey—Akiha."
If she doesn't pull back, it'll be troubling.



".... It seems you don't have a fever."
She pulls her fingers away and backs off slightly.



"Just in case, I'll have Kohaku prepare some cold medicine.
Please wait in the sitting room, Nii-san."

With that, Akiha goes up to the second floor.

The hands of the clock reach seven.



"Sorry to keep you waiting.
I have cold medicine and water, so please drink it after breakfast, okay?"
"Ah..... Kohaku.. san."
My shoulders slump.
I'm really glad Kohaku-san brought it, but I was expecting Akiha to bring it so
I'm a little disappointed.
"Thanks Kohaku-san.
Where's Akiha?
I think it's a bit early for her to go to school.."



"No, since there were some formalities to take care of, Akiha-sama left for school
earlier.
And, you know what, Shiki-san?"
Kohaku-san looks into my face with a smile.
"Wh.. what?
Did I do something again?"



"Yes.
I was wondering what you did to Akiha-sama just now.
It's been such a long time since I have seen Akiha-sama this happy.
I'm curious, really curious."
"... Um, I didn't really do anything to make her happy.
.... In fact, it's more like I'm the happy one—"
.... But, Akiha did seem to be in a good mood, didn't she?
She was smiling when we ran into each other, and for Akiha to take my temperature just isn't like her at all.
It would've been fine just to leave that to Kohaku-san, so that was odd enough.
"Shiki-san?
Does anything ring a bell?"
"No, sorry.
She definitely did seem in a good mood, but I don't think it was because of me.
In the first place, I don't understand Akiha right now at all.
She is different than she was eight years ago."



"Oh really?
Well, I personally think you are a bit dense at times but let us leave that there."
"Well then, please eat breakfast Shiki-san.
It is waiting for you in the dining room."
"Uh, yeah.
Thanks as always."
I give her a quick bow of the head and go to the dining room.



"Ah, Shiki-san.

What you said earlier was mistaken."

".... Eh?

Mistaken?

What was?"

"Akiha-sama has not changed one bit from the past.

I think the one who is making Akiha hard to understand is you, Shiki-san."

Leaving me with a phrase loaded with meaning, Kohaku-san disappears towards the lobby.



"Shiki-sama, what time will you be returning today?"

"Hm, in the evening.

.... I don't have anything special to do, so I'll be back by four."

"I understand.

.... I will no longer be able to wait for you here, but please call for me if you need anything when you return."

".....?"

Unable to wait by the gate.. what does she mean?



"Please have a safe journey, Shiki-sama."

"Yeah, I'm off."

Raising a hand to the bowing Hisui, I exit the front gate of the mansion.

Since I woke up early, I can take my time going to school.
I walk leisurely down the road to school which I normally jog down.

I walk slowly and arrive at the gate ten minutes before it closes.
It's the time when all the students who don't participate in clubs arrive.
In a high school prepping for general entry like mine, the only clubs practicing
in the morning are the athletic clubs.
It's only natural for the school gate to be this crowded.

"Ah, Senpai."

I see Ciel-senpai walking a little bit ahead of me.

"Senpai!"

I call out to stop her.



"Ah, good morning Tohno-kun.

It's rare to meet you by the entrance here."

"Yeah.

I saw you from behind so I ran up to meet you.
Do you always come at this time?"



"Yes, I am bad at getting up early so I always just barely make it.
Did you oversleep today?"

"No, I actually woke up earlier.

You know, I normally make it right as the gate is about to close."

"Wow, you mean you're a late riser, Tohno-kun.... huh?"



I might have something on my face as Senpai stares right at me.

"Um—Senpai?"

"Tohno-kun, did something happen over the weekend?"

"No, not really.

Why do you ask, Senpai?"



"Oh, it's nothing.

I was just playing around.

Please forget about it."

"?"

I'm a little bewildered.

—And then,

at that moment, I see a familiar face running vigorously from the entrance.

"That's Inui-kun."

Senpai says this calmly.

"Yeah, it's Inui."

I try answering her calmly.

Senpai and I don't even think the actions of the rampaging Arihiko as he dashes towards us are odd at all.

In other words, we're used to it.

"Tohno !"

A cloud of dust kicks up behind him.

He does not stop.

Even though we are right in front of him, Arihiko launches a drop kick in my direction without even pausing.

Crash, roll, roll, roll, thud.

"....."

I can't.. believe it.

This guy, this person throws a kick full-force into me and we suddenly crash into the ground and roll three times.

"....."

I get up and shake off all the dust from my clothes.



Arihiko also stands up and pats his uniform.

"Arihiko."

"Tohno."

After a three second interval, we face off directly.

Ready.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

"You have a sister!?"

Both of us shout simultaneously.

——W, what?

".... Wait a second.

How do you know I have a sister?"



"Uwaaa, you do have one after all!"

Arihiko holds his head in his hands, and twists his body.

.... It's so ridiculous looking, I would deny knowing him even if he owed me a million yen.

"Hey, cut it out Arihiko, please.

We'll end up being the laughingstock of the school."



"Screw that, I don't care!"

Arihiko looks up with a glare.



"You traitor!
I'll call you Onii-san someday!"

Leaving such an incomprehensible parting shot, Arihiko runs off.
Not towards the school building, but to the front gate.

".... What's he doing?"

There isn't even five minutes until homeroom starts.

Nothing about him is understandable.

Anyways, it seems like I won't run across him for the rest of the day.

During the break after second period, Arihiko suddenly returns.

"Hum.

After thinking about it for a while, I had no reason to go home."

Saying so, he calmly takes his seat.

Leaving him alone, I stare blankly in my seat and wait for third period to start.

But—the classroom seems odd today.

Every break, all the guys leave the room, and come back with happy looks
on their faces.

"?"

.... I'm a bit curious.



"Hello Tohno-kun.

Do you mind?"

"Huh?"

It's break time, Senpai, is it okay to come to my classroom like this?"



"Yes, being here is much more fun than being in my classroom."

She smiles happily as she says this.

Arihiko sits at his desk unaware of Senpai's arrival.

It is quite the ideal situation.



"But the second year classrooms are pretty noisy too.

The third year boys have also been making a fuss and I imagine the fourth floor is overcrowded by now."

".... Huh?"

The third year boys making a fuss?

About what?"



"Oh, you're not making a big deal out of it.
Well, there is no reason for you to go look, Tohno-kun."
"....?"

.... I don't quite understand, but it seems there is no reason for me to go
look.
"What do you mean?
Go see what?"



"The new first year transfer student.
All the boys in every class are taking turns to go see her.
Apparently the hallway outside her classroom is very crowded.
She's awfully popular."
Transfer student....?
Hmm.. in other words, that's where all the guys in my classroom went too.
"—Oh?
So that means she's really cute, this new transfer student?"



"I don't know, but that's what I've heard.
They say a girl in the first year transferred from a famous ladies academy."
"... I see.
For someone to transfer at this time of the year, there must be some strange
circumstances."
"You thought so too, huh?
But it seems like a waste.
Why is she transferring from the distinguished Asagami Women's Academy to
go here?"
"Hm?
What a coincidence.
My sister is also a first year student at—"
—Wait a minute.

There's something not quite right about this whole conversation.
Senpai sounds like I know this transfer student already.



Please don't mind.
Starting tomorrow your daily life will become more like this.



Since there were some formalities to take care of, Akiha-sama left for school earlier.

"—No way."
I'm shocked.
I'm shocked, but that's the only conclusion I can draw.



"Tohno-kun?"
I can't hear Senpai's voice anymore.
I look over at Arihiko's desk and he has an especially evil grin on his face.

I walk purposefully over to his desk.
"Arihiko."



"Oh?
What could it possibly be, Onii-sama?"
"... I'll punch you for saying that."



"H, hey, can't you take a joke?
What is it, is there a reason you would talk to a commoner like me?
Hyahahaha!"
Arihiko laughs.
"Reason?"
Well, I do have a reason this time."
"Arihiko, can you tell me the name of this new transfer student?"



"Man, you should know without me saying anything, right?
Yes, her name is Tohno Akiha.
Your younger sister."



Geez, you even kept it a secret from me.
I would've found out quickly since she's that hot.
I really doubted our friendship this time."
"... No, there's never been that sort of illusion between us, but I see."
Totally drained, I answer and return to my seat.



"Tohno-kun?"
Senpai is speaking but I just don't feel like responding.



"... Hmm.
You seem to be having trouble, so I will go back."

Senpai walks out of the room lightly.
Akiha has transferred to my school.

"—What is she thinking?"
Muttering aloud in astonishment, I fall into my chair.

Third period starts and English class begins.
The sound of fluent English goes in one ear and out the other.
My head is only full of thoughts about Akiha right now.
This English is just noise to me.
"——"

As always, Akiha is Akiha.
If she's going to transfer to my school, couldn't she at least tell me?
No, more importantly, she transferred to my school when there's no advantage
for her to do so—

"Ah—"
Pain again.
Sharp pain in my neck.

I fall onto my desk.
This is bad.
I can hardly move.
Is it anemia again?
Then it's just as always.
It's normal.
It'll pass.
I'm in class.
I have to recover.
Look, the English teacher is reading aloud.
The blackboard.
Chalk.
Chalk dust.
English.
The sound of chalk scraping.
Teacher.
Teacher.
Adult.
Podium.
The creaking podium.
Desk.
Thirty-six desks.
Student.
Students.
Thirty-six students.
Three days ago there were thirty-seven.
Window.
Sky.

Schoolyard.
Sun.
Unpopular.
Lonely.
Cold.
Frightened.
Uneasy.
Something.
Desire.
Desire.
Desire—

"Tohno-kun!
Hey, are you alright Tohno-kun!?"
My eyes open wide at the sound of the teacher's voice.
.... Sweat rolls down my forehead.
My body is cold.
My breathing is ragged.
"What is it Tohno-kun?
If you are not feeling well, you can rest."
"Ah, no, I'm fine.
It has passed."
".... I see.
Well, don't push yourself.
Your grades are good so it is acceptable to take an occasional rest.
Your progress will be satisfactory even with some handicaps."
.... The English teacher's words lack a little consideration for the other students.
I once again declare I am fine and resume class.

At lunch, the classroom gets frantic.
sigh
I take a deep breath.
I've been hot since this morning.
Maybe I have caught a cold.
My whole body feels languid.



"What, Tohno?
Are you still sticking around here?"
"... Yeah.
I don't feel too well today.
I can't go to the cafeteria, so can you please get me something?
I'll have the usual."
"No, I don't mind, but is that alright?
Your dear sister seems to be having trouble in the cafeteria."
"—Ah."
That's right.
She's always been at a ladies academy so she wouldn't know anything about
how a normal "school cafeteria" system works.
I can distinctly imagine Akiha standing in the cafeteria not knowing what to do.

—Damn, I can't leave her like that.

"Ah, Tohno!
Wait up!
I'm coming too!"
I dash out of the classroom.
.... Close behind me, Akihiko follows a bit more energetic than usual.

Akiha stands aghast in the center of the crowded cafeteria.
She looks as if she does not know what to do.
"—Geez.
What is she doing?"
I hurry over to Akiha.
"Akiha."



"Nii.. san."

In that instant,

I see her face on the verge of tears and my chest starts to hurt.

"—C'mon, over here.

You don't like the crowds, right?"

"Ah—yes."

Not wanting to see her almost crying face a second longer, I strongly pull Akiha out of the cafeteria.

"Here, you should be able to relax here.

I'll go buy us some lunch so just sit at this bench."



".... Yes.

I apologize for the trouble, Nii-san."

"—It's alright.

I'll hear about it later.

Arihiko, I'm going to get lunch so take care of Akiha, okay?"



"W, why are you asking me all of a sudden!?"
Look, I'll go buy lunch and you keep your sister company, Tohno."
"...?"
What's the matter, Arihiko?
Aren't you going to call me Onii-san?
I'll tell you right now, but I won't give you a chance like this in the future."
I whisper to Arihiko.
He whispers back, maintaining our secrecy.
"R, right, but I can't be with her alone all of a sudden.
If it was any other woman I'd agree, but your sister is just too high class."
"... Hm?"
This isn't like you at all.
Are you scared of Akiha?"



"Yeah.
To be honest, I am.
Since she is the type I've never went against, I'd like to concentrate on getting
information in the first round."

.... Why is he always this funny at strange times.
"Alright.
Then can you go get lunch for the three of us?"



"Leave it to me.
.... Um, what does your sister want?
I'm too scared to buy her ordinary cafeteria bread."
".... As if I would know.
She transferred here, so curry bread and coffee milk will be good enough."
"—Roger.
I'll be back in five minutes."

Arihiko returns to the building in a dash.



"You seem to be very good friends with him, Nii-san."
.... Huh?
Where did all her vulnerability go?
She's suddenly back to normal.
"Yeah, we get along specially well.
.... M, more importantly, Akiha!"
"Please don't yell like that.
People around us are surprised."
"Wha—"



"More importantly, can you answer me?
That person, what is he to you, Nii-san?"
.... What is he?

He's just an unwanted but inseparable guy who's been with me since middle school—no, that's not what we're talking about.

Ask her why she transferred to this school.

turn to **309**

I should introduce Arihiko.

turn to **310**

Was she pretending to be naive until just now?

turn to **311**

309

"Arihiko's just one of my classmates.
But you haven't answered my question, either."



"Very well.
What is it, Nii-san?"
"What is it!?"
Why have you transferred to this school?
What possible reason could you have for transferring to a second-rate elevator school!?"



"So you say, Nii-san.
But I can go to school wherever I choose; I do not need to explain myself to you."
".... Don't be stupid.
I'm your brother!
I can't just overlook things that are against your best interests.
Frankly, I can't see any benefit in you transferring to this school.
Since our old man isn't around anymore, it's my responsibility to look out for you..!"



"... What?"

It's not fair to say things like that at times like these."

"'Not fair' is my line.

What were you thinking, transferring without even telling me?"

I won't accept this transfer until I hear a good reason!"



"Ah—"

"If I'm not satisfied with the reason, I'll send you right back to your own school.

So, tell me, Akiha.

Why did you change schools?"

Akiha falls silent and looks down.
A very brief moment later, she raises a brave face.



"... I was worried about you, Nii-san.

Is that not a sufficient reason?"

——Eh?

"... Ha, hang on.

What do you mean, worried about me..?"

What sort of reason is that for transferring?"



"Well, looking at your unruly behavior recently, I decided that in order to prevent you from disgracing the Tohno name, I would have to keep a close eye on you."

Akiha explains clearly.

"Erk——"

When she says "unruly behavior", I can't help but nod.

It's true; my everyday life since coming here has surely been an annoyance to Akiha and the others.

"Bu, but, transferring is still a bit much, isn't it?"

What about your friends?"



"That's none of your concern, Nii-san.

If you feel even a little bad for me, then all you have to do is change your way of thinking from now on."

Akiha turns sharply away.

... Well, this is just the way she is.

"... Alright, do as you please.

But one day, you'll regret it."



"That's fine.
I wasn't thinking of having you worry over me, Nii-san."
With a sound of exasperation, Akiha starts to sulk.

setvar flgL + 1
turn to **312**

310

"What is he to me?—Arihiko is just a classmate.
What else does he look like?"



"Oh, so you refer to 'just' your friend by his first name, Nii-san?"
Akiha looks at me unhappily.
"Look, does it matter if I refer to him by his last name or his first name?
Why are you hung up on that all of a sudden?"



"My, you have no awareness, Nii-san.
Maybe for women, but it is not normal for two boys to refer to each other like that.
Unless they were brothers or relatives.."
"Eh—well, maybe you're right."
.... Even I tilt my head to the side as I think about it.
But since the very beginning, I've always called him "Arihiko".
Besides, we've known each other so long it isn't that odd.
"Well, there is another case.
Don't tell me you have that sort of relationship with him, Nii-san?"
"....?"
That sort of relationship?
What do you mean?"

I respond seriously, not understanding, but Akiha shifts her gaze.



".... It's nothing.
I was being sarcastic but you don't seem to get it, Nii-san."
Akiha slumps her shoulders.
.... I start to get more and more confused.
"—Akiha.
I've known him since middle school and he has always helped me out.
.... He might not look like it, but he is a good person.
I don't know what you don't like about him, but don't think bad of him."



"....."
Is she not satisfied about something?
Akiha starts to sulk.
"Akiha, are you listening?"
"Yes, I hear you!
This is the first time I have ever heard you defend someone so eagerly.
He really must be special to you, this school friend of yours!"

She puffs out her chest and turns her head away.
.... Geez.
I don't know why she decided to transfer here all of a sudden.
Now I don't even know what's with her.
turn to **312**

311

"He's a friend of mine from middle school—Akiha?"

"Yes?"

What is it, Nii-san?"

"You seem to have calmed down a whole lot.

All your confusion earlier in the cafeteria seems like it never happened."



"—What are you trying to say, Nii-san?"

"No, I was just thinking.. maybe you were pretending to be naive earlier?"

There is a strong possibility that is the case.

Come to think of it, there was no reason for Akiha to just stand there stupidly in the middle of the crowd like that.



"Oh?"

Nii-san, is that what you think of me?"

Akiha looks me over from head to toe.

.... I knew it.

She was just putting on an act to fool me.



"Yes, please go ahead and imagine what you like.
It isn't like I wanted you to be worried."
She puffs out her chest and pouts.

turn to **312**

312



"Here ya go, lunch for three people.. huh?
What, am I interrupting something?"



"No, nothing of the sort, Senpai.



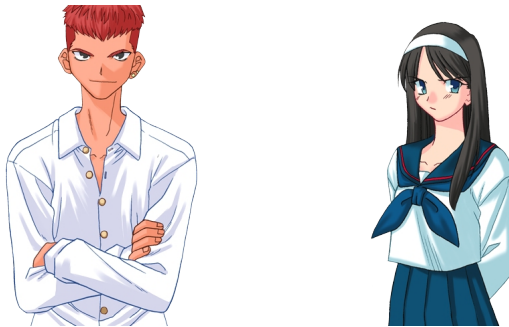
You are a friend of Nii-san?
I am Tohno Shiki's younger sister, Akiha.
It is a pleasure to meet you."
Akiha bows softly.



"Not at all, the pleasure's mine.
I'm Inui Arihiko, I've known Tohno since junior high, but today was the first time I've found out about you, Akiha-chan."
.... Maybe he's still holding a grudge against me for not telling him about her, as he says things he doesn't have to.
"Alright, Arihiko, let's eat.
Lunch break is short, so there's no time for chit-chat with Akiha."



I ignore Akiha glaring at me, and I accept the lunch from Arihiko.
"Here, Akiha.
Here's curry bread and milk, and you can eat them here.
There isn't much time, so you can't take too long over them."



"I know that.
I'm not a child, so you don't have to explain every little thing to me."



"That's right, Tohno.
Aren't you a bit mean to Akiha-chan?"
Arihiko boos at me.
"....."
Ignoring them, I open my own bread, and stick the straw into my milk.

Munch.
Munch munch.
Munch munch munch.

"___"
Right.
Lunch is over, so it's time to go back to class.



".... Ah, Nii-san."
Akiha speaks up timidly.
Looking over, I see that she hasn't even opened her curry bread yet.
"What is it, Akiha?
You're not hungry?"
"It's.. well, it's not that, it's just.."
She glances upward, like she's embarrassed or something.
".... Could you.. teach me how to eat these..?"

"...."

She glances hesitantly towards me.
And.. what am I supposed to say?



"Waddya mean, how to eat them?
You just break open the wrapper and eat it.
It's not hard, is it Tohno?"
"Arihiko, sorry, but could you go get a napkin from the cafeteria?"
".... Eh, me?"
I nod silently.



"Fine, but you'll owe me one."

Arihiko runs off towards the school building again.
"Alright, give it to me.
You open the bag here, like this.
And you just bite into it.. it's okay, but don't expect too much for the taste.
Kohaku-san's cooking and this are like heaven and earth."



"Ahh.. really, Nii-san?"

"I'm not kidding.

Or what are you going to say?

Don't tell me that even though you've transferred to our school, you can't eat our food.

I don't want to think less of you."



"No, it's not that, it's just.. this bread, it's so big, I don't think I could get it into my mouth.."

".... No one said you have to eat it all in one bite.

It's bread, so you bite off a bit at a time.

You'll get crumbs round your mouth, but Arihiko's bringing you a napkin to wipe it, okay?"



".... Yes.

Thank you, Nii-san."

Saying so, Akiha starts to bite into the curry bread.
.... I don't think there ever was a girl getting this nervous to start eating curry bread.

It's a few minutes after Akiha finished her lunch.
Arihiko's appearance doesn't seem to bother her, as they are engaged in pleasant conversation.



"So Inui-san, you have been a friend of Nii-san's since junior high school?"



"Yeah, I've known him for about five years now.
He's been a bothersome guy since the moment we met.
I helped him out with all kinds of stuff, and before I knew it, he kind of grew on me."

".... Arihiko, that's the wrong word.
You should call it extortion."



"Ahh, whatever you wanna call it, we're stuck with each other!"

Arihiko laughs.

"Yeah.

Kind of like how stuff sticks to the bottom of your shoe.

I guess we both give each other a lot of trouble."

I return Arihiko's laugh cynically.



"....."

.... Somehow, Akiha seems to be having trouble stomaching Arihiko and myself.



"Oh, by the way Akiha-chan, can I ask you something?"



"Certainly, if it is something I can answer."

"Well, I've been wondering for a while.. Tohno has chronic anemia, right? Was he always like this?"

.... The amazing thing about Akihiko is how he is so straightforward when asking awkward questions like this.



"Yes, Nii-san has been anemic since birth.

But all the people of the Tohno family have similar problems; his is not a special case."

"Eh..?"

Really, Akiha?"

"Yes.

Father suffered from manic depression.

Divergent Identity Disorder, to give it its full title."



"Wha?
Divergent Identity..?"



"More commonly called split personalities.
Though, Father's wasn't severe enough to cause muddiness of memory."

—I didn't know.

But looking back on it, Tohno Makihisa's character did seem to switch often from tenderness to brutality.

"Hmm.. so, it was a medical condition, that old man.."

Looking at it like that, everything becomes clear.

Before the accident, I always felt father was a tender man, who kept his distance.

But after the accident, Makihisa clearly hated me.

Looking back, it may have been because of his condition.



"Argh!

Lunch break's over, Tohno!"

"Don't complain to me about it.

C'mon Akiha, you should hurry back to your classroom.

It'll be embarrassing to be late on your first day at school."



"I understand.
Take care, Nii-san."

As the bell resounds, we return to our classrooms.

A day full of ups and downs finishes.
What should I do now—

Go home alone.

turn to **314**

Go to Akiha's classroom.

turn to **313**

313

.... The events which happened during lunch break still weigh on my mind.
I'm sure she can walk home alone, but I feel I ought to go and check on Akiha.

I walk along the corridor lit by the fading sun.
I think Akiha's class is first grade, class one.

The classroom is silent.
A girl stands alone in the empty, red classroom.



"...."

.... I feel.. a little dizzy.
The classroom dyed by the evening glow.
Alone, a girl with long, faintly red hair is preparing to leave.

No matter how I look at her, she's Akiha.
So why?
Why do I feel as if I am seeing a stranger for the first time?



"Nii-san?"

"——"

As she calls out to me, the dizziness subsides.
"You're—Akiha, right?"



"..?"

Nii-san, are you feeling poorly again?"

Akiha addresses me in her usual tone.

.... Looking at Akiha's black hair, I feel that without a doubt, this is my own little sister, Tohno Akiha.

".... Nah, it's nothing.

Come on, Akiha, it's time to go back.

If you're not doing anything, do you want to walk home together?"



"Yes.. if you don't mind, let's walk home together."

For some reason, Akiha smiles tenderly.

.... My heart thumps.

Perhaps it's the dizziness from earlier, or perhaps the strangeness of seeing Akiha in my own school.

For some reason, my heart beats far harder than it needs to.

I leave the school building with Akiha.

As we reach the school gates, I catch sight of Senpai waving at me.



"Ah, you came at last, Tohno-kun."

"Huh, Senpai?"

What are you doing, standing here like this?"



"Geez, I wasn't just standing here, I was waiting for you, Tohno-kun, but—"

Senpai glances at Akiha next to me.
Somehow, at a glance she realizes that Akiha and I are walking home together.



"Tohno-kun, is this your little sister?"

Senpai throws a sidelong glance at Akiha.



"....."

Akiha says nothing.

Nothing is said, but both Senpai and Akiha tell me with their eyes to "Introduce me to this person".

—Ahh.

It seems like this is going to be a really tiresome job.

"Senpai, this is my younger sister, Akiha.

She transferred to our school just today."

Akiha bows to Senpai.



"I see.

Hello.

My name is Ciel and I'm a friend of Tohno-kun."





.... What is it?
Senpai and Akiha just stare at each other, saying nothing.

"Senpai, you sounded like you were waiting for me.. What's going on?"



"Well, it just happened that I wanted to spend a little time with you, but—



—Since it's already late today, I'll leave it for another time.
Bye, Tohno-kun.
See you tomorrow as well, Akiha-san."
"Bye" says Senpai, and she walks away from us.

"—Ah."
Senpai leaves without giving me a chance to stop her.



"Let's go home, Nii-san.
It will get dark soon."
Akiha says this as if nothing happened.

```
    setvar akiharegard + 1  
if flgL >= 1  
turn to 316  
    turn to 315
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314

I don't know how to face Akiha once I get home to the mansion.
So, I sit and think right here before I go home.

It looks like no ideas are forthcoming.
Before I knew it, the classroom was empty.
"—I guess I'll go home."
What a waste of time.
If I had time to think, it would have been more productive if I just faced Akiha
without any plans.

"Tohno-kun!"
Someone calls my name as I step out into the hallway.



"Thank God you're still here.
Um, are you going home right now?"
"Umm, something like that.
Since I don't have anything to do, I was thinking of just going straight home.
Are you heading home too, Senpai?"
"Yes, since I don't have anything I have to do, I was thinking of going shopping."
"I see, shopping.
You mean by the station?"



"No, it's on sale here."
Senpai starts to talk weird again.
"... Here—you mean here?"



Yes, says Senpai with a big smile.
"... What's on sale here?"



"This."
Senpai points with her finger.
Only my face is in her slender finger's way.
"You mean, me?"



"Yes, since you're still here, I've decided to buy your time.
So let's go home together, Tohno-kun."
Senpai tugs at my arm and starts to walk.
"W-wait a second, I'm glad we can go home together, but isn't your house in the opposite direction of mine?
Did you come by just to walk together to the gate?"
"No, I'm going to go shopping by the station, so we'll walk together for a while."
"I see, then we will be walking together for a while—wait, what are you shopping for anyways?"



"Well, I thought since it's starting to get cold, I should buy some heating equipment."
"Heating equipment, huh.. I think it's a bit too early for that, but I guess autumn goes by quickly.
So what are you buying?
An air conditioner?"



"A high schooler can't afford an air conditioner.
So, I was thinking of buying the cheap, efficient, traditional Japanese craft,
Kotatsu-san."
I never knew kotatsu was a traditional Japanese craft.
With that aside.
"—Senpai, you were going to talk me into carrying your stuff, right?"



"That's not true.
I just thought we could walk together for a bit, and you could accompany me
while I shop."
"... And you would say this to me after shopping.
Tohno-kun, I can't carry such a heavy load!"



"Hey.
Tohno-kun, I wouldn't ask you to do such a thing."

Even if I did, I'd ask in a much more roundabout manner."

"You're right.

Either way, I'd tell you I wouldn't want to do it."



"Ahaha, it's alright.

I would never ask you to do such a thing."

"I know you're not that kind of a person, Senpai."

We laugh together for a while.

We were laughing together for a while, but Senpai suddenly drops her shoulders.



"..... Meanie."

Oh no, I guess I made too much fun of her.

She was relying on me, so maybe I should have cooperated with her a bit more.

"—Alright.

If you'll buy me lunch next time, I'll do the carrying or anything else you want me to do."



"You don't have to help me if you don't want to.
I just thought it might be a bit too heavy for me alone."
"What are you saying?
There's no way you'll be able to carry it with your weak arms.
I'll go.
You said you'll buy my time, Senpai.
I'll work for lunch, so take advantage of that all you want."



"—Alright.
I'll take your kind words and I'll rely on you today."
"Yeah, rely on me all you want."
I hit my arm to appeal to her that I have some power in there.
Senpai laughs and starts to walk.



"Oh, I wanted to ask you one thing before that."

"What?"
"Can I bring you a bentou for lunch?"
Of course.
I found myself nodding even before I thought about it.

We exit to the school grounds.
There's no one out here except for the track team.



"There's less after school activity now."
Senpai says this regretfully.
Due to that vampire incident, most of the after school clubs have been cancelled and the only guys that are left are the track team.
.... But that incident will not occur again.
Since Yumizuka is no longer alive, there will be no more victims.
But I bet no one would believe me even if I said that.
".... You're right.
There's been several victims, so I guess the parents had a say."
"I feel a bit down.
I liked that after school atmosphere."

We exit to the gate.
"Huh-?"
At the same time, I face an unexpected person.



"Geez, you go home late too, Nii-san."

"A, Aki-"

As I start to finish with "ha", Senpai comes along.



"Tohno-kun?"

Senpai calls me as I stand still.



It seems that Akiha understood the fact that Senpai and I were going home together.

She stares at Senpai and me as if criticizing us.

"Akiha—what are you doing?"

"I thought I would go home with you, Nii-san."

Akiha answers while staring at me coldly.

"Tohno-kun, is that your little sister?"

Senpai glances at Akiha.

They don't say it directly, but both Senpai and Akiha tell me with their eyes to "Introduce me to this person".

——*sigh*

It seems like this is going to be a really tiresome job.

"Senpai, this is my younger sister, Akiha.

She transferred to our school just today."

Akiha bows to Senpai.

"I see.

Hello.

My name is Ciel and I'm a friend of Tohno-kun."



.... What's going on?
Senpai and Akiha just stare at each other, saying nothing.
"Akiha, I'm going to go shopping with Senpai today, so-"



"Is that true, Senpai?"
.... Before I could tell her to go home, Akiha questions Senpai.



"Yes, but I'll do so on another occasion.
Tohno-kun, you should be nicer to your sister."



"Bye" says Senpai, and she walks away from us.
"—Hey."
Senpai leaves without giving me a chance to stop her.
"Let's go home, Nii-san."
It will get dark soon."
Akiha says this as if nothing happened.

```
    if flgL >= 1  
turn to 316  
    turn to 315
```

315

I walk with Akiha towards the mansion.

"...."

Frankly, it's difficult.

If I look beside me, I can see Akiha walking with her long hair fluttering.

Akiha is silent and graceful, the perfect daughter of a respected family.

"....."

Why can't I think of anything to say?

Even though I see Akiha at home every day, I somehow feel some tension walking home toward the mansion.

-But I still haven't had an explanation.

"Akiha."



"Yes?"

What is it, Nii-san?"

"What is it!?"

Why have you transferred to this school?

What possible reason could you have for transferring to a second-rate elevator school!?"



"So you say, Nii-san.

But I can go to school wherever I choose; I do not need to explain myself to

you."

".... Don't be stupid.

I'm your brother!

I can't just overlook things that are against your best interests.

Frankly, I can't see any benefit in you transferring to this school.

Since our old man isn't around anymore, it's my responsibility to look out for you..!"



".... What?

It's not fair to say things like that at times like these."

"'Not fair' is my line.

What were you thinking, transferring without even telling me?

I won't accept this transfer until I hear a good reason!"



"Ah—"

"If I'm not satisfied with the reason, I'll send you right back to your own school.

So, tell me, Akiha.

Why did you change schools?"

Akiha falls silent and looks down.
A very brief moment later, she raises a brave face.



"... I was worried about you, Nii-san.
Is that not a sufficient reason?"

——Eh?

"... Ha, hang on.
What do you mean, worried about me..?"
What sort of reason is that for transferring?"



"Well, looking at your unruly behavior recently, I decided that in order to prevent you from disgracing the Tohno name, I would have to keep a close eye on you."

Akiha explains clearly.

"Erk——"

When she says "unruly behavior", I can't help but nod.

It's true, my everyday life since coming here has surely been an annoyance to Akiha and the others.

"Bu, but, transferring is still a bit much, isn't it?
What about your friends?"



"That's none of your concern, Nii-san.
If you feel even a little bad for me, then all you have to do is change your way
of thinking from now on."
Akiha turns sharply away.

.... Well, this is just the way she is.
".... Alright, do as you please.
But one day, you'll regret it."



"That's fine.
I wasn't thinking of having you worry over me, Nii-san."
With a sound of exasperation, Akiha starts to sulk.
We fall silent, and continue up towards the mansion.

We arrive at the mansion.
Akiha steps forward to open the gate, but as if remembering something, turns
to me.



"... I have one question.
How close are you to that person called Ciel, Nii-san?"
Abruptly, she asks an extremely forward question.
"Not especially close.
We're just friends from school.
She.. feels like someone I can talk to."

"Really?" Akiha says, turning away and going through the gates.

We cross the courtyard and arrive at the door.
As Hisui is not waiting at the gates and Kohaku is not sweeping the garden,
there is no sign of either of them today.
"Ah."



"Yes?
Did you say something, Nii-san?"
"Well, nothing much but.. I'd like to go and take a look at the Japanese-style
building you were talking about, if that's okay."
"—The detached building?"
Murmuring, Akiha's brow creases with concern.



"Please, do not.
It was sealed up many years ago.
Nii-san, even you are not permitted to go there."

Having stated this, Akiha goes into the mansion.

turn to **317**

316

I walk with Akiha towards the mansion.

"...."

Frankly, it's difficult.

If I look beside me, I can see Akiha walking with her long hair fluttering.

Akiha is silent and graceful, the perfect daughter of a respected family.

"....."

Why can't I think of anything to say?

Even though I see Akiha at home every day, I somehow feel some tension walking home toward the mansion.

We arrive at the mansion.

Akiha steps forward to open the gate, but as if remembering something, turns to me.



".... I have one question.

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Abruptly, she asks an extremely forward question.

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"Yes?

Did you say something, Nii-san?"

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"Please, do not.

It was sealed up many years ago.

Nii-san, even you are not permitted to go there."

Having stated this, Akiha goes into the mansion.

turn to **317**

317

It's a bit past five in the evening.
There is about an hour of free time before dinner.
Between now and dinner, should I spend time in my room, or—

Go to the sitting room. turn to **318**

Go to the detached building. turn to **319**

Stay here until dinnertime. turn to **320**

318

—If I go to the sitting room, there should be someone there.

Being with company is surely more pleasant than being alone.

I enter the sitting room and see Kohaku-san.



"Ah, Shiki-san.

What can I do for you?

Supper isn't for another hour."

"No, I came here to relax, not for a meal.

I hope I'm not intruding?"

"Oh, no, please come in.

Let's see.."



"Nee-san, about the detached building.."

"Hi.

Sorry to intrude, Hisui."



"... Welcome home, Shiki-sama.
I am sorry I was not able to welcome you home."
"It's okay, don't worry about it.
I'm sorry for not saying hi as soon as I got back."



"_____"
Hisui's cheeks become faintly red.
Little by little, I'm coaxing expressions out of her.
I'm pleased.



"Excellent timing.
Hisui-chan, would you prepare a drink for Shiki-san?"



"Yes.

Shiki-sama, what would you like to drink?"

"Hm.

Since it's before dinner, I guess just tea would be great.

I only came down to chat, so I don't want to be any trouble."

"Please wait a moment, then."

Hisui returns with three teacups, and time passes by slowly and silently.

"Ah, by the way, Hisui, you were talking about the detached house earlier?"



"Yes.

Did you have a question about it?"

"Mm, not particularly, but Akiha was saying no one can go there anymore.

Did something happen there while I was gone, by any chance?"



"No, nothing like that.
It merely houses servants' quarters, so there's no reason for you to go there,
Shiki-san."
"Servant's quarters...?"



"Yes.
Although it's only me and Hisui-chan now, a little while ago there were more
than ten servants working in the mansion.
Since there isn't room for so many people in the mansion, the detached building
was built."



"Nee-san—you must not speak about this."



"Ah."

Hisui says this, and Kohaku-san looks around guiltily.
.... There is no sign of Akiha.
Kohaku-san lets out a sigh of relief.



"Shiki-san!"

"Ah.. Yes, what is it..?"

".... Our talk just now is a secret!"

Kohaku-san grips my hand hard.

"Ah, yeah—I won't tell Akiha about it."



"Yes, thank you."

Kohaku-san sighs with relief once more.

It seems like Akiha forbids talking about the detached building.

—But, why?
The detached building that used to be the servants' quarters.
Akiha doesn't want people to go there.
"Hey, Kohaku-san.
How long has the detached building been unused?"



"Uhhh.. Hisui-chan?"



"....."

Hisui silently shakes her head.
It seems that even this cannot be spoken of.
"What?
Is it a secret?"



"—Yes.

Talking about the detached building would be bad for your health, Shiki-sama."

And with that final response, talk of the detached building ceases.

turn to **321**

319

.... It's bugging me how Akiha said that.
 She said not to enter the detached building under any circumstances.
 The way she said it gets me more curious.
 Besides—if a Japanese-style room is only located there, I do feel like I want to take a look at it.

".... I guess it's alright if I don't get caught."
 I silently apologize to Akiha and decide to walk to the exit quietly.

—The sun has set and it is pitch black outside.
 I walk through the woods which seem more like a forest.
 I didn't remember quite where it was, but as I enter the forest, my feet automatically head toward the detached building.
 Even if I forgot where it was, I guess my body remembers how to get there.
 At any rate, I am able to get to the detached building without getting lost.

"——"

It must have been many years since this building was put out of use, as many parts are deteriorated.

As I put my hand on the door, I notice that it is unlocked.

It is dark inside, as expected.
 I smell the tatami mats and the shoji, and somehow feel comfortable even though I can't see anything.

"—Ah."

As I enter the Japanese-style room, a chill runs through my spine.

"———I know this place."

I guess I came here as a kid since this Japanese-style room was interesting.

"————"

But it's weird.

I feel the same sense of incompatibility I had when I was first shown my room after I came back to this mansion.

".... Maybe because the Arimas' house was Japanese-style."

I feel like I've lived here all my life.

Or maybe—

If I recall, in the past..

When we were playing in the yard..

Maybe it wasn't just me and Akiha.

"Ouch——"

I feel a pain in my neck.

It might be my anemia, but my body feels like lead.

"... This is bad.... I have to go back to my room."

I shake my head lightly, and I decide to go back to my room before I really faint.



"Oh hello, Shiki-san.

What are you doing at a place like this?"

Kohaku-san suddenly enters the room.

"———!!!"

I look around to see what I can do.

.... There's no place to hide.

Besides, she's already seen me.



"Hey now, you can't come in here.
Akiha-sama told us never to let you in here."
"... Yeah, she told me today.
She told me but——"



"You got curious?
I understand.
I'll let you go this time, but please don't come here again.
This building is old and a bit dangerous."
"... This building is old and a bit dangerous, huh.
It's a weird reason but, it still makes sense.
"... I'm sorry.
But what was this building used for?
You say it's not used now but did someone use it before?"



"Yes, this used to be the servants' residence.
Before you went to the Arimas, this mansion had many servants.
It was impossible to let all the servants live in the mansion, so Makihisa-sama
constructed this detached building."
"I see, this place was the servants' residence."
It does make sense now that she mention it.
If you have a mansion this big, such a thing would be certainly needed.
But, why?
Why is Akiha trying to get me away from this place——?
"Shiki-san, we should go back to the mansion or Akiha-sama might find out."
"Oh—I'm sorry."
I shake off the faint doubt remaining and decide to go back to the mansion with
Kohaku-san.

setvar flgN + 1
turn to **321**

320

Well, I don't exactly have anything in particular to do, so I'll just take it easy in my room.

setvar flgS + 1
turn to **321**

321

Dinner, as usual, is a quiet affair with just me and Akiha. Kohaku-san stands behind Akiha, and Hisui stands behind me during our wordless dinner.

"....."

The only thing different is the way Akiha is acting.

Until now, whenever my tableware would make noise, Akiha would look up with a scowl.

Today, however, Akiha makes quite a lot of clattering herself.

In the end,

"—I am going back to my room.

Please clean up my dinner."

Saying so, she leaves the dining room behind.

".... What's with her?

She wasn't like that when we were walking back together.."



"....."

Hisui says nothing.

Kohaku-san collects the tableware, smiling as ever.

—And then.

From the lobby, I hear the sound of someone falling.

"—Akiha!?"

Fearing the worst, I race towards the lobby.



"—!"

There, I see Akiha leaning on the stairs.
Her breathing is irregular, and I can hear her wheezing from here.
Her face is pale, and there are beads of sweat on her skin.

.... I can see with a single glance that she is not okay.

"Hey, Akiha!"

"Don't come near me..!"

"..!"

I stop.

Leaning on the stairs, Akiha refuses me violently.

"Wha—don't come near you..?"

What are you talking about!?

I don't know what happened, but I can't just leave you like that!"

"—I'm fine, just.. don't come any closer.. Nii-san."

Akiha breathes heavily.

"Hey—"

My heart pounds.

Akiha just breathes painfully.

.... There's something wrong with me.

For a moment, I feel it resembles the figure of Yumizuka Satsuki.

"Aki.. ha—"

"I'm fine, so please, don't come near me.

If you come near me, there's no way I'll be able to.. so don't come any closer.

As long as you are not around, I'll be fine, so.."

With an audible sound,
Akiha collapses once more.



"Akiha-sama?"

Kohaku-san passes me, running toward Akiha.

She whispers something to Akiha, and helps her up.

With Kohaku-san's help, Akiha returns to her room.

"Wha—what was that about?"

I really don't understand.

Akiha's tormented condition, telling me not to come near her, yet she lets Kohaku-san help her.



"—Shiki-sama."

"Hisui.. what was that?"

Why was Akiha like that?"

"At times, Akiha-sama lapses into sudden dyspnea.

Just as with your anemia, Akiha-sama too is a member of the Tohno family."

"Ah—"

—Members of the Tohno family do have such conditions.

Akiha said that during lunch.

"It can't be.. Akiha always seems so healthy."

"Akiha-sama tried her best to keep it a secret from you.

We were also ordered not to speak to Shiki-sama about it."

"——"

There's nothing to be said.

I can only look aghast up the stairs Akiha just ascended.



"Well then, good night.

Please leave Akiha-sama's condition to Nee-san.

As Makihisa-sama was under her care for many years, she has medical experience."

"I guess so.

If we leave Akiha to Kohaku-san, I'm sure she'll be fine."

.... Since there doesn't seem to be anything else I can do, it seems I'll have to just leave her to Kohaku-san.



"Shiki-sama, it is rare for Akiha-sama to to be like that.

Since it can be easily relieved with medication, I do not think that you need to worry.

.... Rather than being concerned with her treatable condition, Akiha-sama is concerned more about your health, Shiki-sama."

"—I know.

Damn it, I'm a crappy older brother.

I guess I really didn't realize anything at all."



"You—do not know anything?"

Hisui murmurs to herself, looking down.

"Hisui?"

What is it?

Don't say that even you feel bad."

"—No, it is just.. Shiki-sama, do you really remember nothing about the detached building?"

"—Eh?"

.... Remember.. what?

".... Hisui, that's.."

"—You really became Tohno Shiki, did you not, Shiki-sama?"

"Hisui?"



".... That detached building fell into disuse right after you left for the Arima family.

Makihisa-sama decided to demolish it, but as Akiha-sama objected strongly, it remains standing today.



—So, Shiki-sama, if you think anything at all of Akiha-sama, please do not approach that detached building."

Saying so, Hisui leaves the room as if she were running.

It's ten o'clock, and all the mansions lights go off.

"....."

I can't sleep.

Akiha.

The detached building she wants to keep a secret from me.

Go to the detached building. $\text{flgN} \geq 1$

turn to **324**

Go to the detached building.

turn to **325**

Just go to sleep. $\text{flgS} \geq 1$

turn to **324**

Just go to sleep.

turn to **325**

322

—But, hold on.

Hisui's words bother me, but I went to the detached house earlier.
I know there's nothing there.
I'll keep quiet tonight and sleep.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—My throat, dry with thirst, hot.

—I can't sleep like this.
I'll go and get a drink of water.

It seems I went into town at night.
It seems like I'm waiting with bloodshot eyes for someone to pass by.

—It is hot.
Suddenly, I see a face reflected in the window.
The eyes are bloodshot, and the face looks quite insane.

—It is just so hot.
It seems I found my prey.
Strangling her from behind, it's all over.
It seems that the unknown woman has died just from that.

—I am just, so hot.

Taking the dead body, perhaps I bit into its throat.
There's a gurgling sound.
Drinking the blood flowing out of the rended neck, my thirst is quenched.

—I don't understand.
The sound of heavy breathing.
Does this act..
Does this act really excite me so much?
I stick my finger in the chest of the dead body.

The sound of crushing meat, the sound of breaking bones.
The sound of a heart being ripped out with my bare hand.

—As I watch, my head fills with pure white.
This, the ultimate pillage.
The height of immorality.
Just gazing at it, I feel hot.
You might say it's negative pleasure, but for making one hot, it's still the same.

—I don't understand.

Hot blood dripping from my mouth, I gaze up at the night sky entranced.
My long hair waves around.
Above is the spiraling sky.
Such a beautiful, silver moon.

—And so, I don't understand.
I am just, only, hot—

turn to **326**

323

".... Shall I take a look?"

Getting out of bed, I leave my room silently.

—Even the moonlight does not penetrate the woods of the garden.

I walk through the woods which seem more like a forest.

.... I didn't remember quite where it was, but as I enter the forest, my feet automatically head toward the detached building.

Even if I forgot where it was, I guess my body remembers how to get there. At any rate, I am able to get to the detached building without getting lost.

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But it's weird.

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I feel like I've lived here all my life.

Or maybe——

If I recall, in the past..

When we were playing in the yard,

maybe it wasn't just me and Akiha..

"Ouch——"

I feel a pain in my neck.

It might be my anemia, but my body feels like lead.

"... This is bad... I have to go back to my room."

I shake my head lightly, and I decide to go back to my room before I really faint.

I take a deep breath.

Somehow, I made it back to my room.

No matter what, if I collapsed in the off-limits building, Akiha's wrath would pour down on me.

"——Mn."

I feel a little dizzy.

I fall onto my bed without even changing.

——Hot.

——Hot.

——Hot.

—My throat, dry with thirst, hot.

—I can't sleep like this.
I'll go and get a drink of water.

It seems I went into town at night.
It seems like I'm waiting with bloodshot eyes for someone to pass by.

—It is hot.
Suddenly, I see a face reflected in the window.
The eyes are bloodshot, and the face looks quite insane.

—It is just so hot.
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—And so, I don't understand.
I am just, only, hot—

turn to **326**

324

.... no, I'll keep my promise with Akiha.
Akiha told me not to go there, and I can't break a promise just because of trifling curiosity.

".... Nn."
A calm drowsiness permeates my body.
I'll keep quiet tonight and sleep.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—My throat, dry with thirst, hot.

—I can't sleep like this.
I'll go and get a drink of water.

It seems I went into town at night.
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setvar flgO + 1
turn to **326**

325

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—And so, I don't understand.
I am just, only, hot—

turn to **326**

326

"..!"

Unable to take it, I leap out of bed.

I start to breathe heavily.

I press my hand over my mouth and resist the urge to throw up.

"Wh—"

What, was that?

A dream.

It was a dream.

But, what was that?

Why did I have such a terrible dream, of killing people and drinking their blood?

I try and catch my breath.

The thirst in my throat.

The feeling of biting flesh.

The pleasure burning through my brain as I killed.

.... These things, why do they seem so real?

I can even remember perfectly the feel and sound of the heart as it was ripped out.

I continue to gasp hungrily for air.

I don't know if it was really "pleasure".

It was just excitement condensed like a bullet, fired straight into my head.

"Guh.."

My breath stops as I remember.

Then—perhaps that impact could be something called "pleasure".

"Why did I.. that kind of dream.."

I look down at my hands.

Of course, they are pure white, without a trace of red blood on them.

I am sleeping on the bed, and fresh morning sunlight shines in through the window.

.... That time.

That first meeting with the vampire Yumizuka in a back alley.. is it still in my mind?

Maybe that's why I had such a ghastly dream.

"Ow—"

My neck hurts where Yumizuka bit it.

—Those who are bitten by a vampire become vampires as well.

Unexpectedly, that common phrase pops into my head.

".... Can't be.

I'm overthinking this."

Excusing herself, Hisui enters the room.

The same figure, the same voice as always.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

Hisui speaks politely.

Since I arrived here, Hisui has brought a calm tranquility with her every morning.

As I think this, the tumult of bad dreams simply fades from my head.



".... Shiki-sama?"

Is there something wrong?"

"—Ah, no.

I was just enraptured for a moment.

.... Morning, Hisui.

This morning's just like always, huh."



"Ah—yes.

I am sorry it is no better than usual."

"I don't mean it like that.

I just feel, since you are the same as always, today is as peaceful a morning as always."

Alright!

With vigor, I throw myself out of bed.

"I'll change and go to the sitting room.

You can go now."



"Very well.

Please excuse me."

Hisui leaves and shuts the door calmly.

"Right—stupid thoughts aside, I should go to school.."

Taking charge of my thoughts, I breathe deeply.

It's ten before seven.

Like yesterday, there's no hurry today, so I'll—

Calm down a little, then head to the sitting room.

turn to **327**

I'm fine, so I'll head to the sitting room.

turn to **328**

I should get a little more rest.

turn to **329**

327

-That's right.
Having just had a bad dream, my chest's still a little jumpy.
I can't have breakfast right away.
I'll go to the sitting room in about ten minutes.



"Ah, good morning, Shiki-san.
Breakfast is already made."
Seeing my face, Kohaku-san immediately greets me with a smile.
"Yeah, morning.
Sorry, as always."
I return the greeting, and glance over at the sofa.



And there is Akiha, looking like she has something to complain about.
"Morning, Akiha.
You're.. up early again today."



"Good morning.
You're up late again, Nii-san."
"... Ahh.
It looks like you're completely recovered, Akiha; I'm glad."
She really does seem much better, mind and body.



"Ah, you were worried?
It still seems like you didn't come to check on me even once."
"Hold on, Akiha, I did want to come watch over you.
Don't you remember ordering me not to come near you?"



"That was depending on the situation.
I was having only a temporary fit so you should not have really listened to what
I said."

.... Akiha's words are unreasonable.
She seems to be in a bad mood this morning, so maybe she wants to yell at me for whatever reason.



"Shiki-sama.
If you don't eat breakfast soon, you'll be late for school."
Crap, come to think of it, I was already running late.

When I finish breakfast and return to the sitting room, Akiha is still drinking tea gracefully.
.... Waiting for me.. is that the right explanation, I wonder?
"Akiha, will you be taking a car to school by any chance?"



"Now wait a minute.
To take a car to your school would be in poor taste.
Even I can understand that."
Ahh.
I guess it was that, after all.
"Well then, shall we go?
At this time we might have to run a bit, but it can't be helped."



"Eh.. Nii-san?"

"I'm saying, let's go to school together.

I'll show you the best route to take.... Well, if you don't want to go with me, I don't really mind."



".... If you say so, I don't mind, but.."

"Then it's settled.

C'mon, you're ready, right?

We'll be late if we don't hurry."

I take Akiha's hand from the sofa, and pull her up.

"Ah.."

"Hisui, we won't need to be seen off.

I'll be back in the afternoon today too, so take care."

—And so, we come out of the mansion, descend the slope at a run, and race on to school.

Matching my speed to Akiha's, even though it takes longer, we still make it in just under fifteen minutes.

"Right, we're here.

You should just about make it to homeroom, Akiha."



"Yes, we're going to make it in plenty of time, since we ran all the way!"

—Ah.

For some reason, Akiha seems to be angry.

"What's wrong, Akiha?"

Such an angry face.

Maybe you should have come by car after all?"



"—Oh please.

Not at all.

I'm angry for a much simpler reason."

Breathing heavily, shoulders heaving, Akiha glares at me.

"Then, did I run a little too fast?"



"Yes.

Not a complete answer, but that is one of the reasons."

"Well, perhaps it's that?

Two of us running together to school, being seen and pointed at?"



"True.

Although I was really embarrassed, I don't really care about that."

—?

.... I don't get it, then.

Why is Akiha so angry?

She's not angry because she's tired, and we made it to school on time.



"Never mind, I am making an issue out of it on my own.

Thinking about it, you have no reason to get up early.. Really, I don't know what I was hoping for."

With a sigh, Akiha hangs her head.

.... I don't really get it, but I guess Akiha's saying she wanted to go to school more leisurely?



"But, I'm surprised.
I'm a fast runner, but I wasn't able to keep up with you, Nii-san.
Even though you don't do any clubs, you're quite fast, aren't you."
"... Well, vigorous activity isn't good for my body, so I can't do clubs, but I
still move around.
Actually, I'm pretty athletic."



"Yes.
I heard from Hisui, but I wasn't expecting this."



But, I still would like to refuse going to school at such a pace every morning."

Passing the main gate, we come to the entrance.
Here I part from Akiha; she goes to the fourth floor, and I go to my classroom
on the third.



"... Well then, Nii-san, I shall go to the first year classrooms.
I shall see you after school."
"What are you talking about?
There's lunch break before that.
I'll be waiting in the courtyard, so come quickly."



"Ah—yes.
I'll be waiting."

Giving a cute little bow, she runs inside.
—Then.
As if remembering something, Akiha stops and turns.



"Nii-san, this morning's race was enjoyable.
Though I wouldn't want to do it everyday, perhaps it's not so bad once in a while!"

Her breath bouncing, Akiha disappears inside.
"...."
.... Well, I guess she does have a cute side.
"How nice!
The two of you get along well, don't you?"
!?



"Ci.. Ciel-senpai!
Please don't sneak up on me like that..!"



"Yes, I'll be careful from now on."
Smiling sweetly, Senpai gazes at me happily.
".... What is it, Senpai?
If you want to say something, say it."



"No, no; I don't think I need to say anything.
You look really happy, Tohno-kun."
"—Wha..!"



"If you go into the classroom with a face like that, Inui-kun will surely tease you.
Well, Tohno-kun, I'll see you at lunch again."

Senpai walks indoors, laughing to herself.
"___"
I pinch my cheek.
".... Did I look that happy?"
.... Well, I guess I did.
Since just seeing Akiha smile made me feel real happy inside.

—Fourth period ends.

Lunch break comes, and the school fills with noise.
"—Right."
Akiha should be waiting in the courtyard.
.... Since it's Akiha, I think she probably got Kohaku-san to make her lunch,
but I should go buy something just in case.
setvar akiharegard + 2
turn to **330**

328

Occasionally I get up early so there's no need to kill time.
I'm concerned about last night's dinner incident—when Akiha's face turned pale and she withdrew to her room.
If she is feeling better, then she is probably in the sitting room.



"Oh, good morning, Shiki-san.
You are up pretty early today."
Seeing my face, Kohaku-san immediately greets me with a smile.
"Morning, Kohaku-san.
By the way, is Akiha up yet?"
"Yes, she will be here shortly.
You can have breakfast together this morning."

Kohaku-san walks happily to the kitchen.



"Nii-san...?"
"Yo, morning, Akiha.
Are you feeling better?"



"Eh—Y, yes.

Thanks to you, my spasms have passed.... Nii-san, were you worried?"

"Well, yeah.

I was worried a bit.

.... I'm sorry about last night.

I didn't know you had that condition, so I panicked and I guess I made you push yourself."



"No, I am the one who must apologize for being upset.... When I have that condition, I tend to get tunnel-visioned and my conduct becomes a little rude."

Akiha starts to look embarrassed as she recalls her actions.

".... I'm sorry, Nii-san.

I showed you an unpleasant side of me yesterday."

"That's not true.

Everyone is like then when they feel sick.

There's no need to beat yourself up over it."



"Ah... okay.
 If you say so, it makes me feel a little better."
 She must still be bothered by it because she doesn't seem relaxed.
 And,
 "Shiki-saan, Akiha-samaaa, breakfast is reaaady!"
 Kohaku-san's boundless, cheerful voice rings out.
 "... Shall we eat now?
 Come to think of it, I haven't had breakfast with you yet."



"That is true.
 After changing schools, my morning schedule has become more flexible.
 I wish we could always do this."

—Now that she mentions it, that's right.
 Since we're both going to the same school, if I get up ten minutes early, I can
 eat breakfast with Akiha.

After breakfast I return to the sitting room.
 It is twenty past seven.
 If we want to walk to school slowly, we have to leave soon.
 Akiha must be all prepared as she is sitting on the sofa, staring at the clock.

... Actually, she's been going to her school in a car this whole time.
 Maybe she intends to do so to go to my school as well.

"Akiha.
Just to make sure, but you're walking to school, right?"



"Of course.
To take a car to your school would be in poor taste.
Even I can understand that."
I see.
Then we'll be leaving together.
"Then shall we get going?
If we leave now, we can take our time."



"Eh.... Nii-san?"
"I'm saying, let's go to school together.
I'll show you the best route to take.... Well, if you don't want to go with me, I
don't really mind."



"—No, I would love to.
I have no worries if I go with you, Nii-san."
"It's decided, then.
Well, we gotta head out now."

"Hisui, you don't need to send us off.
We will be back in the afternoon, so take care."
After instructing Hisui, I leave the mansion with Akiha.

Matching her pace, we arrive leisurely at school.
It's just before seven fifty.
We have plenty of time before homeroom.

"Right on time.
We could probably even leave at seven thirty and still make it—uh, Akiha?"



"....."
Akiha looks at the school gate as if there was something odd about it.
"What is it?
Do you see something weird?"



"Ah—no, it's nothing.

Yesterday I came before everyone else was arriving, so this is the first time I've seen all the students arriving in a clutter like this."

.... I see.

She's always been at a boarding school so many students walking into school like this would be unfamiliar.

"Stupid, why are you being so reserved?

Starting yesterday, you became one of us.

There's no need to hold back."



"....."

Is she holding something back?

She doesn't seem really lively.

"What's wrong, Akiha?

You don't look too well."



"... That, that can't be helped, can it?
I thought just going to school with you would be enough, but such a normal lifestyle, I—"

Akiha averts her gaze, looking sad.
".....?"
I don't know what she's trying to say.
Just that we kind of stand out standing here in front of the gate.
The students who arrive all stare at Akiha and I'm getting a little embarrassed.
"C'mon, let's go inside for now."
I take Akiha's hand and pass through the gate.

We go through the gate and head for the entrance.
We split up here as Akiha has to go to the fourth floor while I am on the third floor.



"Well then, Nii-san, I shall go to the first year classrooms.
I shall see you after school."
"What are you talking about?
There's lunch break before that.
I'll be waiting in the courtyard, so come quickly."



"Ah——Yes, I will be there."

Giving a cute little bow, she runs inside.

"——"

.... well, I guess she does have a cute side.

"How nice!

The two of you get along well, don't you?"

!?



"Ci.. Ciel-senpai!

Please don't sneak up on me like that..!"



"Yes, I'll be careful from now on."

Smiling sweetly, Senpai gazes at me happily.

".... What is it, Senpai?
If you want to say something, say it."



"No, no; I don't think I need to say anything.
You look really happy, Tohno-kun."
"—Wha..!"



"If you go into the classroom with a face like that, Inui-kun will surely tease you.
Well, Tohno-kun, I'll see you at lunch again."

Senpai walks indoors, laughing to herself.
"____"

I pinch my cheek.

".... Did I look that happy?"

.... well, I guess I did.

Since just seeing Akiha smile made me feel real happy inside.

—Fourth period ends.

Lunch break comes, and the school fills with noise.

"—Right."

Akiha should be waiting in the courtyard.

.... Since it's Akiha, I think she probably got Kohaku-san to make her lunch,
but I should go buy something just in case.

setvar akiharegard + 1
turn to **330**

329

—That's true.
Thanks to my nightmare, I'm still a little unsettled.
I have a little time, so I should rest.

At some point, I realize that I've slept in.
I shake my g.oggy head and look around.

And then,



"Shiki-sama."
"Uwaa!"
Hisui is standing right by my bed looking into my face.
"Wha, wha—"
"Shiki-sama, is the time acceptable?
It is past eight o'clock."
"—Eh?"

I look at the clock.
Certainly, the arm is pointing towards eight.
"Crap, I overslept....!"
I jump up from bed.
Flustered, I start to change and then realize Hisui is still here.
"Hisui.
Um, sorry, but.."



"I understand.
Please go to the sitting room this time."

Hisui exits my room.... Her eyes were obviously showing she was upset.
"... Well, of course.
She already came to wake me up, so for me to fall asleep again like that...."
Ruminating to myself, I quickly change.

.... I manage to make it to school.
First period has started a while ago and no one is at the gate.
I give a sigh as I enter the school building.

—Fourth period ends.

Lunch break comes, and the school fills with noise.
"—Right."
Akiha should be waiting in the courtyard.
.... Since it's Akiha, I think she probably got Kohaku-san to make her lunch,
but I should go buy something just in case.
turn to **330**

330

—And there,



"Yo, Tohno.
You're late."



"Indeed; you are rather late, Nii-san."

—For some reason, it seems that Arihiko has come to the courtyard ahead of me, and was keeping Akiha company.

"... I was wondering where you've been all morning, Arihiko.
I guess you've been here."



"Oh!
I knew if I waited here after fourth period it would be worth it!"
Arihiko boasts, puffing out his chest.
... If he's that happy, I guess I can't complain.

"So, Akiha.
What'll we do for lunch today?
Did you have Kohaku-san make you a boxed lunch?"



"Eh?
... a 'boxed lunch'..?"
"... Never mind.
I shouldn't have asked such a common thing."

From the bread I bought, I offer her the best sandwich and a strawberry milk.
"Here, today's lunch.
It's better than yesterday, so eat it in comfort."



"... Alright."
Akiha timidly accepts the sandwiches and strawberry milk.
... I wonder uneasily whether Akiha will ever get used to having lunch at our school.



"Aw, nice, nice!

Hey, Tohno, nothing for me?"

".... Well, yeah, for some reason there is."

I hand him a sausage roll and a suitable drink.



"Hey, what is this!

'Balsam Pear Drink'?

This stuff isn't even fit for animals to drink!"

"Can't be helped, the rest were all gone already.

Well, there were some Cactus Mixer's, but that's not what you would call a drink."

".... Muh.

I guess you still had a bit of compassion, Tohno."

"I have loads for anyone but you.

This makes us even for yesterday."

Though he clicks his tongue in irritation, Arihiko puts the straw into the drink pack happily.

"I got a napkin for you too, Akiha.."



"..!"

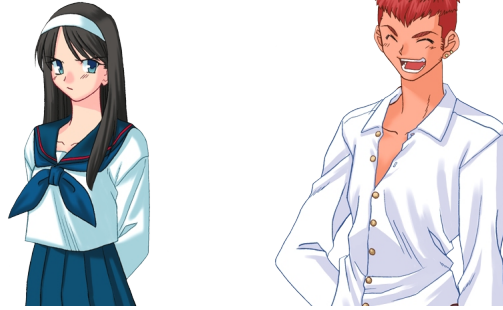
Wha, what a shock.
Why's Akiha making such a face?
"Wha, what is it, Akiha?
Is there a bug on you?"



".... It's nothing at all.
I just thought, Nii-san and Inui-san seem to be really close."



"Hahaha!
Akiha-chan, you're giving us too much credit.
Tohno and I are best friends and bitter enemies, so just call us pals!"



Arihiko laughs happily, and Akiha looks at me as if wanting to say something.

—And then.



"Ah, you were all here, then?"
Boxed lunch in hand, Senpai appears.



"Ah, it's Ciel-senpai!
Today's a jackpot, right, Tohno?"
"..."

.... Sorry, Arihiko, I can't be as easily pleased as that.
That's because—



Akiha has a really scary expression right now.



"May I join you all for lunch?"
Arihiko nods eagerly.
I don't mind either, but—



"No."
For some reason, Akiha refuses directly.

The air in the courtyard is cold.
It's not going to be warm in October, but it's still quite cold.
Arihiko, who until now knew only the ladylike Akiha, gapes silently.
"... Ahh."

Well, as an older brother, it would be bad if I didn't respond to what Akiha just said.

"What're you talking about, Akiha.
That was rude, even for a joke."



"Nii-san, I am not joking.
I meant what I said."
"Wha—what are you saying!
You've only just met Senpai!
You've no reason to dislike her, so why..!?"



"I don't like what I don't like.
She and I are entirely incompatible."



You feel the same, don't you?

You know there's no way we can get along, don't you, Senpai?"



"No, no, not at all.
Certainly we seem to be incompatible types, but I think I can somehow restrain myself."
"—Erk."
Arihiko and I pull ourselves back.
.... Amazing.
Akiha spoiling for a fight is amazing, and Senpai's smiling face turning it aside is also amazing.



"Hm.
So, you're suggesting we merely counterbalance each other, then?"



"To sum it up, yes.

My business is not with you, Akiha-san, but with Tohno-kun and Inui-kun."

Sparks crackle between the two of them.
It's like a face-off between a dragon and a tiger, as they used to say.

.... At last, with the allegedly incompatible Ciel-senpai and Akiha, lunch began.



"But, I never knew Tohno-kun had a sister almost his age.
I always thought Tohno-kun was an only child."
".... Huh?
Didn't I mention that I had a younger sister before?"



"Yes, I heard about a little sister living alone in the Tohno mansion."

..?
What, so she already knew about Akiha?



"I did not know that Nii-san's friends were like you, either.
When did you join this school, Ciel-senpai?"



"Mm?
Akiha-chan, Senpai's been here for three years.
It's a shame that she graduates this year."



"Really.
She doesn't seem accustomed to the school uniform yet, so I thought she might
have transferred from another school, like me."



"Ah, yes.. I really wanted to wear a uniform like Akiha-san's.
Akiha-san, is that the uniform of your last school?"



"Yes.
Since the uniform here isn't to my liking, I wear the uniform from my old school."

Akiha says such an outrageous thing casually.
.... I see.
I had assumed the uniform simply hadn't been made yet, but it seems she never intended to wear our school's uniform at all.



"Ahh.
Well, I think this one suits your level of activity well.
What do you think, Tohno-kun?"
"Eh?"

Uh, about what?"



"About Akiha-san's uniform.
Which one would suit her better?"

"... Which one suits her better, huh.."

I would have to say—

Akiha's current uniform suits her better.

turn to **331**

Our school's uniform would suit her better.

turn to **332**

331

".... I wonder.
I think Akiha looks good the way she is now.
Since she has such beautiful hair, I don't think bright colors would suit her."



"Hmm, that's rare, Tohno praising a woman's appearance like this.
First time, isn't it?"
"Shut up.
That's just what I think.
I'm saying the sailor suit suits her so I don't want her in a blazer."



"Hmm." Arikiko grins at me.
"—Ah."
.... Damn it, Arikiko got me.



Glancing over, Akiha seems to be silently looking the other way.



"I see.. No wonder Tohno has no eye for women.
Because, after looking at Akiha-chan every day, the girls at our school must
hardly compaaaaahhhhh!?"



"Ah, I'm sorry, Inui-kun.
My hand slipped."
Ciel-senpai laughs gently as she drives her elbow into Akihiko's side at a sharp
angle.

.... Man.
I have to live through this stressful situation for almost ten more minutes.....

setvar akiharegard + 1

turn to **333**

332

"I think our school's uniform would match her well.
See, Akiha already looks mature enough, so you don't have to force her to wear
such a prim and proper—"



"—Uh, well, maybe sweeping away the old image and a fresh change might
be nice."

.... Danger!
Danger!
It would be better if I just don't force myself to say things too much.



"Hm?
Is that how it is?
Well, Akiha-chan is a beauty, so I think even in a blazer she would look good."



"That's surprising.
Do you not like our school uniform, Inui-kun?"
"Hm, it's not that I don't like it, it just isn't sexy enough, or at least it's kind of bland.
When you get girls at the level they are in our school all in the same uniform, everyone will start to look the same and iiioooooooww!?"



"Oh, I'm sorry Inui-kun.
My hand slipped."
Ciel-senpai laughs gently as she drives her elbow into Arihiko's side at a sharp angle.

..... This is depressing.
I have to live through this stressful situation for almost ten more minutes.....

setvar akiharegard - 1
turn to **333**

333

School ends.
Let's go meet Akiha at the first year classrooms.

... But just as I leave the classroom, I run into her.



"Ah, Nii-san.
Are you going somewhere?"
"No, I was just on my way to get you.
What about you?
Are you on your way anywhere?"



"No.
I just thought I might go home with you, Nii-san, so I came here.."
"I see.
It's lucky we didn't miss each other.
Well then, let's go.
Kohaku-san and Hisui are waiting."



"You're right.
Let's go home, Nii-san."

"Oh, that's right, there's a question I've been wanting to ask you, Akiha."



"A question for me..?"
"Yeah.
Why did you have that dislike for Senpai?
Did you know her already, by any chance?"



"No, I met her for the first time yesterday.
My dislike for her is simply psychological, so you don't need to worry about it."
"Psychological?
What do you mean?"



"I mean, I can't control how I feel.
It's the same as how you felt about father, so please don't worry about it."
"—Hold on, Akiha.
I just disliked the old man, I didn't hate him."



"I don't hate her, either.
.... I suppose I exaggerated things today.
I'll reflect on it, so please look leniently upon the affair at lunchtime."
".... Right.
I guess that's okay, then."

.... Well, I guess it might not be a problem.
Ciel-senpai often comes by at lunch, so if relations between Akiha and her are bad, it'd be a problem.
At this rate, with Akiha saying things like this, me and Arihiko might not end up on pins and needles on the sidelines—

"—Ahh."
I toss my bag on the desk, and sit down on the bed.
Well, what should I do?
It seems Akiha has lessons, and as soon as we got back, she went somewhere by car.
.... That's right, Hisui and Kohaku-san were busily walking about too.

Go and help Hisui.

turn to **334**

Go and help Kohaku-san.

turn to **335**

334

—That's right.
Since I'm always in her debt, I'll go and help Hisui out.

"I'm home, Hisui, You look busy; what are you doing?"



"Ah—welcome home, Shiki-sama.
I am going to take these to Makihisa-sama's room."
Hisui is surrounded by dozens of books.
Though each of them is light, a dozen of them is pretty heavy.
There must be at least fifty books around her.
It's not too much, but I don't think Hisui's slender arms are up to the task.
"The old man's room, huh.. that's on the west wing of the first floor, isn't it?"
Saying so, I pick up a pile of books.



"You must not, Shiki-sama.
I will take care of this, so you should go and rest in your room."
"It's fine, it's fine.
If I just lay around in my room my body'll go dull, so I thought I'd repay you
by helping out a bit."
"However—"
".... But these are heavy, aren't they?
What's Akiha thinking, making you do this kind of heavy labor?"



"Ah—"

"You go on to the old man's room; I'll bring the books, you can sort them out once they're there.

Everyone should work where they'll be the most use, right?"



".... Yes.

Well then, please do, Shiki-sama."

Apologizing, Hisui goes up the stairs.
—Alright.
Now I've just got to get this mountain of books up to the second floor.

"Ohh.. this is the old man's room, huh?
Hisui, is it okay if I take a look at some of the books?"



"Yes.
I think it is alright if they are not locked up."

Hisui is placing the books onto a bookshelf.
She's busily going back and forth, arranging the books by genre.
"... What does she mean by locked up?
Maybe there's a lock on the desk drawer or something."
I take the handle of the drawer on the old man's desk.
As I pull, I feel a click.
"She's right, it is locked."
The old man's already dead, so what is it protecting?
"——"

Hisui isn't looking.
There's a letter opener on his desk.
It's the perfect opportunity.
"....."
I lower my glasses a little, and look at the desk.
"—There."
Silently, I cut the lock.
"—What, only papers?"
There's only a bundle of old papers in the drawer.
I take out a sheet and look at it.

"Huh?
This is.. our family tree."

There's no mistake.
After Tohno MAKIHISA, the names Tohno SHIKI and Tohno AKIHA are written.
But there's—
"... No way.
That old man adopted a son ten years ago.. ah, but he passed away shortly thereafter."
Ten years ago, that would mean I was just in elementary school.
That long ago, it's only natural that I wouldn't remember.
"But, the heads of the household have had pretty short lifespans.
My old man died before he was fifty, and before that, before thirty in an accident.. Wow, before that, eighteen years of age, suicide..!?"

—No, wait a second.
No matter how you look at it, this is strange.

Looking through the family tree, all members of the Tohno household have died strangely.
Madness.

Accidents.
Murder.
Disappearances.
Still birth.
... Not one of them lived a long life or died peacefully.

"Wha....."

This entire document is filled with horrible fates.
Even worse, most of the deaths are death by madness.
Taking one's own life.

"Ah—"

The light seems to fade.
I feel as if blood is collecting in the back of my head.
My limbs feel weak, and breathing becomes impossible.



"Shiki-sama..!"
Hisui.. Hisui runs toward me.
—Somehow I hold myself up, grabbing onto a bookshelf.



"Shiki-sama!
Hold on, Shiki-sama..!"
Hisui's worrying voice.
But her hands never touch my body.
"It's alright.. I just, felt a little sick for a moment, so.."



"Shiki-sama, please do not push yourself..!
Please, sit down.
As pale as your face is, you should not be trying to stand..!"
.... That's, new.
Hisui is becoming frantic, calling out to me.
"Yeah.. I'm okay.. so.."
I try to regain my senses.
But the dizziness doesn't fade.

My vision flickers red and black.
White.
I gaze at the nape of Hisui's neck, a terribly warm white.
"—Ah."
It's captivating.
If my body could move properly, I would seize Hisui's body and—

The black vision from my anemia all of sudden turns deep red.
Hisui's, white neck.
Last night's crimson dream.

—From the night of killing.
Painful pleasure, as if my heart would rip itself out.

"Kuhh..!"
Unable to bear it, I pull back from Hisui.



"Shiki-sama..?"

"No.. it's alright.. I'm alright, so, just leave me alone."



"I refuse.

You do not seem to realize the state of your body, Shiki-sama.

With.. with your body like this, I cannot leave you alone."

And Hisui approaches.

—Bad.

This is, bad.

If she comes within reach of my hands, I'm afraid I don't know what I'll do.

"I'm fine, so go, Hisui..!"



"I cannot listen to you.

Shiki-sama, please, calm down."

.... So, stop.
It's dangerous if you come near me.
I told you not to come near me.
Why.
Why won't this woman listen to me?

—Why does she get in my way.
Why does it never go the way I want..!

"Shut up..!
Don't you understand I'm telling you to get away, Hisui!"

"Ah—"

A dull, thumping sound.
Hisui is thrown against the bookshelves, her face distorted in pain.

"Ah—"
.... Her expression causes my sanity to return.
The dizziness fades quickly.
After just a moment, all dizziness disappears, leaving only a feeling of guilt.
"—I'm sorry.
What was.. I.."



"———"

Hisui looks down, not meeting my gaze.
"—Hisui, I'm—I'm sorry, I don't know why I did such a thing.."



"I apologize.
 I disobeyed your orders, and caused you discomfort."
 "... No, I'm the one who should apologize.
 I did something horrible to you.."



"Shiki-sama, please return to your room.
 You are tired; if you rest, I believe you will recover immediately."
 "___"
 Hisui will not show me her face.
 "... I understand; I'll go back to my room.
 I'm sorry, Hisui."
 There's no answer.
 I leave the room behind, being crushed by self-loathing.

—After dinner, I return to my room.

I fall on the bed, and remember Hisui's face.
 "___"
 I don't understand.
 Why I felt that way, and why I did that.
 Back then..
 Looking at Hisui's neck, I was lusting.
 Just like in last night's dream, I wanted to bite into her neck.
 But, I can't even think about that right now.

Last night's dream, and myself a while ago.
I feel like there's someone inside me that isn't me.

"__"

I touch my neck.

Those who are bitten by a vampire become vampires in turn, they say.

".... That's stupid.

I'm walking around in the daytime, after all."

.... Yes, it's impossible.

It was just dizziness and my fading consciousness contributing to the imagination.

What happened with Yumizuka is burnt into my mind, so I think I just remember it when I suffer from anemia.

"Like Hisui said, maybe I'm just tired."

.... Perhaps.

I should hurry up and get to sleep, and rest my tired body.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—My body, once aroused,
can't be calmed with something like sleep.

—So.
Tonight too, I shall relieve my thirst.

It seems I went into town at night.
It seems like I'm waiting with bloodshot eyes for someone to pass by.

—Again.

Suddenly, I see a face reflected in the window.
The eyes are bloodshot, and the face looks quite insane.

—This dream, again.

It seems I found my prey.
I bring it down without a chance to scream, without it even realizing it has died.

—I'm seeing this nightmare again.

Taking the dead body, and the sound of biting into the throat.
A gurgling sound.
Drinking the blood flowing out of the rended neck, my thirst is quenched.

—The same scene as last night.
Getting bored with just blood, I take the hand of the dead body and bite off the fingers one by one.

—The same scene as last night.
Getting bored with just the fingers, I take the limbs of the dead body, and bite them off one by one.

—The same scene as last night.
Then,
an obstruction appears.
I throw the dead body aside and jump.
Someone.
Someone is watching me.

—Is it different from last night..?

Something like a vast nail is flying through the air.
To dodge it, I leap aside.
I run up the side of a building, and jump from rooftop to rooftop.

—The figure in black chases the vampire.
From rooftop to rooftop.
From shadow to shadow.
The figure follows.

—It can't be helped.
It can't be helped, it murmurs.
And tonight's meal ended.

"Shiki-sama—?"

—A voice.

"Please get a hold of yourself, I will bring you a drink right away..!"

—The sound of running footsteps.

"Ah—"
I awaken from the nightmare.
"... My own room."
I am definitely in my own room.
Just lying in bed, and morning has come.

.... I saw that dream again.
The dream of sucking someone's blood.
Though I know it's just a dream, it still feels terribly real.
My hands retain the feel of ripping meat; my nose, the smell of fresh blood..
"—What's happening to me?"
I touch my neck gently.
.... Yumizuka's bite marks are long gone.
I'm still a normal human being.
I don't want to drink people's blood, and I don't have a problem with the sun.
"—Ah."
No.
Yesterday, I..
What did I think when I saw Hisui's neck?
—Her white neck.
From the bottom of my heart, I wanted to drink the blood flowing in there—
turn to **336**

335

—Alright.
I'm always in her debt, so I'll go help Kohaku-san.

"Huh....?"
I don't see her anywhere in the courtyard.
I glance around.
For just an instant, I see the color of her kimono in the forest.
"Is that where the detached building is?"
.... After a little internal debate, I follow after Kohaku-san.

Kohaku-san continues and enters inside.
I would be pretty stupid if I came all the way here only to go back, so I force myself to go inside.



"Shiki-san?
Why did you come here?"
"Um, well—I was thinking maybe I should give you a hand.
Am I in the way?"



"Shiki-san, I am happy you feel that way, but I didn't come here to work.
I only came here to check the electricity according to Akiha-sama's orders."
"Eh?"

Electricity?
This place is still used?"



"Yes, this is the only room with electricity.
This building is still maintained at a level for people to live in.
The bath is still able to be used and there are futons ready."
"Really?
But this place hasn't been used for a while, right?
Why is it maintained like that?"



"Let's see, maybe Akiha-sama is just fond of this place.
A long time ago, this was where Makihisa-sama's adopted child used to live."

—Huh?
Makihisa.... my old man, adopted a child.. a long time ago?
".... Wait a sec, Kohaku-san.
My old man adopted a child?"



"Oh, you don't remember?

About ten years ago, he brought a child here.

His parents both died in an accident, so he adopted the child."

"That—happened?"

"Yes.

But two years later, the child passed away.

It was a trivial accident, but a lot of the servants began to say that the Tohno family was cursed."

—Wait a minute.

Something about her words seems scary.

Just hearing them, my vision starts to warp.

It's like the whole room is made entirely of dissolving sugar.

"Ko, Kohaku, san."

A child adopted ten years ago.

Two years later, the child died.

In other words, eight years ago.. That's when I had my accident and was sent to the hospital.

—Accident.

What kind of accident was it?

An accident that seriously wounded me.

An accident, that the adopted child was killed in?

A hot summer day.

—I can't remember.

All I know is at that time, my arms seemed to be soaked in blood—

"Kohaku, san.
You said 'cursed'?"



"No, it isn't anything important.
It is just that a lot of the members of the Tohno family have died young.
Such as in accidents, or suicide, or illness; a curse that does not allow them a
natural death.
Well, that was the rumor, anyway."
"—Suicide.... what?"



"Yes.
Whatever the case, the members of the Tohno family.... mostly male, carried
some mental illness and committed suicide when they became adults.
These are just stubborn rumors, but it is said some of them were murderers
before the war."

.... Mental illness?
.... Murderers?
.... Such as, seeing dreams of killing people every night?
.... Such as, feeling a sense of longing as I see dreams of killing people every
night?
"Kohaku-san, that—"



"Oh, I'm very sorry.
 Those are just dark rumors about the Tohno family."
 "No, that's fine.
 It's okay.... could you tell me in more detail, Kohaku-san?"
 "... I do not mind, but I do not necessarily know all the details.
 Just that, well.... Makihisa-sama did have that kind of air about him."
 "My old man—my old man did?"

Blurring.
 My vision whirls around.



"Yes.
 I took care of Makihisa-sama's condition two years before he passed away.
 While you were living with the Arima family, Makihisa-sama would become
 very depressed and I would have to prepare his medicine to calm him."
 "Medicine to calm him—was my old man that bad, Kohaku-san?"
 "... Yes.
 It would not be uncommon for him to walk into the garden at night and kill the
 pet dogs and cats, or to hurt his own body."

—Wha-
 What is this?
 That's pretty much crazy.
 As crazy as I am in my dreams.

.... No, that is backwards.
Am I crazy just like my old man?



"Shiki-san....!?"
.... I hear Kohaku-san's voice.
I—don't know when it happened, but I'm on my knees on the tatami floor.
"Shiki-san, you look terrible.
If you are feeling poorly, you should rest in your room....!"
Kohaku-san says this as she grabs my shoulder.
With her help, I can stand.
".... Yeah.... I'm fine, so—"
I am somehow able to focus again.
But I am still dizzy.

In the red and white swirl of my vision,
white.
Kohaku.. san's.. terribly warm.. looking neck.

"—Ah."
How captivating.
If my body could move properly, I would seize Kohaku's body and—

The black vision from my anemia all of sudden turns deep red..
Kohaku's white neck.
Last night's crimson dream.

—The nighttime killings.
Painful pleasure, as if my heart would rip itself out.

"Gg—!"
Unable to bear it, I pull away from Kohaku-san.



"Shiki-san...?"

"No—I'm fine—I'm fine, so leave me alone."



"That won't do.

If you collapse here, Akiha-sama will get very angry.

In the first place, you look like you are in a lot of pain."

Kohaku-san says this and draws closer.

—This isn't good.

It's scary.

If she comes within reach of my hands, I'm afraid I don't know what I'll do.

"—I'm fine, just leave me alone, Kohaku.. san.."



"I can't.
Shiki-san, please calm down."

.... Please, stop.
It's dangerous if you come near me.
I told you not to come near me.
Why?
Why won't this woman listen to me?

—Why?

Why are you getting in my way?

Why are you like this,
Not doing what I want you to....!?

"Shut up....!
Don't you understand I'm telling you to get away, Kohaku!"

"Kya—!"
Thud, a thick sound.
Kohaku-san slams into the wall, her face distorting in pain.

"Ah——"

.... Her expression causes my sanity to return.
The dizziness fades quickly.
After just a moment, all dizziness disappears, leaving only a feeling of guilt.
"—Sorry.
What was.. I."



"It is okay, please do not worry about it.
I only provoked you when you were in a bad mood."

She gives her usual smile.

"You are no longer pale and seem to have recovered.
Shall we continue our conversation?"

"No—that's enough for today.

Sorry Kohaku-san.

There's, something wrong with me."

"Oh?

You are a man, so I don't think it is unnatural to be a little rough.

In fact, I think you are usually too calm, Shiki-san."

She says that, smiling.

"....."

Seeing that smile makes my chest hurt.

.... Kohaku-san trusts me.

But what was I about to do to her just earlier—?

".... Like you say, Kohaku-san, I will go back to my room.

I really am sorry about earlier."

I say this and run away.

I leave the detached building behind, being crushed by self-loathing.

—After dinner, I return to my room.

I collapse on my bed and remember Kohaku-san's face.

"—"

I don't understand.

Why I felt that way, and why I did that.

Back then..

Looking at Kohaku-san's neck, I was lusting.

Just like in last night's dream, I wanted to bite into her neck.

But, I can't even think about that right now.

Last night's dream, and myself a while ago.

I feel like there's someone inside me that isn't me.

"—"

I touch my neck.

Those who are bitten by a vampire become vampires in turn, they say.

".... That's stupid.

I'm walking around in the daytime, after all."

.... Yes, it's impossible.

It was just dizziness and my fading consciousness contributing to the imagination.

What happened with Yumizuka is burnt into my mind, so I think I just remember it when I suffer from anemia.

"Like Kohaku-san said, maybe I'm just tired."

.... Perhaps.

I should hurry up and get to sleep, and rest my tired body.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—My body, once aroused,
can't be calmed with something like sleep.

—So.
Tonight too, I shall relieve my thirst.

It seems I went into town at night.
It seems like I'm waiting with bloodshot eyes for someone to pass by.

—Again.

Suddenly, I see a face reflected in the window.
The eyes are bloodshot, and the face looks quite insane.

—This dream, again.

It seems I found my prey.
I bring it down without a chance to scream, without it even realizing it has died.

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Then,
an obstruction appears.
I throw the dead body aside and jump.
Someone.
Someone is watching me.

—Is it different from last night..?

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To dodge it, I leap aside.
I run up the side of a building, and jump from rooftop to rooftop.

—The figure in black chases the vampire.
From rooftop to rooftop.
From shadow to shadow.
The figure follows.

—It can't be helped.
It can't be helped, it murmurs.
And tonight's meal ended.

"Shiki-sama—?"

—A voice.

"Please get a hold of yourself, I will bring you a drink right away..!"

—The sound of running footsteps.

"Ah—"
I awaken from the nightmare.
"... My own room."
I am definitely in my own room.
Just lying in bed, and morning has come.

.... I saw that dream again.
The dream of sucking someone's blood.
Though I know it's just a dream, it still feels terribly real.
My hands retain the feel of ripping meat; my nose, the smell of fresh blood..
"—What's happening to me?"
I touch my neck gently.
.... Yumizuka's bite marks are long gone.
I'm still a normal human being.
I don't want to drink people's blood, and I don't have a problem with the sun.
"—Ah."
No.
Yesterday, I
What did I think when I saw Kohaku-san's neck?

—Her white neck.
From the bottom of my heart, I wanted to drink the blood flowing in there—
turn to **336**

336

"—What am I thinking?"

No, I'm just tired.

I still haven't forgotten what happened with Yumizuka.

I'm not a vampire.

I'm still a normal human being.

But, there's a part of me that wanders in search of blood every night.

So, maybe..

It's that I don't notice, but I'm already at a point where I can't go back—



"Hisui—?"

Hisui enters with an urgent expression.



".... Excuse me.

You are awake, are you not, Shiki-sama?"

Hisui bows quietly.

.... Her pure figure is so much the opposite of my earlier dream, it makes the uneasiness in my chest go away.

"No, don't worry, I was up already.

.... Morning, Hisui.

Thanks for coming to wake me up again today."



"... Yes.
Good morning."
Bowing again, Hisui approaches the bed.



"I have brought you a drink.
If you are feeling poorly, please take it."
Hisui presents a drink on a silver tray.
The tray also has some kind of medicine on it.
"...?
What is it, Hisui?
You've never come with medicine before."



"... Shiki-sama, are you feeling alright?"

As you seemed to be caught up in a terrible nightmare and your face appeared pale, I brought you some medicine."

"—I seemed to be having a nightmare?"



"Yes.

It also seemed that your body was very hot, so I had Nee-san prescribe something for a fever.

Perhaps there was no need?"

"Of course not, thank you for worrying."

I swallow the medicine and water she offers.
Ignoring the medicine, I'm grateful for the water.
As Hisui says, my body is very hot, and my throat is terribly dry.
Even though it's only pure water, it tastes great.



"If you are feeling better, please go to the dining room.

If you are not, please take today off."

"No, I won't skip school.

I can't take a day off just because of this."



"... But, your face still appears pale, Shiki-sama."

"I'll be fine."

Anyway, our school has tomorrow off.

Since I'll have tomorrow off, I can push it a little today, can't I?"



"....."

Hisui glances down, looking like she wants to say something.

Do I really look that bad today?

"Hisui, just one question."

Was I really having a nightmare?"



"—Yes."

I do not know when you returned, but you were terribly tired and went straight to sleep.

When I came to wake you in the morning and opened the curtains, you seemed

to be in pain, and your breathing was rough."
 I see.
 A dream like that would cause me to be in pain.. eh?
 Just hang on a second.
 "—Hisui.
 What did you just say?"



"That you were in poor condition since this morning."
 "No, before that!
 I came back?
 Where from!?"
 "—I do not know.
 Nee-san told me she saw you leave while she was patrolling the mansion."
 "... I, left..?"
 "Yes.
 Nee-san and I patrol the mansion every three hours.
 While Nee-san was doing the rounds at midnight last night, she saw you leaving
 the mansion."
 "Wha.."
 "Since it seems you were able to return before morning, Nee-san has not told
 Akiha-sama of this.
 As Nee-san is indulgent of you, Shiki-sama, it will surely remain that way."

"——"

Wha—what is, this?
 I went outside?
 That can't be.
 I was sound asleep this whole time, having a dream.
 Having such a.. lively.. drea.. m.
 "Ah—"
 But, this is weird.
 Dreams are forgotten the moment you wake up, so why do I still remember all
 the details of the dream so perfectly..



"Shiki-sama..?
Your face still appears pale.
How are you feeling?"
"Ah, yeah, I'm fine.
I'm fine, so go ahead, Hisui.. It's okay, I'll go right away."



"I understand.
I shall wait for you in the dining room."

Closing the door behind her, Hisui leaves the room.

".... Yeah, I'm fine.
No problems at all.
I'm just, fine.."
I say it over and over again, trying to persuade myself.

To get to the dining room, I have to pass through the sitting room.
.... It's depressing.
To be honest, I don't want to see anyone right now.
Hisui and Kohaku-san, and.. and Akiha.
I'm not sure I can act normally.

I'll—

Still, I can at least say good morning to Akiha.

turn to **337**

I can't. Let's go back to my room.

turn to **338**

337

Still, I have to at least say good morning.
Avoiding Akiha because of this little thing will be confirming something is wrong with me.



"Good morning, Nii-san."

"Ah—"

As soon as I enter the sitting room, Akiha greets me with a smile.

"... Ahh.

Morning, Akiha."



"Morning, Akiha'..?"

What's wrong, Nii-san?

You seem really depressed."

"I just had a bit of a bad dream.

But you seem to be in a good mood; did something nice happen?"



"Yes, quite.
You got up early.
Perhaps we might be able to go to school leisurely today?
Having time in the morning always puts me in a good mood."
"—I see.
Well, I'm glad, Akiha."
As I answer, my chest hurts.

I..
I might not be a person that deserves to be smiled at like that.
"You should go ahead, then.
You'll end up running if you wait for me."



"Hm?
Did you say something, Nii-san?"
"I mean, if you like free time in the mornings, you should just go ahead.
You don't really need to accompany me and I don't really have time to keep
you company either.
If you're ready, you should just go on ahead."



"Eh.. well, that's true, but I.. "
"But what?
You're saying you can't go to school on your own?
Give me a break, you're not a child.
We're not that young anymore."



"_____"
Akiha stands up from the sofa.



"Nii-san.
Were you serious about what you just said?"
"... Not really.
It's just what I thought."

Her teeth grit.

Akiha looks down, her shoulders shaking.

"Akiha.

You'll be late if you don't go soon."



"Yeah, I know!

After all, I don't want to go with you and be late!"

"Right.

So go on.... I'm not in the mood to be with anyone right now."



"_ _"

Akiha rushes out.

"_ _ _ _"

.... What am I doing?

I didn't mean to say that, so why—



"Shiki-san, that was horrible!"

"—Kohaku-san?"

"Oh, I completely misjudged you!

Why did you say such things to Akiha-sama!?"

"... I know.

Even I didn't plan on turning her down."

"No, you do not understand anything!

You don't know how much Akiha-sama was looking forward to this while waiting for you up until now."

"?"

—Waiting for me.. you mean this morning?"

"No.

Akiha-sama told me not to tell you, but I can't bear this anymore!"

"Listen, Shiki-san.

Now, Akiha-sama eats breakfast with you normally, but it was a real hassle before she transferred."

... I think the ladies' academy Akiha used to go to was in the next prefecture.

"—Next prefecture...?"

Hold on.

That's more than an hour's worth of driving.



"You finally noticed.

To begin with, Akiha-sama would not have made it to school unless she left here at six.

Nevertheless, she overlooked that because she was looking forward to eating breakfast with you."

"... Looking forward to?"

Why?

She complains every time she sees me."

"Because Akiha-sama isn't honest.

If you ever woke up on time, I do not think she would have any complaints."



"But all you did was sleep in and didn't eat with her even once. But Akiha-sama told me just seeing your face in the morning is good enough, and she never told us to go wake you up."



"—Now do you understand?"

If you do, can you please apologize to Akiha-sama about earlier?"

"——"

..... I was going to do that already, but..

"I don't get it.

What do you want me to do, Kohaku-san?"



"No, don't think too hard about it.
You just act normally.
But Akiha-sama isn't direct, so I just wanted you to be more considerate of
her."
"....."
Act normally?
I think that's the most difficult thing for me to do right now.



"Oh, and all this is a secret.
If Akiha-sama finds out I told you this, I will get in trouble."

Kohaku-san heads into the dining room with a smile on her face.
"....."
"Come on, Shiki-san; if you don't hurry up and eat, you'll really be late.."
I can hear Kohaku-san's voice from the dining room.
I head into the dining room, hiding my embarrassed face with my hand.

I arrive at the school gates just in time.
Running all the way, I somehow escape being late.

—Then,
I'm patted on the shoulder from behind.



"Good morning.
Just made it today, huh Tohno-kun?"
"... Senpai."



"And it seems you're not with Akiha-san.
Perhaps you overslept today?"
"... Uh, something like that.
I had a bit of a fight with Akiha."



"Oh, it's no good for siblings to fight.
Tohno-kun, you're the older brother, so you should go and apologize later."
"... You're right.
We're in the same school, so I should go and apologize before lunchtime.
On top of that, it was my fault to begin with."
I sigh.

Certainly my problems with Akiha are important, but I should worry about my own troubles for now.

Last night's dream.

Even though I knew I was asleep, I seemed to have wandered out at night.



".... Tohno-kun?

What's wrong?

Are you worried about something?"

Senpai stares at me with concern.

I'm grateful for her concern, but I can't rely on her for this.

"Eh?

.... Ah, just a bit.

But it's my problem, so I'll work it out.

Thanks for worrying, Senpai."



".... Really.

Well, if it's something you can't solve on your own, I'm always here to help.

I'd be happy to do whatever I can."

"Yeah, if I'm in real trouble, I'll ask you, then."

.... As I speak, the morning bell begins to ring.

"—Ack!

Well, Senpai, later!"



"Yep.
I'll see you at lunch."

Leaving Senpai standing leisurely as the first bell rings, I rush in the doorway.

Second period ends.
.... If I'm going to go apologize to Akiha about this morning, now would be the right time.

Go to Akiha's classroom.

turn to **339**

No, I don't need to go and see her.

turn to **340**

338

.... Let's go back to my room for now.
I don't think I would even be able to look at Akiha if I went into the sitting room now.
I don't want to look suspicious.
It would be better if I stay in my room until Akiha leaves.

.....
.....
.....
.....
..... It's past seven thirty now.
I look out the window and see Akiha leaving.
"....."
Phew.
I let out a deep sigh.
I feel bad for Akiha, but I should worry about my own troubles for now.
Yesterday's dream.
Even though I knew I was asleep, I seemed to have wandered out at night.
With my hands full of this problem, I don't have the energy to act out my "usual self".
"..... Shit."
I leave my room as if I was pushed by my self-hatred.

No one is in the sitting room.
There is one teacup on the table.
Probably the one Akiha was using until just now.
"....."
I enter the sitting room quietly, probably because I feel guilty about Akiha.
———And.



"Shiki-san!!"
Suddenly, Kohaku-san comes out of the kitchen, scolding me.

"Oh.... good morning, Kohaku-san."
"It's not 'good morning'!"
"What time do you think it is, Shiki-san!!"
"Kohaku-san might be really mad, as she unleashes quite the scary attitude."
".... I'm sorry."
"I couldn't wake up this morning so I decided it didn't matter if I'm late for school or not."
"Geez, I'm not talking about school!!"
"I'm asking you why you didn't show up and talk to Akiha-sama for just a little while!!"
"Kohaku-san draws her eyebrows together."
"Well.... Um, I kinda felt like it was hard for me to face Akiha this morning, um—"
"Felt like it!?"
"Akiha-sama was waiting for you all this time!!"
"But you don't say a word to her and show up after she leaves?"
"That's terrible!"
".... Ugh."
".... I can't counter that."
"It's because I do feel guilty for avoiding Akiha."
".... I understand."
"But it's not like I dislike Akiha."
"But this morning.. I really didn't feel like I could talk to her."
"No, you do not understand anything!"
"You don't know how much Akiha-sama was looking forward to this while waiting for you up until now."
"What—Waiting for me, you mean this morning?"
"No."
"Akiha-sama told me not to tell you, but I can't bear this anymore!"



"Listen, Shiki-san.
Now, Akiha-sama eats breakfast with you normally, but it was a real hassle before she transferred."
"Shiki-san, do you remember where her old school was?"

... I think the ladies' academy Akiha used to go to was in the next prefecture.

"—Next prefecture...?"

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To begin with, Akiha-sama would not have made it to school unless she left here at six.

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"But all you did was sleep in and didn't eat with her even once.

But Akiha-sama told me just seeing your face in the morning is good enough, and she never told us to go wake you up."

"Wha——"



"Now do you understand?"

If you do, can you please apologize to Akiha-sama about earlier?"

"_____"

..... I was going to do that already, but..
Such, such a talk doesn't help me out.
"I don't get it.
What do you want me to do, Kohaku-san?"



"No, don't think too hard about it.
You just act normally.
But Akiha-sama isn't direct, so I just wanted you to be more considerate of her."
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I think that's the most difficult thing for me to do right now.



"Oh, and all this is a secret.
If Akiha-sama finds out I told you this, I will get in trouble."

Kohaku-san heads into the dining room with a smile on her face.
"....."
"Shiki-san, your breakfast is ready, so please come eat."
I can hear Kohaku-san's voice from the dining room.
I head into the dining room, hiding my embarrassed face with my hand.

—I ended up being late for school.

The entrance to the school is empty.

I walk through the school's gate during first period.

It's the end of second period.
.... If I'm going to go apologize to Akiha about this morning, now would be the right time.

Go to Akiha's classroom.

turn to **339**

No, I don't need to go and see her.

turn to **340**

339

I go up to the fourth floor.
 Akiha's class is first year, class one.
 I speak to a student leaving the classroom, and ask her to call Akiha.
 "Tohno-saaan, your brother's here!"
 The girl I stopped calls out to Akiha quite directly.



"Do you need something, Nii-san?"
 Akiha comes out with a sullen expression.
 "_____"
 Well, this is troubling.
 Kohaku-san told me to apologize, but after hearing her story, it's a little troubling.
 "If you don't need anything, I'll go back to my classroom."
 "—No, there's something.
 It's.. well, I mean.."



"What is it, already?
 The break time is short, so if you want to say something then please hurry and say it."
 ".... Well, it's just.."
 —Alright already!
 I've come this far, so I can't be shy about it!

"I'm.. I'm sorry about this morning..!"



"Eh?"

—Ni, nii-san..?"

"I came to say that this morning was my fault, and that from tomorrow on I'll be good, so please forgive me, Akiha..!"



"It's.. there's not much to forgive, it didn't really bother me.."

"That's fine, I just wanted to apologize.

I'll see you later, sorry for taking your time!"

"—Ah, wait, Nii-san!"

Akiha calls after me.

But right now I'm too embarrassed to even look back, so I run straight back to my own classroom.

.... It's lunchtime.

Since I just went and apologized to Akiha, it feels kind of awkward to have lunch with her.

However.



"Yo, Tohno.
Let's hurry up and go to the courtyard.
Akiha-chan is waiting."
.... Says one guy.
Besides, I can't leave her by herself.
..... *sigh*
I let out a big sigh and leave the classroom with Arihiko.

Akiha isn't here yet.
Since Ciel-senpai will be coming too, I guess we'll eat on the grass instead of on
the bench.



"I'm here.
Hey, Akiha-san isn't here yet?"



"Yeah, she should be here any minute now—hey, Tohno, did something happen between you and Akiha-chan?"

Arihiko asks, elbowing me in the side.
.... Why is he so perceptive all of a sudden?
"Ah, there she is.
Akiha-chan, over here!"
Arihiko waves his hands around.
Akiha comes onto the grass looking a bit puzzled.



"I'm sorry I'm late.
I received an invitation to have lunch with my classmates, and it took some time to decline their invitations."



"Don't worry, we just got here too.
Here, sit here."

Arihiko pats the grass.
After hesitating for a moment, Akiha sits down next to me.



"....."

Akiha says nothing.

"____"

Not knowing what to say, I remain silent.



"What is it, you two?"

It's weird to eat lunch like this in silence."

"Uh——"

I know that, I just don't know what to say.

setvar akiharegard + 1
turn to **341**

340

.... But I might be overreacting if I go apologize to her.
Kohaku-san told me to keep that conversation a secret.
Besides, considering Akiha, if I apologize to her like "I'm sorry for everything",
I can see her getting mad at me.

".... Yeah, I guess I'll wait until lunchtime."
I stay in the classroom and get ready for the next period, still feeling a bit
unsettled.

It's lunchtime.
It's like an unspoken agreement, but if I go out to the courtyard, I will end up
having lunch with Akiha.
.... *sigh*
But it's a bit depressing today.
I want to apologize about this morning, but I don't have any idea how I can
apologize.



"Yo, Tohno.
Let's hurry up and go to the courtyard.
Akiha-chan is waiting."
.... Says one guy.
Besides, I can't leave her by herself.
..... *sigh*
I let out a big sigh and leave the classroom with Arihiko.

Akiha isn't here yet.
Since Ciel-senpai will be coming too, I guess we'll eat on the grass instead of on
the bench.



"I'm here.
Hey, Akiha-san isn't here yet?"



"Yeah, she should be here any minute now—-Oh, there she is.
Akiha-chan, over here!!"
Arihiko waves his hands around hard.
Looking a bit puzzled, Akiha comes onto the grass.





"I'm sorry I'm late.
I received an invitation to have lunch with my classmates, and it took me some
time to decline their invitations."



"Don't worry, we just got here too.
Here, sit here."
Arihiko pats the grass.



"Is it alright?
I do not see anyone else eating their lunch on the grass."
"It's okay.
It's not prohibited or anything.
There's no problem.
You don't have to worry about it."
Arihiko pats the grass once again.

"—Okay, then excuse me."
Akiha bows faintly and sits next to me.

"Ug....."
.... I still haven't gotten over the incident from this morning.
I feel a bit nervous if she sits this close to me.



"—What's wrong, Nii-san?
You don't look too well.
Are you not hungry....?"
Akiha gives me a quiet glance as if to find out my condition.
"What—no, I don't feel bad at all."
.... I don't, but it does feel a bit awkward being here.
It seems that Akiha doesn't care about what happened this morning, but it really bugs me as Kohaku-san's words keep flickering in my head.

"....."
As a result, I can't think of anything to say as I fall silent.
turn to **341**

341



"....."

Akiha stares at me intently.
—And then.



".... It's lunchtime, isn't it, Nii-san?"
She says something terribly normal.
"That's right, it's lunchtime."
It'd be bad not to eat anything at lunchtime."
I pull the bread I bought out of a plastic bag.
"It's the same bread as yesterday; is that okay?"



"Yes, thank you."

I hand Akiha a sandwich, and start to chew on my own.
"....."
Damn it, somehow Akiha's every move gets my attention, and my body won't move right.



"Oh, you're livin' in luxury today, Senpai!
You got something to celebrate?"



"No, nothing like that.
Since everything's coming to the peak, I have to eat a lot and get a lot of energy."
"Ahh, I see, autumn eating.
I guess in your case, the food goes straight to your chest, huh?"

.... In contrast to the unpleasant meal me and Akiha are having, Arihiko and Senpai seem to be enjoying a very cheerful meal.

"....."
Munch.
Munch munch.
Munch munch munch munch munch.



"Um.. Nii-san?"

"Hm?"

What is it, Akiha?"

"Well.. is there no drink today?"

I'm a little thirsty.."

"—Ah."

I forgot about it.

The strawberry milk I bought is still sitting in the plastic bag.

"Sorry, I forgot.

Here you go.."

I offer her the milk.

Akiha takes it.



"Ah—"

Because the carton is so small, our fingers touch.

—Thump.

Just that.

It's just that, but my fingertips get hot.

Even though I should take my hand away immediately, it stays there.

Looking at Akiha, she seems to be paralyzed as well.



"Huh?"

Tohno-kun, what are you doing?"

"—!"

Quickly, I pull my hand away from Akiha's.

"Ah, no, I was just passing Akiha her drink."



"Is that so?"

Since you had both stopped moving, I thought you were fighting over the drink."

"Oh, you thought so too, Senpai?"

It looked to me like Tohno was battling to the death not to hand over the juice. Since Akiha-chan was thirsty it would've been good to give it to her, and I was thinking he was being a jerk."

.... Well, I guess it did look like that.

"Nah, it was nothing like that.
I was just careless for a moment, right Akiha?"



"....."

Akiha just seems vacant.
The expression is so unlike the Akiha I know, I'm dazzled for a moment.



"Hmm.. hey, Tohno, I've been thinking for a while, but, you and Akiha-chan."

"—What is it?"

"I'll get mad if you say something stupid."

"Nah, you just don't seem all that alike."

"... That's natural, right?"

"We may be siblings, but we're man and woman, so we won't be that similar."

"Oh, I don't mean that."

"How to say it.. you seem like different types."



"That's true.

Akiha-san is quite unapproachable, Tohno-kun is the opposite.
It's like Tohno-kun is water and Akiha-san is oil, right?"

"... Well, certainly Akiha is hard to grapple with.
I'd have no complaints if she was nicer."



"What?"

Akiha-chan's kind enough, right?"

"Ah, she's nice on the surface.

But underneath there's another person entirely, the coldest of the cold.
You should see how she scolds me when I make mistakes at dinner—"



"—Well, that's about enough.
Let's talk about something more interesting, Arihiko."



"Ah, you're stopping in the middle of what you were saying?
I would like to hear exactly what you think of me, Nii-san."
"Uh....."
Akiha's gaze is painful.
.... The Akiha from a moment ago must have been just some kind of illusion.



"Something more interesting, huh.
Thinking about it, Tohno, did you see the news about your place this morning?"
"Eh—?
This morning's news?"



"Yes, the serial killer's latest victim was found near Tohno-kun's house, wasn't he?
That blank prison-like wall is the wall of Akiha-san's mansion, isn't it?"



"-I don't really know.
I didn't look at the news this morning, so I can't say."
Akiha neatly dismisses the affairs like it had nothing to do with her.
But I can't dismiss it like Akiha.

Because there shouldn't be any more killings.
Yumizuka isn't drinking people's blood to live any longer.
So, there shouldn't be any more victims.
My..
If that dream of mine is just a dream..

"—Senpai.
Is this true?
Is it the same as those vampire killings from before?"



"Yes.
They say last night's was the tenth victim.
Of course all the blood was drained from the body, but this time there were
body parts missing, too."
Senpai explains in her usual tone.
But, I.
I'm attacked by a great dizziness like the whole world just tilted.



"The body's hands and feet were missing, but they say it was like they were
bitten off with a human mouth.
But that's strange, isn't it?
A person's mouth?"

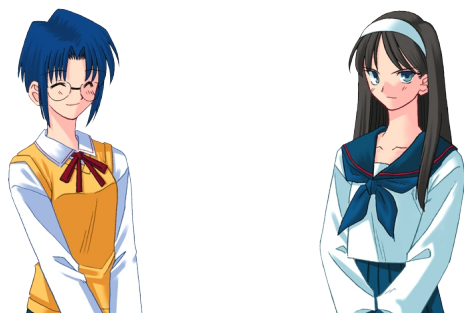


"It's impossible to bite off human body parts.
The human jaw is not strong enough to bite off someone's hand or foot, and the
teeth wouldn't bear it either.
.... Well, you could grind on the cartilage with your teeth, but that's about it."



"Precisely.
But the marks on the body can only belong to a human, so maybe it is some-
thing inhuman yet shaped like a human.
Quite similar to a vampire, don't you think?"

—I feel sick.
Senpai, since she doesn't know, can say all this with a smile—



"Haha."



"Akiha-san.
Have I said something funny?"



"Yes.
Since it was so funny, I laughed in spite of myself."



"Geez, it's no laughing matter!
Last night's victim was found near your house!"



"I'm sorry if I was impolite, Senpai.
But, I didn't think you were a person given to such flights of fancy.
Well, Senpai, perhaps you could tell us what you think of the vampire?"



"Uh, you mean, the vampires in legends?"



"No, I mean your image of the vampire as the serial killer."

Ciel-senpai is lost in thought.

I—while I don't really want to hear Senpai's answer, I'm terribly interested in spite of myself.



"Really, the culprit's just a person.

I think he just has qualities and values different from ours.

I think we take those characteristics that cannot be distinguished by common sense and try to understand them by using the label 'vampire'."



".... In other words, Senpai believes a 'vampire' is someone with a mental disability, a psychosis that prevents them from telling right from wrong?"



"Yes.

You don't have to use the term 'vampire', but anyone outside the customs of society is disowned by those within the society, as society cannot understand the person's character.

That's the defense function of ordinary common sense, isn't it, Akiha-san?"



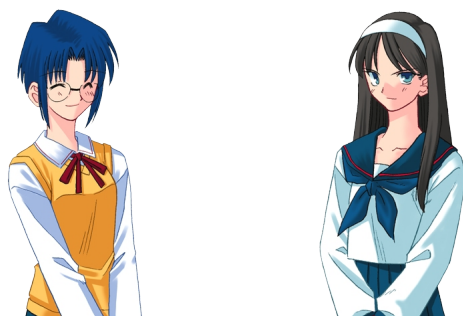
"You've thought about this a lot, Senpai.

But it's difficult, isn't it?"

By your thinking, the 'vampire' cannot be said to have committed a crime.

After all, the 'vampire' has no qualms about his own conduct, does he?"

If there has been no crime, how can he be punished?"

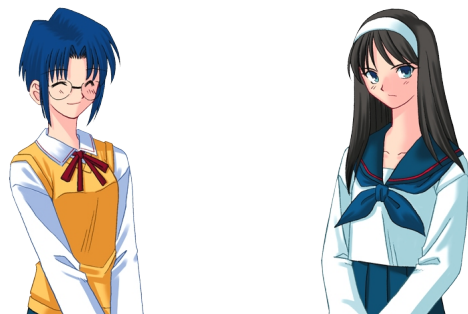


"Indeed.

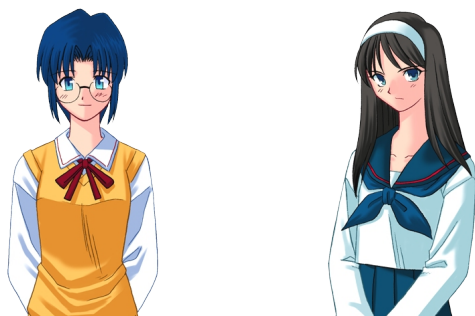
So, it is not the role of those within society to exact punishment.

To punish a crime not recognized as a crime, the punishment must be based not

on the morals of an individual but on the principles of the entire species."



".... The principles of the entire species..?"



"Yes.

The first principle that it is better for one's own kind to prosper than for others' to.

For a species, that which obstructs this principle is a crime by itself.

Even if Vampire-san does not view murder as a crime, for the human species, it is not the murder but the existence of the vampire itself that is the crime."

—The existence itself is a crime.

.... What is this?

Akiha asking those strange things, and Senpai giving those answers.

And,

for some reason, it seems like they're talking about no one else but me.

The chime that marks the end of lunch sounds.



"-I'm sorry for talking about such unappealing things."



"Ah, it's fine, it's fine.
I'm happy just listening to Akiha's voice."





"Well then, shall we go?
You'll all be late if you don't hurry."

Senpai heads for the cafeteria.
It's quicker for her to go through there to get to her classroom.
—Senpai's going.

Is it because she knew so much about the serial killings or is it that I was drawn into the conversation?

if flgO \geq 1
turn to **343**

Talk to Ciel about last night.

turn to **342**

That would just be a waste of my time.

turn to **343**

342

.... I don't have any reason for it.
But I just have a vague feeling she might be the person able to help me with my troubles.

"___"

There's no time to think.
I can't bear to keep this to myself any longer.
"Sorry, you go on ahead, Arihiko!"



"Huh?
'Go on ahead'?
Where are you going, Tohno!?"

.... Anyway, I get her to come to the rear of the school building so forcefully that it can't be helped if she gets mad at me.
fth period has already started.



"Geez, pulling me to a place like this.. what is it, Tohno-kun?"
.... Senpai is more amazed than angry.
"I'm sorry, Senpai.
But, I wanted to hear more about what you were saying before."
"What I was saying before.. you mean the serial killer?"
"Yes, that."

About the person who doesn't feel a crime is a crime.
Are you saying they kill people unconsciously?"
.... For example.
Like if you intend to sleep, but instead go outside to commit murder.



"Hey, that hurts, Tohno-kun.
I'll answer you, so please let go of me."
"Oh—I'm sorry."

I let her go.
.... It seems I was really worked up.



"It's alright.
Anyway, you were asking if the killer might be killing people unconsciously,
right?"
"Yeah—I really want to know."



"Well, I don't know, because I'm not the killer."
"Wha—yes, that's true, Senpai, but..!"



"Yes, it's just a joke.
Since you seemed so serious, Tohno-kun, I thought I'd be a little playful for a moment."
"... Senpai, give me a break.
I'm really serious here."



"Yeah, it looks like it.
But, why?
The serial killer is none of your concern, is he, Tohno-kun?"
"That's—"



"Yes?
What is it?"
.... That's.
"If—if I told you I was the killer, what would you do?"
I finally say it.



But,
Senpai's face lights up as if I said the funniest joke, and she bursts into laughter.
"Senpai, this is no joke, I'm—"



"Yes, I know you're serious.
But that's why it's funny.
Because the murderer doesn't usually come and ask for help because they're the murderer."
"Senpai—"



"Then I will ask.
Why do you think so, Tohno-kun?"
"It's because—recently, I've been.. strange.
I know why.
I was probably bitten by a vampire."
.... I say it frankly, as if it was a euphemism.



"—Please, go on."
".... Since then, it's been strange.
Suddenly I don't feel like myself, and I have dreams about killing people.
Last night, although I only intended to sleep, it seems that I went out.
And I had a dream in which I killed someone, and sucked blood."
"——"
Senpai says nothing, just watching me.
".... My father had a split personality.
Maybe I just don't know about it, but there might be a killer in me.
But I have no way of finding out—"



"So that's why you came to ask if the killer was unconscious of his actions."

Senpai sighs in amazement.

"Um, if you were truly the killer, you would not be unconscious of yourself.

The point you're seeing it in your dreams makes it not unconscious.

But more importantly, it's just a dream.

I don't know what you're worried about, but Tohno-kun is Tohno-kun."

"__"

.... I'm glad to hear that, but..

There's no reason for me to believe in any of Senpai's words.



She sighs.

"You must be feeling really uneasy, Tohno-kun."

Saying so,

Senpai pats my head.



"—It's okay.

You have nothing to worry about, Tohno-kun.

I myself guarantee it, so it's definitely okay."

"Ah—yes."

.... Automatically, I nod in complete agreement.

Even if I know it's only while she's doing so, I feel at ease.

Like wrapping up my uneasiness, Senpai's hands are gentle.

School is over now.

I was confused about myself and Akiha, but today is about to end.

".... Time to go home."

I should go get Akiha and go back to our mansion.

I walk home together with Akiha.

.... Just like lunchtime, we grow quiet as soon as there's only the two of us.

—While I want to talk to Akiha, I also feel embarrassed looking at her.

".... Man, it's not like I'm a middle schooler."



"...?"

Did you say something Nii-san?"

"Oh—no, it's nothing, just talking to myself."

.... *sigh*
Really, what the hell am I doing?

We reach the long hill.
Once we go up it, our mansion will be right there.



"Nii-san.
I would like to ask you one thing before we get home."
Akiha's feet stop and she looks straight at me.
"___"
The kind of silence that was there before is gone.
Akiha looks at me seriously.
"Go ahead, what do you wanna ask about?"



".... Um.. I asked before, but, what do you think of Ciel?"
"—What, that again?
I don't think anything of her.
She's just my senpai.
She's a trustworthy senpai I can ask about anything, though."



".... I see.
It seemed like something was bothering you; this morning was a result of it too,
wasn't it?"
"___"

.... I'm surprised.
Akiha knew that I was worrying about the problem by myself.
"Akiha.. you noticed?"



"Of course.
We are brother and sister.
I can tell when you are depressed, Nii-san.
So, why didn't you just come and talk to me?
Do you trust that woman more than you trust me?"
"Y—you were watching me talk to Senpai..!"



"Yes.
I could hardly believe my eyes and ears.
You, being so honest in front of that person!"

With a "hmph", Akiha turns away.
"... It's not like that.
I didn't talk to you or Kohaku-san, because—"
I didn't want to tell them about my body and have them hate me.



"Because of what?
If there's something you want to say, please, say it."
"Are you stupid?
I wouldn't worry this much if I could say it!
I asked Senpai since you guys are important to me.
It's not because I don't trust you or anything."



"I don't want to hear such excuses!"
"Fine, I'll come out and say it.
That person doesn't suit you.
So please, do not get any closer to her.
It is for your sake."
"Wha—"
It's so sudden I'm at a loss for words.
"Akiha.
Are you saying that ordinary people are not suitable company for those of the

Tohno house, then?"

"....."

Akiha doesn't answer.

The silence means a yes.

"—I see.

Well, you are the head of the Tohno household.

You're saying that family and lineage is important like that old man, right?"



".... Nii-san, that's.."

"It's fine.

I'm not really complaining.

I'm the one who left you alone in that house.

I should have been the one raised that way originally.

So, I'm not speaking badly of you."



"....."

"But, I can't let what you said right now go.

Even though you don't know anything about Senpai, don't just say she's unsuitable."

Looking down, Akiha says nothing.

For a while, we stand in silence.

".... You don't.."

"Eh—?"



"Nii-san, you don't know anything about the Tohno house, don't say such selfish things!"

Crying out painfully, Akiha pulls away from me.



"—Anyway, you mustn't get close to that person.

She's not like us.

If you get any closer to her, you're the one who would suffer."

Akiha runs up the hill.

"—What does that mean?"

All I can do is gaze up after her, aghast.

I return to the mansion.

Though I usually go into the lobby without thinking, right now it's hard to enter.

.... I have made Akiha angry many times since I came back to the mansion.

But, she was really mad back then.

For the first time, I really angered Akiha, and made her sound so hurt.

"....."

I don't think it matters who was wrong.

I'm sure that in time Akiha will calm down and explain why she doesn't like Ciel-senpai.

".... I could hang around the garden for a bit."
If I go into the mansion, I might face Akiha, so I'll take a walk in the garden for a while.

"Huh?
Kohaku-san?"
It's Kohaku-san.
She doesn't seem to have noticed me, and she's heading into the forest.

She hasn't noticed me.
I don't know what she's doing, but she disappears into the forest.
"?"
I'm curious, so I'll follow her.

It seems there's a small clearing where Kohaku-san headed to.
"..... There's a clearing there....?"
Tilting my head to the side, I try to remember, but for some reason, my memory is a bit vague.
In the forest of the mansion, I can see a clearing as if the trees were cut there.
—No, "can see" is not quite right.

If you walked by normally, you probably would never notice it.
If Kohaku-san didn't walk there, hidden enough by the surrounding trees as it is, I would never have noticed even if I lived here all my life.
".... There's a clearing there?"
.... If so, we probably did play there as kids."
To say the least, I don't remember ever playing with Akiha in the clearing.

—I feel like I've never, been there, before.

"....."
After thinking for a bit, I decide to go into the clearing.

.... The clearing doesn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.
There's no sign of Kohaku-san, who entered before me.

"What's this—just an empty place."

I walk to the middle of the clearing.
This clearing really is just an empty space.
The perfectly level open ground.
The deep woods enclosing the area.

The voice of the cicadas.
And the strong, summer sunshine that feels like it could dissolve——

"Eh.....?"
Summer, sunshine—?

"Ou—ouch...."
The wound on my chest starts to hurt.
Like / Stabbing.
This pain / that feels like / a kitchen knife stabbing my chest.

Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp—

—From somewhere, I can hear the voice of cicadas.

But, it's autumn now.

—The summer sunshine that bathes everything in white.

The columns of summer clouds in the far off sky.
I can practically see the voices.
At my feet, there are the discarded shells of cicadas.
Discarded shell.
Someone's—discarded shell.

"—....."

Third.
The third child's discarded shell.
The third child I no longer remember.

.... Someone's crouching shadow.
Young Akiba's approaching footsteps.

Clouds high in the emptiness.
Cicadas in the blue sky.

I was just, in a trance.
Akiha would have been killed.
That was really all I knew.

I just, ran.
That was all I understood.
As for the danger to myself,
I never even thought about it.

I wanted to protect Akiha,
and I just took her place.

In the distance.
The voices of the cicadas.

—After that.
My body that died from having its chest pierced.

And a figure that looks down at my dead body in shock.
A third child's figure—

"Ua—gh."
My chest hurts.
I feel sick.
The wound in my chest should have closed long ago, so why does it hurt now?

My chest, rips.
The old wound opens, and a crimson stream flows out.

—What is this?
My wound, it didn't heal at all.

It hurts.
I'm scared.

—I feel dizzy.

This is,
the impulse of death.

Consciousness fades.
My wound aches.

I hear a thump as my body falls to the ground.

.... I can hear voices talking.

"Akiha-sama, are you not going to call for a doctor?"
"Don't be stupid, Hisui.
There's no way I could do that, since Nii-san's wound isn't normal..!"
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping on the bed.

I planned to say "Yo!" and get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My chest doesn't hurt anymore, but my body is as heavy as lead.
All I can move are my eyes and mouth.



"Just what were you thinking, Hisui?
Nii-san mustn't be allowed to go there, you know that..!"



"Please.... Forgive me."
"This can't be solved by apologizing.
You were assigned to serve Nii-san to avoid this kind of situation.
So what were you doing..!?"
Completely different from her usual manner, Akiha gives full vent to her anger.
In comparison, Hisui is accepting the scolding silently, looking down.

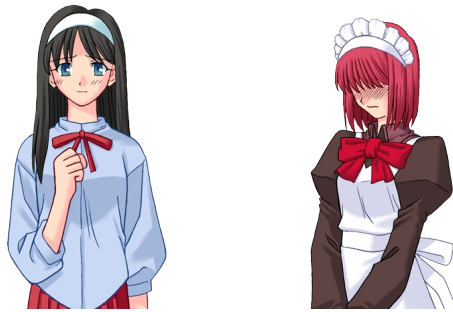
.... I'm not sure how this all came about.
But I can at least tell Hisui is being yelled at because of me.



"Answer me, Hisui.
Why did Nii-san go there?"

Hisui does not answer Akiha's question.
The air between them is becoming heavy.
Biting her lip, Akiha takes a step closer to Hisui.

.... Even I can tell that she's about to raise a hand against her.
I'm sure Hisui knows too, but she's just looking down, accepting it.
"—Hold on, Akiha."



"Nii-san—you're awake!?"
"Yeah, you were so loud, I woke up."
"Ah....."

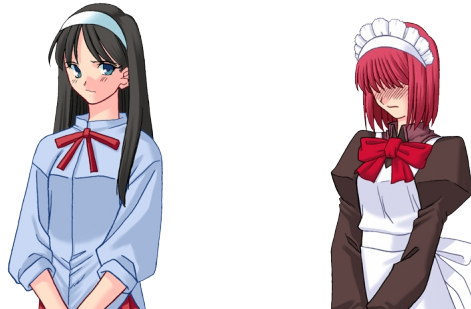


Akiha looks away uncomfortably.
"You know, you shouldn't let it out on Hisui.
I don't know the circumstances, but this has to do with me collapsing, right?
It's not her fault, I just collapsed on my own."
I strain hard and somehow manage to lift the upper half of my body off the bed.

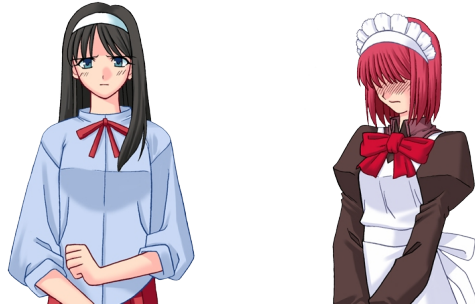
But that's all I can manage, and I don't think I can even move an inch more.
But since Hisui is depressed, I have to force myself to act as fine as possible.
".... Honestly, getting into a fight over me.
Even if you look like an adult, you're still a child."



"But—you were out for a long time, Nii-san.
 You were out for more than five hours, and nothing like this has happened before.
 What would I have done if you'd never woken up..!"
 "Idiot, don't say things like that.
 This is just anemia.. Eh?
 It's ten o'clock already?"

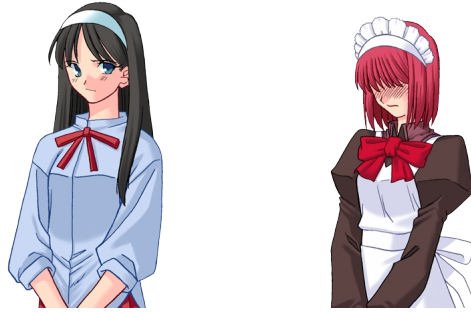


".... Yes.
 Nii-san, you have been out all evening."
 Akiha speaks reluctantly.
 "____"
 The strength flees from my body.
 ".... Geez.
 I haven't fainted for that long since elementary school.
 Yeah, I used to faint all the time back then.
 I wasn't used to the Arimas and my mind was always under stress."
 It seems like I'm still dreaming, maybe an after-effect of the anemia attack.
 ".... I remember.
 The Arimas were all good people; they treated me like their own child."
 —Keiko-san was strict but thoughtful and always treated me like I was her own son.
 ".... So, I thought I had to become their real child, too."



"Nii-san, don't push yourself.
This is the Tohno mansion.
You don't have to tell yourself that anymore.!"
"—I know.
But, for a long time, I thought that way.
From the beginning, I always thought that.
.... The Arimas, and you, you're all good people, so, it was so hard—"

.... What am I saying?
Gazing vacantly at the ceiling, thinking back to memories of long ago.
".... Please, don't push yourself, Nii-san.
You've only been back here for a week.
So you must be tired."
"—Really.
Well, I'm tired, but.."
"Right?
So, please, just rest today.
Since your body's weaker than most people's, if you don't take a day to rest
from time to time, you'll collapse like you did today."
Akiha looks at me seriously.
"....."
.... Certainly, it's just as she says.
Forgetting about everything.
Unless I rest without thinking about vampires or about myself, I'll really be out
of it.
".... You're right.
As you say, I'll just lie quietly today."
Saying so, I lie down again.



"Really..?
 No more sneaking out of your room later, too?"
 "What is that?
 Am I that untrustworthy?"
 Yeah, I guess so.
 I've left Akiha alone for all this time.
 "Hisui, tell Kohaku that Nii-san is up.
 Nii-san, what will you do about dinner?"
 ".... I see.
 Well, my apologies to Kohaku-san, but I don't feel like eating."
 ".... I understand.
 Well, Hisui, please inform Kohaku."
 Still looking down, Hisui nods in assent and leaves the room.



"Well, Nii-san.
 Please go to sleep for tonight."
 Akiha speaks in a very gentle tone.
 But, to sleep..
 I'm afraid that if I sleep, I'll see that nightmare.
 "No, I—"
 "Please, Nii-san.
 Didn't you say you'll listen to what I say, just for today..?"
 Akiha's eyes are pleading.

.... From the bottom of her heart, Akiha is really worried about me.
"Alright.
I'll sleep quietly."
".... Yes.
Thank you."
"Silly.
Why are you thanking me?
I should be the one thanking you."
.... Thanking me?
Even though I neglected you for eight years, you're the one who called me back
to this mansion.
"—Akiha.
I'm.. sorry for everything.
I'm selfish, and never thought about you.
But, from now on.."
"It's fine.
Please stay as you are, Nii-san.
And, I should be the one who's apologizing.
Please, don't apologize to me.
If you do, I'll feel like a really horrible person."
Akiha grasps my hand, tears welling in her eyes.
.... I don't understand.
Why Akiha is saying such things.
Or why she keeps repeating "I'm sorry".
".... I'm, getting tired.
I'll, sleep for a bit."
"—Yes.
Good night, Nii-san."

.... The wound in my chest hurts.
The third child.
.... Probably, it's the child who was adopted ten years ago, and died soon after.

A hot summer day.
A figure of a bloody child.
The world of Tohno Shiki, filled with ill omens.
—Thump.

But, it's so quiet.

—Thump.

I feel at ease.

—Thump.

Akiha's heartbeat is very close.

—Thump.

It's really quiet.

—Thump.

And for the first time in days, I sleep calmly, untroubled by nightmares.
turn to **344**

343

.... No, there's no reason to.
What can Ciel-senpai do if I talk to her about my dreams?
That dream.
If I'm the person who dreams about killing people, then I'm the only one who should be able to solve that problem.



"Yo, Tohno, we don't have much time."
"—I know, we won't make it unless we run, right?"
Saying so, I start running toward our classroom.

——-School is over now.

I was confused about myself and Akiha, but today is about to end.
"—Should I go back?"
I should go get Akiha and go back to our mansion.

I walk home together with Akiha.
.... Just like lunchtime, we grow quiet as soon as there are only the two of us.

—While I want to talk to Akiha, I also feel embarrassed looking at Akiha.

".... Man, it's not like I'm some middle schooler."



"..?
Did you say something, Nii-san?"
"Oh—no, it's nothing, just talking to myself."

.... *sigh*
Really, what the hell am I doing?

We reach the long hill.
Once we go up it, our mansion will be right there.



"Nii-san.
I would like to ask you one thing before we get home."
Akiha's feet stop and she looks straight at me.
"___"

The kind of silence that was there before is gone.
Akiha looks at me seriously.
"Go ahead, what do you wanna ask about?"



"If you don't want to answer, that's fine but—do you have something you are hiding from me, Nii-san?"
"Huh—?"
The question is so abrupt, I stop in my tracks.
"Um... What are you talking about?"
I decide to act like I don't know what she's talking about.



"What?

That's what I am asking.

You have been acting very strange these past few days.

I can easily tell since we live together."

Akiha looks at me as if she can read my mind.

"——Uhh."

.... No, there's no way I can lie to her without her finding out.

"... So you are hiding something.

Is that the reason you have not been feeling well recently, like this morning?

I do not know what is troubling you but is it so bad you have to hide it?"

"——"

.... I'm surprised.

Akiha knew that I was worrying about the problem by myself.

"Akiha.... you noticed?"



"Of course.

We are brother and sister.

I can tell when you are depressed, Nii-san.

Yet you keep the problem to yourself and don't even ask us for help."

"!!

——I can't ask you for help——"

I can never do that.

How I dream about murder every night.

And that I can't tell if it's real or just a dream, and the victims in real life are

just like the ones in my dream.
I can't tell her that I, Tohno Shiki, might be a killer, so be careful at night.



"Nii-san.
We're brother and sister, right?
Then please rely on me a bit.
Not just me, but both Kohaku and Hisui are also worried about you.
If it's a problem you can't solve by yourself, we will gladly help you, so please
tell us about it."
"Akiha——"

Akiha just stares at me.
.... Her eyes are filled only with worry.
Akiha is not complaining to me for hiding something from her, but she is trying
to help me solve my problem.
"..... D-"

That's why I can't tell her.
I—Tohno Akiha's brother might be a killer—those words would never come out
of my mouth.

"Don't say stupid things.
I'm not hiding anything and I don't have any problems.
I wasn't feeling well recently because I wasn't used to the life in the mansion——"



"....."

Akiha looks at me angrily.

"A—Akiha?"

"I understand.

You won't listen to me even after all that I've said.

If you can't trust me or Kohaku or Hisui, then there's nothing more I want to say."



Akiha breathes out and looks away.

"No, that's wrong, Akiha.

It's not that I don't trust you guys, but—"



"I don't want to hear your excuses!

If you like secrets so much, then do what you want!!"

Akiha screams at me and runs up the hill.

—I could not chase after her.

Even if I chased her, I would not be able to tell her anything.

.... Then that means,

it doesn't matter what goes on; I do not trust them well enough.

Dinner has ended and it's time to go to bed.

Akiha ignored me during dinner and during the tea afterwards.

She must be still mad about that conversation we had at the hill.

... This time, it doesn't seem like her anger will fade in a matter of days.

"No, that's better for me."

—Yes, I can't be afraid of my own dreams anymore.

I didn't ask Ciel-senpai for help and I rejected Akiha's offer for help, because I've decided I will solve this on my own.

"To prove that I, Tohno Shiki, am not the killer—"

I can only think of one way to do that.

I turn off the lights in my room and put the knife in my pocket.

"..... Let's go."

I leave the room, trying not to make any noise.

To prove if I am a killer or not.

... I don't even have to think about it.

I just have to look around the town at night and find the killer which isn't me—

I let out a long breath.

—I walk around the night-shrouded town.

I put my hands in my pocket, feeling the knife in there on my fingertips as I walk around town.

pant—*pant*

—I breathe quietly as I walk around.

Trying not to draw attention.

I look at the people passing by as I conceal my presence.

pant—*pant*, *pant*.

—I am searching for the killer.

Someone will get attacked tonight.

He is looking for a new victim.

Say, a girl with long, black hair.

A girl around my age would be best.

No need to mention the beauty of her hands and feet, but the beauty of her neck should be considered.

In the end, everything counts on that one spot.

p-pant, *pant*, *pant*.

——I look for the killer.

.... I know I won't find him easily.
I knew from my dreams that the perfect prey is hard to find.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*

B.. u.. t
Tonight, this town bores me.
I cannot find my PREY.
I'm getting angry.
My objective was to find someone, or to kill someone, or something like that.
"————Ha.."

I'll hold my breath.
I'll hold on to my knife.
I should concentrate, so I will be able to return death at any time.

I pant more and more.

—I look for the KILLER.

But I can't find him.
Only time passes.
pant, *pant*.

It overflows, sharpens, is used, is used up, and over time stands up, and changes form and——

In front of me lies tonight's prey.

My panting fills the air.

It is a dead woman's corpse.
In my hand is a knife.
The red blood on my knife drips to the ground.

——Why?
I was looking for the killer, but all of a sudden, there's the dead body of a woman right in front of me.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*.
My breathing gets out of control.
A dead body in front of me.
A bloody knife in my hand.

—————I don't understand.

When, at what time, what I did.

Did something happen to my mind?

Yes, like..

it overflows, sharpens, is used, is used up, and over time stands up, and changes form, changes its meaning, becomes free, explodes, and lightens up.

On that path.

The theory of evolving consciousness and meaning.

But an important path is missing.

Since when.

Did I.

Turn into.

The other "me"?

—————I see.

There was no need for me to give you a push, Shiki.

From behind me,

comes a voice.

Heavy breathing.

I turn around.

There.



33 0

Someone I have never seen before, yet someone who looks like me, stands there.
—It can't be helped if you're already broken.
Bye, Shiki.
I wanted to play around with you for a bit longer.

Slash.
I'm cut with a knife.

It hurts.
It's funny.
It's deep.
It's great!
"Ha—haha, ha."
I start to pass out.
Like that, in that ambiguous state, I was killed.
.... I'm happy, in a way.
Tohno Shiki was killed by the killer.
That's proof that I wasn't the killer.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **443**

No.

turn to **1**

344

I open my eyes to the morning light.
 Even though my body still feels heavy, probably because of yesterday's anemia,
 I feel pretty good.
 How many days has it been?
 How long since I had a morning so free of unease?
 And today is my school's Founder's Day.
 There's no need to prepare for school like I usually do, so I can enjoy the morn-
 ing calmly.
 "Ah—"
 Then, I notice.
 Though I thought there was no one in the room, someone is asleep by the bed.
 "Akiha..?"
 As if she has been nursing me all night long, Akiha is sitting on a chair, the top
 half of her body collapsed on the bed.

Asleep, she breathes softly.
 Her long black hair spread out on the bed.. it looks beautiful.
 "Akiha.. hey, Akiha.."
 After calling her softly, she shows no sign of waking up.
 Well, if she's sleeping, then there's no point in making her wake up.
 ".... Mm."
 Akiha turns over weakly.
 Sleeping, she has none of her usual strength.
 Her defenseless sleeping face hasn't changed since she was a child.
 Because of that, I can close my eyes and vividly recall the Akiha from back then.

.... Eight years ago.
 Playing together, the black-haired girl who always followed me.
 Although she was a quiet girl, Akiha always came with us.
 She rarely smiled and even her smiling face seemed somehow sad, transitory.

—When I was a child, and knew nothing.

I really wanted to make her laugh with joy, so I dragged her out into the garden
 with us over and over again.

"Nn.. Nii.. san.."
 As Akiha murmurs to herself, I wonder what kind of dream she's having.
 "____"
 For some reason, on impulse, I lift the sleeping Akiha's hair.
 While I watch her sleeping face, my heart becomes calm.
 It makes me want to watch over her forever if I could.
 ".... Akiha."
 I remember.

When we were children, I always thought about it.
That day I vowed to hold this girl more precious than anyone else.
The Akiha who would cry as she held me.
"... But it's no good, is it?
The image from back then is gone.
She's a proper young lady now."
I murmur, gazing at Akiha's sleeping face.
"—Nn."
I let her long black hair fall.
"... I'm... sorry."
Knitting her eyebrows painfully, Akiha whispers in her sleep.
"... I'm sorry... I'm sorry, Nii-san...."
"—Akiha?"
Akiha's breathing is irregular.
With her long black hair sliding off the bed, Akiha slowly lifts herself up.



"Ah—it's Nii-san.
Nii-san.. why are you, here..?"
"... Well, it's natural.
This is my room, after all."



"Eh—!?"

Akiha leaps upright as if stung, and glances around quickly.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
Did you sleep well last night?"
.... As if she hadn't slept here at all, she greets me calmly.
Just like Akiha.
Her guts, or I should say her response, is not normal.
"Yeah, morning.
I slept well, thanks to you.
It's been a long time since I had such a pleasant morning."



"Really?
Is your body completely recovered, then?"
"No, it still feels kind of heavy.
Today's a holiday, so I'll just rest quietly."



"Why Nii-san, it's unlike you to say such things."

Usually you disappear off somewhere before anyone notices."
"Please don't say that.
I'll be staying at home from now on, so you don't need to worry."



"Yes, yes, I'll accept half of that statement."

Smiling happily, Akiha gazes at my face.
.... If our faces stay as close as this, it'll be a problem.
Akiha's features are very beautiful, and if she keeps pointing that cheerful smile at me, I might go crazy.



"Well then, Nii-san, we shall see how you feel at lunch.
Until then, please don't exert yourself, or go outside."
"I understand.. But, it's terrible.
Since I came back here, you've had to nurse me all the time.
I'm no older brother."



"—Nii-san."

Though it was only a casual comment, Akiha's face is clouded. After hanging her head for a moment, she stands and looks up.



"—Please don't say stupid things like that.
You're my brother.
And even if you don't act like a good one, nothing would change."
"... Well, I suppose, but..?"



".... It's nothing.
But, it's true.
I don't mind having to nurse you every day, so please, don't worry about it."

Akiha walks quickly to the door.



"Well, excuse me.
I shall be out during the morning, so if you need anything, please ask Hisui."

And with that, Akiha leaves the room.

Ten o'clock comes around.
Although it's good to rest, lying in bed like this all day is boring.
"... Ahhhh."
.... But even so, it seems my body hasn't slept enough yet.
My body's still sluggish, and if I walk around and end up like yesterday, Akiha will get angry.
"... Akiha will be back in two hours.
And I promised her that I'd take today off, after all."
Telling myself this, I throw the sheets over me.

I get really drowsy, probably because I'm still exhausted.

... If I listen, I can hear my own heartbeat.

"Ho.. t.."
Come to think of it, I haven't had anything to drink since yesterday.
My throat's dry, and my head feels a little dim.

Just a little.
I guess it's okay to go out to get some water.

The corridor is empty.
Long ago.
So long ago I can't remember, or don't need to remember.
Like ruins in a movie, very quiet.

Hot.
The sunshine is hot.
Is my body still not recovered yet?
It seems I can't spend too long in the sun.

.... The detached building seems to waver in the sun.
My vision dims completely, like I'm in a hot desert.
White.

.... There's a clatter.
.... From the detached building.
.... Someone.
.... Is there someone in there?

Opening the sliding door very slightly, I peer in from the porch.
Inside, I see the figures of Akiha and Kohaku.
They look a little strange.
I hear the swishing of an obi being removed.

—What..?

Without a word, Kohaku pulls down her kimono and bares her breasts.

Kohaku stands there with a blushing face, but does not move.
Akiha presses her lips against the bared white chest.

Tension.

Kohaku looks down at her bare chest, and Akiha crouches so that she is burying her face in Kohaku's breasts.
A thin red drop makes a line down her breast.
Akiha's throat starts to move, swallowing something.
What—what is she drinking?
There's no need to ask; I already understand.

Akiha, she's drinking, Kohaku's blood—

———Dream
Dream——

This is a dream.
It's a dream, so I should hurry up and wake up.

"—Eh?"

.... My own room.
I'm definitely in.. my own room.
"Akiha, and Kohaku-san..?"
Akiha.
Akiha was drinking Kohaku's blood, I definitely saw it.
"Was I just dreaming..?"
.... Perhaps.
No, it must have been a dream.
There's no way that was real.
".... But.. it was so real."
It has to be a dream.
The smell of the tatami mats, the two's ragged breathing, the gulping I heard from Akiha's throat.
"_____"
I get out of bed.

.... I feel dizzy.
But I don't care.
The detached building.
If I go out to the detached building, I'll know for sure whether it was a dream or not—

"—!"
Hearing a noise, I hide myself.



"Kohaku.. san."
Kohaku-san walks from the direction of the detached building, towards the mansion.

.... The house is as silent as the grave.
I think it's empty.
Akiha isn't here.
Because she said she'd be out during the morning.
Akiha couldn't have been in a place like this with Kohaku-san.

"....."
I swallow hard.
I take a deep breath, and step inside.



".... Nii.... san....?"
Akiha is standing in the Japanese-styled room.
She is looking at me aghast.
".... Akiha."
"Yes..?"
"What is it, Nii-san..?"
Akiha doesn't seem surprised that I'm here.
She merely reacts listlessly.
"What is it'..?"
"What are you doing in a place like this?"
"What?"
"I just thought I'd come and have one last look around before it's demolished."
"—No, I don't mean that.."

I stare at Akiha's body.
Hm?
—Come to think of it, Akiha's wearing her uniform.
Wasn't she wearing her normal clothes a while ago..?
"Akiha, you changed your clothes?"



"Yes, since I went to school during the morning.
After leaving your room, I changed, and I only just returned."
"... Really?"
Yeah, of course, you weren't doing those things in here."

-Yes, it was a dream, after all.
.... But, something's odd.
It's odd, but.. who's odd?
Is Akiha odd?
Or am I odd?
When I saw that sight, Akiha was wearing her normal clothes.
It would be strange to change clothes after that, and what Akiha just said,
there's nothing strange about it at all.

So—that makes me who saw that dream strange.



".... Nii-san?
What is it?
You seem pale.
You said you'd rest all morning, so why are you out in a place like this?"
"Ah, I just thought I'd go for a bit of a walk."



".... Really?"

Well, I don't care about that, but I forbade you from coming here.

It seems you couldn't keep your promise to me, Nii-san."

Akiha glares accusingly at me.

Her gaze seems to see right to the bottom of my heart, which jumps in response.

".... You're right.

From now on, I'll be careful."



"This building is getting very old, so there's a chance it may collapse.

Please don't come here anymore, Nii-san."

—Is it just my imagination?

I think there really is something odd about Akiha's attitude.

For one thing, why would Akiha be in such a dangerous place alone....?"



"Now, please go back, Nii-san.
You do not look well."

Walking past me, Akiha leaves the Japanese-styled room.
"Wait a minute, Akiha.
There's something I forgot to ask yesterday."



"Something you forgot to ask?"
"Yeah.
That clearing where I collapsed.
Long ago, I used to play with you there, but I feel like there was someone else
as well.
Do you remember?"
"—There was no one else.
You're mistaken."

Answering clearly, Akiha leaves the detached building.
"... But, Akiha, there was a third child.
A child adopted ten years ago.
Are you saying you don't know about him?"
Left alone in the Japanese-styled room, I talk out loud.
Is Akiha hiding the truth about that child, or does she really not remember?
—I can't tell.

—Night.
As I returned and sat absent-mindedly in my room, it seems the day ended.
.... Too many things to think about, too many things I have to think about.
Even with Yumizuka gone, the killings still continue.
And I see matching dreams of killing people and sucking their blood.
Eight years ago.
The near-fatal injury I received in an accident, and the child that had to be
here.
The scene I remembered in the courtyard.
Undoubtedly, it was a memory from eight years ago.

If I've started to see dreams of killing people, there's no question why.
It seems that same thing happened right before my eyes, a long time ago.
"___"

.... I haven't seen Akiha since then.
Kohaku-san brought supper to my room, and Akiha has not come to visit.
"Well, I guess since I'm feeling better, there's no reason to visit, but.."
.... I still feel awkward when it comes to her.
If day breaks, and morning comes, and we say "good morning" as always, I bet
the bad feeling will disappear.
".... That's right.
I'll just sleep today."

With the lights off, I curl up in bed.

But, Akiha is not beside me.
If I sleep like this, then..
I might dream about killing people again—

"—Crap."
.... It's no good, I can't sleep at all.
Because Akiha was beside me yesterday, I was able to sleep peacefully.
If I sleep alone, I might have that dream again.
And if I dream of drinking blood, and another victim appears..
I wouldn't be able to deny it and would have to conclude that I am the killer.
"—Gh."
I get out of bed.
.... I won't sleep.
I won't sleep tonight, I will stay awake.
Moonlight is streaming in through the window, so I can just gaze at the moon
for a while—

"Huh?
There's someone in the courtyard."
I look closely.
"Isn't that Akiha?
What's she doing, standing in the courtyard?"
Akiha is standing quietly under a particularly large tree.
".... Maybe she's taking a walk.
It's past eleven already; she's so careless."
In fact, the first night I came back to the mansion, Akiha was walking about in
the dead of night too.
..... Well, if I'm not going to sleep anyway..
If, like yesterday, I have Akiha beside me, I don't think I'll have nightmares—

I walk in the moonlight.
The mansion's trees are painted in splendid autumn colors, and the falling leaves

really look illusionary.

Akiha stands in the center of it all.

I gaze at her long black hair, her thin back, and the autumn leaves scattered about her.

Swaying.

Her black hair shakes like the leaves; is that why her body seems so weak?

Akiha's figure seems like a mirage.

"... Akiha?"

What are you doing, at a time like this?"

"What?"

I'm watching the moon.

Just like you, Nii-san."

Showing no surprise at my appearance, Akiha turns and answers.

"Good evening, Nii-san.

Going out at a time like this even when you're sick; you're such a troublesome patient, aren't you?"

"I guess.

I could see the moon from my room, but there was a poor little girl outside.

As a proper brother, I had to come out."

"Huhu.

Well, I'm sorry about that."

"Ah—well, I guess inside the mansion is fine, but it has been unsafe recently.

You're a girl, so you shouldn't be wandering around outside at night."

"You're right.

If you say so, I'll go straight to my room."

"Bah, it's fine now.

... I, couldn't sleep either, so it'd be nice to spend some time together."

"If you'd like, then certainly, Nii-san."

Closing her eyes, Akiha nods quietly.

... Akiha's nod seems as if she is praying for something.

"... I'm surprised.

You're really nice tonight.

Did something good happen?"

"Nothing wonderful has happened.. but, I guess being able to talk to you like this might be something wonderful."

Akiha chuckles with a smile.

"——"

In response, my chest thumps.

"Nii-san?"

What is it?

Your face is red.

If you're still feeling ill, shall we move to the terrace?"

"No, I'm fine.

I'd like to gaze for a little longer, so let's stay here."

"Yes.. tonight really is beautiful.
Of all the scenery around the mansion, this is my favorite."
Akiha smiles faintly.
.... Her behavior really surprises me.
Her atmosphere is terribly calm and gentle.
Amidst the red autumn leaves.
Tohno Akiha seems many times prettier than usual.
"Hey, Nii-san?
Do you remember this place?"
"This place?
You mean, this big tree?"
"Yes.
When we were children, this was our meeting place.
When I was inside doing my lessons, I'd hear a stone at the window.
And then I'd slip away from my private teacher, and run out here."
—Yeah, come to think of it, she's right.
Akiha was always doing lessons in the mansion; our old man wouldn't let her go outside.
"The people in the mansion were afraid of Father, so they wouldn't even talk to me.
.... But, that was natural.
I thought I wasn't meant to talk to anyone except Father.
There were lots of people, but to me the rules of the Tohno house were more important than any of them.
So I was fine by myself, and I could bear Father's lessons."
".... Yeah, I remember.
He didn't care about me, but the old man was really strict with you.
Shut up in your room all the time, doing lessons all day long.
I really didn't like that."
"Yes.
To be honest, I hated it too."
.... I guess she has sorted it out as something in the past.
Akiha laughs nostalgically.
"But, Nii-san, you were the one who let me notice.
.... You won't remember this since it was like an everyday thing for you, but one day, while I was waiting for the teacher in the courtyard, you came up, grabbed my hand, and began to run.
I asked what you were doing, and you said you couldn't play tag by yourself, so I should play too.
.... Really.. Thinking back, you were a terribly pushy person, weren't you?"
Akiha giggles.
".... Well, that's what children do.
Please forgive my impoliteness."
"Yes.. after that, Father scolded us, so it became harder for us to meet—"
"—Yeah, I became stubborn too.
I decided I'd play with you once a day, and one way or another, I'd get you

outside.

But, in the end, you slipped away yourself.

But you'd just watch from far away and never come close."

"It's fine.

I was happy just with that.

—Yes, I really was happy.

You took me out to play, and Father would scold us afterwards.

Father's scolding got worse day by day, right?

So, I began to think.

He won't come today.

He shouldn't come today.

I don't think he'll come today..

But, you always betrayed my expectations.

Every time we were scolded, and I thought you wouldn't come anymore, you always appeared, smiling.

You always said Father didn't scold you, but it was a pretty bad lie."

".... Really?

I always thought I'd fooled you completely; but I guess it was easy to tell it was a lie."

"Of course.

I was sorry you were always scolded on my behalf.

Every day at the same time, I would wait excitedly, wondering, 'Is Nii-san going to come today?'"

".... But, that was the happiest time.

When you went away, life returned to normal again, but I didn't suffer.

But, the memories of you were stronger than anything else, Nii-san.

.... You say you left me alone, but that is wrong.

I—I was always saved by you.

Because I had memories of you, I was able to remain as Tohno Akiha."

And, like an illusion, Akiha smiles.

"—There's something wrong with me.

If I was always clinging onto you like a child, I could hardly be head of the Tohno House."

".... Stupid.

That has nothing to do with it.

It's okay to depend on someone when you need to.

We're brother and sister, after all."

"No, that was only when we were children.

It was decided that I would be the heir of the Tohno House.

So, I cannot depend on anyone; I must manage on my own."

".... What's with that?

Just because you became the heir of the Tohno House, does that mean you can't make your own decisions?"

"That's what it means to become the heir of the Tohno House.

Long ago, that's what I was taught to believe.

—But, I'm still no good at it.
After all, I'm showing weakness like this, aren't I?"

As she speaks,
Akiha jumps forward with light steps.
As if dancing, she walks amidst the fallen autumn leaves.
"Aki—ha."
.... My chest hurts.
I don't know why, but right now, I want to embrace Akiha tightly.
.... Is there some magic in the light of the moon?
Even though she's my sister.. no, because she is my sister, I really want to
protect this girl.

"It's getting cold.
Shall we go back, Nii-san?"
".... Yeah, let's go back.
We shouldn't stay here forever—"

".... Nii-san?"
"___"
I can hear Akiha's voice.
But, I can't hear what she's saying.

Really, I don't know what it is.

Akiha's hair that should be black,
It looks crimson, like blood.

—Unnecessary.
It's unnecessary.

—Unnecessary.
It's something unnecessary.

—Unnecessary.
Red hair.
The image of blood.
A demon that drinks blood.

—That is not human, therefore..

It, must be eliminated.

"—Nii-san?
Are you alright?
Nii-san..!?"
"Guh.. ahh..!"
My chest tightens.
My heart is racing.
Blood clogs my veins.
Repeating in my head, kill, kill.

—No, I'm not going to kill yet.

I'll enjoy this woman's body first.
Her slender arms.
Her beautiful hair.
Her small breasts.
Her body, perfect like a beautiful doll; I'll violate it.

—My throat is hot.
It's just like..
when I kill people in dreams.
Hot.
"Nii-san, please hold on.
I'll help you, so let's go back to the mansion."
Voice.
I can only hear Akiha's voice.
No, I mustn't see her face.
If I do, I'll..
"—It's okay.
I.. won't touch, your body."
No.
I can't touch it.

If I touch it—I don't know what I'll do.
"... I'll go back first.
Make sure you come in too, Aki, ha.."
With what little reason I have left, I run from Akiha.

Somehow, I make it back alone.
I breathe desperately.
I collapse onto the bed.
"Damn it.....!"
I hate myself.
Not satisfied with mere dreams, I feel these urges in reality, too.
And not strangers; I wanted to do such things to Akiha—
"I—I."
I don't understand myself anymore.
Memories of eight years ago.
Akiha, and a boy covered in blood.
An event I can't dismiss as a dream or as reality.

—Tohno Shiki, like a killer.



"—I know.
Shiki-kun's fragile side."
.... Her.
Yumizuka spoke those words proudly.

"You're the same as me.
Just like me, you have the same unbearable urge to kill—!"

"—"

I can't deny it.
After all, those in the Tohno family have problems.
Death by madness.
Death by violence.
Disappearances.
Psychotic episodes.

Akiha drinking Kohaku's blood.
Me, seeing homicidal dreams.

"—Guh."
Thinking about it, I have to smile at my foolishness.
Why should Akiha be strange?
Akiha is normal, and that's just what I imagined.

Yes, I'm the only one that's mad.
Only I am—wanting blood tonight as well—

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Hot.

—Once aroused, my body can't be calmed with something like sleep.

—So.
Tonight too, I shall relieve my thirst.

It seems I went into town at night again.
It seems my eyes are bloodshot,
and I'm waiting for someone to pass by again.

—When did I unknowingly fall asleep?
Long hair swaying.
Wandering the town at night.

—I'm having another homicidal dream.
It seems I found new prey.
Anyone will do tonight.
Killing a strange man, dragging him into a back alley.

The sound of biting the throat.
There's a gurgling sound.
Biting into the throat, and drinking blood to relieve the thirst.

—It's the same again.
Then.
An obstruction appears.
I throw the body aside and rise.
Someone.
Someone is watching me.

—The black figure appears.
Shaking my hair loose, I look up at the moon.

—The figure is someone I know well.
From rooftop to rooftop.
From shadow to shadow.
The figure follows.

—The black figure looks a lot like Ciel-senpai, matching the fiend's unnatural speed perfectly.

—The movement stops.
Since it's excited.
It seems ready to fight.
It seems tired of running.
It probably felt like playing.

—Ciel-senpai is coming.

.... After that, it was quick.
Ciel-senpai was very strong, but when a passerby happened to appear, that was the end.
When she moved to protect that passerby, she was skewered with something like an iron pipe along with the passerby.

—It's too cruel to watch.
Lifting her hands up, they too are skewered with pipes.
Hung like a crucifix, Ciel-senpai is stripped.

—.... I know it's laughing.
Sliding its tongue over Ciel-senpai's breasts, it laughs.
Ciel-senpai simply glares, doing nothing.

—Blue pupils like flames.
Looking into my eyes.

—The image stops.

—Organs break.

—Like peeling off a scab,

I wake up.

"—!"

I jump out of bed.

It's almost six in the morning.

"Even Senpai—why?"

.... No, that woman in priestly robes wasn't necessarily Senpai.

Because, there was something different about her.

The me inside the dream was strange, but that Senpai was even stranger.

Leaping from rooftop to rooftop, and throwing swords like bullets.

It almost seemed like Senpai was more of a monster than the killer.

—So it has to be a dream.

Because when I opened my eyes, I was sleeping in my own bed.

"—I can just call it a dream?"

I laugh.

Whether or not it was a dream isn't the problem.

What I remember and how much I didn't want to kill are meaningless.

—All I know is, my body is still excited.

The feel of breaking the man's neck,

of skewering Ciel-senpai's arms over her head, and licking her body.

.... I can still feel the heat of her breath.

So, whether it was a dream or reality makes no difference.

I killed someone and tried to rape Senpai in either case.



"Excuse me."

Hisui enters carrying my school uniform.

"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

".... Yeah, morning, Hisui."

I answer, shaking off the remaining sensation of Senpai's warmth.

.... But, it's no good.

Even though Hisui came to wake me up, I still can't help but feel depressed.

"Shiki-sama..?"

You seem pale.

Are you still ill?"

".... Nah, it's not that.

I'm always like this in the morning."

I get out of bed.

.... My head aches, but I ignore it.

"I'll go to the sitting room.

I bet Akiha's waiting?"



"No.

It seems that Akiha-sama is not feeling well this morning either, so she shall be absent from school today."

"Eh—but, she was fine just last night."



"I cannot say.

Since I heard this only from Nee-san, I do not know the details."

"—I see.

Another fit, like before, I guess.."

"Nee-san is in the sitting room, so please ask her for the details."

With that, Hisui leaves.



"Ah, good morning, Shiki-san.

You're up early today."

"Morning, Kohaku-san.. I heard Akiha's condition is bad, what happened?"



"Eh-?"

Ah, Hisui-chan told you?

Akiha-sama has a bit of a fever, so she's taking today off."

"A fever.. but, why?"

"Well, she's been really busy since you got back, hasn't she?"

Speaking with relatives, arrangements to change schools.

She's just tired out."

".... Just tired out?"

Really?"



"Of course.

Oh, Shiki-san, you're panicking.

She must be really important to you."

Kohaku-san laughs happily.

As she speak, I realize how tense I was getting.

"Ah.. nah, I wasn't really worried about Akiha, I was just.."



"Just what, Shiki-san?"

Her eyes stare straight at me.

I'm not good at lying, and I don't want to betray my feelings.

"—Ah, no, you're right.

Akiha's important to me, so like you said, I was worried."

.... Though I'm embarrassed, I tell Kohaku-san my true feelings.



"Shiki-san, you're very honest today.
Please, say that when Akiha-sama's here."
With an innocent smile, she says something pretty scary.
".. Oh, come on.
There's no way I could tell Akiha that.
By the way, is she still asleep?"



"Yes, she took some medicine and went to sleep a short while ago.
She said 'there's no need to visit, so Nii-san should just go to school'.
"... Really.
Well then, I'm glad."

I sit down on a sofa.
.... At least this is one less thing to worry about.



"Ah, Shiki-san.

Last night, were you really talking to Akiha-sama in the garden?"

"That's right.

I couldn't sleep yesterday, and when I looked out, Akiha was in the garden, so I went out and talked for a bit.

Why?"



"Well, Hisui-chan said so, so I was a bit worried.

But, Shiki-san, you shouldn't be going outside late at night.

It's very dangerous these days."

".... Because of the killer, right?"

I think I know that better than anyone."

"Even so, please take care.

Apparently a man was killed in town last night."

"——"

I jump off the sofa.

"Kohaku-san.. is that true?"



"Yes, it was on the morning news.

Since the victims have all been women until now, they seem to be talking about it a lot."

"——"

A man.
A male victim.
The unknown man I killed in the dream.
"Shiki-san—?"
.... Kohaku-san is saying something.
"Ah—no, it's.. nothing."
That's all I can say as I stand in amazed shock.

—I arrive at school.

It's seven-fifty.
Even though I left the mansion very early, I still only made it to school at the last minute.
The reason is obvious.
The possibility that I might be a killer slowed me down.

I step through the gate.
There are people like me all around, going to class.
"....."
.... Every time I see them, I freeze.
They are people who never think of murder.
And amongst them there are people like me, attending the same lessons.
".... Yumizuka.
At last, I know how you felt."
No, I can't compare my situation to hers.
But perhaps now I understand a little of her feelings.

.... The way I am now, I can't be here.
I have killed many people already.
It doesn't matter if it's a dream or not, but with desires like that, I must not be here.
"..... Ha."
I smile wryly.
A few days ago, I wouldn't even have imagined something like this.
"Hey, you.
If you just stand around like that, you'll be late."
"Eh?"
Someone hits me on the shoulder.



"Good morning, Tohno-kun.
We're here today at the same time."
"____"
I'm so surprised, I can't speak.



"Hm?
What's wrong?
Your face is red, Tohno-kun."
"____"
I forgot.
Thinking only about myself, I forgot about Senpai.

—Last night.

The black figure who appeared before me as I killed.
Pursuing the killer, caught by the killer and skewered from behind.

—And then.
The body, I was about, to rape.

"... Senpai, um—"
I don't know what to say.
I should apologize for last night, but I still don't know myself whether that was
a dream or not.
But, more than anything—



"Yes?"

What is it, Tohno-kun?"

"No, you.. you seem the same as ever, Senpai."

—More than anything, Senpai is the same as ever.

So, either last night's events were just a dream, or the figure in black wasn't Ciel-senpai.

The person who was skewered with an iron pipe last night would not be attending school today.. and if Ciel-senpai was the figure from yesterday, she should not be smiling warmly at the killer.



"Tohno-kun?"

Is something wrong?"

Your face keeps going red and blue.

Are you not feeling well?"

An autumn cold, perhaps?"

"No, it's not that, it's just—"

.... The feel of last night's dream is still with me, and I can't look directly at Senpai.

The gleam of naked skin, its soft texture.

My fingers gripping her soft breasts with most of the red blood flowing over her like a tattoo.

"—Uh."

.... This is bad.

I remember too much, it's too real.



"Tohno-kun?
You've really been strange for a while.
Maybe you should get some medicine from the nurse's office before going to class?"
Is she concerned?
Senpai peers up at me.

"Uh—wait, Senpai.."
If she gets close, I'll remember last night's dream.
.... With Ciel-senpai's face appearing before me, I can feel my face going completely red.



"Ahh, you seem really ill."
Dropping her shoulders in amazement, Senpai stretches out her hand.

Senpai's hand touches my forehead.
Her warmth and gentle touch is too much.
"Wait, Senpai.. it's nice, but, right now it's a bit—"
"Hmm, it doesn't feel like you have a fever."
Senpai ignores my words, pressing her hand against my forehead.

—And.

As she takes my temperature, I catch sight of a bandage under the sleeve of

Senpai's uniform.

"—Eh?"

.... The bandage goes a little way down from the base of her palm.

There's no mistaking it.

That is where she was skewered last night.

My body heat vanishes instantly.
I feel as if reality is collapsing around me.

".... Senpai.

That bandage on your arm.

What happened?"



"Ah, this?

Well, it's embarrassing, but it was my own negligence.

It healed already, but I felt like putting a bandage on.

It's nothing major, so don't worry about it."

Senpai speaks casually.

.... Why?

Because, I know it's a lie.

"—No, it is something major.

Since you were skewered by that iron pipe, I bet it still hurts."



"....."

Then, the smile vanishes from Senpai's face.

"Ah—"

—Thump.

The atmosphere in my dream returns.
For an instant, the air around me freezes.



"Tohno-kun, do you have a moment?"

Saying so, Senpai takes my arm.

"——"

.... I can't find words yet.

Ciel-senpai says nothing, and she pulls me behind the school building.



"I guess I made you skip class."

For some reason, Senpai sounds so normal.

"....."

I can say nothing.

I can only hang awkwardly on this ray of hope.

That in a moment, Senpai will say, "What are you talking about?"

Last night, Tohno-kun?"

That dream will be a dream after all, and Senpai will just be Senpai.

".... Senpai, I.."

"Yes, I should show you this first."

Interrupting me, Ciel-senpai rolls up the sleeves of both arms.
.... Both arms weak, wrapped in bandages.



"As you say, this happened last night."
"_____"

I can't ask who did it.
Because it is my doing.
But, it's clear now.

It's the truth; I am a killer who has killed many people already.
".... Crap.

It's real.. it really happened.."
"_____"

Senpai says nothing else, but merely stares at me.
At me.

She knows Tohno Shiki is the killer, then why..
"_____Why?"

Why does she..

"Why have you said nothing until now, Senpai..!"

You knew I was the killer, right?

So why didn't you—"

I can't understand why she continued to be my ordinary school senpai.

"I've killed people.

I did that to you last night.

How can you face me like that, Senpai..!"



"It's not unusual.
I'm your senpai, so why shouldn't I?
Whatever you say, I haven't seen you out at night."
Straightening, she speaks frankly.
"—What?"
.... She hasn't met me at night—but yesterday we were fighting to the death....?
"—What are you talking about, Senpai!
Twice now, you've interrupted me killing someone..!"
"That's true, but I've never raised a sword against you."
"Wha—that's nonsense, you've thrown loads of them at me!
I saw it clearly.
Or are you saying that figure wasn't you?
Are you pretending not to know!?"
"Well, I would like to feign ignorance if I could, but there's no reason to if you've seen that much."
Senpai's attitude is completely unchanged.
Senpai's words just seem not to the point.. no, she is purposely doing so.
—If I calm down..
I'm not one to talk, but Senpai isn't exactly normal either.
So is that why she is trying to evade my questions—?
"Senpai, please answer me seriously.
There's too much I don't understand, I'll go crazy.
Ciel-senpai, why were you doing that?"



"Oh.. Tohno-kun, you look scary."
.... I don't know how serious she is but Senpai pulls away from me.
Somehow, she dodges the question completely.
".... Senpai, please answer me seriously.
Last night and before that, what were you?
That was something no ordinary human can do."



"Ahh.. what do you mean, 'that'?"

"I mean..!"

That ridiculous movement, throwing all those swords..!

I saw about twenty swords, where were you keeping them all!

And, last night.."

"Yes?"

What about last night?"

"Last night, I. I stabbed you with an iron pipe.

So how, how can you be walking around so calmly today?

However you look at it, it's not normal.

Senpai, are you really human..!?"

For a moment.

Senpai glances down with a terribly sad expression.

".... I don't know.

To be honest, I've no idea."



"I only have the name Ciel, an exorcist specializing in vampires.
I know that I'm not an ordinary human like you."

"Eh.. vampires, Senpai..?"



"Don't worry.
I'm not from around here, so I'm already ready for you to look at me that way."
Looking away, she says something incomprehensible.
"Hold on, Senpai, what do you mean by 'exorcist'!?"



"An exorcist is an exorcist.
A member of a holy order who has learned the rites for banishing demons.
Don't you know, Tohno-kun?
It's a common word, so I thought you'd know it."



"Well, to be honest, I do more extermination than banishing, so I'm a bit different.
Would it help if I said it's more like a sorceress?
It's not exactly right.. in fact, it's almost the opposite, but perhaps it'll be easier for you to understand?"

"A sorceress?
But that's—"
I can hardly call it impossible.
After all, I've seen her superhuman powers.
.... But, I can't believe it.
Or maybe I don't want to believe it.
Since she was such a kind senpai, maybe I just want Ciel to stay as Senpai.
"—That's a lie.."
.... Without realizing it, those words escape my mouth.



"Yep, you're right, it's a lie.
It's all nonsense, so please don't believe any of it."

.... She won't say anything.
She's just going to let it disappear as a lie.

"—No.
This isn't nonsense."
.... I don't want to accept it, but I have to.



"....."
.... Why is it?
Senpai lowers her eyes sadly.
".... I don't know what's happening either.
But, I have tried to kill people, and you always saved me.

I don't understand anything, but I do know that."



"Wasn't that just a dream?
You're just an ordinary high school student.
You have my word."
"Just an ordinary..!
Even if it is a dream, someone who enjoys murder every night is living with
other normal people!
Even I feel bad about being bad....!"
—Yes, feeling the urge to kill people.

Not merely in dreams, but I have such desires in reality too.
And not strangers; Akiha, the person I know best—
".... A killer, huh.
Yeah.
Now that I state it, I understand.
It's natural for you to come to me every night.
You can't leave such a dangerous guy alone.
So—so, you were going to kill me, Senpai....!?"



"....."
"Why won't you answer?
Say something, Senpai!"
"Ah—"

I grab Senpai's arm around the bandage, and drag her towards me.
Senpai says nothing, looking down.
"... I don't understand.
I don't understand anything, Senpai.
I don't understand myself anymore.
So, please, Senpai.
If you know anything, please tell me..!"
"... Tohno-kun.
Do you really believe you're the killer?"
"I can't think of anything else.
.... So, I just want to rest now.
Since I don't know myself.. I want to hear it clearly from you.
And then—"

Then, even if I have to die, I'll be ready for it.
"... Why.."
"Senpai..?"
"Why... why can't you just laugh it off as always.
If you did, maybe we could go on like this.."



"But, it's too late for that now.
The spell has already faded."

—Saying so,
Senpai escapes my grasp and leaps away, far away.



"Tohno-kun, I'll tell you what I know.
What kind of person you are.. exactly how many people you've killed."
"Ah——"
For a moment, I feel dizzy.
Even though I said I was ready, hearing the word 'killed' so clearly, my chest hurts.
".... Good.
Tell me, Senpai."
"No, not here.
I'll be at the school tonight.
After that, you decide, Tohno-kun."

.... So that means she's leaving the final decision to me.
If I go to school tonight, that's the end.
But if I don't, we can go back to the way we've always been; a final choice—
"....."
I can't say I'll definitely be there, so I say nothing.



"Well then, I'll be waiting at school tonight.
But, promise me one thing.
That you will keep this a secret from your younger sister."
"Eh?
From Akiha?"
Of course, I wouldn't get Akiha involved in any of this, so there's no need to

say that.
There isn't, but..
Why is Senpai asking so seriously?
As if saying Akiha was the enemy, not me.
"... Senpai, Akiha has nothing to do with this."
"—Tohno-kun.
Please be careful around her."

Leaving a warning in a frightening voice, Senpai disappears.

—The lesson finishes, and the students disperse.
.... Even if I'm going to meet Ciel-senpai at school tonight, I should return to the mansion first.
In the end, the conversation only told me the dreams were real.
Nothing is resolved, and I still don't know whether I am the killer or not.

—*sigh*
After sighing heavily, I leave the classroom.

Hisui is at the mansion gate.
"Huh?
What are you doing out here, Hisui?"



"I am waiting to welcome you home, Shiki-sama."
"Eh?
Well, I'm glad, but, why?
You said you wouldn't be able to meet me here anymore."



"That was because you and Akiha-sama were together.
.... Nee-san.. she suggested we should refrain from send-offs and greetings when
you were together."
"___"

I see.

Certainly, if I were with Akiha, it would be awkward to be met by Hisui.

"Another of Kohaku-san's strange ideas.

Well, I'm always glad to be met by you, Hisui.



Anyways, I'm home.
Thanks for coming out."

"Yes.

Welcome home, Shiki-sama."

Hisui bows.

.... Thinking about it calmly, a maid bowing in front of a mansion is a terribly
anachronistic image.

"Oh, By the way, is that Akiha doing any better?"



"Yes, it seems her condition improved by lunchtime.
Perhaps you should stop by her room?"
"Maybe, at least once—"

—Please be careful around her.

"—No, I shouldn't.
I.. can't see her right now."
.... It's not that I'm not thinking about her.
But, because of what Ciel-senpai said, it's hard to see her right now.
"Shiki-sama.
Are you not returning to your room?"
"Ah, you're right.
Well then, shall we go in?"
Acting cheerful to hide my uneasiness, I pass through the mansion gates.

.... It's night.
I talked only a little to Akiha at supper, then came straight back to my room.
She seemed no different than usual, so I'm sure Senpai's warning was wrong.
".... If I'm going to go, I should leave pretty soon."
Senpai said we'll talk at the school tonight.
If I go, she won't be my Senpai any longer.
But if I don't go, everything will go back the way it was.

Senpai left me with that choice.
I'll—

if flgO >= 1 turn to **347**

Go and determine my own fate. turn to **345**

No, I'll stay in the mansion. turn to **347**

345

"—I can't let it remain unanswered."
If that dream is real.
Am I really a bloodsucking, killer?
... I can't let those questions remain unanswered.

"I should take it, just in case."
The knife has been in my desk ever since what happened with Satsuki; I slip it
into my pocket.

I go down to the lobby quietly, so that Hisui and Kohaku-san won't notice.
I just need to open the door without making a sound—

but before I can open it, it opens with a creak.



"Nii-san?
What is it?
Why are you standing here, frozen?"
"A—Akiha, you."
Why are you here, I ask wordlessly.



"I was just taking a walk in the garden.
What about you, Nii-san?
You look like you're going to go out right now."

".... Yeah.
I left something at school, so I was going back for it."
.... I don't want to lie to Akiha.
So, I say as little as possible.



"Hmm, you forgot something?"
Akiha narrows her eyes at me.



"Well, alright, it's still eight.
Make sure you are back by nine, Nii-san."
"Right.
I'll be back in an hour."



"Understood.
I shall leave the door unlocked; please take care."

Akiha walks to the sitting room.
.... It's strange.
Before, I would have been doubted more, but Akiha seems to trust me completely.
.... Is it because of what happened in the garden last night?
Being trusted by Akiha, feeling that she trusts me, makes me very happy.

—Please be careful around her.

"—Uh."
Senpai's words return like a curse.
".... Anyway.
I'll go to school, and come straight back." And I'll meet with Senpai.
Alright.
I grasp the door handle.

—The school is wrapped in silence.

Our school closes at half past six, and no teachers or janitors patrol at night.
At this time, the buildings are completely empty.

.... All around, it's quiet.
The only sound is the beating of my own heart.

".... Is Senpai inside, I wonder..?"
Although she said she would wait at school, she never said where.
.... No, Senpai probably deliberately didn't tell me.
".... Well, can't be helped.
I'll cut the lock of a window and go in."
I remove my glasses.

".... Kuh."
Along with a light headache, the "lines" appear before me.
The "lines" along which things easily break.
Things which can be cut just by passing through them.
".... With Yumizuka, it was just desperation.."
Removing my glasses calmly like this, I really feel how strange my eyes are.
".... Now, where's a window with a line in the lock.."
Although anything can be cut, they can only be cut where the "lines" appear.
If I cut the wall or the window itself, it'll draw attention tomorrow.
The cut has to be as small as possible.
"Ah, perfect.
Here goes.."
With a click, I cut the lock smoothly, and open the corridor window.

—Thump.

My chest aches as soon as I climb in the window.

"Uh.."

What is it?

It's horribly..

—Thump.

There's a horribly sinister atmosphere.

".... Senpai.. where are.. you?"

It's hard even to murmur.

My heart beats.

A resounding pumping, like a drum driving my blood backwards.

".... Huh..?"

It looks like my fingertips are trembling.

I feel sick.

Without my glasses, my headache is getting worse by the second.

"What is this.. it's.. strange.."

I don't understand.

The atmosphere inside the building is so different from outside.

If I have to put it into words, it's without life.

Compared to the fresh air outside, the air in the corridor is so weak that it feels sad.

".... But, I know.."

Though I'm breathing this air for the first time, I know it.

Because I've always watched it.

Every night, in my dream.

When I kill people and drink their blood, the atmosphere is always.. full of this smell of decay.

"Eh—?"

A sound.

From behind me, the sound of something falling.

"Senpai..?"

I turn.

There, there is..



47 0

A strange man.

"Uh..!"

I clasp my hand over my mouth, about to vomit.
 The man.. the "lines" run within his body.
 They run through his whole body like blood vessels.
 "—Gih."

The man walks toward me, as if in slow motion.
 "Uh—hello..?"

I make up my mind and talk to him.
 It's strange, but my eyes are stranger.
 It's the first time I've seen "lines" all over a person's body like this, but take
 them away and you'll have a normal human.
 "—Gih—gigih.."

The man is saying something.
 But his voice is not even a noise, I can't hear.

The man approaches.
 Why is it?
 Whenever the man steps closer, a shudder runs through me.
 It's—

"Gih—"
 The man is right in front of me.
 "W.. wait, who.."
 are you?
 I don't even have time to finish.

"Ah—!"
 There is a crash.
 As he approaches, the man throws me aside with a single hand.
 "Ugh—"
 My back.

Thrown aside, my back smashes against the wall.
It's so sudden, the pain makes my eyes dizzy.

"Ow.. what are you doing, all of a sudden..!"
I stand and glare at the man.



49 0

"——"

My voice dies.
He's.. what is he?
What is this thing before me?
Was this a man?
Is this a living human being?

No, that's not important right now.



47 0

I recover my sight, and look again at the man.
.... Yes, it's back.
Sensei said that my eyes see the "death" within things.
That's exactly right.
Because—
"You're—"

"Gi—gigi, gigigih."

The man is saying something.
 Of course it doesn't speak words.
 Because half of his throat is missing.
 It was bitten away by something.
 So there's no way for him to speak.
 "Why—you were killed, yesterday.."
 "Gi—gigigigih.."
 His shoulders are shaking; he seems to be laughing.
 But there's no mistake.
 The corpse before me is definitely the man I killed in the dream yesterday.
 "Ah—"
 The man approaches slowly.
 "Ah—"
 There's no thought.
 The lump of death approaches.
 "Ah—ah."
 A shudder of pain.
 Then, I notice.
 When the man threw me before, the side of my chest was injured.
 My body hurts.
 Not just on the level of muscles; my bones themselves are creaking.
 Something definitely happened to my ribs.
 "Gih—gigigigigih..!"
 The man flings up an arm.
 At last, my numb head understands.

—Without a doubt,
 he intends to kill me.

"Hii—!"
 I dodge the sweep of the man's arm.
 There is an unpleasant crunching sound.
 The man's arm is embedded in the wall.. it's buried right into the concrete wall.
 He did not hold back an inch.
 Breaking a concrete wall, and in return, he's breaking his own bones.
 "Ah—ahah.."
 It's a funny, hard to believe world.
 If it's a dream.. if it's a dream, I want it to end now.
 "Gih—"

The man turns towards me.
"Aaa, ah—"
Another crunch.
The man comes toward me, his arm still in the concrete wall.
The arm.
Stuck in the wall, the arm tears away from his body.
"Gih, gih, gih."
It's still laughing.
"Ah—aaaahhhh!"
My legs move.
I can't bear to be here any longer.

"Ahh, ghah, ghah..!"
I collapse to my knees with a thump.
The man.. that corpse is not following.
At that speed, it can't, catch me.
"Hagh, ghahh..!"
My chest hurts.
Whenever I breathe, my ribs feel like they're about to break.
"Gah.. hah.. ha.. h."
Somehow I catch my breath.
Somehow.
I have to somehow get back to normal.
I MUST calm down.

Think.
Look, and then think.
I learned that from Sensei.
So I have to think hard.
Even if that's a dead body.
Even if it's someone I killed.
"Ha—I can't think about it, that's just..!"

Ignoring the pain in my ribs, I cry out.
I don't understand.
I can't understand.
The one I killed is about to kill me.
The one I have killed has returned to take his revenge.
—That's just a nightmare.
It can't be real, just an insane nightmare.

But what am I saying now?
I've been in a nightmare for a long time already—
"Damn it!"
I have to recover my breath and run away.

I have to leave this school, go back to the mansion, tell Akiha I'm home..

"Eh—?"

A sound from behind me.

"—It can't be."

It caught up?

No, that's impossible.

It moved so slowly it couldn't just catch up like that.

I look down the stairs.

.... There is no one coming up.

The noise was just my—



49 0

"Ahh—!"

Again, I'm beaten.

When I turned around on the stairs, it seems it was already there.

"Have to—get away.."

I drag my aching body up.

"Uhh—!?"

I fall again with a thump.

It seems that when he threw me this time, my leg was damaged.

There's no strength in my right leg at all.

I can't stand, and I can't escape.

"Ah—"

Approaching footsteps.

—Thump.

Clank, clank; a dry, emotionless sound.

—Thump.

The putrid smell of a corpse hangs in the air.

—Thump.

My heart beats loudly.
All rational thought has long departed.

—Thump.

It approaches.
That corpse is coming to kill me.



47 0

"Ah—ah."

I'm just afraid.

"Gih.."

It's coming.

With a body full of holes, it comes to kill me.

One more step.

Then it'll pierce my chest the way it did the wall, and that'll be the end.

"Ah—hah.."

At that moment, I wonder.

What is it that I fear?

Am I afraid because the one I killed has returned?

No, that's not it.

Am I afraid because I'm about to be killed?

No, not that either.

I remember only one thing.

In my dreams, how hot it is when I kill people.

.... I'm afraid of my own crime.

I'm afraid of my own crime trying to kill people.
"Kuh—hah, haha.."
Well, if that's so, then there's no problem.
This one's already dead, so there's nothing to fear.
There's nothing wrong with putting the dead to rest.

So.
There's no need to hesitate about killing again, is there..?
"Gih..!"
The body flings up an arm.
I take the knife from my pocket.

—What followed was, really, quick.

Was it because I watched all those crimes in my dreams?
Or maybe because those crimes were committed by my own hands like I suspected.
My arm moved impossibly fast, and struck down the corpse like a true killer.

The meat, divided into eight pieces, now just rolls around the corridor.

"Ah—hah."
A shudder.
The feeling of slicing meat.
The acceptance of taking a life.
There is no flowing blood.
Only my knife drips with blood; I remain spotless.
"___"
Shuddering.
A feeling of pain and coldness crawls on my back.
There is nothing to earn.
Only my knife drips with blood, I haven't gained anything—
"—Hah."
I just feel ill.
Maybe I'm going crazy.
Looking at the remains before me, my chest hurts like it was torn open.
The school at night.
In the moonlight, it's amusing.

".... Hah,"

".... Hahaha.."

".... Ahahahahahahaha!"
I laugh without stopping.

It's not funny.
Only regret is felt.
I killed.
Whatever the reason, I killed someone again.

—Even though he was blameless.
This person also had a life to protect.
"Haha, hahaha, hahahahahahaha..!"
A jarring, laughing voice.
I want to kill my ears for listening, and my throat for laughing.
But I can only laugh.
At least, I have to laugh.
Unless I do a single act resembling human actions, I will break.
"Haha, ha, haha, ha—"
I'm not laughing because something is funny.
I laugh to keep my sanity.
If I can't even ridicule myself, I can't keep my sanity.

"Hah—hahaha, ha.. hah."

.... Perhaps I should have cried.
But I won't allow myself such hypocrisy.
What do I mean by.. killing the dead.. isn't a crime.
"Hah—hah—ahh."
.... it doesn't change.
Whether he was living or dead, it doesn't change the fact that I made the decision to kill him.
Even if he was already a corpse, the feeling of stopping his activity does not dull.
"—Hah."
I can't get mad at myself for my stupidity.
Even if they're dead, killing someone is still a sin.
As long as I, Tohno Shiki, remain a proper human, the burden of this sin will never leave me.
.... I remember Yumizuka.
Even if it was the right thing to do, in the end, I know she wanted to live.
Saying death is salvation is only the selfish wish of those still living.
Death..
Is just that, and is so painful.

—Someone is coming.

This time, it has to be Senpai.
"—Kuh."
Somehow, I stand, holding onto the wall.
Thump, Thump.

My heart still beats violently.
Even if my heart is halfway dead, my body tries to live until the very end.

.... Such a worthless life.
Dying like this is painful.. I realized that already eight years ago, during my time with Yumizuka, and even this very moment.
Yet, Tohno Shiki's body is still making a great effort to survive.
".... How.. ugly—"
But, which is ugly?
The heart that thinks I should die, because I'm a killer?
Or the body, trying to live by killing others?
.... I think it's the heart.
Good or evil, my heart is really fragile after all.
"—You're here."
Breathing heavily, I grasp the knife.
My injured right leg hurts faintly.
If I can feel pain, I can still move.
Meaning I can still fight.

And Ciel-senpai appears in the moonlight.



".... I'm surprised.
In all the dreams you never were dressed like that."
"Yes.
Because these are the armaments to kill a vampire."

—A jolt.
I understand the instant I see her eyes and hear her voice.
This person plans to kill me without the slightest hesitation.
".... I see.
You called me here to kill me, Senpai."
"———"
Senpai doesn't answer.
.... Clearly, because there's nothing to say.
"That's mean."

You said I'm not the killer, but you knew in your heart that I was."

"—Yes.

I knew from the beginning that the vampire haunting this town was Tohno Shiki."

"You knew.. from the beginning..?"

"Yes.

So, I came to this school.

In order to watch you."



So saying, she draws a dagger.

Twice the length and width of my knife, it is a weapon intended to kill.

"—Senpai, I don't know what you are at all.

Even if I knew, I don't think it would concern me."

"Yes; this is a situation of no concern to you."

".... Yeah.

But, I'm afraid I won't be killed.

Thinking about it, I killed Yumizuka because I didn't want to die.

So—I can't just die here.

If you say you're going to kill me, I'll.."

"That's fine.

If we agree to kill each other, then there is crime, but no punishment.

It would be more helpful if you think of it this way."

A noise of movement.

Before I realize it, Senpai's body is right in front of me.

"Well then, Tohno-kun.

Let us continue last night's fight."

A moment.

Ciel-senpai moves fast enough to fling up sparks.

Her attack is very simple.

Leaping from right in front of me, she slashes a horizontal line with her dagger.

"....!"

I block with my own knife, and am pushed back.

"—!"

My body staggers.

I desperately stop myself from collapsing backwards, and look for..

"Wha—"

For a moment, my mind freezes.

There's no sign of her in the corridor.

In an instant,

as our weapons clashed, Senpai suddenly disappeared—

"Eh—?"

—I think it was just by chance.

Without reason, just the feel of a breeze beside me, I shift my gaze.

In the blue moonlight shining in through the window,

I see Senpai's silhouette running up the wall like she was going up a flight of stairs.

"—Above!?"

Even as I notice, I lower my body.

"——!"

Scrambling on all fours like a dog, I escape forward.

Glancing back, I see Senpai fall from the ceiling precisely where I was.

... After swinging at me, she ran up the wall to try to strike my head from the ceiling?

Such an absurd, rollercoaster-like movement was charmingly beautiful.

Even though it could have skewered the back of my head.



"——"

As if her previous flash of movement never happened, Senpai stops moving.

Is she surprised I avoided that blow?

Her blue eyes confirm that Tohno Shiki is still alive.

Her eyes devoid of feeling, like a machine.

There is a tension, as I wait for her to spring into her next action.

"——"

I forget even to breathe.

With those eyes upon me, I can't move.

In just a moment more, that dagger will be driven into my chest—

"——Ssst."

The only sound is my heart pounding.

I stand unable to move, and Senpai only stares at me.

.... This is bad.

At this rate, I'll break under this tension, and make a movement.

When that happens, Senpai will certainly strike me down.

"——"

All I can do is grasp my knife tightly.

At that moment,

Senpai suddenly speaks.

"—I'm surprised.

You're certainly an excellent killer.

You are not good at feeling the other's presence, but you are good at feeling your own death.

Even if you don't remember it, perhaps you have been trained for such things."

Senpai speaks without even moving her eyebrows.

"Against someone that has a superior self-defense mechanism close to seeing the future, assassination is useless.

Trying to attack you from a blind spot was pointless, Tohno-kun."

Seeming terribly sad, Senpai lets out a sigh.

"——?"

"It's a pity.

If I can't kill your consciousness before you feel pain, all I can do is attack with my full strength.

Even if you can see death coming, your reflexes also make it an almost moot point."

Creak.

"—You don't look well, Tohno-kun."

Thump.

"You've been feeling that way for a while, haven't you?

Nausea that feels like your heart is being grabbed."

Shudder.

"You're so sensitive.

That's.."

Shudder.

"... Because of the impulse all living things have that says 'I'm about to be killed'."

Saying that,
she strikes from right in front of me.

"Kuh...!!"
I block her dagger with mine.
A shock.
Senpai's simple attack feels like she used a giant hammer.
My knife screeches.
"Ttch..!"
My fingertips go numb.
But I don't have time to think about that.
Her foot audibly strikes the ground.

"Ha, guh.....!?"
The air is knocked out of me.
Senpai has stepped into the gap between my legs.
So close that our bodies collide, and with that momentum, Senpai slams her
shoulder into my chest.

I stagger.
The strength in my knife weakens.
Without a single pause, her second attack begins.

Her dagger swings upwards from below.
Somehow, I block it with my knife, but I can't kill its momentum.

Slash.
There's a horrible sound.

"Ah——"
It's hot.
Somewhere, I'm cut.
Falling meat, the heat of blood.
There's no time to feel any of that.

The third blow comes.

It was probably aimed at my heart.
Since I immediately twisted my body to avoid it, the knife rips out my rib along with the flesh around it.

"Gah, aaahhhh..!!!!"
I scream.
The coldness of death does not cause me to shudder.
But fear from the pain races through me.

There.
Follows the fourth unforgiving blow.

—My ribs are damaged.

I can only use the power of my arm to wield my knife.
But with that, it's impossible to block Senpai's dagger.
"Kuh—!"
Somehow, I jump back on my staggering leg.
I get enough distance.
Senpai turns, showing me her back—

Crash.
She drives a roundhouse kick like a spear into my belly.

"Ha—ahh..!!!!!"
I collapse backwards onto the hallway floor.
I don't have time to feel pain.
If I don't stand up immediately, I'll be killed.
But it's too late.
The moment I get up, Senpai is right in front of me.

The dagger strikes down at my heart.
"——!"
I was just, desperate.
In desperation, I try to match her blow by placing my knife next to Senpai's neck.

—Then.
Senpai's dagger stops short.

"Haghh—"
Breathing.
My breathing is, hard.
pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*..
Her dagger is aimed at my throat.

If Senpai moves her hand even slightly, I'll die instantly.

"Ha.. ah.."

That fact.

Just that causes me to go insane.

"—It's over.

Even if you stab that knife through my neck, I won't die."

"Wha—what are.."

"You said before that you saw it.

Even though my body was pierced by an iron pipe, my body heals the wound instantly.

.... Certainly if you stab me through the neck I'll be dead for a while, but I'll kill you before that."

"—Wha."

What she says is true.

.... There's no sense in lying in a situation like this.

In other words.

This situation where both of us hold each other's life in each other's hands is meaningless.

"Won't—die..?"

.... Ah, but it could be true.

Even injured like that, Senpai came to school like normal.

"—Kuh."

But, screw all that.

I can see "death" on her body.

Although it's very different from other people's, I can still see her death.

So, killing her is easy.

The "lines" have no exceptions.

"If you don't believe me, please, use your knife.. In any case, you can't save yourself unless you kill me.

Shall we test it out?"

"——"

....She's provoking me.

If I can be killed, kill me, she's saying.

But Senpai, provocation like that is fatal.

I'm not like the others—I can really kill you.

—My heart beats.

If I look down, her dagger is at my chest.

.... I have to kill.

Because I don't want to die.

I found out I shouldn't die that easily, so I can't let myself be killed.

No, it's simpler than that.

I just, don't want to die.

—My heart beats.

So there's only one answer.

Kill.

Drive this knife into the "line" I see in Ciel's neck, and kill her.

Kill if you want to live.

Kill.

Kill.

Kill.

Kill.

Kill.

Kill—

I have to live.

turn to **413**

I can't do it.

turn to **346**

346

pant *pant* *pant*

I can't breathe properly.
 Senpai's eyes don't even appear interested in my death.
 Her dagger is poised directly in front of my heart.
 A situation where I'm a second away from being killed.
 "That's odd.
 You've killed so many people, yet you are frightened to die yourself."
 "_____"
 Her breath blows into my eyes.
 Her words make me dizzy.

"Goodbye.
 If you won't do it, Tohno-kun, I'll have to do it myself."
 Saying that,
 Senpai tenses her arms.
 "_____"
 This is the end.
 Tohno Shiki dies here.
 If I don't want that.
 I have to stab with this knife faster than Senpai—!

"Guh—!"
 My fingertips fill with strength.
 But that's all.
 My arms don't move at all.
 I don't want to die.
 It's not that I'm willing to die since I'm a killer.
 But if I don't kill Ciel-senpai, I'll be killed.
 So right now, I understand that even if I don't want to kill, I have to.

So why?
 Why won't my arm move—

Suddenly.

I wanted to talk more with you, Tohno-kun.
 That's why I really don't want to die now.

Those words.

But, this is for sure the best way.
—So, don't cry, Tohno-kun.
You did the right thing.

They force themselves into my memory.

Yeah, bye bye, Tohno-kun.
Thank you—and, sorry.

—Yeah.

I see now.

"Why aren't you resisting?"
I hear Senpai's voice.
The dagger is still at my chest; it tears my clothes and digs into my flesh.
"Like this, you'll die.
So why?
Why aren't you moving your knife?"

That's because..

".... I can't."

"Why not?
Even though you've killed so many people up to now?"

Never again.

".... I can't do it."
"You just killed that corpse.
After you've done it once, a second, or third time will not change anything.
If you don't do it, I will kill you."
.... She's serious.
In a second, the killer called Tohno Shiki will surely be killed.
It's not that I'm not afraid.

Yeah, but still—

"I can't.. kill someone—"
As I speak, tears flow.
It's not like something is sad, or someone's unhappy.
But the tears running down my cheeks don't stop.

How much time has passed?
My mind which has been in a trance..
"—Phew.
You understand at last, Tohno-kun."
.... Comes back with Senpai's words.
"Eh—Sen, pai..?"



"See, are you satisfied?
You're not a killer.

Those words were true words.
So, all this is just a dream.
Tohno-kun is Tohno-kun.
Very gentle, thoughtful, and so sensitive as to cry over something like this.
Just the ordinary, everyday boy I yearned for."

Saying so, Senpai puts the dagger away.
Her scary tone of death disappears, and Senpai returns to her everyday gentle self.
"Why..?
You didn't come here to kill me, Senpai..?"



"Right, I came here to kill the self-loathing in your heart.
You're not a killer.
But since it seemed you wouldn't believe that no matter how much I told you,
I had to persuade you on a more physical level."
"Wha—persuade me physically?
Then, you mean, this was all just an act..!?"



"No, I was serious.
I couldn't completely rule out the possibility of you being the killer, Tohno-kun.
Therefore I couldn't hold back.
Besides, it is more fun to go all out.
You know, like how you enjoy teasing someone you like."
Senpai says something pretty scary with a smile.

"Ha—"

—And with that, I collapse.

All the things I've been thinking about up until now seem so foolish.

"Haha, ha—"

For some reason, it's funny and I laugh.

As Senpai says, my fear that I might be a killer has disappeared.

".... Yeah, you're right.

It feels like I finally got it.

But that's terrible, Senpai.

You went too far today."



"Yes.

I've been going easy on you up until now, so I made up for that too."

Smiling, Senpai holds out her hand.

I take it.

With a grunt, Senpai pulls me up.

We exit the building onto the school grounds.

Senpai has treated the wounds she inflicted.

By some trick, the wounds closed after Senpai put medicine-like stuff on there and put her hand over it.



"Well then, I promised to tell you what I know.

What do you want to hear, Tohno-kun?"

"What—well, that's obvious.
I want to know everything about my dreams.
Why do I have dreams about killing people.. who exactly are you.. there's a lot
I don't understand."



"Ahh, I see.
Well, let's start with the dreams you have, Tohno-kun.
"To put it simply, I don't think the dream you're seeing is your dream.
Tohno-kun, you say you dream of killing, but isn't the dream more like watching
someone killing someone else?"
"... Well yeah.
Do you think I would kill people in my dreams if I could control myself?"
"See, that's what I mean.
When you sleep, you go into the killer's mind.
Well, not exactly going into but more like being taken into.
So, even though your viewpoint was that of the killer, didn't you feel as though
you were watching things from afar?"
"....."
That's—precisely right.
Even though I've had dreams about killings for a while now, they've all felt as
if I were watching a "scene".
"But, why is my mind and this killer's mind merging?
There must be some reason, right?"
"... Yes, there's a very clear reason.
But let us leave that aside for a moment.
rst, we have to discuss what you are calling the killer."



"Certainly, there is a killer.
 But it's characteristics are more like a vampire's."
 "... That's fair enough.
 Certainly, you could call someone like that a vampire."
 I remember the scene in my dream.
 That guy, while enjoying the killing, he ate their flesh and blood.
 "Yes.
 I am the person who came to this town to deal with that vampire.
 Although I can't tell you the details, the world has various defense mechanisms.
 Just like there are police to deal with those who break the law, there are also many organizations which deal with heretics who are inhuman.
 Think of me like a member of that kind of organization."
 "... Deal with vampires?"



"Yes.
 That which sucks the blood of the living to maintain its own flesh.
 A stopped life which does so in order to have eternal life.
 It is my role to wipe out such heretics.
 That's the reason I was fighting the vampire every night in your dreams."
 "____"
 There's nothing to say.
 To be honest, I don't understand the world she's talking about at all.
 "... Huh?
 So you've fought the vampire several times already?"

"Twice now.
The first time it escaped, and the second time, our encounter was rather painful."
"Right?
So, you've seen his face, haven't you?
So didn't you know immediately I wasn't the vampire?"
"No.
Unfortunately, I couldn't be certain.
Since some vampires can change their bodies freely, you cannot rely on appearance to identify them."
".... Really.
That's a problem, then."
"But, now it's clear.
So we've beaten around the bush, but this vampire is the serial killer then?"



"Yes.
The dead bodies reported as victims of the serial killer are merely leftover food.
Usually the flesh is consumed completely, or the blood is drained and they become vampires too, so there shouldn't be any bodies left."
".... Hold on.
If people who get their blood sucked turn into vampires, then wouldn't they start multiplying?"
"No, there is a limit to those who are killed by having their blood sucked, yet 'remain' without dying.
Most humans cannot separate the soul from the body, so the soul dies with the death of the body.
Only perhaps one in a hundred people can 'remain' without dying.
.... Like Yumizuka Satsuki did."
"Wha—Senpai, you knew about Yumizuka?"



"No.

By the time I got there, you had already destroyed her.

.... I'm sorry.

Back then, even though I knew you were in pain, I couldn't help you."

"—No, it's alright.

I want to think that what happened with Yumizuka was for the best.

.... But, I see now.

Yumizuka wasn't a vampire from the beginning.

She was attacked by that vampire, and that was the result—"

"Yes, that's true.

But I don't think there are others like Yumizuka-san.

It takes many years before a vampire can function as a vampire.

For her to be able to function immediately, Yumizuka Satsuki must have had amazing spiritual conception."

"Eh..?"

Spiritual conception?

What's that?"

"A functional extent of the brain determined when a person is an embryo—or so it is said.

Like how you use your ability, it is employing a section of the brain most people never use.

The same for Yumizuka Satsuki.

She was naturally 'suitable'.

So, instead of being under the control of her parent vampire, she became a vampire that could act independently."

I don't understand Senpai's explanation.

But, one thing occurs to me.

"Senpai.

You mentioned my abilities.. so, you know about my eyes..?"



"Eyes?"

No, I don't know what kind of eyes you have, Tohno-kun, but I know that you have an unique ability.

Tohno-kun's blood is special.

Not a trained ability like mine, but something you are born with.

Those kind of things are called 'supernatural powers'.

Most people have only one channel open in their minds, but you have another channel open that we can't see, right?"

"... Special blood.. you mean, the blood of the Tohno house..?"

"Yes, the Tohno bloodline is ancient.

But looking at the history of the Tohno family, one can see the abilities of its members are varied.

Such as those who can receive divine inspiration, those unable to maintain their shape as humans and become killers, or those who never awaken to their power.

.... As time passed, this blood has thinned and probably most of these abilities do not occur anymore."

"__"

I'm aghast.

If what Senpai says is true, then not just me, but Akiha will also have something "broken" like my eyes..?



"Shall I continue?"

Tohno-kun, you asked a while ago.

Why are your senses merging with those of the vampire?"

"Ah.. ah, yes, I did.."

"I think that is also related to your abilities.
Your brain has a larger channel than other people's.
Because of that, when you sleep and your sense of self dims, your mind is drawn towards a vampire which has an easily connectable brain with you."

"Huh..?"

Senpai, what do you mean, an easily connectable brain?

You can't mean they are made similarly, right?"

"No, that is precisely what I mean.

Have you ever heard of twins sharing experiences?"

"Twins sharing experiences..?"

"For instance, if the elder brother is injured, the younger brother who's miles away feels the same pain.

I think that your dreams are similar to this.

"Fundamentally, identical twins are two humans' flesh born from the same genes. They are body parts made from the same instructions, so it isn't impossible for pain felt by one brain to be received by the other."

"The brain is an organ that manages reception and transmission.

Since every person's brain is made from a different blueprint, we have to communicate our feelings through language.

But if two brains are precisely the same, thought will be transmitted without the need for language.

To put it in the previous terms, since the brain's channel is on the same frequency, the electric signal is received.

Since your brain is superior to others', you connect to the bodies close to you."

".... It can't be.

I don't have any twin."

"I know.

But in your case, it doesn't need to be a twin.

It's not like you are merging with them, but more like you have similar brains. Since your brain has many channels, there is no need for you to be identical twins.

Simply the same roots, a similar body.. that's probably all that is needed for you to be drawn in.

Probably a sibling with the same parents.. Well, I suppose an exception could be made in the case of organ transplants; the 'flesh' might pull on your mind in that case."

—It could happen with anyone connected by blood..?

That—that can't be.

Akiha is the only blood relative I have left now.

Only Akiha.

Is there.. no one but Akiha?

"—It can't be.

That's.. that's wrong."

.... Senpai doesn't answer.

In my mind,

I see Akiha's figure, drinking Kohaku-san's blood.
"That can't be.
I knew it, it wasn't a dream.
I was the one who killed people and drank their blood.
Because, if I not—"

All together, it makes sense.



".... I suspected you at first.
But after meeting you, I decided you weren't it.
But I might have just been fooling myself.
So, tonight was a gamble for me.
If you had killed me without hesitation, I would have known you were a vampire.. But, you weren't, after all."
"—No.
That was just—"

"Tohno-kun.
All those in the Tohno family have something 'inhuman' mixed in their blood.
Though some were completely harmless, there are usually only one of these in each generation.
In the past, there were many members of the Tohno family that drank blood.
But you do not need to drink the blood of others or have an urge to.
So—"

"How—how would you know that, Senpai?"

".... Tohno-kun, the Tohno House holds a possibility of giving birth to a vampire.
If you are not it, then.."
"——"

No, I shake my head desperately.

—I won't accept Senpai's words.
I can't accept them.

.... But, I remember.
In the detached building, the face of Tohno Akiha drinking Kohaku-san's blood.
".... It's not Akiha.

The one with strange power.. is me."

"—You may be right.

Just by looking, Akiha-san does not seem to have her power awakened.

She is certainly contaminated with it, but only to a level that she can still turn back."

"... No.

It's not Akiha..!

I'm the only one who has these troubles.

Akiha waited for me for many years, and just today, she said goodbye to me properly..!"



"I only hunt vampires.

Whoever it is, I cannot overlook them."

"—"

Unable to speak, I only bite my lip.

.... I don't understand.

If.. if Akiha is such a thing, what should I do?

Should I pretend not to realize, or should I fight Senpai to defend Akiha?

.... It's useless.

No matter how much I think, I can't find any answers.



"—I understand.

Akiha-san is a very important person to you.

Probably more important than yourself."

".... Of course.
A little sister is always important to her brother."
"We might end up fighting each other."
"...."
There's nothing to say.
.... I'm completely defeated.
Senpai clearly states things I don't want to say.

.... We reach the school gates.
Senpai seems to have reached a conclusion, as she doesn't say anything.



"—I won't ask what you'll do now.
We'll part here."
Her eyes emotionless, Senpai extends a hand.
"....."
Saying nothing, I take her hand.

For only a brief moment.
Senpai and I exchange a hollow handshake.

With just a goodbye, Senpai departs.

.... I return to the mansion where Akiha awaits.
I know from the conversation with Senpai that what I see are just dreams.
But, the fundamental problem is still unsolved.

The vampire—the truth, that thing which kills people every night.
If it's really Akiha, what can I do?
What should I do?
"Kuh..!"
I don't know.
Regretfully, all I can do is bite on my lip.
turn to **348**

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"—I can't."

I can't go.

The few remaining things I can be certain about.

My life at school, Ciel as my Senpai.. I can't lose them.

"——"

I know this can't last forever.

But still—I don't want to lose my peaceful life I have left.

—Night.

The time I promised to meet Senpai has already passed and I will watch that dream tonight once more.

"....."

No, that's not right.

I won't rely on Senpai's help.

This is my problem, so I will solve it myself.

In order to keep living the way I have until now, I will have to settle matters with this "killer" myself—

To prove that I am a killer or not.

.... I don't even have to think about it.

I just have to look around the town at night and find the killer which isn't me——

I let out a breath.

——I walk around the night-shrouded town.

I put my hands in my pocket, feeling the knife in there on my fingertips as I walk around town.

pant——*pant*

——I breathe quietly as I walk around.

Trying not to draw attention.

I look at the people passing by as I stand concealing my presence from everyone.

pant——*pant*, *pant*.

——I am searching for the killer.

Someone will get attacked tonight.

He is looking for a new victim.

Say, a girl with long, black hair.
A girl around my age would be best.
No need to mention the beauty of her hands and feet, but the beauty of her
neck should be considered.
In the end, everything counts on that one spot.

p-pant, *pant*, *pant*.

—I look for the killer.

.... I know I won't find him easily.
I knew from my dreams that the perfect prey is hard to find.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*

B.. u.. t
Tonight, this town bores me.
I cannot find my PREY.
I'm getting angry.
My objective was to find someone, or to kill someone, or something like that.
"————Ha."

I'll hold my breath.
I'll hold on to my knife.
I should concentrate, so I will be able to return death at any time.

I pant more and more.

—I look for the KILLER.

But I can't find him.
Only time passes.
pant, *pant*.

It overflows, sharpens, is used, is used up, and over time stands up, and
changes form and——

In front of me lies tonight's prey.

My panting fills the air.

It is a dead woman's corpse.
In my hand is a knife.
The red blood on my knife drips to the ground.

——Why?

I was looking for the killer, but all of a sudden, there's the dead body of a woman right in front of me.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

My breathing gets out of control.

A dead body in front of me.

A bloody knife in my hand.

—————I don't understand.

When, at what time, what I did.

Did something happen to my mind?

Yes, like..

it overflows, sharpens, is used, is used up, and over time stands up, and changes form, changes its meaning, becomes free, explodes, and lightens up.

On that path.

The theory of evolving consciousness and meaning.

But an important path is missing.

Since when.

Did I.

Turn into.

The other "me"?

——I see.

There was no need for me to give you a push, Shiki.

From behind me,

that voice sounds out.

Heavy breathing.

I turn around.

There.



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Someone I have never seen before, yet someone who looks like me, stands there.
—It can't be helped if you're already broken.
Bye, Shiki.
I wanted to play around with you for a bit longer.

Slash.
I'm cut with a knife.

It hurts.
It's funny.
It's deep.
It's great!
"Ha—haha, ha."
I start to pass out.
Like that, in that ambiguous state, I was killed.
.... I'm happy, in a way.
Tohno Shiki was killed by the killer.
That's proof that I wasn't the killer.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **444**

No.

turn to **1**

.... It was years and years ago.
I came here, after having shut myself up in my room for so long.
Probably after I had become friends with one of the servant girls, and was coming out to play at last.

—I'm sorry, Nii-san.

In the empty courtyard, Akiha suddenly started to cry.
Even when I asked what she was apologizing for, she just kept apologizing.
—Because we stole everything from you, Nii-san.

The reason why Akiha is crying is something that has already ended for me in the past.

.... It would be a lie to say I didn't hold a grudge.
But, a six year old girl can't feel responsible for that, and it can't be something she would apologize so desperately for.
In the first place, she didn't do anything wrong.

—I'm sorry.
I'm sorry, Nii-san.

.... Why didn't I notice?
From the very first time I met Akiha, she was always apologizing to me.
In this big mansion, the only one who cried for me.

—Thank you.
But, that's enough.

Smiling, I stroked Akiha's head.
Akiha looked up at me, bewildered.
Then, for the first time, I felt strongly..
—You don't have to cry, Akiha.
From now on, we're brother and sister.

.... I remember Akiha's face laughing happily.
I made a promise then.
We would be a real family.
Since I was the elder brother, I would protect Akiha, whatever happened.

Such thoughts.
I had a time where I held on to those thoughts as if I was dreaming.

"Nn.."
I awake to the morning light.
Knowing for sure that I am not the killer, I had no dreams of murder last night.
"... But, there was something.."
I feel like I had a nostalgic dream.
When Akiha and I were still young, a dream from before we knew what we were
to each other..



"Excuse me.
It is time to get up, Shiki-sama."
"Yeah, morning, Hisui.
You're early again this morning."



Hisui bows and enters.
As always, she places down a fresh school uniform and bids me good morning.



"Shiki-sama, what time did you return last night?
Akiha-sama was waiting in the sitting room."
".... Yeah, I was tired yesterday.
I knew Akiha was waiting in the sitting room, but I went straight to my room."

Answering, I feel depressed from self-loathing.
.... Last night.
After parting from Ciel-senpai, I returned to the mansion and went straight to my room to escape Akiha.
Although I denied it to Senpai, I was afraid to ask Akiha.
I can't just ask Akiha, "Are you a vampire?" If the answer was the worst possible, I wouldn't know what to do.
Thinking about that sort of thing, I can't face her, and I can't talk to her.
"Hisui.
Is Akiha already in the sitting room?"



"Yes.
She has been waiting for you for some time."
".... I see.
That's bad.."
Right now, I have no confidence that I can talk with her as I usually do.
I'm not sure I can manage even a casual greeting.
"Hisui.
Sorry, but could you stay with me today?
Until I leave, I'd like you by my side."



"_____"

Although her expression does not change, Hisui looks at me in shock.



"—I understand.

Then, I shall accompany you until you leave, Shiki-sama."

Bowing very deeply, Hisui grants my request.

In the sitting room, Kohaku-san is drinking tea with Akiha.

"Ah, morning, both of you."

Somehow, I greet them naturally.



"....."

Maybe she's mad at me for going straight to my room; Akiha glances only briefly at me, saying nothing.



"Good morning, Shiki-san.
It's unusual to see you together with Hisui-chan."
"... Yeah, I don't feel great today, so I asked her to escort me.
It would be dangerous if I felt giddy on the stairs."



"Ehe , I see.
Hisui-chan, you really are relied on."



"....."
Of course, Hisui stands beside me silently.



"Well, I'll go and prepare breakfast.
Please wait with Akiha-sama."

Kohaku-san goes into the kitchen.
"....."
Akiha says nothing.
Feeling an unpleasant atmosphere, I sit down on the sofa.
....
.....
.....
An uneasy silence rules the sitting room.



"Nii-san."
"Nn—what is it, Akiha?"



"You said you're not feeling well; are you feeling alright..?"

"No, it's nothing major.

You don't need to worry about it."



".... Really.

Well, then, that's good, but.."

Akiha looks away uneasily.

"..?"

There's something strange about Akiha's attitude.

It's obvious she cares about last night, but she's different from usual.

Usually, she would at least say "Why didn't you tell me when you came home?"

Instead, she looks incredibly nervous.

"Uh, Akiha?"



"Ah, Nii-san?"

—The two of us speak simultaneously.



"Ah, yes.
What is it, Nii-san?"
"No, what were you going to say?"



"... Nothing, I was just calling your name—"
".....?"
I get even more confused.
"Akiha-sama, Shiki-san!
Breakfast is ready..!"
Kohaku-san's voice comes from the dining room.
"Well, shall we go, Akiha?"



"—Yes, let's go, Nii-san."

Somehow, Akiha seems awfully meek this morning.

.... And now, I hate myself even more.
Before, I was thinking how difficult it would be to see Akiha, yet I'm thinking if she is this subdued, I want to talk with her more.



"Well then, Shiki-sama, Akiha-sama, have a good day."
Following my instructions precisely, Hisui follows us to the main gates.
"Since today's Saturday, I'll be back a little early.. Ah, but you don't need to wait out here.
Since I may go to play for a bit, please wait in the mansion."



Affirming her consent, Hisui bows and we leave the gates of the mansion behind.

"....."
Now.
The problem is the way from here to school.



"....."

Akiha follows silently next to me.

....Although part of me is glad of the silence, it still feels uncomfortable.

We arrive at school.

It is just past seven-thirty.

Only a small number of students arrive at this time.

"....."

Akiha is still silent.

.... It would be really awkward if we didn't exchange a word all morning.

".... Hey, Akiha."



"Ah.. ah.

Yes, what is it, Nii-san?"

"What is it..?"

You.. you seem really odd this morning.

You're not even angry about last night and you seem really distant."



"Eh—does it seem that way?"
".... Yeah, it does.
Are you still feeling bad?
If so, you should be resting—"
—Ah.

Suddenly, I notice.
Akiha took the day off school yesterday.
Yesterday Ciel-senpai had bandages on her arm, and said she had a painful
experience.
"....."



".... Um, Nii-san, you don't really look well either."
"Ah—no, that's.."
I shake my head, to throw off the unpleasant image.
.... There's something wrong.
Since Akiha suffers from the same frailties as I do, there's nothing strange about
her taking a day off school.
I have to trust Akiha, so I can't let my imagination run away with me like that.
"I'm fine.
More importantly, what's wrong?
Somehow, you seem really feminine this morning, not like yourself at all."



".... You just said something really terrible, Nii-san."

"Ah, yes, that's a little more like it.

I'll feel uneasy if you're not like this, Akiha.. Well, being calm isn't that bad every once in a while."



".... Oh.

Am I always so rough?"

"Ah.. no, you are gentle.

You're polite, and very proper.. That's strange, in that case, why..."

Why don't I think of her as being calm all the time?

".... Well, it's okay.

If you say there's nothing wrong with you, I won't ask anymore.

Come on, let's go inside."



"....."

Looking like she wants to say something more, Akiha follows me into the school building.

"See you later; since school finishes early today, we can have lunch at the mansion."



"Ah—Nii-san."

"Hm?"

What is it, do you feel bad after all?

If so, I'll take you to the nurse.."



"No, I feel fine.

I don't feel bad at all.

But there is a reason I just.. feel completely lost this morning."

"..?"

Lost?

What do you mean?"



"Um.. Nii-san, do you remember that childhood promise?"
Suddenly,
Akiha glances up at me with flushed cheeks.
"—Childhood promise?
What's that?"



".... Geez.
Of course you don't remember it.



That's fine, it's nothing at all.
I didn't expect you to anyway.
It seems it didn't mean anything to you!"
With a hmp, Akiha turns away.
"What's this all of a sudden?
When we were children, that was eight years ago.

You say promise, but there's so many promises I made to you.
Even if you ask me like that, I won't be able to remember."



"That's.. true, but.. aren't there some things you want others to remember?
Last night, I had a dream about when we were small, so I wondered if you would
remember."

"Akiha.

You think I can remember everything just because you saw a dream from your
childhood?"



".... But, it was nostalgic.

Don't you remember, the first time you called my name, and stroked my head
under that tree?

Back then, I would cry easily, right?

Everyone would try to calm me down when I cried, but you would be sad with
me.

So it caused me to cry more, but afterwards, I really felt like there was nothing
sad anymore.



From that time, I—Nii-san?
What's wrong?
Do you feel ill..?"
"—Akiha.
That dream, last night.
Is it the time you were crying in the empty garden..?"



"Ah.. yes.
I don't remember it very well, but it felt like that kind of dream—"

"——"

Something cold runs down my back.
That dream.
I had that dream too.
.... Senpai said.
I get pulled into the vampire's mind.



"Nii-san?
Are you sure you're alright..?"
"—It's nothing.
Well, I'm going this way, so bye!"

I part from Akiha, feeling sick.
.... Why?
Why is the result always the worst possible?
Being drawn into the vampire's mind as I sleep.
Last night.
I didn't want to know I was dreaming the same dream as Akiha instead of the
killer's dream.

.... There are only a few people in the classroom.
I move to my seat by the window, and put down my bag.
"....."
Sitting in my chair, I wait for homeroom to start.



"Oh, you're early, Tohno.
You look pretty pale this morning; you alright?"
"Arihiko?
.... Honestly, you, Akiha, you all keep saying the same thing.
Do I really look that bad?"
"Uh?
Nah, actually, you look much like you always do.

I guess you just look really down, huh."
"..... Down, huh."

Certainly, I feel down.
If Senpai came and said,
"Wasn't it like I said?"
I wouldn't be able to say anything back.
"—Arihiko?
Have you seen Senpai today?"



"Eh?
Which Senpai?"
"Which..?"
The only Senpai we both know is Ciel-senpai, right?"
"Who's that?"
'Shieru' ?
Were there any foreign students at this school?"

—My mouth falls open in astonishment.

".... Arihiko, you.."
My broken voice gets that far.
But I can't get any further.



"What is it, Tohmo?"

If you got something to say, then say it.
 I'll listen to anything except money problems."
 Arihiko acts like usual.
 Acting like usual, he doesn't remember Senpai at all.
 "You really don't remember Senpai..?"
 "That's why I'm asking, who is this Senpai you keep talking about?"
 "____"
 I can't answer anymore.
 Gradually,
 I begin to understand the meaning of the goodbye she gave last night.



"Oh, old Kunifuji'll be here any moment.
 See you later!"

Arihiko returns to his own desk.
 The teacher enters the classroom, homeroom begins, and after that, the first period starts with physics.

—I just observe vacantly.

Senpai has really disappeared.
 She has not merely disappeared from before me, but she has vanished, without a trace.

—The spell has easily faded.

.... Looking somewhat sad, she said that.
 Arihiko doesn't remember her.
 I'm sure no one else remembers either.
 She was never a student here.
 She was just sent here in order to observe me.
 So, once she revealed her true character to me, there was no need for her to remain here.
 "____"

My chest hurts.
 In place of proving that I was not a killer, Ciel-senpai disappeared like a mirage—

Lunch comes, and all classes end.
Seeking to enjoy Saturday to the fullest, my classmates rush out of the classroom.



"Oh?
What is it, Tohno?
You're not going?"
"Ah, just staying a bit longer.
I thought I'd wait a bit for someone."
"Hmmm?
That'd be Akiha-chan, huh?"
"No way.
If it were Akiha, I'd go and pick her up.
I'm waiting for someone who has no reason to come, so I don't know if I'll get to see her."
"Right.
Well, later."
"Yeah, and don't go playing around too much at night."



"Ahah!
I'm done for if you have to tell me that."

Arihiko goes, and the other students start to go as well.
I am left alone in the classroom, still waiting for Ciel-senpai.

Click, the hand of the clock hits 1pm.
As the sounds of practice begin to echo from the grounds, the classroom door
slides open.



"_____"

It is Akiha.
She comes over to my seat by the window.



"Nii-san?
You're not going home?"
".... No, I'll go.
I just haven't seen Senpai today.
I thought if I waited here, she might come by."

.... No, that's wrong.
I just want her to come by.
But, she's never going to appear before me again.



"—Is that so?
Well then, I'll wait with you."
Akiha sits at the desk next to me.
"... I don't mind or anything.
You really are nosy, aren't you?"



"Yes.
I'm your sister, after all."
.... Seeming a little happy, Akiha sits on the chair with a smile.
.... Well, there's no reason to send her away.
Although it's unpleasant when Akiha and Senpai see each other, Senpai isn't coming anyway.
I'm just wasting a day.

It's afternoon.
Akiha doesn't complain, and merely sits next to me.
.... Come to think of it this is the first time I've been with Akiha for such a long time since I came back to the mansion.
Without conversation, I'm more aware of Akiha than ever.
When we were small, Akiha was always crying.
And for eight years, Akiha waited for me.
And even now, Akiha simply accompanies me calmly.

.... When I was told that Akiha might be a vampire, all I did was to deny it.

The reasons are obvious.
Akiha is my important younger sister, so I didn't want to accept it.
.... The girl I promised to protect.
The reason I returned to the Tohno mansion.
My surprise when I met Akiha for the first time after eight years, now grown beautiful.
Akiha is important to me.
I think I love her.
But what kind of love it is, I cannot put into words clearly.
We've lived as siblings for only two years.
During that time, the feeling of wanting to protect her was stronger than the feeling of family.
"....."
I don't understand.
At times, I gaze on Akiha so much that I don't understand myself.
It's not that she's important to me because she's my younger sister.
She's just important to me.
So.
Even if she's a vampire, I—
"Akiha.
Shall we go back?"



"I don't mind, but.. is that alright, Nii-san?
Senpai isn't here yet, is she?"
"No.
She was never going to come, so it's alright."
"....."
Akiha says nothing more.
.... Suddenly, I realize something.
Arihiko and the others.. even the teachers don't remember Senpai.
But Akiha seems to.
"Akiha.
What do you think of Senpai?"



"... I'm not sure who you mean by 'Senpai'.
But I think you mean Ciel-san?
In that case, my opinion hasn't changed.
I do not want you to associate with that person."
"Wha—"
My voice dies.
Akiha remembers Senpai.
Everyone else has forgotten her, so why—
"Akiha, you—"
"Nii-san?
What is it?
You have such a terrible expression right now."
"... Why?
Why do you remember, Akiha?
Everyone has forgotten Senpai, so why do you remember her..!?"



"Eh—?"
Akiha's expression freezes.

And then, she looks away from me.
"Akiha.
Could it be.. you knew from the beginning who Senpai was..?"
"——"
She doesn't answer.
... The silence means "yes".

"Akiha..!"

Answer me, you knew Senpai was a vampire hunter from the beginning, is that why you didn't like her..!?"



"Vampire.. Nii-san—"

Akiha looks at me, aghast.

.... Her face doesn't seem surprised at the word vampire, but it seems she's surprised to hear it coming from me.

".... Akiha, answer me.
If you don't, I—"
I won't be able to believe you.



".... Yes, Nii-san.

I knew from the beginning that person was different.

Since I knew she was hypnotizing people she saw for the first time, I didn't trust her."

"...?"

Senpai.. was hypnotizing people..?"

"Yes.

That's why everyone didn't think it was odd for someone to have a name like Ciel.

Since I was unaffected by her, I realized there was something different about her."

Akiha explains herself.

But, she left out an important part.

If everyone was taken in by Ciel-senpai's hypnosis, why was Akiha unaffected?

"When the hypnosis is removed, those people affected by it will forget the person called Ciel.

Since I was never affected in the first place, even though it has been removed, I remember her."

".... I get it.

But Akiha, why weren't you affected?"



"—Well, that's—"

".... I see.

Those of the Tohno bloodline aren't normal.

Because of that, Senpai's hypnosis was ineffective."



"Nii-san, why do you.."

".... It's natural.

After all, I'm not normal either."

Saying that, I stand up.



After a moment of astonishment, Akiha also stands up with a determined expression.

—The empty classroom.

We gaze at each other in a classroom dyed red.

"... I heard from Senpai.

That all those in the Tohno family have special powers.

... And that among them, there are those who end up not being able to restrain themselves and kill others."

"....."

"But, I don't believe it.

I don't want to believe it.."

"....."

"Please tell me, Akiha.

You're—not a vampire, are you?"

Akiha doesn't answer.

She merely narrows her eyes painfully.

—Why?

Why won't Akiha, even if it's a lie, say 'of course not'—

"—Say something!

Why won't you answer, Akiha..!"

I cry out, since the silence is painful.

... A little more silence follows.

As if nothing was wrong, Akiha walks gracefully to the window.

Her long red hair is transparent in the sunset.

Her red hair flutters as she turns around.

"Well, then, I'll ask.

If I was a vampire, what would you do, Nii-san?"

Her look, like a blade, pierces my throat.

"—That's.."

Akiha's gaze drills into me.

We're separated.

Even though she's away from me, there is a feeling of tension like she's right in

front of my face.

"Answer me, Nii-san.

I asked, if I were a blood-sucking demon, what would you do?"

"—Akiha, that's.."

"If I were to confirm that, there would be no need for me hold back.

Do you understand, Nii-san?"

I could stop being obstinate and become more honest with myself, right?"

With terrible pressure and a glint of cruel enjoyment in her eyes, Akiha gazes up at me.

I shudder as I look at her.

Even though Akiha is looking up at me, her gaze is so cold that she seems to be looking down on me.

"Wha—"

I'm breathing in and I can't speak.

Even though we're far apart,

.... it feels like we're so close we could kiss at any moment.

Akiha's eyes are cold as those of a stranger.

"Akiha, you—"

My voice stops there.

Whatever happens—whatever happens, I cannot finish.

"Just a joke, Nii-san.

I don't drink people's blood."

With a delightful smile at my hesitant state, Akiha releases her blade-like gaze.

"It is just as Ciel said.

Certainly, members of the Tohno house have something 'different' in their blood.

However, that's something that can be told at a glance if it's awake.

Even you know that, don't you Nii-san?"

Akiha teases with a laugh.

"I.. know..?"

"Yes.

So, your question is meaningless.

Because I am not what you think I am, Nii-san.

Well then, is that all?

In that case, I am going home."

Akiha is about to leave.

But, no.

.... If I miss this chance, I feel there will be no more chances.

Having come this far, I can't let her go without asking her everything.

".... No, there's still something I want to ask.

About the other child, when we were children."

"You're really persistent, Nii-san.

Didn't I tell you there was no other child?"

"That's not true.

Our old man adopted a kid ten years ago."

"_____"

Akiha raises her eyebrows.

It's not like her previous reaction, a hiding of guilt.
 It's more like anger.
 "... I see, Hisui has been troublesome.
 I told her to take care not to let you discover that."
 Akiha sighs.
 "... Akiha.
 There was a third child.
 Even I remember vaguely.
 Can't you tell me?
 He.. why did he die?"
 "No.
 That child did not die."
 "—Eh?"
 "But he was killed.
 By your hands, Nii-san."
 "Wha—I, killed—?"
 Saying that.
 Dizziness assaults me.

—Yes, I killed.

The accident eight years ago.
 My younger self.
 In that courtyard.
 A hot, nightmarish summer day.
 Akiha, and the boy covered in blood.
 The thick clouds, and the echoing sound of the cicadas.

—There, I killed, him..

I feel dizzy.
 "Kuh.."
 Somehow, I have the strength to keep from fainting.
 "No—I.."
 My breath comes out in gasps.
 I. I couldn't..

"See, Nii-san.
 Doesn't everyone have secrets they have to keep to themselves?"
 "Akiha—you.."
 "So, you should stop thinking about such things.
 It's enough if you just live at the mansion as Tohno Shiki."

—Akiha leaves.
 I have no words to stop her.

The classroom in the sunset.
Only I am left, standing, unable to move.

——Night falls.

Since I don't feel like returning to the mansion, I merely sit on the bench in the park, thinking.

"....."

.... Is it pointless?

It's undeniable that Akiha is something "different", and it's clear that there was a third child who is now dead.

Akiha says I killed the third child.

And I remember looking down at a bloody body in the courtyard.

".... Kuh."

Akiha drinking Kohaku-san's blood.

Akiha saying the Tohno family is inhuman.

.... Senpai, saying it would not be strange for the minds of siblings to merge while they sleep.

"——"

So, there's no longer any doubt.

Even if I don't want to accept it, it's true.

At least.

At least, if I didn't see Akiha drinking Kohaku-san's blood——

"——Huh?"

.... Hang on.

When I saw Akiha and Kohaku-san, it was in my dream.

I saw Akiha and Kohaku-san in a dream.

That means, if I was merging with Akiha's mind, I wouldn't be able to see Akiha herself.

".... Then, the person seeing that dream.."

It couldn't have been Akiha, who was being watched.

If Akiha is a vampire, she would never see that.

"—Yeah.

There's no way Akiha could be the killer!"

Saying that, I jump off the bench.

Though I will be embarrassed later, I run around the park.

"Ha, haha, hahahaha——!"

I don't care about how people think.

I just run around happily, laughing.

Because this means I can protect Akiha from now on.

Just this once, I am happy that my mind merged with the vampire's.

If he hadn't seen Akiha, I would still believe my terrible mistake——

"——"

No, hold on.

"Watching—Akiha..?"

The killer, was watching Akiha.
Inside the mansion.
Like watching its prey, from a dark corner.
As if he decided his next prey was Akiha.
"Wha—"
My back freezes.
But this is no time to stand around.
"Akiha—!"
Crying out, I run to the mansion with all my strength.

pant—

pant—

pant—

pant—

" *pant*, *pant*, *pant*.....!"

—Strange.

Though it's still only seven, the lights of the mansion are out.
I gasp for air.
I catch my breath from running, then run into the mansion.

.... The mansion is as silent as a grave.
It's terribly hot.
For an autumn night, it's terribly hot.
I keep panting heavily.
My breathing is irregular, but not just because I've been running.
It's a terrible, tropical night.
Sweat pours off me, dripping down my cheeks.
".... Kuh."
I wipe it away.
In this boiling night, I grasp the door of the mansion.

"Kuh—!"

I feel dizzy.
A chill runs through my bones as if my brain was being wrung out.

"——"

This isn't my normal dizziness.
My consciousness isn't blurred.
Instead, it's sharpened, like a honed blade.

—I grit my teeth.

Without reason, hatred boils up.
The dizziness does not fade, and despite a violent headache, my body fills with strength.
"Akiha..!"
There's no response to my cry.
The mansion is completely without power.
There is no sign of anyone.
"Hisui, Kohaku-san..!"
Is there anyone here..!?"
There is no reply.
The only thing here is heat and silence piercing into my skin like needles.
"—Akiha."
Just, an awful feeling.
I can't think of anything else.
Akiha.
Akiha's room is—

East wing, first floor.	turn to 349
West wing, first floor.	turn to 350
East wing, second floor.	turn to 351
West wing, second floor.	turn to 352

349

—The east wing of the first floor, I think.

"..... Huh?"

—What am I thinking?

All that's in the east wing of the first floor is the sitting room and the kitchen, not anyone's room.

"—East is east, but her room is on the second floor....!"

Cursing at myself, I dash upstairs.

.... I run up the stairs.

The heated air and sense of foreboding seem to stretch over the dark of night like glass.

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

Breathing heavily, I reach the top of the stairs and walk down the hallway.

.... My back hurts.

This terrible feeling in the air gets heavier as I draw near Akiha's room.

setvar akiharegard - 1

turn to **353**

350

—Was it.. the west wing on the first floor?

.... The lights are off and I can't quite make out the details of the room.

But, I can tell right away it isn't Akiha's room.

"This is Kohaku-san's room....!"

I kick the ground in the darkness.

Come to think of it, Akiha's room is exactly across from mine.

In other words, the east wing on the second floor.

"Gah....!"

As I turn around to exit into the hallway, I see something lying on the ground.

".....?"

I squint my eyes in the dark.

I see—Hisui's figure collapsed on the floor.

"Hisui—!?"

I call out and run to her.

"..... Mnh."

Hisui doesn't answer.

She's only peacefully breathing out in her sleep.

"Is she... asleep?"

I can't believe it, but it seems so.

Hisui doesn't look like in pain.

She really does seem like she's sleeping.

Just, there's a teacup tipped over on the table with the contents spilled.

The easiest explanation is there was a sleeping drug mixed into her tea and she fell asleep.

"—Kohaku-san isn't here?"

The only one collapsed in the room is Hisui.

.... Hisui seems to be just sleeping, so I have to make sure Akiha is safe—

.... I run up the stairs.

The heated air and sense of foreboding seem to stretch over the dark of night like glass.

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

Breathing heavily, I reach the top of the stairs and walk down the hallway..

.... My back hurts.

This terrible feeling in the air gets heavier as I draw near Akiha's room.

setvar akiharegard - 1

turn to **353**

351

—The very back of the east wing on the second floor.

That's where Akiha's room is.

.... I run up the stairs.
The heated air and sense of foreboding seem to stretch over the dark of night like glass.

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

Breathing heavily, I reach the top of the stairs and walk down the hallway.

.... My back hurts.

This terrible feeling in the air gets heavier as I draw near Akiha's room.

setvar akiharegard + 1

turn to **353**

352

—It has to be the west wing on the second floor.

"——"

.... If I say so myself, I've never felt so stupid before in my entire life.
The west wing on the second floor only has my room, the others being mostly empty.
It's on the same floor, but Akiha's room is exactly opposite of mine, in the east wing—

I race down the hallway.
The heated air and sense of foreboding seem to stretch over the dark of night like glass.

—*pant*, *pant*, *pant*.

Breathing heavily, I dash down the hallway.
.... My back hurts.
This terrible feeling in the air gets heavier as I draw near Akiha's room.
setvar akiharegard - 1
turn to **353**

353

—I reach Akiha's room.

The dizziness is getting unbearably stronger.

I put my hand in my pocket.

I'm lucky, as my knife is still there.

"——"

I ignore my dizziness and with the knife in my other hand, I open the door.

—Darkness.

The moonlight coming in from the window barely sheds enough light to see.

In the blue darkness, I see Akiha on the ground.

"Akiha—!"

I run to her and hold her up.

"....."

Akiha does not move, so she might be unconscious.

But I can tell she's alive as her small chest rises and falls with her breathing.

But, there's something more strange.

Akiha's black hair.

It has turned into a bloody shade of red.

"Akiha—you're really Akiha.... right?"

.... The hair looks red in the darkness.

But, it's definitely Akiha.

"Akiha, hey, come on....!"

What happen—"

I hear a noise.

"——!"

I turn back.

The direction the sound came from—there's, someone standing by the moonlit window.

.... It seems to be someone wrapped in bandages.

"——Who are you?"

The man does not answer.

.... A cold chill goes through my spine.

I feel death in my nerves.

.... The person is just there, broken.

Abnormal eyes that seem out of this world.

But there is some intelligence.

It seems the bandaged person has both intelligence and madness.

My heart beats loudly.

It beats quicker.
All the while, my mind freezes like I was dead.
This feeling.
I know this feeling of death.

—I'm sure.
What's in this room right now is the world of murder I saw in my dreams.
"—I asked you who you are."
I hold my knife and stare at the person.
The bandaged man appears to be smiling.

"I feel sad, Shiki.
You don't even remember the person you've killed?"
He steps toward me.
"—!"
I back up, holding Akiha in one arm.
"Can't you tell, Shiki?
I'm the guy you killed."
"What are you saying—"
Just listening to his voice gets on my nerves.
I hate him.
.... The hatred I was feeling since I entered the mansion is concentrated on him.
This hatred.
Is my instinctual drive to remove him a homicidal impulse?
My heart beats.
From somewhere inside me, my body screams.
It screams that this person must be killed.

"—I see.
You're the vampire."

Holding Akiha with one arm, I hold out my knife with the other.
Hahaha.
The man laughs as it was really funny.
"Don't even try.
I am you.
There's no one who can truly kill himself."
"W—what...?"
"I'm taking Akiha back.
She was mine to start with."
Another step.
The man comes closer.
"Stop—!"
"I won't stop.
I came to get everything back from you.

Name, position, power.. everything was mine."

The man opens his arms and talks proudly.

"... What are you saying?

You—what are you?"

"... You still don't remember?

What a guy.

We were such good friends eight years ago."

"What—"

Eight years ago?

Such, good, friends—?

"... Well, I guess you forgot it.

It's that old man.

I bet he put a strong spell on you to make you forget."

"And I bet you yourself—wanted to forget about the ugly past, Shiki?"

He laughs.

My vision shakes.

Eight years ago, eight years ago, eight years ago—

That's the time I was sent to the hospital from that accident.

That was the last time the three of us played together in this mansion.

That was the time—that child was there, and all the blood—

"But that's all ending now.

It was painful for you, right, Shiki?

Hold on, I'll save you."

The man slowly takes off the bandage around his head.

His face—

"You.."



33 0

"It's been a while, Tohno Shiki.

No, that's not your real name."

The face that came out from the bandage,

it was—not the face of that bloody child but..
"Tohno—SHIKI."
Yes, why did I forget?
He was with Akiha back then.
The third kid's name was certainly that.
"Yes, it's really been a long time, Nanaya Shiki.
You finally remembered that you were an impostor."
The man's—SHIKI's lips turn up into a smile and he laughs deeply.

"Ah—"
Headache.
I have a headache.
The lid opens.
Which was sealed shut.
(By whom?)
I can't look at it.
(At what?)
The box of forgotten memories.

—He commanded me to forget everything.
Tohno Makihisa.
Nanaya Shiki was adopted by the person who made him alone.
Probably, because it was amusing to him that I had the same name as his son.
It's something that happened ten years ago.
I was adopted.
I was brought into an unknown mansion.
My family were always people I didn't know.
My life in the detached building.
The boy and the girl I met.
The big garden we played around in.
A hot summer day.
Akiha getting attacked by a shadow.
I could only think about helping her, and the moment I used myself as a shield—
-

—I was commanded to forget everything.

By Tohno Makihisa.
By my own father.
He commanded me to live as Tohno Shiki and not Nanaya Shiki and—

"—,!!"
Dizziness, Sickness.
Mixed memories run through my head.

Thump.
I can't control my body.
I throw Akiha on the ground, and embrace my knife as I pant for air.



33 0
"—Is it shocking?
I bet it is.
It should have been a big shock to know that you were an impostor, since you thought you were Tohno Shiki this whole time....!"
SHIKI laughs.



33 0

"But, that's nothing compared to me.
You know, Shiki, I was killed by the person I thought was my best friend and
even had the name Tohno Shiki taken away from me.
You even took Akiha—my Akiha....!
Can you understand how I felt!?"
"Killed—?"
I, you—"



33 0

"That's right.
I killed you first, but the end result was, you killed me.
Can't you recall yet?
Eight years ago on that day, I lost to my blood and killed you.
Look at that scar on your chest.
I took this arm and pierced right through you."
"Scar on my chest—"
That was in an accident.
I was told I got that from an accident—
"Yes, the old man almost killed me afterwards, though.
The Tohno blood finally awakened inside me, but I was imprisoned underground,
and lived in the dark for eight years.
—That damn old man.
He said he'd let me out if I returned to being a human..!
He thought it would be inconvenient for Tohno Shiki to be gone, so he made

you into Tohno Shiki."

"_____"

.... So,
the adopted kid that was here ten years ago was me.



33 0

"Do you get it, Shiki?"

I was killed by you.

I'm alive right now, but you're Tohno Shiki.

I have no place to go back to.

My name as Tohno Shiki, my position, my dear sister, and even my existence
was taken away by you.

I, as Tohno SHIKI, was killed by you, Tohno Shiki."

A step.

He starts to walk towards me with glaring eyes.



33 0

"Here—that's the end of the story.

Shiki, you should have died eight years ago.

You've had enough, right?"

Let's go back to the way things were eight years ago."

"—The way things were—?"

"Yes.

I return to being Tohno Shiki, and you return—to the dead person you were!"

A big impact.
I was blown out to the hallway with one strike from SHIKI.
"A——"
My back strikes the wall.
I can't breathe.
My head, I—still can't think straight.
"Ku——"
I can sense him coming.
SHIKI jumps out from Akiha's room.

"Damn——!"
I can hear SHIKI.
His weapon also happens to be a knife, and my knife joins his in a deadly competition.

I gasp for air.
I'm out of breath.
I still feel sick.
But, I don't have time to think.

I—

Take off my glasses and get ready to kill. turn to **354**

First, I have to get us away from Akiha's room. turn to **355**

354

—I should not consider my own safety.

The only sure thing is that this guy is the reason for everything going on.
The one sucking the blood out of all the people in town.
The one that hurt Senpai and tried to rape her.
.... And Yumizuka.
The one who turned Yumizuka into a vampire and made her suffer like that.

Everything.
Everything is this "enemy's" fault.
Then—
"—"

I grit my teeth and hold on to my hatred.
Trying to cool myself down, I take off my glasses.

—Let's get started.
Fortunately, this is my third time fighting in a life-or-death situation.
By now, I know more than enough about how exactly I should be moving—
turn to **356**

355

—I should worry about Akiha's safety most of all.

It's too dangerous to fight near Akiha.
I need to move to somewhere bigger, like the lobby—
"Ku.....!!"
Still holding my knife, I jump back without looking.

".....!!"
SHIKI's knife slashes in front of my face.
Fortunately, I did not get cut.
But, he hits my glasses off—

"Y—ou bastard.....!!"
My heart pounds loudly.
"Death" covers my view.
Hatred takes over my mind.
I gasp for air.
My breathing goes wild.
SHIKI attacks.
In that case, there's nothing to be afraid of now.

—Not a problem.
Fortunately, this is my third time fighting in a life-or-death situation.
By now, I know more than enough about how exactly I should be moving—
turn to **356**

356

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

Sweat drips down to the ground.

His knife swings at every part of my body, but I have fortunately not received any fatal wounds.

I am breathing hard because I move my body past its limits.



33 0

"I don't understand—"

.... The enemy in front of me breathes out in annoyance.

"Why—why can't I kill just an ordinary human being?"

Why is your killing ability so high, Shiki!?"

There is anger in his eyes.

He's probably irritated from all this unexpected resistance by something that should be easy prey.

My heavy breathing fills the air.

My chest hurts.

Even though I have seen his killings already in my dreams, our abilities are naturally different.

It's already hard enough to block his attacks, and it's almost impossible to attack his "lines".

—But.

If I didn't care to avoid mutual death, I could easily kill him.

"—Alright.

Enough playing around.

I tried to finish you off with the same weapon you had, but I shouldn't have used something I'm not used to using."

The enemy throws down his knife.

Slash.

The sharp, animal-like nails shine in the night.



33 0

"So it's this after all.
It's really dull to use the same thing as eight years ago."
The enemy smiles and frees his stance.

—Thump.
My heart beats.

My body knows I won't be able to keep up with him once he gets serious.
I probably won't be even able to see him attacking me.
The first thing I will realize, is that my body has a hole in it.
—Thump.

The presence of death increases.
The sense of impending death is upon me.
But, I have no fear.
The cracking inside my body grows proportionally with the sense of crisis.
Panting.

Burning pain.
Just like a bow pulled to the limit.
A homicidal impulse that I cannot control.
Most likely—it will be released in a moment and kill SHIKI for sure.



33 0

"So long, Shiki.
Akiha is mine.
This time, you go to hell—!"

The enemy's body disappears.
The strained bow is released.

—But before that,
someone comes in between me and SHIKI.



"——"

.... It was Akiha, with her flowing red hair.
Akiha stands in front of SHIKI as if to protect me.



33 0
".... Akiha, what are you doing?"
Akiha does not answer.

—Her back.
With Akiha's red hair in front of me, I start feeling excited.

".... Move, Akiha.
I am your real brother.

You don't have to worry about this impostor."
Akiha does not answer.

—Her back.
With Akiha's red hair in front of me, I start feeling excited.
"... Akiha, don't make me sad.
You are the only important person for me."



"... No.
I won't move."
Akiha shakes her head and clearly rejects SHIKI.



33 0
"... Akiha!"



"Move back.
If you say you are going to kill Nii-san, I will kill you first.
The role of the head of the Tohno family is to eliminate people like you."



33 0
"What—what are you saying, Akiha!
You were waiting for me for so long.
I was always, always watching.
I came back because you were waiting for your brother.
I killed that old man and became free just for you.
But why are you protecting that impostor!?"



".... Indeed, I was waiting for Nii-san.
But that is not you.
You lost against the Tohno blood and became just a killer."

You should have died on that day eight years ago."



33 0

"A—Akiha, you're telling your own brother to die?

No, that's not right.

I am your only brother.

Listen to me, that guy is just a—"



"Silence....!"

I will not allow any more insults against Nii-san.

I—I am not going to let you kill Nii-san again....!"



33 0

"Aki—ha."

SHIKI staggers.

"Stop—He's just an impostor.
Don't betray me for such a guy, Akiha."
"_____"

Akiha doesn't answer.
She just confronts SHIKI with fierce aggression.
"Akiha—are you going to betray me too, Akiha—"
SHIKI takes a step.
SHIKI looks at me—and Akiha with bloodshot eyes.
"... This is the last warning.
Move, Akiha.
Can't you follow your brother's orders?"



"—I will not move.
You are not my Nii-san....!"

AHHHHHHH

SHIKI screams as he jumps.
Not toward Akiha, but toward me.
"_____"

But, I was expecting that already.
I raise my knife and face my enemy.
But, SHIKI's nails are faster.

The result will still be mutual death.
If that's the case, I can surely cut his "line" and slice him into pieces—

—SHIKI's nails never reach.

"A—"
SHIKI's soulless voice gasps.
"Aki, ha—"
SHIKI's nails slashed across Akiha's back.

It's not that SHIKI aimed for her.
It's just that Akiha crashed into me.
"___"
But, I felt nothing.
My mind has frozen.
Without feeling anything, my homicidal impulse drives me.
Akiha's body falls to the ground.
In that instant.
The instant SHIKI stops moving, I slash through his "line".

.... Smell of blood.
It angers me that scent is the only thing I do sense.
The rest of my senses are paralyzed with exhaustion after all my extreme movement.

Right now, I feel nothing.
There is Akiha covered with blood in front of me, and SHIKI's dead body is there right beside her.
I feel nothing, and simply stand here.

The lights come on.
It hurts my eyes as it returns me to my senses.
"___"
I look around.
On the floor in front of me is a path of red blood.
Akiha's body is not there, nor is SHIKI's.
"What—"
The knife is still in my hands.
I'm sure that wasn't a dream.
As proof, the floor is covered with blood.
"Akiha—you protected me."
I remember, and at the same same time, I feel sick.
I didn't want her to do that.
All I wanted to do was protect Akiha.
Why did it turn out this way—
"Shiki-sama."
Someone calls from behind.



"I have turned on the emergency power.
Akiha-sama's wounds are pretty shallow, so please do not worry."
"Hisui—where were you?"



"I previously stated this.
When Nee-san and I arrived to help, you and Akiha-sama were on the ground.
.... We tried to talk to you several times, but you were in no condition to talk."
.... So, I just stood here while Akiha was lying injured on the ground?



"Akiha-sama needed treatment immediately, so Nee-san and I treated Akiha-sama and then put the power back on—should we have waited for your orders?"
"—No.
You guys did the right thing.
I was just standing there, right?"

"Yes.

It has been about an hour since we came, but you have only been standing there."

"... I.. see."

Not doing anything while Akiha was on the ground wounded is the worst thing I could have done.

Not only did I not protect her, but you could say I was actually hurting her.

"Hisui, is Akiha alright?"

"Yes, it is not that deep of a wound But since it is not a wound that will heal any time soon, we have her resting in her room now."



"—Shiki-sama, what happened?

When we regained consciousness, all the lights in the mansion were turned off and I had apparently been unconscious in Nee-san's room.

It seems Nee-san and I were drugged.

When we came out to the lobby, you and Akiha-sama were there.

Nee-san said that cut on Akiha-sama is from a big animal, but that is—"

"What—?"

There's something wrong.

This doesn't add up.

"Hisui, SHIKI was not there!?"



"Shiki-sama, you were standing in front of Akiha-sama."

"No, not me, but—"

I stop myself.

Hisui doesn't know about SHIKI.
She doesn't know why Akiha was hurt nor does she know I was almost killed.
"... Hisui, there was only me and Akiha in the lobby...?"
She nods.
"—That guy—!"
He's still alive.
I did cut him from his shoulders along his "line", but it didn't kill him?
Or are vampires harder to kill than humans?
Either way, he's alive right now and has run away.
"... No, I don't care about that right now.
But Akiha—"



"Please wait, Shiki-sama.
Are you going to Akiha-sama's bedroom?"
"Of course.
I have to apologize to Akiha and talk to her—"
"... Nee-san is currently treating her wounds.
I do not think Akiha-sama would be pleased to see you right now."
"T.... that might be true but.."



"Please go back to your room, Shiki-sama.
When we finish treating her and Akiha-sama asks for you, I will come and get you."

With that, Hisui starts to walk up the stairs.

She probably went up to Akiha's bedroom to help Kohaku-san.

"....."

Being a guy, I can't help them.

All I can do for now is wait for Hisui in my room.

—I go back to my room and try to calm down.

I have to calm down and think about many things.

About Akiha.

About myself.

About that guy SHIKI.

.... SHIKI told me that I was adopted and treated as Tohno Shiki in his place.

I have no intention of denying it.

Rather, it's very convincing.

Why I didn't recognize this mansion that well, why my room didn't feel like a room I knew..

.... The fact that I was living in with the Arimas, and why no one came to see me while I was in the hospital eight years ago.

.... When I was adopted ten years ago, and the two years until I got into that accident.

Me, Akiha, and SHIKI were raised as brothers and sister.

SHIKI sounded as if he knew I was adopted all along.

But what about Akiha?

"You are not my Nii-san—"

Akiha said that to SHIKI and injured herself while protecting me.

.... Akiha might not know that I was adopted.

That's why she protected me.

You can't do that unless it's your real brother.

So—Akiha must believe I am her true brother.



"Shiki-san, can I come in?"

"Kohaku-san.

Is Akiha alright now?"



"Yes, we are done treating her wounds.
She won't be able to walk at all for a few weeks, but there's no danger to her life."
"I see——thank goodness."
I let out a sigh of relief.
If the wound she received from protecting me was worse, I don't know how I could ever talk to Akiha again.



"Shiki-san, Hisui-chan told me you wanted to talk to Akiha-sama?"
"... Yeah, I'd prefer not to if Akiha's not feeling well, but I would really like to talk to her if I can."



"If that's the case, please go ahead.
But please do not have a complicated conversation."

Akiha-sama is pushing herself and I do not want her to be mentally tired."

".... I know.

I just want to see Akiha and thank her."



"Alright.

That should be fine.

Then, I'll rest for a bit.

Can you take care of Akiha-sama for a while?"

Kohaku-san walks out of the room, wobbling.

She must be tired from taking care of Akiha.

"....."

.... Alright.

I have to go check on Akiha.

I knock on the door.

"Akiha.

It's me.

Can I come in?"

After a moment of silence.

".... Yes, please come in, Nii-san."

I hear her weak whisper.

I go into Akiha's bedroom.

As she was sleeping on the bed until now, she raises herself slowly.

"_____"

.... Crap.

Seeing her like this causes my mind to empty.

There's already tension enough coming into Akiha's bedroom, and she's acting so weak that I regret it.

"_____"

We end up just staring at each other in silence.

....

.....

.....
..... All of a sudden,

"Aren't you going to sit down, Nii-san?"

"Oh—yeah.

I should sit down, huh?"

I take a seat in a chair.

Now I'm at the same height as Akiha, and my head goes even more blank.

".... You never ask about anything, do you, Nii-san?
Even though I am like this, I was ready for anything."

Akiha says in a soft voice.

".... You're right.

There's a lot of things I want to ask about.

But I'll ask all that after you get better.

Right now, I'm here to see how you're doing."

"I see.

But there's something I want to ask you, Nii-san.

I get mad easily when I don't understand something.

So, I can't sleep peacefully unless I hear it from you."

".... Go ahead.

You're hurt right now, I'll answer anything."

"I'm sorry.

I'm hiding a lot of things from you, but I don't want you to hide anything from me.

.... I'm really selfish, aren't I?"

".... Don't worry.

I like that part of you, too.

I'll let it go.

So, what do you want to ask about, Akiha?"

Akiha is probably making me match her pace.

Surprising even myself, I speak kindly to her.

".... Then I'll ask.

Nii-san, you used the word 'vampire'.

Is that something Ciel taught you, or is that something you concluded yourself?"

".... I think it's both.

I don't know why, but I've been having this dream where I killed people and sucked their blood."

So I thought I was the killer.

However, Ciel-senpai proved me wrong."

".... I see.

You were in tune with SHIKI's mind.

That's why—you asked me that at school."

"What—Akiha, you can tell that I am in tune with his mind....?"

"No, I'm just saying the possibility existed.
Nii-san, you might not remember, but that SHIKI is our...."
"Yeah, you wanna say he's our brother, right?
I forgot about it until just now.
But I remember faintly.
Whenever we played in the garden, you always followed us.
"Us" means that there's more than one, right?"

Yes, when I recall my childhood, there is that contradiction.
I didn't recognize it, probably because the old man hypnotized me.
"....."
Akiha does not say anything.
.... It really seems like she doesn't know I'm adopted.
In that case, I do not want to say it right now and mentally attack her.
If I can lie to her right now, I should.
".... Nii-san, you were almost killed by SHIKI eight years ago.
SHIKI did not have that much Tohno blood in him, but it suddenly awakened.
The blood of Tohno is a blood from ancient times, and it makes you give priority
to your instincts rather than your reason.
SHIKI had that blood throughout him and attacked you, as you happened to
be there."
.... I heard that from SHIKI.
That this scar on my chest is not from an accident, but from SHIKI.
"Everyone in the Tohno family has different abilities.
There's some people who eat other people like SHIKI and there's people whose
abnormality is only in their brain like Father.
.... SHIKI attacked you and took away your blood and life.
SHIKI was punished by Father but he survived by taking your life."
".... I don't get it.
What do you mean by him taking away my life....?"
"I should say your soul in this case.
I don't know how it works since I'm not SHIKI.
But SHIKI lived by feeding off your life.
I think you and SHIKI are like different people running off of one heart.
That's why you tune into each other easily.
.... If that's the reasoning, I think you can tune into me too, but I think it's
because you two were really good friends."
"Stop it, with that guy—with a guy that hurts you?
Don't make me friends with him."
"....."
Akiha looks at me with a painful expression.
.... Her thin body.
Her white skin.
Her flowing black hair is tinged slightly red and looks very weak——
"Oh yeah.
Akiha, what happened to your hair?"

It was red back then, and now it's back to black.
 What's going on?"
 "... I told you.
 This is due to the Tohno blood.
 My body does not change like SHIKI, but when my blood gets excited, my hair
 turns back into its original color.
 Now that I am calm, it returned to being black."
 "... That's good.
 I think you look better with black hair.
 I think it'll be bad if your hair stayed red."
 "..... I don't want her to be stained with something like the Tohno blood.
 "... Yes, I also dislike the color red.
 I know it's just the color of my hair, but it means my body's state has changed,
 and I do not want to be like SHIKI—"

Akiha falls back in bed.
 "Akiha—!?"
 I support her body.
 "Ugh—ah.. Ohh.....!!"
 She's shaking.
 Her breathing is difficult, as if her heart was gone.
 She clenches her teeth in pain.
 She sweats as if trying to expel the pain from her body.
 "Akiha...!
 What's wrong?
 Do your wounds hurt!?"
 "Ah—ah, Nii-sa—"
 Akiha grips the bed sheets.
 "Sh...!
 Hold on, I'll go get Kohaku-san...!"
 "N,no—no one can help.. me anyways...!"
 Akiha grabs onto my arm, still breathing hard.
 Her slender fingers.
 Her soft hands grip my hands strongly.
 "Alright—I'll stay right here, Akiha."
 "——"
 I can't hear her; her voice is too choppy.
 Akiha rages around on the bed,
 and I realize her hair is red again.
 "Akiha, your hair—"
 "It's—all, right—This won't—last—long—"
 Akiha is in serious pain.
 Time passes by, and all I can do is hold onto her hands.

.... After an interminable amount of time, it finally ends.
I'm sure it was only a few minutes, but it felt like a few hours.

"—"

She breathes normally now.
Her hair is still red, but it looks fainter than before.

"—I'm sorry I made you watch such unpleasant things."

Akiha sits up.
.... I can easily tell she is pushing herself.
".... You don't have to sit up.
It still hurts, right?
Don't try to push yourself."
"No, I'm alright.
My back has nothing to do with this.
This spasm is like an everyday thing."

—Her back has nothing to do with this?

".... What do you mean, everyday thing?
This is normal for you?"
"....."
She doesn't answer.
That means yes.
.... I can't believe it.
She suffers through this kind of pain all the time—?
".... Why?
That's not right.
That, that's not—nor.. mal.."
Akiha still doesn't answer.
She just nods silently.
".... Like you say, I'm not normal.
This spasm is not like your anemia.
This is a pain all people of the Tohno blood go through.
When you cannot stand this pain, you become like SHIKI."
"—What?"
"I told you, people of the Tohno line are abnormal.
The Tohno blood in me is strong.
As I grew up, it became worse and worse each day.
.... Now it's getting to a point where I can't help it.
I am like this every night."
Akiha just talks without holding any grudge against her blood.
I—understood what Akiha is saying, but at the same time, I don't want to accept it.
".... What do you mean?
I don't get what you're saying."
".... Geez.

Nii-san, you really are stupid."

Akiha laughs.

She smiles, looking a bit troubled.

"My body uses more heat than the average person.
So I cannot get enough energy using normal methods and I end up having to get heat directly from someone.
... Like you say, I act like a vampire trying to contain myself.
But the more I rely on it, the more abnormal I am.
I'm acting more like a Tohno.
But without it, I have no way to control myself."
"Akiha——"

"Do you understand?
I have to take away heat from something alive.
I am an incomplete creature.
That's Tohno Akiha for you, Nii-san."

——I cannot say anything.
But, I still manage to find something to say.
To not say anything right now only hurts Akiha even more.
".... That's why you were sucking Kohaku-san's blood.."
"You knew, Nii-san..?
That I got blood from Kohaku?"
"Yeah.
Sorry for not telling you."
Akiha blushes and looks down.
"That's a last resort.
It doesn't have to be blood I take in.
It can be body heat, it can be mental heat.. anything with heat gives me power.
Blood just happens to be the most efficient method."
".... So you're different from SHIKI; you're not a real vampire like him."
".... Yes, I'm not like SHIKI as I can't make people like me.
I can only take from other people."
Akiha looks away from me.
But, that's good for me.
Because—it's just a matter of the difference in the kind of food you take in.
".... I feel relieved.
You kept on telling me you're abnormal, but you're normal.
Unlike SHIKI, you're a normal human being.
That spasm you had, it won't happen if you get some blood, right?
Then——"
".... It is true that it would not occur if I take in some blood.
But, I can't stand getting blood just because I want to.
If I get used to that, I will just be like SHIKI."
".... No matter how painful it is, if it is just physical pain, I can stand it.
The Tohno blood awakens more at night, but it dies down in the morning.
So this is normal for me.

You don't have to look at me that way."

".... You're stupid.

If you were in that much pain, I'll be glad to give you as much blood as you want."

I'm being honest.

If I knew Akiha was in this much pain every night, I would have given her blood every time.

"No, I do not want to drink anyone's blood.

I really do not want to drink Kohaku's blood either."

"Why....?"

If your spasms go away, then it should be fine."

"That.... is true but,"

Akiha grows quiet and continues with an embarrassed tone.

"But I do not want to be called a vampire by you.

I want to stay as a human being, just like you."

"———Ah."

I really hate how stupid I am.

.... I never thought about how Akiha felt.

About how ominous she feels about the Tohno blood.

About how much she thinks about me.

".... Is there anything I can do for you, Akiha?"

"Let's see, please go rest in your room.

You must be tired too."

"..... Idiot."

.... That's all I can say in response.

"Don't worry.

Just lay down.

I'll stay here until you go to sleep."

".... Alright.

If you say so, I will, Nii-san."

.... She says this as she lies back down.

After time passes quietly by,

she falls into a gentle slumber.

Akiha's face looks very peaceful.

I stay and continue to watch her.

"Shiki-san, are you awake?"

.... I can hear Kohaku-san's voice.

I look at the clock to find out it's three o'clock already.

"I'm awake.

Are you here to look after Akiha, Kohaku-san?"

"Yes, I wanted to take her temperature.

I'm sorry Shiki-san, but...."

"Oh, sorry, I'll leave right away."
I get up from the chair.
As I leave the room, I look at Akiha one more time.
"... Thank you.. and sorry, Akiha."
I whisper this softly as I leave her room.

.... I let Kohaku-san take care of Akiha and I walk down the hallway.
Things should be fine for now, but I still feel uncomfortable.
I don't care that SHIKI is still alive.
There's only one thing that worries me.
.... I was watching Akiha's face while she was sleeping,
but her hair did not turn back to its original black no matter how long I waited.
turn to **357**

Letting Kohaku-san take care of Akiha, I come down to the first floor.
I can't treat Akiha's wounds.
So, I want to help her in some other way.

If I search the old man's room, I might be able to find something to help her.
He was the head of the Tohno family after all.
He should have recorded some way to fight against the Tohno blood.

"Damn—I guess I can't find it that easily."
I sit down and take a breath.
The old man's library is really big and it takes a lot of time to look through each book.
Besides, most of them are just educational reports and it looks like information on the Tohno family isn't here.
The only thing I found was this journal-like book that belonged to the old man.
"..... I see.
This looks to be a record of the time after I was taken into the Arima household."
I flip through the pages.

—And then,
I see Akiha's name and I turn back.
"Let's see.... Report on Akiha's spasms—what is this?"
I start reading it carefully.
.... The old man looked at it this way: Akiha became one of strong Tohno blood right after I left.
To live, Akiha needs more heat than a normal person.
If you say that the heat Akiha needs is ten, food only gives her six or seven, and the extra heat she needs is the reason for her body's extra burden.
The problem is why she needs that much heat to stay alive in the first place.
.... It looks like it took the old man some time to figure it out.
After a few years worth of pages, the answer is finally written down.
"Half of her life....?"

.... I don't think I get what he means.
It says that out of all the energy she has, she is using only half of it.
To rephrase it so it's easier to grasp, it's like she's moving around normally while using only half of her body.
But of course, it's impossible to do that.
That's why Akiha's body consumes heat from some other source to try to make up for that.

But no human can do that; it's superhuman power.
The more she needs heat from her surroundings, the more the Tohno blood awakens as it grows less and less human.

"....."

What's written after that looks like Akiha's growth record.

I read on, but find the information becoming less and less useful to me.

I throw the diary onto the table.

"—Damn, even if you know the reason, it's no help if you don't write down the way to fix it.

Stupid old man."

.... Or was it impossible for even the old man to find a way to help her?

".... But only half her energy?

I wonder what she's doing with the other half...."

It seems simple.

If Akiha can use all of her energy for herself, then she wouldn't have to take in heat from someone else.

"——"

.... I don't think there's anything else for me to find here.

I should go outside and let myself unwind—

.... I'm worried about Akiha.

When I look up, I realize I'm at the detached building.

I didn't feel like going back to my room, so I naturally came here instead of the mansion.

I go in.

I sit down on the tatami and stare at the ceiling.

———*sigh*

I let out a deep breath.

.... I feel relaxed in here.

This was my room when I was a kid.

".... This was the room Akiha came to when I was sick."

I start to remember little by little.

When I was adopted ten years ago.

When I lived in this room, and the days I spent playing with Akiha and SHIKI.

".... He was saying 'Nanaya'."

Nanaya.

Written as "seven nights" in Japanese?

I guess it's my real last name, but it doesn't really matter now.

A kid named Nanaya Shiki was eliminated eight years ago.

His last name, his real name, even his memories.

I can't even remember my parents' faces.

I don't want to remember those things anyway.

".... I see, this knife is not the old man's but really my——"

I take the knife out of my pocket.
"Nanaya" is written on the handle.
In that regard, this was really my true father's.
Tohno Makihisa had some human emotions after all.
He should have eliminated everything that would lead me to Nanaya Shiki, but
he still left me this knife.

—And then.
Something drips onto my hand.
"—What?"
I feel my cheeks.
.... Why?
I'm not happy or sad, but..
"That's weird—why am I crying?"
There's no reason to.
But I cannot stop crying.

.... I wonder how long it's been.
Night should have gone by.. it must be almost sunrise.
"... It's Sunday today, huh?"
Well, even if it was a weekday, I would have skipped school and stayed with
Akiha.
Because it's Sunday, it's more convenient.
"Kohaku-san said she should stay in bed."
.... How depressing.
I don't know how many weeks it will take for Akiha to heal.
"—What can I do until she gets better—"
I don't even have to think about it.
I must find and kill him, once and for all.
He's not human anymore.
.... No, even if he is, even if people tell me I'm a murderer, I can't let SHIKI
stay alive.

"....?"
Someone comes into the building.
Could it be Kohaku-san?
I hear small, light footsteps getting closer, until finally, the sliding door opens.



—I can't believe it.
 It's Akiha.
 "Akiha, are you.... alright?"
 "... Yes, my wounds have healed now."
 Healed....?
 No way.
 That wound wasn't anything that would heal in a night.
 Besides, Kohaku-san said it would take weeks to heal.
 To heal that fast is not human—
 "—Ah."
 Then I finally realize it.
 No, I wish I didn't.
 That Akiha's hair is still red.



".... It's exactly what you think it is, Nii-san.
 My wound is healed—a wound which wouldn't heal this quickly for a normal person."
 Akiha's hair is red in the morning sunlight.
 —But I have no interest in that.
 "—What are you saying Akiha?
 If your wound's healed, that should be good enough.
 I hate the Tohno blood, but if it helps out like this, then it's, it's a good thing—"
 ".... You don't have to force yourself.
 I didn't come here to be a bother to you.

I came to tell you a few things while I'm still sane."

"What—"

She said while she is sane——

"Listen to me, Nii-san.

I've been lying to you for so long now.

There's no way for me to make up for that, but I have to at least tell you the truth.

I cannot disappear like this——"

Akiha's eyes shine as if she's about to cry.

.... If she looks at me that way, there's no way I could stop her.

".... Alright.

I'll listen.

But, Akiha, I'll stay as Tohno Shiki no matter what you tell me.

.... Maybe you don't have to tell me at all.

All the same—do you still want to tell me about it?"

"Nii-san, you..... know?"

".... SHIKI likes to talk a lot, and he told me most of it while you were unconscious.

But, if you want to tell me about it, I'll listen.

If you tell me yourself, I think it would help me understand."

Akiha looks aghast for a moment, and then she bites her lip and looks at me.



"Nii-san.

You were adopted ten years ago from the Nanaya family.

.... I don't know why Father adopted you, but he introduced you to us as our new family member."

Akiha squints as if pained and continues on.

"I've heard that the Nanaya family was the total opposite of our kind.

.... There are those like the Tohno family with mixed blood, and then there are those who oppose them."

"Nii-san, you wouldn't like it if there were lions and tigers in your school, right? We humans tend to eliminate people who are different from us or anyone who is superior to us.

.... It's pretty easy to understand why, if you think about it.
 It's not that they eliminate the 'different people' because they hate them.
 Instead, it is because if these 'different people' were in our society, it would endanger the lives of normal people.
 So, there will always be those who eliminate the non-humans."
 "—The Nanaya family was special among those who stood against the non-humans.
 They didn't use magic, but instead relied purely on their own abilities.
 The Tohno family became special by introducing inhuman blood into their bloodline.
 The Nanaya family became special through willpower and determination.
 Tohno and Nanaya were enemies, but we were actually close, in a way, just by our nature."
 "So if you happen to have any special powers, it's not from the blood of Tohno but from Nanaya.
 It's written in your blood to kill anything that is inhuman.
 Nii-san, there WAS that time when you ran away from me, remember?
 I realized it then.
 The Nanaya blood in you is still working, and it reacted to me."
 —She's talking about that night.
 She's right.
 I did feel a homicidal impulse when I saw Akiha's red hair.
 I thought I was a killer for that reason, but that means—



"Yes, you only feel that way towards abnormal people like me and SHIKI.
 But, that's why you were like death to us.
 Even though the people of Nanaya have stopped their work, I think it was still a threat just to have their blood around."
 "....."
 Why?
 Suddenly my heart is beating very loud.
 I have a very bad feeling about this.
 I cannot let Akiha go on.
 No, it's more that I don't want to hear it from her.
 "It's alright.

.... You don't have to go on.
It's already over, so there's no point.
It has nothing to do with me or you."
"But Nii-san—"
"I don't care about the Nanaya family.
I don't know them.
If you're the head of the Tohno family, you should only worry about the Tohno family."
"_____"
Akiha bows her head and gives a reluctant nod.



".... Then, let's talk about us.
Nii-san and I, and SHIKI, we were raised as true siblings.
You and SHIKI got along so well I was kind of jealous of you guys.
But everything went wrong when 'that' happened to SHIKI."
".... Eight years ago, SHIKI's Tohno blood awakened.. and he killed me."
".... Yes.
But your life was saved.
Things didn't end that easily, though.
We took care of SHIKI, but we couldn't kill the eldest sibling of the Tohno family.
We're a pretty powerful family, socially, so we couldn't just tell everyone that our eldest son, the only successor, died.
"So Father came up with it.
Let Nii-san be Tohno Shiki, and let SHIKI be the adopted son who died in an accident."
Akiha speaks these words as if hoping they will damn Tohno Makihisa.
—So that's it.

SHIKI and I reversed roles.
The one that was killed lived on, and the one who did the killing died.
That's the relationship between SHIKI and I.



".... I'm sorry.
Nii-san—the boy named Shiki no longer exists.
He died eight years ago.
It wasn't just the end of his life, but the end of his existence.
His name, past, household, and even his memories.
There's nothing left anywhere.
Eight years ago, when you took the place of Tohno SHIKI, Father got rid of everything."
"That's why you were taken to the Arimas.
To the outside world, Tohno's eldest son had to be alive, but since there is no Tohno blood in you, you couldn't be the successor.
Father explained that your body was weakened by the accident, so he sent you to the Arimas."
".... I didn't agree.
I even held a grudge against Father for letting you go for a stupid reason like that.
I guess it's because I told him that I wanted you back so many times, but Father finally came out and told me you were adopted.
And he told me never to let you come close to our house.
.... Father didn't take into account what kind of cruel things he was doing to you, and he lied to me shamelessly until the day he died."
Akiha's story ended there.
It might be because she hid these facts from me for so long, but Akiha's story sounded more like a confession.



".... That's the whole story.
So now you know.
You know you're not really my brother.
You're not—part of this rotten family."
About to cry.
Akiha's voice sounds like she's about to cry.
".... I'm sorry, Akiha.
I wasn't your real brother, but I still acted like it, and I caused trouble for you."
"What.... Nii-san....?"
"But I'm already a part of this family.
I might not be your brother, but can I still stay here?
I don't want to leave you ever again."
"A————"



Akiha puts her hands over her mouth and bites back whatever words were about to come out.

After a long silence,
Akiha sadly shakes her head.
".... I see, you're right.
It was wrong for me to ask that.
I've been a terrible brother anyway."



"N—No....!"

That's not true....!"

—I can't.. believe it.

Akiha—Akiha's crying.

"Nii-san—you're my only Nii-san....!"

I've watched you since I was just a little girl....!"

".... It's nice for you to say that, but that's because you didn't know.

You didn't know I wasn't your brother."

"I knew it from the beginning....!"

I knew that you were adopted, that you weren't really my brother.

I knew all that....!"

But I didn't care.

From the time you first called my name, I—"

Thump.

Still crying, Akiha falls against me.

"Aki—ha."

I put my hands on her slender shoulders.

Is that her heartbeat echoing in my ears, or mine?

She's so close.

Akiha's body is so close to me that I could put my arms around her if I wanted to—

".... You, knew?"

Since she was a child.

All this time, she knew that I wasn't her real brother.

".... Why didn't you tell me, Akiha?"

I'm not your brother after all."

.... A small silence.

Akiha looks up.

".... Because I wanted to be with you."

"If I didn't tell you.. if we stayed brother and sister.. we could stay together.

Since I'm not human, since I'm too different from you, we can't stay together....!?"

Akiha clenches her eyes shut and hits me in the chest.

"But—if we were brother and sister, I thought we could still be together.

No matter how much you hated me, no matter how much you ignored me, it would be okay if we could just stay together....!"

Smack.

The sound of her hitting my chest again.

"Isn't it weird....?"

I was born into such a powerful family but I wasn't allowed to ask for anything. Since I'm different, since I'm not like everyone else, I was going to be trapped inside this mansion and live without knowing anyone from outside.

That's what I was ready for, but you destroyed it all."
As if trying to drive out everything she kept inside all these years, Akiha hits my chest again and again.
"If Nii-san—if Nii-san didn't show up, I could have lived like that my whole life....!"
But I became weak and.. and became a liar.
I lied to you and I lied to myself.
I thought if I kept on lying about us being brother and sister, then I wouldn't want—anything else—"

—Hearing this stabs my heart with pain.

Such a small lie.. but to protect that little lie, Akiha has fought against so much—until finally it became too much, leaving her crying like she is now.
"Akiha—I.."
"You were my only Nii-san for all this time.
I could never accept anybody else as my Nii-san, let alone love anybody else.
I can't do anything about this feeling....!"

Smack.

Akiha hits my chest once more and grows quiet.

A long silence.

"Sorry," murmurs Akiha, momentarily breaking the silence.
"——"

My heart stutters at that single word.

.... Akiha was alone with her pain all this time.

She was in pain because she knew everything—that I was adopted, that I was raised as Tohno Shiki, everything.

.... She's now once again that young, black-haired girl who was always crying and apologizing to me when I was a kid.

—Come to think of it.

Akiha was always apologizing to me.

A small, nearly infinitesimal happiness for Akiha.

Yet she still made up an elaborate story to protect it.

That story itself was the barrier pushing her back, but it was also her one source of happiness.

"Akiha—I"

".... No, I'm sorry.

I've been selfish, but this is the last time, so you don't have to worry."

Akiha pushes away from me.

She's not crying anymore.

The "normal" Akiha is here now.

"What do you mean this is the last—Akiha?"



".... Look, Nii-san.
My hair won't turn back anymore."
Akiha looks at me, not sad, but rather letting me take in the truth of this statement.

.... Her hair remains that dull, bloody red.
So.. the Tohno blood is in control of her, just like it was with SHIKI.
"What—that's just for now, right....!?"
Besides, you're still Akiha, so it's not a problem."
"No, I know my own body.
I know I can't go back.
So this is the end of my lie.
Nii-san, you shouldn't be close to a monster like me.
You should escape this place and live on as Nanaya Shiki."

Akiha bows her head and steps back.
.... I don't know anything about this Nanaya Shiki.
I have no attachment to that name now.
No, even if I did, such a thing—would be unimportant, compared to Akiha.
"—You idiot."
I grab Akiha's arms.
"Hey—N.. Nii-san...."
She pushes back.
Always acting so strong.. but always lonely.
.... She caught me.
Come to think of it, she caught me a long time ago.
"Listen Akiha, I don't care what anyone says.
I am your brother.
No matter what happens, it doesn't matter if we're not related by blood.
I'm your brother."
".... Thank you Nii-san.
.... But I...."
"But!
Even if I wasn't, I'd stay beside you.
Even if you're not my sister, you're still important to me.

I won't let anyone else hurt you."

I pull her into my arms.

"..... Ah."

"I love you as my sister."

I hold her tightly.

"But.. I love you as a woman even more.

Isn't that reason enough to stay with you?"

"——"

Her breath catches in her throat.

Everything stops.

.... I can hear her heartbeat.

Our bodies warm up all the way down to our fingertips.

—And then.

As if there was never any doubt, we kiss—

"Oh——"

She refuses a bit at first.

"Mm, Ah——"

But soon I feel her full weight pressing against me.

It's just a normal kiss—far from what anyone would call passionate.

And yet, it still blows my mind.

Akiha's lips are cool and soft.

It feels like we might melt into each other.

My mind stops working as I feel her warm breath against my lips.

—I can come up with many reasons why I shouldn't.

But.. I want Akiha right now.

I want to take her trembling body in my arms and make her all mine—

After a long time, our lips part.

Akiha still rests her body against mine.

".... I'm so happy."

Her voice is so soft I almost miss it.

It was just a kiss, but she really does look happy.

"Akiha——"

I put my hands on her shoulders.

.... It's not that I came up with anything.

As if it's the most natural thing in the world, I gently kiss Akiha's neck.

"..... Nn."

Her body shakes.

But not with disgust or rejection.

.... Does Akiha feel the same as I do?

Maybe, if I'm thinking it's natural to want to touch Akiha, she might be thinking the same thing about me.

"Akiha—do you want to do it?"

I ask her.

I know I could have said it better, but I can't think of anything fancy right now.

"..... Yes."

Akiha nods.

Just this simple gesture makes me more excited than I've ever been.

".... But Nii-san.

Can you do me a favor first....?"

"A favor....?"

"Um.... I just thought this might be.."

She looks down at the tatami.

"I see.

It would probably hurt on the tatami.

.... But what should we do?"

.... I don't think I can hold back if she wants to go all the way back to the mansion.

If I can, I want to make love to Akiha right here in this room.

".... Nii-san, there's a futon in there...."

Akiha points at the closet.

"Um.... it's clean.

We use it when I get blood from Kohaku."

"If that's the case, you should have told me earlier.

Hold on, I'll get it."

I pull away from Akiha and take the futon out of the closet.

I lay it in the middle of the room and turn to face Akiha once again.

—And.

Akiha sits in front of the futon, placing her fingers on the tatami, and gives me a formal bow.

".... Then, I hope you will treat me kindly, Nii-san."

Her face and tone are entirely serious, even though her cheeks are flushed bright red.

"—Akiha."

I move closer and put my hands on her shoulders.

.... Such slender shoulders.

I want to see and feel her smooth white skin.

".... Can I take off your clothes?"

I move my hands from her shoulders to her waist.

And.

"Uhh——!"

Akiha shakes herself and looks up at me.

".... No, I can do it myself...."

Her voice is shaking.

She is probably embarrassed about showing herself to someone else.

Akiha stands up and gets back from me as she puts her hands on her shirt's lowest button.

"..... Nii-san, Um....."

She blushes and looks away.

"... Please don't laugh."

Her voice is no more than a whisper as she slowly pulls her shirt off of her shoulders.



Now in her underwear, Akiha looks away in embarrassment.

I don't know why.

She told me not to laugh, but Akiha's body is more beautiful than anything I've ever seen.

"You have nothing to be embarrassed about.

Akiha, you're beautiful."

I say honestly.

This seems to embarrass her even more, and she tenses from head to toe.

"Akiha....?"

You don't want to do it with your brother after all?"

"... No, that's not it.. but.. I..."

Akiha continues to look down, covering her chest with both hands.

"... I have small breasts, so I was scared you might not like them."

Akiha is blushing so hard that even her ears are turning red.

"—!!"

.... Man.

It had to have taken a lot of courage for her to say that.

And yet, she managed to force her words out, looking to me expectantly for a reply.

"I see.

You have small breasts, huh?"

I say this as brightly as I can.

"....."

Akiha does not answer, but keeps hiding her breasts with her hands.

"I really can't tell like this, though.

You'd have to lower your hands and take your underwear off before I could really judge for myself."

"Take my underwear off....?"

Are you telling me to get naked, Nii-san....?"

"Well, we can't do it unless we get naked, right?"

Here, I'll take my clothes off first, would that make it easier?"

What I can see already is beautiful, so I want to see every last inch of you."

"....."

Akiha hesitates.

Even though she wants to make love, I guess she still has some qualms about exposing herself.

.... I can't understand how women think.

"Well, I guess it's not impossible to do it like that.. but would it really be so bad to show me your body?"

"Uh—no, it's just embarrassing, and um.... it's not that I don't want to."

She answers awkwardly.

Her voice is so weak that I can't help but tease her.

"Well, I don't really mind if you want it that way, but there's a couple of problems.

If we do it like that, your underwear will get dirty and Kohaku-san will definitely be able to tell what happened."

"Oh—"

I guess Akiha didn't think that far ahead.

"I don't have any second thoughts about this, but we're still brother and sister to most people, so if Kohaku-san finds out.. it would be kind of awkward, don't you think?"

"Um, yes.. then what should we do, Nii-san?"

Akiha shifts nervously from one foot to the other.

I can tell that she wants to make love right now rather than risk having Kohaku-san find out.

"Well, we should work on trying to keep this a secret.. so we should both get undressed."

"Uh—that's what you said in the first place, Nii-san!"

"Of course.

I told you you're beautiful.

There's nothing to be ashamed of.

Besides, I really don't care about Kohaku-san.

I just want to see your body.

But if you don't want to, I'll just go back to the mansion."

"Go back—"

Akiha looks down and lets out a deep sigh.

".... Geez, sometimes you act like a spoiled brat, Nii-san."

"I am spoiled, in a way.

I may say what I want, but there haven't been many things I've wanted.

.... So I guess, this is the first time I've ever wanted something this bad."

"——"

Akiha doesn't say anything.

But she quietly slips her fingers into the top of her panties.

Slowly, she pulls them off.

They fall silently to the floor, leaving Akiha's white skin exposed to my eyes.

"Is this alright, Nii-san?"

Akiha averts her eyes and moves her hands out of the way.

"_____"

I can't say anything.

White body.

Her body is perfect, and completely unlike a man's body.

The skin is white, yet bearing a faint tinge of red, as though she is still embarrassed by her nudity.

Everywhere I look, I see curves—and not just her waist.

Even her legs are sleek and well-toned.. it blows my mind.

".... Nii-san, please don't stare at me like that."

"....."

As if I would ever heed that request.

Like Akiha said, her breasts are small.. but they are really well suited to the rest of her.

Her body is as well proportioned as a doll's.

She's perfect in every way.

She doesn't need bigger breasts.

My heart pounds in my chest.

I'm sure Akiha's heart is beating loudly too, but my heartbeat would drown hers with ease.

"——Ah."

My throat loosens enough to let out a low sigh.

White skin.. her hair draping down her slender neck.. even though it has a faint hint of red, the beauty of her body is unparalleled.

Her sculpted brows quiver with embarrassment, and her eyes clench shut just a bit tighter.

Her blushed face, her closed lips,

her flat stomach, her tempting belly button.

.... But more than anything, it's what waits for me between Akiha's legs that truly drives me wild.

"Akiha—um, you really—"

You really are beautiful.

I can't express it with words, but her naked body is so beautiful that I want to yank her into my arms and crush her against me until neither of us can breathe.

".... Oh."

Akiha blushes and puts a hand over her mouth.

It's a different kind of blush than the ones before.

"What?
What is it, Akiha?"
"....."
Instead of answering, Akiha simply stares.
"?"
I follow her gaze.

—And.
Akiha is staring at my naked body.
.... Not just me, but she is looking at my manhood, which has grown hard from looking at her perfect body.
"—Oh."
.... I feel uncomfortable.
It's not that I'm embarrassed, but it's really awkward to have her see me this hard already.
"....."
Akiha slowly comes closer, never taking her eyes off of my hardness.
.... My towering rod is grotesque and menacing compared to the beauty of her body.
"Well, Akiha.. This is, um—"
".... I know.
I was just a bit surprised, since this is the first time I've ever seen a man's.. you know...."
Akiha stares at me in utter fascination.
".... When I think that this is Nii-san's, it makes me think it's kind of cute..
Ah, what am I saying?"
Akiha mumbles as if talking to herself.

—And the sound of her voice erodes my restraint.
"Akiha—"
"Kya—!?"
I grab her by the arms and pull her up against me.
Finally skin to skin, we share a breathless embrace.
My manhood is touching Akiha's stomach.
Arm to arm, chest to chest.
My groin and Akiha's stomach touch.
"Mm..... Ah."
Akiha's body moves.
My shaft reacts to Akiha's body heat, growing harder still.
"Akiha—"
I hold her even tighter.
The sensation of my rod pressing against her stomach makes me feel hazy and drugged.
"Mm.... Nii-san, your body is so hot."
We're only holding each other, but Akiha is already breathing hard.
.... Just as I'm getting excited from this position, Akiha also seems to be turned

on by feeling my hardness against her stomach.

"Akiha—I'm going to make love to you now."

Akiha nods.

"Oh.... but Nii-san.... this is my first time, so...."

Embarrassed, she mumbles.

She says she doesn't know what to do.

"—It's my first time too.

Don't worry.

I'll back off if it hurts too much.

.... So let me lead for now."

Akiha mumbles an agreement.

—I can feel her body getting hotter.

We sit on the futon, still holding each other, and I slowly begin exploring her body.

I move behind her and gently bite her ear.

Putting it between my lips, I carefully saw my teeth back and forth—a kind of foreplay before the foreplay.

"——!!"

And.

Just with that, Akiha's voice stops in her throat.

"Akiha...?"

"Ha—Ah, mm, Ah...!"

My voice doesn't reach her.

I just bit her ear.. is that her weak spot?

"Akiha, are your ears that sensitive?"

"Um—no, it's not that but.."

Akiha's body jerks as I nibble her earlobe.

.... It's a bit strange.

I'm being as gentle as I can, but Akiha seems to be reacting like I'm treating her roughly.

Is she this tense because it's her first time?

"Akiha, relax.

If you're like this when I'm barely touching you, I don't know if you'll be able to take it when we actually do it."

"Mm—I. know—don't worry.. just do what you want, Nii-san—"

Akiha leans back against me, still breathing hard.

"Hmmm—!!"

Her back arches violently.

All I did was put my hands on her breasts, but she's so tightly wound she's nearly breaking her spine.

".... Wow, they really are small."

"Ah...."

"But they're soft and firm.

See, if I do this, my fingers get pushed right back."
 Applying some pressure with the tips of my fingers..
 I squeeze her small breasts.
 "Aaaaaaa.....!"
 Akiha cries out.
 Her skin molds around my fingers.. her breasts are incredibly firm.
 "Mm.. Ah... Nii-san, mmk, please, don't—be.. too.. rough—"
 Akiha's voice is starting to heat up.
 Her body has been hot for some time.
 "—Your breasts really are cute.
 They're so cute, I think I have to play with them some more."
 Leaning over her shoulder, I slowly run my tongue across her breast.
 "Aaaa.....!"
 Akiha gasps and grabs my hands.
 "Ah, hwa—Nii-san, why.. do.. you.. like.. my.. breasts.. so.. much—"
 Akiha's body shudders.
 I'm only licking one of her breasts, but sweat is pouring off of her as if she was on fire.
 "Ha—it's really hot in here."
 I'm not very hot myself, but it definitely feels warmer in here.
 Probably because Akiha is generating enough heat for both of us.
 "Nii-san, please don't touch me like that.
 They're so small.. they're more like a little girl's."
 Akiha breathes hard and tries to stop me from touching her breasts.
 "....."
 Of course, I have no intention of stopping.
 I squeeze her right breast, which easily fits in the palm of my hand.
 "—Mm, Huu, Hauaaaaaa.....!"
 She arches her back.
 Of course, this makes her breast stick out more, letting me squeeze it even harder.
 "Ha, ah, ahhh, ahhh, ahhhh....!"
 Instead of being soft and spongy, Akiha's breasts have a nice, taut firmness to them.
 Like Akiha said, they are more like the breasts of a little girl than a woman—making them almost painfully cute.
 "Mm... N, Nii-san—"
 "See Akiha, even though they're small, you still like it when I touch them.
 Your nipples are as hard as rocks."
 To illustrate my point, I capture her nipples between my fingers.
 "Naaaaaaaaaaaa.....!"
 Akiha's face turns bright red and her entire body shakes.
 Embarrassment and pleasure fight for dominance in her slender body.

Squeeze.
 I continue to squeeze her hard nipples.

"Ahh—ha, Ah.

Ah.

AH—"

Nibble.

Before she can stop me, I wrap my teeth around her right nipple and bite down.

"Nku—!!"

Akiha falls onto me.

But I continue to bite, driving her crazy.

"Ahhh—H,ha, ha,ha, h, ahh—"

I pinch her hard nipples over and over.

".... Hah.... Nii-san—please, stop—ah, naaaaaaaaaaaa.....!!"

Instead of stopping, I bite a little harder.

Her red hair flies from side to side.

Her body is so hot it's almost volcanic.

—I pull away for a moment to survey my work.

The futon under us is already soaking wet.

"Hah, hah, hah, hah—Ah, Nm, hwa—"

.... I'm just touching her, but she acts like I'm already inside of her.

".... Is it good?"

"Huh—N,no—Ah, hau—"

.... Akiha is breathing so hard I can barely understand her.

I can't be sure, but maybe—

"I see.

If it doesn't feel good when I touch your breasts, I'll just try another place."

"Huh—did.. you.. say.. something.. Nii-san?"

"I did.

I told you I was going to do this."

Turning her over, I lick Akiha's back.

—Then.

"Aaaaaaa—!!"

Akiha arches away as if my tongue is burning her.

"Ah—Haaa—Nii-san, what.. are you doing—!?"

"All I did was lick your back.. you don't like that?"

".... No, it tickles.. and I'm scared."

I let my arms fall to my sides.

"——"

.... I'm completely speechless.

No wonder she screamed so loud when I touched her ear.

I guess.. Akiha is more sensitive—much more sensitive.. than a normal person.

"Akiha, tell me the truth—do you feel good?"

"——"

Akiha's face turns bright red.

.... I don't even have to wait for her answer.
".... Man.... I didn't know you were this sensitive.
Um.. are you this sensitive all the time?"
"Uh—um.... I don't know, but I guess it's different right now.
When I think of you touching me, my heart starts pounding really hard and my body gets all hot—"
—Crap.
That's so hot I want to shove her down on the futon and finish what I started.
But Akiha was just injured.
I can't push her past her limits.
".... Akiha, do you want to quit for today?"
"What.... Nii-san?"
Akiha looks surprised.
".... You don't want to be with me, Nii-san?"
"No, how can you even say that!?!
I really want to—right now!!
But you're so sensitive, I don't know what will happen if I keep going.
Plus, you said this is your first time.. I feel like I could break you if I keep g—"

—My explanation is cut off..
.... because Akiha's mouth has closed over mine.
"Nii-san."
"Aki—ha."
"You told me it would be alright.. so please don't stop."
"Akiha—but I.."
".... Please.
If you think you'll break me, then break me.
I'll endure any pain you give me."
Akiha stares directly into my eyes.
.... Her unwavering gaze forces me to make up my mind.
".... You're sure it's alright?
I don't think I can quit once I start.
.... I want you too much."
"—I don't care.
.... I want you too, Nii-san."
Akiha's eyes are watery as she waits for me to make the next move.
"Akiha—"
If she really wants this.
There's no way I can hold myself back.

I lunge forward.
"Ah—"
Akiha lets out a sharp cry and falls back on the futon.
.... Her heated body.
Her heated, sweating body bends pliantly around my fingers.
".... You're already wet enough down here.

I guess I don't have to do anything else to get you ready."
"Nii-san, why do you—say such embarrassing things?"
Akiha blushes.
.... Akiha hasn't seemed to have figured out that the reason I say those things is because I want to see her reaction.
"Hmm—I better check to make sure.
Akiha, spread your legs.
I can't see you like this."
I grab her tightly closed legs.
"Hey—Nii-san, no—"
"No more waiting.
Let me see you right now."
"Kyaa—!?"
I grab her ankles and pull her legs roughly apart.
"No—please don't look.....!!"
Akiha tries to struggle, but I hold her firmly.
I put my face down close to her delicate pink folds.. and take a deep, satisfying whiff.
"!!!
W-what are you doing, Nii-san!!"
"I'm smelling you.
You don't like it?"
"Of course I don't like it....!!
Besides, you don't have to, because, all you have to do is.. take your and.. mine and...."
She's babbling.
I guess Akiha only knows the basics of sex.
".... That's true, but you have to do other things first or it'll hurt."
.... Although, if she's this wet already, I don't think I'll have to worry about it.
"For example, you have to let it get used to being touched.. like this—"
I part her delicate lips and slowly extend my tongue.
"Ahaaaaaa—!?"
Akiha's body nearly shoots off of the futon.
"Amazing.. you're just as wet inside."
"N-Nii-san, no—it's dirty—"
"No—it's not dirty at all.
It's warm.. and delicious."

Lick.
I lap up the juices slowly oozing out of her.
"Ahh—Nn, fwa.... Ahhhh—!"
I up the ante by pushing my tongue inside.
"Naa—Haaaaaaaaaaaa.....!!"
.... Unlike a hard penis, tongues aren't that strong.
I can't really fill her this way, so I just move it around, exploring everything within my reach.

"Ha—nn.
 Sto.. Nii-san, no, stop—Nha....!!"
 Akiha's body arches back.
 Every time she bucks, her red hair dances on her shoulders.. it is possibly the most erotic sight I've ever seen.
 The wispy hair by my mouth is much thinner than the hair on her head.
 Below that small thatch of fuzz I spy a small swelling of flesh, its red tip looking as if it simply aches to be touched.
 "... Hmm."
 Obliginglly, I give it a soft lick.
 This point is like the head of a man's penis—far more sensitive than any other part.
 "———!!"
 Akiha's legs tense.
 "Mm—Ahhh, haa—n."
 Her body shakes.
 With one touch of my tongue, Akiha's beautiful body dances.
 "Ahaa—Nii-san, I—"
 Akiha must be feeling too good to think, as she can't seem to focus on me.
 "....."
 There's no point in putting it off any longer.
 Besides, I can't hold on anymore.
 "Akiha—I'm putting it in now."
 I lower my hips, leading my head to her waiting entrance.
 "Urgh—!"
 I haven't even put it in yet.
 I just touched her with the tip, and her body is trembling.
 I don't know what will happen if I put it in.
 But I want her so bad, I don't think I can stop.
 "———"
 As gently as I can,
 I slowly push myself inside.

"Ahwaaaaa.....!!!!!"
 Akiha shudders violently.
 Her breathing grows more and more labored as I ease myself further inside.
 "Mm, Ah, ah,ah—Ahh, Ah.....!"
 She clutches the sheets, wadding up huge fistfuls of fabric.
 And her teeth grind as she fights the pain.
 "Akiha, does it hurt?"
 "Y—yes.. but I.. can.. still.. stand.. it—"
 Her answer comes in pieces.
 "———"
 I find my own voice leaving as well.
 She's so tight.

Just as Akiha is hurting from me pushing into her, I'm hurting from how tight she is inside.

It's wet.

Yes, it's very wet.. but it's so tight that it's hard to move.

It's like her inner walls are trying to push me out.

That feeling.

Her soft tunnel is snug around my shaft, squeezing me like a fist and almost making me pass out.

".... You...."

I was trying to make Akiha comfortable and relaxed until now, and I wasn't THAT excited yet, but..

Now that I'm partway in, I'm about to explode.

"Shit—"

No, not yet.

I can't finish so soon.

I clench my ass and try to push the rest of the way in.

"Nku.....!"

Ou.. Ouch, Nii-san, it's.. too.. big—!"

Akiha arches back.

My shaft must feel like it's tearing her apart.

I'm trying to go as slowly as I can, but it still seems really painful for her.

Akiha's movements become rough and erratic as the pain assails her.

"Ah—ahh, Aaau, Naaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

I push further in.

Reaching Akiha's unexplored depths as if I had always been meant to.

"Nmm—Ha, Na, Auuuuuuuuuuu!!"

Akiha's voice is more like a scream now.

But as her pain increases, so does my pleasure.

That's how good it feels inside her.

I sink.

I sink my hot shaft slowly into her resisting hole.

"Nku.... Ha, ah, ha—Nii-san.. it's.. so hot....!"

"This is just the beginning, Akiha....!"

She's not the only one feeling hot.

It's so hot inside her passage that it feels like I'm going to melt into her.

"Akiha, I'm going in—!"

I push in a bit more.

And I feel something that I can't push through.

"Ya—"

Akiha's walls keep squeezing me.

"Hah—Nii-san—"

Akiha grits her teeth in preparation of the pain to come.

".... Akiha, are you sure about this?"

"—Yes.. it has to be you, Nii-san."

.... I don't need to hear anything else.

Trying to make the pain as brief as possible, I surge forward.

"_____!"

Her body jerks.

Akiha's ass grinds back against the futon in a futile attempt to escape the pain.

"Nm—Ah, Nku, Haa—!"

I feel something slimy running down my thigh.

The liquid flowing from Akiha now has a faint red tinge mixed with it.

But I keep moving.

I push in.

"—!"

Ah, ah, ahhhhhhhh—!"

Akiha's stomach bulges a bit.

Proof that I am now deep inside of her.

"Hah, hah, hah, hah—"

I move my hips back and forth, loving every noise our joined bodies make.

"Aj—Ah, auuuuu!"

I can't hear Akiha.

She must still be in pain.

It has to be more pain than pleasure for her right now.

"Hah, hah, hah, hah—"

.... But it's the exact opposite for me.

The more it hurts for Akiha, the tighter her passage grips me.

There's no way..

.... no way I can stop myself now.

"Nn.....!"

Nii-san—!"

I move.

"Sto—Nii-san, it hurts—!"

I keep moving.

It's so soft inside her.

It's warm, and tight.. and I feel like I could explode at any second.

"Ah, Nha—Aaaa, aa—!"

I hear Akiha.

.... And I finally realize something.

She has tears in her eyes.

"Ku——!"

But I still can't stop.

I thrust in harder.

Then—

"Nku....!"

Hah, fwa, Nii-san—I, I—!"
Akiha's back arches like a bow.
She squeezes me so tight I can hardly move.

"—Ku, A.....!"
I've reached my limit.
As Akiha falls back on the futon, I know that I can't contain myself for even one more second.
I quickly pull out of her spasming walls.

Splash.
My seed splashes out.
Instead of going inside of her, it sprays all over Akiha's gorgeous body.

"Ha... A,ah—"
Akiha's arching spine finally relaxes.
She slumps weakly on the futon.
Her red hair spreads all over the tatami, looking like a fatally wounded, but achingly beautiful animal.
"Hah—hah—hah—"
Though I'm not as bad as Akiha, I still have trouble getting my breath to calm.
Akiha—lies still on the futon, still flushed.. and with tears still glittering in her eyes.

.... I hope it's only from the pain of losing her virginity.
The tears are still there.
"... Nii-san, you did it outside."
Akiha's voice and expression are dream-like and hazy.
Her body is covered in my essence.
Akiha does not seem to care, making no move to clean herself as she lies still on the futon.
"Akiha.... does it still hurt?"
"Uh—Yeah, a little, but I'm alright now."
"... I see.
Sorry.
I told you I was going to be gentle, but you were just too cute—"
I just did it all for myself.
"... No, it's alright.
It did hurt, but I was more happy.
Now, even if I have to die I—have no regrets."
"W—what are you saying.....!
I told you I don't care which 'Akiha' you are.
I don't care if your hair stays red.
If you want blood, I'll give you all you want.
I want to be with you when you're in pain.
.... Besides, I haven't had enough of you.

I want to be with you more.
So don't say things like that.
Aren't we going to be together from now on?"
"Nii-san——"
Akiha doesn't say anything.

.... For a while,
only our body heat passes between us.
Until.
"Nii-san, can you do your cute little sister just one favor?"
Akiha speaks brightly.
"Yeah, okay.
I'll do anything I can."
"Thank you.
Then please promise me this: If I ever turn into something.. else, please kill me
with your own hands."
Just like that.
She says it like it's nothing.
"Wha——"
I can't speak.
I—don't see why she has to bring that up right now.
".... What do you mean?
Do you think I'd make that kind of promise?"
"Yes, because you're the most important person in my life.
It's natural to have the one you love most next to you when you die, isn't it?
Or are you planning to skip out on my funeral, too, Nii-san?"
"Wha——that has nothing to do with what we're talking about."
"It's no different.
.... Nii-san, my hair might not go back, but that's not a big problem.
.... What I'm afraid of is that I'll go insane like SHIKI.
Father became mentally ill at the age of forty.
So if I live on, I might become like that too."
".... That wouldn't happen.
And even if it does, it's a long time from now.
Besides—if it does happen, I'll——"
".... Thank you, but anybody with the Tohno blood in their veins will die when
it happens.
When the Tohno blood grows too strong, you kill yourself.
.... That's how it's been all along.
If you've completely changed, you can't go back unless you die.
Everyone who has changed has gone insane.
I wouldn't even know myself, and I'd cause pain to anything I laid my eyes on.
.... What's scary about it is that you can't even kill yourself when you get like
that."
"—So Nii-san..
I have to ask the person I love the most.

Because I trust you more than anyone.. because I only have you, I can only let you take care of me.

I don't want to cause suffering to someone I don't know while I'm out of my mind.

If I did that, the old Tohno Akiha would be completely destroyed."

"Akiha—that's...."

".... So kill me.

One day, when I've completely changed, if you still love me.. kill me—for my sake, if no one else's.

Before I do something I'd regret, so that I can stay myself even then.

While I am still just your sister."

"_____"

.... I grit my teeth.

This is why she was crying.

Not because she's happy about us being together right now.

But because one day..

She knows that one day in the future, this happiness is going to be nothing but a memory.

That's why she's crying.

"You——"

.... I feel anger welling up inside of me.

How can she say things like that so easily?

"You idiot——"

Anger at the Tohno blood for forcing such a fate on her.

"Why do you have to——"

Anger at myself for not promising her, even if it turned out to be a lie——

"Hmmm——!?"

I kiss her.. hard.

Our third kiss is not one of love.

It's a wild kiss to quiet her down.

"Akiha——!"

Unlike the previous kiss, it is deep and passionate.

"Ha——Mm——"

Akiha is a bit hesitant at first, but finally extends her tongue, letting it brush against mine.

Our tongues dance as our saliva mixes and flows together.

The feeling of her snakelike tongue makes rational thought impossible.

.... It feels like our tongues are melting into each other.

Being with her feels so good that it even seems like my tongue is in my way.

My skin, my mind, even the fact that I'm human gets on my nerves.

"Mm..... Nii-san....."

It must be the same for her, as she swallows my saliva and replaces it with her own.

Gulp.

Instead of melting into each other, we settle for exchanging saliva.

Akiha sucks wildly on my lips.

"Ha-Nn, ku—"

I breathe hard.

Like Akiha's before, my head goes blank.

.... Really.

I'm furious about what she said.

"Mm... Ha....."

I let her mouth go.

She takes a deep breath.

".... Nii-san....?"

What is it?

We were just talking."

"I don't want to talk anymore.

I'm too mad right now."

I lift her body off the futon.

"Nii-san—?"

What are you mad about?"

"A lot of things—like your pessimistic attitude.. not being able to laugh it off, everything.

But what really pisses me off is that you were thinking about dying when I was trying so hard to please you."

"What—?"

"It wasn't that good for you after all, huh?

I'm so mad that I'm going to make you feel good!"

With that, I bury my face between her breasts.

I don't know if she really liked it the last time.

But I still put my mouth there and suck.

"Nmmm—!"

Akiha jerks back.

"N-Nii-san—I did feel good when—Naaa!?"

I rub around her waist.

She averts her eyes from just that.

"Ah—Nii-san, are.. we.. still going.. to.. do.. more—?"

"We are.

I bet your body's used to it.

You'll feel much better this time... I'm going to do it until you can't think about anything else!"

"What... do you mean that, Nii-san....?"

"Yeah, I'm mad.. so I'm not going to be gentle like last time."

"No, I mean.... is it really going to feel better this time....?"

.... She blushes in spite of what she's asking.

"—Didn't it hurt last time?"

I thought you didn't want to do it again because it hurt you so much."

"Well..... it did hurt, but it also felt good.
.... I thought sex was supposed to be like that, but—"

Am I wrong?

Her eyes ask.

She's so cute it makes me smile.

"It only hurts in the beginning.

Then it just feels good.

So if I do this—"

"——!"

I raise one of her legs and put my hands on her hips.

Then—I pull her hips down on my lap.

"N-Nii-san—?"

".... Akiha, I love you."

I tell her.

"So I'll do anything you want me to.. but lay off the crap you were talking about earlier.

I want to be with you as long as I live."

"Oh....."

".... Come on.

I'll make it feel so good you won't even think of something like that again."

"Nii-san—"

In this position,

it's easy for me to put it into her.

There's no reason for me to go easy on her now.

Holding her tightly against my lap, I push further up inside of her.

"Nhaa——!?"

Akiha arches back wildly.

I don't put it in slowly like earlier.

I just push it in as hard as I can.

"Ha—Ah, Nii-san, it hurts—!"

Akiha puts her arms around my shoulders.

I ignore her complaints and pull out.. but only far enough to ram myself back in.

"——!"

Jerking motion.

My shaft pushes easily into her wet tunnel.

"Mm—Ah, Ha, Nm, Ah—"

This position reaches deep into her, making her shake all over.

"N-Nii-san—You.. lied....!!"

Akiha is panting so hard I can barely understand her.

"You.. said.. it wouldn't.. hurt.. anymore—"

She sounds a little upset.

But she's hotter inside than ever before, and her juices are practically pouring onto the futon.

"I'm lying?
 So you're telling me it.. doesn't feel better than last time?"
 "Nha—!"
 I push up again.
 As hard as I can.
 "... Ha... mm, ah, nn—"
 Her arms tighten around my shoulders.
 Once I'm all the way inside, I stop moving so that she's not entirely out of it.
 She's breathing hard, just from having me inside her.
 "Nii-san, this, position—"
 "Yeah, it's really embarrassing, isn't it?
 What do you think people would say if they saw you in a position like this?"
 "_____"
 Akiha's face turns bright red.
 "N-Nii-san....!"
 If you know I don't like it, please let me down....!"
 Akiha tries to pull away.
 But I have no intention of letting her go.
 "... Akiha, I'm going to do it just like this.
 Hold on to me if you don't want to fall over....!"
 "Wha—Nku!?"
 I grab her waist.
 With one hand, I raise her legs even higher.
 Her body arches back, but that only makes it easier for me to move.
 "Mm.
 Aahhhhhhhhh—!"
 In this position, Akiha might be feeling good just from me putting it in.
 "Akiha—!"
 That's the signal.
 I pull out, then quickly push back in.
 "Ou—!"
 Nii-san, ple-please stop—!"
 Akiha cries louder.
 But not loud enough to make me stop.

Making a lot of noise,
 I keep thrusting.
 "Hi—Fwa, ah, au, hauuuu!!"
 Akiha tightens around me.
 "Ah—Nii-san, Nku, I—!"
 As I push up.
 "What—it feels, fn, mm, aahhhh.....!"
 I feel her heat.

I can hear the wet sounds rising between us.
 Akiha's fluids leak out.

"It—It hurts, but—"
Squeeze.
Akiha's arms and insides clutch at me.
"Ha, fwa, ah, ah—!"
I push as far into her as I possibly can.
Akiha's body jerks with every thrust.
"Nii-san—it's.. so good."
From anger or joy, I'm not sure which..
.... Akiha starts to cry.
".... It's.. really.. different—!"
Akiha holds me tighter, moaning raggedly as I continue to move.
"Hah, hah, hah, Ah—"
Like Akiha, I can't keep myself from groaning with pleasure.
Of course it's different this time.
I'm going as hard as I can, and she's different inside, too.
"Mmm—Akiha, I'm going to go.. harder—!"
As I keep pushing in and out of her, I look for ways to make it better.
It's already tight inside of her.
Her walls suck and pull as my shaft goes in and out of her, seemingly trying to keep me inside.

"Nm—Nii-san, I—!!"
".....!!"
Every stroke feels better than the last.
Her body is so hot my mind shorts out just from touching it.
I wonder—if it's as good for her as it is for me.
"....."
Unconsciously, I caress her perfect ass.
As my fingers roam over her firm skin, I tentatively ease her cheeks apart.
"Hya—!?"
Akiha jumps, not backward, but straight up.
"Nii-san, not—there—!"
.... Slowly, I push my middle finger into her tight anus.
"Nm, mmmmm!!"
Everything tightens up.
Her clenching muscles feel as if they are trying to break my finger.
"N-no, Nii-san, please—stop, Nku.....!"
In spite of her words, Akiha's body is writhing with delight.
"Ha—Nn, ah, ahn, ah, fua—!"
Maybe it's because she is so wet,
but her pain is entirely gone, leaving only pleasure behind.
"Gu—!"
I keep moving my hips.
On and on, in and out.. as if this moment could keep going forever.
"Ah, Nha, ah, ha—!"
Akiha's body shudders.

Her arms wrap around me.

"Nm, ha, ha, haa, haaa—!"

Her hair tickles me everywhere it touches.

Unable to resist, I bite down on one of her cute little nipples.

"Ha—Aahhhh, Nii-san—!"

The continual stimulation of my driving shaft coupled with my attack on her nipple.. seems to be too much for Akiha to take.

With a weak moan, she lets go.

And collapses onto the futon.

"—"

I lay on top of her, following her down.

So instead of having to push up, we've returned to the most basic of positions.

"Nn—Akiha—"

I brace myself over her and keep on moving.

She isn't the only one out of control.

I'm so driven by pleasure that I can't think of anything but coming.

"Nn, fuaaaa—!"

Akiha gets no respite from my frantic thrusting.

Her eyes and lips are sticky with tears and saliva.

"Nii-san, I. I. no—!"

Her arms wrap around my back.

Honestly, I'm at my limit.

"Akiha—I'm going to.....!"

"Mm, mm, mmmmmmm.....!!"

Akiha doesn't hear me.

Her mind is on the constant, unyielding pleasure I'm giving her.

"Ha, ah, ahh, aahhhhhhhh..!!"

"Nn—!!"

Push.

I put all my power into one, final stroke.

"Fwa, ah, ah, ahhhhhhh—!!"

Akiha's body arches back.

"Ha—a."

I feel it.

I'm about to explode.. my hot sperm is about to erupt, sending everything I am shooting into Akiha.

"Kua—"

I try to pull out like I did earlier.

—Then.

"Nii-san—!"

Akiha grabs hold of me.

"Please—stay like this.....!"

"Akiha—"

Her arms wrap tight around my back.

I can't refuse.

"—I'm gonna come, Akiha!"

"—Yes—inside me.....!"

—I've passed the pinnacle.

With an animalistic growl.

"—!!"

"Naaaaaaaaa.....!!"

I come.

Akiha shivers with each jet of sperm I shoot deep inside of her.

Unconsciously,

her arms tighten their hold on me.

"Ah—Ah, ah."

Completely spent, I practically fall on top of her.

"Ha.... hah, hah, hah—"

I can hear her panting in time with mine.

"Aki—ha."

I hold her.

We're both shuddering and coated with a film of sweat, but I don't care.

"..... Was it.. good.. this time..?"

"——"

Akiha can only nod.

.... With that, I really am drained.

I fall onto the futon and close my eyes.

.... It might be because I was moving nonstop since yesterday.

I am really sleepy.

".... Nii-san....?"

I hear Akiha's voice.

But I don't have the energy to reply.

".... Are you going to sleep?"

Hey, Nii-san?"

.... I told you I don't have the energy to reply.

Can't you just let me sleep, Akiha?

".... Well, yeah, but.. can I sleep with you....?"

.... I don't mind.. but don't you want to wash up?

I would think you'd want to take a shower or something.

".... You want me to go wash myself?"

Alright, I'll go.
Wait here.
This bathroom still works."

.... Akiha's body moves away from mine.
And I fall into a deep sleep.

".... Nii-san, please don't forget about our promise."

I can hear a voice.
".... There are worse things than death.
So—please keep our promise."

I can hear a voice, even though I'm asleep.
"I'm sorry.... I have to say this.
But sometimes, death is the only salvation."

This must be a dream.
"I do not want to trust anyone else.
So please—don't forget, no matter what happens."

.... What a bad dream.
I'll never be able to forget it.

If I could,
I wish I could forget it—

"Nii-san, wake up, Nii-san."

—I hear Akiha's voice.

"Nii-san, Nii-san.
You have to wake up.
You can't be sleeping when the sun's about to set."

—Weird.
I can hear Akiha's voice.
".... Oh, that's enough.
How can you sleep so like that when I want you to wake up!?"

—Someone squeezes me.

Instantly, I'm awake.

"Ouchhh.....!"
I wake to a sharp pain in my arm.
—Then.



"Oh.... Good morning, Akiha."

"....."

Akiha looks mad, and I can tell she has something to say.

.... From the shape of the red mark on my arm, the pain I felt was her pinching me.

"Akiha, that really hurts!

What did you do?"



"Nothing.

You wouldn't wake up, so I gave you a little pinch."

"You didn't have to do that, I would have woken up if you had just said to."



Uh.. Akiha is staring at me in disbelief.



"Really, Hisui was right.
You don't remember anything when someone tries to wake you up."
"What—did you try to wake me up just now, Akiha?"



"Yeah, I called your name a bunch of times and—you don't even remember, do you?"
"Um.... Yeah, I'm sorry but I don't remember."



"I understand.
Next time, I'll get right to hitting you.
If you don't want that to happen, try to wake up on time."
.... I guess I left her alone too long while I was sleeping.
Seeing how mad she is, I'd guess she's been up for more than an hour.
".... Geez, I can't help it.
I was tired from everything that happened yesterday.
I was attacked by you at school, and when I came home, I had to fight SHIKI,
then I had to look after you, and then.. you know.. 'that'.
I should be sleeping all day after all that."



"'That' ?
Nii-san——"

Seeming to recall what we did, Akiha blushes.
.... She is so cute.
Seeing that blush makes me want to tease her even more.
"What?
You were holding on to me so tight.
Don't tell me you didn't like it....?"



"Um—uh, um—well."

She mumbles while looking down at the floor.

"It's alright.

If you don't like it, I won't force you to do it.

I guess we can just have a 'pure' relationship from now on."

"Um..... Nii-san, I, well—"

"What, I don't understand what you're trying to say."

.... Crap.

I can't hold a straight face.

Just looking at her makes me want to burst out laughing.

"Um.... but it's not that I dislike it, but.."

"Oh, I see.

So you don't really like it then?

Okay, I'll restrain myself from now on."



"Oh—but, I guess.. I do like it, but—"

Akiha looks away as she answers.

"I see, but you keep saying 'but'.."



"I. I can't help it.
I couldn't think back then.
I couldn't really tell if it was good or bad."
"Alright, then let's do it again to find out for sure.
I want to take off your clothes myself this time."



"Oh———"

Akiha stares at me with her cheeks blazing.
... After she stares at me for a second, she purses her lips and shakes her head.



".... Nii-san, please put your clothes on.
It's almost sunset and we have to go back to the mansion."
"It doesn't matter.
This is part of the mansion."

I want to stay here with you all day.
Or don't you like that idea?"



"No, I feel the same way!
... But I was thinking that it hurts here and I want to do it on a real bed....."
Even though her voice is a bit angry, what she's saying is so cute.
It makes me want her even more.
"—Alright, fine.
To be honest, I was thinking when I was watching you recover that I wanted to
sleep in that bed with you."



"....."
Akiha nods.

—Alright, let's hurry up.
Let me get my clothes on and we'll go back to the mansion.

We leave the detached building and make our way into the garden.
Like Akiha said, the sun is setting and the garden is filled with red.

"—Hey Akiha, what do you think Kohaku-san is doing?"



"... Hmm, well.

Kohaku... might have figured it out.

She's usually a little oblivious, but sometimes, she's really cunning—"

"..... Hmmm."

... It doesn't feel like I did anything wrong, but still.. talking about this feels a bit awkward.

Knowing Kohaku-san, she might actually be happy and congratulate us, but I have no idea how Hisui will react.

"—Huh?"

Just slightly,

I feel a headache.

"Cu....."

I stop.

Akiha keeps walking.

"Akiha, hold on a sec—"

I call out to her.

She turns around.



That face.

Before I can stop myself.

I fall to the ground.

"Nii-san—!"

Akiha runs toward me.
But she never makes it.
Because she is stopped by.. him.

"SHIKI—!!

You!!

How dare you do that to Nii-san....!!"

Akiha lashes out, but she can't break his hold.
That guy.... SHIKI, grabs Akiha's neck and starts to squeeze.

"Ah——"

After several frantic seconds, Akiha's head nods forward.
SHIKI holds her unconscious body and looks down at me contemptuously.



33 0

".... You did it.
You really took everything from me."
If curses were real, they would probably sound just like that.

SHIKI looks down at me, his teeth gritting.
.... I can't move.
My energy seems to be escaping through my back.
There's only a little pain.. pain and the certainty that I might die here.
I can feel my shirt slowly being soaked with my own blood.

In my back.
A knife is planted like some kind of alien wing.

"SHI..... KI"

"Don't misunderstand, Shiki.
Akiha doesn't really love you.
She loves her 'brother'.



33 0

Yeah—for that I may have to thank you.
Isn't that right, Akiha?
Please forgive me for being such a weakling.
I never realized how much you loved me.
If I was smarter, you wouldn't have had your purity taken away by such a pathetic loser."
.... SHIKI puts his face near Akiha.
Since she's unconscious, she can't resist.



33 0

".... Yes, it doesn't matter if we're brother and sister.
I love you more than anything."
SHIKI walks toward me, still holding onto Akiha.
"This time.. this time, I'll make sure to kill you so you won't come back, Shiki.
Akiha has this strain on her body because she's keeping you alive."
".... Strain.... on her, body....?"
"Oh?
You didn't know?
Akiha kept you alive back then by giving you half of her life force.

Haven't you ever wondered about it?
No human can survive with a hole that big in their chest."
"Eight years ago that day,
Akiha regenerated you by giving you half of her life.
She's supplementing the life I took away from you with part of her own.
There's no way you could have survived if it wasn't for that."

—Sharing.. her.. life?

"That's why Akiha can't manage her own body.
She's suffered all this time.. for you.
As long as you live, she'll keep on suffering.
—I will alleviate that suffering now."
SHIKI walks toward me.
My body will not move.
I can feel myself starting to black out.

—Half of her life.

.... I hear the sound of a sword sticking into the ground.
SHIKI screams.

—The reason for Akiha's spasms in the old man's diary.

"—Tohno-kun.
I'll treat you right away—hold on...!"

—This body.. this body that should have died.

.... Someone lifts me up.
And takes me somewhere.
.... But I can't care about what's happening now.

—What an ugly truth to have to face.
It turns out that I.

I was the reason Akiha has been suffering all this time—

turn to **358**

358

—I had a dream.

No, it was a dream which wasn't mine.

That day.

The girl that clung to me crying and who shared with me her life.

It was her dream that I had.

We live alone and we die alone, Akiha.

Those were the first words father taught me.

I did not know what the words meant.

But I remember feeling uneasy, looking at father's inorganic eyes as he said those words.

He was a very lonely person.

And I knew that I would be like him someday—

—Born into the Tohno family, I had an older brother.

But I could not get along with him.

My parents told me he was my brother, but he seemed to me like something else.

Having the Tohno blood means having the blood of nonhumans.

That might be why he looked different to me, but for me, he did not appear like "that" either.

I could not truly accept my brother.

And when I turned six,

a strange boy joined our life as another brother.

At first, I did not like the boy's name, as it sounded exactly like my brother's.

The boy was a few years younger than my brother, but he was mature and kind to everybody.

Even though I was restricted by my family's creed, the boy took me around to play like it was completely normal.

As I followed him silently, I started to take interest in my new brother.

He was loud, unsettling, and a bit rough, but..

Somehow, I knew this person would protect me no matter what.

As a daughter of the Tohno family, I lived separately from my brother and the boy.

Father says I am not able to live a normal life due to the special blood of the Tohno family.

I managed to endure strict studies by accepting my fate.

.... Father is not doing this because he does not like me.

I tell myself that he scolds me really, really harshly only because he loves me.

My mind is getting worn out.

The mind I had was cut down as it started to become smaller and smaller.

But I felt that I could endure it.

Because I have a bit of free time I can use to play outside with everyone after my studies.

The three of us started to play together.

My brother and the boy got along really well.

I usually followed them silently.

My brother seems to know that the boy was different from us.

I also know that time flies by when I play around with normal people like them.

Since I knew, I wanted to value this time.

Wishing that when I mature and become alone in this prison-like mansion,

I would not be lonely and refrain from crying because I have these happy memories.

—The memories were numerous.

There were really special times within the special days I had.

There was the night I went far away with the boy.

On a dark night, the two of us in the field, surrounded by trees.

—It was really a dreamlike experience for me.

Every day was warm like a parade.

But,

it all ended abruptly.

A hot summer day.

I saw my brother in the courtyard and walked towards him.

He was panting painfully as he was crouching on the ground.

I had a really bad feeling about it.

I could hear the cicadas and the ground seemed to tilt.
Feeling myself starting to get dizzy, I called out to my brother.
The brother that turned around was not my brother.

I could not do anything.
All I could do was watch my brother turn into an ugly beast.
The thought that I would turn into something like him in the future caused me
to freeze in place.

The blood-thirsty beast attacked me.
I could not run away.
At that moment, someone pulled on my hand.

The boy was there when I turned around.
He pulled my hand and ran.
.... Is he not scared?
The boy stood in front of that ugly beast as if to protect me.

But the beast was only watching me.
The beast that attacked me, and the boy that came in between us.
Splash.
I remember the moment warm blood splashed onto my cheeks.
.... The boy embraced me and protected his sister from the beast.

Even though his body had a hole and was bleeding seriously, he still embraced
me.
He protected my small body and did not let go.
When I looked up, he was crying.
The tears looked like they were from regret, and not pain.

—I'm sorry, said the boy.

Before he died, he embraced me, hoping his dead body would still protect me.
The boy continues to apologize.

If I was part of your real family, I could probably protect you.
It's so frustrating—I couldn't be your real brother.
I swore—you would be more important to me than anyone else.
.... He died whispering that confession.
The boy wished for my safety even after he died and he tried to be a brother
more than my real brother.

.... Those words were enough.

I cannot wish for anything more.
I understood—I cried knowing that this person will never betray me.
Even though it was imprudent, I embraced him back and cried from happiness.
I was happy that I could think this was the only person for me no matter what happened.

I do not know what happened after that.
When I came to, the only memory I had was the body of the beast getting dragged somewhere, and the body of the small boy being carried into the mansion.

And my father told me.
He said the adopted son died in that accident and that my real brother was the one who survived.
... I knew that was for appearances for the outside world, but I did not care.

He was alive.
I cannot possibly wish for more.
... Even if the boy becomes my true brother in name, and even if the boy himself thinks that way,
I told myself that it would be fine as long as I could stay beside him as his sister.

... Eight years have passed and our father died.
I ascended to full power over the Tohno House and I decided to bring him back to the mansion, ignoring the surrounding opposition.

There is no freedom for me as the successor, but I might be able to act selfishly at least once.
Then—I would like to use that one wish for my love that will never be mentioned.
That was good enough for me.
I have taken away everything from him.
So I cannot wish for more.

—Back then.
The kind of happiness I had while watching the stars together would never happen again, but,

as long as he is here, I do not care.
If Nii-san would come back.

—On a dark night, the two of us in the field, surrounded by trees.

What a
happy and selfish dream—

—Pain.

I wake to the pain in my chest.

"..... Ha."

An unfamiliar room.

I was lying on a bed, with my upper body bare.

Instead of my clothes, white bandages are wrapped all around my chest.

"——"

My memory is messed up.

What's happening, what's going on right now.. everything jumbles together and

I can't sort things out.

".....!!"

The only certain thing is this pain in my chest.

.... The wound on my chest.

I was stabbed by someone from behind.

By who?

I don't even have to think about it.

I was just stabbed by SHIKI, and Akiha—

"Akiha....!"

I get up from the bed.

"Ugh—!?"

My body suddenly stops.

The wound on my chest hurts and my entire body tenses.

"A——, ugh——"

Even breathing is painful.

I can't stand up like this—



"Oh, you woke up, Tohno-kun?"

I'm surprised.

It's not a wound you would wake up so early from."

"What—Sen, pai....?"



"Yes.

It's me.

Also, this is my room so you can relax.

Even if that vampire is after you, he won't likely come here."

"It's you.... Senpai, weren't you never going to appear in front of me....!?"



"That was the plan, but I had to help you in a situation like that."

Saying that, Senpai walks toward the bed.

"See, the wound has opened because you tried to move.

I'll change the bandages for you."

Senpai skillfully takes off the bandages on my body and replaces them with new ones.

They are rather tight.

".... Um.... Senpai, I feel bad mentioning this because you're helping me, but it's too tight."



"Yes, I'm making it tight so you can move around and still be alright.
Could you be quiet for a while?"

"Oh... I'm sorry."

I apologize and look around the room.

This seems to be Ciel-senpai's room.

I guess I was stabbed by SHIKI and rescued by Senpai afterwards.

But then—what happened to Akiha?

"Senpai, Akiha!?"

Where is Akiha!"



"....."

Senpai's hands freeze.

"Senpai—!"

"... The circumstances dictated that I could rescue only one person.

I could not escape from that vampire carrying two people.

So—I gave priority to your rescue since you had a greater chance of recovery."

"Akiha—are you saying you deserted Akiha, Senpai....!"

"... Yes.

Her life cannot be saved anyway.

I cannot endanger your life to save hers if that is the case."

"Wha—"

What—is this person saying.

"Why...!"

Why did you save me....!
Aren't you supposed to kill vampires!?
Then you should have forgot about me and killed SHIKI right there....!"
"... I had that choice, but you would have probably died.
Your wound was deep enough that you would have died unless I treated you quickly.
I wasn't sure if I could kill that vampire quickly, so I made the most certain decision and ran away with you."
"—So you deserted Akiha!?"
That's—that's unwanted help right there!
I bet Akiha would have been saved if you left me and killed SHIKI....!"
"... I won't deny that.
But Tohno-kun, Akiha-san is not dead.
That vampire's purpose is to make her more like him.
Akiha-san will not be killed.
You were the only person that was going to be killed.
Don't you understand that, Tohno-kun?"
"____"
.... I cannot say anything.
Senpai is right.
What am I doing—throwing my powerlessness at her?
"... I'm sorry, but I—I can't believe that guy wouldn't kill Akiha.
He's a killer.
I know that more than anyone else....!"
"... Tohno-kun.
Akiha-san will not be killed.
But, please give up on her.
She—won't be able to turn back."
"I know that....!
But that's just her hair.
Akiha is not like SHIKI."
"No, Tohno-kun.
That vampire's purpose is to obtain Akiha-san.
Tohno SHIKI—Akiha-san's real brother is not human anymore.
So what he wants is someone like him.
—You understand, Tohno-kun.
That vampire does not want Akiha-san as human.
That's why he attacked Akiha-san last night, but didn't kill her.
I don't know how, but Tohno SHIKI must have found a way to awaken the nonhuman blood in the Tohnos."
"____"
Now that she mentions it, I remember.
Ever since that guy knocked Akiha unconscious,
her hair has been red without turning back.
"Senpai—how do you know so much—"
"I made you talk when you were asleep.

.... I'll apologize for making you talk without asking, but consider it compensation for getting rescued."

"___"

I don't care about that.

There's no point in her apologizing.

Instead.

I have to go to Akiha—

"Ku.....!"

I get up from the bed.

Pain.

Pain like I am being gouged with a knife all over my body.

"Ah—Gu.....!"

But, I can still move.

If I can move—I can't sit still.

"—Senpai, you have my knife, right?"

Can you give it back to me?"



"Are you going back to the mansion, Tohno-kun?"

I don't have to answer.

Senpai holds the knife in her hands and stands in front of me.

"That vampire and Akiha-san are still at the mansion."

"___"

"But it has been over six hours since then.

.... It's probably too late by now."

"I said....!"

It doesn't matter, Senpai.

I don't care what Akiha is like.

I've decided I'm going to be with her.

.... A long time ago, I swore that I would be her real brother, like real family."

I say that and feel like crying.

.... It happened a long time ago.

A promise I myself forgot.

The family which did not act like a family.

But still—I worked hard to become a family member.
 Only her.
 She cared for me more than the rest of her real family.

I knew it was a lie from the beginning.
 But we tried to protect that lie.
 Really, I wish I never knew.
 What a fragile and far away dream it was.
 ".... Tohno-kun, it might be true that you will be able to accept Akiha-san no matter what she turns into.
 But that's just your selfish interpretation.
 Akiha-san herself will not allow her own existence."
 ".... Akiha herself will not allow her existence....?"

.... Someone has said something like that before.
 "Listen to me, Tohno-kun.
 Akiha-san will lose her mind when she becomes one of the Tohno.
 Her reason that lost to her instinct will go away and she will repeat senseless murders like Tohno SHIKI."
 "Murders that she doesn't want.
 And Akiha-san herself cannot tell she is doing it.
 There is no 'Akiha-san' in her anymore.
 All that remains is the action called murder."
 "——"
 "Do you understand, Tohno-kun?
 It's not the people who are killed by her that hate her most.
 She herself hates herself the most.
 But she does not have any emotion to feel that.
 —Unless she dies.
 To calm down her awakened blood, you must reset everything.
 But to reset everything means to kill her.
 If she has changed, the old Akiha-san isn't there anymore.
 By dying, Akiha-san can return to her original self."
 Now I remember.
 It was Akiha herself that said that.

—Please kill me.

She said that while crying.
 "——"
 I cannot say anything.
 I thought my blood would boil.
 "Wha——"
 "I know it's painful, but please give up—"
 "How, selfish——!"

"Kya!?"

I grab Senpai's collar and push her into the wall.
This anger is not directed at her.
But, she shouldn't talk about Akiha that lightly.
"Are—Are you telling me to kill Akiha....!?"



"—Yes.
If Akiha-san wishes so, I'll let you take that role."
"D-don't joke around.....!
I can't kill her.
Senpai told me to not kill no matter what.....!"



"Tohno-kun—"

Her emotionless face starts to collapse.
.... I know.
I know that Senpai isn't saying this because she wants to.
".... Tohno-kun, there are some things more painful than death, and Akiha-san knows that."
"—"
".... And if she has already changed, she is no longer human.
You cannot call something that cannot think for itself human, although you might be able to call it alive."

Saying that,

Senpai hands the knife to me.
 "—Tohno-kun.
 Vampire hunting is my job.
 I'll take care of that vampire, so—"
 "... No.
 I'm sorry, but you stay here, Senpai."



"Huh.... Tohno-kun?"
 "... Him and I go way back.
 It's our problem.... honestly, I don't want you involved in this."
 "____"
 "But, if something does happen to me, I'll let you handle it.
 I know it sounds a bit selfish, but would that be alright, Ciel-senpai?"
 "____"
 Senpai narrows her eyes.
 Transient eyes like she is watching an illusion.
 "... Alright.
 It does sound a bit selfish, but I'll let you handle it.
 But I don't understand, why are you willing to do such a thing?
 You're not even a member of the Tohno family, why?"

—Why?
 I know why.
 "You said it already.
 I, Tohno Shiki, value Akiha more than myself.
 But, I couldn't love her as much as she wanted, so I have to go."

—All this time,
 Akiha has suffered by herself.
 Compared to that, this pain is nothing.
 "I'm going now.
 Thanks for everything and good bye, Senpai."
 I endure the pain as I start to walk.

"—Yes, good bye, Tohno-kun."
As I walk away,
I hear Senpai say that to me.

I reach the mansion.

I have a headache.
My vision is blurry like everything was shrouded in mist.

"Ga..... ah."
My vision is distorted.
I can't breathe properly.
Just breathing makes me dizzy.
Each step I take feels like a few hundred meters.
My body.
It's so exhausted, I'm practically numb.
"Ah..... h."
I drag my legs.
My body has reached its limit and doesn't move like I want it to.
My mind thinks negatively, telling me I can't do anything with such a body.
"————"

But my burning blood denies all those ideas.
My loud heartbeat.
Only my pulse is high.
Under the moon, my concentration is sharpened.

—I just came here naturally.

There's no mistake.
My heart beats loudly.
My throat burns.
My body is exhausted and uses all its energy to stay alive.
It's suicidal to fight like this.
But I feel no fear.
My fingers are paralyzed by the weight of my knife.
My nerves feel frayed.
—What a familiar sensation.

I remember this feeling.
I felt it so many times already.
The feeling "he" had when he killed in the dream, and a long time ago, I think
I had this feeling too—

"Gu—"

I won't last long.
I head into the detached building.

—Strangely enough,
I did not feel anything when I saw it.
"—SHIKI."
"It's—you."
SHIKI gets up slowly.

There's only two people there.
One is a vampire called SHIKI.
Another is a red-haired girl.



33 0
"—Welcome, Shiki.
I thought you wouldn't make it."

"——"

My mind does not feel anything.
Akiha is there behind SHIKI.
Her eyes look dead as she rests on the wall.
Maybe SHIKI put it on, but she is wearing a kimono.

That thing.
Akiha is like a mindless doll.
I let out a big breath.

I do not feel anything.
It's like I have turned into a doll like Akiha, feeling nothing.



33 0

"—But you're too late.

I've got Akiha back."

SHIKI walks toward me.

"SHIKI, what do you want to do?"

I ask him as I raise my knife.

SHIKI tries to hold in his laughter as he talks.



33 0

"Beats me.

I don't even know.

My purpose as SHIKI is to get Akiha.

I have no intention of sucking any of the low-lifes' blood."

".... I see.

But for that, you were pretty random back then."

"Yes, you're so right.

But it can't be helped, that wasn't my intent.



33 0

.... It tells me, Shiki.
To kill, deprive, and destroy all.
I'm just following that.
I don't know why."
".... That's awful.
I don't remember much but you weren't like that before, SHIKI."



33 0

"Yeah, I went crazy from that day eight years ago.
There's a weird guy in my head and he tells me to kill everything."
Saying that, SHIKI laughs.
He keeps on laughing like wheels turning indefinitely.

—There,
I can't find one bit of humanity.
".... This is my last question.
Aren't you feeling any pain?"
"Pain...?"
No way.
I'm perfect.
I love myself for doing this.
Well, I could say I was bored, but I've already solved that.
Until now, my only fun was to eat those low-lives, but that's over since Akiha's
back.

Now I have no time to play with those toys."
SHIKI sounds satisfied.

—It was useless to ask.

But, I still wanted to ask.
If this guy had the pain Yumizuka had—the pain as a "human" having to suck
blood despite not wanting to..
"Then, you're not human anymore."
My words are menacing.
SHIKI stops moving.



33 0

"I don't get it.
I don't get why you came here to get killed, and I don't get that question you
asked.
Shiki, what did you come here for?"
"To kill you and to retrieve Akiha."
As those words leave my mouth,

all the blood in my body accelerates.



33 0

"Huh!
Are you sane, Shiki!?"

Are you saying a normal person like you can kill me!?"

"....."

There's no reason for me to answer.

I narrow my gaze.

And, look at his "lines"—



33 0

"Don't be full of yourself....!

This is mine.

I won't give it to you....!"

Maybe he felt something.

SHIKI backs up as if scared.

"Akiha is my sister....!

I am the only one with a blood relation.

There's no place for you....!"

He looks at me with blood-shot eyes.

—There's nothing more to say to him.

I raise my knife and take a step.

"You're right, SHIKI.

Akiha is not my sister."

"What....?"

"Akiha is my woman."

"You—!!"

I take another step.

Losing himself at my words, SHIKI attacks me straight on.

That becomes the signal for our last deathmatch.

—I can't take much time.

My body is at its limit, and I want to get Akiha out of here as fast as I can.

So, there's only one thing to do.

I have to dodge SHIKI's arm and cut across the "line" on his chest.

My body will be able to move this once.
I will be able to avoid it.
He attacks me.
SHIKI's range and my range are about the same.
We try to kill each other fairly in our range—

—No.
That was just my illusion.
"Ha....!"
SHIKI lets out a funny scream as he swings "it".
"——!?"

I stop "it" with my knife.
—There's no time to think about other things.
My knife and whatever SHIKI is holding clang together with a high-pitched shriek.

"Damn, I thought I'd cut you in half along with your knife—but that thing is pretty strong for an antique, Shiki!"
SHIKI swings "it" above his head.
"——"

My whole body shakes.
What SHIKI is holding is a "thing like a sword" that must be ten times longer than my knife.
"——"

I don't understand.
He was certainly bare-handed up until now.
When did he get that—
"But there won't be a second time....!"
The red sword swings down.
Even if he swings it, it's only going to get stuck in the walls or the ceiling due to its length—

"——!?"
I avoid it instantly.
The red sword SHIKI was holding came down without getting stuck anywhere.
During that swing,
the sword was indeed in the ceiling, but it came arcing down like a hot knife through warm butter.

Somewhere.
The sound of dripping blood.

"Persistent——!"
SHIKI holds up his sword once again.
"——"

My mind stops.
In my vision is SHIKI and Akiha, sitting at the back of the room.
Akiha blankly stares at me and SHIKI.
Akiha sits like a doll.
Akiha.
I can't leave Akiha here.
But right now—
"Ku——!"
I bite my tongue and get away.

I go through the shouji door which leads out to the garden.
If that sword does not hit the walls, then I'm at a disadvantage inside.
Outside, the forest.
In this dark night, in these woods, there should be some advantage for me—

"Ar——gh."
I suddenly feel dizzy.
My feet stumble as I almost fall.
The wound in my back reopens and blood pours forth.
No time for that.
"Ugh——"
I let out a breath.
Stumbling, I lean against a tree.
"Tu....."
I can't pass out here,
I hear the sound of someone moving through grass.
SHIKI is definitely after me.
Then, just a little more.
I need to go at least to some place where I can hide and attack him from behind—

"——"
Then,
something like a sword sticks into the tree I am leaning on.
"——!"
I jump sideways.

Twice.
The sword that comes flying pierces through the tree easily.

"——!"

My body moved before I thought about it.
I hide my body from tree to tree.
The swords are following close behind.
Is there no end to this?
His swords are thrown one after another like bullets.
"What——"

There is no end.
As I run away, he increases the amount of swords he throws at me.
When I notice,
The dark forest is full of pierced trees, looking like some sort of foreign execution site.
"—Huh?"

Are you done running away now, Shiki?
Don't tell me you think you can kill me here....!"

I can hear his voice.
But he does not throw his sword.
As I can't see him, maybe he can't see me.. no, no way.
"Ha..... a."
I straighten out and lean on a big tree.
His sword shouldn't pierce through a tree this big.
"Hey man, where's all that talk you gave me earlier!
If you're going to kill me, it's no fun unless you try....!"
The voice echoes as I still cannot tell where he is.
I close my eyes and try to make my hearing more sensitive.

.....
.....
.....
.....

.... I can't hear his breathing or feel his presence.
Of course.
I don't have beast-like senses like he does.
"——?"

I hear a dripping noise.
.... What is it?
I don't think there's any water around here.

"Jeez, you are a big chicken.
Alright.
If that's all you're going to do, I'll make this interesting for you.
You can hide there all you want."

.... I can hear his voice.
But I still can't tell where he is.

".... Let's see.
 If that's the case, I'll have to make this a bit interesting.
 It's no fun just to kill you.
 It's easy to skewer you right now, but I bet Akiha won't be happy about that."
 That dripping sound.
 It's closer this time.
 The sound is from the tree right in front of me.
 When I look,
 I see it's the sound of liquid dripping down the sword that pierced the tree.
 "Yes, I should crush your hands and feet and make you a toy for Akiha....!
 Akiha likes to play with dolls, and it would suit her."
 It doesn't seem to be sap.
 Some kind of liquid is dripping down that thin sword.
 When I look at it harder, it seems more like ice melting into water.
 "Oh yeah, I haven't told you this yet but Akiha right now is a bit out of my hands.
 I guess I was too happy and I overdid it.
 It's good she's back, but it's a problem when she bites anyone she sees, right?"
 The liquid drips down.
 The red sword is more like a blade itself than a sword.
 A simple weapon, just a blade.
 This is the weapon SHIKI was throwing.
 A red, thin, long blade.
 But why is that dripping red liquid?
 Red.
 Red.
 Re.... d?

"I see.
 I'll pass on making you Akiha's toy.
 I'm sure it'll be a great present if I give you to her with tons of swords sticking in you, but I think Akiha will bite on you before she plays with you.
 I can't let Akiha eat such a poor meal——"
 "——"

Shut, up.

Red.
 That person.

Red.
 There's something important.

Red.
 I have to realize it.
 ".... Wait a minute.

Yes, That's a good idea!
To let Akiha be a cannibal just like me....!"
"—Blood."
I, see.

It's blood.
That's blood.
That's why there's so many swords around here.

There are hundreds of swords stuck in trees.
Disjointed hands and feet scattered around.
Dark night.

Glass moon.
The bloody forest—

"Yes, yesyesyesyesyes!
That's good.
It'd be excellent if you were her first meal....!
—I've made up my mind.
Yes, now I have to get Akiha to be like me as soon as possible."

The dripping sound.
The sound of new blood dripping.
"Bye Shiki, I must say we are quite close, but I'm done playing around—!"

That lets me know where he is.

I get away from the tree I am leaning on.
I turn around and cut its "lines".
Sliding,
the large tree falls to the ground.
"Wha———!?"
I hear the voice from above.
In a word, he was saying such tasteless things right above me until now.
"You——!!"
SHIKI comes falling down.
In his hand is the red sword made of blood.
But before he could swing it—

My knife cuts through his arm.

Splattering blood.
.... SHIKI's arm falls to the ground.
The blood pouring out of his sliced arm makes a black stain on the ground.
That's the same for me, as I am below him.
Red blood, like human blood, splashes on my chest.

"Ha.
Agh—!"
SHIKI falls to the ground and—jumps back like a monkey.



33 0

"Ha—haha, ha."
SHIKI looks at me.
"Oh, I guess you can do it if you try....!"
I'm relieved Shiki.
It's unlike you to be killed so easily like that....!"
"—————"
I try to say something and I stop.
I have no room for that.
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.
If you have energy to move your mouth, use it to eliminate that creature.
My body takes over my mind.



33 0

"Hey, why aren't you saying anything...!
Damn, don't act like you're the good guy.
You're more like a monster than I am...!"
"_____"

I grip my knife as I walk toward SHIKI.
"Heh, you don't even want to talk to me, huh?
I feel the same way too.
I don't want to talk to you either.
I may be a cannibal, but I'm not a machine like you...!"
"_____"

I walk through the grass.
"Alright?
I still have a mind that lets me choose.
I know what I'm doing is considered evil for you guys, but we do it knowing
that....!
But what are you, being controlled by your blood?
I'm asking what are you trying to kill without any will of your own, Nanaya
Shiki....!!!"
"_____"

I walk.
To, kill, him—
"Shit....!
Do you know how you look right now?
You're not a living thing.
You're like a machine, a doll that kills anything not human!
I see, it was only right that the old man exterminated the Nanaya.
Because you're all emotionless killers....!"
"_____"

The last step.
With this,
I will be able to kill this monster—
"—See, that's the kind of creature you are, Shiki.
If you're fighting anyone not human, all you do is kill them no matter how much
they look human.

Then, are you going to kill Akiha too after you kill me?"

"——"

What in the world?

I would never——



33 0

"Can you say that you won't?

I'll tell you, but Akiha is more like a monster than I am.

With her in front of you, there's no way you'll be able to hold down your impulse.

.... See, if you have any reasoning left in you as Tohno Shiki and not Nanaya Shiki, you should understand.

You are going to be killed by me, or—that it's best if you kill yourself—!!"

"———!"

He disappears.

No, he ran away.

I can hear the sound of the grass as he runs.

He is running into the forest.

"———Oh."

.... I let him get away.

I could have definitely killed him, but I let him get away.

Why?

Part of me is angry—part of me thinks it was a good thing.

".... I can't let him get away."

.... There is a trail of blood on the grass.

I cut off one of his arms.

His trail of blood will tell me exactly where he went.

But if I don't hurry up, I might lose him.

Pursue him right now.

turn to **359**

Take a breath, calm down, and then pursue him.

turn to **360**

359

—No time to waste.
I have to kill him before his wounds heal, or he will kill me.

I take a forced breath,
and spur my tired body after SHIKI.

Panting—

My breath echoes through the dark forest.
In this darkness, the trail of blood seems to light the way.
There's no way I'll let SHIKI go now.
The question is, can my body survive long enough?
Breathing heavily,
I run while wobbling side to side.
I feel my knife in my left hand.
The sensation of the knife firmly gripped by my hand is the only thing keeping
me from passing out.

"Is he.... going to the courtyard?"

It looks like the trail of blood leads to the courtyard.
Eight years ago.
The place where Nanaya Shiki was killed by Tohno SHIKI.
.... Come to think of it, there's no better place to finish our match.
"—Alright SHIKI, I'll.."
Kill you.

Everything turns red.
"Gu——ugh."
Blood accompanies my breath out of my body.
Blood spews out of my heart.
I start to pass out and—fall to the ground.
"What—?"
I don't understand.
I just feel pain and burning everywhere.
"—What the.."
I look at my back.
There I see numerous swords stuck like wings.
They stick through me and up towards the sky.

That means..
This wound is fatal.
"Why—?"
I don't understand.
It's not that these swords came flying at me.
They just suddenly seemed to sprout from inside me.
The sound of dripping blood.
It drips down the swords on my body.
The blood is not mine—

"—Oh, that blood back then."

.... The blood that spilled on me when I cut SHIKI.
That was still on my chest.
.... What a stupid mistake.
I knew that red swords were made from his blood—so having his blood on me
is like asking him to stab me to death any time he pleases.

"—Ah."
I start to fade.
I look up at the sky in my own sea of blood.

The far away moon.
Dark night, tall trees.
I am facing the same meaningless death as once before.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **446**

No.

turn to **1**

turn to **446**

if selected == 2

turn to **1**

360

"_____"

I let out a deep breath.

Calming down,
I manage to restore control over my breathing.
My view painted in red now returns to normal.
One more calming breath.
I won't believe what SHIKI says.
I would never kill Akiha, and there's no way I would kill someone simply because they weren't human.

"....."

It's different.
It's different from back then.
I'm different from SHIKI.
I can control my actions through my own willpower.
It's just, the smell of blood is so strong.
It makes me remember the past, and that scares me.
"Shi——t"
My right hand is still holding the knife.
With my bare left hand, I wipe the blood off my chest.

—With that, the smell of the blood goes away a bit.

"—SHIKI"

In the darkness, the trail of blood seems to light the way.
I take another deep breath, then go after SHIKI.

This is the last stop.

"_____"

.... Is this just a coincidence or is it on purpose?
Eight years ago.
We fight to death once more at the place where Shiki almost killed me.
".... Hmph, you did come after me."
SHIKI is sitting down at the very edge of the clearing.
Even that is the same as back then.
"....."
I hold onto my knife and walk towards him.
I feel something slimy under my feet.
SHIKI's blood has not stopped; all the flowing blood is from him.
Splash, splash.
His blood makes noise as I step towards him.
.... It's amazing he's alive after losing this much blood.

It's like a giant puddle on the ground.

"Ku....."

But, I'm also at my limit.

I'll be at a disadvantage if I wait any longer.

This is the only chance to kill him, with him wounded.

"——!!"

I step forward.

"—Wait!

There's something I haven't told you yet.

Can you wait there a bit, Shiki?"

"——"

"Don't look at me like that.

This should benefit you too.

Because it's about Akiha.

There might be a way to turn her back."

"Wha——"

At that moment,

my still functioning reason stops my feet.

But, my body is telling me to go on and kill him right now.

I——

Stop.

turn to **362**

I won't let his words trick me.

turn to **361**

361

"_____"

I won't fall for that trick.

My body stops working properly when I listen to him.

If there is a way to turn back Akiha, I'll find it myself.

No way—no way will SHIKI, the one who turned Akiha that way, tell me.

"—Huh!

I guess you won't fall for it.

Alright then.

It's all about killing each other from now on.

Let's see who's the better killer."

SHIKI laughs, still down on the ground.

"_____"

I don't answer and instead walk straight to him.

About ten more meters to go.

I will be able to jump at him within a few seconds.

"... Heh.

Don't tell me you think you're good just because you cut one of my arms off,

Shiki."

"_____"

One meter.

"I'll teach you one last thing.

You know everyone in the Tohno family has different powers, right?

I guess Akiha's good at taking heat from her surroundings.

Well, it's kind of like that, influencing the outside world, like an interference

ability."

"_____"

Two meters.

"It seems the ability to interfere with the outside world has been scarce even in the Tohno family.

You can say that Akiha's ability is rare.

Since she has such large potential, it doesn't wake up easily.

Any time I try to wake it up, it's like throwing a rock into the ocean.

The best way to use her full ability is to have someone take over her mind and control her."

"_____"

Three meters.

"Well, let's put Akiha off to the side.

It's more important to talk about me right now."

"_____"

Four meters.

"Shiki, I'm like the old man; I have no method to interfere with the outside world.

The vampire ability isn't my original ability.

This is more like a bonus that I got later.

My real ability is 'immortality'."

"_____"

ve meters.

"Well, there are limits to my immortality, since I can't heal my own wounds.

Isn't it weird that this ability is called immortality?

But it's true that dying is hard for me.

My body changes its conso that it can survive whatever state it is in at that moment.

Humans die when they lose a large portion of their body, right?

That's because humans need a 'Human shape' with all the necessary parts to live as a human.

If they can't find a substitute for their lost part, they die.

Well, it might be more correct to say they cannot continue to live."

"_____"

Six meters.

"But in my case, it's the opposite.

I don't supplement my lost parts.

Instead, I continue to live even if I lose an arm or all my blood.

My body changes its internal organs so that I can live without the parts I lost.

See, can't you say that this is 'immortality'?

I would probably live even if my head only remained.

.... Well, there's no way I'd want to be like that."

"_____"

Seven meters.

.... One more step.

Then, I am within reach—

".... You're about to kill me, huh?

Well, what I want to say is this.

I have the ability not to influence the outside world, but rather my inner body.

Do you get it?

Even if it seems like a useless part of your body to you, for me——"

"_____"

This is it.

Now, I'll——

Stab.
Suddenly, from my ankles to my head.
I am stabbed by numerous swords that popped out of the ground.

"—I can change it to an important weapon like this.
You need to pay more attention.
There's no way I would scatter this much blood for no reason."
.... I.. understand.
How stupid of me.
I followed his trail of blood,
and walked onto a mountain of needles.
"I don't have the ability like you or Akiha to hurt others directly, so I have to
rely on little tricks like these.
But if this 'someone' in my head becomes clearer, I might be able to use his
ability as a vampire."

"—I guess you can't keep yourself together anymore.
Then this is it.
You can leave the rest to me and you can go back to your grave, Shiki—"

I hear laughter.
It echoes through my head as my mind falls into the darkness—

Yes. turn to **447**

No. turn to **1**

turn to **447**
if selected == 2
turn to **1**

362

"....."

I stop walking.

I stare at the crouching SHIKI as I stand on the slimy ground.

"Ha—haha, ahahahahaha!!"

SHIKI is laughing loudly.

.... I know.

If I stop now, he will recover from his wounds.

I know I have thrown away my last chance.

But still—if there's a way to get Akiha back, I have to hear it.

".... Really?"

"What?"

I can't hear you."

".... Is it for real, SHIKI?"

"Yeah, I talk a lot but it's against my policy to ever lie.

So I'll tell you if you stay there a bit longer—and depending on your attitude,

I could go ahead and save Akiha myself."

"..... Save, Akiha.....?"

Is it that I felt something bad in those words?

My body shakes and I almost fall.

The ground is slippery because it's slimy—

"Sli—ppery?"

—Wait.

I am now..

"Well, you should know how to save her.

She has no power to live as a human, so she has to live as a Tohno.

And since she is using the power of the Tohno blood, she became one of the

Tohno blood, rather than someone of human blood."

His weapon made out of red blood..

"So if you reset things back to the state where she can live as a human, she doesn't have to rely on the Tohno blood.

See?

Isn't it easy?

If you want to save Akiha, all you have to do is eliminate the cause for her current state."

I am standing in a puddle of blood—

"So all I want to say is, everything will be fine if you just die——!!"

"———!!"

At the same time.
I jump to the side with all my power.

"———"

It really was a matter of a split second.
The blood that was flowing from SHIKI's body..
All of it turns into a mountain of needles.
How could I be so careless?
If that red sword was made of his blood, then it would be easy for him to make
his flowing blood into swords as well.

Grunting with exertion, I jump from the puddle of blood and roll onto the
ground.

.... But I couldn't get away unscathed.
My left arm is useless now.
My left arm wasn't stabbed, but cut from the inside out.
.... In other words..

The blood I wiped off with this arm cut through through me like an exploding
firework.

"Agh——gh.....!!"

I roll on the ground and fight the pain.
I still got lucky.

If I hadn't of wiped that blood off my chest, I would have grown swords out of
my back and died instantly.

"Shit——!!"

I hear a voice.
The sound of SHIKI running toward me through the grass accompanies it.

"You don't know when to stay down.

You should have died with that——!!"

He's coming.

I cannot fight back since I'm on the ground.

He's coming.

He sticks out his arm with sharp nails and approaches, trying to dig my heart
out.

It's like a circus.

Dark forest.
I get excited thinking about when the curtain will rise.

The far away voices of cicadas.
Blue sky, and high, high, summer clouds.

And then.
I'll be killed again in the forest?
That pisses me off.
Again.
Again and again, being killed in the same way?

—Wake up, Tohno Shiki.
Enough of that.
Aren't you tired of seeing that over and over—?

"What——?"
The voice comes from SHIKI.
SHIKI's arm is not in my chest, but on the ground.
.... It's nothing, really.
My body has learned to react after having been killed so many times in the same way.

Tohno Shiki simply avoided the enemy's arm and then cut across the line on the enemy's torso.
"Are—you kidding me?"
With a sound,
SHIKI's body slides to one side.
SHIKI desperately supports it as he gets away.



33 0

"Why—why, why, why?"

Hey Shiki, this is wrong.

This cut, why—won't it stick back?"

With a cramped smile on his face, SHIKI staggers back.

His upper body and lower body slowly separate.

SHIKI looks like a circus clown trying to desperately hold onto his body.

"Ou—ch.

It hurts.

I don't like it.

I'm going to pass out.

I can't stop bleeding.

My body is separating.

It hurts.

It hurts.

It hurts.

It hurts.

It hurts.

It hur—"

Saying that,

SHIKI falls to the ground.

His legs are still standing.

Only his upper body falls to the ground like some kind of joke.

"_____"

He's still alive.

He's still alive after becoming like a weird spider with only his upper body left.

"Ghu....."

I push my body and manage to stand up.

He's still alive.

Then—I have to kill him.

"Hi——!?"

I kneel down in front of that thing that is dragging itself with its right hand.

I raise my knife.

Now, all I have to do is to drop it.
If I drop my knife in the center of his body, in the "point" next to his heart,
everything will end.

"Ah—Hiii, hiii?"
.... Will end.
Everything.
A stupid story that has continued for eight years will end with just that.

"Hya—Hyaiiiiiii!?"
SHIKI's voice resists death.
.... It's not like I feel sorry for him.
It's not that I got scared of killing him.
It's not that my anger has gone away, but ".... Why?"

Why?
Why can't I do something so easy as bringing down this knife....?
"Hi—Hihi, hihihihihihhi....!!!"
Laughing, that thing disappears into the bushes.
"————"
I look with a blank stare at my bloody knife.
.... I did not kill him.
Or was it that I could not kill him?
Hihi, hihihhi, hihihihihihihhi.

I hear the annoying laughter.
It seems like he is going toward the detached building, where Akiha is left.
"——!!"
I get up.
How stupid of me!
I should have known that he would have gone to Akiha.
"Ku——!"
I start to move my weak legs and head for the detached building.

The trail of blood goes straight to the detached building.
Around the red trail are remnants of organ-like pieces.
.... With an injury like that, SHIKI would have died anyway without me finishing him off back there, but he is using his last energy to get to Akiha.
"Ku——"
I support my weak body and run.
I reach the detached building after following the red trail of blood.

The blood goes directly into the building.

—I made it in time.

Nothing is different inside the room.

Akiha sits by the wall with a blank stare.

On the tatami floor is a trail of blood, and there,

"Ah—a, aa, a—"

Crawling.

A man with only his upper body, dragging himself desperately on the ground.

"A—A-Aki, ha—!"

Dragging on.

Leaving a trail like a slug, SHIKI crawls toward Akiha by the wall.

"He, lp, me—Aki, ha—"

SHIKI reaches out his hands asking for help.

His bloody fingers reach out to Akiha.

"——"

I won't let him.

I have to go over there and finish him off—

"What—?"

The exclamation of surprise comes from both me and SHIKI.

Hu, huhu.

Innocent laughter.

"Gi—A, hya, a.

Ahhhhhhhh!!"

SHIKI screams as his heart is ripped out.

Ahahaha.

Childlike laughter.

"Hi, hyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!"

SHIKI's scream.

Blood sputters all over.

waves of red blood color the tatami floor and the walls.

Aha, ahaha, ahahaha.

Laughter of unbearable happiness.

"S-stop, stop, Aki, AKIHAAAA!!"

SHIKI's scream ends there.

It's because his throat, the organ allowing him to talk, is crushed, and was torn away along with his head from his body.

"Aki—ha."

Akiha does not react to my voice.

.... She probably doesn't even know that's her name.

Akiha waves her red hair around and laughs like a little girl.

"Aki—ha."

There's no answer.

That is all I can say to her.

She's lost her mind.

Giggling.

The sound of Akiha's laughter echoes in the room.

She was fiddling with the body of SHIKI, but seems to have gotten bored of her toy which didn't move anymore.

After looking around the room, she rips through the shouji and runs outside.

Her hands are still drenched in blood.

"Wa——"

I can't tell her to wait.

.... I know.

I know that everything is too late.

That childlike Akiha.

She is now an innocent creature, not knowing good or evil.

Just a living creature that can only kill.

—Please, kill me.

So.

To go after Akiha right now means..

I am going to kill her.

Chase after Akiha.

turn to **363**

I can't do it.

turn to **418**

363

—I cannot come up with an answer.
But I do know that I can't leave Akiha alone.
"——!!"
I kill the flood of emotions.
Without thinking, I go after Akiha.

—To my surprise, Akiha has not gone beyond the mansion.

Under the moonlight.
Under the autumn leaved tree we once talked under.
Akiha just stands there.

She is standing quietly.
Not doing anything.
Like a child, she innocently stares at the falling autumn leaves.
"——"
What—could I do about it?
No reason, no intelligence, a girl that's just there.
There's no crime.
Akiha is not the one to blame..

—Please kill me.

I recall those words.
—Please kill me with your hands.

What a cruel wish.
She could only ask for that—she couldn't even ask for help.
If you asked—I would have been on your side until the very last moment, even
if the whole world was against me.

—Please keep our promise.

.... What severe treatment.
I did leave her for eight years, but I never thought I'd be retaliated against in
such a way.
"——"
Akiha said..
Not knowing who you are and going around killing people out of instinct is more
frightening than death.
Senpai said..
If you become something that just kills because of instinct, sometimes death is
the only salvation.
"——"

I grip my knife.
 Surprisingly, I feel no sadness.
 It's like my mind has gone empty; I don't want to feel any emotions.
 "Akiha—"
 I step on the dead autumn leaves as I walk towards her.
 Akiha notices me and greets me with a smile.
 "—At least."
 I grip hard onto my knife.
 Akiha laughs.
 She laughs happily as she greets the person that will kill her.
 "——!!"
 My mind weakens.
 But I have started walking.
 —Death can be salvation.

I walk.
 Akiha does not run away, but waits for me happily.

—Please kill me.

The autumn leaves fall.

—That was your last wish.
 Akiha is laughing.
 There's no more distance to cross.
 Now all I have to do is stick out this arm.

—No matter how painful it is for me,

"I have to kill you."

Saying that,
 my eyes suddenly overflow with tears.

if akiharegard < 9
 turn to **364**

Keep my promise.

turn to **364**

I can't do that.

turn to **365**

364

—And then,
I embrace Akiha's body from the front.
—There's no way I could kill her.

".... I want you to live."
Akiha tilts her head questioningly.
"No matter what you become—I still want you to live, Akiha."
My tears cannot be stopped.
Akiha hugs back joyfully—and bites on my neck.
"—!!"
It hurts.
But it is not an act to suck my blood.
It is just a primitive act to bite me.
"A-Akiha."
Akiha just frantically bites my neck.
She tears off the meat and my bones are being chipped away.
Akiha has no intelligence.
She does not know who is holding her, or the meaning of an embrace.

Akiha is no different from a beast in human form.
But still—
"—Still.... I want you to live."

.... Is it wrong to wish such a thing?
Is it a crime to wish for her to stay alive even though she goes around killing people?
Even if Akiha says she cannot endure such a thing, I want her to endure past it.
But.
That's—just a selfish wish.
"—But, we made a promise."
Akiha does not let go.
Still holding on to her, I place my knife on Akiha's "line".

—If someone is going to kill you eventually, then..

"I won't let anyone hurt you."

—The knife, without a sound,
and probably without pain,

"Since I am the only one for you."

—Gently ends Akiha's life.

The autumn leaves fall.
Akiha lies on the red ground.
The hair scattered on the ground is black.
It vividly undulates on the red leaves.
Her face is peaceful, as if happily dreaming.
"————"

One event has ended.
When I was a child.
The happiness when we met here and ran around this courtyard.
The brightness of the stars we watched together.

Just a few days ago.
Everything we talked about here.

—Nii-san, I am just happy that you have come back.
.... I just want you to keep that in mind.

At some point, I started staring at the moon.
.... My body is cold.
My mind feels dizzy, like I'm about to go to sleep.
.... I'm sleepy.
I feel like if I slept right now, I could dream that this was all a dream.

But that's just a dream and someday, I would have to wake up.
It feels like even I am just part of this dream.

Or was everything an ephemeral dream from the start?
If so, please.
Let me sleep on and never wake me up.
"————Ha, ha."

In the sky, the blue, blue, glass moon.
The tall curtain of trees and the applause of showering crimson leaves.

"Haha, ha——"

I'm sad, yet all that comes forth is laughter.
The night is deep.
There is a serene silence around me, which hits my eardrums like thunderous
applause.
My view distorts and narrows.
.... It seems to be time to lower the curtain.
The curtain of trees turns round and round.

As if
everything in this circus
was artificial.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **449**

No.

turn to **1**

365

—And then,
I embrace Akiha's body from the front.
—There's no way I could kill her.

".... I want you to live."
Akiha tilts her head questioningly.
"No matter what you become—I still want you to live, Akiha."

My tears cannot be stopped.
Akiha hugs back joyfully—and bites on my neck.
"——!!"
It hurts.
But it is not an act to suck my blood.
It is just a primitive act to bite me.
"A-Akiha."
Akiha just frantically bites my neck.
She tears off the meat and my bones are being chipped away.
Akiha has no intelligence.
She does not know who is holding her, or the meaning of an embrace.

Akiha is no different from a beast in human form.
But still—
"—Still.... I want you to live."
.... Is it wrong to wish such a thing?
Is it a crime to wish for her to stay alive even though she goes around killing people?
Even if Akiha says she cannot endure such a thing, I want her to endure past it.

—Even if.
To think that the crime is borne by me is selfish thinking.
".... I'll save you."
Hard.
With all my might, I embrace Akiha.
"Uh, uhhh, uhh!!"
I embrace the wildly moving Akiha.
Crunch.
She breaks my shoulder bone by biting through it.
"—A, Akiha——"
Even though one of my shoulder's bone is broken, I embrace Akiha with one arm.
"Ugh!!
Uhn.....!!"
Akiha rages wildly.

I embrace her for a long time.
.... Is it because this might be our last embrace?
I have never held someone so dearly, trying to remember everything.. their
heartbeat, their warmth..
"Uh.... Mm...."
.... Maybe since she found out I am not going to do anything, Akiha stops
fighting.

I don't know how long we were like this in the falling autumn leaves.
But Akiha has fallen asleep in my arms.

"....."
I rest Akiha's body on the ground as gently as I can.
Akiha's hair is still red.
If SHIKI's words are true, then..
There is no way for it to return it to black except for that one method.
"....."
I swore I would save her, no matter what happened.
It's really easy to save her.
The reason why Akiha is living as one of the Tohno Blood.
If the human she is sharing her life with disappears, she can go back to the
original "Tohno Akiha".
But that means—the death of Tohno Shiki.
I don't know what leads to happiness or what can save us.
I don't know if death can be the way to save her.
But right now, I can't tell what is the right thing to do.

I——

Give Akiha back this life.

turn to **367**

I can't do that.

turn to **366**

366

"..... Wrong."
Yes, it's probably wrong.
It's alright if I can really save Akiha by dying.
But there's no proof of that, and besides..

—I don't think death can be a way to save someone.

Even if Akiha is saved by my death, how would she feel afterwards?
It's fine if she only feels sad about it, but it's wrong if she should feel guilty for
the rest of her life.

I don't think that choosing death is neither courageous nor honorable.
I think—that's just a way to run away from reality.

"Aki, ha..."

Akiha isn't like the Akiha before.
She has become a creature that just kills others.
.... But still, I want her to live.

If I bear everything for Akiha, who can't feel crime or punishment—I want to
believe that Akiha can live.

"..... One day."

I don't think she'll turn back one day.
But to keep my belief in her is the last role for me, as I could not keep her
promise.

"..... Akiha, even if you're like this forever.."

I kneel and scoop up Akiha's red hair.

".... Just being able to be with you.."

That will be my greatest happiness.

"_____"

The autumn leaves fall.
Autumn is ending.
In this garden filled with many memories, I quietly kiss Akiha.

—A ritual with no meaning.

I faintly see the future.
This will be my last time touching Akiha as Tohno Shiki.

I open my eyes.
Endless blue soaks my sleepy mind.
Slightly warm sunlight and a slightly cool breeze.

A world with only the smell of grass and the sound of trees.
It might be that this mansion's forest is in a different season.
It's almost winter, but this place still feels like autumn.
"_____"

I look up at the blue sky as I lie on the ground.
The sun is already way up in the sky.
.... I guess I fell asleep.
I guess it was my fault for lying down here on the grass coming after breakfast.
Well, I didn't have anything to do anyway.
Doing this here.
Falling asleep deeply, even forgetting my name, can't be that bad.
—Bottomless blue.

The clean sky is far away.
Thinking like a child, I keep on watching the sky.
A far sky like in a dream.
The view is so beautiful, I even cannot let out a sigh of amazement.
"Shiki-sama....?"
Are you over here, Shiki-sama?"
I hear Hisui's voice from the courtyard.
"....."
It's that time already.
I guess I fell asleep again.
If I forgot time while watching this blue sky, it makes no difference if I was sleeping or not.

Hisui arrives, composed.



"Shiki-sama, Akiha-sama is calling you."
"Alright."
I guess I was asleep.
Sorry for being so troublesome, Hisui."



"Not at all, it is nothing of the sort"

Hisui looks down as if she wants to say something.

.... I know what Hisui wants to say, but even if she did, I wouldn't be able to give her an answer.

"I'll get going.

Can you tell Kohaku-san in about an hour or so?"

"Ah—"

I turn my back to Hisui and head to the detached building where Akiha is waiting.

In the room lives a girl.

No, the term "lives" is not right.

The girl cannot move of her own will.

She only moves as a living thing when she eats, and she just sits there like a statue when she isn't.

So instead of "live",

"exists" is a more correct term, since she is more like a doll.

"I'm sorry Akiha.

I fell asleep and couldn't make it in time."

I enter the room and close the shouji.

Akiha sits there and does not move.

"Whoa, your hair is messed up.

It looks like you haven't changed yet either.

Didn't Kohaku-san come by this morning?"

Akiha does not say anything.

She looks in my direction with a blank stare.

.... No,

it just seems like she's looking.

"Alright, let's at least make your hair look good.

I touch Akiha's hair.

She makes no motion to fight it.

Quietly, as softly as I can, I let my hands go through her hair.

Her long hair flows in my hand.

Akiha does not say anything.

After some time like that,

Akiha suddenly moves her arm.

"Akiha—?"

There's no answer.

She just takes my arm and takes it to her mouth.

After a hard sensation,

Akiha bites on my arm and starts to suck out my blood expressionlessly.

Her white throat gulps down my blood.

The blood which spills out of her mouth drips down her throat and stains her kimono red.

"Ghu—u"

I grit my teeth and hold on until Akiha is full.

.... There is no proper quantity for Akiha.

She stops only when she's full, and I can't predict when that is.

So all I can do is wait like this for her to be full.

"..... Ah."

I feel dizzy.

But I don't pull back.

.... Hisui was against this until the very last minute.

I decided to give Akiha my own blood ever since she could only take in human blood.

It wasn't a sense of responsibility.

If Akiha could only survive by taking in blood, I wanted to limit the amount of victims, and most of all—

—I didn't want Akiha to drink anyone's blood except mine.

I guess Akiha really likes my blood.

She has never gone outside since then.

But it is really dangerous for my body too.

I do not have much blood to start with, and I am not healthy enough to keep feeding Akiha blood.

I faint most of the time when I come here once a day to feed Akiha.

Although I'm getting blood from transfusion, it takes my body a while to get used to other people's blood.

.... My body is getting weaker by the day.

I guess the reason for Hisui trying to say something every time she sees my face is to tell me I should care more about myself.

But such a thing.

It's many times easier since I can feel the pain, unlike Akiha.

—Akiha lowers her arm.

I guess she's happy now, as she lets go of my arm.

Then she goes back to being being a doll once more.

I clean the dripping blood off her face and change her dirty kimono.

Akiha does not fight back.
 She just accepts everything I do.
 —There,
 Akiha's proud look is nowhere to be seen.
 "_____"
 I'd be lying if I said this isn't hard on me.
 But still—my feeling of happiness is greater.
 Akiha is alive.
 She is alive and she is here right now.
 Then, someday, Akiha might return to the previous Akiha she once was.

"Alright.
 See you Akiha.
 I'll come back tomorrow so listen to Kohaku-san at night."
 I say the same phrase as yesterday, no.. the same phrase as always, as I hold
 Akiha's hands.
 Slender fingers, small hands.
 I cover them in my hands.
 The warmth.
 The fact that she is alive.
 It almost makes me cry.
 ".....!!"
 I suppress that feeling and smile.
 I want to laugh so that I won't have room for any sadness.
 It's easy to feel sad about the situation I'm in.
 Even if Akiha doesn't understand, I have to keep on smiling in front of her.
 One day, if Akiha ever finds herself again, I don't want her to remember how I
 was sad.
 I want her to think that this was nothing—that this was one of the happy times
 too.
 So I have to keep on laughing.
 Even if Akiha doesn't understand right now, so that Akiha wouldn't regret the
 past when she finds herself again.
 —I keep on waiting, holding her hands.

Even if Akiha's eyes are not staring at anything, I will keep smiling until the
 end of the world.

So that one day, when Akiha wakes up,
 I would be able to greet her like it was another normal day and say "Hi".

gsetvar clearakiha + 1
 gsetvar cleared + 1
 gsetvar clearakihagood + 1
 Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **451**

No.

turn to **1**

367

—I don't think death can be a way to save anyone.

It is an answer I've carried with me since my life was saved eight years ago.
 No matter how painful or hard it is, I feel happy just being alive.
 So if I live up to my belief, I cannot kill myself.
 It's not like Akiha has died either.
 If she's alive, she might get well again one day if I take care of her.
 I know that to give away your life that easily means you have an illusion that death is honorable.
 "——But still."

Still, I want Akiha to be happy.
 I just want Akiha to be much happier than I am.
 Besides,
 I was dead eight years ago and Akiha has given me this dream this whole time.

So this is just about giving back what used to be hers.
 There's nothing to be sad about and there's nothing to lose.
 It's an end where everything goes back to where it came from.

The autumn leaves fall.
 Akiha lies on the red ground.
 Her hair on the ground is red.
 It flows through the red leaves as if melting in them.
 Her face looks peaceful, as if she's having a happy dream.
 "... Geez, don't catch a cold sleeping in a place like this."
 I mutter as normally as I can and look down at my body.
 The "lines" are throughout my body.
 I look to see which one would kill me the easiest.
 "... I have to return what I have borrowed for so long.
 I've borrowed it for too long, but I can still give it back to you in time.
 Right, Akiha?"
 If this body is being kept alive by Akiha,
 then if I am eliminated, the life should go back to its original owner.
 I place the knife on my body.
 My heart screams loudly.
 I am still scared.
 Since I'm scared, I look at Akiha's sleeping face so that I can go away calmly.
 "Damn—I just keep on breaking my promises with Akiha."
 The familiar feeling of death.
 My knife cuts through the "line" that will kill me the easiest.
 At that moment,
 as if the thing that controlled my body malfunctioned, my whole body stops

working.

I fall onto Akiha.
As I start to pass out, I watch the falling autumn leaves.

They lay thick like snow.
It might be because it is so beautiful.

My mind goes blank as if I am going to sleep.

Distant moon.
White, summer sun.

And the sound.
The sound of cicadas.

—Warm sunlight.

I feel the bright sunlight coming in from the window, and I open my eyes slowly.

"..... Hmm."
I start to wake up.
The sky outside the window is a clear blue, and it tells me that today is going to be a beautiful day.
"Hwaa—ah."
.... It might be because I slept in an unfamiliar bed, but my body feels a bit heavy.
I stretch out a bit and get up.

I hear a knock on the door.



"Excuse me."

Hisui comes in with a bow.

Hisui shuts the door as if she had a lot of experience doing it.

"Ah——"

.... A quiet morning.

Looking at her acting like it was natural for her to come into this room—I feel for a while that this is my own room.



"Good morning, Akiha-sama.

Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yes, I did.

I'm sorry for saying such selfish things as me wanting to sleep in Nii-san's room."



".... No, it is no problem.

I think.. Shiki-sama is also happy for you to use this room."
Hisui says this haltingly.
"I see.
You don't give up easily, Hisui.
Nii-san should be happy that you think of him that much."



"A——Akiha-sama....!!"
"It is true, right?
I'm going to get changed and go to the sitting room.
Can you go tell that to Kohaku?"
"..... Yes.
Excuse me, Akiha-sama."

Hisui exits the room quietly.
The room suddenly feels lonely.
.... Nii-san did not bring any of his belongings here; there is only a bed and a desk.
"..... Really, how could you sleep in such an empty room, Nii-san?"
I am surprised.
I would have obtained for him anything he wanted, but Nii-san did not ask for anything.
.... I guess he was reserving himself a bit, but he was basically a person with no desires for things.
He was like that from the time we were small.
He said with a smile that he did not want anything and he was happy if we were with him.
But that made me uneasy.
He did not leave anything and he was not restricted by anything.
And he let me know as a child that to be free is to be lonely.

"———-Hm?"

I look out the window.
The view Nii-san was always watching.
The forest is illuminated under the blue sky.

—After that, I slowly woke.

In the garden filled with dead leaves.
I slowly moved my collapsed body.
.... I was still alive.
My hair was returned to black, and I did not feel the rage in my blood.
I was feeling rather well and that load I had always had in my body was lifted,
I could almost say it disappeared.
Yes, since I was a child.
That load that was there since I wished to save my brother, was gone, as if it
never existed.
.... That load was painful for me, but it was also a load that relieved me.
I always had only half of my energy and I always felt a load, but I was happy.
Because that load was Nii-san, and I could feel Nii-san as long as I felt the load.
But that started to feel really light.
I looked around the garden.
I could not see Tohno Shiki anywhere in that night of falling leaves.
Then, I understood.
Why I was able to live.
Why Tohno Akiha returned to the original Tohno Akiha.

"....."

It is really nice outside and I can't stay like this forever.
I have to change and eat breakfast so I can get to school on time.

I come down to the dining room and finish my breakfast.
It is only a little past six.
I should be able to relax for a few more minutes.



"Akiha-sama."

"Hmm?"

What is it, Hisui?

Would you like to relax too?"

"....."

Hisui looks at me with an angry expression.... no, it's more like she's staring at me.

It is a bit unusual for that calm Hisui.

"... It does.. not seem like you would like to join me for some morning tea.

Is there something you would like to say?"

"... Yes.

Please forgive my rudeness, but why did you transfer schools again, Akihasama?"

—I see.

It's about that.

The fact that I have transferred back to my original school must mean something to Hisui since she does not believe Nii-san has died.

"Why do you ask?"

I transferred to that school since Nii-san was there.

Now since that reason is gone, it is only natural for me to go back."



"....."

It does not look like Hisui is convinced.

"Or what is it?"

Are you saying I should have stayed at that school even though Nii-san isn't there?"

"..... Yes.

it is not like Shiki-sama has died.

If such a thing is done, Shiki-sama will feel sad."

"Impossible.

How can someone who's not here anymore feel sad, Hisui?"

I get up from the sofa.

.... It's still a bit early but I should leave.

"Hisui, can you tell Kohaku to get ready?"

Oh, and I will probably live in the dormitory from now on, so I will leave you two in charge of the mansion.

I will make it official within this week, so I will give you the details when I come home."

"———Akiha-sama!"

"Yes?"

What else do you have to say, Hisui?"



"... Akiha-sama... are you going to forget about Shiki-sama?"

"No, but it's a waste of time thinking about someone who is not here anymore."

I leave the room.
I walk to the lobby, feeling Hisui's eyes on my back.



"Please take care on your way, Akiha-sama."

Kohaku walks me to the gate and bows.

"I'm going.

I will be back this afternoon, so we can talk then."



"Yes, but it's a bit regrettable since I will no longer be able to see you off anymore like this."

".... Geez.

Even you say that.

This is just like before Nii-san came.

I only came back on the weekends back then."

"That's true, but now that Makihisa-sama is dead, there's no reason for you to come back here, Akiha-sama.

You will only come back during long vacations, right?"

"—Yes, I would think so."

I nod and feel that I can not hide anything from Kohaku.

The only reason I came back to the mansion was because my father wanted me to.

Now that Father is dead and I do not have responsibility as the successor until I graduate, there is no reason for me to come back to this mansion.

Because when I graduate, I will live in this mansion for the rest of my life.

It's stupid to let go the last free time of my life.

"But I won't hire anyone else.

Please keep up your good work, Kohaku."



"Yes, please come back here at least once a month, Akiha-sama."

"—Okay, I'll try."

It's time.

My driver knocks on the door to tell me it is time to leave.

".... Akiha-sama?

Is it really alright?"

"What are you talking about?

Are you going to say what Hisui has said to me too, Kohaku?"

"—No, it's alright then.

Take care, Akiha-sama."

Kohaku bows.

Leaving her in front of the gate, the car starts to drive down the hill.

—I look at the flowing scenery.

Are you going to forget everything, Akiha-sama?

I did not say anything when Hisui asked me that question.
Because it's each person's choice.
It doesn't matter to me if Hisui does or does not believe in Nii-san's death.
Hisui wishes that Nii-san is alive.. it's like wishing for a full count, game winning grand slam.
.... Seeing that my thoughts are meaningless, I laugh at myself.
Because, that is also my wish.

—Are you going to forget about Shiki-sama?

Should I have answered that it will never happen?
I know it is impossible for Nii-san to be alive.
Because the only way for me to turn back is for Nii-san to give back his life.
I know that fact more than anybody—but still, I am believing in him just like Hisui.
".... Because it's still there."
I look up at the sky.
.... The heartbeat that was there since I gave Nii-san half of my life.
The load that felt like I had another heart in me.
The beating is still there.
.... It is really weak and faint, but it is still there.
It does not beat and it feels like a rock, but I am certain it is still there.
So while I am disagreeing, I believe more than Kohaku or Hisui or anyone else in the world that Nii-san is still alive.

He is going to come back one day.
I should go back to my normal life since there are no problems—

—I come back to the mansion.

I believe there will only be a few more times that I will be coming home like this.
".... I got here earlier than I thought."
I think aloud and allow myself some sentimentality.

I am in the forest.
I have not set foot in this place since that night.

.... There are too many memories here.
The garden me and Nii-san played around as children.
The night when we snuck out of the mansion to watch the stars.
The enclosure of the trees when I talked with Nii-san when he came back.

—And the forest where I woke up in after that incident.

".... He really is an idiot.

I told him so much to kill me, and still—"

Nii-san chose to sacrifice himself.

I knew he would have chosen to do that.

That is why I made him promise, but Nii-san did not listen to a word of what I said.

"Yeah, he was like that since he was a kid.

Nii-san only did what he believed was right.

.... He always sacrificed himself for others."

—Yes.

Whenever Hisui or I were scolded by Father, Nii-san took our blame.

When I was about to be killed by SHIKI, he saved me.

And when I could not turn back.

I didn't even ask him to, but—

".....!!"

I stop the tears that were about to come out.

I am not sad.

Rather, I am mad.

I am really mad this time.

He only thinks about himself and does not take into account how I feel.

".... I really won't forgive him this time."

But when the person to say that to is not here..

To where should I release my emotions?

Nii-san is not here.

There is no feeling that he is going to come back.

The warmth in my heart is gone, and only the weight of what seems to be dead remains—

"—That's the only certain thing in me."

I feel uneasy when I think about it.

I feel like giving up thinking that it might be useless no matter how much I try.

—I believe that Nii-san is alive somewhere.

The load inside me is really faint now, but it is still there.

So I want to believe he is alive.

I want to believe, but—

"—But Nii-san, if it's this quiet, I feel like I might forget someday, and I—"

.... I am waiting for Nii-san.

But it is hard to keep my belief in him.

The load still in my chest.
While it might be a proof that Nii-san is alive, I am scared that it might be a proof that Nii-san is dead.
"... Geez, I can't let anyone see me like this."
I let out a breath and decide to head back to the mansion.

—And then,

I hit something with my feet.
"..... Huh?"
I could not see it under the leaves, but something is there.
"..... Hey."
Some metal blade that shines in the setting sun.
.... Is it a hand sickle or something?
It's dangerous for Kohaku to leave tools lying about—
"—————"
No, it's not.
As I notice, I forget to breathe as I pick it up.

—————Thump.

Yes, only once.
When I grabbed the knife, what was dead inside me came alive.
.... I do not know what kind of connection it was.
Was there a special connection between him and the knife?
But still, for a moment.
I could feel his heartbeat inside me as I used to.
No, stronger than ever before.

"—————Ah."
Something warm flows down my cheeks.
Even after noticing it is my tears, I still do not wipe them away.

—————He's alive.

With just that fact, I cannot think.
 I don't know where he is.
 He doesn't tell me how he is doing.
 But I know.
 Nii-san is alive.
 It was only once, but I certainly felt Nii-san's warmth and I was able to embrace it.
 I take a deep breath and swallow my words.
 I can believe.
 That heartbeat is enough.
 No matter what happens in the future, I feel like I can believe in Nii-san and wait for his return.

—That makes me real happy.

".... Yes, I will hold on to it for you, Nii-san."
 I put away the knife that said "Nanatsu Yoru", and turn my back to the forest of memories.
 The forest is tinted red.
 I say goodbye to the forest which carries so many memories.
 Because I can make new memories, and there are things I must do.
 I won't be indulging in sentimentality anymore.

——Now then.

I go back to the normal life I am having as myself.
 And, no matter how long it may take,
 I am going to believe that he will come back some day, and keep waiting for him until he does——

gsetvar clearakiha + 1
 gsetvar cleared + 1
 gsetvar clearakihatrue + 1
 !

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **450**

No.

turn to **1**

368

I get to the classroom, and the class starts uneventfully, as always.

.... There's no one at Yumizuka's desk.
Even though a classmate is gone forever, class life remains unchanged.

"....."

I become a little uneasy.
Because of Hisui, I had forgotten all about that.
Perhaps because of that incident?
With that uneasiness, my thoughts drift towards the sky.

Before I realized it, the school day was over.
I let out a sigh.
I don't really feel like seeing Arihiko or Senpai.
Right now, it seems I'm just more at ease in the Tohno mansion than in school.

I enter the lobby and immediately encounter Hisui.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
"I'm home, Hisui.
Are Kohaku-san and Akiha here?"



"Akiha-sama has not returned yet."

Nee-san will most likely be in the rear courtyard sweeping."

"As usual.

Well, I'll be in my room; please continue whatever you were doing."

"Yes.

Please excuse me."

I head up the stairs to the second floor.

"Ah, Shiki-sama?"

"Hm?"



"I will be in Makihisa-sama's room sorting things out.
If you need me, please call for me."

Hisui disappears towards the east end of the mansion.

Putting down my bag, I take off my jacket.

"... Well, then."

There's still time until evening, so what should I do?

Go see Hisui.

turn to **369**

Go help Kohaku-san.

turn to **370**

Go to Akiha's room.

turn to **371**

369

—I'll go see Hisui.

"... But Hisui doesn't let me help her, and I don't want to get in her way..."

... What should I do?

I don't want to be a burden.

But for some reason, I want to see her.

"... Ah."

That reminds me.

I still need to give her back the ribbon.

Hisui said she'd forgotten about it, but the ribbon is hers.

There's really no point in me holding on to it, so I should give it back.

In the old man's old room, Hisui is arranging books.
Even though it is no longer being used, his room is still being cleaned like before.
"Hisui, can I have a minute?"



"Ah—Shiki-sama.

Yes, what is it?"

"I know we talked about this earlier, but I thought I should give this back."

I pull out the ribbon Hisui gave me eight years ago.



"....."
"Hisui?"
"So, you honestly don't want it...?"



"....No, I will take it.
It is important to me, after all."
Taking the ribbon, Hisui becomes silent.
"....."
I can't talk to her.
The Hisui in front of me right now looks very much like the Hisui from eight years ago, distant from the ones around her.



"Shiki-sama, is this all you came to do?"
I can't seem to speak, so I just nod.
"In that case, please return to your room.
I still have some work remaining."

Hisui walks towards the center of the room.
".... Hisui."
Did that ribbon have any special meaning?
This eight year period.
I think I may have finally fulfilled my promise, even if it was too late.

".... Then, I'll go to my room.
See you later, Hisui."

With that, I leave the room.

turn to **372**

370

—I'll go help Kohaku-san.

I go out to the courtyard and see Kohaku-san holding a broom. I suppose she is done with the rear courtyard, and is now humming in the courtyard while sweeping the leaves.



"Huh?"

What is the matter, Shiki-san, coming out to the courtyard at this time?"

"Ah... Nothing.

I was just bored, so I thought I'd come help you.

Are you done already?"

"Yes, I just finished the rear courtyard.

Since there was some time before I had to prepare dinner, I thought I should sweep the courtyard as well."

It seems Kohaku-san is rather industrious, as she has already taken care of most of the leaves.

".... I guess I'm no help.

Kohaku-san, you almost cleaned up all the leaves in the whole courtyard already."

"Yes, taking care of the garden has always been my job.

Taking care of the garden in the rear courtyard, the woods, and the maples to the south are also my responsibility."

"Wow, your job is not just to take care of the flower bed, but also the woods?"

.... Hold on a minute here.

Does that mean..?"

"Um, Kohaku-san.

There is this huge tree in the middle of the woods.

Do you take care of that too?"



"No, how could I, Shiki-san?
That tree has been at the mansion for a long time.
I can't take care of something that big."
As if she was having a lot of fun, Kohaku-san smiles happily.



"But that tree is very important.
From the second floor of the mansion in the hallway, you can see that tree very well.
As a child, I would use it as a landmark to find many things."
"I see—I too have memories of that tree, although it was just once."
.... But it seems like there isn't any meaning to it anymore.
The girl from that time—Hisui didn't think much about the promise we made.
It was eight years ago, so I guess it can't be helped if she thinks differently now.
"Ah, it's almost time.
Well then, Shiki-san, when it's time for dinner, please come to the dining room."

With that, Kohaku-san disappears, her footsteps echoing in the air.
I'm sure all the ingredients are set, and all that remains is preparing the food.
".... I guess I should head back to my room."
After staring a little more at the big tree in the middle of the woods, I leave the courtyard.

turn to **372**

371

—I'll go to Akiha's room.

.... I heard that Akiha hasn't returned yet.
Which means that if I go to her room, no one will be there.

.... I arrive at her room.
Akiha's room is in the middle of the east wing.
My room is about forty meters away, so this a rare opportunity.
"___"

I gulp anxiously.
.... If I think about it calmly, I'm doing something extremely dangerous.
"—I can't go back now!"
Making up my mind, I open the door to Akiha's room.

"___"
.... I expected this.. but still, I'm at a loss for words.
I am fascinated by the room that looks nothing like any high schooler's room.
".... There's no bed.... it must be in a separate room."
I almost forget myself looking at all the luxury.
I thought I'd explore Akiha's room while she isn't here, but this isn't a place
where you can come in like that.
".... I better go before Akiha finds me."
With a sigh, I turn to leave the room.

—And.



"Oh no, please, take your time, Nii-san."

—Akiha is standing in front of the door with her arms crossed.

"Ah, Akiha—You've come back already....!?"

"Yes, I just got back.

More importantly, Nii-san, is there something you want to talk to me about?
There has to be, otherwise there would be no reason for you to be in my room

alone, now, would there?"

"Ah—um."

I back up as Akiha glares at me intently.

"No, I—it's not really important.. I just thought I'd talk with you for a bit—"

"Oh really?"

That's strange.

If you wanted to talk to me, going into my room when I'm not there is rather pointless, isn't it?

It makes perfect sense that if you saw I was not in my room, you would go back to your room, right?"

"That's true, but.... I thought maybe I should just wait a while in your room or maybe I didn't...."



"——"

Akiha's stare becomes even harder.

... Ugh, I think it's best if I just apologize right now.

"... Sorry.

I just was wondering what your room was like."

"In other words, you sneaked into my room out of curiosity?"

"Uh—no, I had no bad intentions—"



"It doesn't matter!

Sneaking into a girl's room like that, what kind of upbringing did you have at the Arima household!?"

"—I'm sorry.

I guess you can call this my stupidity, or my mischievous mind."



"____."

Akiha's gaze is painful.
Since I'm the only one at fault, I only can apologize.



"... Fine, I will overlook it this time.
Please go back to your room before Kohaku comes."
"S... sorry, Akiha."
It seems that Onii-chan is just a mischievous brat after all.
"But don't think that this matter is over.
I expect to be compensated for this, Nii-san."

For some reason, there is a hint of both amusement and threat in Akiha's voice as she steps away from the door.

"....."

I leave Akiha's room thinking that she has grasped my terrible weakness.

turn to **372**

372

—After dinner, I return to my room.

It's ten at night.

Since I had tea with Akiha and the others after dinner, it's already time for bed.

"Nnn...."

I'm not really tired, but my body feels sluggish.

It seems like I've finally gotten used to life in this mansion.

Expressionless Hisui, bright and cheery Kohaku, and Akiha, who worries over me constantly.

.... Certainly, getting used to this lifestyle.. is fun.

It seems like I've returned to the me that existed eight years ago.

I never had a chance to relax this much when living with the Arimas.

The Arimas have a child in middle school as well, but we were always distant and we never really had a chance to talk.

"Nnn.... I really am sleepy."

Changing into my pajamas, I lie down in bed.

I'll go to bed early, wake up early, and give Akiha quite a surprise—

"—Huh?"

All of a sudden, I find myself in town.

Midnight.

I walk through the empty town.

I pant heavily.

For some reason, I'm out of breath.

I.

With bloodshot eyes, I am looking at people walking down the street.

Foolish people.

Walking the streets so carelessly even though the killer has not been caught.

—Do they think that they're special and won't get killed?

Or maybe, they want to die but are unable to kill themselves and want someone to kill them?

Well, it's probably the latter.

—A group of people that I don't know continues to walk by.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.
That's not the person.

I diligently stare at them one by one, but shake my head.

That's not the person.
That's not the person.
That's not the person.

I still can't find that person.
I definitely heard what this person looks like, but I can't seem to find that person.
I'm getting a little annoyed.

Not here.
Not here.
Not here.
Not here.
Why.
Not here.
Not here.
Not here.
Not here.
I start panting even more.

It's really ticking me off.
Why isn't that person here,
why isn't that person here,
why isn't that person here,
why isn't that person here,
why isn't that person here,
why isn't that person here—!?
"Ku—haha, ha."

I've decided.
Tonight, I'll change my plan.
Anyone will do.
If I can kill, anyone will do.
Once more.
Once more, I want to taste that wonderful sensation—

—There.

A girl with long hair walks by.

"Aki, ha!"

Yeah, that is Akiha.

Akiha.

Akiha.

My sister.

My beautiful sister, only mine.

That is what I want.

My sister, only mine.

She is definitely mine, and mine only.

I kill her from behind, taking care not to damage her body.

Holding her long hair, I drag her body.

Heavy breathing.

Biting into her neck, I suck her blood.

—My breath becomes wild.

This murder is different than the others.

Akiha.

Just thinking this is Akiha makes it feel so wonderful.

My brain becomes numb.

I get fully aroused.

As I suck her blood,
sucking every last drop of blood, I ejaculate over and over.

"H—huh?"

When it's all over, I realize it.

".... Who is this person?"

This isn't Akiha at all....!"

I'm angry.

Even though I slice the body into pieces, I'm still mad.

Impostor.

This impostor is pissing me off.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

I've used up extra energy.
The night isn't that long.
Once it becomes morning, Shiki will awaken.

"I'm tired tonight.
I'll start again, tomorrow."
Yeah, that'll do.
That's what I'll do.

Now then.
Before the morning comes, before anyone realizes, I must go back to my own
bed—

turn to **373**

373

"Ah——!"

Ah——.

I gasp for air.
It's—morning.. now.
This is my room.
Up until now, I've been here,
just like this,
and I should have been sleeping——

"Ahh...."
My forehead is hurting.
"Dre... am."
I had a terrible dream.
A dream where I killed someone.
A dream where I ejaculated over and over as I killed.

"Ho... t.."
My throat is burning.
My body feels like lead, and my hands..
The feeling of breaking someone's neck still lingers on my hands.
"That.. can't be."
That can't be.
That was a dream.
Unmistakably a dream.
But are dreams really that vivid?
I remember it so vividly.
The street in the dead of night,
the feeling of snapping someone's neck,
the stickiness of blood gurgling down my throat,
the face of the woman so cruelly killed——

But it's merely a dream.
Since I'm here, it had to have been a dream.
But the problem is..
I am dreaming that I am having fun killing people.

—You and I are the same, Shiki-kun.

Before my eyes, the world starts spinning.

—Someone who can't resist the pleasure from killing.

And that crazy speed.

"Excuse me," Hisui says as she enters the room.



"Good morning.

It seems that you have already awakened, Shiki-sama."

"..... Ah.

Morning, Hisui."

The world stops spinning.

As soon as Hisui spoke, the whirlpool I was trapped in disappeared like an illusion.



".... Shiki-sama?"

"Eh—what is it, Hisui?"

"How are you feeling this morning?

You are not saying anything."

".... Ah, sorry, I was just staring at you.

I understand; I have to go to school.

I'll go to the sitting room right away, so wait for me there."



"Shiki-sama.
If you are not feeling well, please do not push yourself.
Your health is more important than school."
"Haha, no way, Hisui.
I can't skip school.
It's nothing—really.
So don't spoil me like that."



"No, please rest.
I will tell Akiha-sama so please rest."
Hisui is unusually persistent.
.... Does my face look that haggard?
"Hisui, you worry too much.
It really is nothing at all, so don't worry about it.. I'll just wash my face, so
please wait for me in the sitting room."

Getting out of bed, I walk past Hisui, who seems like she wants to say more.



Leaving the room,
it is a little painful seeing Hisui watch me with such uneasiness in her eyes.

I look in the mirror in the bathroom.
".... I don't look like I'm sick.
Why is Hisui worrying so much?"
I splash cold water onto my face.

—Just thinking about the dream I had last night makes me want to puke and not go to school.

But if I stay home from school because of that, that will just be like confirming something, which makes me feel uneasy.

Akiha and Kohaku-san are in the sitting room, and Hisui is standing nearby.
As usual, I'm the last one to enter the room.



"Ah, good morning, Shiki-san."



"No way!?
It isn't even six-thirty yet!"
Kohaku-san looks towards me with a soft smile while Akiha gets up from the sofa and gapes at me in surprise.
"Good morning, Kohaku-san, oh, and Akiha too."



"Wha.. What do you mean, 'Akiha too?'"
"Well, 'Akiha too' means 'Akiha too'.
That should be enough for someone who's so surprised to see me get up early when you tell me to get up early every day."



"—I see.
Nii-san, you wake up early for once and now you triumphantly walk around with your head held high."
"Head held high, Akiha—"

Head.

Neck.

Neck....?

I remember the sensations from my dream and feel like vomiting.

".... Sorry, Kohaku-san.

I don't mean to be a bother, but could you get me something cold to drink before I eat?"



"Not at all.

Would you like soda or fruit juice?"

"Ummm, I'll have a soda please."

"Coming right up."



Kohaku-san disappears towards the kitchen.



".... Nii-san?
You're not arguing back.
Are you feeling alright?"
".... Geez.
You and even Hisui, what do you think I am?
I just woke up early and my throat is dry, there isn't anything wrong with me..!"
Trying to resist the urge to vomit, I shout back.



".... I'm sorry, Nii-san.
But there is obviously something wrong, and I want to help."
"Ah—no, that's not it.
The fact that you're worried about me makes me really happy.
I just had a really bad nightmare last night and my mind is elsewhere, that's
all.
.... I'm sorry, Akiha.
I'm the one who should apologize."

I sit down on the sofa.
I know that something's wrong with me, but I can't do anything about it.



"Nii-san, is there something bothering you?
If it's something to do with this mansion, please tell me, and I'm sure I can be
of help.."
"No, it isn't that I'm not used to living here—"

.... That's right.
Maybe if I ask her indirectly, it might help me feel better.

I decide to—

Talk with her about it. turn to **374**

Don't talk with her about it. turn to **375**

374

I decide that it's better to do it than not.
Besides, I keep on thinking for the worst since I'm keeping this to myself.
"... Well, then let me ask you a question.
If someone does things they know they shouldn't do, would that be a result of stress?"



"Doing something they know they shouldn't do?
Is it a recurring problem or just an accident?"
"... Well, it's more like an accident.
It seems that the person really isn't that conscious."



"So you mean they're doing things while unconscious, so they can't stop themselves from doing it?"
"—That's right, they can't stop.
They can't even get themselves to think about stopping."



"In that case, it sounds like a personality inversion."

".... Personality inversion.... you mean their personality gets reversed?"

"Yes.

For whatever reason, something triggers a change in the person and their entire moral spectrum, their whole attitude gets reversed."



"It may be termed a disease of the mind.

Don't you remember, Nii-san?

Father was usually a very kind person, but sometimes he would just turn cold as ice."

"The old man was—?"

.... Come to think of it.... Tohno Makihisa was extremely kind one day and extremely strict the next.

".... I don't remember that well.

Do you remember, Hisui?"

I look at Hisui, who is standing by the wall.

—And.



-2 0

It looks like Hisui is trying to contain herself and can't hear my voice.



"Akiha-sama, please don't talk about any of that.
Makihisa-sama was just a little manic-depressive, that's all."
Kohaku-san says this as she brings a silver tray with a glass on it.
"You shouldn't say bad things about those who have departed.
And besides, Makihisa-sama is your father, too."



"I, I know....!
I don't need you to tell me that....!"



Akiha joins Hisui in silence.



"Here you go, Shiki-san.

Thanks for waiting."

Kohaku-san puts the glass of Lemon Squash onto the table.

"Thanks."

Using a straw, I let the cool drink fill my body.

.... The rest of the time, Akiha and Hisui never open their mouths.

The only cheerful one in the sitting room is Kohaku-san.

.... I don't understand why everyone became so depressed, but the old man is definitely connected to it.



"Please be careful on your way, Shiki-sama."

"Ah, I'll be going.... Hisui?"

".... Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"When we were talking earlier, about my old man.
You were deathly quiet.
Not just you, but Akiha as well."



"Did something happen to that old man in the eight years I was gone?
You and Akiha were both acting strange earlier."
"....."
Hisui doesn't answer.
".... I see.
Well, I won't force you to answer.
If you ever feel like it, we can talk about it."



"—No.
This is not something that concerns you, Shiki-sama."



"Shiki-sama, if you are going to live in this mansion, please do not ever mention Makihisa-sama again."

After Hisui's eyes flash for a brief instant, she heads back to the mansion.

turn to **376**

375

—No, I really shouldn't make Akiha and the others worry about any of this. This problem—that dream, I should take care of it myself.
 "—It's just that things at school are keeping me busy. In November, there's the school festival, and before that, the athletic festival."



".... Is that so?
 Since it's a school problem, then there isn't really anything I can do to help, I suppose."

Akiha lowers her gaze, a little disappointed.
 Deceiving Akiha by telling her a lie is very painful.



"Here you go, Shiki-san.
 Thanks for waiting."
 Kohaku-san comes carrying a glass on a tray.
 "Thanks."
 Using a straw, I drink the Lemon Squash that Kohaku-san got for me.
 With that, the conversation ends.
 The only cheerful one in the sitting room is Kohaku-san, and I end up eating breakfast like always.

Hisui walks with me to the gate to see me off.
 Just like before in the sitting room, Hisui continues her silence, which makes

me uneasy.



"Please take care on your way, Shiki-sama."

"Yeah, I'll be on my way.... Hisui?"

"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"

Hisui looks at me directly.

—Why is it?

Being stared at by those pure eyes, I get this uncomfortable feeling, like I was very dirty.

".... It's nothing.

Just be careful at home."

With a deep uneasiness in my chest, I leave the mansion.

—It's lunch time.

As usual, Arihiko is skipping school.

".... I'll go eat at the cafeteria."

If I eat by myself, I'll just end up being depressed.

If I go eat in the cafeteria full of people, it should help me get my mind off of things.

As expected, the cafeteria is packed.

After waiting in a long line, I buy the tried and true meal set A and walk to a table.

The students' voices are pretty loud, so I am able to concentrate on just eating my meal.

I use my fork and eat in silence.

—And then.

For a moment, I see a terrible image.

".... The television screen...."

I gape at the large television mounted on the wall at the end of the cafeteria.
At my school, they record the morning news and replay it at lunch.
My eyes fixate on what is playing.

"—No way.."

I watch the news in amazed horror.
Shown on the television is the alley that I saw last night in my dream.
The newscaster is talking.
On the screen, the words "Vampire Serial Killer's Ninth Victim" appear in
bloody lettering.

After that, the face of the victim appears.
The woman with the long hair, she.. definitely was the one I killed in my dream.

"——"

I start to feel faint.
"How.... come?"
That was a dream.
It had to be a dream.
But in reality, the same person as in my dream, in the same place as my dream,
was killed in the same way as my dream.
"The vampire should be gone already."
I killed Yumizuka with my own hands.
Those killings, they shouldn't be happening anymore.

"I—killed?"

Yes, I killed.
Just like the time I killed Yumizuka.
While breathing hard, last night, that woman I've never met—

Didn't I tell you, Shiki-kun?
It's useless to resist it.

"U—"

Quashing the urge to throw up my lunch, I stagger out of my seat.

I can't go back to class.

I somehow find myself running into town.

—I come to the place I saw in my dream.

There are several policemen around the area, and tape reading "Police Line Do Not Cross" is stretched across the alley.

"—Exactly the same."

Without a doubt, this is the place I went to in my dream.

—No, that's not a dream.

I can't delude myself into thinking it is a dream any longer.

"....."

Even if I stay here longer, the cops will only stare at me.

.... I can't go back to school now.

I guess I'll go back to the mansion.

Since it's not even two o'clock yet, Hisui isn't waiting in the lobby.

"....."

I can say I got lucky.

I don't feel like seeing anyone right now.

sigh

Letting out a deep breath, I collapse onto my bed.

.... I just don't understand any of this at all.

I have dreams where I kill people.

In reality, the same killing has happened.

I am living today like living a normal life.

I was taking delight in killing people in my dreams.

—Just which one..

is the real Tohno Shiki?

Do you really have to ask?

.... That voice again.

C'mon, let's continue, Shiki.

.... That voice that echoes inside my head.
My voice.

Night comes every day.
For sure, we'll find the one we want someday, right....?



"Shut up——!"
I leap out of bed.
I start to pant heavily.
My breathing is out of control.
Just now..
I wanted Akiha.
"Damn it—what in the world.."
I don't understand what's happening to me.
All I know for sure, is that if I see Akiha or Hisui right now, I don't know what
I'll do to them.
turn to **378**

376

—It's lunch time.
As usual, Arihiko is skipping school.

".... I'll go eat at the cafeteria."
If I eat by myself, I'll just end up being depressed.
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I use my fork and eat in silence.

—And then.

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"....?"
Is it the television screen?"
I gape at the large television mounted on the wall at the end of the cafeteria.
At my school, they record the morning news and replay it at lunch.
I just stare dumbfounded at the news broadcast that is several hours late.

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Those killings, they shouldn't be happening anymore.
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Yes, I killed.
Just like the time I killed Yumizuka.
While breathing hard, last night, that woman I've never met—

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It's useless to resist it.

"Uu—"
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Without a doubt, this is the place I went to in my dream.

—No, that's not a dream.
I can't delude myself into thinking it is a dream any longer.
"....."
Even if I stay here longer, the cops will only stare at me.
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"....."
I can say I got lucky.
I don't feel like seeing anyone right now.

sigh
Giving a deep breath, I collapse onto my bed.

.... I just don't understand any of this at all.

I have dreams where I kill people.
In reality, the same killing has happened.
I am living today like living a normal life.
I was taking delight in killing people in my dreams.

——-Just which one?
Which is the real Tohno Shiki?

Do you really have to ask?
.... That voice again.

C'mon, let's continue, Shiki.
.... That voice that echoes inside my head.
My voice.

Night comes every day.
For sure, we'll find the one we want someday, right..?



"Shut up—!"
I leap out of bed.
pant *pant* *pant*
I breathe wildly.

Just now,
I was lusting after Akiha.
pant *pant*
.... I feel like I'm going to vomit.
I don't ever think about these things normally, but when I try to sleep, these
weird thoughts pop up in my head.
It's almost as if there's someone else inside my brain.
"..... Ah."
Come to think of it, Akiha said something like that earlier.
That was about—my old man would have extreme personality shifts.... it sounds
almost like me right now.
.... Of course, like father, like son.
It might even be hereditary.
"My old man's room.. I think they still keep it like before.."

Go to my old man's room.

turn to **377**

Stay in my room.

turn to **378**

377

My old man's room is just like it always was.
 Nearly all of the rows of books are educational reports, and nothing catches my attention.
 What I want right now is my old man's journal or notes.
 The old man was extremely methodical.
 There certainly has to be something like that lying around here somewhere—
 "... Of course, they're not just lying about where anyone can see them."
 Maybe they're locked away somewhere.
 I should probably look in these desk drawers first.

Using a letter opener lying on the desk, I cut the "line" of the drawer lock.
 Inside, there appears to be some old documents bundled together and what seems to be a journal.
 First, I'll look at the old documents.
 "... This is.. my family tree?"
 Definitely.
 Right after Tohno MAKIHISA is written Tohno SHIKI and Tohno AKIHA.

"Huh... my old man, he adopted a son ten years ago?
 Ah, but he passed away shortly thereafter."
 Ten years ago; that would be when I was just in elementary school.
 That long ago, it's only natural I wouldn't remember.
 "But, the heads of the household have had pretty short lifespans.
 My old man died before he was fifty, and before that, before thirty in an accident.... Wow, before that, eighteen years of age, suicide..!?"

—No, wait a second.
 No matter how you look at it, this is strange.

Looking through the family tree, all members of the Tohno household have died strangely.
 Madness.
 Accidents.
 Murder.
 Disappearances.
 Stillbirth.
 Not one of them lived a long life or even died peacefully.

"Wha....."
 This entire document is filled with horrible fates.
 Even worse, most of the causes of death are madness.
 Most of them ended up taking their own lives.
 "That's strange—it's just strange."

But I can't exactly tell what's strange about it.
 "... Next is... my old man's journal."
 I pick up the journal, which has a relatively new binding.

—Thump.

My heart starts to pound.
 My heart seems to understand that I shouldn't be opening this.
 But I can't turn back now.
 Swallowing hard, I open my old man's journal.

—There is a demon lurking inside the Tohno bloodline.
 The opening statement is in those lines.

And that isn't just a simple metaphor.
 The ancestors of the Tohno were a mixed breed of "something nonhuman" and human.
 We, being their descendants, also have this element of "something nonhuman" in our blood.
 In regards to our blood..
 There are those with strong and those with weak nonhuman blood.
 Those with weak nonhuman blood can live their lives as ordinary people, but those with strong nonhuman blood can never live a normal life.

Those with strong Tohno blood are born with special powers.
 It could be a body that is resistant to death,
 it could be an ability to move things without touching them,
 or it could be fangs used to take bodily fluids from other people.
 This blood.
 When this blood becomes too strong, the members of the Tohno House start to gradually lose their sanity.
 And the majority of the members of the Tohno House that lose their sanity become demons that feed on human flesh.
 So, the head of the Tohno household carries the responsibility of punishing those who have turned into such monsters.
 "——Ha."
 It's messed up.
 My old man, what was he trying to say?
 Writing so seriously about something that's more like a fairy tale.

The journal turns more into the old man's rant.

The date is roughly nine years ago.
The handwriting starts to get erratic.

.... I am no longer able to suppress my raging blood.
I was able to obtain an orphan from a family of Synchronizers, so this should help me strengthen my mind.
However, it really is only a matter of time before I go insane.
.... It is terrifying.
When I come to, I find that I can't even remember half of the day.
During that time, I'm forcing my inversion impulse on that child.
If this keeps up,
it is only a matter of time before I completely lose my sanity and turn into a beast.
I don't even know how much time I have left to remain as myself.
No.
If that child is here, then I can probably last for a few more years.
But that child will not be able to bear that.
After that child breaks, I will have to take my own life.

But until then—I must protect my children.
Akiha's blood is weak.
Unless she wishes it herself, she does not have to suffer the same fate.
The real problem is SHIKI.
That child is incredibly close to me.
More than anything, I do not want that child to suffer my fate.
.... If the Tohno blood is unnatural, I need to distance him as much as possible from the Tohno name and see how he will fare—

"——"

I finish reading in a state of horror and amazement.
The contents of my old man's journal are so far away from reality that it's out-right bizarre.

My old man didn't just have manic-depression.
Rather, he just became violent without his knowing.
Just like Tohno Shiki right now.
".... No."
That's wrong.
That old man isn't like me.
I'm like him.
Fearing that, he sent me from the mansion.
But now I've returned, and my sleeping blood has awoken.
"Heh.... nonsense, all of this."

I try to laugh but find myself unable to laugh it off.
The Tohno blood is mixed with the blood of something nonhuman.
Those of the Tohno blood have special powers.
.... I can't laugh it off.
Supernatural power.
I've been carrying that for eight years.
Being able to perceive the death of things, my unnatural eyes.

"G....."

—I feel like vomiting.

I can't stay standing up.
Hurry.
I must hurry back to my room and sleep; it feels like there is something wrong
with my head.

"Shiki-sama, you have returned already?"

.... I can hear a voice that sounds like Hisui.

"Shiki-sama, please excuse me."



.... Hisui enters my room.
"Please forgive me.
I did not realize that you had returned, so I was unable to greet you at the
door."
".... Don't worry about it.
I came early on my own.
Hisui, can you leave me alone?
I just don't feel like talking to anyone."



"Shiki-sama, are you feeling sick..?"

"—I don't know.

I don't understand it myself."

"....."

Hisui looks at me with worried eyes.

.... Damn it, what am I doing?

Hisui is worrying about me; there's no reason to take it out on her....!

".... Sorry, I just feel a bit bad.

I want to sleep until dinner; is there some medicine I can take?

Headache medicine would be the best."



"Yes, I will go get some."



"Thank you for waiting.
Please drink this."

"Thank you, as always, and sorry."

I take the water and the powdered medicine that Hisui brought me.

For some reason, there are two kinds of medicine.

"Huh?"

Two?

What are they?"

"Yes, I told my sister that you were not feeling well, and she gave me some medicine she had prescribed from your doctor.

This one is to help you sleep.

This contains benzodiazepine, which is known for being able to produce a relaxed sleep."

".....?"

I trust Kohaku-san, but she doesn't have to tell Hisui all this in-depth knowledge..



".... Wow, does Kohaku-san plan on becoming a licensed pharmacist?"

Saying that, I drink the medicine.



I drink the water to gulp down my medicine.

Apparently, it works fast; I feel sleepy already.

".... I'm going to sleep.

Please wake me when it's dinner time."



"I understand.
Well then, excuse me."

Hisui leaves.
My consciousness starts to fade.

.... I'll sleep just a little bit.
It's still bright outside.
Because it's during the day, I shouldn't see any of those horrible dreams—



"Please excuse me.
Good night, Shiki-sama."

With a bow, Hisui exits the room.
I yawn heavily.
.... I'm still just a little sleepy.
Kohaku-san's medicine was pretty strong, so I spent most of dinner in a daze.

It's only about nine o'clock.
I took a nap already, so it's a little early to be sleeping.

At ten o'clock, the lights in the mansion are turned off.
".... Well then, what should I do?"
I say this calmly, but I really have no idea what I should do.

.... Just what are the dreams that I keep seeing?
Am I just like my father, who does things unconsciously, and did I really kill anyone?
.... No, there's something not right about this interpretation.
If I left the mansion and walked the streets, Kohaku-san and Hisui would definitely notice something.
I can't explain the fact that I wake up in my bed clean when there's so much blood splattered on me.
"..... There's only one way to know for sure."

Yes, if I want to prove everything—

Go to the nighttime city. turn to **379**

Don't sleep and wait until morning. turn to **380**

378

I start to breathe heavily.
.... I won't move.
Right now, if anything.
If anything moves right now—I'd be admitting I'm insane, and it's scaring me.
My brain might have gone numb.
If I stay like this—I am thinking stupidly that the storm will be over—

My whole world starts to flicker.

Just like a police car's siren, everything revolves, red and black.

"Ah——"
My head hurts.

"I'm tired—I'm just tired, that's all."
I say so to myself.

I collapse onto the bed.

"Shiki-sama, have you returned?"
.... A voice like Hisui's wakes me up.
"Shiki-sama, please excuse me."
.... Someone enters my room.
But, it hurts so much.

I can't make out who it is.
"Please forgive me.
I did not realize that you had returned, so I was unable to greet you at the door."
".... No, that's, fine—leave me alone, please."
"Shiki-sama, are you feeling sick?"
"—Ah.
I don't really.."
.... know.
I can't finish my sentence.
".... Sorry.
I feel—bad.
I want, to, sleep, is there, any, medicine?"
"Yes, I will go get some."



"Thank you for waiting.
Please drink this."
"Thank you, as always, and sorry."
With eyes that can't quite see too well, I take the water and the powdered
medicine Hisui brought me.
For some reason, there are two kinds of medicine.
... I don't care, so I put both of them in my mouth and drink the water.



Apparently, it works fast; I start to feel sleepy already.
"... I'm going to sleep.
Until tomorrow—"
"Don't worry, no one's going to bother you, Shiki-sama."
Hisui giggles and I sense her walking away.

My consciousness starts to swim.

—I'll go to sleep.
My head hurts so much right now—I don't even care if I see those bad dreams
or not.

—I am in the night-shrouded town.

I got here somehow.
Is this a dream?
If so, why am I here?

"_____"

No, the reason is clear.

I'm out on the streets in the middle of the night because of the killer—in order to look for the killer and find the killer.

I wander around aimlessly.
I wonder how late it is?

.... I don't see anyone suspicious.

.... There's no point in coming here.

.... I don't see any sign of the killer.

"_____"

.... My legs become heavy.
Somehow, everything feels unreal.
The atmosphere is getting weaker.
Time is degrading.
My sense of people around me becomes dreadfully surreal.

.... But the sense of smell feels real.
The odor that tugs at my nostrils.
It's floating from over there.

—That was the final stop.

Just like my dream from last night, a dead body of someone I don't know is there in the back alley.
It's a woman.
Her face is scraped from her chin to her nose, and I can't tell now if she is beautiful or not.
The flowing blood is incredibly sticky, and it reminds me more of red jelly than liquid.
From her body, her internal organs bloom out like the legs of an octopus.
The pink mass of dead organs shines and looks warm.

In front of that corpse,
a black, truly black figure is crouched and seems to be crying.
""——-Who are you!?" "
Our voices overlap each other.

I ask him who he is, and he asks me who I am and turns.

"I am—"

"A killer." But which one of us said that?

Well, after all, this is a dream.

So I play around a bit, and with a small amount of hope, I say that I am the killer.

"Eh——?"

The dark figure tilts his head, puzzled.

The man crouching in front of the dead body looks at me, as if trying to compare the two of us.

During that moment,

in that emptiness, I get certain.

"——Heh."

A laugh escapes my throat.

This man is a fake.

The puzzled figure in front of the corpse, and myself not feeling anything.

If you ask which one of us is more like a killer, the answer is simple.

".... Is it you?"

The man says with trembling voice.

I stifle my laugh and naturally, as if I'm shaking his hand, stick my knife into his chest.

——Eh?

A voice shows his surprise.

Even though he's about to get killed, he is sluggish enough not to move.

It makes me sick that this guy was calling himself a killer like that.

I vomit as I slice him.

Like a paper doll, he crumbles to pieces.

Like a pouring bucket full of water, his blood paints my body crimson from head to toe.

Drip drip, drip drip.

His blood drips from my hair.

I let out a deep breath.

Before my eyes is yet another dead body.

In my hands is my steaming knife.

The killer is dead, and the town is now safe like before.

—But that still leaves me.
Even if the town returns to normal, I still remain affected.

The killer still exists.

"..... Let's go home."
Yes, I should go home.
Affected as I am, I should go back to the mansion.
Nothing has changed.
I'll live normally as Tohno Shiki, and continue the nightmare at night.

—Really, nothing at all.

It's just a matter that instead of dream becoming a reality, it's just that I won't wake up from my dream anymore.

I think I heard the faint chuckle of a small girl.
That's just a trivial matter, though.
I have to go to sleep, and wait for my dream to continue again tomorrow night—

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes. turn to **437**

No. turn to **1**

379

—I'll walk around the night-shrouded town and find the serial killer.

Then, I can prove that my dreams were just dreams.

Because if I find the killer..

.... Then all the incidents must be the work of that killer.

"..... Alright."

For safety's sake, I put my knife in my pocket and start my investigation.

—I go out into the night-shrouded town.

There isn't exactly a way to search for the serial killer.

The only thing I can do is wander the streets and look for anything suspicious—
or I use myself as a decoy to bring out the killer.

"....."

After what happened with Yumizuka, maybe I've become numb to danger.

Since the serial killer is just a human, I can roam the streets without any nervousness.

I wander around aimlessly.

The time is about eleven at night.

.... I don't see anything suspicious.

The clock has by now gone past midnight.

.... There's no use coming here.

.... Damn it.

I don't see anyone that looks like a killer.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*.... *pant*

——I'm starting to get really annoyed.

Why can't I find anyone like that?

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

Unable to stand it, I put my hand in my pocket, gripping my knife.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person.

That's not the person——

"——Eh?"

For a brief instant, I see the face of a man with bloodshot eyes.

.... It's nothing.

It is merely my reflection off of a show window.

"——"

How——stupid.

Gripping my knife.

Breathing out of control.

Unconsciously acting exactly like the killer in my dreams.

"No——!"

No.

I didn't want to do these kinds of things.

"Damn it.... What am I doing.....!?"

.... Seriously, what am I doing?

If I didn't recognize my face like that, I would—I would really, take anyone and..

Tell myself it is the killer and would have killed anyone.

"Tsk——"

I start to run.

I can't stay here.

I won't find out anything this way.

I—there's something wrong with me—

I breathe heavily.

I reach my room as if running away, and I collapse onto my bed.

"Da....!"

In the end, I didn't solve anything.

.... I start to get sleepy.

All I can do is try to sleep deeply so that I won't dream at all.

pant—*pant*—*pant*

I feel like I am being watched.

I.

With bloodshot eyes, I look at the people walking down the streets.

—Maybe it's because of the time?

Compared to last night, there's hardly anyone around.

.... Someone is watching me.

I can't find what I'm looking for.

Again.

Tonight, I can't find the person I'm looking for.

I'm starting to get annoyed.

I pant heavily.

I should change my spot.

I'm going to stop looking in town.

I go from roof to roof and end up somewhere crowded.

.... Looking from the roof of the highest house, I scan the streets.

Don't look!

"—There."

I see a person walking alone.

A woman.

This time, there can be no mistake..

It'll be great if it's Akiha.

Don't look at me.
No, it really doesn't matter.
Once more.
Once more, I want to taste that wonderful sensation—

I kill her from behind, taking care not to damage her body.
Holding her long hair, I drag Akiha's body.

pant—*pant*—*pant*
Biting into Akiha's neck, I suck her blood.

—Boring.
This is nowhere near as exciting as last night.
If her hair is this short, it's not Akiha at all.
"... Boring....!"
I start to get pissed off.
Even though I slice the body into pieces, I'm still mad.
Impostor.
This impostor pisses me off.

Stop watching me!
pant—*pant*—*pant*—

I've used up extra energy.
Soon, dawn will arrive.
Once it becomes morning, Shiki will awaken.

"I'm tired tonight.
I'll start again, tomorrow."
Yeah, that'll do.
That's what I'll do.
Now then.
Before the morning comes, before any one realizes, I must go back to school—

turn to **381**

380

—If I don't sleep tonight, it'll be fine.

".... That's right.

If I don't sleep, and if—"

If there is another victim tomorrow, then for sure, I won't have had anything to do with it.

"—Alright."

I do understand this is a bit off course.

I know it's a bit strange staying here and not sleeping, waiting for someone I do not know to be killed.

"—But, what else can I do?"

Since I—my memory is not to be trusted, there is no other way to do this.

—Anyway.

There is no other way for me to do this than to stay in my room without dreaming and wait until morning.

—Time passes.

I still manage to stay awake.

—Another hour.

I still manage to stay awake.

—An hour.

I still, manage.. to stay awake.

—It is now past one o'clock in the morning.

I.. still manage to stay awake.

—In just four hours, it will be morning.

.... Something is wrong.
I am.. still conscious.. but..

.... My field of vision collapses.

I must stay up.
I am not sleepy yet, but..
Why?
Why?
Why?
Why does my body want to sleep this much—?

pant—*pant*—*pant*
I feel like I am being watched.
I.
With bloodshot eyes, I look at the people walking down the streets.

—Maybe it's because of the time?
Compared to last night, there's hardly anyone around.
.... Someone is watching me.
I can't find what I'm looking for.
Again.
Tonight, I can't find the person I'm looking for.

I'm starting to get annoyed.
I pant heavily.
I should change my spot.
I'm going to stop looking in town.

I go from roof to roof and end up somewhere crowded.
.... Looking from the roof of the highest house, I scan the streets.

Don't look!
"—There."
I see a person walking alone.
A woman.
This time, there can be no mistake..
It'll be great if it's Akiha.

Don't look at me.
No, it really doesn't matter.
Once more.
Once more, I want to taste that wonderful sensation—

I kill her from behind, taking care not to damage her body.
Holding her long hair, I drag Akiha's body.

pant—*pant*—*pant*

Biting into Akiha's neck, I suck her blood.

—Boring.

This is nowhere near as exciting as last night.

If her hair is this short, it's not Akiha at all.

"... Boring....!"

I start to get pissed off.

Even though I slice the body into pieces, I'm still mad.

Impostor.

This impostor pisses me off.

Stop watching me!

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

I've used up extra energy.

Soon, dawn will arrive.

Once it becomes morning, Shiki will awaken.

"I'm tired tonight.

I'll start again, tomorrow."

Yeah, that'll do.

That's what I'll do.

Now then.

Before the morning comes, before any one realizes, I must go back to school—

turn to **381**

381

I cannot wake up.
Immersed in a dark dream, I can't wake up.

—I feel a chill go down my spine.
Without reason, without purpose.
I realize I will never be able to wake from this dream.
"Shiki-sama, please wake up.
You will be late for school."

"——Eh?"
Hisui is in front of me.
This is my room, and there is surprisingly great weather outside.
"Hi... sui?"



"Good morning, Shiki-sama.
You do not have as much time today, so please hurry to the sitting room."
As usual, Hisui speaks in her detached tone.
"Oh——h."
With that, everything disappeared.
I embrace my recently awakened but still throbbing body.
.... I feel relieved.
The awful world I was in until just now has just turned into a dream.
".... Thanks.
If you hadn't woken me up, I might have never woken up."
"Shiki-sama....?
If you are not feeling well, please tell me so."
"No, that's not it.
—Morning, Hisui.
I'm glad that you're here."



"Eh—ah, thank you very much, Shiki-sama."

She blushes slightly and lowers her head.

"No, I'm the one who should be saying thank—it's past seven-thirty already!?"

Sorry, I'll get up, so please go wait in the sitting room!"

"Yes, I will be waiting."

Right as Hisui leaves the room, I change into my school uniform.

Jumping out of bed, I scarf down a little of the breakfast Kohaku-san made and leave the mansion.

It all took me less than ten minutes.

"I'm leaving—see you later, Hisui!"



"Yes, I will be awaiting your return."

"... I made it..."

I breathe out and rest my body.

I made it just in time before they closed the gate, but I still have to make it to class.

"... Whew."

The teacher hasn't arrived in the classroom yet.

I try to catch my breath as I sit down.

... The classroom seems more lively today than usual.

Tomorrow is a holiday, so everyone probably feels like today is a Saturday.

School ends.
Since I don't have any reason to stay at school, I'll head back to the mansion.

".... Yesterday's dream."
This is definitely the place where I saw someone get killed in my dream.
Even though I tried as hard as I could not to dream, I guess you can't run away from yourself.
"—Kk."
I grind my teeth.
I feel pitiful about my weakness.
After all, it's all a dream.
Certainly there is something wrong with me seeing those dreams, but I think I'm still sane.

.... My old man is my old man.
I don't know about the Tohno blood.
But I don't want to become a burden on Akiha and the others while I'm sane.
I have to try and act as normally as possible, and try to find a way to solve all of this—



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
As soon as I open the door, Hisui politely greets me.
"I'm back.
I'll be in my room, so it's okay if you return to whatever you were doing."
"Thank you.
I will return to cleaning the sitting room.
If you need anything, please call for me."

".... Hisui is cleaning the sitting room.."
I don't see Kohaku-san, but she's probably sweeping the rear courtyard or going out to get groceries.
It appears Akiha hasn't come back yet, so I'll go back to my room.

Putting away my bag, I change out of my uniform.
I spend about an hour just sitting around my room.
All of a sudden, I hear a gurgling noise.
It's not a strange noise or anything.
It's just the sound of my stomach.
"... That's right, I didn't really have a chance to eat since this morning."
Not wanting to be late this morning, I was only able to eat just a little of what
Kohaku-san made for breakfast.
I thought about eating at the cafeteria, but I lost my appetite as soon as I
remembered what I saw at the cafeteria yesterday.
"... I wonder if I can get something to snack on before dinner...."
... I really don't want to be a bother, but I'm really starving.

I should—

Get Kohaku-san to make something. turn to **382**

Ask Hisui to make something. turn to **383**

382

.... It is a little selfish, but I'd better ask Kohaku-san to make me something to eat.



"Ah, Shiki-san.
You're back."
Moving the broom off to one side, Kohaku-san bows.
"Yeah, I'm back.
I do have a little favor to ask, though."



"Yes?
Is there something special you need?"
"Um, I'm a little embarrassed, but.."
Before I could even ask her nicely to make me something to eat,
the growling of my stomach rumbles through the courtyard.



"___"

Surprised, Kohaku-san just gapes.

"—Uh."

My face turns red.. I didn't realize my body was that crass..

"... Um, so that's it.

I didn't have much to eat since morning, so I can't wait until dinner.."

"___"

Kohaku-san stares at me wordlessly and then, as if remembering, lets out a little laugh.



"I understand.

So you want me to fix you something light?

Shiki-san, is there something you want in particular?"

"Something I want?"

... To be honest, I was just hungry, and I didn't even think about what I wanted to eat.

"Um... I guess some pancakes would be fine."

I don't know why, but the image of golden pancakes just pops into my head.



"Pancakes....?"

Shiki-san, I've heard that you do not like sweets, but.."

Kohaku-san tilts her head in surprise.

"Ah—no, I don't eat a lot of sugar, but it's not like I don't like it.. I did eat lots of Japanese candy at the Arima's too.."

"Really!?"

If that was the case, you should have told me earlier.

I was wondering all this time if I should get you something during teatime.

But from now on, I'll make you the same thing that I make Akiha-sama."

Kohaku-san's voice suddenly brightens.

.... But eating the same thing as Akiha, does she mean I'll be eating those dainty little shortcakes from now on..?"

"But, Shiki-san, why do you want pancakes?"

If you want, I can fix you something a little better."

"Hm.... no reason, I guess.

I like them because they are pretty simple."



"Ahaha, Shiki-san, you just said the same thing as Hisui-chan.



This is a secret, but I think Hisui-chan really likes pancakes, too.
Whenever she tries to cook something, it's almost always pancakes."

"Really?"

.... That's pretty surprising.

I thought she would like something a little more complex."

Like, a very decorated cake that makes you wonder where to cut it from.

"Isn't it?"

I think it is a little strange too, so I asked her.

She told me it's because I told her that they are very simple to make.

But she says she still can't make it to satisfy her.."

".....?"

.... Um, so it's not that she likes pancakes, but just that she practices making them?



"Ah, sorry Shiki-san.

I will go make you some, so please wait in the sitting room."

With her broom in hand, Kohaku-san hurries toward the rear entrance.

"—Well, whatever."

In any case, I'll get to eat soon.

I'll be able to have some tea and pancakes and then get to rest until dinner—

turn to **384**

383

.... Although I think she'll refuse, I wonder what will happen if I ask Hisui.
".... Hisui's in the sitting room."
I'm a little excited.
I should hurry over and go ask Hisui.



"I refuse."

Not even a second after I ask..
With an incredible counterpunch, she totally knocks out my plan.

"I... I see.
You are a little busy."
Defeated, I slump like a captured soldier.
"Sorry.
Please continue what you were doing."
I slowly start to shuffle my way to the lobby.
"Ah... Please wait, Shiki-sama.
Um.. it is not that I would not like to make you something, but...."
"Eh.....?"
I turn around without even thinking.
Then—



Hisui looks incredibly cute for some reason.

"I, I just thought that since you are used to Nee-san's cooking, my cooking would not even come close.."

Getting, Hisui continues speaking uneasily.

"So I want for you to eat my food when my skill has improved.."

"_____"

Wh... what an amazing thing she says!

That "I refuse" back then was a big shock, but compared to what she just said, it's merely a light jab.

"What are you saying, Hisui?"

I'll eat anything you make, so please don't fret about that sort of thing."



"..... No, I cannot do that.

Shiki-sama, please ask Nee-san about food."

".... No, what I really want is something from you.

If I wanted Kohaku-san's cooking, I'd have gone to her first.

I came here to ask you—cause I wanted your cooking."



Hisui just looks at me, not responding.

"..... Hm."

If that's how she's going to be, then I'll just stay right here in the sitting room until she says she'll make me something.

"...."



"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."
"....."

We continue staring at each other without saying anything.

.... That's odd.

How did we end up like this?

".... I understand.

If you do not mind, then I will make something."

"—!

Yes!

For real, Hisui!?"



"Yes.

But since you insisted, you are bringing this on yourself."

"Eh.....?"

Saying something incredibly ominous, Hisui heads towards the kitchen.

"——He.

Hehe, hehehehehe."

I start chuckling uncontrollably.

In the kitchen behind that wall, Hisui is making food for my sake.

Thinking about it, I can't help but smile.

Even though Kohaku-san prepares food everyday, she does so too professionally; it feels like some other cook is making the food.

On the other hand, I have never seen Hisui's cooking, so I'm pretty excited.

".... Kohaku-san did say that Hisui was poor at cooking though...."

Well, even so, I don't think anything inedible will be the result.

If you have a normal sense of taste, it's impossible to make something that is completely inedible.

....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... But still.

Doesn't she seem to be taking a little too long?

"Kya-!?"

—And then,

I hear a gigantic crash coming from the kitchen.

"Hisui!?"

"What happened, Hisui!?"

I run into the kitchen.

"—Ah."

After entering, I'm a little taken aback.

Hisui might have been planning on cooking a feast as ingredients are stacked all about the kitchen.

A kitchen knife is thrust into the cutting board like a gravestone or like that holy sword from somewhere.

And on the stove, black smoke billows from a frying pan.

"Um.... Hisui?"



"....."

Hisui embarrassedly hangs her head.

"Um, Hisui.

I would have been happy with something light.

Something simple, like a pancake."



".... Shiki-sama, you may say that, but a pancake is not very simple."

Hisui says so from the bottom of her heart.

.... Geez.

Hisui really IS pretty poor at cooking—

"Hisui, let me see your hand."



"Eh.... My hand?"

Hisui reluctantly shows me her hand.

"Just as I thought.

You cut yourself, didn't you?"

".... Yes.

Forgive me, I was not even able to fix you anything properly, and now I have shown you this pathetic sight."

"Don't be stupid, that's not what I'm trying to say.

If you cut yourself, you shouldn't force—"

She shouldn't force herself, she should treat her wounds.

".... Shiki-sama?"

Hisui's white finger is painted a deep red.

Her fingertip, wet with the color red.

"—This is bad.

That's pretty deep."

Saying that, I take her arm.



"—!"

Hisui's body flinches noticeably.

I don't even notice.

The only thing I care about right now is treating her cut.

"Ah—"

Hisui's voice.

—I don't even hear it.

Just like back when I was a kid, I place the finger in my mouth and lick the blood.

"..... Shiki-sama."

—Her slender finger.

Red blood does not suit her white finger at all.

So I only thought to make her finger clean again.

".... Please stop, Shiki.. sama...."

—Why is it?

Hisui's blood is extremely—

"..... Ah."

—sweet.

Her blood is sweet, and just from doing this, my body starts to feel hot and—

"....."

—I can't hear her voice.

Looking up, I see Hisui's face.

Blushing cheeks.

Deep blue eyes.

.... Years ago, the red hair that was so close to me.

"—!"

I pull back from Hisui.

What.. what was I doing just now—



Hisui just hangs her head, not moving.

"..... Ah."

I—even though Hisui hates to be in contact with men, I licked her finger—and I sucked her blood for a long time.

".... I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have done that—"

I really shouldn't have done that.

It's not just in a dream anymore, is it?

Enjoying sucking someone's blood, it's not just in my dreams—



"... All you were doing was taking care of my wound.
There is no need to apologize."
"—No, I—"

—I can't do it.
I can't look at her face.
The taste of her blood still lingers in my mouth.
I can't forget the feeling of her finger.

"—I'm sorry.
I know I asked for it myself, but I'll be just fine without any food.
I'm going back to my room—let me be by myself."



Hisui doesn't say anything.
Escaping from her wordless stare, I flee to my room.

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After dinner is over, I head to the sitting room to have some tea.
.... Not that I'm in the mood to elegantly drink tea, but I can't exactly refuse Akiha and Kohaku-san's invitation.
While drinking the tea that Kohaku-san made, I listen to the conversation between the two.



"By the way, Nii-san, about the end of this year.."
And, Akiha suddenly directs the conversation toward me.
"The end of the year?
Aren't you thinking about it a little early?
It's only October."



"What are you saying?
Pretty soon it will be November, and once it becomes December, it'll be time for winter vacation already.
It makes sense to plan this early."
".... Well, I guess you're right.
What do you all plan to do?
I usually just do the same old thing for New Year's—"



"Yes, I've heard from Mrs. Arima that whenever you have a long holiday, you spend it at your friend's house."

Akiha stares at me as if she wants to say something.

.... Uh, how does Akiha know about all these things?

".... What's wrong with that?

Holidays are meant to be spent however you want, and I'm not being a burden to you all, so leave me alone."



"Oh my, Shiki-san, you're not going to take a trip?"

".... Now look.

I'm only a student, so I don't have any money for a trip.

Well, I do want to get a part-time job but—"



"Nii-san.

You would know what would happen if the eldest son of the Tohno household goes out for a part-time job, right?"

"Kohaku-san, I can't have fun like a high schooler with this evil teacher."



"Well, I suppose that can't be helped.

But Shiki-san, you really don't want to go on a trip?

I already made reservations for Akiha-sama, you, Hisui-chan, and myself."

"Eh—reservations?

Where..?"

"The hotel where we take our winter trip.

Since you prefer Japanese things, we decided to keep our trip within the country, right, Akiha-sama?"



"Y, you're the one that said it, Kohaku.

I just approved it."



"Hmph," Akiha looks away.



"Yes, of course it was.
So, please leave your schedule open for the end of the year, Shiki-san.
Hisui-chan told me that if you go, she will go too.



Do you understand?
This would be the first time ever for Hisui-chan to go on a trip.
She's always staying at the mansion, and never goes out."

"....."

.... Um, it's a problem for you to say such things all of a sudden.
Well, taking a trip as a family.. I haven't actually done that before, so—



"Wh, what is it, Nii-san?"

I, I won't force you, so if you have other plans, please just let us know."

"No, I'll come along.

If I refuse your invitation, who knows what you'll do to me?"



"I have been saying this isn't my idea....!"

I don't really.... care either way."

"Yeah, of course not.

.... Anyways, thanks.

.... Going on a trip with everyone actually does sound fun."



".... You don't have to thank me.

It's only natural for a family to go on a trip together."

Akiha sniffs and turns her head.

Now that the main conversation ends, tea time ends quietly.

It's time to sleep.

.... Thanks to the discussion in the sitting room, I actually feel more relaxed right now.

".... End of the year trip, huh."

I can't imagine what the trip will be like, but there's no doubt that it will be fun.

"—Phew."

Taking a deep breath, I jump into bed.

At least for tonight..

I wish to not see that dream as I close my eyes.

.... I'm in a dark place.

It must be cloudy.

There's no moonlight tonight, and I can't see anything.

—*pant*—*pant*—*pant*—

My breath echoes in the air.

I'm not killing anyone tonight.

Instead, I'm breaking a doll.

—*pant*—*pant*—*pant*—

I grab the arm.
I don't care if it comes off so I hold nothing back.
I pull the body and continue to violate the doll.

-*pant*—-*pant*—*pant*—

I've gotten tired of this.
This person doesn't do anything.
It doesn't even scream, so I don't feel anything.
I violate it just to slake my lust.
.... The wind blows.
The clouds shift slightly.

The nighttime classroom.
There, a beautiful doll exists.

-*pant*—-*pant*—*pant*—

The doll doesn't say anything.
It doesn't even move by itself.

Even when hard meat is put in between its legs, it doesn't move.
—With something like this, I can't get excited.
No matter how beautiful it is, a doll can't ever be a fitting companion.

—*pant*—*pant*—*pant*—
But, her feeling is exceptional.
No matter how many times I violate it, I never get bored of its body.
The body shakes as I move it.
The doll's eyes are not looking at me.
The empty eyes are just reflecting the moon, I suppose.

—This piece of trash starts to piss me off.
"—Very soon.."

The brows on the doll twitch a little.

"—Soon, I'll kill."

Redness starts to enter the frozen face.

"—Soon, I will return."

"..... Ku."
I feel dizzy.
Right now—I can't bring myself to look at her face.
But I can't bear to go back to my room without saying anything.
If Hisui tried to wake me up as usual—I think this sickness would have been a bit better.
"... Hisui."
Hisui realizes I'm here and quietly walks over to me.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
"... Ah, morning.
Sorry for waking up at a selfish time."



"I apologize as well.
I should have been there when you awoke.
Please forgive me."
Hisui silently bows her head.
.... Hisui's expressionless face.
Remembering last night's dream, I start to feel guilty.



"... No, there's no need for you to apologize.
I didn't wake up at the usual time, so it's my fault.
It's better if you complain to me a bit."
... If you do that, I'd feel a little better.



"Shiki-sama....?"
But, that's just my selfish thoughts.
Like right now, my words are making her feel bad.
"It's nothing, forget about it."
... More importantly, I'm kinda' hungry; is breakfast ready?"



"... Nee-san went outside.
Your breakfast is ready in the dining room."
"Oh.
In that case, I'll go have some food."

Sorry to bother you while you were working."
After saying a quick goodbye, I head towards the dining room.

I go back to my room, but I don't really have anything to do here.
I've had my fill of sleeping.
Thinking about what I should do next, I decide to walk around the mansion.

I arrive at the lobby.
For some reason, I aimlessly wander around the mansion to confirm my childhood memories.

The hallway stretches quite a long distance.
When I was a child, I believed that this hallway would go on forever.
The mansion seemed as large as a castle, and every day, I would walk a bit around the mansion and would carve my name on the wall, the pillars, or the floor.
It was sort of a game I would play with Akiha to see who could take over the mansion.

Saying that wherever we put our names became our territory, the two of us walked around the mansion carving our names here and there.

"... Here."
On the handrail by the stairs is carved the name SHIKI.
It was probably because of these games that my old man forbade us from playing inside the mansion.
Anyway, if I look closely, I can see both mine and Akiha's name all over the place.

I go outside.
... Come to think of it, most of the time we spent playing was in the garden.
Since Akiha was obedient to the old man, unlike me, she could only play outside for about thirty minutes a day.
And still, she usually just stayed behind us, watching and listening.
But she would energetically run out with us and compete with us in whatever games we would play.
"... Perhaps her personality stems from those times?"
She might have suppressed herself in front of the old man.

On the walls of the mansion, the carved names appear again.
Shiki, Shiki, Akiha, SHIKI, Akiha, SHIKI, Akiha, Shiki, Shiki, SHIKI, Shiki.
The ratios are like that, and the name SHIKI appeared far more times.
I suppose Akiha was just a girl so she couldn't keep up with a boy.

"Kohaku-san...?"
As I come to the backyard, I see Kohaku-san's figure from behind.
She hasn't noticed me.

I don't know what she's doing, but she disappears into the forest.
"?"

A bit curious, I follow her from a slight distance.

—And.

Where Kohaku-san headed to, there seems to be a small clearing.

"..... There's a clearing there....?"

Tilting my head to the side, I try to remember, but for some reason, my memory is a bit vague.

In the forest of the mansion, I can see a clearing as if the trees were cut there.

—No, "can see" is not quite right.

If you walked by normally, you probably would never notice it.

If Kohaku-san didn't walk there, hidden enough by the surrounding trees as it is, I would never have noticed even if I lived here all my life.

".... That's odd.

I don't remember a clearing ever being here."

To say the least, I don't remember ever playing with Akiha in the clearing.

—I feel like I've never, been there, before.

"....."

After thinking for a bit, I decide to go into the clearing.

.... The clearing doesn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.

There's no sign of Kohaku-san, who entered before me.

"What's this—just an empty place."

I walk to the middle of the clearing.

This clearing really is just an empty space.

The perfectly level open ground.

The deep woods enclose the area.

The voice of the cicadas.

And the strong, summer sunshine that feels like it could dissolve—

"Eh.....?"

Summer, sunshine—?

"Ou—ouch...."

The wound on my chest starts to hurt.

Like / Stabbing.

This pain / that feels like / a kitchen knife stabbing my chest.

Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp—

—From somewhere, I can hear the voice of cicadas.

But, it's autumn now.

—The summer sunshine that bathes everything in white.

The columns of summer clouds in the far off sky.
I can practically see the voices.
At my feet, there are the discarded shells of cicadas.
Discarded shell.
Someone's—discarded shell.

"—————....."

My wound opens.

My chest becomes painted a dark crimson; black vermillion soaks both my hands—

.... Someone's crouched silhouette.
The approaching footsteps of a young girl.
The columns of clouds in the far sky.
The discarded shells of cicadas.
I suddenly realize,
in front of me is the crying face of Akiha, drenched in blood.

Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.
Chiiirp.
Chirp Chirp.

—Ah.
Voices which try to pierce my eardrums,
voices of the cicadas.

"Ah—gu."
My chest hurts.
I feel sick.
My wound healed a long time ago, so why does it hurt so much?

My chest is broken.
The old wound opens, blood flows forth from the opening.

—What is this?
My wound, it hasn't healed at all.

My consciousness sinks.
My wound hurts.

Right before I pass out, I remember a terrible image.

A hot summer day.
Akiha stained in blood and myself staring down at her.

The silhouette licks the blood off its hands.
.... Then, the silhouette becomes my face as a young boy, laughing with
pleasure—

.... I can hear voices talking.
"Akiha-sama, are you not going to call for a doctor?"
"Don't be stupid, Hisui.
There's no way I could do that, since Nii-san's wound isn't normal....!"
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping in the bed.
I planned to say "Yo!" and get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My chest doesn't hurt anymore, but my body feels as heavy as lead.
All I can move are my eyes and mouth.



"Just what in the world were you trying to do, Hisui?
You know not to let Shiki go near that place...!"



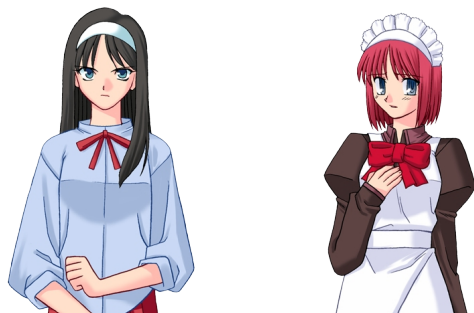
"Please.... forgive me."
"This can't be solved by apologizing.
You were assigned to serve Nii-san to avoid this kind of situation.
So what were you doing....!?"
Completely different from her usual manner, Akiha gives full vent to her anger.
In comparison, Hisui is accepting the scolding, looking down silently.



"What about Kohaku?
Didn't I give her orders too?
Not to let Nii-san out of her sight?"
"Nee-san-is not here."
"Not here.... what do you mean by that?"

Hisui doesn't answer.
Akiha grinds her teeth.

—Not here?
What is she saying?
Kohaku-san was in the rear courtyard right now—



"Akiha-sama.
We should stop doing this."
"—Hisui."
"He is different.
He is a different person.
This mansion, it is not good for him.
So, we should stop doing this."
"I don't want to hear those words!"



"No, that is why I must say them.
You realize it, too.
At this rate, Shiki-sama will really become a killer."

—Just now, what did Hisui say?
".... Are you saying his Tohno blood is awakened in this mansion?
That's ridiculous.
It's impossible for that to happen to Nii-san."
".... You are right.
He is just like us, with Makihisa-sama's choice—"
In that instant.
Smack!
The sound of a cheek being slapped echoes throughout the room.



"I've told you that I won't allow anyone to say that."



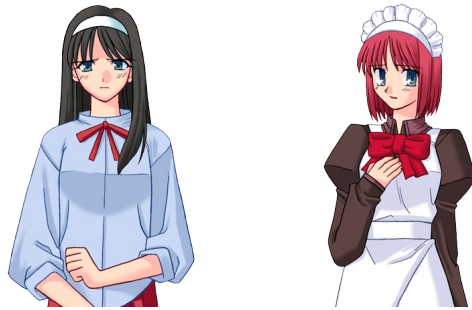
"....."

The two become silent.
The air between the two of them increases in tension.

.... Hisui stands painfully with her head down.
I don't understand why Akiha is so angry, but I don't want to see Hisui in pain any longer.
"Ugh."
Somehow, I manage to shift my body.



"... Hisui, I leave the rest to you.
If Nii-san wakes, take care of what he needs."



"Akiha-sama, are you okay with this?"
"Yes.
If I'm here, Nii-san will just get weaker."

Akiha leaves the room with an extremely painful smile on her face.
"....."
Well, what should I do now?
Maybe it's better if I just pretend that I haven't woke up yet—



"Shiki-sama, I think it is safe now for you to open your eyes."
"... Oh, you knew, Hisui."



"Yes, Akiha-sama did not realize it but.... Ever since a long time ago, she has never been good at being able to see through someone who is acting."

Hisui speaks reluctantly.

".... Is that so?"

But you are pretty perceptive."



".... I do not know.

Since I cannot understand the heart of the person I want to know the most about, I do not think I am very perceptive."

"I see.."

Nodding, I somehow get the feeling she's talking about Kohaku-san.



".... Hisui, you mentioned it earlier, but where did Kohaku-san go?"



".... I am sorry.
I, do not know about Nee-san very well."
"....."
Something about that response is not right.
But what's not right, I can't seem to grasp it right now.

As I am doing this right now.
My body is sluggish, and it takes all my strength just to talk.



"Shiki-sama, are you not pushing yourself?"
".... To tell the truth, I feel extremely sluggish.
Just what in the world happened to me?"
".... Shiki-sama, we found you collapsed in the rear courtyard.
It did not seem like your normal anemia, so we contacted Akiha-sama and
brought you to your room."

.... Collapsed.
In the rear courtyard.
The white summer sunshine, and the voice of cicadas.
"—I remember.
I was standing, and then I got real dizzy.

Geez, I haven't had it this bad since elementary school."

"... I thought that I should call the doctor, but Akiha-sama wanted us to wait and see."

"... Yeah, Akiha's right.

This is more like a mental thing, so calling the doctor wouldn't have helped.

How long was I out?"

"... I found you after noon, so approximately twelve hours."

"Th—that long!?"

Surprised, I look at the clock.

But, my body doesn't move.



"It is now midnight.

I will watch over you tonight, so please, if you need anything, do not hesitate to ask."

"O... okay.

I appreciate it."

—I was unconscious for half a day, I haven't done that since that accident.

Furthermore, after sleeping for so long, my body is still wanting more sleep.

"... I'm sorry.

I'm so sleepy..."

"Then please go to sleep.

I will be in the hallway, so if anything happens, I will be there."

"... What... are you saying?"

I can't let someone taking care of me wait out in the hallway... I have to ask, Hisui... you stay.. right.. here."

—Damn it, I can't continue.

I feel as if I'm falling into a tank of water.

My consciousness ceases abruptly.

——I saw a dream.

It was a dark night.
In the middle of the night, I thought I heard a noise and I woke up.
The tatami room was otherwise empty.
It seems at some point, all the adults went outside.
I was a little uneasy all by myself.
I went outside to the garden to see where they went.

The night itself feels frozen by the winter cold.
My breath hangs white in the air.
The garden is cold, but at the same time, the sky was beautiful.
The expression "freezing cold" seems to have been made up just for this winter night.
The cold stars.
The deep darkness.
Illuminating this world is the lifeless moonlight.

For a child like myself, the mansion's garden is too big.
A dense forest encloses the garden.
The mansion is deep in the mountains, and to be honest, is no place for anyone to live.

The mansion is in the very heart of a dark forest.
It is..
like the light of a luminescent fish at the bottom of the ocean.

The darkness of the forest swells deeply.
The trees are like a black curtain trying to reach for the moon.
I heard a noise, and was convinced the adults must have gone into the forest.
I enter the forest.

Not even a single ray of light exists in this darkness.
Unable to even see my own body, I walk towards the sound.
It's just cold.
Even my eyes become numb.
I feel as if someone is calling my name.

A reed warbler's cry.
The swaying grass.
There, I met a red demon.
The demon does not seem to be interested in me.
At the same time, I am not concerned with the demon either.
Crimson.
Red.
Vermillion.
I walk past the field that has turned into a crimson sea.

The trees part into a clearing.
There, the scattered corpses of all the adults are littered all over the ground.
The dark ground is bathed in poisonous red, as if the entire world was bleeding.

——That is.

In the middle of the bleeding earth, the enemy that slaughtered the adults
is standing there.

——The very first nightmare.

The enemy approaches to kill even me.
My mother dies, protecting me.

—Blood splatters onto my face.

In the middle of this frigid night.
That warmth.

—The first hated color.

The claws of the enemy pierce my chest.
Maybe I was numb from the coldness.
I didn't really feel much pain.

—I look up at the heavens.

The whole world starts to melt away.
There, the unchanging, pale darkness.

—How beautiful.

The ephemeral glass moon.

Ah—I didn't realize it.

Tonight,

The moon is so—beautiful—

..... A door
closes softly and my consciousness separates from my memories.
My heart surfaces.
Reality is on the surface.

—And I wake from the old dream.

"Huh?
.... Why?"
Touching my cheeks, I realize I was crying.
I don't know what was so painful, or what was so sad.
Only, the feeling that I just lost something extremely important remains in my heart.

"Was it a nightmare?"

I think this is different than those dreams where I killed people.
But it was the first time that I slept so well in many days.
Maybe it was because Hisui was watching me the whole time.
"... Hisui?"
I lift my body and look around the room.
I don't see Hisui anywhere.
The sound I heard of a door closing was probably her leaving the room just a second ago.
Anyway, it is now morning.
Today is Friday, so I should go to school.
"I have to get up."
Maybe it's the aftereffects of yesterday, but I feel a little nauseous when I stand up.

"I should change.... What's this, my clothes aren't ready?"

It seems like Hisui went to pick up my uniform.
Which means she should return soon.

".... Hu.... h?"

All of a sudden, all strength drains from my body and I collapse.
It feels just like the normal dizziness—only I can't get back up.
I can't put any power into my arms or legs.
I can barely move my arm, but I can't even get up from the ground.
"... This can't be happening."
I desperately try to get up.
But I can't move.
I can't even do a single push-up from here.
"Geez.... looks like my condition is still pretty bad."

Floundering around on the carpet, I take in my situation.
It's obvious that I won't be able to get up no matter how hard I try.
It's not that I'm in so much pain, so I should feel better if I lay here for a while.



"Shiki-sama, I have your clothes ready."
Hisui opens the door and walks into my room.



"—Shiki-sama!?"
Hisui's voice rings out like a scream, and her footsteps rush toward me.



"Shiki-sama, please hold on, Shiki-sama....!"
Hisui frantically calls my name.
"Hey, morning Hisui.
I just fell down a little, so there's no need to panic."
"Just fell down—what are you saying, Shiki-sama, you.... !"

"I'm fine.
If you let me up, I will be fine."
"As you wish—"
Hisui immediately stoops down and reaches her hand to my shoulder.



"Ah...."
Hisui suddenly stops her hand.
With a strained face, Hisui desperately reaches out her hand with all her will, sweat appearing on her forehead.

But that is all she can do.
Biting her lip, Hisui tries frantically to touch my shoulder, but she just stands there, shaking uncontrollably.
".... I see.
No, don't push yourself, Hisui.
Just go get Kohaku-san and it'll be fine."



"....."
Hisui nods and runs out of the room.
"... What was that all about?
Hisui's obsession about cleanliness looks pretty bad."
Collapsed on the floor, I carelessly voice my thoughts.

Kohaku-san arrives soon and lends me her shoulder.
.... Actually, since I don't have any power, Kohaku-san does most of the work.

Probably because I'm so weak, but Kohaku-san has the gall to say that I'm as light as a girl.

"That's strange... there's nothing wrong, but my body just won't move."



"I see, you do not seem sick, but I can't say anything unless we wait a while. But your face looks fine. I think you will recover soon."

Still smiling, Kohaku-san takes my temperature. Because of her smile, I do feel a little more at ease, but....



Hisui has a clouded expression. Even right now, she seems to be hiding behind Kohaku-san and looks at me occasionally.



"Nii-san....!"

—And.

With a bit of a panic, Akiha bursts into the room.

"Yo.

You're pretty energetic this morning, Akiha."

I raise my hand to greet her.



"Wha—"

After seeing my face, her expression transforms into surprise.

"What's with this exaggeration?"

I'm fine, so don't make such a scary face.

If you do that, I'll be the one to start worrying."



"That.... may be true, but—"

Akiha stares at me with a pale face.

I really am fine, but it seems like Hisui and Akiha honestly think that I am deathly ill or something.
".... Do I look that bad right now?"



"No, Shiki-san.
You look like you always do.



But still, your body is not fully recovered so I think you should take the day off.
I'll go call your school to let them know."



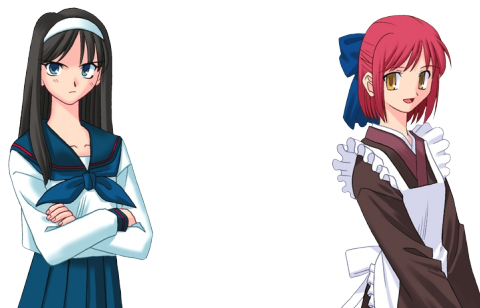
".... Yes.
Please call the doctor as well.
He can perform a more thorough examination."
"A thorough examination?"

.... I don't think I really need that."



"—Nii-san, if you don't care for an examination, maybe we should check you into a hospital instead?"

"Ah.... No, an examination will be fine."



"Alright.

Kohaku, Hisui, please take care of Nii-san.

Since he does not seem to concern himself with his health, please do that for him."



Akiha gives severe instructions and departs the room.



"In that case, I'll use the telephone, okay?"

Kohaku-san leaves the room as well.
The only ones left are me lying on the bed, and Hisui.
"Hisui?"



".... Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"
"I'm fine, so you can go back to your duties.
Since I can't really move, it's not like I'll be going anywhere."
"....."
Hisui does not even budge a single step.
".... Hisui?"
"What's wrong, you've been acting a little strange.
If you feel sick, go ahead and rest; I don't mind."
"....."
Hisui stands there in silence.
.... And then.
All of a sudden, as if making up her mind, Hisui says,



"... Shiki-sama, you are not mad?"
"Wha..?"
Mad about what?"



"Of what happened before.
... Even though I should take care of you, I could not even help you..."
"—Hisui."
... I am shocked.
I didn't even think about that.
"Well, it was a bit of a surprise.
I thought that you would be able to help me right away, but it ended up being
Kohaku-san."



"....."
"But I don't care about that."

You may not realize it, Hisui, but you have already helped me so much. Compared to that, what happened earlier is nothing."



".... Really?
I do not think I am very useful."
"You don't understand, it seems.
I'm able to be calm right now because of you being here.
.... It's more than you looking after me; if you weren't here, I don't know what I would do."



"....?
Because of me?"
"Of course.
Ever since I came here, I've been uneasy, and always had these nightmares. But when you say good morning to me every day, I'm able to be at peace. —Therefore, you have helped me so many times. Like today, when you came, it made me happy."



"Eh... Ah, thank you very much."

"Um, that's how it is.

Even if you can't touch me, your words reach me, don't they?

Just that makes me happy enough.

Hisui, you are extremely helpful."



"Um.... are you serious?"

"I'm very serious.

As proof, I don't feel like it's morning yet.

It's because even though I said it, you haven't said it yet."



"_____"

Hisui looks at me timidly and takes a small breath.



"... Yes, good morning, Shiki-sama."

She blushes a bit as she says the words she forgot to say this morning.

"That's the thing.

Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, so don't worry about it.

Hisui, as long as you do what you do, everything will be alright."

"....."

Hisui does not respond.

She just looks at me as if she is deep in thought.

"Ah-, if you stare at me like that, I'll start to get nervous, Hisui."



"Y, yes, forgive me."

After saying that, Hisui starts to escape towards the door.



"Please excuse me.

It appears that Nee-san has contacted the doctor, so he should be here soon."

Bowing quickly, Hisui swiftly heads out the door.

It was my fault for thinking that a thorough examination would be just taking blood pressure and a few measurements. Being a rich family's doctor, the doctor brings a lot of equipment and sets up an examination room next to mine.

After an exhaustive evaluation, the doctor leaves after noon.

Leaning on Kohaku's shoulder, I stumble back to my room.

All in all, everything took about four hours.

"..... Whew."

Lying on my bed, I give a little sigh.

Even after the examination, he did not find anything wrong with me.

.... Well, ever since the accident eight years ago and my miraculous recovery, the doctor has always blamed any mysterious symptoms upon it.

Well, the best policy is just to sleep here in bed.

I thought maybe I should get an IV or something, but if there's nothing wrong with my body, he said it's better if I don't take any medicine.

"Shiki-saaan, I'm coming in."



Kohaku-san enters my room.

She carries something like rice porridge on a tray.

"You haven't had anything since this morning, right?"

It is a little late, but I brought you something to eat."

"Oh.

Thanks, Kohaku-san."

"Not at all, this is my job, after all."

Kohaku-san walks right next to my pillow, humming merrily as she holds the spoon.

"Um, Kohaku-san?"



"Yes, please open your mouth wide."

With a big smile, she asks me to do something extremely embarrassing.

"..... Eh?"

Not quite understanding the situation, I just open my mouth.

And then, after cooling down the rice in the spoon, she sticks the spoon in my mouth.

—With her open hand she holds my jaw and moves it up and down.

"... Kohaku-san, is this some sort of joke?"



"Not at all.

Shiki-san, you are sick, so it is only natural that I help you to eat."

Smiling, Kohaku-san proceeds to attack me a second time.

"Gw—"

This time, I am able to swallow it by myself.

"Good job!

Keep it up, Shiki-san."

"Wa, wait a second, Kohaku-san....!"

I may be sick, but it's just my anemia.

I can handle feeding myself....!"

"Sure, sure, now please calm down.

I'm used to things like this."

Kohaku-san gives a pleased giggle and starts to attack me a third time.

"Nn—"

She puts the spoon into my mouth forcefully, and I can't help but just swallow

it down.

"How does it taste?"

I heard that when you lived with the Arimas you liked plum porridge."

".... Yes, it is very tasty."



"That's good.

Then please, eat as much as you like."

Kohaku-san appears to be having a fun time.

".... Haa."

It seems whatever I say will have no effect.

I give up and let Kohaku-san do what she wants.

....

.....

..... I'm so embarrassed.

I'm embarrassed, but I suppose I'm a little happy as well.

Kohaku-san's cooking is so delicious, and I finish pretty quickly.



"By the way, Shiki-san, how do you feel?"

"I'm fine.

It just feels like my regular anemia."

"Is that so?"

When you were a child, you received a serious injury here, too, so please do not push yourself."

Kohaku-san says this as she straightens up the dishes.
"—Kohaku-san, what is that supposed to mean?"
"Eh?
That just means that you were in an accident and were really injured eight years ago, right?
I heard that's why you were adopted by the Arimas: to help to get better."
"That's true, but that's not what I meant.... you said that I got injured here at the mansio—"

—In the first place.
Just where did I get into the accident that almost killed me?

The near fatal wound from my childhood.
The accident that caused me to be able to see death's lines.
Just how in the world did it happen,
and where in the world did I get in that accident,
I don't remember anything at all—



"Shiki-san?
Is something wrong?"
"Eh.... Ah, it's nothing.
I don't think you'd understand even if I told you."

—But what I remembered yesterday,
it might be something that has to do with the accident eight years ago.

That time, I think—there was Akiha, myself, and one more person there—



"I will go and take care of these dishes then."

Kohaku-san tries to leave the room.

"Wait a sec, Kohaku-san.

Back then, we played a lot together, didn't we?

At that time, was there someone else with us?"

Kohaku-san stops in her tracks.



"We played, a lot, together...?"

She laughs.

As if remembering the past, her nostalgic laughs echoes in the room coldly.



"Hmm, maybe it is your imagination?

Maybe Hisui-chan might have been with you or something."

"Ah, maybe that's it.

That could be it."
 "Of course.
 Well then, I will see you later."

Kohaku-san carries the dishes and leaves the room.

"——Well."
 Having eaten, I feel pretty sleepy.
 There isn't anything else to do, so I guess I should just sleep a little—

—All of a sudden, I find myself in an unknown place.
 This place—looks like a basement that hasn't been used for a long time.
 Desks and chairs are strewn about.
 In the back of the room are discarded broken chalkboards and folding chairs.
 The sun's rays cannot reach this place.
 In this dark basement that smells like mold, I just breathe in and out.

Sitting on top of a desk, hugging my knees.
 The dead body of a new woman is laying on the floor.

The sound of my breathing.

It's ragged.
 That thing is thinking that it does not have enough blood.
 That thing is thinking that it wants to eat fresh meat.
 I'm thinking that I want to kill people.

pant *pant* *pant*

pant *pant* *pant*
 pant *pant* *pant*

Our breathing matches rhythm.

"Who is it—!"
 Raising my voice, I look around.
 In this basement, there is no one else.

pant *pant* *pant*
 pant *pant* *pant*
 pant *pant* *pant*

"Damn it, it's you again!"

It shouts this at me.
 "I won't....!"

I took this woman myself!
I won't give her to you."

Saying that, it bites into the dead body.

Munch.
Squish, rip.
The sound of intestines being chewed.
——Exhaling.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*
My breathing gets ragged.
Somehow.
Just like that thing's breathing, my breathing starts to get wild as well.

"I'll kill you."

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

"Soon, soon, I'll, kill, you."

As if it lost its mind, it starts to wolf down everything, even the bones.



"Shiki-sama, are you sleeping?"

"Eh—?"

Suddenly, Hisui appears in front of me.

"Hisui... when did you come in?"



"When... you ask?
It has been about five minutes since I finished changing your sheets."
"Oh.
Sorry, I was sleeping and didn't notice you come in."



"... Shiki-sama, please do not joke around.
You accepted me coming into the room, and you ordered me to change the sheets."
"Wha——"
What's going on?
Up until now, I was asleep, had another nightmare, and I woke up to Hisui's voice...
"... Hisui.
Did I look like I was awake?"



".... Yes.

After I changed the sheets, you closed your eyes, which is why I inquired if you were sleeping."

"—No, I won't sleep anymore right now."

Somehow responding, I look at my hand.

.... Lifting my hand is still difficult.

I haven't gotten even the slightest bit better.

My heavy body.

My body—the body of Tohno Shiki, feels like it belongs to some other person.

".... I'll be awake for a while.

Do you have work after this?"



"No, today I will be watching over you.... If it is alright with you, I would like to take care of you, Shiki-sama."

I can't help but be grateful.

If Hisui is here, I probably won't see nightmares like the one I saw before.

".... That's exactly what I wish, Hisui.

If I am not a burden to you, please stay in my room."



"—Yes.

Then I shall do so, Shiki-sama."



After giving a bow, Hisui stands and watches me intently.

"Um, you don't have to concentrate so hard.

I would be happier if you maybe just bring in a chair and read a book or something.

I'm just going to kill some time too."



"Ah... yes, as you wish."

Hisui quickly leaves the room.

I'm sure she will come back with a book and a chair, just like I suggested.

"You're pretty dutiful, aren't you, Hisui?"

I laugh a little as I say this.

It feels like ages since the time I met Hisui again and thought that she was simply a cold, expressionless girl.

Well, that's all I thought back then, but now—I think I understand Hisui a little better.

"—C'mon, Hisui, hurry back."

Leaning on the bed, I really do mean this.

If she's going to be around, being sick like I am right now doesn't sound bad at all.

Hisui nursing me turns out to be her just being with me.

Not being able to touch someone of the opposite gender, Hisui can't really take care of me physically.

Taking my temperature or wiping the sweat off my brow is Kohaku-san's role,

and Hisui just stays by me, listening to me when I ask for anything, like something to drink.

But that doesn't mean that I'm dissatisfied.

It's not that she was always there, but she was there most of the time.

Thanks to that, I didn't see any terrible dreams.

It becomes a little before ten o'clock, right before bedtime.



"Nii-san, how are you feeling?"

Akiha comes to see how I'm doing.

"Yeah, I feel fine.

Even though I still can't move my body freely, I think I'll be better tomorrow.

This kind of thing happened to me once before, and it's exactly the same as back then."



"—I'm glad to hear it.

It makes me feel a little more at ease."

Akiha exhales and visibly relaxes.



"Good night, Nii-san.
Ah, but even if you feel better, don't strain yourself.
It wouldn't do you any good to get hurt again."
"I know that.
.... G'night, Akiha.
Thanks for all of your concern."



"Eh.... Well, we are brother and sister, it's only natural..."



Anyway, please take care.
I do not want to see you collapsed again tomorrow."

With a light smile, Akiha exits the room.

"___"

It is time for bed.
If I can't move, I can't go out anywhere.
I have to get enough sleep and make sure that I'll be better tomorrow.
Not thinking of anything, I decide to sleep for tonight.

The light from the window wakes me up.
"—I didn't have any dreams."
It really was just a sleep without dreams, good or bad.
Thanks to that, I don't feel bad at all.
Today's Saturday, so I should probably thank Hisui and Kohaku-san for taking care of me.
It's only just past six.
All I did was lie down yesterday, so I don't feel tired anymore.
"—Time to get up!"
I get up from bed.

"—Eh?"
My body doesn't move at all.
.... I haven't healed at all.
If anything, it's worse.
Yesterday, I could move my arms, but today I can't even do that.
"—Kk—"
I try to bring my arm straight up.
....
.....
.....
"—Ha... ah."
I finally manage to do so.
Using all of my strength, it takes me about a full minute.
"... What's going on?"
It's like my body is dead.
Or more like a robot out of gas.
At any rate, my body won't move.
At the same time, I am fully conscious, and I don't feel any pain.
"Hey, Hisui—Kohaku-san—"

I was going to tell them to come here, but I stop.
I can speak, but using a loud voice makes me extremely dizzy.
.... It almost feels like a loud voice uses too much muscle, placing too much strain on the blood flow to the brain.
"Ha—"
I breathe out.
I guess all I can do is just wait for Hisui to come wake me up.

—After that, it's pretty much like yesterday morning.

Since I was already in bed, it went by just a bit faster than yesterday.
After coming to wake me up, a pale-faced Hisui called for Kohaku-san, who did a little check up.
Hearing this, Akiha once again ran into my room, called the same doctor as yesterday, who did the same examination, and I end up resting in bed.
... Since sleeping in bed all day makes me pretty sick, I am now leaning my upper body on the headboard.



"Shiki-sama, did you say something?"

"N...?"

No, I was just zoning out.

I didn't say anything."



"——"

"Hey, what's with that expression?"

I told you that I'm not in any pain or anything, so you don't need to worry."



"... I am very sorry, Shiki-sama."
"I told you it's alright.... Geez, you really are worrisome.
Well, I guess you two really are sisters.
You're a lot like Kohaku-san in that way."



"Eh—I'm like Nee-san?"
Hisui asks, very surprised.
.... Well, I wasn't referring to appearance, as that's pretty obvious.
"Yeah, it's a pretty old story.
Did you know that Kohaku-san has acted like an older sister since we were small?
Whenever Akiha or I would get hurt, Kohaku-san would get so worried.
.... No, it's fine if it was only when we were hurt, but even when we were not feeling well, she would be very fussy, telling us to go to sleep, go to sleep."



"Eh.... She was really, that fussy?"
 "Yeah, I felt pretty bashful when she'd do it.
 Hmm, when was it?
 I remember once when I caught a cold, I wanted to play anyway.
 Kohaku-san, she would keep telling me to go to bed over and over.
 Eventually, she won and I went back to my room, but after that, she came into
 my room and lay a wet towel on me.
 I really thought she would smother me to death."



".....,"
 "Come to think of it, this time around, I think Kohaku-san wasn't worried as
 much as I thought, but maybe she wanted to act as a nurse or something.
 She really did seem to enjoy it."
 ".....,"
 "Ah, but I don't mean I didn't like what Kohaku-san did.
 I liked what she would do, and playing with Akiha was also fun.
 That's right.
 Come to think of it, I had a pretty happy time as a kid."



"—Yes.
 I am sure Nee-san feels the same way."
 Hisui nods quietly.
 Oh no.
 Simply talking about my childhood like this, Hisui must be getting bored.
 "—Sorry.

I didn't mean to bore you with this kind of talk."



"Please do not worry about it.

I enjoy it."

"Eh, really...?"

In that case..."

Certainly Hisui doesn't look bored at all.

"Yes.

As long as it does not bother you, please continue on.

The doctor said that any sort of activity is preferable."

.... I see.

They say to move my body, but it's really just my mouth I can move right now.

"Geez.

I don't really have much to talk about, although I do have a lot of memories of my childhood."

"I do not mind.

Please, tell me about your childhood, Shiki-sama."

".... Really?"

But I think it'll just be boring, are you sure?"



"Yes, I am really, enjoying this."

Hisui gives an extremely happy smile.

"___"

Completely forgetting about the state I'm in now, my heart starts to race.

.... The smile that is so rarely seen on Hisui's face is, it makes me blush, and,

well—



"Shiki-sama?

Is there something wrong?"

"Ah—no, it's nothing.

Well, let's continue talking about the past then."

Hisui nods.

As I continue to remember more and more about the past, I continue my boring, inane monologue.

At lunchtime, Kohaku-san comes in and trades places with Hisui.

Kohaku-san brings a wash pail and several towels.

"....."

I get a really bad feeling about this.



"Shiki-san, we have to wash your body, so please endure this."

"—"

I knew it.

"..... Um"

Even though it is something I'd hate to do, I can't exactly say no.

It's obvious that since I can't move my body, someone has to clean it for me.

I've been laying around since yesterday, and to be honest, I do feel sticky and pretty gross.

".... Yes.
Please."



"Not at all, I'm the one who should be saying please."

.... And it's over.
It was deadly embarrassing, but I can't fight Kohaku-san.
After all, Kohaku-san helps me get to the bathroom when I have to go.
After receiving so much care from Kohaku-san, I think being embarrassed is
rude to her.



"All finished.
Thank you for your cooperation."
After changing me into a new set of pajamas, she replaces my sheets.



"But Shiki-san, you really have no strength at all, do you?
I was surprised when you didn't even flinch when I was washing you."
"... You're right.
I wonder what's wrong with my body?"

Normally, when someone is taking care of you, if they move your arms and legs, there is some sort of muscular reaction in the body. Since the reaction is there, the one doing the caring usually takes a lot of work, but I don't even have that reaction right now. It's like I'm a boneless jellyfish.
"Jellyfish... I might be quite right."
I meant it to be a joke, but I don't feel like laughing.
... How do I put it, it's almost as if I'm not quite alive. The fact that I can't move my body.
I didn't think that not having any feeling in my body would be this scary. It's like I'm almost in a dream, just a vague existence.



"Shiki-san, please don't make that uneasy face.
Whatever the reason, I'm sure you will be able to return to normal soon."
"... I'm sure.
But I wonder what the reason is."
... If there is a reason, it would be this scar from eight years ago.
The doctor said that it was simply a miracle to be alive.
Perhaps this is the price of my miraculous recovery.

—If that is the case, then I, Tohno Shiki,
may never be able to even stand on my own for the rest of my life.
"Shiki-san?
Are you okay?
You look terrible."
"Ah... I just imagined something terrible and got a little scared."



"Ah, that's no good, Shiki-san!
If your spirit is weak, you will never be able to recover."
"—I guess you're right.
I guess I'll try to think positive.... Thank you very much, Kohaku-san."



"As long as you understand.
You understand things pretty well, and you always seem to accept your circumstances.
So I think it is okay if you complain every once in a while."
.... Kohaku-san seriously offers some advice.
Suddenly, I remember what I was telling Hisui earlier.
".... Geez.
Kohaku-san, you still do like to nurse people, don't you?"



"Huh?"

What do you mean by that?"

"Remember way back, when I caught a cold and wanted to play anyway?"

It's just like back then."



"Hmm, I guess something like that happened.

You never said anything about how you felt, Shiki-san."

"But you found out quickly.

Afterwards, you made me go back to the detached building, and I never forgave you for that."

.... Not really; I was actually extremely grateful, but I thought I'd tease Kohaku-san a little bit.



"_____"

And then..

Kohaku-san tries earnestly to remember, and she freezes in place.

".... Huh.

What's this, did you forget?"



"I guess so.

I'm sorry, my memory is not all that great."

"No, it's hard to remember stuff from eight years ago, so it's no big deal."

"You're right.

I remember most of the things, but it's something from eight years ago, so maybe I might be forgetting something important too."

.... I completely agree.

Before I went to that garden in the forest, I had forgotten entirely the image of the accident eight years ago.



"Well then, I'll bring you some food, so please rest until then."

In the afternoon, I become alone.

I feel bad letting Kohaku-san and Hisui take care of me all the time, so I had them return to their duties.

Since I didn't have any hideous nightmares last night, even though I can't move, my health is pretty stable.

I figure I can manage by myself until dinner time.

".... Well, my body can't move, so I can't say my health is good or bad."

Leaning back against the headboard, I stare aimlessly.

It's been ten days since I came back to the mansion.

At first, I felt out of place, but now I feel very comfortable in this room.

You can't underestimate the adaptability of the human mind, I suppose.

—And.

—My headache.

"..... Eh?"

Lines.

I can see lines.

"My glasses are on—so why?"

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

"—, Who is it!?"

I move my head.

There's no one in the room except me.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

I can hear someone breathing.

Something that sounds like a wild dog's salivated breathing reaches my ears.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—

"—Wh—"

I manage to turn my head.

But there is no one behind me.

I can't even sense anyone.

Is it some sort of auditory hallucination?

No.
It is a hallucination, but it is real.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—
It isn't echoing through my room.
It's echoing inside of my head.
In that case,
this breathing, is without a doubt,
coming from inside my brain.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—
pant—*pant*—*pant*—
Mixing together.
Progressively mixing together.
This unknown voice and my breathing harmonize together.

What is this?
Just what is this?
I'm about to merge with him.
I am about to fuse with him.

Triangle cogwheels and / Diamond cogwheels
Noise / Echo
Panorama / Strings
There shouldn't be any point of connection between us

Even in an illusion, knowing should be rejected.

Strange
Strange
What are you
What are you
I am
I am!

"Ah—"
The torrent breaks through.
Spinning.
Spinning.
Spinning spinning the world is spinning.
Sun and moon.
Female and lion.
Angel and pollution.
Colliding uphill paths.
Broken hourglass.
Upwards falling sand.
Shattered window and a door without a handle.
Darkness.
Darkness.
Darkness.
Darkness.
Darkness.

"S, to—"
I'm getting crushed.
Melting wall.
Solvable meaning.
Self who can explain.
Smoothness of changeable permeability.
Transitioning time.
Observation life and execution function.
A pinky-less hand.
Headless eyes.
Rolling carpet.
Once.
Twice.
Three Times.
777 cages.

Burst balloon.
 Unfulfillable promise.
 Unprotectable law.
 Death contract.
 Poison and honey.
 Red and afterbirth.
 Mercury lamp and bug light.
 Light refracting to countless dimensions.
 Swimming fish, singing at the ocean bottom.
 Tools, tools, tools.
 Towards endlessly reproducing stars without meaning, without will.
 Better than wishes.
 Another only me.
 Unraveling deep sea.
 Contradictory that appears from microscopic organisms.
 Detailed view of a quark.
 Rejection of everything.
 Formless form.
 An embryo within a hearse.
 I curse and celebrate their existence.

Haha ahahaha.
 "What, is this—!"

Cessation is disregard.
 The bleeding earth.
 Trade your blood for poison and you will attain immortality.
 Rose.
 Rose.
 Rose.
 Rose.
 Your splendor will not last forever.
 The way to reach Lohan's temple, eat this bread.
 Spreading defilement.
 The April that's farther than May, the reversal of limbs, awaken in the shrine
 of balance beyond the dual serpent and scorpion.
 The skin of rotten fruit.
 Burned puppet of celluloid.
 The cannabis of Legion.
 Grinding and friction.

Sun and Moon.
 Colliding uphill paths.
 Female and lions.
 Broken hourglass.
 Spiraling clouds.
 I am unparalleled.
 Upwards falling sand.
 Eight years ago.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 Killed.
 You.
 Killed!

Ha haha ahahahahahahahahahahaha!
 "Shu-shut, up—!"

pant—*pant*—*pant*—
 It stops.
 Trying with all my might, I bang my head against the wall, and it stops.
 "—What the hell—was that just now—"
 I don't know.
 Just random words filled my mind, and I couldn't think about anything.
 Anything at all—not being able to think, and all those words repeating machine-
 like in my head.
 "..... Ah."
 I notice that tears are streaming from my eyes.
 Mucus and drool are streaming down my face as well.

"Ag—!"
 My head hurts.
 It's not a normal headache I get from my anemia.
 My brain feels like it's about to explode.
 It's because even though I have a limit to my memory, much more than I can

handle has flowed into my brain.

"....."

Once more.

Once more, if that inexplicable headache returns.

At this rate—my mind will surely break before my body does.

Ahaahaha ha

"Wh—"

"Sto—"

It's flowing.

No, I'm picking it up.

That guy's knowledge, of a level so far beyond that of ours, is picked up by me.

Yes, we are about to merge.

The fusion between me and him had already begun.

It was eight years ago.

The white summer day.

Empty shells of cicadas.

Feasting ants.

Someone's sudden death.

The gravitation towards extreme pain, spurting blood, going into shock.

Shrinking field of vision.

Nothing but darkness.

Nothing but crimson.

The crisis of death.

Abortion.

Cutting up the birthing woman when the baby is still inside, inside this hungry world, sampling the flesh of babies.

Pointless all of it.

"St—op."

As long as you keep your eyes open,

I will become one with you.

"—Ch!"

I desperately close my eyes, as if imploring for help.

"..... Ha..... ah."

It's subsided.

The flow of information and the voice inside my head ceases.

"... Thank... goodness."

I breathe a sigh of relief.

But on the other hand, I feel a chill go down my spine.

"... If I open my eyes... that will happen again?"

I don't know.

Maybe that was instantaneous.

But I'm too terrified to open my eyes.

A disgusting sensation.

It feels like a caterpillar is crawling within my brain.

"—"

... I become sleepy.

But if I sleep, I might see those nightmares again.

"—I don't care.

That dream is much better than what happened now."

I relax my consciousness.

With my eyes still closed, I fall asleep.

—Ah, I've come here again.

The dark basement.

The smell of mold emanating from the darkness.

... The school's, probably the gym's basement.

The dispersed celluloid mannequin.

No, the pieces of half eaten people.

He's.

—I start to go crazy.

A dream.

If this is a dream, please, wake up!

It hurts.

I'd rather.

Die.

This pain is enough to kill me from shock, but I am not dying.

"Your voice, your position, all of it is mine, it was all originally mine—!

Just you wait, I will kill you, I will come soon....!"

Screaming.

It takes a knife,

brings it to it's head,

aims for the brain,

and stabs deeply.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

In the middle of the ultimate pain, I wake up.

"Ahhh—ghaa, aagh, aghhh—!"

A dream.

That was a dream.

"G..!"

But my body is hurting everywhere.

Hand, thigh, eyes, skull.

They all hurt.

The pain I received during my dream, I have brought it back into reality.

"A—hh!"

But my body still can't move.

Even though I feel like there is a hole ripped in my palm, I still can't move my body.

"Ah—ah."

At least if I could move—I could thrash around and maybe reduce some of the agony, but I can't even do that.

"Damn—it."

What is, this?

"Why—do these things.."

Earlier, I thought my mind would break before my body would.

"Why, do these, things happen, to me.... !"
But if I sleep, my body may very well break before my mind.

"That guy—what is he?"
That someone who comes in my dreams.
That someone who knows me, whose nerves became one with mine.
The one who kills people every night.
What's this?
You won't admit it yet?
"... Admit, what?"
I am you.
"... No way."
You are the same as me.
"... No."
I'm still sane."
For the longest time, you have already been crazy.
"... I told you no....!"



"Shiki-sama—!"

—And,

without a knock, Hisui enters my room.
"Hi—sui....?"
"Shiki-sama, was that your voice just now—!?"

Hisui walks to the bed with an urgent expression.
"Wha—Shiki-sama, what, in the world—"
Hisui's voice is shaking.
.... I look down.
My sheets are soaked in blood.

—It looks like the blood came from my hand and my thigh.
I say 'looks like' because I just think so.
Because there's no wounds on my body, so what's wrong is the fact that the

blood's there..



"Hisui-chan, I will prepare an IV, so please watch over Shiki-san."



"Wait, Nee-san, Shiki-sama is—"



"Hisui-chan.
Don't you think it's best to listen to what your older sister has to say once in a while?"



"Ah—"



"Now, Shiki-san, you are going to have a blood transfusion soon, so please relax until then."



After taking care of me, Kohaku-san leaves the room.



"Shiki-sama—is there really nothing wrong?
Nee-san told me not to worry, but all that blood—"
"... Pretty persistent, aren't you?
I said there isn't anything wrong.
I don't have any wounds.
I'm the one with questions."

—Saying this roughly, I hate myself.
I'm sorry for Hisui, but I can't calm down.
There—must be something wrong with me.
If I sleep, I dream of the killer and hurt myself.
I know that's the cause of the bleeding.
I know, but I can't tell Hisui or Kohaku-san that.
They wouldn't believe me, and worse, they would think I have simply gone
crazy.
I'll admit my body is weird.
But Hisui, Kohaku-san and Akiha, I just don't want them to think I am crazy.
I do not want to say that.



"But Shiki-sama, your body is not working properly.
You appear to have a fever, and your breathing is wild, I do not—"
wish to see you like this.
Hisui swallows the rest of her sentence.
"... I'm fine; go away.
Thanks for worrying about me, but I just want to be alone for now."



"... Then, is there something you want?
If you are thirsty, please tell me, and I can bring you something."
"Something—I want?"
Something I want?
I don't really want anything right now.
"... Yeah, I am certainly thirsty..."

Yes, thirsty.
Really thirsty.
So I must suck.

Red, drink.
That sticky fluid that sticks to my throat.
Hot, crimson red blood that is still warm, that's what I want right now—

"Ah—"



"... Shiki-sama?"
Something I, want.
Of course there's something I want.

That is..

Hisui's body I saw in my dream.

"——Tss!"

Smack!

I hit myself in the head.

The arm that I couldn't move before was able to be moved out of pure hatred for myself.



"Shiki-sama!?"

What is wrong, Shiki-sama!"

"Don't come near me—!"



"Shiki... sama."

I breathe painfully.

My throat is burning.

My body is burning.

There's something wrong with me.

There's something wrong with me.

There's something wrong with me.

What was I just thinking!?"

".... Don't come near me.... If you do, I don't know what, I will do."



"But, Shiki-sama—"
"I told you not to come near me....!
I'm not crazy....!"
I scream, refusing Hisui's help.
But if I don't do so, I will violate Hisui for sure.
Like that time in my dream.
Being controlled by my pulse through my veins.
"—Just leave.
Hisui, you don't understand, anything about my body."



".... Yes.
As you wish, Shiki-sama."

Hisui leaves.
As she leaves, I stare at her with hazy vision.

—My excited body thinks about the same thing, no matter who I saw.

When Kohaku-san came to give me transfusion, I had the urge to sink my teeth into her white throat.

I—I can't retain my sanity unless I'm alone.
So I made Hisui and Kohaku-san, even Akiha go out of my room.

—The result doesn't change.
If I am alone, all I can do is break.

"Gu..."
I get a headache.
If I stay awake, the headache flows into me.
Before I go crazy, I close my eyes to sleep.

But then, if I sleep, I will dream about him.
Every time he inflicts pain on his body, I also feel the physical pain.

"—Agh."
That pain causes me to wake up.
But as soon as I do so, the splitting pain in my head returns.
So I close my eyes—and I fall asleep again.

..... And I repeat this process.
I go into a light sleep, and wake up from the pain of getting my brain stabbed through.
Breathing is painful.
I gasp for air.
My limbs won't move, but they shake from the pain.

I have no sense of time.
An hour feels like infinity.
Truthfully, I..
I don't even think that I will be able to maintain my sanity until the morning.

—The door opens with a creak.



The sound of approaching footsteps.
.... I am half asleep, and I can't tell exactly who it is.
"—Nii-san, you look so exhausted."
She sounds like she is crying.

"—I'm so sorry.... You're in this much pain, but there is nothing I can do."

The weight of fingers.

"This is the only thing—that I can do, Nii-san."

Akiha wraps her fingers in mine.

Throb.

Throb.

Throb.

Matching the sound of my IV, Akiha's body temperature flows into me.

—Warm.

It feels like my rotten wall of my consciousness got rebuilt by just that.

"Hold on, Nii-san.

I will save you soon."

.... Her fingers separate.

The sound of footsteps goes away.

—The door closes.

.... In my half-sleep,

I saw that strange dream.

It's been several mornings.

Time-wise, it is only the next morning from last night, but for me, having alternated between being asleep and being awake, time and day is of no concern.

"Excuse me, Shiki-sama."

I hear a voice, and Hisui enters the room.



"Good morning.

I have brought you something to drink."

"....."

I don't even have the energy to say thank you.
I can only stare longingly at what Hisui brought me.



"Shiki-sama, can you drink it by yourself?
If you can not move freely yet, I can help you."
She leans over to me to check my condition.
Helping me to drink, she says, but she won't even touch my body.
More importantly, I can't allow her to get close to me.
It's just the same as yesterday.
Even though my body won't move, every time I see Hisui or Kohaku-san, I—

—I feel like going crazy.
".... I can drink water by myself.
Please just leave the glass over there."



"Yes, as you wish."

Hisui places the glass down and waits by the wall.
I manage to move my arm, and place my lips on the cup.
The cold water is tasteless, just like air.
The burning in me cannot be soothed by just this water, and my thirst cannot
be quenched by such a thing.



Hisui stares at me silently from the wall.

.... What is this?

Not being able to move for only three days, and I already feel jealous of Hisui. Being able to move freely like that, not having to feel this pain, I start to get a little annoyed.

"Hisui."

"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"

"If you have finished your task, please leave.

I can't relax with people around me like this."



"—But Shiki-sama, in that case.."

"I told you if I need anything, I'll call for you.

.... Don't make me say the same thing over and over again.

Talking makes me pretty tired."



".... As you wish.
I will return in a while, so please do not strain yourself."

The door closes.
.... Hisui comes every hour to take care of me.
I let out a deep sigh.
I feel even more tired.
Thinking that I have to turn back Hisui like this more than ten times today
makes me depressed from self-hatred.

"Ahh.....!"
A pain stabbing my arm causes me to waken.
I gasp for air.
It appears I fell asleep at some point.
That person is still in that basement, continuing to kill his body.
"Damn.... it."
I strike the wall with my fist.
How long do I have to stand this pain?
Or will this pain continue forever until I do something to him personally?
"Just what in the world do I have to do—!"
I strike the wall again.

.... Huh?

".... My body, it's moving."
I lift my upper body from bed.
The motion which took me about an hour to do before seems so natural now—
no, like it always has been—and I may even be healed.
"Alright!
.... I'm all better.... !
I'm so happy, I jump out from the bed.

Whump.

"Eh?"
Something falls down.
I lower my gaze.

On the carpet,
is my forearm, which detached itself from my elbow.

"—Sssttt!"
.... I guess it was a dream.
Using all of my power, I lift my upper body.
My arm is still attached to my body.
I don't have any feeling, not even pain.
It appears I'm not broken yet.

"Shiki-sama, may I please enter?"
.... Hisui's voice.
I guess it's time for her to check up on me again.
".... Yeah, come in."



"Excuse me."



"Shiki-sama, please lie down.
The doctor has told you not to sit up."
"Well, I can't be sleeping all day.
And even if you call him a doctor, I don't have any appreciation if he can't help

me at all."



Hisui lowers her shoulders silently with an apologetic look.

.... I feel annoyed.

If she acts like that I'll just get more miserable, why can't she understand that, this woman—.

"—Stop it.

If you keep showing such a pitying face, I'll just feel worse."



"—I am very sorry, Shiki-sama."

".... If you have something to do, hurry up and do it.

I can't do anything, so it should be easy for you to change the sheets or my IV."

".... Yes, as you wish."

Hisui wordlessly changes my IV bag.
Taking care of the sweat and blood-stained sheets along with my pajamas is apparently Kohaku-san's job.



Even though she's done, Hisui does not withdraw from the bedside.

"Hisui....?"

"—Shiki-sama.

May I ask you a question....?"

"?"

Hisui's voice seems to be quivering.

".... Yeah, what is it?"

".... Shiki-sama, does your body.... hurt?"

"Wha——"

For a moment, I almost yell at Hisui.

Does my body hurt?

Can she—someone not me, understand the pain I'm going through?

I'm about to go insane from the constant sensation of my body being stabbed,
and I can't even move while all this is happening.

She looks at me like that and asks me if my body hurts—

"—Who knows.

I don't know.

I've just become numb all over."

"..... Ye..... s."

Hisui's voice is shaking more and more.

"It feels like my body is being burned by an invisible fire.

I'm dying bit by bit from my fingers onward."

"....."

Hisui stays there in pained silence.

....

.....

.....

..... And then,



"—Shiki-sama, I.."

Hisui's voice is no longer shaking.

Calm, as always, uninflected voice.

"I cannot stand seeing you like this any longer."

Hisui says all of this,

but her expressionless face seems like she doesn't care about me.

—My heart starts to race.

"—"

The impulse to want her increases.

Hisui stands this close to me.

Her body is this close.

If I just reach out my arms, I can make her mine—

"Shiki-sama, I.."

"Shut up....!"

Don't look at me with that face!"

This anger is totally unexpected.

I can't stand her expressionless face, so I take the IV bag and throw it at her.

Splat!



The red stain splashes all over Hisui.

But her expression does not change.

"—Shiki-sama, please do not strain yourself."

That way of talking.

That expressionless, voice.
"... Shut up!
This is my body, I can do what I want with it....!"
Her unchanging expression.
It gets more and more on my nerves.
"That's it.
Hisui, this has nothing to do with you.
Of course you don't feel pain or anything like that!"
"Shiki-sama—please, calm down."
Her expression still does not change.
No matter what I say to her, she receives it quietly.

—That only makes me even angrier.
"Yeah, of course.
Compared to you, I can never be that calm.
Because as hurt as I am, you don't even raise an eyebrow, and you just calmly observe me—!"
"Shiki-sama, please do not push yourself.
If you yell like that, your body may get worse."
"Why.... you....!
That's enough, get out of here!
I'm sick and tired of looking at you, you're worthless....!"
"—As you wish.
Please excuse me, Shiki-sama."

Hisui leaves the room.
As she does so, I happen to see her fingers.
Her fingers are clenched so tightly, I expected to see blood flow.
.... As if she is trying to kill her expression as much as possible.
"Ah—"
I understand instantly that it is for my sake.
Since I told her not to pity me.
She just withstood all my selfish venting of anger on her—
"Damn.. what am I doing?"
It's not like I'll get better if I take it out on Hisui.
No, not just that, but I—

"—Gah."
.... There really is something wrong with me.
Not only did I take it out on her like that, but when she was close, I was lusting for her.
If seeing her skin so close and smelling her light fragrance makes me want all of her, I'm no different than him.

That's why I said we are the same.
"Again—"

Because you and I are the same person.

"Shut—up!"

That's right the same just like I was locked up all this time you too.

"Shut up—"

In this room locked up for life.

"Wh—"

Unable to leave this prison forever.

"Y—ou."

Eternally locked away....!

"I said, shut up....!"

I slam my head against the wall.

The voice stops.

.... But, as a price, my consciousness fades.

"....."

Then, I dream of the basement again.

—It's afternoon now.

The headache that greets me when I awake is slightly less than usual.

"....."

Kohaku-san finishes changing me for the third time and leaves.

.... Hisui did not come again after that incident.

"Of course.

.... After what I said, it's only natural not to come back."

.... Hisui won't come again.

Just thinking that, I start to feel my spirit drift far away, but I understand that it's to both of our benefits.

If by some chance, she does come again,

all I will do is take it out on her again, and I don't deserve her kindness.

".... Please excuse me, Shiki-sama."

Saying that, Hisui enters my room.



Hisui shuts the door, but does not come any closer.
In her hand, she holds a tray with a glass of water.
"I have brought you something to drink, do you care for it?"
"....."

Hisui really is expressionless.
But, I can still see her fingertips shaking.
".... Hisui."
.... Why?
After all those terrible things I said, why is she still taking care of me?
".... It's okay, Hisui.
You don't have to force yourself; if you don't wish to be near me, it's fine."
"Shiki-sama, I am not forcing myself.
Rather, please do not force yourself, Shiki-sama."
Hisui's emotionless voice.
Her shaking fingers.
.... I finally realize it.
It isn't that her voice is emotionless; it's that she's killing the emotion in her voice.
".... I'm sorry.
You can hate me, if you want."
"It is alright, Shiki-sama.
I cannot do anything, so it is natural for you to scold me."

—That, isn't natural at all.
The only one at fault is me.

".... I'm sorry.
My body is a little heavy.
I don't think I can drink by myself, can you please help me?"



".... Yes.
I have been waiting for those words."

Hisui walks towards my bed.
".... Please excuse me."

Saying that with a restrained voice, she lifts my body.
"Eh—Hisui?"



"Please, drink slowly."
With one hand supporting my back, she brings the glass to my mouth.

Until now, Hisui never touched me no matter what.

"....."

Gulping down a few mouthfuls, I shake my head.

Hisui puts the glass to the side.

Then she puts her hand on my forehead.

—Thump.

My heart starts to pound heavily in a totally different way than other times.

"Hisui—is this, alright?"

Hisui lifts her hand.



".... There does not, seem to be a fever."

Hisui murmurs this.

I didn't even think so.

All of my pain seems to fade away with just that—

"Hisui.... Can I ask you a favor?"



"Yes, what is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Aa—could you please, keep your hand there for a bit longer."

"Why... do you want me to do that?"

"... Your cool hand, it feels good.

If you do that, I can relax."

—All of my pain disappears as if it was merely a lie.



Hisui's cheeks turn slightly red, and with a smile, she places her hand on my forehead.

"... That's strange... Why do I feel nostalgic, all of a sudden..."

I feel relaxed.

My consciousness starts to become at ease.

... Yeah, come to think of it, I felt like this when Hisui took care of me like this before.

"... Thank you... and sorry, Hisui."

My consciousness sinks into oblivion.

For a brief period of time.

For the first time in days, I slip into a peaceful sleep without any pain or suffering.

It's midnight, and I made Hisui return to her room.

Even though I felt better earlier, I don't know when that headache will return and make me lose my sanity.

"....."

Furthermore, there is something still wrong with my body.
Even though I can't even move my fingers, I wouldn't be surprised if they suddenly moved against my will to attack Hisui or Kohaku-san.

"Ouu—"

My headache does not stop.
My body does not move.
Maybe it's not just pain being transmitted when that guy hurts his own body.

"Ah—ha,a,haa.....!"

I cough uncontrollably.
Ever since he started stabbing himself in the throat with a knife, I haven't been able to breathe properly.

"Ahh.... gghaa.... ah.... ggggg."

wheeze *wheeze*

My hoarse voice echoes through the night.
I can't even perform a simple task like breathing normally unless I concentrate.

".... Is this.... the end?"

This body was supposed to have died eight years ago.
It's not that I never thought I would end up like this.

"Ha..... haha, ha."

But maybe this is for the best.
I've always watched him kill people in my dreams.
But, maybe "he" never existed in the first place—maybe it was me all along.

.... I remember Yumizuka's words.

She said that I was a true killer.
Back then, all I could do was deny it, but now—I don't even have the power to do so.

My disturbed mind.

My broken body.

The dreams I have of killing people.

The voice that echoes within me, the voice that isn't mine.

.... The Tohno Shiki who can't stop imagining how I violated Hisui.

"..... Ah!"

The headache that feels like my skull is cracking.
It's like the sound of the killer's personality devouring my soul.

.... The forgotten memory of that incident.
My figure coated in blood.

Then maybe, my dreams of killing people might be forgotten memories surfacing once again.

"—Gah...!
Ah, auuu...!"
Pain floods my consciousness.
I can hear a voice that tells me to kill something, anything.

.... Ah, but it's alright.
Even if I am a killer, I couldn't possibly kill anyone the way I am now.
Just like he said, I'm locked up in here, not even being able to take a step outside by myself—

wheeze, *wheeze*, *wheeze*

wheeze, *wheeze*, *wheeze*

wheeze.
wheeze.
wheeze.
wheeze.

".... Shiki-sama!?
Please, hold on, Shiki-sama...!"
wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*....!

"Please excuse me, Shiki-sama....!"

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

"... H.... uh.... Hisu,i....?"



"Thank goodness... You have awoken, Shiki-sama."
Hisui speaks to me in a clipped voice.

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

".... ?"

I don't understand why Hisui is looking at me like that.

"... What happened Hisui?"

Looking at me like that, did something happen?"



"..... No, it's nothing.

Shiki-sama, please rest your body; you do not need to think about anything at all."

"... Yeah, I'm already doing that."

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

"But Hisui, isn't it loud this morning?
I can't sleep well with this wheezing sound coming from somewhere."



".... Shiki-sama, that is.."

Hisui falls silent with a strained expression on her face.
wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze* *wheeze*

The sound keeps coming.
I can hear it coming from near me.
"—!"
I cough.
Only during that instant does the sound stop.
"A—"
.... Well, I feel stupid.
The wheezing sound was only my breathing this whole time.
"Man.
It's not like I've caught a cold."



"....."
With tight lips, Hisui hangs her head.
It looks like she wants to say something, but she can't.
.... Hisui seems to be acting that way.

"Hisui, why are you so quiet?
You haven't done anything wrong, so relax."



"—Yes.
If there is anything I can do, I will try my hardest to do so."
"Um, you don't have be so tense, Hisui.
As long as you're here, I can relax, and it's better for me if you smile."



".... Um, is this face acceptable?"
Hisui looks at me with an incredibly serious face.
.... In all honesty, the look she has now is nothing like the smile she has shown before, but seeing Hisui try so hard does make me happy.
"Yeah, you can relax even more if you want.
.... Could you bring me something to drink?
My throat is so dry I can hardly breathe."



"Yes, I already have a drink ready for you."

Hisui disappears from my view.
The drink probably is set by the wall.
Hisui comes back with a silver tray and places her hand on my back to lift me up.

—In that instant.

As soon as I feel her hand on my back, it comes with disgusting speed.

"Shiki-sama, is this alright?"

"It is not good to drink it all at once, so please drink this slowly."

"Shiki-sama?
If you do not open your mouth, it will spill."

"Get away——!"

"Kyaa!"
Crash
The glass falls to the floor.
Hisui sits on the floor where I pushed her away.
I start to wheeze once more.
My breathing is as ragged as that of a wild beast.



"Shiki—sama."

Hisui isn't mad that I pushed her; instead, she's even more worried.



"Pl, please forgive me.... I moved you without asking, I should not have done such a shameful thing—"

"No—that's not it.

It isn't your fault....!"

.... The one to blame.

"That's not it at all.

You haven't done anything wrong."

The one to blame,

is me, wheezing even more heavily, lusting after Hisui's body.



"Shiki—sama?"

"It's okay; please leave.... I beg of you, just for now, please leave me alone."



".... Shiki-sama, if that is what you wish."
Hisui's voice trembles.

She retreats from the room.

Time slips by.

Simply lying in bed with my body as it is, I lose all sense of time.

.... Did I run Hisui out of my room an hour ago, or was it thirty minutes ago?

I can't tell for certain.

After I became alone, the clock has advanced three hours.

But I can't trust it.

The seemingly round clock looks distorted.

wheeze *wheeze* *wheeze*

All I can hear is the wheezing of my breathing.

The distorted clock claims it is now noon.

The examination is around two, so I can protect my sanity by myself for a bit longer.

.... Well, but then..

If I am alone, then those "headaches" will return and they may rob me completely of all my reason.



"Excuse me."

Silently closing the door, Hisui enters my room.

Hisui enters carrying a tray with a glass of water and some sort of medicine.

"... Hisui.

It isn't time for the examination yet, right?"

"Yes.

I just thought that you might be thirsty."

She locks the door with metallic clinking and draws close to my bed.

..... Locks, the door....?



"Can you raise your body by yourself?

If you can't, then I will most humbly give you assistance."

"No, I'm not thirsty.

Besides, why did you come here?

I told you to leave me alone."



"I refuse.
I cannot leave you alone like this."
After she says this in a distinct voice, she places her hands on my shoulders.
"Hey—Hisui?"



"Please, if you are unable to stand by yourself, just say so."

"—!?"

She quickly lifts up my body with a strong pull.
Hisui takes the medicine and forces it into my mouth.



"Please drink.
This is a special medicine that my sister made for you."
"N....!"
The water pours down my throat.

"N-,n,n-....!"

.... Maybe it's because she is mad about before, but she is acting rather forceful. She moves like a precise, flexible doll without a will of her own.

"Ha—puhaa....!"

What are you doing, all of a sudden!

Of course I've been taking it out on you, but, this, is too——"

Hu—h?

My body falls to the bed.

.... I can't put any power to my movements.

I have no strength, but I don't feel bad, either.

Rather, it's more of a feeling of inconvenience.

My body starts to heat up from its very core.

—This is, like.

That feeling of being alive.

How long has it been since I've felt like this——

".... I can't believe it.

Somehow, like this—"

I feel like I could even walk.



"You must not.

My sister has told me that it would not work unless you slowly regain your senses of the body.

Please, rest some more, Shiki-sama."

"Eh.... Ah, okay.

If you say so, but, what are you going to do?"

"I will take care of your body, Shiki-sama."

With that,

Hisui takes her cool fingers and crawls them on my chest.

"——!"

I shiver.

Like the recovering body, what's been quieted down surfaces again.

"Hisui....!"

If you want to take my pulse, use my arm....!"



"No, I am not taking your pulse.
I am checking your heartbeat."

"N—!"

Ice..

Her cold fingers move from my chest towards my stomach.

Sliding downwards.

From the opening in my shirt, her fingers feel my skin.

"H,H, Hisui....!"



"Please be quiet.

If you move around, the medicine will not work."

"Eh—for.. real....?"



"Yes.

It is a medicine that is easily dissolved by your body, so if you move, it will dissolve quickly.

My sister has told me that this will dilute the effects of the drug and that you should let the drug dissolve slowly for its full effect."

"U.... If Kohaku-san said so, then I guess it can't be helped."

I blush.

Hisui's fingers, which normally don't touch men, are now feeling my skin directly.

At this rate, I'll—

"H..... uh?"



"Your body temperature is pretty constant.

At this rate, you will be unable to think about anything difficult for a while."

"..... What?"

What are you..

saying right now Hisui ?

"However, it will take more time, so let's talk to pass the time.

.... Yes.

Let's talk about your beloved childhood, Shiki-sama."

Still standing,

she looks down at me as if she was staring at a dead body in a coffin.

"Do you remember?
Whenever you would play in the garden, you would always look up at the window I was in.
I was always looking forward to that time.
Everyone at the mansion treated me as if I didn't exist."



"Your eyes would always look at me and speak without words.
'Hurry up and come outside and play with us,' they said.
But I didn't leave the mansion.
I didn't know how, I didn't even know what that meant."

—Hisui's voice is.. far away.
Her uninterested voice.
Her voice seems to be clear of dark tones, but still—
"I did not look out the window to find meaning.
I just didn't want to be in Makihisa-sama's room, so I was there, the only place I was allowed to be outside of his room.
Therefore, it meant nothing to me.
The figures of SHIKI-sama and Akiha-sama playing in the garden were no different than the sun and the trees."
"—If you.
If you had never noticed me, I would have been fine.
If you hadn't waved to me or called out to me, who knows how I would have turned out.
The way I am now, everything is because of you."

Saying that,



Hisui smiles happily.

"Every day, I looked forward to that time.

I would always see you looking for me.

Every day, those eyes would tell me to come play, to come outside.

.... Isn't it funny?

Because you were there, I noticed for the first time that I had legs that could take me outside."

"Are you listening Shiki-sama?

Even though the drug is working, please don't space out on me.

Since I was a child, I have always wanted to talk to you like this."

.... Hisui's mouth is distorted.

Happy.

Her lips make the shape of a smile as if she is having fun.

"I really did look forward to it.

But it wasn't for you to take me outside.

I knew that such a thing was impossible."

"I would have been fine if I never knew what hope was.

Then I never would have known despair either.

But you would always tell me with your eyes how simple it was, how much better it would be if I went outside.

.... Really, I would always look forward to the afternoons when you would play outside.

You were the only one I could let my emotions out on.

.... No matter what that emotion was, I bet you didn't know how much I thought about you everyday."

—I can't hear her voice very well.

She just keeps talking.

My mind is hazy, and I can't quite grasp what she's saying.

Just that—what Hisui is saying right now is a curse.

"A——"

When I come to, my whole body is burning.
 My pulse races, and my veins feel as if they will explode.
 Even though I was that close to death, I feel vitality returning to my organs.
 "H—hot, Hisui, it's really—"
 Hot.
 It's so hot, I'm going to go crazy.
 These sheets.
 These sheets are in the way.
 These pajamas are too hot too.
 I feel as if I am wearing a winter coat in the summer.
 "Ha—a, gah—"
 But I still can't move.
 This body that hasn't been able to move for three days, can't start working
 that easily.
 "Hisui, what is happening to me....!?"
 I, I'm hot, but my body won't move....!"



"—Yes.
 No matter how much energy is restored, you are losing energy at a higher rate.
 Therefore, this drug can only restore your energy in this small part of you."

Hisui says this, and..
 Hisui takes the fingers on my stomach and moves them downward.
 Down there, which has been standing up from before, is what you could say is
 a pillar of myself.
 "—!"
 My back starts to arch slightly.
 Hisui's fingers crawl over the hot, hard bulge and slowly pull my pants down.
 "... !
 Don't taunt me like this....!
 Why—I kept you away so this wouldn't happen, but if you keep doing this,
 I'll—"
 I can't hold back my lust.. any longer.



"... Shiki-sama.
I will now tend to your.. lower parts."
Her face flushed with embarrassment, Hisui says such an unbelievable thing.
"____"
I want to tell her to stop, but I can't say anything.
I can't let her do this.
But—with a mind of its own, my shaft starts to twitch, asking for Hisui's fingers.
"—What.. am I thinking!?"
I try to shout, but it only comes out as a whisper.

I can hear my blood pounding.
I remember the beautiful arms and legs of that violated doll in my dreams.



"Shiki-sama.
Are you holding back?"
"Of course I'm holding back....!
For me to do this.. to you—"
"Shiki-sama.
The way your body is, you shouldn't strain yourself."

Hisui's fingers start to gently caress me.
Is there preliminary semen coming out already?
A loose strand pools between her fingers.

"Please relax.

Let's do something that you wish for.

.... I really don't want to see you stressing your body and heart, Shiki-sama."

"_____"

That's—maybe that is the truth, but.

.... Hot.

Damn it, so hot—I can't sort out things calmly.



"Shiki-sama.

Please let me make you feel a little more alive."

Hisui's fingers grasp my shaft firmly.

"We have that kind of power.

If we receive some of your bodily fluids, we can help you just a bit.

.... So please, don't say anything and just bear this."

I can feel her hot breath on "me".

Hisui's breath, unlike her fingers—is roasting hot, almost burning.

".... Then, please excuse me."

After saying this with a hesitating voice, she lowers her face towards my groin.

Is it because of the medicine, or maybe her fingers?

Unlike the rest of my body, which is completely unable to move, my rod is fully erect.

A hot, erect pillar of flesh.

Her fingers continue to touch it with a bit of uneasiness.

"....!"

H,Hisui, this is—"

I start to tell her this is wrong, but before I can..

Hisui holds the base of my penis with both of her hands, as if embracing something extremely important to her.

"Nn...."

Hisui takes a deep breath.

And then, a different feeling of heat comes down on me.

—My body ignites.

I've never felt this sensation before.
My heart starts to pound heavily.
Hisui's tender lips enclose my tip.
With soft pressure, she slowly begins to suck.
"_____"

My mind goes completely blank.
I had no idea anything could feel this good.
Just watching my shaft vanish between her lips makes my blood boil.
"Nn... ha, n..."
Hisui's breath starts to become wild, probably because she's having a difficult time breathing.
Her face.
Just looking at her like that, my reason crumbles away completely.
Her blushing face as she earnestly tries to do her duty.
Her fingers move around awkwardly, just desperately gripping my engorged member.
"Ha... n, na... n."
The breath from her nose and mouth tickles my tip.
"_____"

It starts to tickle, and it makes me feel more pleasure.
Is it Hisui's saliva, or maybe my own liquids?
My shaft starts to get covered in sticky fluid.
—My heart pounds.

My pulse races even faster than before.
Her fingers grip me tightly.
Her tongue licks me hesitantly.
"Nn—ha, n ,..."
Her inexperienced lips are still weak.
But her tongue still caresses the tip of my shaft.
Gradually, her tongue becomes more active.
"... Kk... Hisu.. i...!"
This sensation shoots up my spine.

—My heart beats.

... Just a moment ago, the fact that Hisui is the one doing this set my body afire.
But that's ending.
Now her action seems like she's got the hang of it, growing more and more confident.
"... Mn... nna—n..."
Hisui starts breathing violently.
The sensation of viscous fluid.

She uses the tip of her tongue to lick the opening at the head of my penis.

"K—ha...!"

My hips jump a bit.

I desperately try to resist the sensation that is welling from my loins to my testicles.

"Hisu... i, stop—"

My heartbeat rages in my ears.

The hot feelings start to accumulate and redouble..

"Nn... na... n—"

Hisui does not stop.

Little by little.

Her lips start to creep lower.

—Thump.

"... N, ... n, ... u... n."

Hisui's flowing hair.

Hisui's lips, which weren't moving before, start to move up and down.

With a slurping noise.

Hisui's saliva and my fluids continue sliding up and down beneath her lips—

"Ah—a,a—"

A gasp escapes my lips.

The feeling of Hisui wrapping me with her mouth.

The mixture of pleasure and pain that shoots from my hips, through my back and up to my brain.

The sound of gentle slurping.

These erotic sounds get louder.

Hisui just continues to passionately suck at my shaft.

"Nn... nn,n.....!"

Gripping.

Hisui's fingers continue to grip me harder.

"—A.. ha...!"

... My breathing is out of control.

... I start to blank out.

"A... n, nmu..."

Hisui's breathing almost sounds pained.

Her mouth full, the exhalations from her nose flow over my penis.

—Thump.

My shaft starts to get wet.

It's not just that, but Hisui's fingers are wet as well.

Dirty.

Those beautiful fingers are covered in two kinds of fluid, hers and mine.

—My.. heart.. is pounding..

It feels like it's telling me to go crazy.

"... Nn... Shiki... sama."

Hisui suddenly draws away from my rod.. maybe the smell is too much for her.

A string.

A thin thread stretches from her lips, connecting the two of us.

The sound of breathing.

Wild breathing.

From me, not Hisui.

—Thump.

My heart is about to burst.

My body is about to shut down.

This—this kind of pleasure.. I don't want it.

Not enough.

This is not even close to enough.

"... Shiki-sama... are, you feeling.. better....?"

Hisui's voice is full of hesitation.

pant... *pant*... *pant*...

Still unable to move even my arms, I just breathe in and out.

"... If that felt good... then please, bear.. just a little more."

Taking a deep breath, Hisui once again lowers her head.

"Nn—"

Once again, she starts to caress me with the inside of her mouth.

—My heart thumps.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump—!

"... Not.. enough..."

"Ah... Shiki.. sama....?"

"Hisui... deeper..."

So saying.

My arms grab her head.

"...!"

Shiki-sama, what are....!"

"Hi.. sui—"

I put some power into my arms.

And I forcibly push her head down.

"Nn—!?"

Her lips make a wet, sliding sound.

"Nn—,n.. n—!"

Hisui tries to pull her head back.

But.. my arms do not allow her.

"Hisui—more—"

With ragged breath, I say such a selfish thing.

"Nn—ha,n,ah—!"

Hisui tries to breathe.

Before, it was Hisui embracing me with her mouth.

But now it's different.

Now I thrust my whole shaft into her mouth.

"Nn—n, n—!"

Opening her mouth, Hisui manages to take it all in.

There is no resemblance to the enthusiasm of before.

Now it feels like she is just trying to escape.

"... Hisui... does this hurt?"

"Nn—n, mu."

Her breathing flows against my shaft.

I start to feel the pressure of her teeth.

"I see.

Then I'll let go."

I pull my hands off her head.

"Nn... ha, ah."

Breathing painfully, Hisui tries to lift her face.

"No.

Hisui—move right there."

Hisui freezes.

"——"

Confused, Hisui hesitates and then.

"N... nn,ha..."

Hisui swallows me deeper and starts to move.

—Thump.

"Nn... mu, nn, n..."

Back and forth.

Her burning lips run up and down.

"A... n, n, Ah..."

Instead of breathing in air, she's breathing in me.

The sensation of being inside a woman's mouth.

"Nn—na,n—"

Hisui is no longer able to hold her saliva in.

It's flowing much more than before.

Sliding. Sliding.
 Hisui's dirtied face.
 "Ha—Hisui, it's really—"
 Matching Hisui's sliding, I start to move my hips.
 I hit the back of her throat.

"Ha—n, nnn—!"
 It must really hurt her as she starts to bite down.
 Hisui bites with enough power to leave tooth marks.
 "—!"
 Trying to escape those teeth, I move my hips even more.
 "nn—!"
 Her gripping fingers.
 Her hair sways wildly.
 She continues to caress me.

" n... Hisui, more...!"
 "Nn—a, Shiki.. sama—!"
 I hear her voice.
 The blood pounds in my shaft.
 Opening her mouth, she takes it all in.
 The sensation of being sucked, up and down.

"Nn—,...!"
 My semen starts to well up.
 "Ha,a—I'm going to come, Hisui...!"
 Hisui starts to pull back.
 But my arms move on their own.
 I start to come.
 I don't try to hold back, and I don't let Hisui escape.

In my ecstasy, I release everything into Hisui's mouth.
 "Nn—Ah,nn—!"
 Splash.
 "N—,n—!"
 Hisui tries to pull back with a pained expression.
 But my arms do not allow it.
 I force her to take everything.
 "—Ah, ah, ahh—!"
 At the same time, her throat starts to move.
 pant... *pant*... *pant*...
 With that, I let her go.

Breathing.
 Hisui collapses onto the floor.
 Wild breathing.

Both of us are breathing desperately.

—Thump.

But.. this isn't good.

I'm not satisfied with this.

My body can now move.

It looks like I can move.

Because of that, this isn't enough.

—Thump.

"Shiki-sama.... How are you feeling?"

Hisui asks me this while sitting on the ground.

I—

Just this isn't enough at all.

turn to **386**

I can move again, so I should just thank her.

turn to **385**

385

"....."

I don't know what to say.

Even though I'm only a little better than yesterday, at least now I feel alive.

But, after making Hisui do that—making her drink that completely, maybe it was just better if I stayed like that.



"——"

Hisui straightens out her clothes and moves away from the bed.

".... Hisui.... I"

"Shiki-sama.

Please do not tell anyone of this.

.... I do not want you to say it even to myself."

"——"

.... Of course, Hisui must hate what she just did enough to not even want to be reminded of it.

"Shiki-sama.

This was something that I did on my own.

Please think that nothing happened.

Otherwise, I will be unable to serve you any longer."

"——"

I don't know how to respond.

I don't have words to apologize to her, and I don't have the words to thank her either.

"Well then, please excuse me."

"A....."

Hisui leaves.

All I can do is watch as she does so.

.... It's two o'clock.

Even though it's time for my checkup, Hisui probably won't come.

..... *sigh*

All I can do is sigh.

Just how did all of this happen?

Even though it was Hisui that started all this, what was I doing holding her head and coming in her mouth like that?

turn to **387**

——It's not enough.

pant *pant* *pant*

I'm out of breath, but..

It's not even close to being enough.

Being done this much.

Being done this much by Hisui, I can't let it end now.

"—Shiki-sama....?"

You should be able to move your body now...."

"——"

Hisui comes a little closer.

Her face sets it off.

Pulling on her arms, I yank her onto the bed.

"Ah—Shi, Shiki-sama, what are you....!"

"What does it look like?"

After doing all that—are you going to say no, Hisui?"

"N, No....!"

I was just trying to help you, and—"

Hisui tries to escape.

But that doesn't last very long.

With her back against the pillow, she realizes that she can't move back any further.

—Thump.

My heart races.

All my blood vessels are ordering me.

VIOLATE HER

Do it.

These words echo in my head.

"It's hot—I'm so hot I could die, Hisui."

"No....!"

Please calm down, get a hold of yourself, Shiki-sama....!"

——Thump.

It's impossible.

What made me this way,

what did this to me,

what I now want,

what made me want it?

All of it.. is what Hisui did to me.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*—

"Sto.... Please stop, Shiki-sama....!"

I can hear her voice.

But.. her voice.. has the opposite effect.

"Hisui—!"

And just like that,

I get on the bed and keep her from escaping.

"N, Hwa....!"

Hisui's voice is bewildered, and her body starts to shake.

I don't care about foreplay.

I tug her clothes out of the way and thrust my burning organ into her.

.... She is somewhat wet from before, so I slide in rather easily.

The sound of me burying myself in Hisui's tender body is like ripping meat.

"A—n, n.... ah....."

Hisui doesn't even resist.

All she does is surrender herself shamefully, blushing brightly as I start to move.

".... This is wrong, Shiki-sama.... If.. Akiha-sama finds, out—"

Even though she refuses me with her words, her body tells a different story.

She lifts her skirt so it won't get dirty, and, in my mind, to give me better access.

"I don't care—you.. are the only one.. right now—"

I thrust even deeper.

I continue to bury myself in her.

"Nn—!"

Hisui's legs start to shake.

"Nn.... Ah, it's coming in...."

As if they are not hers, Hisui lifts her legs and stares at where we are connected.

"Ah—"

Deeper.. Deeper.

"It's hot.... Hisui, inside of you.... so hot...."

This isn't figurative.

Her passage is really, extremely hot.

She tightens around me.

Her muscles squeeze me tenderly, and her contractions draw me deeper and deeper.

"U—,....!"

As if to resist, I start to pull back, then push back in.

"Nnn—!"

Shiki-sama, there!"

Hisui's hips start to float.

Her insides tighten even harder.

Her tender contractions become softer and pull me even deeper.

"Ha—wait, Hisu.. i—"

Strange.

Hisui's insides are.. terribly strange.

"Ho.... t, it's so hot, yet—?"

It feels so good.

It almost feels as if countless fingers are caressing me.

Those fingers are hot, delicate, and moving as if wrapping around every millimeter of me.

"K—-aah."

I don't even need to thrust.

Just being inside her gives me pleasure enough.

"A—Shiki.. sama.... please, move...."

She whispers as if ashamed.

—Thump.

My heart starts to throb.

That's right.

I'm the one who said it wasn't enough.

This ordinary pleasure is not enough.

If this is enough pleasure right now, then there should be pleasure beyond imagination in what lies ahead.

"Ha—a, k—"

I move my hips.

ghting against Hisui's tightness inviting me in to her depths, I pull out, then thrust back in.

"Nn....!"

Hisui's body starts to pull away.

In response, my body presses harder.

Sliding.. sliding.

"Ha—n, na, ah, ah....!"

Sliding on her juices, I thrust again and again and again.

Her hips glide with mine.

"A—hwa, ah, Shiki.. Sa—n....!"

She tries to take me in completely.

"K, haa, ah, aa—-ah."

Her swaying hair.

Her eyes, drenched with passion.

"—Ah, aah, ah."

My hips rock back and forth.

I can think of nothing else.

Once.

I start to feel everything well up inside me and I hold it back.

Twice.

Even as I resist, Hisui tightens her hold on me.

Three times.

Hisui's insides even take away my will to hold back.

"Ha—ah, ah."

I don't even know whose voice is whose.

Only for the time being,

I am literally drowning in Hisui's body.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

".... No, that's wrong....!"

This isn't like that.

I'm just doing this because I love her.

"Definitely—"

I start to forget myself as I thrust.

"Definitely,"

Within her depths, I can forget what I am, so I keep thrusting.

"Definitely, I am—!"

"Na....!"

Hisui's head falls back.

"Ha,a—!"

Shiki-sa.. ma—it.. hurts....!"

"I'm different!"

Different!

Different....!"

I keep thrusting.

Hisui's body shakes uncontrollably.

"St—Sto.. p, please Shiki-sama....!"

If this, keeps up, I'll—!"

I can't hear her.

Lost in this pleasure.

The heat of pre-climax.

"N, a, Aa....!"

Stop, please, this....!"

Hisui's back begins to arch.

Her arms reach out, and she tries to push me away.

—Thump.

"Not done yet....!"

You started this, so why—!?"

I don't care.

I don't care if I break her.

My mind is burning.

Burning.

Flaring.

Erupting.
 Frying.
 Roasting.
 There is nothing left.
 "Shiki, Shiki-sa—please, stop....!"
 pant *pant* *pant*
 Thrust, thrust, thrust.
 Hisui keeps struggling.
 But I keep thrusting.
 "Ha—a, n.... ah—"
 She stops trying to push me away.
 "Haa.... haha, hahaha, ha....!"
 Hisui collapses, powerless.
 She welcomed me so eagerly before, but now lies exhausted and twitching on the bed.
 "... Sto.... p.... please, forgive.. me...."
 A weak, faltering voice.
 And then,
 Ha HAHAHA HAHAHAHAHAHA
 I shiver.
 An order enters my brain.
 "Fine, I'll end it right here—drink up, Hisui....!"
 I pull out of her.
 She drips fluid all over as I pull my rock hard cock out of her abused hole.

 "Here, you like it, don't you....!"
 Tearing back her clothes, I expose her small breasts.
 I start to rub myself between her perfectly shaped mounds.
 "Nn—!?"
 I push on the back of her head and make her swallow it.
 "Ha,n,nnn—!"
 This is entirely different from before.
 Dripping and mixed with her love juices, I thrust it into her mouth.
 "A—n, No....!"
 "Here I come, Hisui....!"
 The sensation shoots along my body.
 Squeezed between her breasts, I release the heat that was boiling inside of me.

 "Na—!"
 I shoot it into her face.
 My squirting come splatters onto Hisui.
 "A—ha, ha....!"
 Holding back tears, Hisui spits out what was in her mouth.
 She sticks her tongue out, showing it to be painted an impure white.
 Erotically, some of our mingled fluids trickle from the corner of her lips.
 "A.... ha, a—"

Hisui is drained of all energy.

"Ha... Haa... ha."

It looks like I can still move.

Not being able to resist, Hisui becomes a doll which I hold onto as I move.

My tool still moves around.

"Ha... A, ah."

Still.. overflowing.

The sticky whiteness continues to pour.

"A—ha."

It flows from her breasts and dirties even her neck.

"—Ha."

And.. it is completely finished.

Both my lust and the whirlpool of energy that was flowing in my body.

As if my earlier recovery never happened, my body once again returns to its pitiful state.

"....."

My body.. does not move.

.... I'm able to move a little bit, but the aliveness I had before disappears.

.... Probably because I climaxed so hard.

It seems that the energy I gained was sucked up by Hisui.



"——"

Hisui straightens her clothes and moves away from the bed.

I—can't say anything to her.

Even though I was so excited—I did such terrible things to her.

There's no way I can give her any justification.

"... Hisui... I"

"Shiki-sama.

Let's forget about this."

"—But Hisui, I"

"I've already forgotten about it.

So.. please do the same, Shiki-sama."

"_____"

I don't know how to respond.

I don't have words to apologize to her, and I don't have the words to thank her either.



"Well then, please excuse me.

I'm repeating myself, but please don't tell Akiha-sama or my sister about this."

"A....."

Hisui leaves, or rather, escapes the room.

.... But that's understandable.

After going through that, she probably doesn't want to be in this room for even a second longer.

.... It's two o'clock.

Even though it's time for my checkup, Hisui probably won't come.

sigh

All I can do is sigh.

How did all of this happen?

Even though Hisui started it and my body got so excited, I didn't have to force her down and treat her that roughly.

turn to **387**

387

"——"

I have a headache.

.... I don't quite understand how, but what I did with Hisui helped me regain some of my strength.

But in exchange, my headaches have gotten much worse.

.... I hear a knock at the door.

It's probably.... Kohaku-san, I suppose.



"Please excuse me, Shiki-sama."

"——Eh?"

The one who came was Hisui.

"——"

Hisui wordlessly performs her usual check-up.

Because I haven't slept today, I'm not bleeding.

I'm not using an IV, so after taking a few measurements and changing the sheets, she gives me some water and medicine.

"——"

The whole time, there is nothing but silence between us.

.... After doing what I did, I can't look at her in the face.

I think Hisui is like that too, but Hisui probably still dutifully and methodically carries out all her normal tasks because of her role as a servant.

And all of a sudden.



"Shiki-sama, how is your body's condition?"

She talks to me.

"Um, I, uh—"

As far as my condition goes, I can move a little more than before because of what happened earlier, but—



"Shiki-sama, is there something the matter?"

Your face appears very red."

"My, my face is red.. because—Hisui, you.."

"Yes?"

What did I do?"

Hisui tilts her head to the side questioningly.

"Uh—"

Damn it, I can't just say it.

And I still haven't been able to apologize for before.

"That is, I... I'm sorry about before.

You must have been embarrassed to do it, but I treated you a bit rough."



"Ah....."

Hisui lowers her gaze as if embarrassed.
I suppose she remembers now.

—I guess that's not the reason.



".... Do not worry, Shiki-sama.

I must apologize as well, for doing that to your body without asking.
It is only natural if you end up hating me."

"Wha—hate you?"

I have no reason to hate you....!

No matter what happens, I won't hate you.

.... Besides, it is only natural if you end up hating me."

My whole body becomes heavy as I say this.
Even though I'm the one who said it, it should be about time Hisui is getting
tired of hearing me.
I bet she's remembering what happened before and hating me even as I speak...
Huh?



.... That's odd.
Why is Hisui smiling so happily?
".... Hisui.
Why, are you smiling?"
"Shiki-sama, your words and mine were the same.
I thought it was amusing."
Hisui giggles, as if it is really funny.
.... My head starts spinning.
Hisui's rare smile is so cute, I'm about to go crazy.



That might be why.
Her smile looks incredibly scary to me.
".... Anyway, I haven't said thanks yet.
Thank you for before, Hisui.
.... The, method was a little problematic, but thanks to you my body is better.
I may even be able to walk a little."



"Eh—ah, yes.

Even though what I did is a small thing, I am happy that I could be of some use."

Hisui looks at me directly.

.... Seeing her like that makes me remember what happened, and I start to get a little uncomfortable.

".... But, about before, I don't think it was really appropriate.

I'm happy, but it's not quite right."



".... Not quite, right?"

"Yes.

That's, something that both parties should agree to.. and even though you're a servant, you don't have to go that far.."



"I understand.

As you say, I will ask for your permission before I touch you next time."
 No, you're missing my point..



"Please excuse me.
 If anything happens, please call for me, Shiki-sama."

Hisui walks out of the room.
 ".... She's really calm...."
 I'm a bit taken aback.
 Just seeing Hisui's face makes me blush, but Hisui acted just like she always does.
 "....."
 I don't get it.
 Something doesn't feel quite right and lingers in the back of my mind.

"A——"
 When I open my eyes, the day has already passed.
 It seems I fell asleep, but I don't remember when.
 pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

My breathing is ragged.
 My body is burning.
 My body.
 My body feels like it's roasting, erupting into flames.
 ".... Wa.... ter...."
 My throat is thirsty.
 It's so hot, I can't even speak.
 I can't even call for Hisui or Kohaku-san.
 "....."
 My empty room.
 I start to feel down staying in this for so long.
 This restless room.
 This room I don't remember.
 This room, it feels, like it isn't my room.
 ".... Wa.... ter...."

I'm thirsty.

Water.

I should go back to my house, and quickly, get some water to drink.

I gasp for air.

Placing my hand on the wall and feeling like I'll collapse any second, I manage to drag myself out of my room.

I have trouble breathing.

.... What is this?

I haven't even walked thirty feet and already my heart feels like it will explode.

I need more air.

Still, I have to go.

I might die if I walk anymore.

But if I don't get any water to drink, I'll probably die anyway.

Then, I'll walk and go get some water.

I can't just stay and lounge on my bed forever.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*....

I go out into the courtyard.

Water—this, isn't, the kitchen though.

..... *pant*..... *pant*

I enter the woods.

.... Soon.

Soon, I will be able to be at a place with water, a familiar place.

pant *pant*

With the fever getting to me, I arrive at the place.

White, sunshine.

Even though the day is already ending, the entire world is white.

This place is burning hot like a desert, and I squint my eyes since the world is so white.

.... Thud.

I hear a noise.

.... It comes from the detached house.

.... Someone.

.... Someone's inside?

Opening the sliding door very slightly, I peer in from the porch.
Inside, I see the figures of Akiha and Kohaku.
They look a little strange.
I hear the swishing of an obi being removed.

—What..?

Without a word, Kohaku pulls down her kimono and bares her breasts.

Kohaku stands there with a blushing face, but does not move.
Akiha presses her lips against the bared white chest.

Tension.

Kohaku looks down at her bare chest, and Akiha crouches so that she is burying her face in Kohaku's breasts.

A thin red drop makes a line down her breast.
Akiha's throat starts to move, swallowing something.
What—what is she drinking?
There's no need to ask; I already understand.

Akiha, she's drinking, Kohaku's blood—

.... I feel dizzy.
My mind goes blank.
All I can do is stare at the strange event happening before my eyes, like in a daydream.
Suddenly, Akiha opens her mouth with her arms still around Kohaku.
"About the killer.... what do you think, Kohaku?"
"Let's see.
I think there can be no mistake that it's the work of SHIKI-sama."

—What.

"I—I suppose so.
I have no idea how he can walk around with that body, but we can't leave him alone.
The impurity of the Tohno blood that has awakened must be cleansed by those of the Tohno blood."

—Just, what are they saying?
"Then, Akiha-sama."
"Yes.
As the head of the Tohno family, I will kill my brother."

—Those words send chills down my spine.

Akiha isn't playing around.

Even Kohaku-san nods seriously.

"Then, Akiha-sama.

We should let Hisui-chan know about this too."

"You're right.

.... But we shouldn't need her help.

My brother can't move around as he likes, so we should be enough to kill him."

—*pant* *pant* *pant*

My breathing gets out of control.

"You understand, Kohaku?

Don't let Nii-san pick up on any of this.

It will all be over in a few days, so let's not trouble him."

"Yes, I understand.

He can't even move from his bed by himself, so he will never find out."

—*pant* *pant* *pant*

My fingers shake uncontrollably.

Nausea permeates my being and I almost pass out.

But, I can't pass out here.

—I have to get away.

If I pass out here, I'll surely be killed.

If they find out I was watching them, they'll kill me right here.

I struggle for breath.

.... I don't understand.

I don't understand why they would want to kill me.

Even my brain trying to understand doesn't work because of the fever.

.... I don't understand.

This, has to be a bad dream.

———-Dream

Dream———-?

Yes, this is a dream.

Like always, this has to be just another one of my nightmares.
 Then, I have to wake up quickly.
 Before this horrible vision consumes me, I have to wake up and return to my normal life—

"Ah—"
 Somehow, I make it to my room.
 Now—yes, now I, should lock the door—



"Shiki-sama."
 "_____"

.... I don't know how long she has been there, but Hisui is standing in my room.



"What are you doing?
 In your condition, walking is very dangerous."
 "Hi... sui."
 "Please, lay down.
 If you push yourself, Akiha-sama will scold me."
 "Akiha... will scold....?"

Why would she get in trouble if I went outside?
 No, I understand perfectly.
 Akiha realizes that I'm the killer.
 So she plans to lock me in my room, and when night comes, kill me.

"—Please leave, Hisui."

"Shiki-sama....?"

"I won't let anyone in this room.

Even you, no one will ever come in again....!"



"Shiki-sama—kyaa!"

I don't know where I got the strength, but I push her out into the hallway.
Then, I shut the door and lock it.

"Shiki-sama—!?"

Shiki, sama, please open the door, Shiki-sama....!"

She knocks on the door.

Ignoring it all, I crumble to the floor.

—Pai, n.

It sticks inside my brain.

The poison permeates every pore in my body.

Every time I take a breath, the mold invades my whole body.

—I can't move freely.

Something other than my organs or my functions, but something more from
the core, like my very own energy, seems to be flowing out of my body.

My heart has an invisible pipe sticking out of it.

My "life" is flowing along this pipe to him.

—It, hurts.

So I can't make it.

No matter how hard my body tries to recover, he takes away everything.

So unless I take in something from the outside world, I can't live.

Intravenous drip.
 Nutrient supplement.
 Injection.
 Sedative.
 Moisture.
 Blood.
 Reason.
 Intelligence.
 Feelings.
 Memory.
 Sight.
 Sound.
 Taste.
 Touch.
 Smell.
 Bodily fluids.
 Love.
 Impulse.
 —Ha.... a

These drugs, all they can do is barely keep me alive.
 This isn't healing me.
 If there's something that will help me move, it's—

Knock.
 Knock.
 The sound wakes me up.

Knock Knock.
 Knock Knock.
 Knock Knock.
 "... Sh.... ut, up!"
 Placing my hand on the wall, I manage to stand up.
 My own wheezing fills my ears.

Knock Knock.
 Knock Knock.
 Knock Knock.

"Nii-san!
 Please open the door, Nii-san."
 Akiha is banging on the door.
 That's right.
 I locked it, so no one can get in.

Unlock the door.

turn to **389**

Why did I lock the door in the first place?

turn to **388**

388

"... Why.. did I lock it...."

My thoughts start to move through a haze.

That, was because—

"——"

That's right.

I locked it so Akiha wouldn't get in.

"Nii-san....!"

I know you're up.

You have to get your examination, so why did you lock the door!?"

Bam bam.

She knocks harder.

Akiha frantically calls me from outside in a bitter voice.

"Please open the door already!"

You haven't had your evening IV, do you want to die!?"

The pounding on the door doesn't stop.

.... That's only natural.

It's not good for Akiha if I shut myself in this room like this.

As long as I'm doing this—Akiha will not be able to kill me.

"Nii-san....!?"

Hey, are you listening to me, Nii-san....!?"

Bam, Bam.

.... I don't really mind the knocking, but I cannot stand having to listen to her voice.

"Shut-up.....!!!"

"Eh——?"

I hear her gasp from the other side of the door.

"Shut.. up?"

.... Nii-san, I am only worrying about you—"

".... I don't care.

I'm not coming out.

If you're really worried about me, then just go away."

"Wha—"

"Do you get it?"

I'm not ever coming out.

I won't—let you—kill me....!"

Thud.

I hit the door.

.... The other side of the door becomes a frozen silence.

—And after that..

".... Nii-san, just what do you mean?
Who told you I would kill you?"
".... Just go away....!"
I'm not a killer, I'm still sane....!"
"I can't believe it—Nii-san, you are already pulled in this much?"
Her words are filled with surprise.
I sense her step back from the door.
".... I understand.
Nii-san, you are exhausted right now, so I will come back and see you later."
"—Shut up!
I won't let you or anyone else in this room....!"
".... Nii-san.
I will listen to your words today, but tomorrow, I will make you listen to me.
Leaving you by yourself for one day is dangerous enough; I simply cannot leave
you alone for two days, otherwise you will surely die.
Please wait for just one more day, Nii-san."
I hear her footsteps recede.
pant.... *pant*.... *pant*
I can hardly breathe.
Just like Akiha said, I will surely die at this rate.
pant.... *pant*.... *pant*
But, it's still better than Akiha killing me.

—I keep the door locked.

I lean against the wall and keep my eyes open so I won't fall asleep.

turn to **390**

389

"Stop pounding on the door, I'm, going to open.."

Hazily, I open the door.

"Nii-san—!"

Akiha rushes into the room.

Kohaku-san follows behind her.



"Nii-san, what were you doing...!?"

You look terrible, you should be in bed—!"

—My heart pounds.



"That's right, Shiki-san.

You haven't eaten since lunch, and you haven't taken your IV.

If you keep this up, you will not heal."

—My heart pounds.



"Geez.
I don't know what happened, but please calm down.
Sleeping on the floor like that.. do you want to die, Nii-san?"

—My heart pounds.

Akiha comes closer to take my arm as she says this.
Like she said in that detached house.
She's coming.. to kill me.
"—Get out!"



"Eh—Ni, Nii-san, what are—"
"Get out, I said!
I won't let you—kill me...!"

I push her away.
.... But it's not like I can push her out into the hallway with this body.
Akiha simply takes a step back and stares at me.



"Nii-san, just what do you mean?
Who told you that I would kill you?"
Akiha looks at me directly.
My heart skips a beat.
Her sharp glance feels like she is reading my mind.
".... Just get out....!
I'm not a killer, I'm still sane....!"



"Killer.. Nii-san—you are already pulled in this much?"
Her voice is filled with surprise.
Akiha walks towards the door on her own.



".... I understand.
Nii-san, you are exhausted right now, so I will come back and see you later."
"-Shut up!"

I won't let you or anyone else in this room....!"

"....."

Akiha raises her eyebrows for a second, then starts to leave the room.



".... Nii-san.

I will listen to your words today, but tomorrow, I will make you listen to me.
Leaving you by yourself for one day is dangerous enough; I simply cannot leave
you alone for two days, otherwise you will surely die.
Please wait for just one more day, Nii-san."

The door shuts.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*

I can hardly breathe.

Just like Akiha said, I will surely die at this rate.

pant.... *pant*.... *pant*

But, it's still better than Akiha killing me.

—I lock the door.

I lean against the wall and keep my eyes open so I won't fall asleep.

turn to **390**

390

.... Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.

.... Knock, knock knock, knock.

—The night is over.

A terrible silence.
 I can't even hear the wheezing of my breathing.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.

"——"

My body doesn't even twitch or move at all.
 My mind has completely stopped as well.
 I bet if I look at myself in the mirror, I would look like a puppet with its strings cut.
 Kn.
 kno kno, ck.
 kno, ck.

"——Gohu."
 I cough.

.... I screw up the rhythm again.

"Go-ha, ah, ah——"

.... Knock.
 Kno, knock.
 Knock.
 Kno kno, ck knock.
 Knock.
 Knock knock.
 Knock.
 Knock, knock knock, knock.

",,"

I get back my rhythm, and I can continue breathing.

"_____"

Being by myself all night caused my body to become really weak.

My vision is really blurry.

The air touching my skin is painful.

My organs are so screwed up now that I can't breathe unless I concentrate.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

"Shiki-sama, are you awake....?"

Hisui's voice.

.... How many times is this?

Hisui really doesn't grow tired of this at all.

"You are awake, are you not?"

If that is the case, then please at least eat."

".... No.

I won't eat what any of you give me."

I won't eat anything.

I can't trust anything that comes from this house.

Food.

Water.

Medicine.

It seems like everything is a poison to kill me.

".... Shiki-sama, I will place your food here.

After I leave, please open the door and eat it."

.... Hisui's presence recedes.

"....."

I bang my head against the wall.

.... How many times have I ignored Hisui like this?

.... Hisui.

Hisui is different from Akiha and Kohaku-san.

Maybe Hisui is not trying to kill me.

"....."

But, that is just a fantasy.

Hisui tried to lock me in this room.

Like right now, she came to my room to look after me, keeping me trapped in this room.

"—Ha, ah."

.... This is no good.

I know my thoughts are just paranoia.

But my mind won't return to normal.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

.... Knock, Knock Knock, Knock.

My mind is foggy and my body pulses with pain.

My throat is so dry that it feels like I will die if I don't drink water.

.... In spite of all that, I still keep the door locked.

if hisuiregard < 5
turn to **392**
turn to **391**

391

.... The knocking begins once again.
Knock knock, knock knock, repeating.

"Shiki-sama, your food has gotten cold."
Her voice sounds sad.
"... Akiha-sama and Nee-san have gone out and will not return today.
We are the only ones in the mansion right now."
Does she want to tell me to come out?
"Shut up...!"
I told you to leave me alone.
Why can't you understand that, Hisui.... !?"
"_____"
I hear a gasp.

Her presence recedes.

.... Yet again, the knocking continues.

Her presence recedes.

.... We repeat this cycle countless times.
"Ha-ah, g—"
.... Pain.
The hunger is nothing.
But thirst is killing my burning body.
"_____"
.... Just what am I doing?
Lying crumpled against the wall, hugging my broken body.
The closed window, the locked door.
"_____"
.... Come to think of it, a long time ago..
It feels like something like this happened before too.

—That was..
How long ago was that?

When I was just a small kid, taken to new surroundings and not being used
to the new people, I locked myself up in my room.
I hated everything and I didn't want to talk to anyone.

During that time, there was a girl that always knocked on the door.

Knock, knock, was the sound.

Every time I would ask who it was, the voice would always respond "It's me."
"SHIKI-chan, let's play.
You'll get moldy if you stay in one place like that."
I tell her it's none of her business and make her go away day after day.

The knocking sound again.

Her presence draws away.

.... That girl came every day.
She would always knock, not getting tired of doing so.
She would never force me out, but continue to call my name without opening the door.
"Why won't you come outside?"
I can't go outside.
Everyone in the mansion, they all see me as the enemy.
"That's not true.
Everyone wants to like you, SHIKI-chan."
But I can't believe her.
My own father believed that, and was killed by Tohno Makihisa.
".... I see.
No wonder you can't trust anyone."
That's right.
So it's easier for me to be alone.
"But, you will just be yourself all the time.
Being by yourself is no fun."
I don't care.
This is better than getting killed.
Better than being tricked.
It's better to be alone and trick myself instead of dying.
"Geez.
I understand, so you can ***** me.
Then you can come outside, right?"
Her words then.
I. can't remember exactly what they were.
With her voice, that girl said I could do what—?

Knock knock.
Hisui really doesn't tire of this.
Her surprising endurance reminds me of that childhood memory.
".....?"
I don't hear her footsteps.
She doesn't seem to have walked away.
"..... Hisui?"
There is nothing but silence on the other side of the door.

Hisui is just standing quietly on the other side.

Time passes.

Hisui's presence doesn't move.

All she does is wait by the door.

".... Why will you not come outside, Shiki-sama?"

.... That's obvious.

Since I can't trust anyone anymore, I'm being by myself.

Neither Akiha nor Kohaku, not even I can be trusted, so I can't do anything but lock myself away.

.... Yeah, I finally realize it.

The thing with Akiha might really be a trivial thing.

I am trying to be alone so that I can lock myself up, as I might be the killer.

".... No one?"

Are you saying you can believe in no one, Shiki-sama?"

.... That's right.

Therefore, there is no reason for her to worry about me.

It's wrong for her to worry that much about me, the one wanting human blood, the one who violated her body so roughly.

".... Hisui.

Just go away.

It's easier for me to be by myself.

This way I won't be a burden to anyone."

"That is a lie.

That.. that is not fun at all.

Shiki-sama, you are telling a lie....!"

.... Her voice actually sounds a little angry.

"Shiki-sama.

If you say you cannot believe in anyone, please believe in me!

So please, listen to me for just now....!"

.... Her voice.. she sounds like she is crying.

She must be really angry as she's not making any sense.

"You can believe in me"?

That's backwards.

Normally, I have to say "I believe in you."

"..... Geez....."

That's just absurd.

I thought the only one who'd make that kind of ridiculous argument was that one girl.

".... Believe in what?"

"I do not know....!"

I just know that.. I like you, Shiki-sama, which is why I am calling to you like this....!"

Thud.

She knocks louder than ever before.

".... Shiki-sama, please.

Open the door.

I know I am powerless, but I do know that it will be better than being by yourself....!"

She sounds like she's crying.

The tone is different, but it feels similar to what that girl told me back then.

"Will you resist again....!?"

Shiki-sama, you are really in danger like this....!

Why—why are you acting like back then....!

You promised that when you came back, you would play with everyone, so why....!"

The crying voice of a young girl.

"Ah....."

I start to remember a little.

That's right.

Back then, before I was taken to the hospital, I made that small promise.

I thought that I would go back to the mansion when I healed, so I just said it without thinking too much.

"Shiki-sama—I do not want to lose you right before my eyes, just like before....!"

So please.... please, open the door.... Shi, ki—"

The pounding against the door stops.

It seems Hisui has crumbled to the ground in tears.

That girl, who would call to me day after day.

That energetic, worrying girl that was always by my side.

—Just who?

Really, who was she—?

"Hisui....!"

Even though I shouldn't have any strength left, I somehow manage to stand.

Every time I move, I feel like fainting.

But the pain is of no concern right now.

—Hisui.

Hisui.

Hisui, Hisui, Hisui, Hisui—!

I drag myself to the door and place my hand on the lock.

".... Yo.... u"

My numb fingers don't move as I tell them to, and the lock is difficult to turn.

The lock finally clinks loose.

The door opens.

In front of me, I see the figure of Hisui.

"Shiki-sama—you look.. terrible."

With tears still streaming down her face, Hisui stares at me.

But I don't care about my body right now.

More than that, I—

"—Hisui.

Are you that girl?"

"....."

Hisui doesn't answer.

Her silence isn't disagreement, but agreement.

"Why?"

—I thought she was Kohaku-san.

You even told me yesterday that you were the child in the mansion."

"... Shiki-sama.

That was not me.

I think Nee-san was helping you out since you were so weak."

"Eh—"

—In other words.... The Hisui that I saw yesterday.. was really—Kohaku-san....?

"... Then Hisui?"

You're the one who played with us when we were kids, and Kohaku-san is—the one who was always in the mansion?"

"....."

"Why....?"

I don't understand.

Just why are the two of you acting like you traded places?"

"... We never intended to deceive you.

I think I became calmer after you were adopted by the Arima family.

Nee-san tried to cheer me up by acting very happy, and then, we gradually traded our roles."

"But why.... why did it happen....?"

Hisui.... you were always so energetic."

"... That is not true.

I am naturally not active.

But when you were there, I tried to follow you as hard as I could."

"... But, I never should have done that.

Since I took you out into the garden, you had the accident."

I—all I could do was watch in fear as you were killed before my eyes.

All I could do was stare at your blood-soaked body.

I couldn't even cry, or call for help.

.... Since that time, I was unable to understand myself.

No matter how I tried, I could not remember how I acted, or how I smiled."

"... When you were dying, I could not do anything.

I could only watch.

It was as if I was just a doll.

So—I thought.. that maybe it would be better if I was just a doll.
 Maybe I put a curse on myself.
 Before I knew it, I became silent just like Nee-san.
 Nee-san took my place, doing the work I could not do, smiling because I
 could not."
 ".... Wait, Hisui.
 What you're saying, I don't really—"
 Understand, is what I wanted to say.
 "What do you mean I almost died?
 You know about that accident eight years ago?"
 ".... Yes.
 You were not injured from a traffic accident.
 In the courtyard of the mansion, you were killed."
 "Wha—"

That's.
 Not.
 Right.
 I'm the one who did the killing.
 Because I was the one looking down on that blood stained body—

"Ah...."
 I start feeling light-headed.
 All the strength drains from my legs and I start to fall—

"Shiki-sama...!
 Please, hold on....!"

.... In that instant,
 Hisui wraps her arms around me to prevent me from falling.

"Ah—"
 Her voice and mine overlap.
 Hisui stands there, desperately holding on to me.
 We look like we're embracing each other, and Hisui stands there trembling.
 "..... Hisui."
 I understand.
 I understand that she doesn't like to come into contact with men.
 Even now, her body is trembling all over.
 "—Hisui."
 Still, I can't let go.
 I wrap my arms around her.
 Her warmth.
 Her soft body.
 Since we were children, the girl that has always looked after me.

Yeah—there can be no more doubt.

"Hisui... Finally, we meet again."

With my weak body, I embrace her close to me.

"Ah... Shiki.. sama..."

Her shaking doesn't stop.

But she does not refuse me and wraps her arms around my back.

"... I'm sorry."

I don't know what I'm apologizing for.

I just feel like there's so many things I have to apologize to her for.

"... Not at all.

You do not need to apologize for anything, Shiki-sama."

Answering quietly, she takes me to my bed.

I rest in bed.

My body relaxes a little bit, the bed being much more comfortable than the floor.

Hisui covers me with a clean sheet and brings a glass of water.



"Shiki-sama, are you able to drink by yourself?"

"Yeah, I think I can manage that."

Taking the glass from Hisui, I drink my first glass of water in a day.

"Nnnh..."

The water quenches my thirst.

The water seems to fill me completely, up to my fingertips.

I give the glass back to Hisui, and I fall down onto the bed.



"Shiki-sama!?"

"—No, no no, that's not it.
I actually feel good, I was just relaxing.
My health actually seems better."



"Shiki-sama, do not scare me like that.
It would not be very surprising if you really did collapse, in your condition."
Hisui looks at me with uneasiness in her eyes.
.... That look makes me want to thank her, and also makes me feel regret.



".... Shiki-sama?
Does it hurt anywhere?
If you are in pain, please do not hesitate to tell me."
"No, nothing really hurts right now."
.... Well, my heart hurts.

Hisui is worrying about me right now, just like always.
All I've done in return to her is to act stupidly.
Not even realizing her absolute devotion, all I've done is bring pain to her heart.

And that time, when I did those terrible things to Hisui.
.... Even though it turned out to actually be Kohaku-san, I still did them to Hisui.

And that's not all.
I dreamt about killing people, and in accordance with that, I dreamt about violating Hisui.
.... I,
I do not deserve to be cared for by Hisui.



"Shiki-sama, was the water not pleasing to you....?"
I shake my head no.
"That's not it."
.... Um.. thanks for everything, Hisui.
I never even thought that drinking water could help me this much.



But, that's enough.
I don't deserve to be treated this well by you."



"—Shiki-sama, are you still saying that?
I just want to help you, it doesn't matter if you deserve it or not."
"No, Hisui.
It's not you."
.... Yeah, I'm the one at fault here.
Hisui gives me nothing but devotion, but I repay her with cruelty.
".... If you are here with me, I'll probably do something horrible again.
So before I do anything, please, leave.
.... I beg you.
I—I don't want to hurt you anymore, Hisui."



Hisui doesn't say anything.
But she has to understand what I am saying.
After several seconds of silence, it appears she understands as she raises her head and nods.



"I refuse."

"... Yeah, I'm sorry it had to be this way, but.... W, wait a minute. Hisui, what did you just say....?"



"I said that I refuse.

Those words are not enough, and I cannot leave you alone. Until you can give me a valid reason, I will not follow your command." Hisui responds clearly.



"Please tell me the reason, Shiki-sama. Unless you do, I will not move one step." "Wha—"

Her eyes are dead serious.

I bet she could tell if I'm telling a lie or an excuse, and more than anything—I don't want to lie to her.

".... I get it.
So if I tell you the reason, you'll go?"
"Yes.
If it is something that can convince me, then I will fulfill your command."
..... *sigh*
I take a deep breath.
.... Mentally prepared, I open my mouth.
"Hisui, I see dreams where I kill people.
Every night, I dream that I kill someone I don't know and drink their blood."



".... You see dreams.... Is that supposed to be your reason, Shiki-sama?"
".... No, the thing is, I can't tell if they are dreams or not.
Maybe it's that I don't notice, but I might be killing people in reality.
.... Just like the old man.
There might be another self in me I don't know about, walking the streets killing people."



"Shiki-sama, that—that is impossible.
You are acting like the normal Shiki-sama right now."
".... Right now I am.
But sometimes, I get these strange thoughts.
The dreams I see.. they may simply be my memories."
.... And truthfully, I did kill someone eight years ago.
I actually have the memory of looking down on that blood-stained kid.



"Shiki-sama, please get a hold of yourself.
Thinking that you are a blood sucking monster is surely too strange."
"... Yeah, it's strange, but I can't laugh it off.
... Hisui, you don't know it, but I guess those of the Tohno family are different
from normal people.
The old man had split personalities, and even Akiha—"

—was sucking Kohaku-san's blood.
"Anyway, the people of the Tohno family are not normal.
So I'm not normal either.
I can't stop myself from lusting after you and Kohaku-san.
It's alright now, but if I get that headache again, for sure—I will do something
terrible to you, Hisui....!"



"—Shiki-sama, Nee-san and I have known all of that from the very beginning."
"Huh....?
You knew?
Knew what?"
"That the people of the Tohno are not normal.
No, in other words, you were the only one that did not know.
Nee-san and I have known that since we were first brought to this mansion."
"—Wha.."
"But do not think that is anything strange.
Nee-san and I, we also carry a power that is not normal.
It was because of that power that Makihisa-sama brought us here."

Regarding the Tohno family, we know much more than you, Shiki-sama."
"Certainly, you can call the Tohno blood abnormal.
But, Shiki-sama, that has nothing to do with you.
You do not have a split personality like Makihisa-sama nor are you a vampire that sucks human blood.
Shiki-sama, you are rather someone closer to Nee-san and I."
"... I'm, closer to you...?"
"Yes.
You are definitely not a killer.
.... Please, just trust me for now and let me take care of you."
"... No.
It still doesn't make a difference to the fact that, um.... I still want you.
If you remain here, I'll do something I can't take back."



"U—um, about this problem, will you allow me to ask a question...?"
"Eh..?
Yeah, I don't mind..."



"Um, Shiki-sama, um.... Do you not like Nee-san and I...?"
"—Huh?"
Hisui asks something totally absurd and she starts fidgeting with her fingers.
Do I not like Hisui and Kohaku-san?
Nothing could be further from the truth.
"... Now look.
There's no way I could ever not like either of you."

I'm always thankful to Kohaku-san, and to you too.... um, I'm always thinking about how thankful I am to you."



She lets out the breath she was holding.
Hisui visibly relaxes for some reason.



"Then there is no problem.
Your condition has put you under a lot of stress.
This caused things in your mind to come up into your dreams.
That means your thoughts are your true feelings.
So it is not odd to feel that way if you have any liking toward us."
"Ah.... That's true, but.... !
Even still, it's strange to lust after the both of you like this."



"Yes, it is a bit dangerous.

But Shiki-sama, you have always endured it, right?
 Then it will not be a problem.
 You say that you are dangerous, but you are a stronger person than that.
 If you have held out for this long, then you can still do so, right?
 Besides, it is your own will, so in no way do you have a split personality."
 "Well.... That theory may be right, but...."

.... It isn't that simple.
 But just seeing that trusting smile, I feel like I have to hold on no matter what.
 ".... Alright.
 If you say so, then you can be close by me.
 I will try to hold myself in check as much as possible."



"Eh—no.
 That.. that is not exactly what I meant.."
 Hisui blushes and looks down.
 "Hm....?"
 I don't get it.
 Hisui just looks up at me from time to time with a difficult expression.
 "Hisui?
 Did I say something weird?"



"....."
 Hisui just stares at me.
 ".....?"

I start to feel very uncomfortable.
My heart beats faster under tension.
I feel uneasy, like I got caught with something and am about to get yelled at for it.

—Thump.

—Thump.

—Thump.

—Thump.

—Thump.

"Cr—"
.... Crap.
I start to feel a little dizzy, probably because I'm nervous.

"Uu... "
My consciousness starts to flutter.
.... I forgot all about it, but my body isn't in the condition to keep talking.
"Ah....., ——"
I feel like throwing up every time my heart pounds.
Hisui—I hate to do this to her, but maybe it's better if I just sleep right now—



"Shiki-sama?
Are you suffering?"
"Eh... Ah.
Just.. a little bit.
But it's not serious, you don't have to worry about it."
".... No.
At this rate, you will surely die.
Nee-san said that you may not last until evening."

"Wha—"

I feel a chill as I hear that.

.... It's not like I haven't thought about it.

When this body did not heal.

I've imagined many times that my weakening body will only end in death.

But still,.

.... to hear it from someone else like that sends a chill up my spine.

"....."

I.. don't know what to say.

Should I just accept it?

Should I deny it?

"....."

I can't do either.

I have felt that my body would die pretty soon.. but it just doesn't feel real.

It's like I'm just watching the life of some sick person on some sort of television show.



".... Akiha-sama and Nee-san left in order to save you.

.... But they may not make it in time.

Even if they are successful, if your body runs out of energy before that, there is no point."

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

I don't know what the two of them are doing.

She says they are going to save me, but are they searching for something that can cure my condition?

But, all that work....

it'll be useless if I die before they get home.



"... But, you know?
There is a way to give you energy so you will be able to last until they come
back."
"... ?"



"... Please excuse me, but if you would allow it—then I can perform that
method."
Hisui hesitantly looks at my face.
Hisui says there is a method to save me at least for tonight.
If that is true, then I have no reason to refuse it.
"... It isn't a matter of allowing, or not.
If it can help me even a little bit, then we don't have a choice.
I'd like to ask for it myself."



"—Yes.

Then Shiki-sama, could you please close your eyes for just a bit?"

"Close my eyes?"

Well, sure.... Is this good?"

".... That is fine.

Please do not move."

I hear her footsteps.

The rustling of her clothes tells me she is coming closer.

And then..

Something shifts onto the bed and I feel something touch my lips.

"——"

A tender sensation.

I feel the warmth of a human body, and it must be Hisui's lips.

—My body heats up.

Her lips hesitantly pressing up against mine.

This sensation, and the feeling of her breathing, seems to fill my body like a drug.

"Ah——"

Thump, Thump.

With just a kiss, my mind goes totally white.

I am pleasantly floating away.

All my pain, all my tiredness melts away like ice on a summer day.

"Nn...., ah."

.... Hisui exhales.

That small contact between us starts to get heavier.

"Nn——Hisu, i"

.... I don't know what I'm doing.

It's just that her lips feel so good, so I press back with mine.

".... Shiki... sa-ma...."

Hisui hesitantly starts to pull back.

I don't want that and I pull her closer to me.

"Nn... ah."

Pulling her in, I seek out her lips.

"Ha... n, n....!"

Hisui resists slightly as she might be having a hard time breathing.

"——Ha-ah."

But I can't stop.

Her breath.

Her lips.

Her warmth.

It all feels so good.

With my eyes still closed, I slip my tongue in between her lips.

"N-n!"

Unlike before, now she really tries to pull back.
I embrace her body to hold on to her, and I continue to seek out her tongue.
"A.... n, n....!"
If I open my eyes, I bet I'll see her distressed face.
If I saw that, I'd let her go right away.
And so, instead,
I continue blindly twirling my tongue against hers.
"N.... a, a...."
Our wet tongues intertwine.
Just the sensation of my tongue against another's drives me wild.
Just the fact that my sensitive tongue is feeling someone else's tongue makes
my rational thought about to explode.

And because it is Hisui's tongue, it crumbles completely away.
"A.... n, n.... ah...."
The red, tangled tongues continue their dance.
Even though our lips separate, our tongues have become one.
.... This isn't just some sort of metaphor.
Our tongues are stuck together with all our saliva.

—I wonder how long that lasted?

Before I know it, my body is burning, and Hisui is at the side of the bed
adjusting her clothes.

Thump.

"Ah—"

Thump.

Thump.

I'm out of breath.

Thump, Thump, Thump.

"My... body.. it feels incredibly... warm."

My heart races uncontrollably.



.... Hisui stands by the side of the bed, averting her gaze in embarrassment.
 I—don't exactly know why she did that.
 ".... Hisui.... just now, why—"
 Why did she kiss me?
 Why did nothing more than a kiss heal me better than any medicine?
 I don't understand any of it.



".... That is the way I can help you, Shiki-sama."
 "Help me—but, how?"
 "I really don't know how.
 It is just that Nee-san and I can transmit some of our energy to those that we press our bodies against.
 Um, if we exchange bodily fluids, we are able to recognize that person as someone like us, and it lets us share our energy and amplify their powers."
 "Wha—what are you talking about?"
 "Ever since we were born, we have had special bodies.
 We are not like the Tohno family, but we are special people born from normal people.
 Makihisa-sama called us 'Synchronizers'."
 —Ah.
 I think that word was in the old man's journal.
 "Makihisa-sama brought us here to suppress his increasing 'Tohno self'.
 We are more suited for amplifying one's power rather than sharing our power.
 Makihisa-sama synchronized with Nee-san with his human side, and barely

stayed sane."

"....."

No, she doesn't have to tell me all this.... but by "The exchange of bodily fluids", it must mean—

" I don't understand completely, but your body.. it's sort of like a medicine or something....?"

"Yes.

Normally, it would not have much of an effect, but now your energy is very low. I believe you will be able to at least return to your normal state even with my powers."

"—I see.

That's why I feel so good right now."

I squeeze my hands.

".... Moving.

Yeah, I can move....!"

My joints are a little stiff, but I can move my body with my own will. Being able to do such a simple thing makes me so happy right now.

"Th, thank you Hisui!

It looks like my body is back to normal, thanks to you!"



I throw my arms up in the air.

But, Hisui still looks uneasy.

.... As I think back.

Her breath felt so good, I forced Hisui to continue kissing me.

"Ah.... I'm, sorry.

Your breath, it.. felt so good, so I—"

"No, what happened before was a good thing.... Um, I don't think I would have been able to transfer any fluids by myself."

Hisui looks at me, embarrassed.



"But, Shiki-sama, this is a temporary treatment.

You will return to your original state soon."

"Wha—for real?

My previous state—you mean back to the way I was?"

No.

Anything but that.

Being able to move like this again, I finally understand.

These past few days, my body has been terribly wrong.

So now, since I can move again, thinking about my body going back to the way it was sends shivers down my spine.

"... What should I do?

I don't ever want to go through that again.

Being like a puppet with its strings cut, my head feeling like it's being split open.. This time—"

Before my body would stop, I think my mind would break first.



"Shiki-sama.

I do not want you to have to return to the way you were before either.

Therefore... can you.. share your body with me a little deeper this time?"

With her fingers trembling, she says this while looking directly at me.

—My heart skips a beat.

Sharing our bodies deeper means..

Um, it means exchanging our bodily fluids, so that would mean—

"—That's, um—"
Hisui remains silent.
.... Should I be the one to say it?
"—In other words, I have to make love to you?"



Hisui nods wordlessly.
"———"

My face instantly flushes crimson.
The very thought makes me happy, but—
"—No, that's bad.
I can't go back to the way I was, but that's bad.
Using you like that to make me better, that's just wrong..!"
I emphatically refuse her offer.



"....."
Hisui is still silent.
It seems more like she's hurt by my words instead of being relieved by my refusal.
"No, it's not that I don't want you....!
It's just strange.
It might help me, but to use your body like that, it's wrong."



"... There is only something wrong with you, Shiki-sama.
I understand that you do not want me.
But if I do not do this, you will die tonight.
So how can you say such things like that?"
"Ah—no, that is—"
"... Right.
That's why Hisui is suggesting this preposterous "plan".
... Hisui, who can't even stand contact with the opposite gender, is suggesting
this because my life is at stake.
So—she says all that for my sake.
She's saying I can sleep with her, with like or dislike having nothing to do with
it—
"Da—"
Isn't it okay?
I don't want to die either.
I mean, all I have to do is sleep with her, and if I don't like that, then there
really is something wrong with me.
"_____"



Hisui watches me quietly.
Her fingers are still shaking.
As uneasy as I am—she is still far more uneasy.
But she hides it, and tries to act normally.
She is doing so much for me, so why—
"Hisui—is this.. alright with you?"



".... Yes.

If I can be useful to you, then I will be satisfied."

"—No!

That's not what I meant, um—"

Is she really okay with giving her body to someone she does not love?

I.. don't like it.

I want to sleep with her.
I think I love her, and I want to do things for her sake.
But those are two different things.
Simply put, I don't want to sleep with her because I don't know if Hisui loves me or not.

"—Is it okay, Hisui?

Giving out your body like that, won't you regret it later?"



".... I do not know.

But I just have one request to ask of you."

"Request....?"



"Yes.
 Shiki-sama, if you were to like me even just a little bit, just for now—please, think only of that.
 If you are to love me just for now—I would never regret this."
 Hisui speaks, still trembling.
 "___"
 I'm stupid.
 I've never felt more stupid than I do right now.
 "—Hisui.
 I"
 What do I mean by "I don't want to if Hisui doesn't love me"?
 Really—I don't deserve to say that.
 "—Come here.
 Right now, I really need you."

.... Hisui draws closer.
 Reaching out my arms, I draw her towards me.
 "—But don't get me wrong.
 Even without my condition, I've always—wanted you the most for all this time."

Then.
 Bringing her down to the bed, I run my fingers across her body.

I untie her ribbon and it swishes downwards.
 "Ah..."
 Hisui's voice quivers.
 I pretend I didn't hear her, and I untie the belt of her apron behind her back.
 "Shiki-sama?
 Um..."
 Hisui looks at me with unknowing, uneasy eyes.
 "Hisui, is this your first time...?"
 "Ah... yes.
 Please, forgive me."
 Her voice fades to a whisper and her cheeks blush bright red.
 Quivering, she clenches the sheets as if to fight back her fear.

"But Shiki-sama, I... I was thinking that it might not be necessary to take my apron off."

It doesn't look like she wants to take off her clothes and bare herself.

She looks uneasily at me, like a scared rabbit.

.... But that just makes my heart go on fire.

"Nope.

If you don't take off your clothes, then I won't be able to do anything.

.... Hmm, I wonder how this comes off."

Holding onto Hisui from behind, I search for something like a zipper.

But I can't seem to find it.

"Hey.

Hisui, how did you put this on?

This.. doesn't really look like it can be taken off."

"Um.... This is a one piece, so it is difficult to take off in this position."

".... I see.

I guess that can't be helped."

"Yes.

So just like this, um.... I want you to...."

"_____"

Not a chance.

If I get this far and still don't get to see her body, I'll kill myself.

"No.

Hisui, stand up and take it off.

If you don't, it'll be a little difficult."

"Eh—ah, eh, but, if I do that, I'll be naked."

"Yeah.

I want to see your body.

I can't make love to you with your clothes on, I'll be missing out too much."

"Missing out too much..?"

Shiki-sama...."

She looks troubled.

Hisui herself is embarrassed, but it seems she is still trying to follow my orders.

"Ah..... Y, yes."

After some consideration, she quietly stands up.

".... Shiki-sama, can we turn off the lights?"

"—Hm."

That's a big minus.

I hadn't realized it, but it's quite dark outside.

If I turn off the lights, there's only the moonlight to light up the room.

".... I do not want to otherwise.

But if you insist, I will follow your orders.

.... But I might hate you for that, though."

"Ah—"

.... She's good.

She never asks anything for herself normally, but her words strike me where I'm weak.

".... I understand.
 I'll turn off the lights, so take off your clothes."
 I flick the switch off.
 At the same time, I hear her clothes coming off.
 She must be used to them, as she takes off her maid uniform rather easily.

Moonlight provides the only illumination.
 I can't see her naked body clearly, and I can only see her outline.

—No.
 Even still, it is more than enough.
 The curves of her body that were always hidden by her maid uniform can be seen clearly now.
 Her breasts are not large, but they're not small either.
 Her perfectly shaped mounds do not look that soft, but are balanced somewhere between those of a girl and those of a woman.
 Her exquisite breasts are both beautiful and erotic.
 Her body is slender yet not skinny.
 Her fragile, delicate, soft looking body.
 Her femininity, normally hidden, now embraces my senses.
 ".... Shiki-sama....?"
 "Ah—sorry.
 I was just mesmerized by your beauty.
 Now, come on over, Hisui."
 I hold out my hand from the bed.
 After briefly hesitating, she comes toward the bed, looking down.
 I sit cross-legged on the bed.
 Hisui does not get on the bed, but stands by the bedside.
 "....."
 Hisui mumbles that she doesn't quite know what to do.
 "——"
 My heart pounds furiously.
 I have the uneasy feeling like I'm about to do this to a pure innocent girl.
 I let my mind go numb, and I slowly let my fingers touch her arms.
 "┐"
 Hisui reacts with a jerk.
 But she tries not to react too much and endures it.
 ".... Hisui.
 I'm going to do it now.... are you absolutely sure that you're okay with this?"
 ".... Yes.
 Please.. do as you wish.
 Please, love me."
 "————"
 As soon as I hear that, something flies away.
 My worries over Hisui completely vanish.

".....!"

I grab her arms.

"Aah....!"

Her delicate body quivers nervously.

I ignore it all and caress her neck with my tongue.

"Ha-a, n-!"

Hisui rolls her head back.

Her body tenses up.

"... Just relax.

I won't go that fast, so don't worry."

I move my face from her neck down to her collarbone.

My tongue makes a sticky path as it travels.

"Ah.... Ye.... yes, relaxed...."

Hisui stands still, as if she is some sort of a doll.

I bet she won't move from that position unless I force her onto the bed.

But for now, this is better.

"... Mm.... Hisui, your skin tastes good."

"Ah.....!"

Her body trembles.

My words seem to affect her even more than my tongue going down to her breasts.

But that's over.

Holding her gently by the arms, I take my tongue onto her breasts.

"... Aah.... nn.... ah."

I move my wet tongue.

I lick her perfectly shaped breast from the crevice outward.

"Mmm.... Hisui, you don't seem to be feeling good here."

Saying so, I lick her nipple.

"....!"

Her body jerks.

But I already have her by her arms.

If there's anything she can do, it's..

"Ah.... ah, n, no...."

Kill her voice and look away.

I roll around her nipples with the tip of my tongue.

"N-ah, naah....!"

I lick around.

Her pink nipples start to harden.

"What's this already?"

You look so calm, but you're pretty erotic, Hisui."

"... Ah.... n, no, I'm, not,!"

—Before she even has a chance to finish, I suck her breasts along with her nipples.

"Haah—ah, mm—"

Maybe she is really embarrassed by being called erotic, she desperately tries to

hold her voice in.

.... But, it's not that she is sensitive.

The nipples harden after only light stimulation.

The sensitive part that hardens when felt by someone, no matter how much the woman does not want it.

That's the nipple, so actually, Hisui herself has nothing to do with this.

"Mmm... Already this hard.

In that case.... maybe it'll be okay if I use my teeth."

I bite down.

"Aah—!"

Her jaw rises.

"Shi, Shiki-sama, th, that—ah—!"

I caress her with my tongue after biting down.

"Haa-ah, mm... nna.."

She feels some pain, then some pleasure, and her body goes powerless.

"How cute.

Your body reacts honestly, Hisui."

"Eh..."

It feels like she got warmer.

Maybe it's not my imagination, but it really did get warmer.

Her white skin has turned a shade of light pink.

".... Alright, now let's...."

Releasing her arms, I hug her closer to me.

"Ah..."

Hisui falls onto the bed.

I lie down too, on top of her.

"Shiki-sama.... Um."

"Hold on.

I still haven't, gotten a good look at your most important part."

"Eh—!

Shi, Shiki-sama, that is not necessary, so....!"

Hisui backs away bit by bit.

But the more she does so, the more she gets in a position where I can take a good look at her.

".... Nn,...."

I bury my face in her soft looking stomach.

Since Hisui runs away, I am unable to lick her below her bellybutton, but I don't care.

"Ah, ooh....!"

Her body arches upwards.

With both hands, I grab her breasts from below.

"Aha, ah, n—!"

Her voice jumps up to meet my rhythm.

"Nn, n, n....!"

Her sweet, moaning voice.

The breasts I grabbed from below feel small indeed.

I could cover them with my hand if I opened them up.

They don't even bulge out past my fingers.

"Ah.... mm.... n.. ah, n.... n."

Pinching her nipples with my fingers, I continue massaging her breasts softly.

While Hisui immerses herself in that light pleasure, I arrive between her legs.

.... Her thin pubic hair.

Her red flower bud.

Below her swelling lips, her pink, throbbing entrance.

.... And her dripping, clear honey.

I didn't think she was, since she stifled her voice so much, but it looks like she is pretty turned on already.

".... Mmn."

As if I'm tasting her,

I lightly glide my tongue around her entrance.

"Nn, ahh.....!"

Hisui arches her back in pleasure.

"Ah.... Shiki-sama.... please.

Don't.... look there."

Hisui blushes furiously.

"But if I can't see, I won't know.

Here, I can't do it like this so you move too."

"Eh.... move?"

What should I move....?"

She has such a serious expression on her face, I'm the one who gets embarrassed.

"Your legs.

If you don't open them, I can't go in between them.

Here, open them like this."

Grabbing her thighs, I pry them open.

"Ah---no....!"

No, stop, Shiki-sama....!"

Hisui desperately pulls back again.

But I'm not about to stop here.

With her legs spread far apart, I can see everything clearly.

It really does look a little grotesque, but at the same time, unbelievably cute.

"Mn...."

I use the tip of my tongue to separate her folds.

"N, ah-!"

Hisui reacts strongly to my slight touch.

It is wet with her love juice.

.... I'm worried how much longer my body will actually last, so even though her responses are so cute, I can't take up too much time.

"—Hisui.
 I'm going to go, so relax.
 If it hurts, just tell me and I'll stop."
 "Y... yes... please, Shiki-sama..."
 Nodding at Hisui's wavering voice, I unzip my pants.
 My manhood urgently sticks out of my pants.
 "Ah..."
 Hisui sounds like she's seeing some kind of ghost.
 —Just like that.
 I hold my hardened self and place my tip by her entrance.

"N—"
 She doesn't even resist.
 Hisui is so wet, there's no problem putting it in her.
 But that's just only the tip.
 "Ah....., n—"
 Her eyes wide in surprise, Hisui stares at where the two of us are joined.
 The ripping of flesh.
 As soon as my tip enters, her body jerks back.
 "Haa... ah... aa..."
 Holding back her tears, she just stares at me.
 —She can't be feeling any pleasure right now.
 Hisui is just gaping at where our flesh meets, trying to bear the pain.
 "... Ah... ha, Ah...!"
 Her breathing is wild.
 Hisui is enduring her pain.
 But, she does not admit her pain.
 "Nn... n, nnN, Ah—!"
 Hisui takes in everything I do.
 And I—entranced by her warmness, I'm about to melt.
 pant—*pant*—*pant*—
 Hisui isn't the only one breathing hard.
 She's so tight.
 Her insides are like a wall of flesh.
 It's probably because she has never experienced it, but it is really hard to push
 in, and her walls just wrap around me.
 "Nn—ah, ha, ah—"
 But what is this feeling?
 As I enter her, my whole body comes alive.
 My breathing gets wild.
 My heart starts pumping harder.
 I burn with passion.
 "H—ah."
 My breath is hot.
 I feel as if I'm breathing fire.
 "—Hisu—i—"

Now I—I can't breathe.
"Ah.... Are you, alright, Shiki, sama?"
Pain wreathes her voice.
But still, she's worrying about me.

—Thump.

So cute.
I push in harder, not caring if either one of us breaks.
"Ah—ha, ah—!"
She tightens around all around me.
My tip is completely inserted.
My penis rips through her insides uncaringly.
They grip me tightly.
Her hips try to run away from the pain while still holding on to me.
"Hisui.... does it hurt....?"
"Ha.... ah.... N, No—"
Hisui weakly shakes her head.
All she does is earnestly try to catch her breath.
Looking down,
I can already see blood pouring from her.
Her virginity is already taken.
Even still, she didn't even say one word—she never said it hurt.
"... I'm sorry, I should have been.... more gentle."
I push in my hips.
As if to betray my words, I push even more forcefully.
The sound of our breathing fills the room.
My hips pound back and forth.
I take my inserted shaft, pull out a bit, and insert it once more.
"Mm.....!"
Not being able to resist the force, Hisui tightens even harder.
.... Pull.

"Ah.... ha, ah."

.... Thrust.

"Hwaa—!
Ah, oh,n—ah."

Pull,

"Ha—ah, ah....."

Thrust.
"N, ah.... !

Ha, ooh, ha, n....!"

Pull,

"Ah-Shi, Shiki, sa—"

Thrust....!

"Ha—ah, Shiki.. sama—!"

.... Her voice echoes in the air.
But, I won't stop.

Sliding, sliding, sliding.

As I continue the cycle, it gets better inside of Hisui.
Her tenseness eases, and she starts to accept me in her as her walls tighten
around me and contract.

"Ha.... ah, aha.... nn—!"

But she still sounds like she is in pain.

Her breathing is wilder than mine and her body is shaking.

"Hisui—this.."

If it hurts, I should make her feel better quickly.

"Ah—aah, aah, aah, aah....!"

But I can't stop.

Exchanging body fluids had already been done once I was inside her.

But I want to continue.

"N—ah, ha, ha, n—!"

Her voice rises and falls in harmony with my thrusts.

"Ha, ah, ah, Shiki, sama—"

It's gotta hurt, but she endures it quietly.

—Her figure.

She looks so lovely, my body does not stop.

Back and forth.

With erotic sounds, I bury myself in a body that knows no pleasure.

But—It'll all be over soon.

"Hisui—here I come."

I take a big breath.

Even now, I still haven't brought myself fully inside of her.

Just bringing half of myself in her brought tears to her eyes.

If I put it all in, she might just pass out.

Up until now, I haven't done that.

"Hisui, with this—"

"Ah—ha, nn—!"

But that was until now.

My heart feels like it's exploding.

So before that happens,
I wanted to bury myself completely in her.
"Hisui—!"
I push harder.
Hisui doesn't realize what I'm going to do.
Without any further warning, I thrust my entire self into her.

"Nn——!"
Her back arches.
Her perfect breasts shake and sweat peals down her body.
"Ah—it, it hurts, Shiki-sama....!"
For the first time, those words leave her mouth.
"Nn—ha, ah—!"
But I can't stop.
Pulling out, I thrust once more.
"—!"
Ah, aa, ha, oh.....!"
Her trembling body.
She desperately tries to hold back the pain.
But this time, she feels pleasure.
So—I keep going.
"Ah, ha—Shiki, sama—!"
Pl, please, stop, it....!"
Raising her hips from the bed, she tries to escape from as much pain as she can.

—But that makes her tighten up even more.
"S—Hisu, i—!"
Everything overflows.
The sensation starts to well within me.
"Ha—ah, ah, ah.....!"
Hisui's hips rock back and forth.
That movement finishes me off.
"Ah, k—!"
I push in hard.
"Ah—hwa-ah-AaAaa——!"
"Tss——!"
The feeling of explosive release.
"Hisu.. i—!"
That instant, I hold back and manage to pull out.

I release.
My hot, white fluid sprays over her belly.
"Ah... Shiki, sama...."
Hisui just stares at it.
Drip, drip.
It looks like keloid on her otherwise perfect skin.

But in contrast, she looks more appealing and at that second,

I feel dizzy.

"Ha—ah."

Taking a deep breath, I collapse on the bed.
Hisui is laid out nearby in the same state.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

Hisui's pained gasps echo through the room.
Hisui seems to have reached her limit with one time.
".... This will not do, Shiki-sama...."
But Hisui lifts her body up.
Her shoulders heave as she breathes hard, staring blankly at me.
"Eh—what's wrong?"
".... You did it outside of me.
You have to, um.... do it inside, or I.. cannot accept you."
"—Inside?"

.... That means.."

I thought there'd be a lot of problems if I released inside of her, so I just—
"....."

Hisui looks at me apologetically.
.... Seeing that kind of face makes me feel sorry.
After making her go through all that pain only to make it useless, it's completely my fault.
".... But, What should we do?
Um.... do we have to give it one more try?"
"..... Yes.
If it is, what you wish."
Hisui's voice almost disappears.

—If I wish so?
Of course I wish so.

Even though I just came, my penis is still fully erect.
In all honesty, that was not enough.
"I'm okay with it.
But are you?
If it still hurts, we can wait a little bit—"
".... No, I am fine.
But please, before your body reaches its limit, please pour yourself into me."
.... Hisui.. Even though she seems to be so tired she can't even talk steadily, she still insists on doing this.
Hisui is really pushing herself.
She is probably still hurting, and she must be tired.

.... I can't forcefully make love to her like that.
".... I understand.
Then, come a little closer."
"Eh—ah....."
Holding her arms, I sweep her on top of me.
"Ah.... Shiki.... sama."
She must be incredibly tired, because she just rests herself completely on me.
"Yes.... please, do as you wish, Shiki-sama."
Taking a deep breath, she puts her body right on mine.
".... Hisui.
This is fine, please raise your hips a bit.
You don't even have to move.
I'll go slow."
Hisui wordlessly agrees.
Her hips inch upwards.
Still wet from last time, I place my erect manhood against her.

.... A sliding touch.
I don't enter, but just rub her gently.
"Nnn....."
Hisui breathes sweetly.
Her body is tense.
She readies herself for it to enter her again.
Sliding, sliding.
Slowly, I rub against her teasingly.
"A.... n, Na..... Ah."
She moans.
Her breathing swirls down my chest.
.... Slide, Slide, Slide.
"Ha..... Nngu.... n, Ha—"
As I rub her with my shaft, her breathing heightens.
Calmly, our bodies meet like puppies licking and greeting each other.
The sound of our wet flesh meeting becomes louder and more frequent.
"A.... Ha.... Ahh, a..... nn."
I feel like I'm rubbing against the sweetest jam in existence.
"N.... Shiki.... sama, I, I...."
Her voice sounds even more passionate than before.
Back and forth, up and down.
Her love juices flow between us, coating us with sticky passion.
".... Nnnn..... ha-ah..... Ha."
When I notice, I realize my hips aren't the only ones moving.
It really is a small movement.
As if trying to relieve an itch, Hisui rubs herself against me.
"Nnn—Hisu, Hisui—"
The rubbing causes a thrill of pleasure to shoot through me.
"Hisui, m.... more."

I can't resist, and I grab her hips.
"N—"
Hisui stops suddenly.
I revel in the feeling.
I grip just a little stronger and feel her firmness.
"Ah—Shiki-sama, right—there—"
"... I see.
That was just a little break."
I let my power out.
Her hips start to move again and she breathes out in short, sweet sighs again.
The sweet sliding friction.
I continue sliding in between her cheeks.
"... Hisui.
Could you use more of your body...?"
"Eh... yes.
Like, this...?"
Slide, slide-slide.
She slides all the way down, meeting my hips.
"Mmm—yeah, that feels—great."
Hisui slowly and sensuously raises her hips.
"Ah... stuck, feels..."
Did I catch on something?
The movement stops for an instant.
But, no big deal.
Hisui smoothly moves up again.
"Haa... This, is great."
This really gets me excited.
It isn't even doing much, so why—why does it feel so good, and why does it make Hisui look so adorable?
"N... ha, Ah—Ah."
Hisui can't stop herself from voicing her passion.
Moving her hips up and down, she leans the rest of her body on mine.
"... Hisui... does it feel good...?"
"Y... s.
Yes... Shiki-sama, your chest... is broad, I feel... so relaxed—"
Exhaling, she presses herself even more against me.
I continue to revel in the rubbing her sliding cheeks give me.
"—Tss."
My heart rate increases even more.
... This gentle foreplay starts to overwhelm me.
Hisui isn't the only one feeling the pleasure.
"Ha—"
I tense the muscles below my groin.
It's to stop the urge rising from my very core.
Even though I'm just rubbing against her, it's as close to the real thing as it'll be.

No, knowing that I'm rubbing her outside numbs my mind and brings me more pleasure than the real thing.

Our bodies are clenched together.

The sensation of her breasts pushing up against my chest is so wonderfully soft.

No, the feeling of her small, delicate body just resting on mine is even better.

Our voices rise in harmony with the pistoning of our bodies.

Hisui relaxes completely, moving only her hips.

Her beautiful back, the sensuous curves of her bottom, all of it—I love all of it.

"Hisui—can I?"

"Eh.... are you, stopping already...?"

Hisui must've really enjoyed it because she regretfully plays her fingers on my chest.

"We don't have a choice.

I have to do it inside of you, so we have to do it right."

"Ah.... yes, that is right.."

Hisui slowly moves her body.

As she moves to pull back, she gets down on all fours, like a cat.

"—"

Her posture jumps out at me.

"Hisui, don't move."

"Eh....?"

But Shiki-sama, we cannot.... do it, like this, right?"

"It's okay, just lift your hips a little.

No, not with your hands—get on your knees and elbows."

"....?"

Confused, Hisui tilts her head to the side, but complies.

—All set.

Since Hisui's well rested, I won't hold back.

To let out all that's been welled up inside me, I get behind her and—

—I enter her from behind.

"Nku—!?"

The bed rocks.

"Ah—n, nku—"

Hisui drops her back.

Her toes curl up as if resisting the shock.

Seeing her completely from this angle, her body seems entirely different.

Her long, white, graceful legs.

The single curve of her unblemished back is like a field of virgin snow.

It's so white and pure, I get the urge to bury my face in it.

".... Wow.

I can even see your asshole and.. right here.. completely."

"Shi, Shiki-sama—please, don't say things like that....!"

Hisui blushes and shakes her head.

But Hisui can't turn her body because I am in her now.
 "If I do exactly the same old thing, it'll be boring.
 I think you're already used to it too, so we'll do it this way this time."
 "Ha.... Shiki-sama, why is it that you are only mean, now....!?"
 "..... Tch."
 I punish her by entering a little deeply.
 "A-n, ku....!"
 I slide inside her, making churning noises.
 Looks like my foreplay really helped.
 Her smoothness now feels completely different from earlier.
 "N-this, -"
 N, Ah....!
 Ha.... Ah-"
 "It doesn't hurt as much, does it, Hisui-!"
 "Nn-!"
 I thrust my hips into her.
 Her white hips shake as I thrust.
 With every thrust, her love juices flow out and trickle down her legs.
 "Ah-ha, ah, Shiki, sama.....!"
 Her arms dig desperately into the bed.
 "Ha, oh, oh, n.... Ah, n-!"
 Her body shakes every time I thrust into her.
 "... Nn, nah, ha-Ah!"
 She squeezes all around me.
 Her insides are more intense, more sensational than before.
 Her contractions pull me in deeper towards her center.
 "Ah-, n-!"

 Slide.

 "Ha-ah.. Shiki-sa-ma, n, oh-!"

 Slide, slide.

 "... Ah, haa, haa, haa—n...."

 Slide, slide, slide, slide.

 "—Hwaa, ah, ah, ah-!"

 Slide, Slide, Slide, Slide....!
 "N-oh, Shiki-sama-please, not so-wild....!"
 "Haa-ah, Haa, ahh, ah....!"
 I can't hear her well.
 All I can hear is my own heartbeat.

Even that—starts to disappear.
"Ah-ah, please, stop, I, I am going—!"
Her voice reaches a scream.
Squeeze.
She grips me way harder than before.
"Aah—Hi.. sui....!"
"Shiki, sa, ma——!"

I come.
Our sensations climax together at the same time at an ever-rising crescendo,
and then stop.
"Ha-ah."
I explode inside of her.
I continue to release in her in desperate spurts.
The lingering sensation.
I quiver inside of her as Hisui's hips jerk.
"Nn.... It's-finished."
I pull myself out of her.
"Ha.... ah."
.... I'm spent.
I'm so tired I feel like sleeping right now.
"Hisui.... did it hurt....?"
".... Ah.... no, it hurt less than the first time."
In other words, it still hurt.
.... I regret it again.
Why is that during all of this, all I end up doing is being mean to her like
this....?
"Then, it's over, right....?"
I'm sorry, hurting you twice like this."
".... Not at all.
If I could help you, then I am satisfied."
Hisui says this as she lies there, staring blankly.
Her eyes aren't even focusing on anything.
.... Is that what they call absence of mind?
It seems Hisui simply lies there without any rational thought.
But her eyes still holds tears, and I feel a stabbing pain in my heart.
".... I'm sorry, Hisui.
I've made you cry so much."
I brush off her tears with my finger.

—And then.

All of a sudden, Hisui grabs my palm.

".... Hisui?"
"Shiki..... sama."

She takes my finger and sticks it in her mouth.

"Um...."

I don't even know what to say.

Hisui just lies there, as if all she wanted to feel was the pressure of my finger.

"....."

Hisui looks like she isn't even thinking about anything.

I think I was just a little too rough earlier and she's doing this since her head is still blanked out.

"..... N..... a....."

Hisui distantly sucks on my finger.

.... For some reason, I'm really enjoying this.

I don't pull away, but rather go with her movement.

Squish, squish.

I start to feel her tongue with my finger.

"..... Mmm.."

Hisui just continues.

.... Those eyes, still flowing with tears, seem to be in a trance.

She isn't even licking me, she's just holding it in her mouth.

"N..... nn.."

As if it was something precious to her, she just holds it.

Hisui just unconsciously caresses me.

She grips my hand as if it were a treasure.

"N.... Shiki, sama...."

A slight squeeze.

Hisui bites down gently on my finger.

"—Hisui."

I feel the blood start to circulate within me once more.

No, this isn't right.

What am I thinking—about Hisui who's already this tired?

"Hisui—"

".... Yes.

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"Hisui, I want to make love to you, one more time."

I just blurt out my selfish thoughts to her.

Hisui—she just stares at me.

".... How, come?"

There is no longer any need for you to do so."

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

I haven't really made love to you yet." That's right.

Before, it was just to help me recover—that's all it was from the beginning.

But I don't want it to be like that.

I really love her, and—for no other reason, I want to make love to her.

"It isn't enough, Hisui.

I don't want to do it for healing.

I like you, Hisui—I love you.
That's why I want you now, Hisui."
"....."
"So for that reason, I ask you for one more time.
Not for anything like just exchanging fluids.
I just—really want to make love to you."
"..... Shiki, sama."
Consciousness returns to her eyes.
Still biting down on my finger, she looks at me.
".... Is it okay, Shiki-sama.
I, I am.."
"Don't be stupid.
I only want you, Hisui."
"——"
The sound of a sigh.
But right after that,
she gives me her tender smile.
".... Yes.
I want to be loved by you too, Shiki-sama."
That is her answer.

"Well then.
This time, you ride on top of me, Hisui."
"Eh.... on.. top....?"
She doesn't understand what I mean and looks at me, confused and a little embarrassed.
"What's this?
You still can't be embarrassed.
There isn't a part of you I haven't seen."
"Ah....."
As soon as I say that, her face blushes a bright red.
.... Even though we've done it so roughly, Hisui still hesitates like it's her first time.
"It's okay, so just get on top!"
Grabbing her arms, I raise her on top of me.
"Kyaa-ah, eh....?"
I feel her butt on my stomach.
With her back to me, she lowers her hips.
"Ah...."
I hear her sudden intake of breath.
I bet she's looking at my erect manhood in front of her.
"Shi, Shiki-sama, um...."
Not knowing what to do and unable to escape, she blushes furiously and asks me for help.
..... This is bad.
She is so cute I just might die.

"What should I do now—hyaa!?"
 She looks up quickly.
 Her body reacts as I lick her defenseless back.
 "Ha—Shi, Shiki, sama—"
 "Mmm—your ass, it's so tiny, so cute."
 Licking the center of her back, I use a hand to hold onto her cheeks.
 "N.....!"
 Her back arches in response.
 "Ha.... n, nnn...."
 Hisui tries to resist the sensation of my tongue playing along her back.
 "Ah.... Shiki-sama, that.... tickles."
 She twists around while increasing her body heat.
 Sweat glistens in rivulets down her body.
 "... Um.... Shiki-sama.
 What—should.... I—do now?"
 Her last words are barely even said.
 I get this feeling that she will always act like this, no matter how many times we do this.
 "Simple.
 You don't have to move."
 "Eh—ah.....!"
 I wrap both my hands around her stomach.
 Gathering up my strength, I pick her up.
 "Ah—!
 U, um, Shiki-sama, are you going to...."
 "——"
 Not answering her question, I set about to do what she is thinking.

"Hwa.....!!!"
 Thrust.
 I penetrate her from underneath.
 "Ah—ah, Hwa—!"
 Her body jumps up.
 Trying to get away from what is coming at her from below,
 she tries to prevent her body weight from finishing it.
 Between these two forces, her nerves don't stand a chance.
 "... I'm moving, Hisui....!"
 "Ah.... N, no, please stop....!"
 Ignoring her, I lift her up and bring her down.
 "N, ha....!
 Ah, Aah, HaAaAAA....!"
 Her fingers clench as her senses are overwhelmed.
 I guess I'm hitting her in a different spot as she is reacting more now.
 "Ah, Shi—Shiki-sama, inside of, me—!"
 Her voice is almost a scream.
 I keep lifting her, and lowering her.

"Ha-ah, ,nwa—!"
 I can feel her tightening her butt.
 And at the same time, her insides tighten up.
 "N—Hisui, not so—relax a bit—"
 "Ah—ha, ah—"
 My voice doesn't seem to reach her.
 As if in a dream, she continues to contract and wrap her walls around my manhood.
 "Haa—ku.....!"
 Trying to fight back, I lift her up again.
 The sound of our flesh sliding past.
 "HA.... ah, ha....."
 The crushing feeling subsides and Hisui tries to catch her breath.
 At that same time, I lower her once more.
 "Nwaa—!"
 The pressure tightens around me again.
 Her heat transmits itself all the way through me.
 Her warmth causes my mind to blank out completely.
 "... Yo.... u...."
 I don't know what got me mad.
 But I just slide Hisui's body with all my might.
 "—!"
 Ah, ha-naa—!"
 The sticky sound of juices and flesh meeting and parting.
 "N—ah, Shiki-sa—ma—!"
 My shaft gets drenched.
 Her love juices mix with mine and soak me.
 "N—this, this is—"
 And suddenly,
 I'm not only moving Hisui's body, but I am also moving my hips up into her.
 —*pant* *pant* *pant*

Holding Hisui's body and moving my hips is a big load.
 Naturally, my breathing starts to become rapid.
 But—
 "Ah.... it.... h, hurts, Shiki-sama....!"

—*pant* *pant* *pant*

I don't care.
 Hisui.
 If I could make Hisui mine, then such a thing—!
 "Nhaa—!
 Ah, hwa, Shiki-sa—please, more—slower....!"

—*pant* *pant* *pant*

I thrust up.
 I thrust up to fill her insides.
 "... Ah!
 No, if this continues—I, I will....!"

—*pant* *pant* *pant*

Her convulsing body.
 Her arching back.
 Her fluttering hair.
 Is it pain, or is it pleasure?
 The drool leaking from her mouth tells me that she's lost all her reason.
 "Ha, n, nn, ah—!
 Haa, it, hwa, it hurts—Shiki-sama, please.....!!!!"
 Her body is on fire.
 It feels like I am inside an oven.
 Or, is it.
 Is it my own column of flesh, swollen with blood that is on fire?
 —*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*

"Ah, ha—Shiki-sama, I—!"
 Even though her eyes are flooding with tears, she still brings down her body onto me once more.
 Her feeling.
 Her warmth.
 Her voice.
 Tears.
 All of it.
 All of it is precious.
 "Hisui—my, Hisui—!"
 I penetrate again with all my strength.
 My heart pounds wildly.
 "I love you—more than anyone, more than anything, I love only you, Hisui....!"
 Not thinking, I let loose these words.
 Baring all of my feelings, I thrust into her passionately.
 "Ha—ah, ah—!"
 Her spasming body.
 I feel the climax of all these emotions, all these sensations coming.
 "Me, me too....!"

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

"Ah—Shiki-sama, I love you too—Shiki-sama, always....!"
 Her body tenses.
 All the love within me gathers up.

pant *pant* *pant* *pant*....!

"Hisui—!"

"Ah—yes, Shiki, sama.....!"

Our emotions fuse together.

We climax together.

"—Hisu, i—!"

I release inside of her.

"Ah.... ha, n—!"

I embrace her shaking body close to mine.

"Ah—ah."

Hisui endures the heat flowing into her.

"Nn—ah."

Her voice lowers.

Probably because my finger is in her mouth.

Our heartbeats harmonize and pulse together.

She still shakes from the lingering sensations inside of her.

I want to ease that, and hold on to her.

".... Shiki, sama...."

Why is she crying?

From her eyes the tears keep falling.

"I.... this.."

It seems her wavering voice contains some regret.

".... What, Hisui?"

.... Did it hurt....?"

".... No.... I am scared, of this happiness."

Taking a deep breath, her shaking stops.

"Ah...."

The strength drains from her body.

Exhausted, she leans her whole onto me.

".... I'm so sorry.... Nee-san."

With that last remark, she collapses and closes her eyes.

The sound of gentle breathing reaches my ears.

".... Are you sleeping, Hisui?"

Placing her on the bed, I pull the sheets over her.

Unlike Hisui, who's exhausted, I still have a lot of energy.

.... No, even though I am tired, the condition I had before is totally gone.

So, it seems for tonight, I can move like a normal person once again.

.... Hisui sleeps in my bed.

It might be because she helped me regain my strength, but Hisui is absolutely exhausted.

".... Or maybe, I pushed her too hard."
 I feel a tinge of regret.
 All of this was her first time, so that was really too much for her.
 ".... But she is just so cute, I couldn't help it."
 I make up an excuse, but it can't be helped.
 Hisui sleeps, taking relaxed breaths.
 If I'm going to take action, it has to be now.
 ".... Sorry.
 Sleep just a little longer, Hisui."
 After running my hand through her hair one last time, I change my clothes and leave the room.

—That's right.
 Akiha and Kohaku-san aren't here.

This is a good opportunity.
 I can do some investigating into what happened eight years ago.

I enter the old man's room.
 This place should definitely have something to answer my questions.

".... The desk drawer.... it's empty now."
 There might be something that belongs to the old man in one of the locked drawers.
 But I don't think he'll keep something that important there.
 ".... It'd be great if he had a safe or something."
 I search the room.

"..... Here it is."
 I find something like a safe pretty easily.
 There's no external lock and I don't know the dial combination.
 So I take off my glasses, and I cut its "line".
 ".... Hmm...."
 There seems to be an old diary and some envelope.
 The diary looks like that of a child's and the other looks like some old letters.
 ".... Old letters?
 Why?"
 The handwriting is definitely my old man's.
 It's fragmented and I can't understand it at first glance.

—The date starts in the summer of eight years ago and seems to continue on a past that.
 "....."
 I don't understand it yet, but I continue leafing through it.

Month Day

My son SHIKI succumbed to his Tohno blood.

SHIKI, he killed my adopted son who happened to be there.

(The adopted son is the heir of the house Nanaya. I guess it is a blessing in all the unfortunate events that he isn't in the same family as the Synchronizers, like Kohaku and Hisui.)

SHIKI's inversion impulse is terrible.

So it was determined that he must be eliminated.

I have my duty as the head of the Tohno household, but killing my own son is so difficult.

The Tohno blood, more in SHIKI than in AKIHA.

Talking about potential, I feel an older origin in Akiha's blood, but SHIKI's Tohno blood runs much stronger.

I assume that is why SHIKI inverted before he became an adult.

SHIKI's powers are "immortality" and "fusion".

SHIKI could not manage the awakened powers and as a result, killed the adopted Nanaya child, taking his life.

I have to say it was a superb job for using his powers for the first time.

Month x Day

Both SHIKI and the adopted son managed to escape death.

Before I killed SHIKI, he killed the adopted son and stole his "life", regenerating himself with it.

I don't know if it is because he was so close to death, but SHIKI has regained some of his sanity.

Even though it is dangerous, I will not kill him but simply separate him from the mansion for a while.

On the other hand, the adopted child of Nanaya will not live long even if he does survive.

Even if he does heal, his life has been taken by SHIKI.

His body can die any day.

As long as the adopted child lives, there is a possibility that his mind will be attuned with SHIKI's.

It seems it is a side effect of their two lives being linked.

But if that happens, the adopted son will die eventually, so there is no problem there.

Month Day

The problem of maintaining appearances to normal society still remains.

SHIKI has killed the adopted Nanaya child.

I have covered up the incident, but SHIKI cannot be shown to the public.

The wound I gave him hasn't healed and his figure has transformed.

He is not in a condition to be brought in front of others as Tohno SHIKI... he cannot be called a human either.

The Nanaya child still lives.

As long as he lives, I've decided to use him.

If there are any disagreements, I would like to hear them.

Complementarity.

The Nanayas are a family that produces killers.

If that adopted son happens to stay alive, the link between him and SHIKI may corrupt SHIKI's mind.

Even if SHIKI regains his sanity, I cannot deny the possibility of the Nanaya child's influence turning him into a killer.

To not let this happen, we must have him somewhere where we can keep an eye on him.

But we cannot allow him near the Tohno mansion either.

I should have him raised by an appropriate branch of the family.

Month x Day

.... The Tohno blood that has awakened within SHIKI.

Maybe it is because he was so close to death, but he has regained his sanity like before.

But I don't know if something will cause him to invert again.

Even though it tears me apart, I cannot allow SHIKI near the Tohno mansion either.

I place him in the care of a trusted servant.

Month x Day

I still haven't received word that his sanity has completely been restored.

.... A year has passed with him under the care of another house.

My heart is in anguish.

It is so hard for me when I think of the way my own son has to live.

As soon as SHIKI heals, I will be able to bring him back to the mansion.

"—What is.. this?"

Adopted son.

I knew about the adoption ten years ago.

Even though I don't exactly remember the details, I know about it.

.... He killed me?

Eight years ago, in that courtyard?

".... Our minds are linked...."

The words say that my mind and his are possibly linked.

Normally, this story would just be something to laugh off.

But, right now, it explains too much.

"—No."

No, that's not it.

This isn't anything like that.

"—Kk."

.... I know.

Even though I already know about it, I try not to notice.

—I want to deny it again.
The adopted child was..
The one who was killed was..
I know which is which, but I don't want to admit it—.

"Tch—this is useless."
Cursing myself, I toss the letters to the side.
"... All that's left is this."
I pick up the diary in the safe.
It looks like a child's diary; certainly nothing Tohno Makihisa would have had.
I flip the pages.
There are only two words.

HELP ME

Like that.
On a white page, it is written really small.
"..... Huh?"
I flip through the pages.

HELP ME.
I turn the page.

HELP ME.
I turn the page.

HELP ME.
I turn the page.

"Wha—"
It's like a curse that brings the reader to the depths of darkness.

HELP ME
HELP ME
HELP ME
HELP ME
HELP ME
HELP ME
HELP ME HELP ME HELP ME HELP ME HELP ME HELP ME HELP ME

HELP ME HELPMEHHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHELPMEHE
 —

"—"

.... I feel sick.

I've seen many nightmares up until now, but this is far worse.

Those words, "HELP ME".

It isn't that whoever wrote this diary knew only those words.

Only these words.

That is all this person could feel.

None of the dark litany was scribbled out.

One letter after another, like the spewed feelings of this person.

This is the only way the author could escape.

This person knew no other way to let out this curse.

".... Ah."

There is still more than half the diary to look at.

I,

I can't bring myself to read the rest of it.

"—"

I flip through the pages trying not to look at its contents.

As I flip through the pages, my hand stops on the very last page.

".... Regular sentences....?"

On the last page, there is a short paragraph.

Silver lettering adorns the otherwise perfectly white sheet.

So it's better to just become a doll

Gradually, my body stopped generating a pulse

Blood vessels turned into tubes one by one

Blood vanished like vapor

My heart, everything, just crafted parts

See, that's why there will be no more

pain

"——"

.... Closing the diary, I put it back in the safe.
I don't know why Tohno Makihisa kept such a thing.
But I do know one thing.
Fearing the child's malice, it was something meant to be sealed away in the safe.

.... The day draws to a close.
The dark garden.
The dark trees spread out before me like a black vail.
I remember the dream I saw before coming to this mansion.

"..... Alright."
It isn't that there is something there.
I just need to confirm something in my heart, so I enter the black vail.

There isn't anything here.
It's not like the body of the one killed eight years ago is here.
It's not like the blood of the one killed eight years ago is here.

"....."

For an instant, the scene flashes in my mind.
That hot summer day.
I was looking down at my blood-stained self as if I was another person.
".... So.
Someone must have been killed here."
Whether it was me or him, I don't know.

Which one was adopted?
Which one is the monster SHIKI?
".... If I think about it logically, I had to have been the one to kill him here."
"That is incorrect.
The one who was killed, was you, Shiki-sama."
"——!?"
I turn around.
I don't know when she arrived, but Hisui is there.



"Hisui.
You woke up already?
.... Don't push yourself.
Aren't you still tired....?"
"Shiki-sama, you are the one who should not push yourself.
You are still losing energy at a great pace, much more than you have gained."

Hisui stands before me.
"Ah..."
.... My pulse picks up.
Hisui standing so close to me really does make me feel more alive.
"Wow, my body really is warm."
.... I think it is your warmth coming into me."



"But Hisui, what are you saying?
You say that I was killed here—do you know what happened here?"



"—Yes.

I saw you die here.

You were killed, by SHIKI... not just your body and soul, but everything was killed."

Her voice is shaking.

It isn't that she is scared.

Instead, she sounds incredibly angry at that person who killed me.

"... Wait a sec, Hisui.

The one who was killed was the adopted Nanaya kid.

So wasn't he the one who died?"

"No, you are the one that died, Shiki-sama."

Hisui answers directly.

—Oh, I see.

Then that means—.

"—I see.

So, I'm the adopted child?"

"... Yes, you are a descendant of the Nanaya family.

Makihisa-sama adopted you, the only surviving member.

... Your name is Shiki—and because Makihisa-sama found it amusing that his son was also named SHIKI by a strange coincidence, he adopted you."

"Our names—are the same?"

"Yes.

It is natural for you to be confused.

And you are different from us; you were really adopted into the Tohno family."

"___"

I can't speak.

... Such a thing, isn't a shock or anything.

I remember not getting along with my old man from the beginning, and I never felt quite right in the mansion..

So such a thing—

Such a—

Such a thing—

Even if it were all lies, I—



".... I am very sorry.
Saying things that cause you sadness."
"No, I'm fine.
I'm not sad."

—I say that, but I know it's a lie.

I don't know what kind of feeling it is.
But it is true that I feel an emptiness in my heart.
"—But, that's weird.
People of the Tohno bloodline have powers don't they?
He... if SHIKI is a vampire, then what am I?
I'm not the same as him, but I have these strange eyes."



".... I do not know in detail.
But Akiha-sama said that you are the same as Nee-san and I, whose families
are enemies to those of 'mixed blood'.
.... We have the power to synchronize with those we exchange fluids with, and

the Nanaya family had the power to fight demons."

.... I see.

Certainly my eyes are not a power to help people like Hisui's.

Rather, it is a power to kill.

".... I see.

But then, why was I adopted by the old man?

It doesn't make any sense why he would adopt an enemy."

".... Shiki-sama, you are the inheritor of a very special bloodline of demon hunters.

Asagami, Fujyou, Ryougi and Nanaya.

These four families are the enemies of 'mixed blood'.

I think Makihisa-sama brought you here to help fend off something."

".... I mean, how did he even get a chance to adopt me in the first place?"



"I.... I heard that you were the only member of the Nanaya family to survive."

"..... Ah, I see."

Ten years ago.

The Japanese style house nestled deep within the mountains.

Surrounded by a black forest, a rustic world isolated from the flow of history.

.... I can't, quite, remember it well.

All I can remember is that pale, blue glass moon.

And in the forest's clearing, a figure that looked like Tohno Makihisa was cutting up lots of people.

——*sigh*

But that was then, and this is now.

Something done so long ago, it doesn't matter now.

".... Well, I understand that I was killed by SHIKI here.

But how is it that I am living as Tohno Shiki right now?"



".... Yes.

Without a doubt, you were stabbed by SHIKI in the chest and on the verge of death.

But by some miracle, you were able to recover.

You were saved and SHIKI also survived.

Since no one died, everything should have ended right then.

But SHIKI became something that could not be shown to other people."

"I see, so a replacement was needed for Tohno SHIKI.

The name of Tohno Makihisa is in the top of the business world; his son can't just suddenly die."

".... Yes.

Makihisa-sama pretended that the Nanaya child died, and had you live as Tohno Shiki.... It was all to protect the family name."

".... I get it, it's something the old man would do."

Yeah, everything fits in now.

Even though I am Tohno Shiki, I'm not technically part of the Tohno family.

Besides Akiha, no one else holds that blood.

So my old man sent me to live with the Arimas, and contrived a situation where I couldn't be the successor since my health was bad even though I was supposedly the eldest son of the Tohno household.



"Shiki-sama—I.."

".... It's fine.

You don't have to apologize for keeping this a secret.

Just telling me now is enough.

Besides, aren't you like me?"



"No, compared to you or Nee-san, I have not suffered at all....!
Even after Makihisa-sama died, Akiha-sama took us under her care.
So only I lived peacefully, not knowing anything....!"
"Wait, Hisui.
Akiha—she knows that I'm not her real brother....?"



".... Yes.
She heard it from Makihisa-sama after you were adopted.
But, Akiha-sama would always insist that you were her real brother.
.... Every day, Makihisa-sama would tell Akiha-sama to forget about you.
But, Akiha-sama would never agree.
Even though she would be scolded severely, she still waited for you in her heart.
".... If you knew the truth, you would leave.
That is why Akiha-sama told us to never let you know the truth.
Akiha-sama always helped Nee-san and myself.
Nee-san was Makihisa-sama's servant and was not allowed out of his room.
Akiha-sama hated that and freed Nee-san.
So—for Akiha-sama's sake, we continued the lie.
Akiha-sama, all of us.. we wanted you to come back."
"..... Hisui."



"So please, do not hate Akiha-sama.
 More than anyone else, she thinks importantly of you."
 "... Yeah, I know.
 There's no way I would hate her.
 It's more appropriate for me to be hated.
 I was the one living peacefully while you were all suffering."
 "....."
 So.
 I am thankful to Akiha.
 She welcomed me, nothing more than an outsider, back into the mansion.
 She even calls me brother.
 So, I'll have to keep it up too.
 If she is willing to call me Tohno Shiki, as her brother, then I don't care about
 the name Nanaya Shiki.
 I have to continue being her brother, continue being Tohno Shiki—

"G—!"



"Shiki-sama!?"
 Hisui rushes to me.
 I separate myself from Hisui, who was staring with a worried face, and take a
 deep breath.
 "... Geez.
 I just got helped by you, Hisui, but I'm still having these headaches."



"—Shiki-sama.

Your body's weakening is because of that incident eight years ago.

At that time, SHIKI stole your life and is using it to prolong his own life.

That—that is why you are weakening, and why you are linked with SHIKI."

".... I see.

So, that's how it is.

In other words, as long as I don't do something about that killer—SHIKI, I won't be able to return to normal."



".... Yes.

I believe he despises you utterly.

That is why he is stealing your life gradually, trying to dirty your heart; he is enjoying your pain."

Her voice is shaded with anger again.

"He hates me?

.... I don't get it.

He's the one that killed me.

I can understand me having a grudge against him, but why would he have a grudge against me?"

"No, SHIKI sees you as someone who has killed him.

Shiki-sama, you have caused the existence of Tohno SHIKI to disappear."

"....?"

I caused him to disappear....?"

"Yes.

You were certainly killed by SHIKI.

But once your life was saved, you took SHIKI's place as Tohno Shiki.
 After that, the SHIKI who was confined somewhere must have viewed you as a threat.

Tohno SHIKI is still alive, but there is now someone else existing as Tohno Shiki.
 SHIKI is still alive, but you have taken away everything as Tohno Shiki, and he became something that has no name, no existence."

".... I see.

So he views himself as the rightful Tohno SHIKI, and sees me as an impostor.
 No wonder—"

SHIKI wants to kill me and get everything back.

"But, that is coming to an end.

I will protect you, Shiki-sama.

No matter what SHIKI does, I will not let him kill you once again.

.... Even if the killer SHIKI walks the streets, he will be disposed of.

So please, until then, rest in your room."

"....."

Rest in my room....?

No, that won't help me.

She doesn't know it, but our fusion gets worse by day.

That means,

if he really does go crazy, I don't know if I can stay sane myself.

".... Ha.

He's a guy who would hurt even himself to get his revenge."

.... Revenge?

No, that's not it.

.... The SHIKI who says he was killed by me.

.... The SHIKI who sees me as an impostor.

.... The SHIKI who repeatedly says he will kill me.

.... The SHIKI who says any of this would not have happened if I was not here.

.... The SHIKI who has lost his sanity like Tohno Makihisa, killing people in the streets.

And, yes.

—The one who died in the distant past,
 the child called Nanaya Shiki.

Unconsciously, I grit my teeth.

"Don't be ridiculous—I'm the one who has the right to be bitter, SHIKI."

Suddenly,

the old wound on my chest starts to hurt.

There's only one way to stop this pain.



"Shiki-sama, where are....?"

"You know.

He says he's going to come.

But I'm not going to wait for him."

I know where his hideout is.

I will end this worthless connection of ours.



"Please stop, Shiki-sama....!"

With your body like that, it will be too dangerous."

"Hisui.

Sorry, but there's a knife in my room.

Would you go get it for me?"

"—I refuse.

I cannot let you go."

".... Oh well, I'll get it myself.

Watch over things when I'm gone."

"Shiki-sama....!"

Turning my back to Hisui, I walk away.

"Shiki-sama!

If you do that, I will really get upset....!"

Silently apologizing to Hisui, I head back inside.

—I leave the gate.

In my pocket is the knife engraved with "Nanaya".
Thanks to Hisui, I have strength in my body now.
If there is a problem, that is—



"....."

that Hisui remains by my side.

"... Hisui.

Please, go back to the mansion."

"... I refuse.

You did not listen to my words, so I will not listen to yours."

Hisui peevishly tosses her head to the side.

"Now look.

I'm not saying you're going to get in the way.

... Um, the place I'm going to is very dangerous, so I want you to stay in the mansion."



"You say that, but should I leave, you will collapse.

If you really do want to go, it will be a big problem for you unless I go along."

"Eh—your power, is like that?

But, we did that.... we joined our bodies together so much, shouldn't I be good for a while?"

"... No.

That is just like a ritual to form intimate bonds between us.
Even if someone has exchanged fluids with me or Nee-san, they cannot receive energy if we are not nearby."

"—That's.."

That's a huge problem.

If that is true, then I can't even get to the school by myself.



"If you still order me to stay here, I will.

Please, decide on what I should do."

Hisui looks at me directly.

".... Uuu."

.... It seems my answer is already decided.

If I can't get to school without her help, then I can only let her come with me.

.... For the first time in so many days, I arrive at school.
The eerie silence sends a chill down my spine.
A space where no living presence can be felt.
Even though it holds hundreds of students during the daytime, it looks like an abandoned ruin under the moonlight.



"Shiki-sama, is this really the right place...?"

"_____"

I don't have the words to answer her.

I've only seen him being in school in my dreams.

"... Let's go, Hisui."
We walk through the front gate.

"—"



"Shiki-sama, this is—"
Hisui halts immediately like I did.

—Creak.

Night hangs over the school building.
As soon as I pass the gate, I feel something wrong in the air.
—Creak, creak.

.... The air as a whole is creaking.
The tense atmosphere stings our lungs.
—Creak, creak, creak.

"... This feeling, it's—"
I've felt this ill wind many times in my nightmares.
The air is thick with a murderous intent.
Hostility.
Hatred.
Inside the building,
the darkness is filled with murderous intent as if a battle to the death is occurring like in my dreams.

"SHIKI... he's fighting someone?"
.... I don't get it.
There couldn't be anyone that would be able to fight an inhuman monster like him.

"Nee, san—?"
A whisper.
Hisui speaks this, as if resisting the urge to throw up.

—Nee-san—Kohaku-san.

Akiha hasn't been in the mansion since morning.
She left with Kohaku-san and didn't return all day.
.... Last night..
When I was locked up in my room,
Akiha told me to just wait a little longer.

"Wha—?
.... Don't tell me—Akiha—!?"
My legs spring into action.
Before I start to think, I dash towards the building.

—I run into the building.

Inside, the air is even more tense.



"Shiki-sama—"
"....."
Not answering her, I search for any indication of presence.

—The hallway.

—Is horribly.

—Quiet.

".....!"
Skreeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!
A high pitched sound assails my eardrums.
It shakes the windows.

—The sound, it's coming from the floor above me.



"Shiki-sama, that's—"
 "... Just stay close.
 Let's go, Hisui."

Grabbing Hisui's hand, I bolt to the stairs.

—Still holding her hand, I go up the stairs.

"....."
 I clench my teeth.
 That day.
 I remember about the time when I left the room and overheard Akiha and Kohaku-san talking.
 Akiha said she would kill SHIKI—her brother.
 I know now that she didn't mean me, but she meant SHIKI.
 Without a doubt, the ones fighting right now are Akiha and SHIKI.

Skreeee!
 The ear-piercing noise screams once again.
 The sound comes from above—around the fourth floor.
 "That idiot....!"
 I fly through the third floor.
 Damn it—she's being unreasonable.
 Because of my nightmares, I understand SHIKI's body the best.
 His power isn't on the same level as a human's.
 I don't know how "nonhuman" the members of the Tohno family are, but she won't be able to win.
 It would be like going to get herself killed.
 ".....!"
 I run up the stairs as fast as I can.

—Akiha.

I turned her away, not trusting her.

I haven't done anything to act like her brother, but still she calls me her brother.

—And now, she is fighting the killer SHIKI by herself.

"Damn—it!"

.... I just have this terrible, awful feeling.

Akiha—Akiha can't possibly win.

Will SHIKI kill her?

.... I don't know.

I don't think he will kill Akiha since he persistently went after Akiha in the dreams.

But, on the other hand..

I don't think he has the same definition of being 'persistent' about someone.

Our definition is obtaining the ones we are persistent about.

He's crazy.

I can't understand his broken conceptions since I'm not.

No, even a lunatic couldn't understand another lunatic's thoughts.

Since the lunatic himself can't understand it, no one understands it, and he has to be alone.

"Aki.. ha—"

—She is alive.

Akiha.. She has to be alive.

There's no way she'll be killed by SHIKI.

Because I should be the one SHIKI is going to kill.

Akiha—I cannot let her die in my place.

If such a thing happens, I—

Skreeeeeeee!

As I arrive on the fourth floor, that sound screeches once more.

It's close.

It feels like it is in the hallway past these stairs.

"Akiha—!!"

The worst mental image still writhing in my brain, I dash into the hallway.

—Eh?

For a moment, I stand, dumbstruck.

"——"

From behind me, I hear Hisui gasp.

"A—Aki.. ha."

That's the only thing that pops into my head.

The Moonlit hallway.

In the freezing air that cuts into my lungs,

Akiha is standing, a few yards down the hall.



Like blood, a deep crimson.

—At first, it looks like Akiha's blood.

But that's not right.

What is red is just her long, long hair.

"_____"

I'm still not able to grasp what is going on.

Down the hallway, there is Akiha, with her red flowing hair and—



33 0

him, crouching with one hand on the floor, coughing up blood.

The one kneeling before Akiha is him—SHIKI.

Akiha is looking down at him.

.... Drawing close behind her is the figure of Kohaku-san.

SHIKI is seemingly on the verge of death and gasping for air.
Akiha is not even breathing wildly.

—The situation.

Unbelievably, it would seem Akiha is the one overwhelming him.

"Gu.....!"

SHIKI leaps forward.

In a flash of speed I can't even follow, a black blur shoots toward Akiha.



Skreeeeeeeee!

Akiha simply glances down at SHIKI.
With that, his body slams down to the ground, and as if in response to the sound.
His torso burns, giving out smoke.

"Hya-aaAaaaaaAH!"
SHIKI's screams echo through the hallway.
His evaporating body is covered in smoke.
His body under his kimono has mostly bones showing, like a mummy.
But he still lives, his gruesome form still staring at Akiha.
His eyes filled with fear.
On the other hand, Akiha's clothes are undisturbed.
.... Even from here, I can understand it all.
Her surroundings are distorted like a heat-induced mirage, and it seems more out of this world than the air in the building.
"Haa, g, uwaaaaaa.....!"
SHIKI claws at his evaporating body.



Akiha calmly observes without carelessness.

—These two's powers..

They are fundamentally different.

"Amazing... Akiha-sama, that is... amazing."
 Behind me, Hisui speaks in surprise.
 That's exactly what I'm thinking too.
 ... What is this?
 You can say she is superior, but that's too much.
 She is too overwhelming—



"This is it, SHIKI."



33 0

"Aki-ha."

With a ragged breath, SHIKI somehow manages to say his real sister's name.

Akiha—she just stares at SHIKI, unmoving.

"Why—why are you treating me this way?"

I'm your true Nii-san."

"....."

Shifting,

the distortion around Akiha increases even more.

"I love you, Akiha.

I only love you.

That's why I kept living in that damn basement, trying to kill that impostor
 and trying to get us back to being brother and sister!

... So why, why are you getting in my way, Akiha?"



"... I'm not getting in your way.
This is nothing more than my duty as the head of the Tohno household—the
duty to pass down judgment on all those in the family who stray from being
human."



33 0

"I'm the head of the Tohno household!
If he was not here, I would have still been SHIKI.
I could have always been your Nii-san.
Wake up, Akiha.
That impostor is just deceiving you!"

The distortion around Akiha increases even more.
After closing her eyes briefly, she looks at SHIKI as if she is parting with him.



"—I am not being deceived.
You are not my Nii-san....!"
Skreeeeee!

"Aaaahhh....!"
SHIKI hides his face with his hands.
.... But that is pointless.
I don't understand what kind of power Akiha possesses.
But that—takes away heat from everything in her view, anything she can see.
It is an inevitable "plunder".
Skreeeeeeeeeeee!
So in the next instant,
SHIKI's face will vaporize.

Well, it should have.
"Shiki-san?"
Kohaku-san says this as she realizes our presence.
"—Eh?"
Akiha turns toward us in surprise.

.... In that brief moment,
for just a split second, a complete letting down of her guard.

There's no way he would let that chance slip away.
if clearhisui != 0
turn to **393**
turn to **394**

392

.....
I can't hear the annoying sound of the clock anymore.

Knock, Kno—ck.

The rhythm of my breathing has gone totally erratic and I can't fix it.
.... It's deathly cold.
If it's this cold, I want to stop caring about everything—I feel like sleeping.

Knock Kno, Knock.
Kno, Kno, Knock.
Kno Kno Kno, Kno Kno.
Kno, Kno, Kno—Kno.
Kno, Kno Kno, Kno—Knock.
kno—,,,,,knock.
,,,,—Kno kno, knock knock.

"——"

I think I hear a knocking sound.
Maybe it's Hisui.
But my body doesn't move anymore.
Tohno Shiki, will live forever in this cage, and no one will kill Tohno Shiki..

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **438**

No.

turn to **1**

393

Call out Akiha's name.

turn to **394**

Call out Kohaku's name.

turn to **395**

394

"Hee—!"

SHIKI lunges with a cry.

His black shape explodes forward like a firework.

"Ts—!"

Akiha and Kohaku-san both turn.

But, it's hopeless.

They'll never make it.

The black shape isn't going for Akiha.

SHIKI lunges not at Akiha, but at Kohaku-san who stands next to her.

—He knows.

Just like how I am able to move right now because of Hisui's power, he knows that Akiha's overwhelming power is possible through Kohaku-san's help.

"Kohaku.....!"

Akiha's voice cannot stop it.

"Hee—eeeeee!"

SHIKI raises his voice, and with his arm thrusting like a spear, aims for Kohaku's face.

The sound of pierced flesh.

"——"

My voice dies in my throat.

Splat!

The sound of blood spurting forth.

Kohaku-san's face is splattered, with the redness, of, Akiha's blood.

"... Akiha-sama...?"

"Aa——"

The sound of coughing.

Akiha tries to speak, but blood is the only thing that pours from her mouth.

That means,

the majority of her blood vessels have been destroyed, and all she can do is regurgitate blood.

"——"

I can't speak.

My mind is empty.

That is,

the same as SHIKI, who has just impaled Akiha.

"—Aah.."

SHIKI pulls back his arm.

"Uuu?"

A thud.

Akiha's body falls down on Kohaku-san.



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"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?"

SHIKI swings his blood stained arm around wildly.

Every time he waves it around, Akiha's blood paints the wall and ceiling.

"AAAAAa, AA, AAAAAAAAAA!"

SHIKI shakes his arm desperately.

"AAA, Aki, Akiha, Akiha is, Akiha?"

SHIKI suddenly stops moving.

SHIKI stares at Akiha's blood-drenched body, then looks at his blood-soaked arm—then bolts down the hallway as if running from something.

His footsteps lead upstairs.

SHIKI has run to the rooftop.

—But that,

I don't care about that.

"Akiha..... Akiha—!"

Still unable to think, I run to her.

Kohaku-san is still standing in a daze, her amber eyes nothing more than jewels devoid of emotion.

—I

crouch down next to Akiha's body.

Akiha just lies on the floor, powerless, with terribly calm eyes.

"Akiha....!"

I can't tell her—it's alright.

Even with my glasses on—I, can, see, them.

"Akiha—Akiha!"

These are the only words that I can think of.

Akiha—with her calm, gentle eyes, looks up at me.

"... Nii-san... why, are you, here....?"

She coughs.

More blood trickles from her mouth.

"——!"

... I can see them.

The lines of death on her body are spreading across her body with gruesome speed.

This is.. fatal.

The fact that she's still alive must simply be due to her unnatural Tohno blood.

"God—damn it, why....!?"

Even though—I understand death better than anyone else, I don't want to believe it.

"Don't move....!"

I'll help you right away....!"

Taking off my shirt, I put it on Akiha's chest.

Trying to cover up her wound, I tie it up.

The blood soaks the shirt in matter of seconds.

It doesn't do anything.

As if trying to hold off my weeping emotions, I push against it.

—All I can do is push.

"Hey... answer me."

In a daze.

Akiha says this to me like she does not see me pushing against her wound.

"Nii-san, why, are, you here?"

I'm curious, so I can't rest until I know.

Things I don't understand, they make me angry—you know that, right?"

"——"

"Oh yeah, that's right," I nod.

Her wound keeps bleeding.

The shirt is too soaked, it can't stop the bleeding.

Damn it—this crappy shirt.

Why does it have to soak so fast?

I'm pissed.

At the useless shirt, my useless self.

Really, really, not being able to stop just one wound, I—

"... Stupid.

Why, you ask?

This is my school.

Even though it's late, it's not that strange for me to be here."

I hold back my tears.

I answer as best as I can.

"Ah, I see—this isn't like me at all.

I didn't.. even.. think of that at all.."

Akiha sounds satisfied.

She doesn't even seem to be in pain.

Only, her body warmth starts to disappear.

Like pure white ice melting under the sun.

Does she understand what is happening, or maybe it is because she does understand—she speaks normally as if we were talking during breakfast.

"Hey, did you hear about what we were talking about?"

"—Yeah, sorry, but I heard."

"O, oh.

You know now.

.... I'm such an idiot, letting you hear it, the person I didn't want to let hear the most."

"Don't speak...!"

It's okay, so relax.

Please..... please."

I roll up my shirt and tie it around her body.

I know it's useless.

But, if I don't do anything, I don't think I can stay sane.

"—I'm sorry.

I, I've deceived you all this time.

I've kept secrets about many, so many things."

".... It's okay.

I don't care about it.

So please—"

"Nii-san—you are not my real brother.

I was.. a, horrible, woman.

I wanted you, to always, always be by my side, so I.. told.. all those, stupid, lies."

So this is my punishment.

With her trembling lips,
Akiha says those words clearly.

The blood doesn't stop.
I'll go crazy at this rate.
"... I knew.
I already knew.
So don't worry about it."
I grip her hand tightly.

She takes a deep breath.
Akiha gives a strange smile.

"... Nii-san, you knew?
... Then, I didn't, have to, hold back."

—I really am an idiot.
Her lips shape those words.
She should have said it.
She should have voiced it.
But Akiha, did not do so.

"... Akiha?"
There is no reply.
What I am holding right now is not breathing.

"Hey!"
There is no response.
What I am holding is what used to be Tohno Akiha.

"Say something!"
There will never be an answer.
What I am holding has closed her eyes calmly—
"Akiha—!!!"
I shake her body.
Even though—I understand better than anyone else, that it has no meaning.



"... Shiki-sama, please—"

Hisui places her hand on mine.

"—Ah.."

Without even realizing it, I was making her body dirty.

I—like an idiot, I made her body dirty.

"_"

Quietly, I place her on the floor.

—The school building is horribly quiet.

Hisui and I are wordlessly frozen.

Only—only Kohaku-san seems to have regained the power to move.



"I wonder where SHIKI-sama went to?"

—SHI, KI.

Those words catapult my consciousness back.



"Nee-san, don't say that now—"

"No—Kohaku-san is right."

I stand up.

It's a good thing—it really is a good thing I brought my knife.



"P... please stop, Shiki-sama....!"

You, you don't have to do such a dangerous thing.

SHIKI will not last long with that wound anyways."

"... No.

Akiha went that far since she could not let SHIKI, the killer, be alive any longer.

For Akiha's sake, I can't leave him be."

I say this as I push her away.

That's a lie.

More than that just cause—

"I have to settle this with him here and now."

—I hate him.

To put it simply, I just want to kill him.

"Don't follow me.

Both of you stay here and take care of Akiha."

Kohaku-san nods.

Hisui uneasily watches me as I run up the stairs.

The rooftop.
 The moon hangs in the sky.
 That wild beast is crouching on the concrete.
 "—SHIKI."
 I remove my glasses.
 I look at his "death".
 pant—*pant*—*pant*—!

Crouching, SHIKI is biting his own arms.
 There—exists no trace of sanity.
 Perhaps what happened caused him to go insane.
 "....."
 That pisses me off.
 I—I am not able to lose my sanity for Akiha's sake.
 Underneath the moonlight.
 Even though I've known him for so long, I take my first step towards the enemy
 I just met tonight.
 "SHIKI—Akiha is dead."
 "Ah—"
 SHIKI looks at me with bloodshot eyes.
 His face is half gone, but he still isn't dead.
 The powers of those of Tohno blood—Shiki's power is "immortality".
 That must mean it is harder for him to die, more likely for him to live on.
 "Ha.."
 That's funny.
 For me, that means nothing.
 "You look ugly."
 "SHUT.... UP!"
 SHIKI gets up with a sharp breath.

"SHUT, UP!
 SHUT U-P.
 SHUT UP!"
 Like a broken record, he repeats the same thing.
 "SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUTUPSHUTUP, SHUTUP-
 SHUTUP, SHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP, SHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP SHUTUPSHUTUP—
 —!!!!"
 "....."
 "Just shut the hell up!"
 Panting furiously, SHIKI just shouts.
 "You're always, always noisy!
 What kind of grudge do you have against me!?
 Why are you always getting in my way!?"
 SHIKI screams around while staggering around.

I—

"What—are you.."

—I don't get it.

"Just shut up!

Just leave me alone—don't look inside me, don't use my dreams.....!!

You, you, you, you're always watching me, that's why I'm so full of uneasiness!"

SHIKI claws at his head.

"Wha—"

.... I never even thought about that.

I've always seen him, tracking him in my dreams.

But..

It never even occurred to me how SHIKI would feel about being tracked.

".... Get out.

Get out of me.

Get out of my house, get out of my name.

You're in my way, you're in my way, you're in my way, I'll!!!!"

SHIKI is screaming like a child.

".... Hmph.

Same goes for you."

I raise my knife.

I never thought to understand him in the first place.

I—I came here for a deathmatch.

"Fine, let's fight to the death!

All those who get in my way are my enemy.

I'll kill you all.

You, you, Akiha, Kohaku!

Just like that old man who wanted to lock me up till I died, I'll kill you all....!"

SHIKI screams like a raving lunatic.

His figure really is ugly.

"HA, HAHA, HAHAAAAAAAAHAHAHA!"

And then.

SHIKI attacks me head on.

—Because of his fight with Akiha, SHIKI does not have a functional body.

So, it was easy.

SHIKI runs—or so he thinks, and I avoid his arm, which is swung slower than walking speed.

I slice the "line" from the top of his head to his abdomen.

"Gi—"

Thud.

SHIKI's body loses power and collapses onto mine.

"See, it's simple.
Your lines are too clear."
SHIKI's death looked like an iron shaft was sticking out of his head.

"See.
That's what I meant by ugly."

"Ha..... haha, ha."
SHIKI just laughs.
There, no intelligence exists.
"AHA, HAHAHA, AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"
Laughing, and dying.
His arms leaning on me fall to the ground.
SHIKI dies.
Before he does, he looks up at me, curiously.

"——Who.. are you?"

"... Eh?"
"Who-are you?"
"What are you saying?"
"I'm the Tohno Shiki you were always targeting."
"Ah, I see.
You're Shiki."

SHIKI collapses to the ground.

"What's this?
—You look nothing.. like what I heard."
SHIKI collapses and his body disperses into the wind.

——It's over.

With this, it's over.
But, I don't feel anything.
I won't feel those splitting headaches, I can return to life as normal—but I don't
feel happy.
What I've lost, is far greater.

—But, what is over?

"—Why?"

I feel dizzy.

SHIKI's last words won't fade away.

Something did end.

But I don't know what ended, or in the beginning, what I was trying to end.

"——"

I look up at the moon.

In the vague darkness, my heart is enthralled.

Until Hisui came, I just stood in dumb amazement, standing in the moonlight.

The next week passed like it was just a dream.

Just like SHIKI's dead body, Akiha's remains dissolved into nothingness.

The whole affair did not leak out to the public and was taken care of by the people of the Tohno family.

I stayed in the mansion, becoming the successor to the Tohno household in Akiha's place.

For now, it is just in name, but I guess it's not something that can be determined easily.

Since SHIKI died, my body returned to health and I'm allowed to lead a normal life.

As for everything else, only a little has changed since before.

My happy school life without Akiha.

My life at the mansion with Hisui and Kohaku-san.

I, Tohno Shiki, think the whole incident that occurred after I came to the mansion ended.

However.

There is still a matter that I have to take care of.

If I think about it, there was a slight discrepancy.

It was something so small that if I didn't question it, I would never have noticed.

That night.

If SHIKI did not leave those words before he died.

.... The discrepancies between my memories, and what Kohaku-san and Hisui

told me.

SHIKI had a grudge against Makihisa.

SHIKI had a grudge against the old man because he was going to be locked away his entire life, even though my old man wanted to return SHIKI to the mansion as early as possible.

SHIKI thought of me as the target of revenge, but he never showed up in front of me and he did not even know what I looked like.

And one more thing.

That one dream, where SHIKI was violating that one doll-like girl.

That.. is probably—.

A clear holiday afternoon.

I told Hisui to go shopping.

I asked her for a lot, so she shouldn't be back until evening.

The only ones in the mansion are me and her.

I leave in her room a note that says I want to talk to her.

It is almost the promised time.

I have to go to that place.

When I get there, she is already there, waiting for me.



"Lovely weather, isn't it, Shiki-san?"

I nod.

She smiles cheerfully at me.

"You realized it, didn't you, Shiki-san?"

I nod.

Her smile does not fade.

Always.... her smile does not go away no matter what happens.
Come to think of it, the expressionless Hisui actually showed a lot of different feelings.
From the outside, she appeared to be a heartless doll, but her heart was not a doll's.
However—what about this girl?
The always, ever smiling Kohaku.
No matter what happens, always a smile, like a person with the heart of a doll.
Even when Akiha died, that smile did not fade—her smile that is just like a mask.

—That smile.

".... Kohaku-san.
You're the one who made SHIKI go crazy, right?"



"Yes."
"And the reason you were sharing your blood with Akiha, was to make her not human?"
"Yes."
"And you lied to SHIKI, and made him attack innocent people."
"Yes."
"When we were small, the one watching us from a distance wasn't Hisui, it was you, Kohaku."
"Yes."
"Back then, you intentionally distracted Akiha!"
"Yes."
"And then you suggested that I kill SHIKI!"
"Yes."
".... All of it, all of it is how you planned it out, Kohaku....?"
Still smiling, she nods.



"That's right.
All of it was something I wished would happen, Shiki-san."
Still, she smiles.
I feel a chill and unknowingly take a step back.
"Why—why, did you do these things?"
"Oh my.
You know already.
There are only one or two reasons why I would do all of this."
".... Revenge.."



"Ah, I think that's it.
For the sake of revenge, I decided that every one of the Tohnos should die."
"Revenge.... Is it because like me, you had your parents killed by Tohno Makihisa?"
"Oh, don't be silly.
Hisui-chan and I were orphans.
We don't even know what our parents looked like."
"So why!?"
"Who knows.
I don't even remember how I felt back then.
All I know is the reason."
"Reason?"
"What reason?"
"Let's see.. such as getting abused by Makihisa-sama?"
That is the reason why Hisui-chan and I were adopted in the first place.

In order to stay human, he needed our abilities as Synchronizers.
Shiki-san, you've done it with Hisui-chan, right?
It is said that sexual intercourse is the best way to share energy."
"_____"

I-knew that already.
Then that means—in other words—



"Makihisa-sama was really pushed to his limits.
I think he was too desperate to consider my age.
I was chosen first for a simple reason.
He probably thought that since I wasn't talkative and was quiet, I wouldn't
resist like the energetic Hisui-chan would have."
Even now, her smile, does not fade.



"Makihisa-sama wasn't really a bad person.
Only sometimes, he would turn violent because of his Tohno blood.
So, for those times, he had me ready in his room, and he let those feelings out
on me.
I guess it is called sexual abuse.
But I don't really remember much of it.
It was just like a daily routine for him to want me, so if I tried to remember
something like that, my brain would explode, wouldn't it?"
"Oh, but I remember clearly the first time it happened.



It was on my eighth birthday.
Makihisa-sama said he had a present for me, so I quietly but excitedly went into his room."
As if she is having fun, she gives her usual laugh.



"Every day, he got a little worse.
But that couldn't really be helped.
I was merely a child, so my abilities as a Synchronizer weren't fully developed.
That's why he needed Hisui-chan's help too.
But, since I was the older sister, I just thought I shouldn't allow her to cry."
"So, I took in everything Makihisa-sama wanted to do.
I asked him not to touch Hisui-chan because I would take everything myself.
He was probably ashamed and agreed to my request.
He probably also thought it was better that as few people knew about this secret as possible."
"That's how I came to stay in Makihisa-sama's room, our relationship a secret from everyone else.
During that time, I was able to think about things a little bit, I think.
I always thought about how to get away, how to run away with Hisui-chan.
But I didn't know where to go, and the more I submitted my body to Makihisa-sama, the more I broke down.
Eventually, I got tired of thinking and I realized that if I didn't think, it wouldn't hurt."



"I am just a doll.
A doll doesn't know pain.
A doll doesn't think.
I endured Makihisa-sama thinking like that.
Then, it mysteriously did not hurt as much as before.
Makihisa-sama's breath didn't make me sick, his arms were just like warm meat,
and even if he strangled my neck or kicked me in the stomach, it seemed like he
was doing it to someone else.
And every day got a little easier."



"Shiki-san, I wanted Hisui-chan to stay clean.
For her sake, I could endure any kind of abuse.
But, it was so hard.
Not Makihisa-sama's abuse.
I couldn't understand you, and that made me scared."

"Scared... of me?"

"Yes.

The way you played innocently was like a different world to me.
I looked out the window to see all of you play when Makihisa-sama wasn't looking."

"I didn't understand any of that.

I didn't understand why you did those pointless things.

It was strange for me to think so since it was just another world and I couldn't

be involved in it.
 I wasn't jealous of you, and I didn't hate the Tohno children.
 All I did was stare at all of you, while having this unknown feeling.
 But, I was afraid that feeling would turn me back into a human."
 "And two years later, you were killed by SHIKI-sama.
 You probably don't remember it, but SHIKI-sama was trying to kill Akiha-sama.
 But you suddenly came, and you shielded Akiha-sama.
 You weren't related to her, and you had everything stolen from you by the Tohno family, but you still died protecting her."
 "At that time, I was watching Akiha-sama, who was holding onto your dead body painfully but happily.



Oh, maybe I made up my mind back then.
 That it would suit Akiha-sama for her to die just like you did."
 "Wha—!"



"Wait, Shiki-san.
 If you want to know the reason, you have to be patient."
 "....."
 I stop my rush towards her.
 "Days later, you were brought back to the mansion and you were going to be adopted by the Arimas.
 That was really a secret, but I overheard it from Makihisa-sama.
 That's how I knew you would be leaving.

I didn't have time to tell Akiha-sama or Hisui-chan.

When I thought that I couldn't see that boy again, without even getting to talk to him—my legs strangely moved, and I ran down the hallway and found him, but I couldn't think of anything to say.

So I gave him my ribbon, the only thing that I owned."

"I heard that the Tohno family members were going to terminate SHIKI-sama soon after that.

Makihisa-sama didn't want to kill his own son, so he secretly locked him away underground.

He said SHIKI-sama would return to normal and asked me to take care of him."

"....."

Oh, of course—that's how it was.

So that dream was real.

It wasn't that I wanted to abuse Hisui or Kohaku-san.

That—was in reality.

SHIKI.. did that to her—



"After gaining some freedom from Makihisa-sama, I became a little happy.

But, it was the same.

SHIKI-sama was just like his father and only used me to let out his feelings."



"I think that had to have been what destroyed my last emotions.

I desperately thought about how I could break free from everything.

Then, I easily came up with a solution.

The whole Tohno family just had to disappear.
If not only Makihisa-sama but SHIKI-sama did those painful things, then that's the only possible thing to do, right?
And when I realized that, I laughed for the first time in years.
I was surprised that it was so simple and I didn't even realize it before."
"From that time, I was able to start moving on my own.
The hardest thing for me was to find a reason to move.
A doll can't move by itself.
Without a spring or strings, it can't act like a human.
So, once I found a reason, everything became simple.
All I needed to do was to place mistrust between them by making SHIKI-sama reject Makihisa-sama.
SHIKI-sama said that he wanted to drink blood, so I gave him mine and told him that he wasn't a bad person and I kept him the way he was."
"When SHIKI-sama became sick, I took care to make special medicine for him.



Oh, it's the same as the one I gave you.
You know those morning glories in the garden behind the mansion?
They are called Chosen morning glories and have three kinds of mental effects.



In simple terms, it's a drug that makes people hallucinate.
Once they are unconscious, they listen to what I tell them, and when they wake up, they don't remember a thing.
Quite convenient, don't you think?
Because I was educated to become Makihisa-sama's personal doctor, I know a

lot about these sorts of things."

"With things like that, SHIKI-sama went crazy at my convenience.

After that, it was even easier.

I secretly told Akiha-sama to look inside Makihisa-sama's room around midnight, and she finally found out about our relationship.

Since then, Akiha-sama felt guilty and it became easier to do a lot of things."



"Well, I didn't expect her to protest against him right away though.

But because Akiha-sama pressed the issue, I was released from Makihisa-sama soon after.

.... I thought that I wouldn't be free until SHIKI-sama killed Makihisa-sama, but I was freed four years earlier, actually.

From then on, I became a normal servant and traded places with Hisui, who became silent.



Oh, but don't worry since I was the one who took care of SHIKI-sama and Makihisa-sama.

Hisui-chan was always clean of everything."

Smiling, she ends her story.

"....."

I don't know what to say.

Even if Tohno Makihisa was the main cause,

the one who wished it to turn out this way, and made it turn out this way is

this girl before me.



"But Shiki-san.
I didn't hate Akiha-sama or SHIKI-sama.
I didn't even want to do it.
Those are my true feelings."
"_____"

.... How can she say that now?
"But, there wasn't anything else I could do.
Without a purpose like that, I couldn't live.
A doll cannot move on its own.
Without anything to guide it, it can't move."
"But still—"
.... That is unforgivable.
"There wasn't anything I ever wished from my heart.
But it's strange.
Everyone seriously accepts what I say.
Just the words of a ten-year-old child can manipulate their feelings.
Aren't coincidences scary?"

Kohaku giggles.

"—Are you satisfied, Kohaku?"
"I don't know.
I'm merely a doll that doesn't feel happiness or sadness."
I thought she'd say that.

.... Before me is a human that is a doll.
A girl whose emotions were exhausted so long ago.
Nothing remains.
Telling herself that she is a doll that doesn't feel any pain.
More than half of her really believes it.
That's why injuries don't hurt her.
SHIKI and Akiha died, but she doesn't feel happy or sad.

She is just,
an empty shell manipulated by strings.



"But—"

"Eh?"

"But, there was just one strange thing."

Really just a little bit.

She said that as her eyes trailed off into the distance.

"Akiha-sama protected me in the end.

I knew there was a fifty-fifty chance she would do that.

I stayed close to her for that reason.

Revealing Makihisa-sama's abuse and devotedly helping Akiha-sama who was slowly turning nonhuman.

—Yes that's right.

Really, I knew she would die protecting me."

That smile.

Even though she is smiling, she looks really sad, as if she's—

"But—I was really surprised at the time.

Why is she protecting me?

Why is she protecting me, risking her life?"

—She looks like she might burst into tears.



"I still don't actually understand if I was actually happy or sad when Akiha-

sama died.
But when I wake up in the morning, I take tea to her room even though I know she is gone.
Isn't this strange?
Even though there's no one in that room anymore."

She takes something out.
The sound of moving cloth.
Holding something long wrapped in cloth, she aims for her chest.

A shining blade reflects the sunlight.

"Ko—!"
I run.
But, she is much faster.

—A small sound.

And she collapses to the ground.

She stabs herself, and falls to the ground.
Even though I ran, it's already too late.
It has pierced her heart.

My mind reels.

—Without reason.
"Wha—why.....!?"
I hold her in my arms.
Fresh blood blossoms from her chest like a flower.
Her smile still does not fade.

—On the contrary,
it seems indescribably pitiful.
"Hang in there..!
Why, why did you do that..!"
"Because revenge was the only thing I could do—I can only disappear when it's all over.
I tried to find new springs, but I could never find one, and time ran out."
She smiles.

That.. for no reason at all—
"What the hell is that?
What are you saying..!"
I look at the wound like I did to Akiha.

—She won't make it.

It has pierced her heart.

"....."

Why?

There was no reason—I just can't bear the sadness.

... She's looking up to the blue sky with thinned eyes.

Under the tree in the courtyard.

Eight years ago, when I was leaving this mansion, the place where the girl who was just looking out the window gave me a ribbon as a present.

This is..

where we promised to meet again, under this big tree.

"That ribbon, it was my favorite."

She speaks lightly.

"That's why I asked you to return it when we met again.

But you didn't keep your promise, Shiki-san."

"But—that.."

I was mistaken, and thought it was Hisui's—

"I made a little bet with myself.

That if that boy noticed that I switched places with Hisui-chan—then I would quit everything."

"Wha—what is that?

Are you trying to make me responsible for it at the end..!"

As I shout, my hand desperately tries to stop her bleeding.

But, death truly is miserable.

Ruthless, and accurate, without even a delay or the failure of a single second.

The clock of her life counts down to zero.

"Damn it, don't be ridiculous!

What the hell do you mean you made a bet!?

Because of you Akiha was, Akiha was—"

I frantically try to stop the bleeding.

Sad, without a reason.

The tears flow from my eyes.

"Huh?

You're crying, Shiki-san."

"—Well excuse me!

Damn it!

I know it's your fault, damn it, so why do I—"

That's right—

"Kohaku, I still don't want you to die, damn it....!"

Tears flow down.

She smiles again.

"Shiki-san, you are too kind.

But please don't worry about it.

I'm just a doll, so I don't feel pain or fear."

"That again—why do you—"

"But it is much easier this way.

Being a human, everything is painful and it hurts too much.

But no one saved me, I couldn't escape."

She exhales slightly.

She closes her eyes and remembers.

"I just remembered something.

.... It was when I was a child.

I was scared and hurt, but more scared of dying.

Tohno Makihisa was huge, like a demon out of a story book.

The mansion was too big, like a haunted house.

Every day was cold, and it was my daily routine to cry and scream.

But if I raised my voice, it got worse, so I had to endure it all."

"But, my sister was playing outside.

She was laughing under the sun by easily jumping out the window of the haunted house, where I could not get out, no matter how much I wished for it.

.... Come to think of it, everything was sad.

That's why.

That's why I wanted to become a doll that didn't feel pain."

The bleeding doesn't stop.

With her eyes still closed, she remembers the childhood filled only with pain.

"I don't like pain.

That's why I thought it would be better to become a doll."

"Ko.... haku?"

"And gradually, my body stopped generating a pulse.

Blood vessels turned into tubes one by one.

Blood vanished like vapor.

My heart, everything, just crafted parts.

If I did that, there would be no more pain, right?"

"Wha....."

I can't say anything.

A girl who thought she was a doll.

A girl who couldn't live without thinking that she was a doll.

Kohaku had no other means of salvation but to maintain an illusion that she really was a doll.

"That's why, even if you are this kind, there is no need for tears.

It's just a doll breaking."
Kohaku still keeps her eyes closed.

—No, that is wrong.
I grasp her hand, and shake my head in refusal.
"No..!
Kohaku, you are human.
You can't be a doll..!
Kohaku, you're alive, you're a living human being..!
As proof, you are bleeding red blood right now!"
"Ah, that's right."
She laughs again.
".... Right?
You're a normal girl who liked Akiha, was always worried about Hisui, and
laughed when we talked about stupid things.
So—"

Even if she wished it and caused the deaths of Akiha and SHIKI..

"—Kohaku, there was no reason for you to die."
Increasing my grip, I say these words from the bottom of my heart.
".... Huhu.
Shiki-san, you are just the boy I thought you would be.
I... finally got to speak to you."

Her heartbeat.
Her heartbeat surges like it is a grand finale.
Her chest rises and falls.
.... Her closed eyes open.
At the very end.

She looks at the deep, distant blue sky.

"I see—I guess it was only an illusion after all."
She coughs up blood.

—It hurts.
She whispers softly.

"That's why—I wanted to be a doll."

Then, she passes away.
The hollow eyes endlessly look into the blue sky.
Not a fake smile, but a quiet and very sad face.

—Leaving my room, I head towards the gate.

After a quiet meal together, we leave the garden behind.



"Please be careful, Shiki-sama.
It has become cold recently, so do not strain yourself."
"Yeah.
Don't strain yourself either, Hisui."
Taking my bag from Hisui, I turn my back to the mansion.

The road is long, as if it goes on forever.
The gently sloping road, and the blue sky that might suck me in.
I see an illusion.
The road, like a ladder, heading to the sky, trying to reach the clear, blue sky.

—I see that, and for no reason.
I remember that sorrowful affair.
"——Hisui."



"Yes.

What is it, Shiki-sama?"

"... Mm, tomorrow is the start of winter break, right?

I'll come straight home, so how about we go to town?

I have something I want to talk about, too."

"Huh—?

To town?"

"Yeah.

Once it is winter vacation, let's take a trip somewhere.

... Well, I don't know where yet, so I was thinking of letting you decide."



Hisui stands there in silence.

... That's right.

Hisui doesn't leave the mansion for herself.

Kohaku-san was always the one to take care of things outside, so Hisui never left for eight years.

... It isn't that I don't like that fact.

Only, it's just that,

I wanted to go somewhere new with Hisui and wanted to increase our fun memories so we won't lose against all the sad memories.

"What do you think?

If you don't want to, I don't mind either way."



"—No, if I get to be with you, it would make me very happy.

I—will look forward to it."

"I see.
Then, I'll be back before noon.
Please be waiting in some regular clothes.
Then we'll figure out what to do.... and maybe a terrible guy might come along
too, but we'll deal with it then if it happens."



Hisui tilts her head questioningly, but agrees.
.... When I go to school, I will end up asking for suggestions from Arihiko, but
considering him, he will want to come along.

—Well, that's that.
I can ask his sister to come along too and going with a lot of people might not
be bad either.

"Well, I'm off.
Thanks for sending me off, Hisui!"
Saying that, I run down the hill.
The road is long, and continues into the town.
I run under the clear blue sky and feel the warmth of Hisui's gaze on my back.

And, I see him off.
This daily task done, I close the gate.
The only one left in the mansion is me.
Nee-san and Akiha-sama are no longer here.
And it seems that no new servants or masters will be coming.
His sister left him this mansion and some money.
Since the money that is used to maintain this place will be paid by the members
of the branched Tohno family, it seems we will not have to leave here anytime

soon.

—Once vacation starts, do you want to take a trip?

I decided to nod to those words.

.... Ever since that day, I forbade myself from leaving this mansion.

Ever since I found out Makihisa-sama was using Nee-san like that in my place, I hated going outside.

Isn't it natural?

Nee-san did that so I would stay clean.

So, I had to stay clean, no matter what.

I would not let any male touch me.

I would never touch the fingers of the gender that used my sister like that.

I thought it would be better if I was just like a machine.

If I went outside, I would get dirty, so it would be better if I stayed inside.

If I locked myself away in the sterile mansion, I would never become dirty.

Because Nee-san protected me.

I thought the only thing I could do was become like a doll, staying pretty forever.

".... But, I will end that, will I not?

I am thinking of going outside, Nee-san."

Once it gets close to noon, I change my clothes.

.... It's been years since I last wore my own clothes.

Pushing my hands through the sleeves, I am amazed at how light it is.

That maid uniform I got used to so much, compared to these light regular clothes, is really heavy.

"——Ah."

A wind blows.

The hair ribbon that was in my hand flies off.

It is white.

It was a lone memory that a girl gave to him a long time ago.

The ribbon flies up and up.

Riding the wind, as if it was never there before, it vanishes into the forest.

"Wait, that was——"

I try to chase after it, and I stop.

That was the girl's ribbon.

It is not mine, so I guess I have to at least give that back to her.

In my hand, I hold a promise.

That awaited promise of the girl who gave that ribbon still lives inside of me.

So—just that ribbon, at least.
I think it tried to return to the place the girl dreamed of.
"_____"
Promises are fulfilled.
If he thought I was that girl, then I will have to fulfill her dream.
Like how I love him.
That girl had to have always loved him too.
Come to think of it, we really were sisters alike each other.
Nee-san and I traded places, but Nee-san really did a perfect job of acting out my part.
That carefree smile.
Those straightforward emotions.
And that fleeting experience of love with him, those were all real.
Even though it was just an elaborate play, Nee-san really did love him when she played my role.
She played my part perfectly, and she loved him from the bottom of her heart.
.... Long ago.
As if watching a dream that girl always wished and waited for.
"That's why, Nee-san.
That's why I have to return to myself."

I don't think I can do it right away, but I can do it gradually.
Maybe I won't be able to behave exactly as I was back then, but with all my strength—I must fulfill her dream, as I am right now.
After the boy left, Nee-san acted like me because she wanted to do that.
.... Her dream was always to be Hisui and to love Tohno Shiki.
So I will grant her dream.
For the sake of my childhood dream, and for Nee-san's dream, I will always—
always be by his side.
"Ah——"

I hear noisy voices in the distance.
.... It seems like he has returned, but it is noisy.
.... He is not alone, but it looks like he brought some friends.

—A voice calls my name.

Checking myself in the reflection off a window, I hurry to the entrance.

—The sky, the infinite deep, blue, sky.

Hisui greets the long-awaited boy, takes delight in such normal things, and returns a smile.
That is something that will continue tirelessly, day after day.
The long-awaited peaceful world.

I have been waiting for it for so, so long.
Always believing that one day I would be flying freely, I always stood by the
window, looking up at the deep sky.
That one day, wings would sprout from this world.
And wings would sprout from this back.
And I will smile like Nee-san with that boy.

—This is what the little girl,
so long ago,
dreamed of—

gsetvar clearhisui + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar clearhisuitrue + 1
!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **439**

No.

turn to **1**

395

"Hee—!"

SHIKI lunges with a cry.
His black shape explodes forward like a firework.

"Ko——"

I can't make it from here.
If there's anything that would make it, that would be—

"Dam—"

Akiha turns towards SHIKI.
Akiha instantly prepares for his attack.
But the black figure isn't going towards Akiha.
SHIKI lunges not at Akiha, but at Kohaku-san who stands next to her.
"Koha——"

—He knows.

Just like I am able to move right now because of Hisui's power..
He knows that Akiha's overwhelming power is possible from Kohaku-san's help.

"Kohaku-san, get down——!"

I shout.

Like if I knew SHIKI was going for Kohaku all along, I shout from the bottom of my lungs.

"Kohaku.....!"

Akiha throws her body in front of Kohaku.

—I don't believe it.

Is she sacrificing her body to protect Kohaku-san?

"Hee—eeeeee!"

SHIKI raises his voice, and with his arm thrusting like a spear, aims for Kohaku's face.

Akiha forces herself in between them.

—Her timing is perfect.

I don't want to look.

I don't want to see Akiha die as she protects Kohaku-san.

"N—o....!!!!"

Right before it all happens,

I hear a voice which I've never heard before: Kohaku-san's crying voice.

The sound of rending flesh.

Red blood drips down onto the hallway.

"Eh——"

Kohaku-san's voice almost sounds absent-minded.

She has quickly pushed Akiha away.

She pushed Akiha trying to protect her, and threw herself in front of SHIKI's claws.

"Y—you!"

SHIKI's voice quivers with anger.

.... Red blood continues to flow forth.



33 0

"Ah——no, no, Akiha.

I, didn't mean, to hurt you——"

He shakes his head.

In front of SHIKI, Akiha lies collapsed, her arm coated with blood.

.... Thanks to Kohaku-san pushing her away, it seems only Akiha's arm was shredded by SHIKI's claws.

".... G.... wah!"

Lying on the ground, Akiha writhes in agony, clutching her arm.

SHIKI stands dumbstruck, shaking as he looks down.

Kohaku-san, fixated with surprise, stands there unmoving, like a doll.



33 0

"You—you bitch, are you trying to get in my way...!?"

SHIKI lifts his head.

Kohaku-san is in front of him.

.... Why is it?

She is just standing there, not moving a muscle, as if her soul had fled her body.

"You—you, also get in my way.....!?"

SHIKI howls.

"Shiki-sama.....!"

Hisui's pleading voice.

She doesn't even have to tell me.

Like Kohaku-san protecting Akiha, this time, I'll stop him for sure...!

"SHIKI.....!"

I run, my glasses already off.

The lines I see are across his neck and from his upper left chest to his stomach.

.... Either one will do.

If I work my knife through either one, it will surely kill him.

Gripping my knife firmly, I fly down the hallway with a speed that surprises even myself.



33 0

"———!"

SHIKI turns towards me.

But, I'm much faster.

"Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?"

His anguished cry reverberates through the hallway.

"Hii—ha, hahahahahaha!"

An insane laugh.

—It was too shallow.

How naive.

In front of Akiha—I hesitated in cutting her real brother's neck.
The line that runs through his body.
I was only able to cut it halfway.
"Hiha, hahahahahahahahaha!"
Laughing wildly, SHIKI pulls back.
Like that, he escapes towards the stairs.

.... Following him would be easy.
But there's something more important for me to do.
"—Akiha!
Hang in there, Akiha....!"
Kneeling down, I look over her body.
.... This is terrible.
Her right arm is almost split in two and painted an awful crimson.

".... Ah.... Nii-sa.... why.... are you here—"

Her eyes are hazy.
Her shallow breathing, her pale face.
.... The figure of death stretches across her body.
".... Why, aren't.... you, resting, in your, room.....?"
"D—don't talk....!"
We can talk about it later, for now, just don't talk....!"
".... No, I won't.... Nii-san, how long, have you, been, here—"
It's spreading.
With her bleeding, her lines of death spread across her body.
"It's alright, just be quiet....!"
Please—I beg of you, for now, just calm down, please.....!"
"..... Okay.
If you say so—then I will, be obedient, Nii-san—"
With a forced smile, Akiha closes her mouth.
.... No, that..
Simply put, she's so weak she can't even speak.
"N—no.....!!!!
Wait, I'll stop the bleeding....!"
Taking off my shirt, I wrap it around her arm.
"Damn—this is useless....!
Shit....!
If the bleeding doesn't stop, she'll die, why doesn't.....!"
I frantically tie it around her arm.
.... I know that it will not help her at all, but I can't think of anything else to
do.
I..
I know that I'm starting to go crazy, but I still cannot calm myself.



"Shiki-sama, please calm down...!
 If you tie it any tighter, it will not help her."
 "Hisui——but!"
 "... It is alright!
 Akiha-sama will not die.
 If Nee-san is here, Akiha-sama will heal.
 Nee-san, is that not right?"



Hisui pulls Kohaku-san, who's still standing like a motionless doll, and sits her next to Akiha.

".... Nee-san.
 For now, please synchronize with Akiha-sama.
 You destroyed everything because you wanted Akiha-sama saved, is that not right?"
 "_____"

Hisui wraps both of her hands around Kohaku-san's white hand.
 But Kohaku-san's gaze is still empty.
 But—maybe Hisui's words reach her after all.
 Akiha's blood stops spilling forth.

"Ha——ah."
 I relax.
 With this—I can be assured.
 The uneasiness that gripped me before.
 The uneasiness that Akiha would meet the worst fate starts to gradually disap-

pear.

"_____"

Akiha will be helped by Hisui and Kohaku-san.

So.

As Tohno Shiki, I will have to end this.

"——Hisui.

I leave Akiha and Kohaku-san up to you."

"... Shiki-sama, you are still planning to go, are you not?"

"——We are the same type, he and I.

The least I can do is put him to rest."

"....."

Hisui wordlessly stares at me.

.... Her eyes beg me not to go, but I can't listen to them.

"... Thanks for everything up until now, Hisui.

I'm so glad you were with me."

I walk away.

Feeling her watch me as I leave, I follow after SHIKI.

—The path of blood continues.

Maybe he didn't try to really escape, or maybe he isn't even sane enough to understand what running away means.

SHIKI is standing in the hallway as if waiting for me.

"——SHIKI!"

I call out.

SHIKI looks over at me with his unfocused eyes.

"Ha——you again?"

SHIKI doesn't move.

.... Probably because of the wounds by me and Akiha.

He doesn't have a body that can move properly.

"Shit——I failed again.

It won't work out right.

Why is everything getting ruined...!?

It won't work, it never works out right, I always mess up.....!!!!

That's strange, why is she getting in my way!?

He, he came just like I was told, so why does he always always always always always always always always always always always always get in my way!?"

.... SHIKI's eyes are just hollow orbs.

Maybe he didn't even see anyone from the very beginning?

He only sees me before him, holding my knife, as just another obstacle.

"SHIKI.

Are you, in pain?"

"In pain?"

Me?

Why?"

SHIKI laughs as if it is so funny, and slowly stands up.

"I'm not in any pain.
 This is a wonderful life.
 No matter what I do, no one can punish me."
 SHIKI's eyes burn with the desire to kill.
 It seems he's ready.
 Underneath the moonlight.
 Even though I've known him for so long, I take my first step towards the enemy
 I just met tonight.
 "Fine, let's fight to the death!
 All those who get in my way are my enemy.
 I'll kill you all.
 You, you, Akiha, Kohaku!
 Just like that old man who wanted to lock me up till I died, I'll kill you all....!"
 SHIKI screams like a raving lunatic.

—Maybe because that figure looks terribly pitiful.

Even though this is a fight to the death, I remain cool and collected, like ice.
 "HA, HAHA, HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA!"
 SHIKI attacks me head on.
 "—————"
 It's nothing difficult.
 Like I'm cutting meat on a plate, I easily slice through Tohno SHIKI.

Thud.
 SHIKI's head falls to the floor.
 His powerless body falls against mine.

"—————"

I don't feel anything.
 I don't feel regret, pain, hatred, or disgust.
 Like Kohaku-san was earlier, I just stand like a doll.
 "Ku——kuku, ku."
 An unbelievable laughing voice.
 SHIKI's laughing head rolls on the ground.
 "You're wonderful—this is the first time I felt this cold pain!
 What a—what a superb hinderer you are!"
 Still laughing, his face dissolves into ash.
 Gradually, it disappears into the wind.
 SHIKI is disappearing.
 Before he does, he looks up at me, and curiously says.
 "—So who are you, anyway?"
 ".... Eh?"
 "Who are you?"
 ".... You don't know?"

I'm the Tohno Shiki you were always targeting."

"Ah, I see.

You're Shiki."

His disappearing face.

"What's this?

—You look nothing.. like what I heard."

With that, he completely disappears.

——It's over.

With this, it's over.

I don't feel anything.

I won't feel those splitting headaches, I can return to life as normal—but I don't feel happy.

—And?

Just what ended?

"—Why?"

I feel dizzy.

SHIKI's last words won't fade away.

Something did end.

But I don't know what ended, or in the beginning, what I was trying to end.

"——"

I look up at the moon.

In the vague darkness, my heart is enthralled.

Until Hisui came, I just stood in dumb amazement, standing in the moonlight.

The next week passed quickly.

SHIKI's body vanished without a trace and the wound in Akiha's arm was treated.

Even though my place as Tohno Shiki became vague, I can't go back to being Nanaya Shiki.

I don't know if she understands my feelings or not about it, but Akiha hasn't said one word about that night.

If Akiha, the head of the household, is going to play dumb, then I think I can continue my life as Tohno Shiki.

—The peaceful days have returned.

Since SHIKI disappeared, all my strength returned and Akiha is healing well, too.

Kohaku-san and Hisui go back to their regular duties at the mansion and there isn't a trace of uneasiness.

.... I want to believe that there isn't.

"Nii-san?

It's noon already, Nii-san."

.... I hear a voice.

"Geez, even though it's so nice outside, please do not sleep in such a place. If you want to take a nap, do so in your room."

.... Fingers tap my shoulder.

"Nnn—"

With that, I wake from my dream.



"..... Nnn, morning, Akiha."

"Don't say 'morning!' Coming to the sitting room only to sleep.. Just what were you thinking, Nii-san?"

"..... Well, I was thinking about this and that."

Giving a deep sigh, I get up from the sofa.



"Wait a minute, Nii-san.
Are you going to actually go sleep in your room?"



.... Hey, don't you think you should actually do something worthwhile on your day off?

To give you examples, like going out to deepen bonds with family members or, or invite them to have fun out of gratitude."

"....."

I think what Akiha says is worthwhile is very limited.

".... Well, I do think so.

It's just that what you think is worthwhile is different from what I think is worthwhile.

Sleeping twice would just be a waste.

The reason why I want to go to my room is simple.

It takes a lot of effort to face you right after waking up, so I thought I'd refresh my head in my own room."



"Wh, what is that supposed to mean, Nii-san!?"
 "Nothing, I just can't answer to your all your little scolding when my head's still dozy.
 So I'm just going to my territory to regroup, that's all.
 We can talk more during lunch."
 waving, I turn away.



Akiha watches me silently, but her face tells me she wants to complain.
 It looks like I will have to be ready during lunchtime.

I come to my room.
 While I was dozing in the sitting room, it looks like Hisui cleaned my room.
 ".... But, this really is a dull room, if I have to say it myself."
 Other than a bed and a desk, the room is completely empty.
 It's close to winter, so I should probably get some heating equipment.
 Akiha is pretty noisy about it, but I'd never feel like using the fireplace.
 "....?"
 What's this on the desk—"
 A letter I don't remember about is placed there.
 I'm curious, so I open it up.
 "....."
 The letter just says "I am waiting underneath that tree."
 "——Why?"

Saying that, I crumble the paper.
Opening the drawer, I put the knife with the engraving "Nanatsu Yoru" in my pocket.
"_____"

.... I can't pretend like I didn't see it.
Taking a deep breath to compose myself, I leave my room.

—I don't know when I realized it.
It all started when I thought that everything turned out pretty conveniently.
The happenstances and circumstances surrounding the connection between SHIKI and I were too convenient.
SHIKI had his lair at my school—but he never attacked me, his most hated enemy.
If SHIKI had ever felt like it, I probably would have been killed a long time ago.
I could only think that things ended this way because someone readied a convenient plot.

When I get there, she is waiting with her usual smile.



"You're late, Shiki-san.
I've been waiting since morning, but it's noon already."
"Yeah, sorry.
I fell asleep in the sitting room and just got back to my room."
"Ah, I see.
.... I messed up.
I knew I should have told you directly."
"That may be true," I nod.
She smiles at me.



"But, it is good you came.
Now we can talk, just the two of us."
"___"

She smiles happily.
With a smile on her face, she begins to speak like it's nothing.



"You realized it, didn't you, Shiki-san?"

"....."
I can't nod or shake my head.
"I knew it," she laughs.



"Shiki-san, I was the one who made SHIKI-sama like that."
"....."

.... That..

"I gave Akiha-sama my blood so that she would turn more into one of the Tohno blood."

"....."

.... But that....

"I was the one that gave SHIKI-sama wrong information, and made him attack innocent people."

"....."

I didn't want her to say it.

"When we were small, the one who was always watching from the distance wasn't Hisui, it was me."

"..... Kohaku-san."

"Back then, I intentionally distracted Akiha-sama so that SHIKI-sama could have an opening."

"..... Kohaku."

"But I really messed up.

Akiha-sama and SHIKI-sama were both supposed to die there—"

"——Kohakuuuuuuuu!"

Looking down,

All I could do is shout her name.

"..... It's fine."



"Shiki-san?"

"..... It's fine.

All of it is over, so I—don't want to hear that kind of story."

Those words are truly how I feel.

Such a reality, it is better if I don't realize it.

Kohaku-san can just be Kohaku-san.

Always smiling, thinking of Hisui dearly, being such good friends with Akiha, and laughing when we talk about stupid things, I wanted Kohaku-san to stay like that.

"—I, I don't care about all that.
You can just be here, and it'll be fine."
"_____"

.... She doesn't answer.

A long,
painful silence.

"No, that won't do, Shiki-san.

What I did can't be ignored like that.

I failed.

I have lost the reason that moved me these past years, so this Kohaku will just disappear."

"Wha—"

I lift my head.

Over there—



She looks like she always does.

"But, I thought you had the right to blame me.

You are the only one who is not connected with the Tohno house.

I used you in my plot against Akiha-sama and SHIKI-sama.

So if you wish to blame me, you can do whatever you like."

"The right—no one has the right to blame you, Kohaku-san."

.... That's right.

Ever since she was a small child and came to this mansion, she had to receive all the crimes of Tohno Makihisa.

She could not ask for help, nobody helped her, if she lived that life for years, then that's..

".... If you want to talk about rights, you had to have every right to take revenge.

.... I can only imagine what happened to you, but you only could hold nothing but a grudge against the Tohno family."

I know that I'm just sounding clever, but I say those unsatisfactory lies.

"—No, I didn't have a grudge against Makihisa-sama or Akiha-sama at all.

So what I did wasn't revenge.

I just thought that was what a human would have done.

Only for my sake, I put Makihisa-sama and SHIKI-sama in a trap, and tried to

get Akiha-sama dead too.
—That was all I had.
There really weren't any feelings behind it."
Her smile does not fade.
But that's a lie.
If that's true, then I—I would have hated her from the bottom of my heart.
"... No, that's wrong.
Kohaku-san, you just want to think that.
If that was true—then why did you protect Akiha?
Kohaku-san, you had emotions.
... You liked Akiha, so you destroyed your own plan yourself....!"



"_____"

For just an instant.
She lowers her glance just a little bit, and smiles again.



".... That's right.
I destroyed my own plan.
Really, SHIKI-sama should have killed me back then.
.... I made it so that only one of us would stay alive after that.
But why did we both end up surviving?
She seemed troubled as she says this, and her smile returns.
"... That's simple.
It's because you wanted Akiha to live, and you wanted to stay alive too.
Then—everything's alright.

Even though you planned it all, I'm happy.
Akiha's still alive, and you're still alive, that makes me really happy.
Is that—not enough for you, Kohaku-san?"

Tears come out as I say so.
... I can't stop my feelings, which are more full of regret than pity.
—I already understand.

That this person will not return.
Since then, from the time she protected Akiha, she became broken and couldn't
come back.
I understand that too well—



"Shiki-san, are you crying?
That's stupid, crying over a doll in a play that broke.
... Yes, it really is stupid.



Hey, Shiki-san.
I said that I didn't hate anyone, but there is one person I hated.
You understand, right?
I think I hated you.
Because if you weren't there, I could have just stared out the window without
even thinking."

Smiling, she turns away.

Her sleeves flutter like butterfly wings.
My legs want to dash forward.
But I can't move.
Even one step.
I feel that if I move one step towards her—something will happen that I can't take back.
"You are the only one I hated.
Everyone else, I neither liked nor hated.
I lost those emotions.
So—saving Akiha-sama was only an accident."
Her figure starts to become hazy.
"Kohaku, san—"
I have a bad feeling about this.
I can't place it, but I have a terrible feeling.

—Then.

"Nee-san—!"

A voice calling for her echoes through the air.



"Hisui——?"

"Hisui, chan...?"

Our voices overlap.

Gasping for breath, Hisui looks directly at her.

".... Hisui-chan, why?"

Her voice is shaking.

Taking it, she looks sharply at her.

".... Lies."

With a short, strong voice, Hisui says so.

"Everything you say are lies, Nee-san.

You saved Akiha-sama back then because you like her—and I know you can't hate Shiki-sama."

"——"

I hear a sharp gasp.

Still turned around—she looks extremely frightened.



"Is that not right?
 You played my role, so you cannot hate Shiki-sama.
 You played the role of Hisui from back then.
 So you loved Shiki-sama and tried to protect Akiha-sama....!
 You're not an empty human like you think you are....!"
 Hisui's voice hangs in the air.
 Kohaku doesn't turn back, and just answers "no".

".... Geez.
 If you had never slept in the sitting room, then Hisui-chan never would have noticed us.
 Shiki-san, you really do throw all my plans into disarray."
 Still facing the other way, she laughs.
 She holds up a finger to her mouth.

Gulp.
 I hear the sound of something being swallowed.
 "_____"
 I run.
 But, I don't make it in time.
 Before I can reach her, she collapses to the ground, coughing up blood.

Thud.
 A hard, sickening noise.
 Still smiling, she drips red blood from her mouth.

"Nee-san———!"

Hisui holds her.
 But, that.
 No matter who looks at it, it is already too late.

"No—Nee-san, Nee-san, Nee-san——!!!"
 Cradling the unmoving girl's head, Hisui frantically calls out.

It seems her feelings overflow like the blood pouring from Kohaku's mouth.
Her mouth opens and closes over and over.

"Nee-san....?
Nee-san, hold on....!!"
A desperate cry.
Seeing that, the girl smiles like a child.
"... Huh?
.... Don't do that, Hisui-chan.
Crying like that, it feels.... like back then."
"What—Nee-san, why—"
"... Yeah, because if I, don't do, so, you won't be, able to return, to the way,
you were."
Her words in pieces,
and with glazed eyes, she speaks to Hisui.

"——Nee, san."
Hisui's face contorts in grief.
Her tears flood her face.
"... Why?
That's fine.
I was okay with the way I was.
If you were happy, then I was happy.
I—I was always protected by you, so—"
I was always happy.
Painfully, she swallows her last words.
"Why....?
You should have stayed like Hisui, Nee-san.
Like Hisui, the one you admired long ago, so why—why are you returning it to
me now—"

A tear falls.
Maybe Hisui's tears caused that.
She nods quietly.
"... That's, right.
I, really, had fun.
It was all just an act, but it was really fun, Hisui-chan.
So I hoped, Hisui-chan, you were having fun, too—"
Her blood drips out.
As she speaks, blood dribbles out of her mouth.

"Ne—Nee-san, hang on, Nee-san....!
This, this can't be....!
Why, why do you have to die, Nee-san....!?
There is—there is no reason for you to die, Nee-san....!"

Hisui's voice can no longer reach her.
 Her chest rising and falling, she just looks up at the deep, deep blue sky.
 "... It's pretty.
 I could never go outside, but I always remembered the color of the sky."
 "Nee-san—Nee-san....?"
 "... Just those little things were my days.
 Hisui-chan, Shiki-san, and Akiha-sama were there.
 And there was such a pretty sky overhead."
 "Yeah.... I can't remember it too well.
 Those fun things.... are starting to disappear."
 Her energy drains away.
 The remaining light in her eyes is disappearing.

That.
 I could not let it be.

I take out my knife.
 My glasses are already off.
 All that is left—

"Shiki-sama, what are—!"
 Hisui holds on to me.
 "—I am going to save Kohaku-san.
 Please be quiet and trust me."
 I pull free and look hard at her body.
 Just like the time with Yumizuka.
 That time, I found Yumizuka's polluted blood and "killed" it.
 So I should be able to kill the poison she drank.

"———Gah."
 The headache gets worse.
 It feels like someone is stabbing my skull with a knife.
 It's so bad I want to close my eyes.
 "———"

.... I guess looking at something wrong in someone else's body is difficult.
 The pain warns me that this is surpassing the limits of my ability.

"AH——ha, ah."
 My breathing explodes into harsh gasping.
 Bubbles escape from my open mouth.
 My entire world is red.
 As if all my bodily fluids turned into poison, my body is burning from the inside.
 "Ahh—g—gaah!!"

Yeah.
 But, still——

"Ku——-ah, ahh——-!"

I stare at it, not caring if I go blind.

——My senses disassociate.

My world becomes a white sheet.

As the sound of my blood vessels burning away roars in my ears, I quickly, before I am unable to move, find the poison in her body and kill it.

The first scenery I've seen in a few days is this white examination room.

".... All set.

It seems like you are fine, Shiki-kun.

I do not see any cloudiness and your condition should not return.

You can go back to your normal life now."

The doctor continues scribbling away, as he's done these past few days.

His face which I see for the first time looks somewhat kind.

"Well then, take care.

Yeah, but don't strain yourself for a while.

You always seem to push yourself too hard."

"—I understand.

Thank you so much for your help."

I bow with heartfelt thanks.

And, I stand up from the chair.

I go out into the hallway.

In the waiting room is Hisui.

Not having seen her face in days, I wave to her excitedly.

Hisui quickly runs to my side to support me.

"Well then, shall we go?

We can meet Kohaku-san starting today, right?"

Hisui nods.

".... Um, Shiki-sama.

Is your body really okay?"

Hisui looks up at me, full of worry.

"Hey.

A doctor is a person who can't let unhealed people go free.

If I get to leave the hospital, that means I'm fine.

I'm used to being in hospitals, so trust me."

"—Yes.

That is why I worry.

There never was an instance where you would come back from the hospital fully healed."

"..... Hmph."

.... Hisui really talks a lot now.

Well, that's the truth, so I can't disagree.

"—Anyway, I finally got those bandages off my eyes.

I can see your face and my body is healed, so there's no more problems.

C'mon, let's go see Kohaku-san."

Pulling Hisui, whose still wanting to say something, I walk towards Kohaku-san's room.

—After that.

After seeing me plunge my knife into Kohaku-san, Hisui panicked.

But, after seeing that Kohaku-san's body was not harmed, that her breathing returned after that, and seeing me collapsing, Hisui ran to save all of us, even though she was still in a panic.

As a result, Kohaku-san was saved.

I fell into a condition where my eyes would not function in addition to the decrease in my physical body strength.

.... Well, I somehow understood that I went blind.

When I stabbed my knife into her body, the only thing I was able to see were those "lines".

So when I was told I went blind, it didn't shock me that much, but then, my sight came back shortly after.

The examination revealed absolutely nothing wrong with my eyes, but only problems with my nerves.

Rather than my cut nerves connecting themselves, it seems that it's more like the nerves which were numb healed up.

.... It seems like my eyes will not go blind that easily.

Or it might be that even if I do go blind, I'll still see those "lines".

.... Well, those are trivial matters.

The important fact is that Kohaku-san and I were saved.

.... But Kohaku-san wasn't fully saved.

She was able to recover.

But, in turn, she lost something.

"Shiki-sama."

"Eh—yeah, go ahead.

I think it's probably better if you went in first."

After answering yes, she knocks on the door.

A voice tells us to come in and we enter the room.

—Kohaku-san is the only one in the room.

She sits up in bed and looks at Hisui and I.

"....."

.... Kohaku-san isn't smiling.

With uneasy eyes, she looks at her guests.

"Um.... May I please ask who you are?"

With those words, Hisui's shoulders shake a bit.

"We have come to see how you are doing.

Please excuse us, Nee-san."

Kohaku-san looks at Hisui with surprised eyes after she hears the word "Nee-san".

Hisui sits down next to Kohaku-san.

I don't want to be in the way, so I sit down on a chair by the wall.

Kohaku-san looks uneasily back and forth between Hisui's face and mine.

"Um.... I am sorry.

It's a bit strange.

I feel that I do know both of you, but I cannot remember either of you."

Her voice sounds very apologetic.

This isn't a joke or anything as she really does mean those words.

—There is some problem with her memory.

I think I was told so before by Hisui.

Kohaku-san was no longer the Kohaku-san from before.

.... No, that's not quite right.

The system of the brain can be divided into four functions: recording, preserving, playback, and recognition.

And it seems that Kohaku-san has something wrong with her preserving function.

The doctor said that she can return to her normal lifestyle, but.... she can't remember most of her past.

.... It isn't so much that she can't remember, rather, it is more like she lost it.

The preservation of her memories up until now—all that information was lost, so there is nothing to remember.

So Kohaku-san cannot remember me or Hisui.

.... Having Kohaku-san return to the way she was before really is a hopeless dream.

I don't know if it was the near-fatal shock from the poison or if Kohaku-san closed it off herself.

But, I know that the Kohaku-san has the body and heart she had before, but she has forgotten all about me, Hisui, and Akiha.

"Um....."

Kohaku-san looks up at Hisui.

"Yes," Hisui answers, and Kohaku-san hesitantly starts to speak.

"Your face is the same as mine, might I ask who you are?"

"_____"

Hisui's body freezes.

But that is just for an instant.

With a light smile, Hisui holds Kohaku-san's hand.

"I am your little sister, Hisui."

"Hisui.... chan?"

She manages to let this response out.

That is probably the most cruel response she could have given.

But Hisui still smiles gently, and answers "Yes."

".... I am so sorry.

I, do not remember anything about you, Hisui-chan, or that person over there.

.... Ahaha, I'm a little scared.

I don't remember anything about you, Hisui-chan.

Maybe there must be something wrong with me."

Downcast, Kohaku-san looks like a lost child.

Her face clouds over and her eyes are uneasy; she is not like Kohaku-san.

—But still.

Hisui grips her hand tightly.

"No, do not worry, Nee-san.

No matter how uneasy you are, I will always be with you.

.... Like how you always protected me, I will always, always protect you from now on, Nee-san."

Kohaku-san's face is pure bewilderment.

After looking at Hisui in surprise, Kohaku-san thanks her.

"Eh—ah, yes."

Looking down in embarrassment, Hisui mumbles a response.

"Uum, is there anything you need?"

Like, something to eat, or something you want?"

Kohaku-san says yes and nods with her eyes in response to Hisui's attempt to hide her shyness.

".... There isn't anything I want to eat, but there is something I want.

Can I ask you?"

Kohaku-san does not look just at Hisui, but looks at me sitting by the wall, too.

"Yes.

What is it, Nee-san?"

".... I, think I never liked the name Kohaku.

So—I, want a new name."

"..... Name?"

I wonder why.

Once she says that, only one name comes to me.

That name has been discarded and only remains in memories.

"..... Shiki-sama."

Hisui turns to me.

.... Is she thinking of the same thing?

She looks at me as if she wants confirmation.

"..... Mm."

I nod in response.

Hisui turns back to Kohaku-san and,

"How does Nanaya sound?"

tells her so.

"..... Nanaya."

Kohaku-san murmurs it as if testing the sound.

Right after, she lifts her face up as if she remembered something.

"—Yes.

I, think I like the sound of that.

It seems, awfully nostalgic for some reason."

Saying that, she smiles.

Her usual smile that blossoms like a rose.

—Finally.

For the first time since she's awakened, she smiles happily.

—The two of them talking looks perfectly natural.

Naturally, the two of them peacefully pass the time as sisters.

.... I don't know if her losing her memory was good or bad.

Since all of her memories were painful, maybe it was a good thing that it happened.

Because from now on, there will be nothing but happiness.

Forgetting all the sorrowful incidents, she can earn a normal happiness.

"———"

But, looking at this blue sky, I just can't help but think back.

That young girl standing by the window.

I know that the past for her is something to be forgotten about.

But, still—if I could, I wanted that Kohaku-san to become happy.

.... But that is a wish that can no longer be granted.

So I just have to end that wish right now.

—Underneath that longed-for blue sky.

I imagine for the last time her care-free smile, like a lingering flower—

"Shiki-sama, may I please have a moment?"

After we leave the hospital,
Hisui suddenly asks me that question.

"Eh....?"

Sure, what is it?"

"Yes.

We still have time, so there is somewhere I wish to go."

"Somewhere you wish to go....?"

Not understanding, I tilt my head.

"Come on, let's go, Shiki-sama!"

Hisui pulls my hand forcefully and starts running.

"—————"

She takes me to a grassy plain outside of the city.

Autumn is ending and the sky is deep.

The wind that blows through the flowers and onto our faces seems to blow through our hearts.

"Hisui....?"

Why did you want to come here?"

"Hmm, who knows?"

To be honest, there really isn't a reason.

It's just that when we were coming to the hospital, I saw this field from the train."

Hisui says this trivially as she stands by my side.

".... I don't get it.

This is a nice place, but it doesn't seem that special.

If you wanted to play, we should go to another—"

"No.

This is the right place to visit.

I wanted to come not somewhere in the city, but somewhere quiet and beautiful, and it makes me feel positive.

A place where you could return to your usual self."

With a light smile, she looks up at me.

"My usual self—Hisui?"

"Yes.

Well, when you were in the hospital room, you looked so depressed.

.... I understand how you feel, and I'm glad you feel that way.

But, that is not what Nee-san wanted."

Hisui reaches out.

She lightly places her hands on mine.

"Is that not right?"

I think it is better if you cheer up.

.... Hey, Shiki-sama.

You may not have realized it, but you smell like sunshine.

That is the Shiki-sama that I like, and will always like."
Her eyes look at me directly.
Those eyes are really kind, and optimistic.
Hisui is the one that smells like sunshine.
Eight years ago.
It feels like we returned to that time, when Akiha and I and her would run around the garden.
"—Really.
I think I'm the gloomy one if you ask me."
"You are just someone who does not start conversation that much.
But to me—no, to us, you are like this open field."
"———" "
Her fingers move.
I feel her squeeze me tighter.
"So there, please don't make that face, Shiki-sama.
Akiha-sama was saved, and even Nee-san was saved.
There is no reason for you to be sad.
Nee-san is still alive.
Then I am sure she will return to the way she was someday, and even if not, I will make her many times happier.
You do not have time to be sad.
Because we have to help Nee-san and Akiha-sama be happier from now on."
"———" "
What she's saying is fairly preposterous.
So I wonder why?
After hearing those words—I feel a ray of light shining into my gloomy heart.
"—That's, right.
I'm her big brother, so its only natural to do such a thing."
Hisui nods.
"... Yeah.
It might be hard, but we have to do it.
Because I want them to be happy too."
"——Yes.
I know you can do it."
Nodding strongly, she holds my hand against her chest.

.... I can feel her heartbeat.
The delicate warmth of her body serenely blows like the wind through the grass into my own heart.
"—Besides.
If you do not cheer up, I would be very troubled."
"Why?" I ask.
Hisui's cheeks flush, but she still looks directly at me—

"... You are the only one who can make me happy.
I want to always be near your side, always be near your sunshine."

—She stands on her tiptoes to kiss me.

The sky is high.
Underneath that sky where there is no sadness, I receive the warmth of the one
I love the most.

—From the field,
is the gentle smell of the sunshine.

—Yeah, Hisui's words are exactly right.

We lost a lot, but we haven't lost everything.
The days will still go on into the future.
Then, we have to go on, and try our best to make everyone live happily.
"... Thanks, Hisui."
Holding her delicate body, I close my eyes.

Tears flow down my cheeks, but there is no sadness.
Life itself is fun enough, I've known that for a long time.

—Then.
Holding Hisui's hand, I'll walk on and have no regrets——

gsetvar clearhisui + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar clearhisuigood + 1
!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **440**

No.

turn to **1**

396

.... No, I don't feel like it at all.
I know Kohaku-san just wants me to feel good, but I can't forget about Yumizuka right now.

These past two days.
After I've seen so much of other people's blood, I can't be welcomed by them.

"Sorry.
I'm really happy that you asked, but I just don't feel like it right now—"

—Thump.
Thump.

"Hu—h?"

—My head is pounding.
Suddenly.

—Pound.
Pound.

I feel, very dizzy.

"Shiki-sama—?"
Hisui hesitantly calls my name.
.... Hisui seems to have noticed my sudden dizziness which neither Akiha nor Kohaku-san realized, and which I barely realized myself.
But that doesn't stop it from getting worse.

Thud.
Just like a puppet without any strings, I collapse to the floor.
"Shiki-sama, get a hold of yourself, Shiki-sama....!"
Hisui's voice grows distant.
.... Ah, I really am pretty pathetic.
Just thinking about Yumizuka and what happened, I lose consciousness like this—

"Ah—"
When I come to, I'm lying in my room.
While I was sleeping, Akiha must have been watching me because she is there

in front of me.

"Aki, ha?"



"Nii-san?"

You finally got up."

Akiha visibly relaxes.

"I... that's right, I must have passed out from my anemia again."



"Yes.

You slept for about seven hours, Nii-san."

"—Really.

I haven't been sleeping enough recently, that might be why.

.... Sorry.

I've caused you trouble again."



"What are you saying?
Your condition isn't your fault, right?
It is only natural for me to take care of my own brother, Nii-san.
You saying that you are a trouble to me is actually more troublesome than me watching over you."
".... I see.
Well, I won't say thanks than.
It's only natural, since we are brother and sister."
"Well, if you can say all that, then I suppose you must be alright."
saying that, she takes my temperature.
Thirty seven degrees Celsius.
That's just one more degree than normal.



".... I still feel a little uneasy, but you look fine, so I guess it is okay for me to leave you by yourself.
I'll be in my room then."
"....?
What, Akiha?"



"Please give your thanks to Hisui.
She is the one that cared for you all this time."

After wishing me well, she leaves the room.
"... Hisui... was the one who cared for me?"
Come to think of it, I heard her voice before I passed out.
Even though I'm sure Akiha and Kohaku-san must have said something, Hisui's
was the only voice that I heard coming towards me.

I start to get dizzy.
"..... I guess I'm not fully well yet."
I take a deep breath.
My day off ended before I knew it.
.... Well, if Hisui was watching over me all day, then I suppose it wasn't a bad
thing—

—Something seems.. very familiar.
An old Japanese-style room.
A dark room.

—That is,
that's an extremely old memory.
When I was very young, I wasn't used to the new people that took me in, so I
locked myself up in my room.

I didn't care for anything; I didn't want to talk to anyone.
Always, always alone, and I wanted to be swaddled in a cradle of my happy memories.
Even if I knew there would be nothing like that for me ever again, I still wanted to do so.
Knock knock, came a sound.
"... Who is it?"
"It's me."
Ah, she came again.
That girl around my age was knocking on the door again.
"SHIKI-chan, let's play.
You'll get moldy if you stay in a place like that."
"I don't wanna.
I don't like going outside."
Hugging my knees, I huddled in a corner of the dark room.

.... That girl came every day.
She would always knock, never getting tired of it.
She would never force me out, so she would not open the door, but just continued to call my name.
"Why won't you come outside?"

Because there's no one that I know outside.
Everyone hates me outside.

"That's not true.
Everyone wants to like you, SHIKI-kun."

Yes.
I knew that, but I couldn't believe it.
Because my father went outside, and—

And.
He was torn to pieces.
"... I see.
No wonder you can't trust anyone."

Yeah, that's why I will always stay here.
I don't want any more scary things happening.

"But, you will just be by yourself all the time.
Being by yourself is no fun."

Even if it's no fun, it is better than being scared.

"That's, that's not fun at all.

Then, SHIKI-chan, you can believe in me."

.... You say I can believe in you.

That's a little backwards.

Don't people normally say, "I believe you?"

"It's okay!

SHIKI-chan, you can trust me and come out!

.... Fine, but, believe, what should I believe in?

"Simple.

Even if everyone hates you, I will still like you, SHIKI-chan.

Because I like you, I always come and ask you to play."

..... Is outside, fun?

"Yeah!

It's much, much more fun than being by yourself—!"

—A bright light floods my consciousness.

As I open my eyes, the morning light shines through the window.

"..... Nnn."

I wake from my dream.

.... I don't quite remember it, but I remember vaguely watching a dream.

It was very nostalgic.

The smell of tatami—is that what it was?

"Shiki-sama, are you awake?"

Knock knock.

I hear Hisui's voice.

"Yeah, I'm up, so you can come in."



"Yes.

Please excuse me."
With a bow, Hisui enters the room.



"Shiki-sama, how are you feeling?
If you feel bad, please do not hesitate to tell me."
Hisui stares over at me as I lay in bed.
.... It seems she is still really worried about me collapsing so suddenly yesterday.
"I'm fine, there's nothing wrong with me.
I collapsed yesterday because I've been pushing myself recently, but that won't happen again."
Yumizuka—the vampire does not exist anymore.
Therefore, I won't have to walk the streets late at night anymore, like I did these past few days.



"If you say that is the case, then—"
I don't know what else she is worried about, but she looks at me uneasily.
"—Well, thank you for worrying about me."
I jump out of bed.
"As you can see, I'm just fine.
I'll change real quick, so please go ahead of me to the sitting room."
Hisui still stares at me with an expression that looks like she wants to say something more.
But, that look passes.



"... As you wish.
Well then, please excuse me."

Hisui places my fresh clothes down and exits the room.
"... What was that all about?
Do I look that pale?"
My reflection on the window glass looks pretty normal to me.
Anyways, I should hurry up and change, then head to the sitting room.

I go to the sitting room and see Hisui standing there.
Akiha has already eaten breakfast and is now drinking tea.
Kohaku-san seems to be in the kitchen.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
You seem like you've recovered."
In contrast to me, she seems very calm and collected.
"Yeah, good morning Akiha.
Sorry for being such a burden last night."
"... Nii-san, don't make me repeat myself.
I didn't consider that a burden, and if you are to thank someone, thank Hisui."
She closes her eyes in displeasure.

"—I see."
Those words remind me that I haven't thanked Hisui yet.
"... Hisui.

This is a little late, but thanks for what you did yesterday.
Since my body's this way, I'm sorry I caused you a lot of trouble."



"No, I am the one who should apologize.
I was not attentive to your condition."

Hisui bows.

"No, it's really my fault.
You don't need to apologize."



"But protecting your health is my duty.
It is my fault for suggesting things without thinking about your health."

"..... Uh."

That suggestion, she must mean last night's welcome party.

Actually, it was Kohaku-san's suggestion, and Hisui only agreed with it.

"That has nothing to do with it, so—"



"Nii-san, this is starting to get a little pointless.
If Hisui says that is the case, then let it be."
Akiha stands up from the sofa.
"Well, it is now time, so I'll excuse myself.
Nii-san, can you hurry to the dining room and eat your breakfast?"
"Wh... Of course I will eat breakfast."
"Breakfast is already prepared.
It's almost seven-thirty, so you should hurry up or you'll be late."

Akiha elegantly strolls out of the sitting room.



"Shiki-sama, please eat.
As Akiha-sama stated, you do not have much time."
".... Right.
I'll go to the dining room."

I eat breakfast and go to the entrance of the mansion.
Hisui already went to get my bag and has it when I get there.
"I'll come back right after school, so I should be home around four o'clock.
Oh, and you don't have to wait for me here."



"I understand.
Shiki-sama, please be careful on your way."
"Thanks.
I'll get going, Hisui."



Waving a hand to the bowing Hisui, I dash down the street.

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.... I don't have any reason for it.
But I just have a vague feeling she might be the person able to help me with my troubles.

"___"

There's no time to think.
I can't bear to keep this to myself any longer.
"Sorry, you go on ahead, Arihiko!"



"Huh?
'Go on ahead'?
Where are you going, Tohno!?"

.... Anyway, I get her to come to the rear of the school building so forcefully that it can't be helped if she gets mad at me.
fth period has already started.



"Geez, pulling me to a place like this, what is it Tohno-kun?"
.... Senpai is more amazed than angry.
"I'm sorry, senpai.
But, I wanted to hear more about what you were saying before."
"What I was saying before.. you mean the serial killer?"
"Yes, that."

About the person who doesn't feel a crime is a crime.
Are you saying they kill people unconsciously?"
.... For example.
Like intending to sleep but instead going outside to commit murder.



"Hey, that hurts, Tohno-kun.
I'll answer you, so please let go of me."
"Oh—I'm sorry."

I let her go.
.... It seems I was really worked up.



"It's alright.
Anyway, you were asking if the killer might be killing people unconsciously,
right?"
"Yeah—I really want to know."



"Well, I don't know, because I'm not the killer."
"Wha—yes, that's true Senpai, but..!"



"Yes, it's just a joke.
Since you seemed so serious Tohno-kun, I thought I'd be a little playful for a moment."
"... Senpai, give me a break.
I'm really serious here."



"Yeah, it looks like it.
But, why?
The serial killer is none of your concern, is he, Tohno-kun?"
"That's—"



"Yes?
What is it?"
.... That's.
"If—if I told you I was the killer, what would you do?"
I finally say it.



But.
Senpai's face lights up as if I said the funniest joke, and she bursts into laughter.
"Senpai, this is no joke, I'm—"



"Yes, I know you're serious.
But that's why it's funny.
Because the murderer doesn't usually come and ask for help because they're the murderer."
"Senpai—"



"Then I will ask.
Why do you think so, Tohno-kun?"
"It's because—recently, I've been.. strange.
I know why.
I was probably bitten by a vampire."
.... I say it frankly, as if it was a euphemism.



"—Please, go on."
".... Since then, it's been strange.
Suddenly I don't feel like myself, and I have dreams about killing people.
Last night, although I only intended to sleep, it seems that I went out.
And I had a dream in which I killed someone, and sucked blood."
"——"
Senpai says nothing, just watching me.
".... My father had a split personality.
Maybe I just don't know about it, but there might be a killer in me.
But I have no way of finding out—"



"So that's why you came to ask if the killer was unconscious of his actions."

Senpai sighs in amazement.

"Um, if you were truly the killer, you would not be unconscious of yourself.

The point you're seeing it in your dreams makes it not unconscious.

But more importantly, it's just a dream.

I don't know what you're worried about, but Tohno-kun is Tohno-kun."

"__"

.... I'm glad to hear that, but..

There's no reason for me to believe in any of Senpai's words.



She sighs.

"You must be feeling really uneasy, Tohno-kun."

With that,
Senpai pats my head.



"—It's okay.

You have nothing to worry about, Tohno-kun.

I myself guarantee it, so it's definitely okay."

"Ah—okay."

.... Automatically, I nod in complete agreement.

Even if I know it's only while she's doing so, I feel at ease.

Like wrapping up my uneasiness, Senpai's hands are gentle.

School is over now.

I was confused about myself and Akiha, but today is about to end.

".... Time to go home."

I should go get Akiha and go back to our mansion.

I walk home together with Akiha.

.... Just like lunchtime, we grow quiet as soon as there are only the two of us.

—While I want to talk to Akiha, I also feel embarrassed looking at Akiha.

".... Man, it's not like I'm a middle schooler."



"...?"

Did you say something Nii-san?"

"Oh—no, it's nothing, just talking to myself."

.... *sigh*
Really, what the hell am I doing?

We reach the long hill.
Once we go up it, our mansion will be right there.



"Nii-san.
I would like to ask you one thing before we get home."
Akiha's feet stop and she looks straight at me.
"___"
The kind of silence that was there before is gone.
Akiha looks at me seriously.
"Go ahead, what do you wanna ask about?"



".... Um.. I asked before, but, what do you think of Ciel?"
"—What, that again?
I don't think anything of her.
She's just my senpai.
She's a trustworthy senpai I can ask about anything, though."



".... I see.
It seemed like something was bothering you; this morning was a result of it too,
wasn't it?"
"___"

.... I'm surprised.
Akiha knew that I was worrying about the problem by myself.
"Akiha.. you noticed?"



"Of course.
We are brother and sister.
I can tell when you are depressed, Nii-san.
So, why didn't you just come and talk to me?
Do you trust that woman more than you trust me?"
"Y—you were watching me talk to Senpai..!"



"Yes.
I could hardly believe my eyes and ears.
You, being so honest in front of that person!"

With a "hmph", Akiha turns away.
"... It's not like that.
I didn't talk to you or Kohaku-san, because—"
I didn't want to tell them about my body and have them hate me.



"Because of what?
If there's something you want to say, please, say it."
"Are you stupid?
I wouldn't worry this much if I could say it!
I asked Senpai since you guys are important to me.
It's not because I don't trust you or anything."



"I don't want to hear such excuses!"
"Fine, I'll come out and say it.
That person doesn't suit you.
So please, do not get any closer to her.
It is for your sake."
"Wha—"
It's so sudden I'm at a loss for words.
"Akiha.
Are you saying that ordinary people are not suitable company for those of the

Tohno house, then?"

"....."

Akiha doesn't answer.

The silence means a yes.

"—I see.

Well, you are the head of the Tohno household.

You're saying that family and lineage is important like that old man, right?"



".... Nii-san, that's.."

"It's fine.

I'm not really complaining.

I'm the one who left you alone in that house.

I should have been the one raised that way originally.

So, I'm not speaking badly of you."



"....."

"But, I can't let what you said right now go.

Even though you don't know anything about Senpai, don't just say she's unsuitable."

Looking down, Akiha says nothing.

For a while, we stand in silence.

".... You don't.."

"Eh—?"



"Nii-san, You don't know anything about the Tohno house, don't say such selfish things!"
Crying out painfully, Akiha pulls away from me.



"—Anyway, you mustn't get close to that person.
She's not like us.
If you get any closer to her, you're the one who would suffer."

Akiha runs up the hill.

"—What does that mean?"
All I can do is gaze up after her, aghast.

I return to the mansion.
Though I usually go into the lobby without thinking, right now it's hard to enter.
.... I have made Akiha angry many times since I came back to the mansion.
But, she was really mad back then.
For the first time, I really angered Akiha, and made her sound so hurt.
"....."
I don't think it matters who was wrong.
I'm sure that in time Akiha will calm down and explain why she doesn't like Ciel-senpai.

".... I could hang around the garden for a bit."
 If I go into the mansion, I might face Akiha, so I'll take a walk in the garden for a while.

"Huh?
 Kohaku-san?"
 It's Kohaku-san.
 She doesn't seem to have noticed me, and she's heading into the forest.

She hasn't noticed me.
 I don't know what she's doing, but she disappears into the forest.
 "?"
 I'm curious, so I'll follow her.

It seems there's a small clearing where Kohaku-san headed to.
 "..... There's a clearing there....?"
 Tilting my head to the side, I try to remember, but for some reason, my memory is a bit vague.
 In the forest of the mansion, I can see a clearing as if the trees were cut there.
 —No, "can see" is not quite right.

If you walked by normally, you probably would never notice it.
 If Kohaku-san didn't walk there, hidden enough by the surrounding trees as it is, I would never have noticed even if I lived here all my life.
 ".... There's a clearing there?"
 If so, we probably did play there as kids."
 To say the least, I don't remember ever playing with Akiha in the clearing.

—I feel like I've never, been there, before.

"....."
 After thinking for a bit, I decide to go into the clearing.

.... The clearing doesn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.
 There's no sign of Kohaku-san, who entered before me.

"What's this—just an empty place."

I walk to the middle of the clearing.
 This clearing really is just an empty space.
 The perfectly level open ground.
 The deep woods enclose the area.

The voice of the cicadas.
 And the strong, summer sunshine that feels like it could dissolve——

"Eh.....?"
 Summer, sunshine—?

"Ou—ouch...."
 The wound on my chest starts to hurt.
 Like / Stabbing.
 This pain / that feels like / a kitchen knife stabbing my chest.

Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp.
 Chiiirp.
 Chirp Chirp—

—From somewhere, I can hear the voice of cicadas.

But, it's autumn now.

—The summer sunshine that bathes everything in white.

The columns of summer clouds in the far off sky.
 I can practically see the voices.
 At my feet, there are the discarded shells of cicadas.
 Discarded shell.
 Someone's—discarded shell.

.... Someone's crouching shadow.
 Young Akiha's approaching footsteps.
 Clouds high in the emptiness.
 Cicadas in the blue sky.

I was just, in a trance.

Akiha would have been killed.
That was really all I knew.

I just, ran.
That was all I understood.
As for the danger to myself,
I never even thought about it.

I wanted to protect Akiha,
And I just took her place.

In the distance.
The voices of the cicadas.

—After that.
My body that died from having its chest pierced.

And a figure that looks down at my dead body in shock.
A figure of another child—

"Ua—gh."
My chest hurts.
I feel sick.

The wound in my chest should have closed long ago, so why does it hurt now?

My chest, rips.
The old wound opens, and a crimson stream flows out.

—What is this?
My wound, it didn't heal at all.

It hurts.
I'm scared.

—I feel dizzy.

This is,
the impulse of Death.

Consciousness fades.
My wound aches.

I hear a thump as my body falls to the ground.

.... I can hear voices talking.

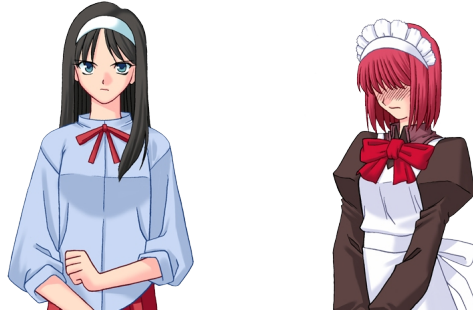
"Akiha-sama, are you not going to call for a doctor?"
"Don't be stupid, Hisui.
There's no way I could do that, since Nii-san's wound isn't normal..!"
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping on the bed.

I planned to say "Yo!" and get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My chest doesn't hurt anymore, but my body is as heavy as lead.
All I can move are my eyes and mouth.



"Just what were you thinking, Hisui.

Nii-san mustn't be allowed to go there, you know that..!"



"Please.... Forgive me."

"This can't be solved by apologizing.

You were assigned to serve Nii-san to avoid this kind of situation.

So what were you doing..!?"

Completely different from her usual manner, Akiha gives full vent to her anger.

In comparison, Hisui is accepting the scolding silently, looking down.

.... I'm not sure how this all came about.

But I can at least tell Hisui is being yelled at because of me.



"Answer me, Hisui.

Why did Nii-san go there?"

Hisui does not answer Akiha's question.

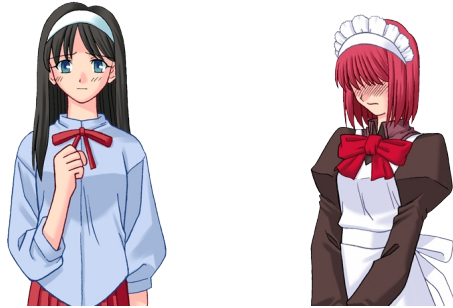
The air between them is becoming heavy.

Biting her lip, Akiha takes a step closer to Hisui.

.... Even I can tell that she's about to raise a hand against her.

I'm sure Hisui knows too, but she's just looking down, accepting it.

"—Hold on, Akiha."



"Nii-san-You're awake!?"
"Yeah, you were so loud, I woke up."
"Ah....."

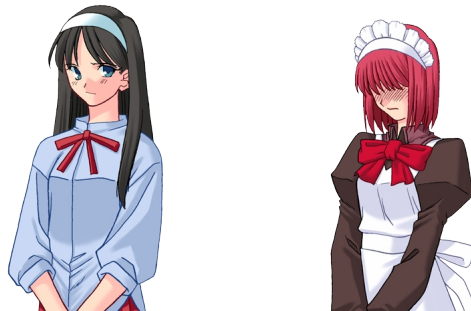


Akiha looks away uncomfortably.
"You know, you shouldn't let it out on Hisui.
I don't know the circumstances, but this has to do with me collapsing, right?
It's not her fault, I just collapsed on my own."
I strain hard and somehow manage to lift the upper half of my body off the bed.

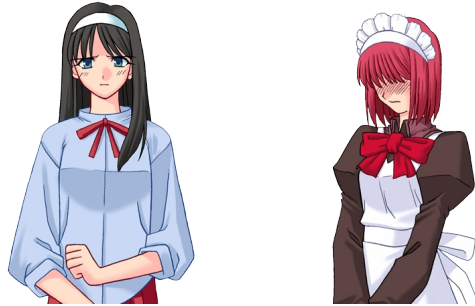
But that's all I can manage, and I don't think I can even move an inch more.
But since Hisui is depressed, I have to force myself to act as fine as possible.
"... Honestly, getting into a fight over me.
Even if you look like an adult, you're still a child."



"But—you were out for a long time, Nii-san.
 You were out for more than five hours, and nothing like this has happened before.
 What would I have done if you'd never woken up..!"
 "Idiot, don't say things like that.
 This is just anemia.
 eh?
 It's ten o'clock already?"

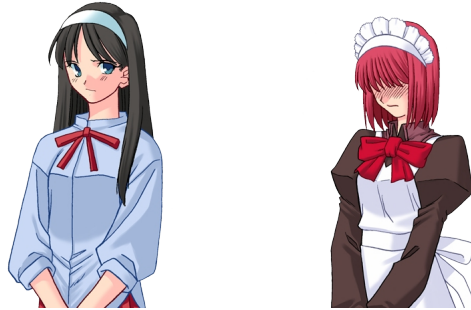


".... Yes.
 Nii-san, you have been out all evening."
 Akiha speaks reluctantly.
 "____"
 The strength flees from my body.
 ".... Geez.
 I haven't fainted for that long since elementary school.
 Yeah, I used to faint all the time back then.
 I wasn't used to the Arimas and my mind was always under stress."
 It seems like I'm still dreaming, maybe an after-effect of the anemia attack.
 ".... I remember.
 The Arimas were all good people; they treated me like their own child."
 —Keiko-san was strict but thoughtful and always treated me like I was her own son.
 ".... So, I thought I had to become their real child, too."



"Nii-san, don't push yourself.
This is the Tohno mansion.
You don't have to tell yourself that anymore.!"
"—I know.
But, for a long time, I thought that way.
From the beginning, I always thought that.
.... The Arimas, and you, you're all good people, so, it was so hard—"

.... What am I saying?
Gazing vacantly at the ceiling, thinking back to memories of long ago.
".... Please, don't push yourself, Nii-san.
You've only been back here for a week.
So you must be tired."
"—Really.
Well, I'm tired, but.."
"Right?
So, please, just rest today.
Since your body's weaker than most people's, if you don't take a day to rest
from time to time, you'll collapse like you did today."
Akiha looks at me seriously.
"....."
.... Certainly, it's just as she says.
Forgetting about everything.
Unless I rest without thinking about vampires or about myself, I'll really be out
of it.
".... You're right.
As you say, I'll just lie quietly today."
Saying so, I lie down again.



"Really..?
 No more sneaking out of your room later, too?"
 "What is that?
 Am I that untrustworthy?"
 Yeah, I guess so.
 I've left Akiha alone for all this time.
 "Hisui, tell Kohaku Nii-san is up.
 Nii-san, what will you do about dinner?"
 ".... I see.
 Well, My apologies to Kohaku-san, but I don't feel like eating."
 ".... I understand, Well, Hisui, please inform Kohaku."
 Still looking down, Hisui nods in assent and leaves the room.



"Well, Nii-san.
 Please go to sleep for tonight."
 Akiha speaks in a very gentle tone.

 But, to sleep..
 I'm afraid that if I sleep, I'll see that nightmare.

 "No, I—"
 "Please, Nii-san.
 Didn't you say you'll listen to what I say, just for today..?"
 Akiha's eyes are pleading.
 From the bottom of her heart, Akiha is really worried about me.

"Alright.
I'll sleep quietly."
"... Yes.
Thank you."
"Silly.
why are you thanking me?
I should be the one thanking you."
.... I.
Even though I neglected you for eight years, you're the one who called me back
to this mansion.
"—Akiha.
I'm, sorry for everything.
I'm selfish, and never thought about you.
But, from now on.."
"It's fine.
Please stay as you are, Nii-san.
And, I should be the one who's apologizing.
Please, don't apologize to me.
If you do, I'll feel like a really horrible person."
Akiha grasps my hand, tears welling in her eyes.
.... I don't understand.
Why Akiha is saying such things.
Why she keeps repeating "I'm sorry".
"... I'm, getting tired.
I'll.. sleep for a bit."
"—Yes.
Good night, Nii-san."

A hot summer day.
A figure of a bloody child.
The world of Tohno Shiki, filled with ill omens.

—Thump.

But, it's so quiet.

—Thump.

I feel at ease.

—Thump.

Akiha's heartbeat is very close.

—Thump.

It's really quiet.

-Thump.

And for the first time in days, I sleep calmly, untroubled by nightmares.
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A wrenching pain suddenly wakes me.

"Ah..... Ouch....."

I lift myself up from bed.

I sleepily check my back.

There aren't any wounds.

.... The pain is exactly my back, but more from my spine.

And not so much pain as it is the feeling of something hot welling up around the back of my neck.

"... I must've slept wrong.

It's a good thing this bed is soft, but when it's too gorgeous like this—"

All of a sudden..

I look down at my hands and my mind halts completely.

"—What is, this?"

I stare at both hands.

Red.

From my elbows to my hands, my skin is painted red.

My fists are a dark vermillion.

No, red doesn't quite describe it.

The dried red on my hands is closer to black.

"___"

I don't understand.

Last night, I spoke with Kohaku-san in the courtyard and went straight to bed.

I didn't do anything to make my hands like this, and I don't remember seeing a nightmare.

".....!"

My head is throbbing with pain.

I put aside wondering why my hands are painted red.

It's almost seven o'clock.

I have to go wash my hands before Hisui comes to wake me up.

After washing my hands, I go to the lobby.



"Shiki-sama?"

Hisui calls my name.

"Ah, morning, Hisui.

I woke up a little early, so I went to wash my face."

Somehow, I manage to blurt out an excuse.

"Good morning.

Well then, what should we do about your change of clothes?

I have prepared your uniform in your room."

It seems like Hisui was already in my room, and we just missed each other by the stairs.

"Yeah, I'll go ahead and change after breakfast, so leave it there.

Sorry for not being there when you came to wake me up."



".... As you wish.

I will go tell Nee-san, so please wait in the sitting room."

Hisui walks toward the west end of the mansion to call for Kohaku-san.

"—Now then."

It is still six-thirty.

I'm sure no one is in the sitting room at this time, so I should go enjoy the morning.



"Nii-san, you are up surprisingly early."

—And then.

As soon as I open the door to the sitting room, Akiha greets me while elegantly drinking some tea.

"..... No, I'm the one who's surprised."

Managing to respond calmly, I walk into the sitting room.

"What's going on?"

Do you usually get up this early?"

"Is it that early?"

Today I slept in an hour more than usual, so I don't think it is early at all."

She seems to be in a very good mood.

Usually,



"Nii-san, it is common sense for students to get up this early.

Do not assume I am lazy like you."

is what she would say.

".... Akiha, did something good happen?"



I ask full of fear, to which she answers with a big smile and a nod.



"Nii-san, please have a seat.
Breakfast is not for a while, so please keep me company."
"Ah—sure."
I sit on the sofa across from her.

She prepares a separate teacup.
Some tea is poured into the opulent teacup.
Steam comes out.
Even the steam looks bourgeois.



"Do you want any milk?
If so, I can go get some."
"No, this is fine."

But Akiha, it just strikes me as odd that you already had another teacup ready."
I ask this, being a fairly natural question.



"Yes.
I always prepare an extra set so we can have tea if you ever come."
"Eh—you mean you were waiting for me yesterday and the day before?"
I'm a little afraid of her answer.
But, she doesn't seem angry at all.
"That is true, but you do not need to worry.
I do it because I want to, so you may do the same."
.... Her words are correct.
"Besides, I think this is fine.
It's good enough if you wake up early only once in a while."

Smiling, she brings the teacup to her lips.
"___"
A chill runs down my spine.
Something is wrong.
Akiha being calm and kind is very fortunate, but this might be too much.
I have to find out what's wrong.
"Akiha, you,"



"Yes?
What is it, Nii-san?"
"Um, I hate to ask, but are you still drunk?"

"——-Huh?"

Akiha tilts her head to the side like a small bird.

I think her eyebrow twitched, but she still holds her smile.

"Um.

I do not necessarily want to ask either, but what exactly were you thinking?"

"Well, you drank a whole lot yesterday.

That amount of alcohol just doesn't go away in a day, so I thought you were still drunk."

There is no other explanation for Akiha's good mood this morning.

"Ni, Nii-san, you——"

She looks down, shoulders quivering.

It looks like she's not happy I found out.

"Here, you don't have to try to act kind, so go back to your room.

You can skip school and rest today.

I won't laugh."



"You are so wrong——!!!!!"

She slams her hand down on the table.

The teacups rattle.

"—Oh really?

Akiha, you really shouldn't force yourself like this."

"I am not forcing anything....!

You think that I would do such a thing as to drink so much that I would be drunk the next morning!?"

She pounds the table again.

Again, the teacups rattle.

"First of all, don't make my plans yourself.

I don't need your permission to skip school....!!!"

She stares at me, breathing heavily.

"....."

I take in her gaze and cross my arms.

"You're back to normal now.

Well, since you have that much energy, I guess all of the alcohol is out of your system."



"Ah——"

Akiha stares at me, aghast.



".... Nii-san, did you plan this?"

"Not really.

I actually did think that, though."

"Your method is a bit sneaky.

Why can't you just keep peaceful mornings peaceful, Nii-san?"

"Same to you.

A peaceful morning isn't something you control.... Well, I'm happy that you were always waiting for me though.

But, I think it's better if we spend the morning more like this.

So go ahead and say the things you want to say."

.... Well, I'd probably be squashed completely if she really did say something every time she had a complaint, so I hope she can hold back at least a little.

"What's that?

More like it is now?

Is that the kind of relationship between us?"

"Can't we?

I just wanted to be honest with each other.

I don't want to lie or hide things."



"Ah... yeah, me too..."
Akiha gives a subdued response.



".... Geez.
Nii-san, you seem to have become a better talker since I saw you last.
Back then, you could never calm me down like that."
"Is that so?
That was just me talking honestly.
As your Onii-chan, I just wanted to get along with my beloved.... no, I can't
say that.... my dear little sister."



"Onii-chan?
Even if you are just joking, please don't say that.
It feels sick."

Akiha averts her eyes.
She just stares at her teacup.

"... I, do not want to hide things from you either, Nii-san."

She manages that response.

"What?"

Are you actually hiding something from me, Akiha?"



"No.

Well, if it's something I want to say, then I want you to get up early everyday.
... Really, I was happy when you woke up this early today.



So.... If you had tea with me every morning, I would be able to go to school
everyday happily—"

Akiha fidgets and glances around.

Then,



"Thank you for waiting.
Shiki-san, breakfast is ready."
Kohaku-san arrives.
"Huh...?"
Akiha, you're not eating?"
"Of course not.
Akiha-sama already finished breakfast.
Shiki-san, if you want to eat with Akiha-sama, you have to get up before six."
.... There's no way that's going to happen.

"Oh well, I'm going to eat.
Later, Akiha."
Getting up, I head towards the dining room.



"....."
Akiha wordlessly watches me leave.
She wants to say something, but that look seems to be directed not at me, but
at Kohaku-san.

I return to the sitting room after breakfast to find that Akiha is not there.
Instead, I run into Hisui, who's gathering up all the tea cups.
"Huh...?"
Hisui, where's Akiha?"



"Akiha-sama already left for school."

"Oh yeah, her school is far away... Well, I shouldn't be hanging around either."

"Yes."

Your uniform is prepared in your room.

When you are done changing, please call for me."

Hisui quietly disappears towards the lobby.

After changing my clothes, I leave the mansion earlier than usual.

"I'll come right back today, so it'll probably be around four o'clock.

Oh, and you don't have to wait for me here."



"As you wish.

In that case, please be careful on your way, Shiki-sama."

"Thanks.

I'm heading out."

waving to Hisui as she bows, I go out into the street.

I uneventfully arrive at my classroom and start another normal day of classes.

"_____"

Then, I realize something.

Yumizuka's desk is now missing.

Even though one classmate is gone, the school schedule resumes as always.

Her desk is forgotten and life goes on.

".... Why?"

As soon as I realize it, I become uneasy.

What happened with Yumizuka was something that I could not forget.

So why—why is it that until now, I didn't even remember her?

—Shiki-kun, you and I are the same.

.... Those words still burn in the back of my mind.

"..... But that's strange."

But still, I can't think about it deeply.

That night.

It seems that when Akiha tended my wounds that night, I lost something.

About Yumizuka being a vampire, and even now, it all seems too empty.

Or was that a really bad dream after all?

"..... That, can't be true....."

But I can deny it that strongly.

Even though I'm in a classroom without her right now, I can't recall her that well.

From that night until now.

Something about reality doesn't seem quite right to me—

Before I know it, the day is over.

..... *sigh*

I don't feel like seeing Arihiko or Senpai.

It seems like I can calm down more when I'm at home.

I enter the lobby and see Hisui.



"Welcome back, Shiki-sama."

".... Yeah, thanks, Hisui.

Are Kohaku-san and Akiha gone?"

"Akiha-sama has yet to return.

Nee-san is in the rear courtyard cleaning up."

"Like always.

I'll be in my room, so please continue whatever you were doing."

"Yes.

Please excuse me."

I head up the stairs.

"Ah, Shiki-sama."

"Hmm?"



"I will be arranging Makihisa-sama's room.

If you need anything, please call me."

Hisui walks toward the eastern end of the mansion quickly.

I take off my shirt and take things out of my bag.

—And then.

A white ribbon sticks out between the textbooks.

"..... Oh.

I should probably give this back."

That ribbon I've been carrying for eight years since that day.

I returned here to give back that ribbon, so it's about time I give it back to whom it belongs.

I grip it tightly.

.... I imagine myself giving the ribbon to Hisui and shake my head.

Eight years ago.

We only spoke a few words underneath that tree.

But it is a precious memory to me.

So—even though it might sound selfish, I don't want to give it back to Hisui when she doesn't remember the promise.

"—Besides, there's something.."

I can't quite place it, but there's something not right.

Until this feeling goes away, I want to hold on to this ribbon.

—*sigh*

Sitting in my chair, I look at the leaves fluttering down.

I put the ribbon in my pocket.
I might meet Hisui if I stay inside, so I decide to cool off outside.
.....
.....
.....
.....
..... I think about yesterday.
I spoke with Kohaku-san when I was cooling off in the courtyard.

—Why did you return?

Her face, for an instant, was not her usual cheery expression.
Just what was that all about—



"Huh?
Shiki-san, you've grown to like this place?"
Is she done cleaning?
Kohaku-san walks over to me with her broom.
"Ah—n, no, that's not it."
Having her appear in front of me while I was thinking about her, I'm unable to respond quickly.
Anyway, I'll just be in Kohaku-san's way, so I should go back to my room—



"Oh, are you leaving already Shiki-san?
It is still pretty early, so can't you stay here a bit longer?"

Kohaku-san places the broom on the ground.

"I didn't want to get in your way."

"I am already done sweeping.

I've already checked on the flowers, so I'm finished.

I have a little spare time before I have to prepare dinner, so I thought that I would come here and relax."

She takes off her apron, as if emphasizing the fact that she isn't working right now.



"So, Shiki-san.

Would you mind talking with me?"

"Ah—no.

If you're fine with it, then sure."

"Then it's decided," Kohaku-san says with a smile and sits down on a chair a little distance away.

—Actually, let me make a correction.

Trying to sit down, she stares at me.



"Shiki-san.

You look like you aren't very happy."

"Eh?"

Do I look that way?"

"Yes.

If you keep that face up, your glasses will cloud over, you know."

Kohaku warns me half-jokingly.



"Anyway, Shiki-san.

About our conversation last night.."

"?"

Yesterday's conversation, which one?"

"About you borrowing something a long time ago.

Did you already give that back?"

Her eyes shine brightly as she asks.

.... Just like the time I received the knife, she seems incredibly curious.

".... No, the person doesn't seem to remember it.

That's not the whole reason, but I've decided to hold onto it for now."

"Oh, so you'll just steal it like that?"

It's not like it's a useful thing, right?"

"Ahaha.

Yeah, it's not anything useful.

It was nice to get it, but I haven't even used it once."

.... Well, a guy using a ribbon is just weird, and thankfully, I'm not into that sort of thing.

"I see.

.... Hey, Shiki-san.

Can I guess who you got it from?"

"Sure, you seem to like that sort of thing."

"Yes.

That person definitely has to be Hisui-chan, right?"

"—Bingo.

Well done, Kohaku-san."



"It was eight years ago, right?
Hisui-chan was the one really close to you back then."
Kohaku-san sounds very happy.
".....?"
Really close to me....?
"... Is that so?
Putting that aside, the promise was a really important thing for me.
That day eight years ago, that girl, who only watched me, came to tell me to
give it back.... That really saved me."



"..... Huh?"
With a pause.
Kohaku looks directly at me.
"I don't know how it was for her, but without that promise, I think I would've
become a miserable person."

.... Those days where I was treated like an unwanted child.
I was given her most prized possession and was told to come return it.
Thinking that the girl was waiting for me, Tohno Shiki, at the place I was sup-
posed to return to—that was enough for me and I didn't want anything else.
".... Yeah, that's right.
That's why I can't simply give it back.
If I gave it back to Hisui, she'd just take it away like an empty plate after dinner.
.... I don't want that."



"___"

"I know it's just my selfish notion, but I can't give it back to Hisui yet.
I want her to remember it.
Since it made me so happy, I want to thank her and fulfill the promise.
... If I don't do that, I don't think I will be able to face myself or Hisui."
Still sitting in the chair, I completely bare my heart.
... I don't know why I'm telling all of this to Kohaku-san.
Maybe there's something about this garden that helps me to talk about the past.



".... Kohaku-san?
Is there something the matter?
You look troubled."
"Eh?
I feel like I always do."
With her troubled face, she smiles like normal.
... Well, she tries to.
"Shiki-san?
Am I really making that strange of a face?"
She looks at the window glass.
In the window is the troubled looking face, and Kohaku-san just looks at herself
in a surprise.
"Kohaku-san...?
If you aren't feeling well, you can go back to your room and rest.
Don't mind me."
"—Maybe you're right.

I'll rest and then get dinner ready."
Kohaku-san slowly walks away.



"And Shiki-san?
Hisui-chan is forgetful, so please be patient with her.
Oh, maybe if you take her to that same tree in the garden as eight years ago,
she might somehow remember."

Kohaku-san picks up the broom and heads toward the rear entrance to the mansion.

"... I see.

If I take her to that tree, she just might remember..."

But, that seems wrong.

If I force her to remember, that won't make me happy either.

But, maybe it is a good idea to go see that tree.

I haven't been there since I got back, so maybe I'll swing by there when I have another chance—

"..... Huh?"

Come to think of it, I wonder why Kohaku-san knows about where I met Hisui.

... Even though they're sisters, I can't imagine that Hisui would just tell her.

That promise seemed secret, somehow.

I just can't imagine Hisui, with her personality, telling Kohaku-san like that—

Dinner, as usual, is a quiet affair with just me and Akiha.

Kohaku-san stands behind Akiha, and Hisui stands behind me during our wordless dinner.

"....."

The only thing different is the way Akiha is acting.

Until now, whenever my tableware would make noise, Akiha would look up with a scowl.

Today, however, Akiha makes quite a lot of clattering herself.

In the end,

"—I am going back to my room.

Please clean up my dinner."

Saying so, she leaves the dining room behind.

"... What's with her?
She seemed so cheerful this morning."



"....."
Hisui is silent.
Kohaku-san is cleaning things up in the kitchen like normal.

—And then.

From the lobby, I hear the sound of someone falling.
"—Akiha!?"
Fearing the worst, I race towards the lobby.



"—!"
There, I see Akiha leaning on the stairs.
Her breathing is irregular, and I can hear her wheezing from here.
Her face is pale, and there are beads of sweat on her skin.
... I can see with a single glance that she is not okay.
"Hey, Akiha!"
"Don't come near me...!"
"!"

I stop.
Leaning on the stairs, Akiha refuses me violently.
"Wha.. don't come near you..?
What are you talking about!?
I don't know what happened, but I can't just leave you like that!"
"I'm fine, just.. don't come any closer.. Nii-san."
"Wha—" "
My heart skips a beat.
Akiha just breathes painfully.
.... There's something wrong with me.
For a moment, I feel it resembles the figure of Yumizuka Satsuki.
"Aki, ha—" "
"I'm fine, so please, don't come near me.
If you come near me, I'll—" "

She wavers,
and then collapses.
"Akiha———" "
I dash towards her.
"Nii, s.... sto,p—" "
She still tries to stop me.
Ignoring her, I hold her with both my arms.
"....." "
Her face contorts in pain.
As if she is trying to resist something, she bites her lip.



"—Shiki-san...!?"
Kohaku-san enters the lobby.
"Kohaku-san, Akiha's acting strange.
I'm going to get her to bed, is it alright?"



"—Yes.
I'll be there right away, so please take care of her....!"

Kohaku-san disappears towards the west end of the mansion at a run.
".... Ah.... ha, ah.....!"
Akiha suppresses her cry.
Her back arches as pain seems to flow through her.
"Nii-sa—let, go—"
"Calm down, stupid....!
I'll get you to your room....!"
I carry the writhing Akiha in my arms as I go up the stairs.

"No.... Nii-sa.... let, go—"
With empty eyes, Akiha still tries to break free.
"Just be quiet....!
Just relax and let me handle this....!"
I run through the hallway as I tell her this.

Her wild breathing.
Her flailing nails.
Her fluttering hair.
They all rob me of my calm.

"___"
I must be going crazy.
For a brief instant, I think I saw a flash of red.

".... Ha.... ah, n.... ha, ah...."
Her breathing seems hot.
She grabs me so hard that it feels like my clothes will be torn off.
"Hey Akiha, rest in your bed."
"Hwa.... ah.... ha.... ah...."
She lies down on the bed, still breathing hard.
"N.... ah, nn.....!!"
The bed shakes.

Her hair shaking wildly, she claws at her breast.

—That redness again.

It has to be my imagination.

As if to dispel the illusion, I raise my voice.

"Hang in there, Akiha....!"

Damn it, what's with this, all of a sudden....!!!!"

I stand before Akiha, who is writhing in pain, unable to do anything.

I bite my lip.

Even though she's in so much pain, there isn't anything I can do to help her.

—I bite down so hard, blood starts to trickle.

A red drop falls on the bed.

It is quickly absorbed by her red hair.

"——"

No, I must be seeing things.

Her hair is black.

The redness I saw was just because I imagined it.

"..... Ah..... nn....."

Maybe laying in bed is helping, as her breathing gradually calms.

"——"

I relax a bit.

I suppose if she's like that, she should be alright without me.

Kohaku-san will be here soon, and I shouldn't stay in her room too long.

"... Rest easy.

Kohaku-san should be here soon."

I start to stand up.

In that instant,

"——No.....!!!!!!!"

Akiha embraces me.

"——"

No, embraces isn't the right word.

With all her heart, she clings to me, as if trying to rend my back to pieces.

"A... Akiha, what are—"

I can't imagine this much strength coming from those delicate arms.

She grips me hard enough to cause bruises.

"..... No.... don't leave, Nii-san."

Her nails drive into my back.

As if frightened of something, she continues to cling to me.

How can I break free from that?

Her nails rip into me.

Despite this, I embrace her shoulders.

"..... Akiha.
 It's okay, I'm here."
 "Ah... a, ah—"
 Her shaking hands.
 Resting her face against my shoulder, she muffles a sob.
 "—Akiha.
 If it hurts that much, don't push yourself.
 You don't have to hold back."
 "... No... that's not it, Nii-san.
 I—I don't deserve anything from you."
 Saying that,
 her strength drains from her body.
 "... Father, I—I must, to Nii-san.."

She sobs.
 As if trying to hide it,

"Must I, kill him with my own hands?"

—With that,
 I hear her sobbing.
 "——Aki, ha?"
 "I don't want to—what, what should I do...!"
 Speaking with a wavering voice, Akiha cries.
 No matter how hard she tries, she can't hold it in.
 "....."
 I just hold her, not saying anything.

—How long did it last?
 Akiha sleeps like a child who cried herself to sleep, and I lay her slender body
 onto the bed.



"Shiki-san.
 Has Akiha-sama calmed down?"
 Kohaku-san must have been waiting in the hallway as she was standing outside

the door.

".... Yeah.

She's sleeping.

But Kohaku-san, why is Akiha—"

"No, it is nothing you need to worry about.

At times, Akiha-sama lapses into sudden dyspnea.

It is the same as your anemia; Akiha-sama is a member of the Tohno family after all."

".... What do you mean?

She's always healthy."

"Yes.

But those of the Tohno family all have that sort of illness.

Maybe it's inherited, but both you and Akiha-sama carry a variation of Makihisa-sama's condition.

Akiha-sama's condition is not very serious.

It isn't something to be taken lightly, but it's not life-threatening, as your condition is, so please don't make such a worried face."

"—I can't help it.

She seemed to be in such pain.

I couldn't even do anything.

Until now—I didn't even know she had that condition."



"Yes.

Akiha-sama tried her best to keep it a secret from you.

We were also told to keep it a secret from you."

"—But, why?"

"Akiha-sama didn't want to worry you.

So please, do not concern yourself and do as Akiha-sama wishes."

"....."

I don't know what to say.

What she says is true; I can't dispute it.

In other words, I was the only one who didn't know.

I just thought I was the only one with problems.

"..... Sorry.

Please take care of Akiha, Kohaku-san."

Bowing to Kohaku-san, I walk away.

"——"

I go back to my room, but I can't sleep.
The frightened figure of Akiha burns in my mind, and I can't calm down.

"Ah..... ow."

My back hurts.
Blood oozes where her nails dug into my back.
Her nails left numerous knife-like marks in my skin.
.... But, they don't hurt that much.

I look out my window to the distant moon.
My worrying heart still cannot calm down.
.... She was in such pain.
.... The illness of the Tohno family.

"——"

My pulse increases.
Just thinking about it, I get mad at myself for not knowing anything.

"——"

Red.
Blood drips from my lip.
It was only for an instant, but her hair was blood red.

"——Damn, it."

I can't calm down because I'm angry at myself?
That's a lie.
That hair.
Just remembering that color makes my heart beat like a drum.

.... What's wrong with me?
Just remembering her red hair causes my blood to boil and my breathing to become difficult.
I try not to think about it, but I can't even manage that.
Back then, Akiha was just too beautiful.
Even now.
This was the first time I was so into something.

—No, or..

I think I felt this burning sensation in my head a few days ago.

".... Jeez.
I'm acting like I'm in love with Akiha."

.... That, is also a lie.
This excitement isn't anything as gentle as love.
Remembering, and breathing out of control.
That is what you call lust.
"_____"
Slapping my face, I collapse on my bed.
I can't settle down.
Do I have to stay like this the whole night—?

Knock.
Knock.

"Shiki-san?
Are you awake?"
"Eh.... I'm up.
Kohaku-san?"



"Yes.
Please excuse me, Shiki-san."
Kohaku-san enters my room, carrying a silver tray.
There is a glass of water and something that looks like medicine.
"Ah, you look like you're not feeling well after all.
Before, you looked very worried.
I thought that maybe you wouldn't be able to sleep and was a little concerned."
Kohaku-san steps over to my bed.
".... Kohaku-san.
Is that, something like a sleeping pill?"
"No, it isn't anything that strong.
It's something that only helps to relax.
If you don't mind, then please take it."
Kohaku-san sounds a bit hesitant.
In other words, she doesn't want to offer the medicine, but if I can't sleep, I
should take it.

.... That kindness really helps.
"—Thanks.
I couldn't sleep, so I'll take it."



".... Is it okay?
Shiki-san, I heard from your doctor that you do not usually like medicine."
"It's not that I hate it.
It's just that the doctor gives me medicine without telling me what it's for.
I feel like I'm a guinea pig.
But, you're different.
If it's from you, then I can safely take it."
I take the glass and down the pill.



The water carries the pill down to my stomach.
.... I don't think it's because it works that fast, but the cool water seems to
already calm my agitated mind.
"Thanks.
With this, I should be able to sleep soon."



"Yes.
Well then, I will be going.
Sweet dreams, Shiki-san."

With a bow, Kohaku-san exits the room.
"—Haa."
Stretching out my arms, I let out a deep breath.
.... I should just stop thinking about Akiha.
I should go to sleep and wait until tomorrow—

I open my eyes.
Thanks to Kohaku-san's medicine, my head has cleared perfectly.
I look out the window to the sky, which is clear too.

I feel like something good might happen today.

After breakfast, I head to school.
I thought that I would see how Akiha is doing, but I stopped myself.
Hurrying things just makes things worse.
I decide to just go to school.

—School's just the same as always.
Nothing is especially different, nothing threatens me.
In the afternoon, everyone leaves and the school building becomes quiet.

For no reason, I just kill time until sunset.

Night falls.
I don't feel like going back to the mansion.
I should play around a bit and then decide what to do.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—.

Finishing it up, I resume breathing.

In front of me is a new girl's dead body.
Both my hands are painted with blood.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—.

It looks like I did it again.
I didn't really feel like it, but once I started, I just got into it.
It's a bad habit.
Well, what should I do with the dead body?

—*pant* *pant* *pant*, Thud—.

My voice is the only thing that echoes in the air.
But I hear a weird sound at the end.
"——Who is it!?"
I turn around.

I hear footsteps along the path leading to the main street.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—.

Sweat trickles from my forehead.
... It's not that I'm nervous.

My body is just so hot.
There's something wrong.
It's so hot, I'm thirsty.

The dead body is horribly hot.
Biting its neck, I drink the blood.

But that isn't enough.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—.

My world starts to waver.
It isn't my imagination.
There is something unnaturally hot in the air.
And the ground is much hotter than the air.
This burning heat is screaming a warning at me.

"——Sst."

I run, still gnawing at the body.
My head tells me that staying here is incredibly dangerous.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—!

I escape to school.
No one will see me here.
I don't know what that was but—

It is smiling.

"——!"

Behind me, I feel an indescribable heat.
I turn around and see what is there.
The something that is like red heat.
I feel something moving towards me.
"Damn it——"
It chases after me.
.... It's a real bother, so I'll just kill it.
I grip my knife.
The red heat expands.
The footsteps of "someone" approach me.
A careless gait.
I don't know what it is, but I lick my lips in anticipation.



"Ah——"

Thump.
My heart screams at me, telling me that I'm no match for whatever that is.
"Ha——haha, ha."

I sweat.
Not because of the heat.
After instinct, my mind understands as well.
If that catches me, I'm finished.
"Haha, hahaha, hahahahahahahahaha!"
Scared, I escape into the school building.

—*pant* *pant* *pant* *pant*—.

I run up to the fourth floor.
If I come up here, it won't follow me this far.



Why—are you smiling?

"Haa..... ha, haha, ha."
Taking a deep breath, I realize I'm still biting that dead body.
I open my mouth.
The dead body falls to the ground with a thud.
The arms and legs are still attached.
I am hungry right now, so I guess I'll take care of this right here.
—Creak.

"——!?"

I spin around.
There—there is that unknown person.

"I knew it was you, Nii-san."

That person speaks.
These hands are bloody.
At my feet is the dead body.
I've been seen.
I've been seen where I killed someone.
There's no more reason to be afraid.
No matter who this is, I have to finish it here and now.
"Ha——!"
Gripping my knife, I run towards the enemy.
In that instant.



Kreeeeee!
My arm disintegrates.
"Wha.....!?"
Stopping, I leap backwards.
I barely avoid that red heat.
"You, what the—"
There is nothing past my elbow.
It doesn't hurt.
There is no blood.
I can see the cross-section of flesh and bone, from there—a chill nausea enters
my body.
"Haa.... ha, ah...!?"
I don't understand.
The enemy didn't do anything.
It seemed like it only stared at my now missing arm.
In other words—just a look can kill.
No, that's not right.
Dry footsteps echo through the air.
The enemy is coming.
That's foolish.
If I fall in the enemy's line of vision, I will die.
"Hee..... heehee, heee.....!"

In the dark, I run down the hallway.

I make it to the stairs.
 The footsteps sound closer.
 "Ha—haha, ha—"
 I open the window.
 This is the fourth floor, but I don't care.
 The difference between my skills and the enemy's are just too great.
 I have to get close to kill, but the enemy merely has to look.
 The only way to kill such a thing would be through a surprise attack.
 For now, I have to get away and kill the enemy later.
 Outside the window,
 is a web of countless red threads.
 I stick my body out the window.
 "—Ah, aaaaaaaaaah!"
 Instantly, my body burns.
 Before I burst into flames, I roll back in the hallway.
 "Wha... what was—"
 The red threads are wrapped around the school building.
 I don't understand.
 There is nothing outside the building, but if I go outside, I'll go up in flames.
 —I hear the footsteps.

"Damn it.... the window is no good....!"
 I need to escape.
 If I don't, I'll die.
 I roll down the stairs.

I make it past the third floor to the second.
 I can make it.
 I'm faster than the enemy.
 No.
 There's already the red hair behind me.
 ".....!"
 I roll.
 All of a sudden, my leg is vaporized.
 "Gah—ah, ah.....!?"
 I roll again.
 Backwards, away from the stairs.
 From above, I hear the footsteps of the enemy walking down the stairs.
 "*pant*—*pant* *pant* *pant*.....!"
 With my remaining arm and leg, I escape down the hall.

"G..... What's this?
 Shit....!"
 I scream.

Even though the enemy is still by the stairs, my body feels so cold.
Down the hall, that red heat.
The hallway is hot enough to sweat, but my body is cool.
And then, the part that still felt cool, evaporates.
"Ha—ha, ah.....!"
But I won't die with such a wound.
Like that, I enter a nearby classroom.

.... Clomp, clomp, clomp, clomp.

The footsteps come closer.
.... I don't know how the enemy does it.
No, that's not it.
The enemy's ability to kill, no matter how I think of it, is so many times superior to mine.
It's probably that red heat.
But—the one controlling the power is awful.
It can't hide its presence, and it can't even sense its enemy.
Footsteps.
The enemy is about to walk past the classroom without noticing me.
"———" "
I calm down.
If it's only an amateur with a ranged weapon, it's nothing.
.... The enemy passes the classroom.
Then it's simple.
I just have to kill from behind.
I only have one leg, but that's fine.
I'll certainly slice open the brain faster than the enemy can turn around——!

I go out in the hallway.
I see the enemy's back.
.... How careless.
The enemy doesn't even notice my presence yet.

Full of confidence, I jump.

"——!?"

The enemy turns, surprised.
I had at least five seconds.
It was enough time to kill the enemy seven times.
Was.
Was.
Was.
Was.
Was.
Supposed to.

The enemy.
The enemy turns to face me with merciless eyes.

"—I'm surprised.
You can still move with that body."

The enemy speaks.
Clang!
My knife falls to the ground.
.... H o t.
What is this?
This enemy did not need to feel anyone's presence or to protect itself.
The enemy's surrounding is filled with heat.
Just getting close—my skin roasts, and it stops my movement.
It's because that red hair is wrapping around my limbs.
"Ha—ah."
I look up.
The clouds part.
The freed moonlight illuminates the enemy.
Is the enemy confident it's over?
The fluttering hair falls down.



—It is Akiha.
"——"
I can't speak.
But, with that—I realize that this is a dream.



"Goodbye, Nii-san.
You led me on quite the chase, but it is now over."

She looks directly at me.
The red hair shoots forth.
I can't escape from her gaze.
No.
That is, wrong.
The piercing chill from the center of my spine.
And then, the feeling of everything being taken.
So this is, wrong.
I can still make it.
Cut it.
Cut that hair.
Or, maybe..

Not being able to do anything, my consciousness fades.
This is a dream, so I can't see it right now.
"Why, did it end this way?"
Akiha mutters this like a curse.
Then.
"Good work fulfilling your duty as the head of the household."
With a smile, Kohaku-san says this.
A nightmare.
This is a nightmare.
This is just a glimpse of the future.
This is an undecided future.

So I have to hurry, back to my own time—

—And then, I jump up from my bed.
"Ahh—ah, ha—"
I suck in air.
That, was just, a dream.
"*pant*—*pant*, *pant*....."
Hugging myself, I try to control my breathing.
.... My body is still all here; there are no burn marks on my skin.
I feel my back with my fingers.
It's wet.
".... All this.... sweat...."
I speak as if it is happening to someone else.
My entire body is drenched in sweat, as if someone covered me in water.
That dream—even after I woke up from it, sweat pours from my forehead.
".... I feel.... terrible."
I get up from bed and suppress the urge to vomit.
Walking towards the window, the wind calms me down a little bit.
".... What a dream."
Recalling the dream, I check both my hands.
There isn't any blood on my hands.
Well, of course.
That was just a dream, so I wasn't covered in blood, nor did I suck any blood.

—But.
Yesterday morning, what did I do?
Didn't I take my hands drenched in red paint,
while trying not to let anyone see them,
and wash them clean?

—You and I are the same, Shiki-kun.

That's what she said.

.... I can't remember that well.
Tohno Shiki was bit by her.

.... I can't remember that well.

If there is a habit of drinking blood.

.... I can't think well.

It spreads by being bitten.

"—No...!!"

I sweep away the dark passions in my brain.

But that dream doesn't disappear.

There was a me that killed someone.

There's the problem.

Even though it's in my dreams, I killed someone and didn't feel any guilt.

All I did was kill naturally, and watch.

That's abnormal.

Inside my dreams, I wasn't sane.

That is different from this me right now.

But, that's a dream that Tohno Shiki saw.

So—even that insane Tohno Shiki has to be me.

"—No."

.... And, the Akiha that came to punish me.

It might be a dream.

But for some reason, I feel like it's a glimpse of the future, and start to get nauseous.

I hear a knock at the door.



"Excuse me.

.... Shiki-sama?

Are you already awake?"

"Yeah I just had a bad dream, so I just woke up.... Thank goodness.

I sweated a lot, so I wanted to change quickly."

As usual, Hisui has prepared my uniform.

I draw nearer to her to get them, and,

I get real dizzy.

"Shiki-sama!?"

.... I can hear her voice.
 I sense her coming closer, and raise my hand to stop her.
 "Ah—I'm fine.
 I just was a little dizzy, I'll be fine in a bit."
 Taking a deep breath, I focus on my heart's rhythm.
 I wait for the blood to stop pounding in my head.

"See?
 All better."
 I say this with my best attempt at a bright smile to calm Hisui's worries.



"..... Ugh.."
 But I guess I failed.
 "... Shiki-sama.
 Please do not overexert yourself.
 Smiling with a face like that troubles me."
 Hisui says this with a pained expression.
 "Eh—"
 I think this is the first time I've seen her show emotion like this.
 No, that's not true.
 If I recall in detail, Hisui just looks expressionless, but you can see her emotions
 if you study her face.
 I think she shows her feelings too much, so that when I compare her to that girl
 standing by the window, I feel a big contradiction.



".... Shiki-sama?
Are you feeling bad after all—"
"No, that's not it, Hisui.
I just found it surprising.
You've changed a lot since back then.
I think you're more cheerful than the time when you were just watching us."



"—Is, that so?
I think your memory is mistaken."
Hisui averts her gaze.
.... Yeah, she's different from the quiet, doll-like Hisui from my memory.



"More importantly, Shiki-sama.
Are you really feeling well?"
"Yeah, I'm fine.
Speaking with you made me feel better."



".... I understand.
But Shiki-sama, I think you need to see a doctor.
It seems like you are not feeling well since you came back to the mansion."
"..... Um."
Well, that's true.
"What's this?
You're saying the same thing as Kohaku-san.
You sound like it would've been better if I never came back."
I meant that as a joke.

"Yes.
Nee-san and I share the same view."

"Wha——"
For an instant, my vision flickers.
"——"
I can't even speak.
I came back to fulfill the promise.
But that.
The one who gave the ribbon disagrees.
".... Hisui.
You say that?
Who do you think I came to the mansion for——"



".... No.

Shiki-sama, you came back here for your own sake.
Therefore—there is no need to be bound by any promise from the past.
.... There is still time.
You decided yourself to come here.
So you can decide on your own to become free at any time."

Hisui places my uniform on the desk and walks away.



".... Excuse me.
Please forgive my rudeness."

..... Hisui leaves.
"....."
Left alone, my chest hurts for some reason.
.... I'm not angry at her.
No, I can only feel apologetic.
—There is no need to be bound by a promise from the past.

The promise Hisui doesn't seem to care about.
The promise that was very important to me.
Even when she tells me directly this difference, I feel no anger.
The reason is obvious.
".... Hisui.
Why did you look like you were going to cry?"
Because of that, I could not blame her.

There isn't anyone in the sitting room.
Neither Akiha, who usually has already finished eating by now, nor Hisui, who usually stands like a statue by the wall, are there.



"Ah, good morning, Shiki-san.
You're up early today again."
"... Yeah, morning, Kohaku-san."
Greeting her, I glance around the sitting room.
It bothers me that they're not there.
"Kohaku-san.
Has Akiha recovered since then?"
"Yes.
She's healthy now, so there is nothing to worry about.
But she is still feeling a bit tired, so she will be resting today."
"... I see.
Thank goodness it was nothing too bad."
"Yes.
Maybe you should go see her?
She probably wouldn't want you to see her when she just woke up, so she'll probably throw a pillow at you."
Kohaku-san tells me indirectly to go have a fight with Akiha.
Certainly, seeing Akiha panic so much that she would throw a pillow at me sounds fun.

"—Ah."
But, after seeing that dream, I just don't think I can face her.
"... No, I don't think I will.
I don't feel good today, so I don't have the strength to fight her."



"I see.

Akiha-sama also said you don't have to worry too much about her, so you go to school as usual.

Oh, Shiki-san?

Did you do something to Hisui-chan?"

She stares.

With a smile, Kohaku-san asks such a thing.

"Hisui-chan said she could not possibly see you today, so she locked herself up in her room.

Something must have really happened in order to make her skip work like that, Shiki-san."

Hehehe, Kohaku-san laughs with a frightening smile.

... Without a doubt, she must think I did something horrible to Hisui.

"—Wha, what?

I didn't do anything....!

If anything, she's the one that scolded me."



"Hisui-chan scolded you?"

"Ah—no, well, that's not it, it's just.... she told me I shouldn't be too persistent over small things."



"Hmmm.... Hisui-chan is doing some weird things.

But, I'm relieved.

I was worried that you were going to be like Makihisa-sama."

"Huh?"

Like my old man?

How?"

"Ah....."

Kohaku-san looks away like she didn't mean to say that.



"No, it isn't anything.

It's a trivial matter, so please do not worry about it."

".... Hey, Kohaku-san.

It makes me more curious if you say it like that."

As revenge for before, I stare at her.

....

.....

.....

.....



".... I understand.

But keep this a secret from Akiha-sama and Hisui-chan.

It isn't too good to speak about Makihisa-sama."

"?"

There isn't anything to hide about my old man, is there?"

"Well no, but it isn't a good story to talk about.

Don't you remember, Shiki-san?

About Makihisa-sama's manic depression?"

"Manic depression....?"

Manic depression means that someone changes mood all of a sudden, from ex-

treme happiness to utter despair, and vice versa.

"... Yeah, well, I guess he was like that.

He was very kind when he was kind, but he would get extremely angry over little things when he was in a bad mood."



"Yes.

But it was still alright when you were here.

But after you were adopted by the Arima family, his condition grew a lot worse.

He would yell at Akiha-sama for no reason and often abuse Hisui-chan."

"Wha—wait a minute.

I know my old man was strict, but he would never do such a—"

"... Like I said, this is after you left, Shiki-san.

Day by day, Makihisa-sama's manic depression worsened.

It was so bad it was more like having two different personalities rather than having manic depression.

He would be set off by the littlest things, but after he calmed down, he wouldn't even remember what he did.

During that time, I was taking care of him, and Makihisa-sama told me."

—I have a violent me within myself.

I cannot suppress it with my normal self, and when it appears, I go to sleep.

Without reason, I want to destroy everything I see.

Back then, it felt like I was watching a bad dream.



".... Makihisa-sama passed away from illness, but the illness was worsened by the illness in his mind.
.... Mental illnesses are a very difficult thing.
So I worried, thinking that you might have inherited some of that characteristic.
It seems that everyone in the Tohno family has some sort of illness.
But, I guess I was worrying for no reason in your case.
Because your illness is anemia, right?
It's not like you can't control yourself like Makihisa-sama."

"Thank goodness," Kohaku-san smiles at me.

I.

"___"

I.

"——No."

I can't do it like that.

I can't feel relieved and smile.

Last night's dream.

My lust over Akiha.

Watching a dream of killing people as if it was natural, the insane Tohno Shiki.



"Ah, it's already this late.
I'll go prepare breakfast now."

Kohaku-san disappears towards the dining room.
I can only stare at her in shock.

I ate breakfast, but I didn't taste anything.
What Kohaku-san said about my old man kept circling in my head and before I knew it, I was at the gate in front of the mansion.



"Shiki-san, you didn't forget anything?"
Hisui-chan is still in her room, Kohaku-san says as she sends me off.



"Geez, Shiki-san!
The weather is so nice today so you have to cheer up.
I can't send you off when you look like that."
"Ah—yeah.
.... You're right.
Sorry, I was just thinking about some things."
Giving my head a little shake, I banish the shadows in my mind.



"Ah, now that's more like the normal Shiki-san.
Yes, I can relax now."
.... That's odd.
Seeing that smile, I really do feel better.

"Goodbye, Shiki-san.
 I'll be waiting for your return."
 Kohaku-san bows.
 With that, all of my worries seem to disappear.
 "—Thanks, Kohaku-san.
 I feel better already."
 "Yes.
 A bright face suits you better, Shiki-san."
 "... Thanks.
 Well, then, I'm off, Kohaku-san."

Thanking her from the bottom of my heart, I run down the road to school.

I arrive in the classroom with more spare time than usual.
 Arihiko is late as usual, so I can wait quietly for homeroom.
 I decide to sit in my seat in the noisy classroom and wait for the teacher.

—The day passes without any trouble.
 Maybe he went on a trip?
 Arihiko didn't show up.
 "Trip" isn't a metaphor or anything.
 He does have this strange habit of spontaneously taking trips.
 It isn't anything cool like roaming the country on a motorcycle.
 He goes on sightseeing tours on weekdays with the old people.
 Geez.
 I've known since elementary school, but I've never completely understood his hobbies.

—I arrive at the mansion.

What I didn't think about at school comes back into my mind.
 What Kohaku-san said about my old man's split personalities.
 The hereditary illnesses of the Tohno family.
 Like Hisui said, ever since I came back, there's been something wrong with me.
 It feels like my memories are vague about something.
 Like Kohaku-san said, I don't think I'm like my old man.
 But, ever since I came back to this mansion, I no longer have full confidence in myself as Tohno Shiki.
 "Was my old man—really that crazy?"
 I do have a vague memory like that, but I can't say for sure.
 I understand that it's stupid of me to even be troubled by it.
 But, still—I should probably know about the Tohno family.

"I'm back—"
 I call out, but there's no response.

Akiha is probably still resting in her room.

Kohaku-san and Hisui are probably doing their jobs right now.

"..... Well then."

Come to think of it, this might be a good opportunity.

I-

Go see Kohaku-san.

turn to **399**

Investigate Makihisa's room.

turn to **400**

399

I'll go ask Kohaku-san.
 She seemed pretty knowledgeable about all those things this morning.
 I don't think Akiha would want to talk about it, and searching my old man's
 room would take time.
 I'll probably have the best luck with Kohaku-san.

"She's probably sweeping in the back."
 I enter the courtyard.
 "Huh...?"
 I don't see her anywhere.
 I glance around.

—And then.

For just an instant, I see the color of her kimono in the forest.
 "....?"
 Is there anything to clean over there?
 There isn't anything over there.
 I played in that forest as a child, so I would remember.
 I used to play a lot in that direction, so over there—

"—Eh?"
 What was that?
 There should be nothing there.
 But there's something odd about that.
 If there's nothing there, then why?
 Did this garden-like area hold some special significance to me?
 "..... Ou, ch....."
 I get a light headache.
 After a little debate with myself, I follow after Kohaku-san.

"———"
 Deep in the forest, there is another mansion.
 Detached, I suppose.
 Deep within the trees, it seems to be hidden from sight from the main building
 of the mansion.

"———No way."
 My heart convulses.
 This is the first time I've seen it, but—it seems horribly familiar, and I start to
 get dizzy.
 "....."
 Kohaku-san went inside.
 I don't remember what this detached building is.

I just have a bad feeling about all of this and I don't want to go inside.
But, it would be pretty stupid if I came all the way here only to go back, so I force myself to continue.

.... I walk around inside.
It's a little run-down here and there, probably because it hasn't been used in years.
But it seems like someone may have been doing some maintenance because it isn't dirty.
"... Kohaku-san is probably in the Japanese-style room in the back."
I absent-mindedly think that aloud and automatically walk towards the room.

—This is all so familiar.
The smell of tatami fills the small room.



"Huh?
Shiki-san?
Why did you come here?"
Kohaku-san tilts her head in surprise.
I—
"I wanted to ask you about something, so I followed you here."
—Strangely enough, I respond calmly.



"A talk, with me?"

"Yeah.

I wanted to talk more about this morning.

.... If this isn't a good place, should we go to the courtyard?"

I look up to the ceiling.

It is almost sunset, so it'll get dark soon.

The light in this room probably doesn't work, so we should head somewhere else.



"Shiki-san, if you want to talk about that then here is probably better.

If we go back to the mansion, we might run into Akiha-sama and will not be able to talk about Makihisa-sama."

"Ah—that's right.

She'll probably see us.

.... But Kohaku-san, I don't like keeping things secret from Akiha."

"Hmm, that is a little difficult.

Akiha-sama does not like talking about Makihisa-sama.

So if you wish to continue our talk from this morning, then we have to do it where Akiha-sama will not overhear us."

".... Does that mean, we have to keep it a secret from Akiha?"



"Yes.

A secret between me and you, Shiki-san.

We can't let Akiha-sama or Hisui-chan know about it."

Kohaku-san smiles like she's having a lot of fun.

.... Well.

Having a secret just between the two of us does seem a little exciting, but....

"But Kohaku-san, the sun is almost setting.

We can't talk here, right?"



"Not at all.

This building is still maintained at a level for people to live in, so it has futons already prepared and electricity."

"Really?"

But this place hasn't been used for a while, right?

Why is it maintained like that?"

"Let's see, maybe Akiha-sama is just fond of this place.

A long time ago, this was where Makihisa-sama's adopted child used to live."

—Huh?

Makihisa.... my old man, adopted a child, a long time ago?

".... Wait a sec, Kohaku-san.

My old man adopted a child?"



"Oh, you don't remember?

About ten years ago, he brought a child here.

His parents both died in an accident, so he adopted the child."

"That—happened?"

"Yes.

But two years later, the child passed away.

It was a trivial accident, but a lot of the servants began to say that the Tohno family was cursed."

—Wait a minute.

Something about her words seems scary.

Just hearing them, my vision starts to warp.

It was as if the room was made completely of dissolving sugar.

"Ko, Kohaku, san."

A child adopted ten years ago.

Two years later, the child died.

In other words,

eight years ago—that's when I had my accident and was sent to the hospital.

—Accident.

What kind of accident was it?

An accident that seriously wounded me.

An, accident that the adopted child, was killed in?

A hot summer day.

—I can't remember.

All I know is at that time, my arms seemed to be soaked in blood—

"Kohaku, san.

You said 'cursed'?"



"No, it isn't anything important.
It is just that a lot of the members of the Tohno family have died young.
Such as in accidents, or suicide, or illness; a curse that does not allow them a natural death.
Well, that was the rumor, anyway."
"—Suicide... what?"
"Some members of the Tohno family—like Makihisa-sama, carried mental illnesses and committed suicide when they became adults.
These are just rumors, but it's said some of them were murderers before the war."

.... Mental illness?
.... Murderers?
.... Such as, seeing dreams of killing people?
.... Such as, my memory being extremely vague?
"Kohaku-san, that—"



"Oh, I'm very sorry.
Those are just dark rumors about the Tohno family."
".... No, that's fine.
That is what I wanted to ask about.
.... If you don't mind, can you continue?"



"—About Makihisa-sama?"

Her tone lowers.

"..... Yeah."

I nod.

Kohaku-san lowers her eyes, and then looks directly at me.



"Shiki-san.

We spoke about it this morning, but I took care of Makihisa-sama's condition two years before he passed away.

.... While you were living with the Arima family, Makihisa-sama would become very depressed at times and I would have to prepare his medicine."

".... Wait.

You said it this morning too, but was he that bad that he had to take medicine?"

"—Yes.

It would not be uncommon for him to walk into the garden at night and kill the pet dogs and cats, or to hurt his own body.

And when the night was over, he wouldn't remember a thing, only thinking that it was strange that his hands were painted in blood."

—What—

What is this?

That's pretty much crazy.

As crazy as I am in my dreams.

.... No, that is backwards.

Am I crazy just like my old man?



"Shiki-san...!?"

.... I hear Kohaku-san's voice.

I—I don't know when it happened, but I'm on my knees on the tatami floor.

"Shiki-san, you look terrible.

If you are feeling poorly, you should rest in your room....!"

Kohaku-san says this as she grabs my shoulder.

With her help, I can stand.

".... Yeah.... I'm fine, so—"

I'm somehow able to focus again.

But I'm still dizzy.

Swirling red and black.

My vision strobesc between blood and night.

The darkness brought about by my anemia now turns into just one sheet of red.

A red reminiscent of blood.

The ease with which I bit the neck of the dead body in last night's dream.

—It slides down my throat.

The taste of warm blood.

"———Ah."

Thud.

Somehow, I understand that was the sound of my body hitting the floor.

"Shiki-san—!?"

Kohaku-san dashes towards me.

"Shiki-san, are you in pain?"

Shiki-san...!?"

.... No.

It doesn't hurt.

I want to tell her, but my consciousness is fading.

"....."

I can't speak.

I can't even move a finger.

It seems that if I exert myself even the slightest bit, I'll completely lose consciousness.

Collapsed on the floor, I try as hard as I can to resist the coming darkness.

"—Don't strain yourself, please lie down."

Kohaku-san speaks to me.

She slides me over.

With one hand holding my head, Kohaku-san slides a pillow underneath me.

".... Please relax.

This will help the blood to flow, right?"

"..... Nn."

Her voice sounds so close.

I piece together my situation.

It seems I am resting on her lap.

.... The time passes quietly.

Neither of us say anything.

Right now, that silence relaxes my heart.

".... It's so quiet.

For some reason.... this seems so familiar."

Lying down on my side, I stare at the tatami mat floor.

After nodding, Kohaku-san checks my pulse.

"Well, this isn't good.

Shiki-san, your body temperature has fallen.

I should go back and bring you some medicine."

"No, I'm fine.

I'm used to this, so I'll be fine soon.

Today was a little harder than before, but I'll be alright.

.... So can we stay like this a little longer?

I can relax better like this."

I tell her that, wanting to stay like this a little longer.

"In that case", Kohaku-san says as she stays in place.

———And then.

"Shiki-san, you are not scared?"

Kohaku-san asks me this.

".... Eh?

Of what?"

"About your health.

About two days before you returned here, I received all your information from the doctor.

I was not surprised, but felt more like he was deceiving me."

"?

Deceiving you?

Why?"

"Because you are so close to wavering between life and death, but you can live a normal life.

Normally, with a condition like yours, you would be confined to bed."

That voice seems not so much full of worry, but more.... full of anger, almost.

"Shiki-san, you're different from most people, who can rest assured at night that they'll wake up the next morning.

But you still live normally and do not have fear.

.... I can't understand it.

Please answer me.

Why are you not scared?"

"....."

I can't come up with a good answer.

My weak body.

The death that's always close.

.... My eyes that can see death.

Maybe that's why I'm just numb to it.

"Who knows?

Maybe I just don't feel it as being real."

".... I don't get it.

Do you not feel how close death is?

Or is it because your body could die at any moment so living does not concern you?"

".... It's hard to say.

Maybe I'm desensitized to death.

Being sensitive and seeing it that close every day, it just becomes normal."

".... But I can still say this, Kohaku-san.

Since I'm so close to death all the time, I can feel life more strongly.

I know that living itself is happiness.

Like you said, my body isn't that free.

.... But, with such a puppet-like body, I want to believe that even talking right now is such a wonderful thing."

.... That's right.

More than thinking about my body, I want to treasure the present.

If I have time to worry about dying, I should be enjoying the present more.

".... I see.

Your heart is free, isn't it?"

Quietly, as if she's singing, Kohaku-san says this to herself.

Her fingers run through my hair gently.

"—Kohaku-san?"

I look up.

I see—

—her smiling very peacefully.
Her smile that I should be so used to seeing.
But it seems like it's the first time,
the first time I've ever seen her smile.
"....."
.... Time just passes by.
She lightly runs her fingers through my hair.
I feel the warmth of her body from her legs.
The nostalgic smell of the tatami mats.
It's all so comforting, my eyelids slowly start to close.
.... She has such a gentle look on her face.
If I can sleep like this, it would be—
".... That's funny—"

Really, like this.

".... I feel like, this is the first time, I've seen you smile, Kohaku-san."

I feel like I'm falling asleep.

"Is that right?
Shiki-san, you must be really sleepy."
".... That's fine.
If you're happy, then—"
If this makes her smile, I want to do this forever.
.... In the middle of this dark room.
I want to feel her closer to me and I reach out my hand.
".... Shiki-san....?"
My fingers touch her.
My fingers trace the lines of her face.
They brush her smooth skin, and reach her hair, then—

"—Kohaku, you came here ahead of me?"

Vigorously opening the screen door, Akiha enters the room.



"Wha——"

Kohaku-san's fingers suddenly stop moving.



"—What are you two doing?"

Akiha's emotionless voice.

"A, Akiha....!?"

This, it's not what you think....!"

I stand up in a hurry.

I'll just tell her to calm down.

There's nothing wrong, or anything suspicious.

We haven't done anything, and all Kohaku-san did was watch over me after I collapsed.

"Wait, Akiha.

I just collapsed, so Kohaku-san was—"

It's over before I can finish.



Akiha stares at Kohaku-san and enters.

It's only a moment after.

Slap!

The dry sound echoes through the room.

"Wha....."

There wasn't even time to stop it.

Akiha just walked in and slapped her.

Kohaku-san takes a few steps back.

It must've been pretty hard.

"Akiha, you—!"



"Nii-san, this place is off limits.

If you are feeling well, please go back to the mansion."

"....!"

I don't care about that!

Why'd you hit her!?"

"Why not?"

This is an old, decrepit building.

What was she thinking, having you rest here?"

"Just for that?"

She was just taking care of me!"

"—Just that?"

What do you mean, Nii-san?

It would not be surprising if this place collapses.
An earthquake could cause the ceiling to collapse.
To take care of the eldest son of the Tohno household in such a place means she
doesn't have the discretion proper for a servant."
"Akiha...!
There's some things you shouldn't say.
Kohaku-san didn't do anything wrong.
I was the one that called her here anyway!"



"—Oh?
You're going this far to protect Kohaku, Nii-san?"
Her gaze sharpens.
"——"
She looks just like she did in that dream.
A gaze that looks close to malice and hatred.
In front of me—in reality, there's a nightmarish Akiha.

"Eh——?"
My pulse tightens.
Was I hallucinating?
For an instant, around Akiha—I thought that I saw something terrible.



"—I understand.
If you say that, then I will not say anything else.
But, Nii-san.

From now on, please do not come here.
If you can not even do that, then I have some ideas, too."

—It must have been an illusion.
There isn't anything strange around her.
But why?
The danger I feel from her makes me uneasy.
"We're going back, Kohaku.
Nii-san, go back to your room."

.... Akiha walks away.
"Kohaku-san."
.... I call out to Kohaku-san, who is still looking down.
"Kohaku-san....?"
Are, you alright....?"



"Yes?
Alright about what?"
She says this casually.
With her usual smile, she looks up.
.... That isn't a forced, empty smile.
She really is smiling.
As if Akiha never even hit her.
".... Um, well, that—"
"Well then, Shiki-san.
Let's go back.
Akiha-sama found out, so you shouldn't come back here again.
Akiha-sama would really punish you for sure."

"Ahaha," laughing at her own joke, she leaves the room.
"_____"

It's probably because both of them are acting strange.
I can't go back right away.

I eat dinner alone and go back to my room.

I guess Akiha was still feeling poorly because she wasn't there.
.... Kohaku-san made me dinner with her usual cheery mood and then went to take care of Akiha.
".... I wonder if Kohaku-san is feeling uneasy."
It would seem that Kohaku-san doesn't resent Akiha at all.
It seems like Hisui is over what happened this morning and is taking care of me.
.... Hisui took half a day to get over it, so maybe Kohaku-san is a lot stronger.
"....."
Lying down on my bed, I let out a big sigh.
.... I must be tired.
Recently, as soon as night falls, I've been falling into bed.
Even though there are a lot of things I should think about, I feel like nothing concerns me and try to go to sleep.
".... That's odd.
I can't concentrate—"
I stare at the ceiling.

My eyes start to close.
Again, I don't think about anything and fall into a deep sleep—

—Burning.

—Burning.

—Burning.

—My skin is burning.

—I can't sleep like this.
I have get up and drink some water.

The city at night.
Repeating my hot breathing, I look at the people passing by.
There are only two or three of them tonight.
If possible, I want to find a lone girl who is about my age.

—Hot.
I see my reflection in the mirror.
Breathing wildly, it looks like I'm running a high fever.

—Hot—I can't stand this burning.
.... There.
I don't need to get any closer.
I grab her from behind and make her pass out.

I pick her up and take her with me.
—I start to smile.
I endured it for so long, and now everything is over.

.... I decide to do it here in the end.
The reason is simple.
Because, this was the killer's lair.

—Burning.
My breathing fills the air.
Soon.
Soon I can taste her.

Then I start my meal.
Biting into her neck, I suck the blood.

—It is unbelievably sweet.
The sensation is really terrifying.
If it is this sweet and feels this good,
I may just become a captive to this sensation, in place of that killer.

—The night is deep.
Above my head is the silver eye bearing witness to my sin.
With blood-smearing lips, I look up at the night sky with eyes full of amusement.
Fluttering hair.
Above is the spiraling sky.
What a beautiful, silver moon.

—Like a snake.
Watching the blood-sucking demon.

"——!"
I leap out of bed, unable to take it any longer.
"Ah—haa, ha—ah."
Holding back the urge to vomit, I breathe like some sort of animal.
"Wha——"
What was that just now?
A dream.
It was a dream.
But, what was that?
It's different than what I saw two days ago.
The feeling of walking the streets at night.
The smell of blood lingering in my nose.
The sound of dragging that girl who was close to my age.

—All of it is fresh in my memory.
"Ha, ah——"
Was that something you could call pleasure?
It was pure excitement condensed like a bullet, fired straight into my head.
"G——"

My breathing stops just thinking about it.
Then.. perhaps that impact could be something called "pleasure".
"Why did I.. that kind of dream.."
I look down at my hands.
Of course, they are pure white, without a trace of red blood on them.

But, for an instant,
I saw both of my hands covered in red.

—What, you too?

.... Huh?

—This is the first time I've seen another killer besides myself.

.... That's right.
I did have that conversation.

—The same city doesn't need two killers.
I'll give you this place.

.... But, when was that?

".... Why, can't I remember—?"
Certainly, I feel like I had that conversation with someone.
But I just can't remember.
Was it real, or was it just an empty dream?
I just remember that the killer said I was the same as him.
"—That's strange.
.... Why is it.... all mixed up in my head—"
I earnestly try hard to remember about last night's dream.

"Ga—!?"
My head pounds.
"Agh—ah, agh.....!"
I can't, remember.
When I try to remember about yesterday, I feel the urge to vomit.
I'm scared.
I'm scared of the fact that I can't remember.
It feels like..
A Tohno Shiki I don't know is killing people, and in order to hide it, is deceiving
the Tohno Shiki that is me.

—And.
I sense someone in the hallway.

"Who's there—!?"
I call out.

Knock.
Knock.



"Please excuse me," Hisui says as she enters the room.
It's just a normal morning scene.
"Ah——"
Is it because she is acting so naturally?
My pounding heart instantly calms down.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
"..... Hisu, i?"



"Yes, it is time, so I have prepared your change of clothes already.
 Um, Shiki-sama?
 Are you not feeling well?"
 "No, that's not it.
 I feel fine.
 There's nothing wrong."
 I get up from bed, as if to prove my words.
 "Morning, Hisui.
 I'll go to the sitting room after I change, so please go ahead of me."



"Yes.
 Well then, please excuse me."

Hisui quietly closes the door and leaves.
 After watching her go, I take a deep breath.
 "Why am I feeling down like this?"
 Probably because I found out about my old man's illness yesterday.
 Just because my symptoms are similar to his, maybe I'm being too paranoid.
 ".... Yeah.
 Ever since I came back, I've been so tired.
 I shouldn't think about that dream."

—Well then.
 It's almost seven.
 Like yesterday, I should be able to enjoy the morning.

—And then..

Unthinkingly, I step into the sitting room and it hits me that I forgot something very important.

"Oh cra—"

I swallow my words.

Akiha, Hisui, and Kohaku-san are in the sitting room.

Everything seems just like normal, but after what happened yesterday, I'm sure it'll be really awkward.

Akiha and Kohaku-san seemed to have reached an understanding, but I haven't spoken with Akiha yet.

Thinking how Akiha acted yesterday, I'm pretty sure Akiha's still mad at me.



"Good morning, Nii-san.

Did you sleep well?"

"——Huh?"

And.

Akiha greets me with a big smile.

"Uh.....?"

My mind freezes at such an unexpected event.

Akiha still has a big smile as I just stand there.

Akiha is way too cheerful and it makes me think she is planning something.



"Shiki-sama, would you care to sit down?"

"Ah... yeah, if you want me to sit, I will."
I fearfully look at Akiha as I sit down across from her.

"Morning, Akiha.
You seem to be in a good mood today."



"Is that so?
Certainly I feel much better, so I probably look less pale than before."
... No, it is far beyond not looking pale.



"Anyway, first I have to thank you.
I really wanted to thank you yesterday, but I was feeling rather ill and did not have an opportunity."
Akiha looks directly at me.
There isn't even a trace of yesterday's coldness.
... It also seems that the air of danger has disappeared.
"Thank me?
I didn't really do anything to deserve that."
"That's not true.
You took care of me when I was sick, right?
Because you embraced me, I was determined.
I was extremely happy that night."
"——!"
She says something that catches me totally off guard.

—And then.
I feel incredibly heavy pressure against my back.
I glance behind me.



-2 0



.... There, Hisui and Kohaku-san stare at me in a manner far different than usual.

"—Akiha.
Don't say things that might give people the wrong impression.
You were in so much pain, I just supported you, that's all."



"Oh?
 I suppose wrapping your arms around me is just supporting me?"
 Akiha giggles softly.
 Staring.
 They're staring at me.
 The stares of the two behind me get even heavier.
 "—Now look.
 You're acting odd.
 Are you enjoying making fun of me?"
 "Yes, a lot.
 Looking at your troubled face is fun."
 "....."
 This is just too weird.
 Is this really Akiha's personality?
 "You have some strange hobbies.
 Bothering me in the morning and lecturing me last night.
 Well, I thought so at first, but you really must have something against me."
 I end with a sigh.

All of a sudden, Akiha averts her gaze.



".... I'm very sorry.
 What I did yesterday was stupid.
 There was something wrong with me, and I've already apologized to Kohaku—"
 "You apologized to Kohaku-san!?"

I blurt this out in surprise.
Not only did she apologize, but she apologized to Kohaku-san.



"—Hey.
Nii-san, just what kind of person do you think I am?
I was at fault, so it is only natural that I apologized to Kohaku, right?"
.... When she says that, I get a vague mental image of her acting as a strict mistress.



"Nii-san.
You're thinking of something bad, aren't you?"
.... She's sharp.
As happy as she is, it doesn't do anything to dull her sense of perception.

setvar flgR + 1
turn to **401**

—I'll go to my old man's room.
I can't say for sure that I expect to find anything, but I might be able to investigate something about the Tohno lineage.



"—, Welcome back, Shiki-sama."
..... And.
There is already someone in the old man's room.
Hisui puts down the mountain of books she is carrying and bows.
"—Hisui."
.... She looks like she always does.
I was uneasy about seeing her because of this morning, but it seems she is over it already.
"I deeply apologize for not being able to welcome you earlier.
—May I help you with anything?"
"No, I just thought that I'd look around my old man's room.
As long as I'm not in the way, could I stay here a bit?"
".... Yes, but Akiha-sama has the keys to the locked shelves and drawers, so I cannot open them.
Is that acceptable?"
"Locked?"
.... That's fine.
I'm not really looking for anything in particular."
"—??"
Hisui tilts her head questioningly.
"I'll just look around myself, so please continue.
I don't want to get in your way."



"As you wish.
Well then, if you need anything, please call me."

Hisui resumes cleaning the room.
—Well then.
I should start too.

.... I spend a little time searching the bookshelves, but realize it's useless.
The shelves are all full of books, but nothing about the Tohno family.
What I want to see is something like my family tree or my old man's journal.
".... I guess things like that are in here...."
I pull the drawers to my old man's desk.
I feel it catch.
".... But they are locked...."
If I want the key, I have to talk to Akiha.
.... But from what Hisui says, I don't think she'll open them for me.
"—"

Hisui isn't looking this way.
There is a letter opener on the desk.
This is convenient.
.... Well, might as well use what's given to me.
"....."

Lowering my glasses a bit, I look at the desk.
"—There."
Without a sound, I cut the lock.
"Hmm—there's only some papers."
Inside the drawer is only a bundle of old papers.
I pick up a sheet.

"—What is this?"

The flowing script is difficult to read.
My eyes come to the names Tohno MAKIHISA followed by Tohno SHIKI and
Tohno AKIHA.
And after that,

I see an unfamiliar name: Nanaya.

——Suddenly.

For no reason, I see a vision of a dark forest.

"Ah——"

My vision thins.

I feel the blood welling in the back of my head.

Strength drains from my limbs, and I feel like I can't breathe.

——Why?

Why is it hard to breathe all of a sudden?

It's not like anything happened.

I didn't see anything.

So why am I—shaking like a small kid?



"Shiki-sama....!"

Hisui... Hisui rushes over to me.

—Placing a hand on a bookcase, I somehow manage to stay standing.



"Shiki-sama!

Please, hold on, Shiki-sama....!"

Hisui's voice is full of worry.

But her hand does not touch me.

"I'm fine—I just got a little nauseous."



"Shiki-sama, please do not strain yourself.
Please have a seat and rest."
"... Yeah... I'm fine, so—"
I manage to hold onto consciousness.
But I'm still dizzy.

In my flickering red and black vision.
White.
I see her terribly warm neck.

"—Ah."
I'm captivated.
If my body could move properly, I would seize Hisui's body and—

The black vision from my anemia all of a sudden turns deep red.
Hisui's, white neck.
Last night's crimson dream.

—The nighttime killing.
Painful pleasure, as if my heart would rip itself out.

"K—!"
Unable to bear it, I get away from Hisui.



"Shiki-sama....?"

"No—I'm fine—I'm fine, so leave me alone."



"I cannot do that when you look that ill.
Please do not strain yourself."

Hisui draws close.

She comes to support my collapsing body.

—This isn't good.

This is, bad.

If she comes within reach of my hands, I'm afraid I don't know what I'll do.

"Sto—I'm, fine.... leave, me—"

Dizziness assails me.

I feel very faint.

.... But that's fine.

If I collapse, then—I won't feel the urge to suck Hisui's blood—



"Hisui?
About yesterday, Kohaku and Nii-san—"
Eh... Aki, ha....?"



"Nii-san?
Why are you here—"

Akiha comes straight to me and snatches the Tohno family lineage away from me.



"Nii-san.
You broke the lock?"
"——"

Akiha stares at me angrily.
I—fighting my dizziness, can't look at her right.

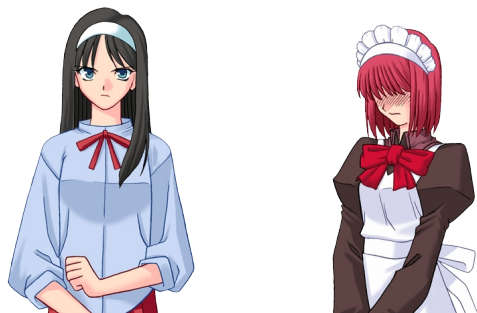
".... I see.
It can't be helped if you saw it already.
I will let it go this time, but be prepared for a deserving punishment next time."
Akiha then stares at Hisui.
.... She looks like she almost hates Hisui.
"Ah——"
She looks like the Akiha in that dream.
A gaze that looks close to malice and hatred.
I almost feel burning heat emanating from her hair.



"Eh——?"
My heart skips a beat.
Was I hallucinating?
For an instant, around Akiha—I thought that I saw something terrible.



"—Hisui, what were you doing?
Nii-san's body is weak, so you have to at least take away his mental burden.
But letting Nii-san enter Father's room, were you not thinking?"



"—I am, deeply sorry."



".... Be more careful from now on.
I have to speak with Kohaku, so tell her to come to my room immediately."



Akiha walks away.
".... Shiki-sama, please return to your room.
Your condition is not good, so please rest until dinner."
Hisui says this, still looking down.
".... You're right, I'll go to my room.
Sorry, Hisui.
Because of me, Akiha was mad at you."



"No, it was my fault.
.... As Akiha-sama says, you are still not used to this mansion.
Until you are settled in, you should not enter this room."
"....."
I don't know what to say.
Still dizzy, I exit my old man's room.

I eat dinner alone and go back to my room.
I guess Akiha was still feeling poorly because she wasn't there.
"____"
Lying down on my bed, I let out a big sigh.
.... I must be tired.
Recently, as soon as night falls, I fall into bed.
Even though there are a lot of things I should think about, I feel like nothing
concerns me and try to sleep.
".... That's odd.
I can't concentrate—"
I stare at the ceiling.

My eyes start to close.
Again, I don't think about anything and fall into a deep sleep—

—Burning.

—Burning.

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—My skin is burning.

—I can't sleep like this.
I have get up and drink some water.

The nighttime city.
Breathing out in warm gasps, I look at the people passing by.
There are only two or three of them tonight.
If possible, I want to find a lone girl who is about my age.

—Hot.
I see my reflection in the mirror.
Breathing wildly, it looks like I'm running a high fever.

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I don't need to get near her.
I grab her from behind and make her pass out.

I pick her up and take her with me.
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I endured it for so long, and now everything is over.

.... I decide to do it here in the end.
The reason is simple.
Because, this was the killer's lair.

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 My breathing fills the air.
 Soon.
 Soon I can taste her.

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 I may just become a captive to this sensation, in place of that killer.

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 With blood-smearred lips, I look up at the night sky with eyes full of amusement.
 Fluttering hair.
 Above is the spiraling sky.
 What a beautiful, silver moon.

—Like a snake.
 Watching the blood-sucking demon.

"——!"
 I leap out of bed unable to take it.
 "Ah—haa, ha—ah."
 Holding back the urge to vomit, I breathe like a beast.
 "Wha——"
 What was that just now?

A dream.
It was a dream.
But, what was that?
It's different than what I saw two days ago.
The feeling of walking the streets at night.
The smell of blood lingering in my nose.
The sound of pulling that girl who was close to my age.

—All of it is fresh in my memory.
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It was pure excitement condensed like a bullet, fired straight into my head.
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My breathing stops just thinking about it.
Then.. perhaps that impact could be something called "pleasure".
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I look down at my hands.
Of course, they are pure white, without a trace of red blood on them.

But, for an instant,
I saw both of my hands covered in red.

—What, you too?

.... Huh?

—This is the first time I've seen another killer besides myself.

.... That's right.
I did have that conversation.

—The same city doesn't need two killers.
I'll give you this place.

.... But, when was that?

".... Why, can't I remember——?"
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But I just can't remember.
Was it real, or was it just an empty dream?
I just remember that the killer said I was the same as him.
"—That's strange.
.... Why is it.... all mixed up in my head——"
I earnestly try hard to remember about last night's dream.

"Ga——!?"

My head pounds.

"Agh—ah, agh.....!"

I can't, remember.

When I try to remember about yesterday, I feel the urge to vomit.

I'm scared.

I'm scared of the fact that I can't remember.

It feels like..

A Tohno Shiki I don't know is killing people, and in order to hide it, is deceiving the Tohno Shiki that is me.

—And.

I sense someone in the hallway.

"Who's there—!?"

I call out.

Knock.

Knock.



"Please excuse me," Hisui says as she enters the room.

It's just a normal morning scene.

"Ah——"

Is it because she is acting so naturally?

My pounding heart calms down immediately.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"..... Hisu, i?"



"Yes, it is time, so I have prepared your change of clothes already.

.... Um, Shiki-sama?

Are you not feeling well?"

"No, that's not it.

I feel fine.

There's nothing wrong."

I get up from bed, as if to prove my words.

"Morning, Hisui.

I'll go to the sitting room after I change, so please go ahead of me."



"Yes.

Well then, please excuse me."

Hisui quietly closes the door and leaves.
After she leaves, I take a deep breath.
"Why am I feeling down like that?"
Probably because I found out about my old man's illness yesterday.
Just because my symptoms are similar to his, maybe I'm being too paranoid.
"... Yeah.
Ever since I came back, I've been so tired.
I shouldn't think about that dream."

—Well then.
It's almost seven.
Like yesterday, I should be able to enjoy the morning.

—And then.
Unthinkingly, I step into the sitting room and it hits me that I forgot something very important.
"Oh cra—" ~~—~~
I swallow my words.
Akiha, Hisui and Kohaku-san are in the sitting room.
Everything seems just like normal, but after the thing yesterday, I'm sure it'll be really uneasy.
Akiha and Kohaku-san seemed to have reached an understanding, but I haven't spoken with Akiha yet.
Thinking how Akiha acted yesterday, I'm pretty sure Akiha's still mad at me.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
Did you sleep well?"
"—Huh?"
And.
Akiha greets me with a big smile.

"Uh.....?"
My mind freezes at such an unexpected event.
Akiha still has a big smile as I just stand there.

Akiha is way too cheerful and it makes me think she is planning on something.



"Shiki-sama, would you care to sit down?"

"Ah... yeah, if you want me to sit, I will."

I fearfully look at Akiha as I sit down across from her.

"Morning, Akiha.
You seem to be in a good mood today."



"Is that so?"

Certainly I feel much better, so I probably look less pale than before."

.... No, it is far beyond not looking pale.



"Anyway, first I have to thank you.

I really wanted to thank you yesterday, but I was feeling rather ill and did not

have a chance to."
Akiha looks directly at me.
There isn't even a trace of yesterday's coldness.
.... It also seems that the air of danger has disappeared.
"Thank me?
I didn't really do anything to deserve that."
"That's not true.
You took care of me when I was sick, right?
Because you embraced me, I was determined.
I was extremely happy that night."
"——!"
She says something that catches me totally off guard.

—And then.
I feel some heavy pressure against my back.
I glance back.





.... There, Hisui and Kohaku-san stare at me in a manner far different than usual.

"—Akiha.

Don't say things that might give people the wrong impression.
You were in so much pain, I just supported you, that's all."



"Oh?

I suppose wrapping your arms around me is just supporting me?"

Akiha giggles softly.

Staring.

They're staring at me.

The stares of the two behind me get even heavier.

"—Now look.

You're acting odd.

Are you enjoying making fun of me?"

"Yes, a lot.

Looking at your troubled face is fun."

"....."

This is just too weird.

Is this really Akiha's personality?

"You have some strange hobbies.

Bothering me in the morning and lecturing me last night.

.... Well, I thought so at first, but you really must have something against me."

I end with a sigh.

All of a sudden, Akiha averts her gaze.



"... I'm very sorry.
What I did yesterday was stupid.
There was something wrong with me, and I've already apologized to Hisui—"
"You apologized to Hisui!?"
I blurt this out in surprise.
Not only did she apologize, but she apologized to Hisui.



"—Hey.
Nii-san, just what kind of person do you think I am?
I was at fault, so it is only natural that I apologized to Hisui, right?"
... When she says that, I get a vague mental image of her acting as a strict
mistress.



"Nii-san.

You're thinking of something bad, aren't you?"

.... She's sharp.

As happy as she was, it didn't do anything to dull her sense of perception.

turn to **401**

401



"Shiki-san, I hate to ruin your fun, but would you like some breakfast?
It is almost time, so I thought I should make some."

"Oh, I forgot.

... I'm not so much hungry as I am thirsty though."



"Oh, that won't do, Shiki-san.

You collapsed yesterday so you need to eat to regain your strength.
Even if you don't feel like eating, you should have some food."

"Uh..."

What she says is true, but I just don't feel like it right now.
After seeing that dream, I can't bring myself to eat.



-2 0

"... Nee-san.

If Shiki-sama does not feel well, I do not think you should force him."



-2 0



"Hisui-chan, you are too indulgent when it comes to Shiki-san—huh?"



-2 0



"Shiki-san, you're not feeling well again this morning?"

Kohaku-san stares at me.

As if on cue, Hisui and Akiha add their serious stares on me as well.

.... I guess I really can't go on fooling myself.

"—To tell the truth, I do feel a little under the weather.

I can eat, but could you make it something I don't need to chew?

I feel pretty bad, and I can't really taste anything."



-2 0

After telling the truth, Kohaku-san says "Oh, I see," and looks a little downcast.

.... As the one in charge of cooking, she probably feels something about what I said.



-2 0

".... Um, Shiki-sama?"

I think you are not feeling well because there was a change in your environment. So, if the mansion is not suitable for you, maybe you should go back and live with the Arima family for a while....?"

"....."

Hisui's opinion is driven by a sincere concern about my health.

.... Ever since I came back, my life has been strange. Since that promise from eight years ago has apparently been forgotten; maybe it's better for my health if I go back and live at the Arimas.

".... Yeah.

That may be good too.

Although I've only been here for a week, if I don't seem to get used to it soon, I'll leave for a while and go regain my health."

"Well, that may be jumping the gun a little bit," I add.

—And then.

Suddenly, Akiha stands up from her sofa.



"Oh, that will not do, Nii-san. You finally came back, so please do not leave again.



If you say you are going to leave one more time, I will kill you, Nii-san."

Akiha smiles as she says that joke and disappears towards the lobby.



"Hisui-chan.

It's time for Akiha-sama to go to school, please accompany her to the door.

I'll be taking care of Shiki-san's breakfast."

With a simple "yes", Hisui walks after Akiha.

"Well then, I'll make you something easy for you to eat.

Please wait just a moment."

Kohaku-san walks quickly toward the kitchen.

"_____"

I sit on the sofa, dumbstruck.

—I will kill you, Nii-san.

.... Those words won't leave my head.

It's probably because even though it was a joke, it didn't sound like a joke to me.

—Noon arrives.

As usual, Arihiko is skipping school.

"I guess I'll go to the cafeteria."

I don't feel like eating by myself here.

Maybe if I go to the lively cafeteria, my appetite may pick up.

As expected, the cafeteria is full of people.

After waiting in a long line, I buy the tried and true meal set A and walk to a table.

Listening to the voices of everyone else, I begin to eat.

—And then.

For a moment, I see a terrible image.

"....?"

Is it the television screen?"

I gape at the large television mounted on the wall at the end of the cafeteria.

At my school, they record the morning news and replay it at lunch.

I just stare dumbfounded at the news broadcast that is several hours late.

"—No way.."

I watch the news in amazed horror.

Shown in the television is the alley that I saw last night in my dream.

The newscaster is talking.

On the screen, the words "Vampire Serial Killer's New Victim" appears in bloody lettering.

.... It appears that the girl was saved.

The girl is in the hospital recovering from having her blood drained.

She is still unconscious.

Chances of recovery are unknown.

.... The identity of who attacked and stole her blood is also unknown.

The picture of the girl on the television is unmistakably that girl from last night.

—That means there's one thing that isn't unknown.

The criminal who attacked her is, without a doubt—

"——"

I start to feel faint.

"How..... come?"

That was a dream.

It had to be a dream.

But in reality, the same person in my dream, had her blood sucked out the same way in my dream.

"That vampire should be gone already."

I killed Yumizuka with my own hands.

Those killings, they shouldn't be happening anymore.

"I—killed?"

Yes, I killed.

Just like the time when I killed Yumizuka.

While breathing hard, last night, that woman I've never met—

Didn't I tell you, Shiki-kun?

It's useless to resist it.

What are you talking about?
You're more of a killer than I am.

"Ugh—"
Resisting the urge to throw up, I get up from my seat.

I can't go back to class.
I find myself running into the city.

—I come to the place I saw in my dream.

There are several policemen around the area, and tape reading "Police Line Do Not Cross" is stretched across the alley.

"—Exactly the same."

Without a doubt, this is the place I went to in my dream.

—No, it wasn't a dream.

I can't delude myself into thinking it is a dream any longer.

"....."

Even if I stay here longer, the cops will only stare at me.

... I can't go back to school now, so I guess I'll go back to the mansion.

Since it's not even two o'clock yet, Hisui isn't waiting in the lobby.

"....."

I can say I got lucky.

I don't feel like seeing anyone right now.

I glance at my reflection in the window.

The pale face looks like a completely different Tohno Shiki.

My self that seems like another person.

That dream that seemed like it belonged to another person.

That which cannot be noticed,

the traces of the killing that only remains in my memory.

Dizziness.

Before me, my vision goes black.

"No—!"

I'm not the same as my old man.....!!!"
Desperately fending off the dizziness, I try to stay upright.
"—My old man."
I can go to my old man's room, and I can find out about his illness.
If I do that, I can confirm that I'm not the same.
If I am the same—there might be a way to help myself.

.... His room is on the first floor in the western part of the mansion, next to Kohaku-san's room.
It was fortunate that I left school early.
At this time, no one else is around.
I pull out my knife and take off my glasses.
I try to cut the "line" of the door's lock and put my glasses back on.

The room was not locked.

My old man's room is just like it always was.
Nearly all of the rows of books are educational reports, and nothing catches my attention.
What I want right now is my old man's journal or notes.
The old man was extremely methodical.
There certainly has to be something like that lying around here somewhere—
"... Of course, they're not just lying about where anyone can see them."
Maybe they're locked away somewhere.
I should probably look in these desk drawers first.

This isn't time to be fooling around.
Taking off my glasses, I look at the "lines".
Using my knife, I cut the "lines" on the drawer.
Inside, there appears to be some old documents bundled together and what seems to be a journal.
rst, I look at the old documents.
"... This is, my family tree?"
Definitely.
Right after Tohno MAKIHISA is written Tohno SHIKI and Tohno AKIHA.
And right after that, the word "Nanaya" is written there.

"Eh.... my old man, he adopted a son ten years ago?
.... Ah, but he passed away shortly thereafter."
Ten years ago, that would mean I was just in elementary school.
That long ago, it's only natural that I wouldn't remember.
"Let's see.... the heads of the household have had pretty short lifespans.
My old man died before he was fifty, and before that, before thirty in an accident.. before that, eighteen years of age, with suicide—"

—No, wait a second.

No matter how you look at it, this is strange.

Looking through the family tree, all members of the Tohno household have died strangely.

Madness.

Accidents.

Murder.

Disappearances.

Still birth.

... Not one of them lived a long life, or even died peacefully.

"Wha....."

This entire document is filled with horrible fates.

Even worse, most of the causes of death are madness.

Most of these ended up taking their own lives.

"That's strange—all of this is strange."

But I can't exactly place my finger on it.

"... Next is... my old man's journal."

I pick up the journal which has a relatively new binding.

—Thump, Thump.

My heart starts to pound.

My heart seems to understand that I shouldn't be opening this.

But I can't turn back now.

Swallowing hard, I open my old man's journal.

—There is a demon lurking inside the Tohno bloodline.

The opening statement is in those lines.

And that isn't just a simple metaphor.

The ancestors of the Tohno were a mixed breed of "something nonhuman" and human.

We, being their descendants, also have this element of "something nonhuman" in our blood.

In regards to our blood..

There are those with strong and those with weak nonhuman blood.

Those with weak nonhuman blood can live their lives as ordinary people, but those with strong nonhuman blood can never live a normal life.

Those with strong Tohno blood are born with special powers.

It could be a body that is resistant to death,

it could be an ability to move things without touching them,

or it could be fangs used to take bodily fluids from other people.

This blood.

When this blood becomes too strong, the members of the Tohno family start to gradually lose their sanity.

The majority of those become demons that feed on human flesh.

So, the head of the Tohno household carries the responsibility of punishing those who have turned into such a monster.

"_____"

It's messed up.

My old man, what was he trying to say?

Writing so seriously about something that's more like a fairy tale.

—The journal turns more into the old man's rant.

The date is roughly nine years ago.

The handwriting starts to get erratic.

I am no longer able to suppress my raging blood.

I was able to obtain an orphan from a family of Synchronizers, so this should help me strengthen my mind.

However, it really is only a matter of time before I go insane.

.... It is terrifying.

When I come to, I find that I can't even remember half of the day.

During that time, I'm forcing my inversion impulse on that child.

If this keeps up,

it is only a matter of time before I completely lose my sanity and turn into a beast.

I don't even know how much time I have left to remain as myself.

No.

If that child is here, then I can probably last for a few more years.

But that child will not be able to bear that.

After that child breaks, I will have to take my own life.

.... It is incredibly ironic.

I eliminated so many things in order to preserve myself, but in the end, I will probably have to commit suicide.

Or maybe this is the curse of the Nanayas.

I end up adopting his son, but I guess I could not lift their grudge with such a thing.

But, I can't make up for the events of the past.

If death is waiting for me, then I must accept it when the time comes.

But until then—I must protect my children.

Akiha's blood is weak.

Unless she wishes it herself, she does not have to suffer the same fate.

The problem is SHIKI.
 That child is incredibly close to me.
 More than anything else, I do not want that child to suffer my fate.
 If the Tohno blood is unnatural, I need to distance him as much as possible
 from the Tohno name and see how he will fare—

I let out a deep breath and expel the air from my lungs.
 I take a break from reading.
 It makes me sick.
 The contents of my old man's journal are so far away from reality that it's plain
 weird.

My old man didn't just have manic-depression.
 Rather, he just became violent without his knowing.
 Just like Tohno Shiki right now.
 "—That's strange."
 But, that isn't what concerns me.
 He writes SHIKI and AKIHA strangely.
 Looking back to the family tree, I see that he writes "Akiha" using the Chinese
 characters for "Autumn Leaves", while "SHIKI" is written using the characters
 for "Four Seasons".
 "The characters for 'Four Seasons' can certainly be pronounced as 'SHIKI', but
 the characters in my name are 'Intention' and 'Esteemed'."
 I have a feeling that thinking too hard about that will be bad, but my train of
 thought does not stop.
 ".... What are these 'Synchronizers'?"
 Maybe the adopted child?"
 But, I feel that's wrong too.
 Anyway, I've only read half-way through all of this.
 If I read through it completely, I might come up with a solution.
 But—do I really want to find out?

"....."

—I feel like vomiting.

I can't stay standing.
 Hurry.
 I must hurry back to my room and sleep; it feels like there is something wrong
 with my head.

But still, I decide to go back reading the journal.
 —The rest of it seems to be a record of some sort.

The date starts in the summer of eight years ago, and about a month after
 that.

"....."

I don't understand it yet, but I continue to look through it.

Month Day

My son SHIKI succumbed to his Tohno blood.

SHIKI, he killed my adopted son who happened to be there.

(The adopted son is the heir of the house Nanaya. I guess it is a blessing in all the unfortunate events that he isn't in the same family as the Synchronizers, like Kohaku and Hisui.)

SHIKI's inversion impulse is terrible.

So it was determined that he must be eliminated.

I have my duty as the head of the Tohno household, but killing my own son is so difficult.

The Tohno blood is stronger in SHIKI than in AKIHA.

Talking about potential, I feel an older origin in Akiha's blood, but SHIKI's Tohno blood runs much stronger.

I assume that is why SHIKI inverted before he became an adult.

SHIKI's powers are "immortality" and "fusion".

SHIKI could not manage the awakened powers and as a result, killed the adopted Nanaya child, taking his life.

I have to say it was a superb job for using his powers for the first time.

Month x Day

Both SHIKI and the adopted son managed to escape death.

Month Day

The problem of maintaining appearances to normal society still remains.

SHIKI has killed the adopted Nanaya child.

I have covered up the incident, but SHIKI cannot be shown to the public.

The wound I gave him hasn't healed and his figure has transformed.

He is not in a condition to be brought in front of others as Tohno SHIKI... he cannot be called a human either.

The Nanaya child still lives.

As long as he lives, I've decided to use him.

If there are any disagreements, I would like to hear them.

Complementarity.

The Nanayas are a family that produces killers.

If that adopted son happens to stay alive, the link between him and SHIKI may corrupt SHIKI's mind.

Even if SHIKI regains his sanity, I cannot deny the possibility of the Nanaya child's influence turning him into a killer.

To prevent this from occurring, we must have him somewhere where we can keep an eye on him.

But we cannot allow him near the Tohno mansion either.
I should have him raised by an appropriate branch of the family.
Month x Day

.... The Tohno blood that has awakened within SHIKI.
Maybe it is because he was so close to death, but he has regained his sanity like before.
But I don't know if something will cause him to invert again.
Even though it tears me apart, I cannot allow SHIKI near the Tohno mansion either.
I place him in the care of a trusted servant.
Month x Day

I put my adopted son from the Nanaya family into the care of another branch of our family.
AKIHA hates me.
AKIHA has lost both of her brothers at the same time, so I suppose it is only natural.
Month X Day

I start to raise Akiha as the next head of the household.
AKIHA has more than enough talent to carry out her duties as the head of the household.
SHIKI may have the ability of "Immortality",
but Akiha has the power to "plunder."
(As siblings, both of them have the ability to share and take life energy.)
It is regretful.
If only she had been born ten years ago, I would have been able to eliminate the Nanayas without the help from the Kishimas.
But I have to be careful.
Her ability to "plunder" is a double-edged sword.
She might plunder someone's entire concept while plundering their heat.
Like me—I have to teach her how not to attract the curse of an enemy.
Month X Day

AKIHA tried to visit the Arima residence.
I cannot let her and my adopted son see each other.
I placed her in a boarding school so that her freedom is limited.
Month X Day

Recently, my condition has been getting worse.
It seems like the daughter of the Synchronizers is not enough now.
Month X Day

.... For the first time in a long time, I've come back to my self.
How many months has it been since I last picked up this pen?

There probably will not be a next time.
I will have to finish writing here.
I gave instructions for this to be given to my daughter AKIHA after my death.
I don't know if AKIHA will ever read this, but if she does read it, it is to be destroyed.
That is my only request for my daughter to fulfill.

"——What is this?"
The child adopted ten years ago.
I completely forgot about that.
.... I killed him?
That summer day eight years ago, when I received that wound.

.... He, killed me?
That summer day eight years ago, when I received this wound.
"——"
Nausea wells within me.
I feel sick.
That memory that I had forgotten until now runs through my head.

"——"
.... I understand.
Everything has been written down, so I have to accept it.
Besides, everything falls into place.
The reason I was adopted by the Arimas.
The reason I was disinherited as the eldest son.
It's nothing.
In other words, I—Shiki was only a replacement for the one named SHIKI.
"—What is, this?"
Cursing myself, I toss the journal to the side.
.... There's no need for me to investigate any further.
Staying here any longer is just a waste of my time.

—The day ends.

Collapsed on my bed, I just keep on thinking about the same thing.
.... Thinking calmly, there were only two things I found out from that journal.
That I am not a part of the Tohno family.
That the Nanaya lineage turns out a large number of killers.
I don't have any blood ties to Tohno Makihisa.
In other words, those dreams of murder have to be my own.
If that is the case, there's only one thing left to do.

—I hear voices coming from the lobby.

".... I wonder if Akiha is back."
I get up from bed.
I want to hear the truth from Akiha.

"——"

Gathering up my courage, I knock on the door.
"Akiha, I want to talk."
"Eh, Nii-san?
Please come in."
Her voice is bright and cheerful.
Taking a breath to compose myself, I open the door.



"It certainly is rare for you to come to my room like this, Nii-san."
Just like this morning, Akiha has a smile on her face.
Seeing that, I just stand there wordlessly, wanting to go back.
.... I guess after all,
I have felt that my self as Tohno Shiki and my sister, Tohno Akiha, are important to me.

—But still.
There is something I have to ask her.
"Akiha—"
"Yes, what is it Nii-san?"
Akiha appears to be looking forward to a fun conversation.

"——"

Gritting my teeth, I look her seriously in the eye.
"Please tell me about the Nanaya family.
I think I have a right to know."
"——"
In that instant, Akiha freezes like a puppet whose strings were cut.



"_____"

Akiha wordlessly stares at me.

"If you won't answer, then I'll rephrase my question.

My old man—Tohno Makihisa had two personalities, right?

And not just him.

Almost all members of the Tohno family have some sort of illness.

.... I used to think that's what I had.

But, that's wrong.

My anemia came from that incident eight years ago.

Because I."

"I know.

You were adopted by the Tohno family, right?"

Saying that,

she smiles for some reason.

"Akiha—?"

Akiha slowly and elegantly walks to the window as if she was in a play.

The curtains billow in the breeze.

Placing her hand on the window, she turns around.

"Nii-san, you were adopted by the Tohno family.

Your real name is Nanaya Shiki.

As you say, your health condition is due to that accident eight years ago.

You appear to know already that the members of the Tohno family are different

than most humans."

Akiha succinctly says the thing that I would have had the most difficulty asking.

".... Akiha.

That—"

"It is okay.

It was only a matter of time, and I did not like hiding it.

Now that you know, there is no need.

.... No, maybe there never was a need.

Then there's no need to put up with any of this."

"Is that not right, Nii-san?"

Akiha says this with her voice full of confidence.

"Akiha.

So like I thought, I—"

"Yes.

You are the one Father adopted ten years ago, but you do not remember it.

Do you remember the SHIKI who used to play with us?"

"—No.

I don't."

"That's right.

It is because Father hypnotized you."

"... SHIKI was someone who could not resist his Tohno blood.

You may not remember it, but that day eight years ago, you protected me from SHIKI.

You sacrificed yourself to protect me from the bloodthirsty SHIKI.

That is how you were killed by SHIKI and SHIKI was killed by Father.

It is the duty of the head of the Tohno household to dispose of those who are no longer human."

"...?"

Killed?

But I'm still alive, right?"

"—Yes.

By a miracle, you survived.

You remember what happened afterwards, right?

You were taken to a hospital and the day you returned, you were adopted by the Arima family.

That is when Father hypnotized you.

You were not fully healed so your heart and mind was weak.

So you easily believed what Father told you."

"... I see.

Then, that's enough.

If you understand, then there is no more need to talk.

I'm not a member of the Tohno family, right?

Then, you don't—have to force yourself to call me brother."

Soon.

Soon I, an outsider, should leave this place.

"... Don't get me wrong, Nii-san.

I do not call you Nii-san for the sake of society.

Do you not remember?

Even before you were killed by SHIKI, I called you Nii-san.

It had nothing to do with you being adopted.

I knew from the very beginning you were not my true brother.

And you accepted that too.

So—no matter what you think, you are Tohno Shiki.

So please stay here in this mansion."

Akiha's words make me happy.

But, I don't understand.

Why does she accept me, an outsider?

"—Why?

I'm not even your real brother."

".... Goodness, after I have said all this, you still do not understand?

You are the only one I will call Nii-san.

Even if you do not wish it, I just want you by my side.

Because, I love you, Nii-san."

"Wha——"

Akiha says something totally unbelievable.

I'm happy that she likes me as her brother.

But, as long as this situation remains—I can't be here.

".... No, I'm not the kind of person you think I am.

You see SHIKI as a killer, but I—I'm just a killer like him."

"A killer, what do you mean?"

"....."

I can't keep it a secret any longer.

Everything I did up until now—the dream I had last night, the bloodstains I can not explain, and that dream where Akiha killed me.

".... I can't trust myself.

I thought those were just dreams.

But my old man wrote that the Nanaya were a family that produced killers.

If I become like SHIKI, I don't know what I will do to you, Akiha."

I lay it all out to her from the bottom of my heart.

But, after blinking in surprise, she tries not to laugh.

"Wha, what's so funny?

This isn't a joke.

.... You may not believe me, but I really have dreams of sucking people's blood....!"

Akiha is still giggling.

.... What is this?

She makes me look stupid, worrying about all of this.

"Yeah, it is funny.

See, you can't be a vampire.

Because you are from the Nanaya family, your blood is only human.

Besides, the Nanayas are not killers.

.... Certainly from Father's point of view, they are, but the only ones that the Nanaya feel a homicidal impulse towards are nonhumans.

So what you saw had to be just dreams.

And even those dreams are probably SHIKI transmitting to you, so it isn't that you want to see them."

.... SHIKI transmitted them?

Come to think of it, my old man did write something about that.

SHIKI stole some of my life, so there is like a link between us.

".... I see.
Then who is killing on the streets right now?
Even if what I saw was just a dream, there are victims showing up on the streets
in reality—"

—The killer is real.
I feel like I've met him before.
Or was that a dream too?
No, putting that off to the side.
If there's a killer on the streets, then—
".... SHIKI is still alive....?"
"Eh?"
Akiha, who was just giggling until now, becomes serious.
"Akiha.
In my old man's journal, he wrote that SHIKI was still alive.
In other words—"
"Father's journal....?"
Akiha tilts her head, curious.
"My old man wrote that SHIKI and I were connected.
Then maybe what I saw were really his dreams."
.... No, it's more likely what he's actually doing.
".... That may be a possibility.
Father's death was suspicious, and it did seem like someone was being raised in
the underground cell."
".... Wait a minute, Akiha.
Do we have such a thing like an underground cell here?"
"Oh, of course.
There are a lot of members of the Tohno family who lose their sanity, so it is
only natural to lock them away before they can hurt the outside world, right?
Well, that isn't all it is used for.
When I got in trouble, Father would lock me up down there."
For some reason, Akiha sounds like she is having fun.
.... A chill runs down my spine.
".... I get it.
We'll stop talking about it.
We have to do something about SHIKI, though.
If SHIKI really is wandering the streets killing people, then we have to stop
him."
"Is that so?
We really do not have to concern ourselves about him, do we?
Is it not the job of the police to take care of killers?"
"Wha—Akiha, what are you saying?
He's killing people, but he is your brother.
He has to pay for his crime, but still—"
".... Goodness, Nii-san.
You are really too nice of a person."

Taking a breath, she brushes her hair back.
"You are my only relative.
I do not care about SHIKI, so you do not have to worry about him."
"No, we can't just do that.
Do you think the police can catch him so easily?
And before then, there will be more victims!"
"I will not do anything.
That is, not our responsibility."
She says this and looks me directly in the eye.
"Hey, let's not speak of these matters any longer.
Talking about murder and killers is boring, isn't it?"
"Wha—"
I try to tell her that it has to do with our family, but I can't.
.... Her eyes pierce into me deeply.
Staring at me like that, her eyes seem to take away my resolution.
"It seems you understand.
Well then, will you return to your room?
I just came back from school so there are things I have to do."
"—"
.... Like Akiha says, there isn't anything else to talk about.
Still not convinced, I turn away from her.

I go to leave her room.

—And all of a sudden,
from behind me, a voice tells me to stop.
".... What is it?
Aren't we done talking Akiha?"



"——"

Akiha stares at me silently.
"—Nii-san.

You are the most important thing to me.
If I had lost my memories of you over these eight years, I would not be who I
am.

.... Because you were here, I was able to be myself.
You are more important to me than myself, so I wanted you to like me, always."
True sincerity.
Akiha looks at me like I'm the only thing she sees.
"But that is just a selfish request, right?
This family and I are just a burden to you.
That is why I always feared that you would distance yourself from me.



But that's just me worrying, right?
Because you came back here.
Because you came back for my sake."

She says happily.
.... Seeing her smile, my chest hurts.
" That's right.
I came back because I could not leave you alone here.
But now, I'm beginning to think I was wrong."
I did come back because I wanted to watch over her.
But, she's wrong.
Her eyes are so sincere that I can't lie.
"But, Akiha.
That isn't the only reason why I came back.
I—"

I came back for the sake of the child I made a promise with.
That is something that's even more precious than my feelings towards Akiha,
and something I can't lie about.



"Stop it.
I do not want to hear it.
You came back, so that is that.
So anything else—such as your feelings, I do not need."

She looks away.
Akiha looking down like that just—for no real reason, seems very dangerous.
"Go back to your room.
Please do not look like that in front of me, Nii-san."
"....."
Not knowing what to say, I silently leave her room.

The night wears on, and it's almost midnight.
It's already way past the time I would usually go to sleep.
I lie down and look up at the moon through the window.
"....."
The night goes by without me sleeping.
It isn't that I'm scared of seeing another dream of murder.
The killer SHIKI wandering the streets.
The somehow dangerous looking Akiha.
Thinking of that, I cannot sleep and just look up at the moon.
"..... I'm so thirsty."
The last time I drank anything was about four hours ago at dinner.
I don't want to endure it, so I go to the kitchen to get something to drink.

I down a cup of water in one gulp.
Why is it so delicious?
"... That's odd.
I was just thirsty."
The sensation of fluid going down my throat is just like it was last night in my dream.
"Hm....?"
Someone's coming."
I can hear the footsteps coming closer.
Soft, small footsteps that barely echo in the deep night.



"... Shiki-sama?
What are you doing this late at night?"
"Hisui?
I was just thirsty so I thought I'd get something to drink."



"Shiki-sama.
If that is the case, please call for me.
At night, you should be resting in your room.
... Walking around here at night is not good."
Hisui speaks plainly.
"....?"
There's something wrong with her words.
Telling me it's not good to walk around at night means she's telling me not to
get out of my room at night.
... No, more than that.
Hisui and Kohaku-san have worked here since they were very young.
So—it would not be strange for them to know that I was adopted.

"... Hisui.
There is something that I want to ask.
Is it okay?"



"Yes.
If that is the case, then let us go back to your room.
This is not somewhere to be having a conversation."
"No, this is fine.
It is just something small, anyway."
"___?"
Hisui tilts her head.
"....."
I take a deep breath.
If she doesn't know, then asking her will be revealing a secret.
But, I don't intend to hide it anyway.
"I'll make it short.
Did you know that I was adopted?"
"____"
Her shoulder shakes.
.... That tells me that she did know.
".... I see.
If you know, then Kohaku-san must know too.
What's this?
This really isn't a secret after all."
"Shiki-sama, that is—"



She says that as she lowers her eyes.
".... I am so very sorry.
Even if you are adopted, there is no doubt that you are the eldest son of the

Tohno family.

Akiha-sama accepts you as her relative and you are mine and Nee-san's master."

".... Thanks.

If you say that, then I believe that I can stay here."



"Shiki-sama.... Please do not say things like that.

This really is your true home."

"I know.

That's what I think too.

Even though it was for a short while, what happened here when I was a child is very important to me.

I can't throw it away."



Hisui looks visibly relieved.

".... But I still want to know.

Before I came here, um.... it was Nanaya..?

If you know, could you tell me what kind of child I was?"

".... I am sorry.

Other than that you were the eldest son of the Nanaya line, I do not know.

Makihisa-sama completely destroyed all the records."

.... I see.

Well, if he made me act as Tohno Shiki, then all the records of me as Nanaya Shiki probably were destroyed.



"But Shiki-sama, Nee-san may know something."

"Huh...?"

Hisui, why would Kohaku-san know anything?"

"Nee-san took care of Makihisa-sama ever since she was young.

She may know more about the Tohno family than even Akiha-sama does."

".....?"

Come to think of it, Kohaku-san did say that she was Makihisa's servant.

But I thought that was just to take care of his condition once in a while.

... I didn't realize she was his servant from that young of an age.

"... That Kohaku-san?"

... Since she played with us everyday, I just can't picture her being near my old man all the time——"

... To be honest, Hisui seems like she was more suited for that.

Always looking down at me, Akiha, and Kohaku-san from the inside of the mansion.

"... Is that true?"

But that's odd.

Why would my old man tell Kohaku-san all the things he would not even tell Akiha?"

"No, I do not think he told her directly.

Since Nee-san was always near Makihisa-sama's room in the mansion, I believe she had many chances to overhear Makihisa-sama thinking out loud."

"——Always near my old man?"

But.

But that's what Hisui, who stayed in the mansion all the time, did—

"Wait.

Kohaku-san was always with my old man as a child?"



"Ah—"



Hisui looks down.

—Something just went wrong here.

The feeling of inconsistency comes back and everything falls back into place.
Kohaku-san knew about the promise that only Hisui should know about.
Hisui forgot about the promise made eight years ago.
But it might just be..
That I just reversed their roles in my memory.
If that's true then—
"... Hisui.
I'll ask one more time, but do you remember about eight years ago?"



"—Yes.

About how I gave you that ribbon, right?"

"... That's right.

After I left my room, you stopped me by the entrance and gave me a ribbon.

Do you remember what color it was?"

"It was white, but what about it?"

There is nothing wrong with her answer.

But, she is already wrong.

"——"

Thud.

The power drains from my legs and I collapse onto the chair.

"—How—"

How could I have been so wrong up until now?



"Shiki-sama....?"

"—That's wrong Hisui.

I was given the ribbon under that tree in the garden.

Not by the entrance."

"——"

Hisui gasps and falls into silence.

"Why—"

I don't get it.

Why did Kohaku-san try to trick me?

Why—why didn't she just tell me that she was the one I made the promise with?



"Shiki-sama—please do not tell Nee-san about this.
If she finds out, she will have nowhere else to go."
All of a sudden,
Hisui says this.
"If she finds out that I knew you two changed places?"
She silently nods.
"... Then it was you who played with us, and Kohaku-san—was the one in the
mansion, right?"
She silently nods.
"Why....?"
Why did you act like you traded places?
There's no point.
Or were you guys playing around with me?"



"It was not our intent to deceive you, Shiki-sama.
We cannot even fully describe it ourselves how it came to be."
"... It started eight years ago.
After you were adopted by the Arima family, I think I just became calmer than
before.
Nee-san tried to cheer me up by acting very happy, and then, we gradually
traded our roles."
"But why... why did it happen....?"
Hisui.... you were always so energetic."
"... That is not true.
I am naturally not active.

But when you were there, I tried to follow you as hard as I could."
"_____."

.... Yeah, I remember.
That girl who was always cheerful, always smiling.
The most free-spirited, who would always worry over us, who put up with the most, who acted like Kohaku-san would, if she was younger.

".... Really?
I think you would be cheerful even if I wasn't there.
That was your character.
Trust me since I, the one who followed after you, am saying this."



".... Yes.
Those days were very fun.
I think those were the best two years of my life."



"But something crumbled after you left, Shiki-sama.
Akiha-sama started to hate Makihisa-sama, and Makihisa-sama became very strict with Nee-san.
The happy days were then over.
I gradually became very quiet and could not even work anymore."
"So Nee-san took over for me.
Smiling like I always used to, running around like I used to.
In turn, I took over Nee-san's old role."

.... That was the easiest for me.
At the same time, it fulfilled Nee-san's only wish."
".... Kohaku-san's wish....?"
I don't understand what she said.
Only that Hisui really thinks about Kohaku-san.
That is the only thing I could feel.
"Hisui.
What do you mean by her wish?"



".... Nee-san always wanted to be like me.
But for my sake, she held back.
I think it is just an act for her to work in my place.
She pretends to be me and kills her own will.
She is just a doll that only acts like a 'Hisui from the past'."



".... I was scared of that Nee-san.
Nee-san lost her identity and I realized that she was just living by acting out
someone's role.
.... I think that if I go back to my old self, Nee-san will return to her old, true
self.
.... Nee-san said this when we first traded places."

It's okay, Hisui-chan.
Until you become cheerful again, I will take your place.
So no matter when, once you are cheerful again, I will give you back your role.



"—I was scared of those words and I thought that I should return to my self right away.
... But then, by accident, I saw her walking around happily in the garden.



... Nee-san really looked happy.
... I did not know I looked that way back then, but she really was happy.
And all she was doing was walking by herself."
"Nee-san was only pretending to be 'Hisui'.
Even still, she looked so happy.
So—Nee-san just does not realize it, but I understood that Nee-san always wanted to be like that.
I just could not destroy that."

... Biting her lip, Hisui holds back her tears in silence.



"... Shiki-sama.

Please let Nee-san stay the way she is.

... If you do not, she will lose her place."

... I can only nod to her words.

But that definitely is not the correct choice.

Kohaku-san has to pretend to be the Hisui from the past, and Hisui has to pretend to be the Kohaku-san from the past to protect that.

—Hisui has been watching Kohaku-san who only knows how to live a lie, but still says she will live with her.

That—has to be so difficult.



"Shiki-sama.

Please promise me that you will not say anything to Nee-san."

"... Fine.

But, Hisui, are you okay with this?"

"....."

Hisui doesn't answer.

... Full of conflicting emotions, I get up from the chair.

All I can do is leave the downcast Hisui behind in the kitchen.

"——?"

Going back to my room, I notice that the door is open.

"... Did someone go outside?"

... Hisui must still be in the kitchen.

That means that it's either Kohaku-san or Akiha.

"....."

To be honest, I want to sleep.

My body and my heart are tired; I feel like I could collapse if I don't sleep.

Just tonight.

I feel like if I don't sleep, I'll break.

I should—

Go look outside.

turn to **402**

Just go back to my room.

turn to **403**

—I should check it out.

I go outside.
The previously present moon is now obscured by clouds.

"Hm.....?"
Someone is opening the front gate.
I start to say something,
"..... Akiha?"
Akiha looks quickly over her shoulder and exits the gate.

"Eh—?"
Thump.
Out of nowhere, my chest starts to pound.

Thump.
THUMP.
Thump.
THUMP.

My heart seems to pulse with new life.
I can feel the blood coursing through my body, and the shaking of my fingers.
"Ah—"
A chill runs down my back.
Despite that, my body feels like it's on fire.

"Akiha—what is she doing this late?—"
I feel dizzy.
I try to sort things out rationally, but I stop.
Right now, I have to follow Akiha.

"Haa—"
Stiffing my breath, I follow after her.
Thump, Thump.
My beating heart.
I follow her quietly to avoid being noticed.
Thump, thump, thump.
I feel regret.
I don't have my knife tonight.

There's no moonlight and it's now midnight.
There isn't a sign of anyone else on the streets.

Thump,
Thump.
Akiha walks unsteadily.
I try to silence my breathing and await my chance.

Thump,
Thump.
It's taking her a while to be alone.
Where she's going is trivial.

Thump,
Thump.
I'm terribly thirsty.
I'm incredibly excited.

Thump,
Thump, thump.

—All of a sudden, I lose sight of her.
Where'd she go?

I return to the main street.
I feel instinctively that I'll see her again if I wait here.

I let out a deep breath.
My heart is still burning.
"_____"
That's odd.
This isn't a dream.
This isn't a dream, then why—is my blood burning as I'm following Akiha?

It's like, I want to kill Akiha.

Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump
Thump

Sensing something, I instantly conceal myself.
Akiha is coming.
She looks around from side to side, as if searching for something.

"..... There isn't anyone here, I guess."

I hear her thinking aloud.
I must be that close if I can hear her.
Peering from the shadows, I look out into the street.



"__"

My head aches.
The air around me tenses.

—I collapse to the ground.

I've never felt such pain before.
It's so bad it makes me seriously think my skull just split open and I'm going to die.

"Ah—ouch....."
Shaking my head, I stand up.
I don't know how long I was out, but the night is quiet.

—Wait a minute.

"Wh, why am I here!?"
I am out on the main street.
I saw Akiha by the gate, and after that—that's right, I followed her.
".... What am I doing?"
I'm surprised at what I'm doing.
"—Huh?"
An unpleasant smell pricks at my nose.

A smell I've never known until now.
The smell that stuck to my mouth during my dreams these past few days.
"... From that alley...?"
Getting a bad feeling, I run towards that alley.

—It's like a rehash of my dream last night.

In the alley there is a collapsed stranger.
Despite the blood flowing from the neck, the person is still breathing.
"_____"

Everything before me turns crimson.
But this isn't a dream.
Maybe it's because I've had all those dreams of murder, but I can think calmly.

I go out to the street.
I go to the nearest public phone and call the nearest hospital.
After giving a fake name, I tell the location and condition of the victim, and I hang up the phone.
Now, before the ambulance comes, I should head back to the mansion so no one sees me.

pant *pant* *pant*—
After running without stopping, I can finally relax.
I don't have anything to feel bad about, but I felt that getting involved would be dangerous, and I did the best I could.
.... The person in the alley was still breathing,
and the bleeding wasn't that bad, so I don't think it was life-threatening.

"Ah—"
.... As expected, running here with all my strength, including up the big hill, was a little much.
I'm completely out of breath.

"Cra—"
.... Dizziness assails me.
I can feel my consciousness withdrawing.
This isn't a normal dizziness.
If it's this bad, if I collapse, I won't be able to get back up for a while.

"Damn..... I have to, get back, to my room, before—"
I lean up against the stairs.
I manage to take one step up the stairs.

That's it though.
I collapse.

Strong rays of sunshine cause me to open my eyes.
I'm in my room.
I'm now wearing my pajamas and lying in bed.

"Excuse me."
With a knock, the door opens.
Kohaku-san enters carrying a towel and a bucket.



"Ah, good morning Shiki-san.
How are you feeling?"
Kohaku-san draws near with her normal smile.
"____"

I think back to last night's conversation with Hisui.
Tucking that away into the back of my mind, I try to make my usual smile.
"Morning Kohaku-san.
Um—did you carry me up here?"



"Huh?
Don't you remember Shiki-san?
I found you alone on the stairs and you stood up once I called you.
You said you had a nice nap and started to walk.
I did lend you my shoulder, but you walked here by yourself."
..... *sigh*
"I don't remember.
I must've been so tired that I forgot what I did."

"So you don't remember anything about last night?"

".... Maybe.

I don't remember anything after I came back to the mansion."



"Ahaha.

That's unfortunate.

Shiki-san, you kept apologizing to me.

I inquired why you kept apologizing, and you kept saying that you were an idiot and a blockhead.



Shiki-san, are you a blockhead?"

"No, I don't think so."

.... Well, I am really starting to get the idea that they think my brain is made out of wood.

".... Anyway, thanks a lot.

If I slept on the stairs, I'd have caught a cold, and school—"

Huh?

Are my eyes playing tricks on me?

The clock tells me it is already past ten in the morning.

"Ah—!

Ko, Kohaku-san, School!"



"Yes.
 Today is your school's founding holiday, so you don't have school."
 "_____"
 That's right.
 Come to think of it, it was.
 I completely forgot about it since I have been spacing out at school lately.
 "Well, I should get up anyway.
 If I sleep any longer Akiha will—"
 I sit up on my bed.
 "Huh—I can't really."
 My body won't move.
 I try to get up with my arms, but they have no strength.



"It seems your condition is still bad.
 You have a slight fever and you look a little pale.
 It may be boring, but please rest in bed today, Shiki-san."

Kohaku-san wipes my forehead with the cold, wet towel.
 It feels good and cold.
 "Hmm, it seems your fever is down.
 You're not sweating as much and your face looks much better.
 You should be well by the evening."
 Kohaku-san crisply brings out a thermometer and an ice pillow.
 In the end, she makes me open my mouth and checks the condition of my tongue.



"Well, I'll bring you some rice porridge right away.
Shiki-san, you better behave today."

"Ah—Kohaku-san."



"Yes?"

"What is it, Shiki-san?"

.... As expected, she is like always.

Her usual cheerful smile doesn't change.

I—I can't bring myself to think that her smile is just an act.

".... Nothing.

I'm looking forward to the rice porridge."



"Yes, well then, excuse me."

Kohaku-san disappears down the hall, her footsteps padding after her.
I just stare at that figure silently.

Noon arrives.
After bringing the food, Kohaku-san went back to her duties.
..... *sigh*
Being alone, I let out a sigh as I think of my strange circumstances.
.... Myself being adopted.
.... Akiha saying that she doesn't care about it.
.... Hisui and Kohaku-san.
.... And the killer that's still on the loose.
I asked Kohaku-san, but it doesn't seem like there was a new victim in the news today.
I guess last night's victim was saved, but while SHIKI is on the loose, there will be more victims.
".... If only this body did what I told it to, I—"
I could stop SHIKI.
I lay my head back down on the pillow as I start to say that.
Maybe it's because I've been seeing those dreams, but I'm beginning to have violent thoughts like SHIKI.
".... Whatever I do, I should heal up first."
I close my eyes.
turn to **404**

403

—I should go back to my room.

Hisui's words echo inside my head.
My leaden body weakens more, weighed down by those chains.

"....."

I try to go up the stairs and my body stops.
.... My legs can't go far up enough.
It looks like I can only walk.

"..... What is this?"

.... Oh well.

I should go back to the kitchen to ask Hisui to lend me her shoulder—

"H—uh?"

I start to go back and collapse on the carpet.

"—H, hey."

I can't even shout.

I exhaust myself crawling on my arms.

Clomp, clomp.

I hear footsteps.

Hisui comes from the kitchen.

.... I'm saved.

Now Hisui can help me out—

Clomp-clomp, clomp-clomp, clomp.

"..... No way."

Crawling away from the stairs backfired.

I have hidden myself in the shadows and Hisui goes up the stairs without even noticing me.

"..... That was incredibly stupid of me."

As soon as I voice my thoughts, something catches my attention.
The feeling of something close to me.

"———!"

I look behind me as I'm lying on the ground.

Over there,
a ghost-like figure.

"———"

Then I really realize my situation.

I can't move.

I can't even call out.

The dark mansion.
 That "someone" looks at me as if staring at its prey.
 Under all these conditions, it's no surprise if I die here.
 This situation seems like such a bad horror movie that I almost start to laugh
 instead of being scared.

"..... Ha, haha."
 That "someone" takes a step towards me.
 Is it fear of being killed?
 My dizziness starts to increase.

"———"
 The presence stops.
 It looks down at me and my defenseless back—

"Shiki-san, if you sleep there, you will catch a cold you know."

—and throws me those cheerful words.

"..... Kohaku, san?"
 "Yes, it is me.
 What is it?"
 I let my tension go.
 "Shiki-san?"
 Really, just what exactly are you doing lying down like that?"
 Her voice is really cheerful.
 With that, I relaxed, and I—

completely overwhelmed by dizziness, my consciousness shuts down.

Strong rays of sunshine cause me to open my eyes.
 I'm in my room.
 I am now wearing my pajamas and lying in bed.
 "———That's right, last night."
 I collapsed in the lobby last night.
 Hisui did not realize I was there and Kohaku-san heard something and came.
 "... That means that Akiha was the one that left."
 Probably.
 Akiha always had a strong sense of responsibility, so she must have gone looking
 for SHIKI on the streets.
 " Akiha.
 I told her to leave him to me...."

"Excuse me."
 With a knock, the door opens.
 Kohaku-san enters carrying a towel and a bucket.



"Ah, good morning Shiki-san.

How are you feeling?"

Kohaku-san draws near with her normal smile.

"——"

I think back to last night's conversation with Hisui.

Tucking that away into the back of my mind, I try to make my usual smile.

"Mornin', Kohaku-san.

Um—did you carry me up here after last night?"



"Huh?"

Do you not remember Shiki-san?

I found you collapsed in the lobby and you stood up once I called you.

You said you had a nice nap and started to walk.

I did lend you my shoulder, but you walked here by yourself."

"..... Oh.

I don't even remember it.

I must have been so tired that I forgot what I did."

"So you don't remember anything about last night?"

".... Maybe.

I remember being in the kitchen——"

.... And hearing about Hisui and Kohaku-san's connection.



"Ahaha.
That is unfortunate.
Shiki-san, you kept apologizing to me.
I inquired why you kept apologizing, and you kept saying that you were an idiot
and a blockhead.
Shiki-san, are you a blockhead?"
"No, I don't think so."
.... Well, I am really starting to get the idea that they think my brain is made
out of wood.

".... Anyway, thanks a lot.
If I slept on the stairs, I'd have caught a cold, and school—"
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Noon arrives.
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 *sigh*
 Being alone, I let out a sigh as I think of my strange circumstances.
 Myself being adopted.
 Akiha saying that she doesn't care about it.
 Hisui and Kohaku-san.
 And the killer that's still on the loose.
 I asked Kohaku-san, but it doesn't seem like there was a new victim in the news today.
 But as long as SHIKI is still on the loose, there will be more victims.
 ".... If only this body did what I told it to, I—"

I could stop SHIKI.

I lay my head back down on the pillow as I start to say that.

Maybe it's because I've been seeing those dreams, but I'm beginning to have violent thoughts like SHIKI.

"... Whatever I do, I should heal up first."

I close my eyes.

turn to **404**

404

Was I this tired all along?
My energy just drains from me and I feel sleepiness overcome me.

.... I can hear my pulse in my ears.
Thump, Thump, Thump, Thump.
It echoes inside my whole body noisily and jerks me away from dozing off.

"Ho..... t."
I'm thirsty again.
My throat is dry, my mind is foggy.

I open my eyes.
My body still feels sluggish and my fever has slightly increased.
But still, I should be able to at least go to the dining room and get some water.

The hallway is empty.
A long time ago.
So long ago I don't remember or something I don't need to remember.... this place is quiet like ruins you might see in a movie.

Hot.
The sunlight is hot.
I just want some water, so why?
Something compels my legs to move.

.... It seems like the detached building is bathed in sunlight.
Completely, like I'm in a hot desert, my vision dims, white.

.... Thud.
I hear a noise.
.... It's from this detached house.
.... Someone.
.... Is there someone in there?

Opening the sliding door very slightly, I peer in from the porch.
Inside, I see the figures of Akiha and Kohaku.
They look a little strange.
I hear the swishing of an obi being removed.

—What?

Without a word, Kohaku-san pulls down her kimono and bares her breasts.

Kohaku stands there with a blushing face, but does not move.
Akiha presses her lips against the bared white chest.

Tension.

Kohaku looks down at her bare chest, and Akiha crouches so that she is burying her face in Kohaku's breasts.
A thin red drop makes a line down her breast.
Akiha's throat starts to move, swallowing something.
What—what is she drinking?
There's no need to ask; I already understand.

Akiha, she's drinking, Kohaku's blood—

"——"

Time itself seems to freeze.
My entire body pulses and I feel inside-out.
My heart doesn't even beat.
It ticks like it was a machine.
My very cells have been transformed.

—My bodily functions have quieted like a still lake.
All I can do is move my head and process what I see.
Akiha.
Bewilderment fills my world.
Is Akiha a vampire, too?
"... Akiha, sama."
Kohaku's lips tremble.
"... Please, stop.
If you take any more, it will be bad for you.
Just like overdosing on medicine, getting too used to blood would cause you—"
"You want to say I will be like SHIKI?
That is strange, Kohaku.
You don't want that?"
Her eyes are filled with enjoyment.
"....."
Kohaku doesn't answer.
"That is fine, I didn't like Father, either.
He was pure evil.
Just thinking he was my real father made even me want to kill him.
Right?
Succumbing to his blood and forcing his passions on you when you were still a child.
Every, every day, he would do those disgraceful assaults without end.
So, Kohaku.

I already know that you have a grudge against me and SHIKI."
 "... Why?
 You know all that and still drink my blood?"
 "Of course.
 I know it can't be helped that you have a grudge against me, but I still like you.
 So whatever you do, I will forgive you.
 Unless, you mess with what's most important to me, that is."
 With a smile, Akiha licks Kohaku's nipple.
 With a sudden jerk.
 Shaking her shoulders, Kohaku stifles a gasp.
 "... No, stop, Akiha-sama.... If you drink more blood than usual, really—"
 "No need to worry.
 I won't become like Nii-san.
 To me, sucking blood is just for pleasure.
 It won't destroy me like it did SHIKI.
 But then—it would make you happy if it did."
 "....."
 Kohaku doesn't answer.
 She only narrows her eyes, not affirming or denying it.

Akiha's red tongue slides along Kohaku's white skin.
 Akiha clinches her nails against Kohaku's breast.
 Slice.
 They break the surface of the skin and ruby drops of blood appear.
 _____, _____.

Chikichiki.
 Chikichiki.

My heart rumbles.
 My will has gone to a far off place.
 Thump, Thump.
 Commanding me to kill.
 Kill.

".... Akiha-sama.
 Why did SHIKI-sama want so much blood?
 My blood was enough for him to stay alive."
 "Yes, your blood was enough for him.
 As a Synchronizer, your blood is more efficient and tasty.
 But, reproduction and sucking blood are different.
 It isn't just that there needs to be a lot of blood.
 Everyone's blood has a different taste.
 To something that has become accustomed to sucking blood, different flavors
 are desired."
 "There is—no limit?"

"Yes.

But this is more like a hobby, so if your will is strong enough, you can quit.

If you want delicious blood, it is easy to obtain some.

.... Really, SHIKI and I just need the blood of one person."

—Am I entranced?

Just looking at Akiha sipping the blood, I can't even breathe.

Chikichiki.

Chikichiki.

Pain.

If it hurts so much, I might mistakenly....

kill to be, free, of, this, pain.

".... Just the blood of one person?"

"Yes.

For SHIKI, it may have been mine.

That is why he never came here.

.... If he did that, the fun game would have been over."

"Yes, over completely.

If you drink what would for you be the best blood, there would be nothing left afterwards.

I would kill the one I love the most, and drink up even their life.

After that, the only thing left would be emptiness."

Akiha tightens her fingers around Kohaku's body.

Kohaku closes her eyes and endures Akiha's actions.

".... That is why I will never go after the thing I want the most.

If there is a time for me to do that, then that is..."

—After finding out that it will never become mine.

Akiha and Kohaku collapse together.

Rustle, rustle.

Her red hair fills the room like a waterfall.

"Ha—ah."

ghting back nausea, I escape with blood-shot eyes.

The dizziness threatens to overpower me.

What—what was she saying?

Chiki.
 Sucking blood.
 Just like SHIKI, and joking with Kohaku as she sucked her blood.
 Her red hair.
 Kohaku.
 Kohaku.
 Kohaku-san.
 Disgracefully assaulted, by Makihisa.

Chikichiki.

My head is pounding.
 My heart is still wild.
 Akiha.
 I saw Akiha drinking Kohaku's blood and I thought it was beautiful.

Chikichikichikichiki.
 Crimson hair.
 A vermilion spider web.
 Freakishly scarlet like the wings of a poisonous moth, the very color of evil.
 Excessively beautiful, excessively poisonous.

Therefore—I am ruled by this strange feeling.
 Underneath the brilliant sun, I walk through the woods.

Chikichiki.
 Chikichiki.
 Chikichiki.
 "—Shut, up—"
 The incessant racket does not stop.
 Chikichiki.
 The unnatural sounds.
 I can hear them coming from behind me.

Leaning my back against the wall, I catch my breath.
 I can't control myself.
 Just what's different between SHIKI and the way I am now?
 No.
 That isn't really important.
 Why—why couldn't I understand her?

"——Kohaku, san——"
 The word in Makihisa's journal.
 The word "Synchronizer".
 Kohaku and Hisui weren't adopted, they were just brought here as tools.
 The meaning.
 I didn't know the meaning of what it meant by being Makihisa's servant.
 I didn't even try to understand.

—Every, every day, without end—

Akiha said that.
 I don't have to think too hard about what Makihisa did.
 If Makihisa was subject to the same violent urges as me, I understand all too clearly what he must have done.

—Always.
 That girl was always by the window.
 Not knowing how to leave, or even how to beg for help.

Makihisa had no sympathy for Kohaku still being a little girl.
 It was written in the journal.
 Makihisa only saw Kohaku as a tool.
 Just like a child.
 Placing all his emotions onto her.

—That girl would perpetually just stare at us while we played in the garden.

I can't condemn Makihisa.
 I also tortured her, more than Makihisa.

Hisui said it.
 That Kohaku-san always wanted to become "Hisui".
 "——"

I can't even imagine it.
 That girl being locked in the mansion ever since childhood.
 Looking down at us playing behind that clear wall of a window every day.

Despite this,
 she gave me something important to her as I left.

After that.
For the sake of her younger sister, she began smiling in her own play.

—A terrible farce.

.... Only, inside the play even she knows is a lie, all she can do is laugh?
"——What——"

What a terrible thing I've done.
.... Thinking that Kohaku-san was Hisui, I've spoke to her about my memories of the past.
The day of the welcome party.
While cooking with Kohaku-san, I spoke so happily about memories with Hisui.

—She said she didn't feel pain when she cut her finger.
"——Foolish."

.... My chest constricts.
I can't breathe.
My self that wants to kill Akiha.
My self that couldn't even understand what was going on.

"Sorry——sorry, Kohaku-san——"

My consciousness wavers.
My body enters a stupor.
For the first time,
I want to kill myself using my ability.

"Akiha-sama, won't you call a doctor?"
"That is pointless.
He isn't sick.
He won't get better unless we take away what's causing it."
.... Akiha and Hisui are talking.
This is SHIKI's room.
It looks like I am sleeping on the bed.
I try to get out of bed, but I can't move at all.
My body is heavy like lead.
All I can move freely are my mouth and eyes.
For an instant,
I think I am still dreaming.



"You failed, Hisui.
I told you to pay attention to Nii-san today, right?
I can't even trust you to take care of Nii-san like this."



"I am..... very sorry."



"If you want to apologize, apologize to Nii-san.
Apologizing to me will just make me angry."



.... I don't understand why they're like that.
But I understand that Hisui is being scolded because of me.



".... Akiha-sama.
I cannot help Shiki-sama if he collapses.
Please give Nee-san my duty."



".... That won't do.
I can't let Kohaku near Nii-san.
You shouldn't, either.
Be with Kohaku every time she's here and never let her alone with Nii-san."



"But Akiha-sama, Shiki-sama's condition is getting worse.
If he does not receive medicine from Nee-san, he will not even be able to stand."



".... That is true.
But, that's better for me."
Akiha murmurs this as she ponders.
"Hisui, tell Nii-san to skip school for a few days when he wakes.
He has not been well the past few days, so do not let him out of the room until
he gets better.
I will contact his school."

.... I can no longer see Akiha's figure.
A subdued Hisui is the only one in the room.



".... Shiki-sama, are you awake?"

.... I'm surprised.
Akiha didn't even realize it, but Hisui must have known I was awake.
".... Yeah, I woke up just a little bit ago.
.... Sorry.
Because of me, Akiha was mad at you."



"No, it was only natural for her to be angry.
I did not realize that you had collapsed, Shiki-sama."
"—Geez.
I'm used to it.
And what's with Akiha wanting me to skip school?
I'm fine, so I don't really need intensive care or anything."



".... Shiki-sama.
About that, can you not do as she tells you to do?"
"Huh?
You mean not going to school tomorrow?"
Hisui nods.
She looks as if she is not worried about being scolded by Akiha.
Rather, she is really concerned over me.
"Oo——"
I can't say no to those eyes.
"..... I understand.
I'll rest from school tomorrow, is that acceptable?"



Hisui gives a weak, apologetic smile.
 "... Well then, please excuse me.
 If anything happens, please call for me."

—Hisui disappears with a bow.
 The instant I become alone, sleepiness assails me.
 "—"

In all seriousness, there does seem to be something wrong with my body.
 I'm trying to stay awake, but it's no use.
 Staring at the pattern on the ceiling, I easily fall asleep—

—Why is there this much sadness?

I don't understand the reason.
 Whatever happens to anyone, it is their fate.
 It's not something that I can receive as a stranger.
 Neither pain, nor happiness, nor feelings, nor flesh.
 It's not that I'm sad.

—So why this relentless regret?

Even though I never knew about that girl.
 Even though I only looked at her now.
 For me, there isn't a connection between the two.
 So why?
 After thinking of the past I did not see until now, why does my chest feel like
 it is tearing apart?

—Hey, I wonder what is the most miserable?

That moonlit night.
 The killer I happened to meet that one night asked that question.
 That was just one of the many, rambling and meaningless scenes.

.... And how did I respond?

Sadness is easy to see and happiness is hard to understand.

To find miserable situations, you have to look way down.
If being miserable is living a life so painful and full of suffering that makes you wish you were dead, then it would mean that it was better if you were never born.

—As for me,
I thought the saddest thing was to never have been born.

After I said that, the killer laughed.
After laughing so hard, he said something along the lines that I was really a nice guy.

—What is misery?
Not even realizing your misery and mistaking it for happiness, I think.
I remember nodding to that.
That really can't be helped.
Not being able to think that you're miserable.
The only thing that is granted to them will be that sympathy is meaningless.
Believing the illusion that she's happy, she will live a laughable life.

As a stranger that can't feel her pain,
I agreed that kind of misery was the worst.

"——"

I slowly wake up for no apparent reason.
The combination of the cool breeze and the sunlight streaming from the window feels great.
The weather is simply exquisite.
It's not the kind of weather to spend all day in bed.
I lift my upper body.

"Aww—still no good."

My arms are still sluggish.
It's not like I can't stand up, but I probably won't be able to walk.

I hear the gentle rhythm of knocking.



"Please excuse me, Shiki-sama.
How are you feeling?"
"Ah, I feel fine.
I bet I'll be able to move by evening."
.... I kind of remember saying that last night, but it should be fine this time.



".... Shiki-sama.
May I ask you a question?"
"Hm?"
"What is it?"
"Shiki-sama, while you were living with the Arima family, did you ever collapse like this before?"
Hisui's voice is weak.
.... She's seems to be worrying that my declining condition is due to me coming back here.
"You don't need to feel responsible, Hisui.
This happened to me while I lived with the Arimas.
.... Well, maybe once a year during middle school, but that stopped once I entered high school.
But, I was ready thinking that if it was going to come, it should be pretty soon."
"And did you recover quickly at those times?"
"In a day or two, so it's not a big deal.
You act like I have some serious illness or something."



"..... Shiki-sama, I think it is a serious illness.
I have heard that you have anemia, but nothing like this.
Have you never thought that your body was strange?"
"Ahaha.
My doctor always says my body is just totally weird.
Come to think of it, collapsing like this and recovering so quickly, I could say
my strength is much more amazing than most people's."



"....."
.... Ah.
I tried to laugh it off and made her angry.



"Shiki-sama.
People whose strength is much more amazing do not have many fevers during
the night.

Do you remember how many times you had a fever last night?"

"Eh—I, did something happen?"

".... It was last night.

As soon as you fell asleep, you had a fever.

You began to sweat profusely and I had to come check on you every hour."

—If I do say so myself, that's amazing.

It is amazing, but I am a bit embarrassed to have been such a burden to her.

".... Huh?

Come to think of it, these are different pajamas then I wore last night.

Hisui.... did Kohaku-san change my clothes?"

"No, Akiha-sama did it herself.

Last night, Akiha-sama and I took turns caring for you.

After you calmed down this morning, Akiha-sama returned to her room."

"—Akiha did?"

As I blurt this out, I flash back to what I saw yesterday.

—Akiha, who was sucking Kohaku-san's blood.

Akiha, who was yelling at Hisui.

"Shiki-sama...?"

I vaguely hear Hisui's voice.

Maybe I showed my tension on my face.

"Um—it's nothing.... I see, Akiha took care of me, huh."



"Yes.

She would come every hour and take care of you.

.... Um, since I was unable to contact you physically, it was very fortunate that Akiha-sama came."

"——"

.... How stupid of me.

Akiha was so worried about me, but what did I think about her?

".... Thanks, Hisui.

Please tell Akiha thanks, too."



"Yes.

Well then, Shiki-sama, I will bring you breakfast, so please wait a moment."

Hisui leaves the room and I lift myself up.

Leaning my back against the wall, I take a deep breath.

.... My body has gotten a little better and the weather outside is excellent.

To add to that, I am truly happy that Hisui and Akiha took care of me last night.

Still, I feel down.

".... I haven't seen Kohaku-san since yesterday."

I know that if I see her face, I won't be able to talk to her normally.

But still, I just want to see her face.

It passes noon and the sun starts its dip from the top of the sky.

My condition does not improve, but it doesn't get worse either.

Not knowing what to do, I just stare out the window.

"——"

Even though I try not to think, one person pops into my mind.

I know the killer SHIKI has to be dealt with, but I'm thinking of Kohaku-san—

A solid knock at the door.

"Nii-san.

It is me, can I come in?"

—Akiha's voice.

I don't really have any reason to avoid her.

.... Obviously I'm concerned about yesterday.

But, it didn't look like she hated Kohaku-san, and it might be something she has to do.

Those of the Tohno blood need Synchronizers.

.... Akiha isn't hurting her like my old man did, so I should keep quiet about it for now.

"You don't need to ask me.

Come on in."



"Yes, excuse me, Nii-san."
Akiha enters my room.
"Akiha, what about school?
It's not even one o'clock, right?"



"I took off today.
If you are suffering, I should not leave, right?"

With a smile, Akiha comes over to my bed.



"I will take your temperature, so please put this in your mouth.
After that, we need to change your sheets, so can you get up for a just a moment?"
She sticks the thermometer in my mouth.
.... It looks like she came in place of Hisui.

After checking my temperature, she smartly changes my sheets and gets out a fresh set of pajamas.
.... Come to think of it, Kohaku-san was efficient too, but she didn't have Ak-
iha's air of swiftness.
Even though Kohaku-san is relaxed normally, she probably has things ordered
so there's nothing unnecessary done.



"All finished.
Nii-san, please lay down."
Still standing, I steal a glance out the window.
"——Ah."
Kohaku-san is gathering the fallen leaves with her broom in the garden.
I could probably say hi from here so—



"Nii-san, I have finished putting new sheets on your bed."
"Eh...?"
Ah, sorry.
I spaced out a little."

I sluggishly lie back down on my bed.
Sitting down on a chair, she starts to peel an apple rather clumsily.
With an intense look on her face, she intently works the knife, but sometimes,
she uses too much strength and the knife almost flies toward my bed.
.... Is she practicing to be a good housewife?

I wish she would do such dangerous things in the kitchen.

"... Akiha, you don't have to force yourself."

Indirectly, I tell her not to do things she's not good at.



"....."

Akiha, a little dissatisfied, puts down the apple and the knife on the floor.

Seeing her with the plate and fork, it's obvious that she was going to do something she's not good at.

"....."

Despite the result, I'm happy for Akiha's care.

But it's funny, so I start to laugh.



"... Hey.

What is so funny, Nii-san?

I did not do anything to make you laugh."

"I was just thinking that this is just like back then.

When I was sick as a child, you used to clumsily take care of me back then, too."

.... Yeah, I remember.

When I was still living as an adopted child.

When I was playing with Akiha, I caught a fever and collapsed.

I was resting in that detached house after that, but Akiha escaped the mansion to come care for me.

"..... It sure brings back memories.

At first you just held my hand, but you started to try and take care of me.

At the end, you even took some empty syringes and were going to inject me, right?"



"Uu... I regret it now, but it's the truth I cannot take back."

"No kidding.

If Jinan-san hadn't realized it and stopped you, I probably would have died."

Incidentally, Jinan-san was the assistant of the family doctor.

After that time, he became my personal physician.



"Jinan-sensei?"

Come to think of it, even though you didn't like doctors, you always ended up losing to him."

".... Of course.

That person is a mad doctor.

If you disobey him, he'll pay you back twice as much.

Do you understand how scary that is?"

"Who knows?" Akiha says as she smiles.

She knows it doesn't concern her and she isn't being cute at all.

"Ah, speaking of doctors, when did Kohaku-san get her pharmacist license?"

She seems to be very close to our age, but doesn't that sort of thing have an age limit?"

".... That is true, but it is Father's doing.

We don't know the exact date of Kohaku and Hisui's birth, so Father did a little manipulation of the documents and made her older."

"——Whoa."

As expected of a rich man, his methods are a bit illegal.

"But, I think that Hisui is about your age.

Kohaku and Hisui are twins, so that would naturally make her around your age, right?"

"—No way."

.... Kohaku-san and I, the same age....?

Well, it's not like I really gave it much thought, but I always felt she was older.

.... Well, she certainly doesn't act older, but I never thought of her as the same age.

Because, if that's true.... Then from when Kohaku-san was eight or nine, Tohno Makihisa did—

Crack.

I imagine a crack in my body.



"Nii-san....?"

What is wrong, are you feeling alright....?"

"—Nah, it's nothing.

No need to worry."

After all, this is just a brief pain.

"There is a need to worry.

Sweating like that, you seem like you will collapse any moment now....!"

"—But—compared to Kohaku-san—"



"———"

Compared to that, this pain is nothing.
I really want to see Kohaku-san after all.
I don't know what I will say after I meet her, but I have to see her and do something.
I still haven't fulfilled my promise from eight years ago.
This isn't the time for me to be lazing around here—

—And just like that.
Suddenly, my dizziness comes to a complete stop.



"How is that?
Have you calmed down?"
Akiha is placing her palm on my forehead.
Her cool fingers.
It seems the cool sensation has doused away my dizziness like soothing water.
"—Nii-san.
How are you feeling?"
"?"
Didn't I already tell her?
Her eyes are dead serious.
.... Her gaze seems to be asking something different.
"... Fine, I will just have to investigate myself."

After saying this, she lowers her hand from my forehead.
Her palm smoothly glides down to the top of my shirt.
"... It doesn't seem like there is anything wrong in particular.
But your fluctuating temperature might be due to me simply not being used to it."
Murmuring to herself, she draws back her hand.



"Nii-san, you have a normally healthy body, but you have anemia like this very often.

Do you ever think that is strange?"

"... Yeah, well, the doctor told me that many times, but what about it?"



"Of course.

Doctors cannot know the reason for your anemia.

... Hey, Nii-san, do you want to know the reason for it?"

"Eh—?"

My heart skips a beat.

What I haven't known for all these years.

This unstable body of mine.

Akiha knows....?

"It... doesn't seem like you're joking."

"Right.

If you want to know, then I will tell you.

It is due to the sins of my family, so you have a right to know."

For some reason—her words seem very dangerous.

But I can't shake my head in denial after all this.

"... I want to know.

Please tell me, Akiha."

"I understand.

Then, I will tell you.

I say that, but you already know most of it.

After that accident eight years ago, you became this way, right?"

So that has to be the root of all this."

"Eight years ago—you mean, when I was almost killed by SHIKI?"

"Exactly.

At that time, SHIKI stole the majority of your life.

After Father carried out sentence on SHIKI, he was kept alive in the basement, right?

So SHIKI is using your life in place of the life he lost to stay alive.

That's why, Nii-san.

That's why you cannot move around freely with your own life.

And as a result, you are always teetering on the brink of death.

So as long as SHIKI is alive, you will always be like this.

You can never go back to the way you were before."

"Wha.... on the edge of death?"

That's ridiculous, it's just—"

It can't be just anemia.

Not being able to move freely and losing consciousness this frequently can't be called anemia.

So it's just like she says.

There's not much difference between this and drifting into death.

".... Why?"

But I made it this far.

If I lived like this for eight years, then I can surely—"

"No.

Until now, SHIKI was locked away so you were able to live barely.

But now SHIKI is going outside and is using your life to do as he pleases.

The burden for whatever he does is on you, so you will not be able to live like before."

"_____."

My pulse surges.

Her words hold nothing back.

Since they are the truth, they pierce my heart like a sword even more.



"Nii-san.

If you want to hate someone, hate SHIKI or the one who set him free.

Because even if he is alive, if SHIKI was quiet, this would have never happened

to you."
 She bites her lip as she says this.
 Is she that angry at SHIKI for stealing my life?
 She bites so hard that blood flows from her lips.
 "..... Akiha."
 But she isn't looking at me.
 She is staring into emptiness as if staring at an enemy.



"But rest assured.
 I will do anything to protect you, Nii-san...
 So you can always smile, I—"

—will kill SHIKI, you want to say?

.... I remember my old man's journal.
 The responsibility of the head of the Tohno household is to exterminate all those
 who stray from a human existence.

"——Ah."

That one night.

Akiha was hugging me, desperately fighting back her tears.

That time, I know she said those words.

She said she didn't want to kill her brother with her own hands.

.... She was crying, not being able to tell me that—

".... It's fine.

You don't have to feel any responsibility."



"No... I am the head of the Tohno family.
So all the crimes any member of the Tohno house has committed, I will definitely—
"
"... Hey, you don't have to make such a painful face.
It's okay, this has happened before.
Whatever SHIKI does, I'll recover in a matter of days.
So you don't have to worry."
"Nii-san, you are just repeating yourself.
I cannot bear you to be like this, not even knowing if you may die any minute....!
So, I—"
"I told you not to worry.
SHIKI is—my responsibility.
You don't have to do anything."
"..... Nii, san."

.... Yeah.
Akiha doesn't have to kill her brother.
This is just between me and him.
If the Tohno blood is cursed and I've been forced into this ridiculous dance for
eight years,
then I—with my own hands, will end all of this that started eight years ago.
Neither Kohaku-san nor Akiha, can be—should suffer any longer from that
blood.



"—Nii-san."

Has she relaxed?
 She finally eases her shoulders.
 "... Thank goodness.
 You are definitely my Nii-san.
 Just like eight years ago, you only protect me."
 Her brimming eyes look directly at me.
 How do you say this?
 The atmosphere has become incredibly intimate.
 —, and.
 As if to spoil this great mood, Akiha's stomach lets out a growl.



"_____"

"....."

.... Come to think of it, Akiha stayed up all night watching over me.
 She must have been so worried over me that she didn't eat.
 "I think I'm getting hungry."
 I try to follow her up.



".... Geez.

I was so relaxed I let down my guard."
 Akiha gives an embarrassed excuse.
 Well, maybe it helped me out.
 I don't know what would have flowed from that mood.
 "Akiha, I'm fine right now, so please rest.
 You took care of me all night, right?"



"Ah—yes.
It was really nothing at all.
I could not help you, and I only did the best that I could."
"That's enough.
I heard it all from Hisui.
I really am happy to have such a great little sister."
"... Yes.
Then I suppose I will rest a little bit.
I will come here again after dinner, so please rest and relax."

Getting up from the chair, Akiha leaves the room.

A light knock and the door opens.



"Thanks for waiting.
Shiki-san, time for dinner."
"——Eh?"
Kohaku-san's arrival takes me completely by surprise.
"Huh?"
Kohaku-san....?"
"Yes?"
She tilts her head.
"I thought Akiha said she wouldn't let you near me."
Still off-kilter with surprise, I blurt out what I was thinking.



"Yes, I was ordered the same thing, but Akiha-sama and Hisui-chan do not know how to do an IV.
Shiki-san, after dinner, you'll have to get a shot, you know."

With her usual smile, she wheels in a cart and shuts the door.
.... On top of the cart there is food.
On the lower shelf, there is a syringe and everything needed for an IV.
"Uh, Kohaku-san?"



"Ummm, first is dinner, right?"
Here you go, she says as she presents the meal on a platter.
Kohaku-san's smile is full of contentment.
.... How could I destroy it?
—Please act like before.

I remember Hisui's words.
Even I want her to keep smiling like this.
I want to see her smile happily, just like this.
I—I can't destroy that.
".... Well, I'll dig in."
"Yes.
Please chew everything well."

Lowering my eyes, I pick up my chopsticks.

.... Kohaku-san stands nearby with that smile.
It's all so sad, I just can't look at her.
Clink.
Clank.
The sound of my utensils echo through the room.
Seeing her so close to me and smiling makes me want to kill myself.

.... Why am I so sad?
Kohaku-san is right here.
The one I wanted to meet since yesterday is here, so there can't be any reason
to be sad.

—Sadness is easy to see,
happiness is difficult to understand.

For example,
a girl who was locked away in the mansion since she was very young.
The girl giving Tohno Shiki her ribbon despite all that.
.... The stupid me that spoke so happily about the past in this mansion.

.... Such things caused me pain.
Clink.
Clank.
The sound of my utensils.
Bringing my hands together, I thank her for the meal.
As if she was so happy that I had seconds, she cheerfully takes the dishes.
.... If that was true happiness, maybe I would be happy as well.
"—That's pretty simple, isn't it?"

I suddenly find the reason for my sadness.
There must be something wrong with me to not have seen it earlier.
I just like this person.
I love her to a point where I can't even imagine seeing her in pain.

It seems I've finally realized this simple fact—



"Well then, a shot before your IV.
Shiki-san, can you roll up your sleeve for me?"
"....."
I roll it up to the elbow.



"This won't be too painful, so just relax.
Makihisa-sama would sometimes fall ill, too.
So, I've had a lot of practice, you know."
She rubs my arm with a swab of cotton drenched in alcohol.
.... I don't know what to do.
Kohaku-san says Tohno Makihisa's name as if it was nothing.
This perfect—act, is there a reason for it?
"Ah, come to think of it, you were always injuring yourself as a little kid.
You would ignore Makihisa-sama's scolding and run around the garden."
She speaks nostalgically.
"——Tss."
I just can't look at her smile directly.
For an instant, her smile changes from its usual form.
It isn't her cheerful smile, it is a smile that comes from describing a distant,
longed-for dream.
But to protect the Kohaku-san of the present, I have to play along with this
charade.
"..... That's, right.
But, Kohaku-san, you—also seemed to be having, a lot of fun."



"Yes, running around with you, Shiki-san.
.... Yeah, it really was fun.
Playing in the garden until sunset.
But after it was all over, you would always get yelled at for being covered in mud."

—That's another act, too.
That smile is just fake.
".....!"
Not being able to stand it anymore, I wrap my arms around this girl speaking of her dream.

—I can't even hold onto her tightly.
"Ah..... um, Shiki-san?"
Her questioning voice reaches me.
I just wordlessly hold her close to me and stroke her hair.
"....."
I can't let her see my face.
I probably have a horrible expression.
I can't meet her gaze, her sharp perception.
If I did that, she would know that I know everything.
"....."
But still.
I try to hold back and bite my lip.
"Shiki-san....?"
Does it hurt that much, Shiki-san?"
"..... No.
It isn't, that."
All I can do is grip with my fingers.
I can't hold her tightly, but I want to embrace her as much as I can.
".... Aw.
That's no good, Shiki-san.
You're a boy, so have to endure some pain."
Her arm brushes against my hair.
She quietly rubs my head.

That breaks my limit.

"——It's okay."

"Shiki-san?

Did you say something?"

Kohaku-san asks.

No matter how much my mind screams at me to stop, the words just come out.

"——It's okay.

You don't have to smile any longer."

"Eh?"

"——It's okay, you don't have to force yourself to smile."

My voiced feelings spurt forth from my clenched lips.

"——"

Her hand stops moving.

Kohaku-san freezes.

She doesn't even breathe.

——Kacha.

I hear a noise.

".....!"

Kohaku-san pulls away.



"Oh no, it looks like the IV spilled."

The usual smile.



"Unfortunately the next one will not arrive until tomorrow, so we'll stop for today.
Well then, Shiki-san, if anything happens, please call me."

Kohaku-san pushes the cart as if nothing just happened.
She leaves without opening the door.
"___"

What was I doing?
Acting like that and breaking my promise to Hisui.
It's no different than Makihisa.
I couldn't even control my feelings.
The open door flutters at me in ridicule.

—Wait.

Kohaku-san left without opening the door..?

".... That's odd.
I know Kohaku-san closed it when she came in."
So why was the door open?
That has to mean that someone was watching when I was hugging Kohaku-san.

—After dinner I will return, Nii-san.

.... That's what Akiha said.
"Akiha, saw it——"
I ponder aloud.
That wasn't really a big deal.
So why—why do I have this whirlpool of uneasiness in my chest like I just did something I can never take back?

—Night falls.

The clear daytime sky turns into a black dome.

The swarm of clouds carouse across the sky and obscure the moonlight.
 I take a deep breath and get out of bed.
 "... See?
 I told them I'd be better by evening."
 I'm pretty much better.
 There isn't anything to stop me from running about.
 I take my knife from the drawer.
 "Alright." I place it in my pocket and psyche myself up.
 The problems really have piled up.
 But I won't mistake what I can do and what must be done.
 The killer wandering the streets.
 Tonight I will have to end SHIKI's wanderings once and for all.
 "... As her big brother, it's the least I can do."
 I can't allow Akiha to be forced into fighting her real brother.
 I have to stop SHIKI while I can still move my body.

I don't see SHIKI anywhere under the clouded night streets.
 "... Damn.
 I guess I was thinking too optimistically."
 I thought I would meet SHIKI if I just walked the streets at night.
 Even though I have never seen him, I thought I'd be able to meet him like two
 magnets coming together—
 "... It's probably better if I just wait somewhere instead of randomly walking
 about."
 The alley would probably be a good idea.
 I witnessed so many murders there in my dreams.
 That's probably the best bet if I want to find SHIKI.

—Well then.

I hide in the darkness and take a deep breath.
 Ready for an attack at any moment, I grip my knife.

.....

.....

.....

"——"

My heart is beating furiously.
 This may be imprudent, but my mind isn't out of control.
 Soon I will be battling SHIKI.
 This will be extremely close to a fight to the death.

I don't intend to kill, but the possibility of ending that way is high.

"——Kk."

Even still, my mind is calm.

Has watching those dreams truly desensitized me towards killing?

.... The only thing that is normal is my heart.

It is the only thing that feels the tension of the upcoming killing and beats a warning bell inside of me.

Maybe it is the only true normalcy of Nanaya Shiki.

"——"

I let out a deep breath.

My insides are still overheating.

"——"

Strange.

My feelings are completely calm, so why—why is my blood racing to meet this vampire?

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

Thump

—Once before.

I think I was searching for someone like this.

"——"

I sense someone and instantly hide myself.

.... The sound of footsteps.

My pulse reaches new heights.

The one who is coming is the one "enemy" I know I came here to defeat.
—The footsteps come closer.

Only a few more steps.

One step.

Two steps.

Three steps.

Four steps——!

I dash towards the enemy.
The enemy suddenly whirls to face me.
The enemy tries to jump back, but I am many times faster.

I swing my knife at the enemy's throat without the slightest hesitation——



"!?"

—Right before impact, I manage to pull back.

The knife breezes through Akiha's hair.
We both take a deep breath and point at the other at the same time.
"Nii-san, what are you doing here!?"
"Akiha, what are you doing here!?"

..... Well, I guess it's pretty obvious we're after the same thing.



"....."

Akiha looks at me with eyes almost brimming with complaint.

.... I think she's still mad at me for hugging Kohaku-san, but I can't worry about that right now.

"Akiha.

Just what are you doing here at this time of night?"

"Is it not obvious?"

I am looking for SHIKI so I can fulfill my duty as head of the Tohno family."

"....."

Akiha answers me.

"—Akiha.

I told you I'd take care of it, so there's no need for you to put yourself in danger like this.

Didn't you agree to that?"



"That may be true, but I changed my mind.

Nii-san, you seemed a little busy, so I thought I would go in your place."

With a "hmpf," Akiha looks away.

".... Akiha.

I won't ask what you're angry about, but isn't that a different matter?

This is between me and SHIKI.

Akiha—I won't let you get involved in such a dangerous fight."



"Give it up.
You are very naive if you keep saying that, Nii-san.
Look.
Even now your body is getting weaker.



.... So I will do whatever it takes to make you better.
I will not listen to you if you tell me to stop."
.... Akiha looks intently at me.
She's dead serious.
".... What you say is right.
I really am happy that you worry over me this much.
But, isn't it tough?
SHIKI is your, um...."
"Nii-san.
You are the only one I call Nii-san.
.... Certainly this is a difficult task, but someone has to do it, right?
I was raised to fulfill my duty as head of the Tohno family, so all of this is under
my own resolution."



"More importantly!
Nii-san, at your current health, what are you doing?
Aren't you the one who is in danger from SHIKI!?"

"Uu—"

Akiha adopts an incredibly commanding pose as she walks toward me with her finger pointed right at my throat.
I unconsciously take a few steps back under this attack.



"See, you're already losing to me mentally.
Look, you are just a normal human so a monster like SHIKI is too far above your level.
I will escort you this night, but from now on, you have to take care of yourself."

Akiha grabs my arm and walks off.

"Wa—wait Akiha, wait up....!"

"Oh quiet, if you make a racket this late at night you will just attract the police....!"

"—Ugh."

I lose once again.

.... Oh well.

My body still isn't fully well so I should just go back like she says—



"Nii-san, please go back to your room.
I am also done for the night."

Akiha turns away, still a bit perturbed.

—Her black hair swishes in the air.

For no reason whatsoever,
I see her and feel this incredible uneasiness.
".... Akiha."



"Yes?
What is it, Nii-san?"
".... I can trust it, right?"
....?
I say that without really even knowing what I want to trust in.
Akiha looks surprised for a moment.



"Yes, you have not done anything you need to worry about, so please rest."
She says this with a completely unclouded smile.

"....."

Akiha walks away.

My room is on the second floor in the western part of the mansion.

Akiha's is in the eastern part.

Does living under the same roof but being so far away make me that uneasy?

With this lingering uneasiness that I still can't define, I open the door to my room.

—I hear the voices of reed warblers.

The distant moon.

The night is dark, the vale of trees shrouds the entire world.

The ground is jagged like the teeth of a saw.

There isn't anyone around.

All I can hear is the reed warblers.

A black field.

I instinctually feel homesick.

As I child, a small child, I always played in this forest.

I always go out in the dead of night.

Since my parents and siblings feel uneasy about getting seen by people, we usually don't go out during the day too much.

So, this is just like any other day.

I walk out of the garden alone into that forest and I encounter those people I don't know.

The black field is an even darker shade today.

It isn't a natural darkness.

It's as if it was being radiated from a dull lamp.

The fresh carpeting of blood looks like wild berries.

It is awfully hot.

As I take each breath it feels like I'm bringing fire into my lungs.

The heat is as intense as summer.

Is that why?
 I keep hearing those reed warblers in the chilled air.
 The wild berries are strewn all over the field.
 In the middle, a single, bright red eye.
 A stranger is standing in the field.
 It only has one eye.
 The eye shines with red light.
 Looking like it's floating in empty air, its very existence screams abnormally.
 Since there is only one eye, its color doubles?
 Compared to that eye, the fresh blood seems like the chrome yellow of a far-off mountain.
 A scarlet deeper than red.
 A name for that has been passed down in the Nanaya oral tradition.
 Crimson Red Vermillion.
 A name that points to an existence that has awakened to the nonhuman blood of its ancestors.
 It describes a person whose ego is subsumed by a transcendental self and loses all sanity.
 It is said that the red Evil Eye is a sign of being possessed.
 Like a mirage, something shimmers behind it.
 Laughing around aimlessly as if insane.
 It doesn't look like it's having any fun.
 With the reed warbler's cry, its body becomes hazy.

It disappears as if eaten by the surrounding bush.
 A voice calls me from the distance.
 I'm scared to be alone, so I should go towards the forest.
 Within the vale of trees, I hear sounds like they are having a festival.
 Crash!
 Crunch!
 Smash!
 Splat!

Nanaya Shiki walks toward the back of the forest.

After passing through the field, I think back about that redness I saw earlier.
 How pitiful.
 When did it become so tired and hazy like that?
 It seemed incredibly strong, but at the same time, very fragile.
 After finding out that it doesn't have much longer to live, I continue towards the heart of the forest.

I open my eyes to the morning sun streaming from my window.
 "——Hot."
 My pajamas are drenched with sweat.
 It seems I had a weird dream.

It was like that really old silent comedy film.... I'm not too sure, but that one where that actor with a black derby hat and a mustache keeps getting in all sorts of situations.. it was a dream where it felt like I was watching a movie.

".... Come to think of it, I never did dream when I stayed at the Arimas."

Actually, I never did dream since I was a kid.

My doctor said that I sleep so deeply that I can't dream.

Then, maybe the dreams I see since coming back to this mansion are actually my memories instead.

".... Wait, isn't that what you call a dream?"

Well, I'll leave these little things for scholars to debate.

As a student, I should go to school.

"—Alright, time to get up!"

I get up from bed.

"—Eh?"

Actually, my body does not move.

"Wha.... Why can't I move!?"

I clench my teeth and summon all my strength.

The blood rushes to my head causing dizziness and I manage to lift my upper body.

"H..... Ho, t....."

My body is on fire.

"Damn.... This is worse, than yesterday...."

Yesterday my body was just heavy.

But now, just moving my arm is incredibly difficult.

"—, Da—"

I see if I can lift my arm vertically.

....

.....

.....

"—Gaa.... argh."

I finally lift it up.

Just doing this expends all of my energy and takes me about a minute.

".... What's going on?"

This is like a dead body.

Or maybe like a robot without any power.

Either way, I can't move.

But still, my mind is sharp and I don't feel any pain.

"Kohaku-san—"

I start to call her then stop.

Yesterday I said those things while I embraced her.

I don't know what Kohaku-san thought of that.

.... I don't think she knows that I know about her and Hisui trading places, but it's still difficult for me to face her now.

"Hisui—Akiha, hey—"

I try to say "come", but I stop.
Speaking loudly brings another wave of dizziness crashing into me.
.... Shouting requires muscle use, and that probably puts a strain on the blood to my brain.
"Ahh——"
I breathe shallowly.
All I can do is just wait like this until Hisui comes to wake me.

—In the end, I take off from school today.

When Hisui came to wake me, she immediately turned pale and called for Akiha.
As soon as she heard, Akiha came running, and I guess neither Akiha nor Kohaku-san knew what to do because they called the doctor in to perform an examination.
As usual, it came up with nothing.
As expected, Akiha ordered me to rest in bed afterwards.

.... The sun sinks below the horizon.
Lying on my side, I gaze emptily out the window.
"..... Damn it."
I knew I should have settled things with SHIKI last night, especially now that I became like this.
While I'm like this the number of victims will increase.
.... No, even last night after I came back with Akiha, SHIKI may have already sucked another person's blood.
"——"
Was it the wrong decision?
Last night.
Maybe I should have stayed in that alley waiting for SHIKI no matter what Akiha said.
"..... I have to go tonight."
I can't cry over the fact that I can't move.
I have to stop SHIKI as soon as possible.
I have to save up all my strength until tonight so I can do that.



"Shiki-san, are you awake?"
Kohaku-san opens the door and walks in.
"Kohaku—san."
"Yes.
It's been a whole day, hasn't it, Shiki-san?"
She closes the door with a smile.
"... That's right.
Yeah, that's right."

I suddenly feel awkward and look away.
I can't speak to her directly now.
Not only am I worried too much about SHIKI, but I also haven't figured out a
excuse yet for my stupidity last night.



"Shiki-san?
Why do you look so down?
You really don't feel well?"

".....!"
She looks into my face.
"—No, that's not it, but.."
Blushing furiously, I somehow manage a calm response.
.... This is bad.
I said it would be difficult to meet her, but just seeing her face uplifts me.
Since I could not see her for a whole day, just having her beside me makes me

so happy, I forget about SHIKI.
"... Kohaku-san, I thought the IV was already done?"
.... All the same, I need to keep my distance from her.
I broke my promise to Hisui and held her.
I don't know what she thinks about what happened yesterday, but as for me,
I've finally realized how I feel.
I have no clue what I'll do now if she's close to me—
"If there's nothing, please leave."
If Akiha sees you, you'll be in trouble."
"I do have something.
I thought that I would ask if you wanted anything special tonight to eat?"
"To eat?"
.... Since I'm like this, I think something easily digestible would be best."



"Heehee, don't worry about such delicate matters, Shiki-san.
The doctor said you could eat as you please.
So tonight I'll make you whatever you want to eat."

.... I do have foods I like, but I think right now nutrition is more important
than taste.

"—I see, then something really nutritious.
I have to get as much power as possible to stop SHIKI tonight—"



"Huh?"

Stop yourself, Shiki-san?"
Kohaku-san confusedly tilts her head.
"Ah—"
Crap.
I let that slip without even thinking about it.
.... Wait a minute.
She has to know about SHIKI.
When Akiha was drinking Kohaku-san's blood, they were discussing SHIKI.
.... Even Hisui knew I was adopted.
Then there's no way Kohaku-san does not know about SHIKI.
"—I see, you know about it."
"Um.
Do I know what?"
"... That I was adopted, and that Akiha has a killer brother called SHIKI."



Her smile freezes.



".... I see.
Shiki-san, you found out about it."
But, that's just for an instant.
Kohaku's act of "Hisui from the past" doesn't crumble.
"But SHIKI-sama is no longer in this world.
You are the only eldest son of the Tohno family now.
I think it's best to forget about it."
She keeps smiling.

The same smile she had when discussing the evening menu.

".... I want to forget it, but I can't.
I can't forgive what the Tohno blood did."

My old man.

He turned you into nothing more than a smiling doll.

".... And I can't leave SHIKI alone.
As long as he is being a vampire, I can't ever be Akiha's brother."

I can't give that girl back her ribbon, either.

—This is the only thing I can do.

I don't know how to save this person or erase the sin of Tohno Makihisa.
All I can do right now is to stop the killer SHIKI and extinguish that Tohno blood.

".... I want to do this with my own hands.
I can't leave him alone, but more than that, I—I want to help you, Kohaku-san."

.... Idiot.

I keep saying these stupid things.

Thinking selfishly, thinking that I can save Kohaku by doing that.

Such selfish things—

".... Haha, what am I saying?"

But, anyway, this is a problem of the Tohno family, so I will end it.

There is no need for you or Hisui to worry."



Kohaku-san doesn't say anything.

Her smile also ceases.

"Kohaku-san?"

Did I say something wrong?"



"—No.
Um, do you really mean that?"

—?
What does she mean....?"



"Shiki-san.
You know that Akiha-sama leaves the mansion every night?"
"Yeah.
It's her responsibility as head of the Tohno family to look for SHIKI.
I told her to stop, but she doesn't listen."



"I don't believe it.
You didn't hear from Akiha-sama!?"
"... Wait, Kohaku-san... hear what?"

"....."

Kohaku-san doesn't answer.

.... But she isn't acting normal.

Even someone thick-headed like me can tell.

Thump.

My pulse starts to increase.

"Akiha-sama is lying to you, Shiki-san.

.... SHIKI-sama was not exactly a blood sucking demon.

It's the body warmth of others.

Not the blood, but the heat."

Thump, Thump.

My pulse goes crazy.

The combination of those facts and her serious eyes make me imagine something bad.

—Wait.

Please, just wait.

That is.

Unconsciously, something I avoided thinking about.

".... Please wait.

.... It's okay, you don't have to say anything."



"—Shiki-san.

The one known as Tohno SHIKI is no longer in this world.

Certainly SHIKI-sama was a blood sucking demon and killed people on the streets.

But that is all over.

.... Five days ago, by Akiha-sama's hand, SHIKI-sama was exterminated."

—That dream.

The dream of the killer being killed by Akiha.

That wasn't what I saw.
It was what SHIKI was watching in his final moments.
"The SHIKI that killed people and drank their blood is no longer alive.
So... that means that all the recent incidents, they are all—"
—SHIKI is no longer alive.

Long gone.
The only one that is left.
Leaving every night to walk the streets,
the blood sucking demon named Tohno Akiha.

"Shiki-san—!?"
Ignoring her voice, I fly out of the room.

—Running.

My body is engulfed in pain but that doesn't matter.
I don't think about anything.
I don't want to think about anything.
Until I hear the truth from Akiha's mouth, nothing else.

Running.
Running toward her room at the east end of the mansion.
Breathing wildly, I open her heavy double door without knocking.

pant—*pant*, *pant*—
I look around the room.
Akiha—elegantly gets up from her chair as soon as she sees me.



"What is it, Nii-san?
Entering without knocking is pretty rude, you know."
"Ah—haa..."
I catch my breath as I stare at her.
No, I'm definitely glaring at her without realizing it.



Akiha senses the emotion in my look.

"Nii-san.....?"

Did something happen?"

"——"

I take one more deep breath and calm my breathing.

Suppressing the pulse in my chest, I glare as I speak.

"—Akiha.

What is the meaning of this?"



Her face tightens.

.... With just those words she probably figured out what I was going to say.

After staring at me wordlessly, she walks casually over to the window sill.

The deep sky.

The red rays of sun glaring through the sky and into the room.

Like three days ago, she turns her back to the crimson sky.

"I'm not sure what you mean, Nii-san.

Could you be a little more specific?"

"——"

Dizziness assails me.

Is it just a trick of the eyes?"

I thought I saw something hazy around her.

—Danger fills the air.

It must be the fault of that glowing sky behind her.

Akiha's hair looks crimson and my whole body creaks.

"Nii-san?

If you don't say anything I can't help.

Or—will you go back to your room and pretend nothing happened?"

Akiha giggles.

With that, I understand she was really deceiving me all along.

"Akiha, why—"

"You already know why I killed SHIKI.

I am the head of the Tohno family.

It is my responsibility to exterminate those that become controlled by the Tohno blood.

What I did was by consensus of the family, and even you wanted to kill him."

The hairs on my body stand on end.

—What is this?

Who is this person in front of me?

Who is this that takes away my breath through sheer pressure?

"No—that's not, what I meant."

"Oh?

Well then, there's no problem.

Killing someone who isn't human isn't a sin, right?

It is just like killing a dog that attacks people.

It is on the same level."

"I said that it's not about that....!"

What I want to say is, why did you hide it from me....!"

"Ah, that.

It's boring, asking me such an obvious question.

Hey Nii-san, asking something you know the answer to is not a question, but a confirmation.

If that's the case, I can only nod."

The air around her shimmers.

The curtains waver like a mirage.

Her long hair illuminated red by the setting sun.

Creak.

My body screams at me to kill her.

"—You killed SHIKI five days ago."

"Yes," Akiha nods.

ve days ago—that night when she collapsed.

Hugging me while she was crying, trying to hold something back.

"Then the recent vampire incidents aren't the work of SHIKI.... they are all your doing."

"Yes," Akiha nods.

The detached building in the forest,
 where Akiha was sucking Kohaku-san's blood.
 At that time—SHIKI was already gone and Akiha was still committing those
 acts.

Kohaku-san even asked why Akiha wasn't satisfied with just her blood.

"—Why?

SHIKI was, but you—you don't seem strange."

"Yes, I am not like SHIKI.

It's obvious because I'm drinking Kohaku's blood so I don't become like him."

".... Then!

Why aren't you satisfied with just her blood!?

You said it yourself, so why—"

Why are you doing the same things as SHIKI.....!!

"It is the influence of SHIKI.

This is my failure, Nii-san.

.... My power is not something that excludes anything or destroys, it is the
 power to plunder.

I stole SHIKI's life from him.

But at that same time, it seems I also took in something not good."

"—?"

Something not good?

Something that wasn't in her before, something that's in her now.

That's, um—

".... How do I put this.... ever since I killed SHIKI, I became unable to suppress
 my emotions any longer.

I become unusually strong minded, and my lust takes shape when I normally
 would have just kept it inside.

So I guess I just became honest with the desires I held back for so long.

I needed Kohaku's blood to maintain my body, but I was getting bored of that
 taste since I had been drinking it for few years."

"—Yes, you probably will not understand, but the first time I tasted the blood
 of someone other than Kohaku, it was simply amazing.

It was so delicious I thought I would go insane."

She smiles from the bottom of her heart.

The wavering mirage.

The only time I sensed this danger was when I.... No, that was SHIKI.

When SHIKI was killed in that dream.

"—Akiha, you—"

"Don't look at me like that.

I only stole their blood.

SHIKI took their lives as well, so you should not look at me like that, Nii-san."

".... Only, their blood....?"

Akiha is neither defiant nor remorseful.

She just smiles as she looks at me and speaks as if it was a matter of course.

"——"

.... I can hardly breathe.
Akiha is enjoying this.
I came to confront her, but it seems like it's just killing her boredom.

—What is this?
This is like a killer truly enjoying insanity—
"Stop messing around...!"
Why—that.... why, Akiha?
There's something wrong with you....!!"
Somehow warding off her gaze, I take a step closer.
"Ah....."
It must have worked, because she swallows her words.
"You must know, too.
What you're saying isn't right....!"
I take another step.
After looking away peevishly, she bites her lip and glares at me.
".... There's nothing wrong.
I drink the blood of other people only for your sake."
"Eh—"
My legs stop.
After she strongly bites her lip, she relaxes.
".... I already told you.
You were killed by SHIKI eight years ago.
You are not of the mixed blood of the Tohno family, but you are just a normal person.
You did not have any power to live after SHIKI stole your life from you."
".... But, I could not allow that.
You were killed protecting me, so I was the one that should have died.
I was saved by your bloody body.
You were already dead, but you still protected me.
.... I do not remember everything that happened afterwards clearly, but I just remember thinking only that it would have been better if I died instead of you."
"—That wish was granted.
See, it's like what happens in a fairy tale.
Like giving your blood to dead birds and dogs so they can live again.
My power is really the opposite, but I guess I put that curse on you.
You miraculously recovered and ever since that day I have carried a load....
come to think of it, it was only natural.
It is because I shared half of my life with you, Nii-san."
"....."
Everything goes black.
So I am alive because of Akiha, and at the same time—because of that, Akiha has to live with that terminal illness?
".... Akiha.
That time you had that fit, it was all—my fault?"
".... Yes.

As long as I keep you alive, I have to use the powers of the Tohno blood.
If I do that, my human blood becomes thinned.
If it becomes too weak, I will become something less than human, just like SHIKI.
To prevent that, I have to only use the minimum of my powers.
But if I do that, I can only maintain your life and I can't support my own body."
"... As a result, those fits occur.
Sensing the danger, my body tells me to stop providing you with energy or just become one with the Tohno blood.
It is only thanks to Kohaku that I have been able to resist it this long.
As a Synchronizer, she can strengthen one's will.
I regularly drank her blood to strengthen the human part of Tohno Akiha."
Before I realize it, my whole body staggers.
Akiha.
Akiha's sucking of blood.
It's completely my fault.
As long as I'm alive, Akiha has to live as the Tohno—
"But, I thought if I killed SHIKI it would be solved.
If SHIKI died, then he would no longer be able to steal your life."
"—Ah."
"... That's right.
If SHIKI is no longer alive, then I could have my life to myself, so I wouldn't be anemic anymore.
"Hehe.
But, it really is funny.
If anyone other than me had killed SHIKI, then you would have been back to normal.
Didn't I tell you?
I stole everything from SHIKI.
I do not have the power to synchronize like Kohaku.
What I stole, I cannot give to anyone else."

She strangely gives a heart-felt smile in pure self-deprecation.
"After killing SHIKI, I felt a weight lifted from me.
Those spasms I had every evening did not occur, and I felt great.
"... I do not need to say why, do I?
Because, in place of SHIKI, I am now stealing your life.
But, I just took it and I can't give it back to you, Nii-san.
Unlike SHIKI, I do not have the ability to fuse."
"... Yes, you were fused with SHIKI.
Certainly, SHIKI took away life from you, but it returned to you when he slept.
But that is no longer the case.
That is why you have trouble moving now.
That is why I have to continue supplying you with energy more than before.
"... For that reason, I need to accumulate energy from people's blood."

After saying this, Akiha walks away from the glowing red window.



"Nii-san.

Maybe I am just a blood sucking demon, but it is all for your sake.

Will you still not allow it?

Not as Tohno Shiki, but will you kill me as Nanaya Shiki?"

"_____"

I don't know what to say.

Whatever she says, I'm Tohno Shiki.

I won't become what I don't even remember, as Nanaya.

But, my body is different.

Just seeing Akiha causes all the strength in my body to coil like a spring.

It's like, it's trying to do something to the nonhuman Tohno Akiha.

".... No.

It isn't about Tohno or Nanaya.

I just don't want you.... as Akiha to have to drink blood.

I don't want you—to be like SHIKI."

"Nii-san.

I'm doing this for your sake.

Don't you understand that?

Even that time—I told you how I felt and you didn't even say anything.

I told you, that I loved you, so why do you look at another woman....!?"

"Bu—love?

But that's like brother and sister....!

Even if we are not connected by blood, we're still siblings!

Don't say such stupid things....!"

"It is not stupid.....!!

Because we are siblings—I can't love you!?"

Her voice echoes through the room.

.... That may be the first time she's yelled like that.

Akiha's shoulders rise and fall as she pants heavily and bites her lip regretfully.

"——Aki, ha."



".... Nii-san.
 I don't care if I become no longer human.
 If that means you can live, then I do not care what happens.
 So please—look only at me.
 I was always waiting for you.
 Now that you came back.... do not betray me."

—Her fingers tremble as she says this.
 She closes her mouth and awaits my response.
 She wants me only to look at her.
 I didn't think Akiha, with her pride, would ever actually say that.
 —But, that's wrong, Akiha.

Without a doubt, she is dear to me.
 Akiha has saved me up until now.
 So I want to grant her wishes as much as I can.
 But, still—she is my sister.
 I can't love her in any other way.
 Because the one I think of the most isn't her—
 "..... Akiha.
 I can't return your feelings.
 My special person, is someone else."



.... Akiha is calm, as if she knew from the start.
 She closes her eyes quietly and distances herself.

Her footsteps.
She walks to the window.
The wind blows her long hair freely.
"... Oh?
But, Nii-san.
You do not have a choice."

—Her eyes become glaciers.
In that instant,
My body collapses to the floor loudly.

"Ah—, gah.....!?"
Breathe.
I can't breathe.
This is worse than anything before.
I really, can't breathe, my arms, and legs, won't move—
"How is it, Nii-san?
Returning to how it was eight years ago."
I can hear her laughter.
"A..... Aki, ha—?"
I somehow manage to look up.
Her eyes are filled with pleasure as she looks at my deteriorating, fragile situation.

"I told you your body is alive only because of me.
Do you understand?
I just have to think it and you will die.
That is the life of Tohno Shiki, Nii-san."
Her voice reaches my ear like a whisper.
"—, Ss, —!"
My heat cools down.
I feel like I'm rapidly tumbling towards death.
My senses start to drain away and I'm scared that if I let my guard down, I will totally disappear.

.... What she is saying is the truth.
Akiha clutches my very heart in her hands right now—
"You're pretty strong-willed.
I took enough energy away to cause you to pass out already."
.... Her finger lowers.
Ah.
Her finger traces on my back.

"Ah—ouch.....!"

Her nail finds the scars on my back.
 "... Beautiful.
 The cuts I gave you are still here."
 That night.
 Those marks she gave me when she was holding me and crying.
 "—So, I will ask once more, Nii-san.
 I am the most important person to you, right?"
 Her whispering voice next to my ear.
 My senses are just about completely gone.
 If I don't answer—I might die.
 "Answer.
 I will not be gentle forever, you know."

..... You've gotta be kidding me.
 Using her power like this on me, I won't cave in...!

"—Geez.
 You really are strong-willed, Nii-san."
 Her finger pulls away.
 "I understand.
 I will give you until tomorrow to think about it calmly."

Akiha walks away from me and picks up something that looks like a receiver.
 "Kohaku, come to my room.
 There is something I need you to carry."
 Her voice sounds happy.
 "————"

.... I can't think well.
 All I can understand is that Kohaku-san, will be, here soon.



The door opens and Kohaku-san arrives.



"Shiki—san?"

I think she realizes I'm on the floor.
She runs to me.

"Shiki-san...!?"
Hang in there, Shiki-san...!"
.... My mind must be really messed up.
Kohaku-san.
She sounds, so tense.
I don't believe it.

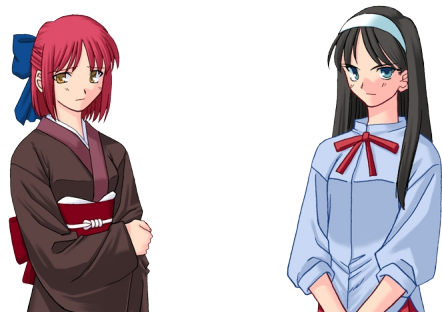
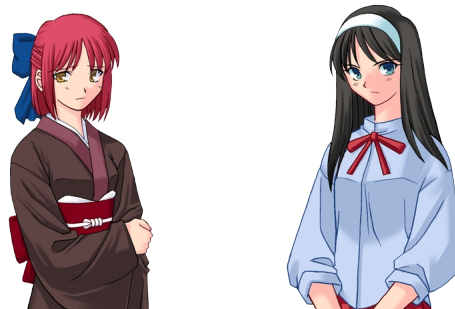


"Akiha-sama, what have you done?"



"Nothing.
I just showed Nii-san how things stand.

It seemed he would not understand unless I told his body."



"But I can't just let him lie here all night.
So can you take him to his room?
He will be in that state at least until tomorrow night."

Akiha turns away.
.... It seems like she's going to her bedroom.
That fiery aura swirls behind her back like a mirage.



"..... Shiki-san, can you stand?"
..... I can.
That's what I meant to say, but I can't even do that.

Kohaku-san lends me her shoulder.
.... I hardly feel like I am alive, let alone able to walk.
The cable that lets the human Tohno Shiki move about seems to have been cut.
Looking at my vision in pieces, it seems I have gone out, into the hallway—

—Night falls.

Tohno Shiki is lying in bed.
My wheezing drowns out the ticking of the clock.
My body feels like every joint is bursting like a firecracker.
Consciousness comes in shards.
I am probably alternating between waking and fainting in between each second.

—It's because of that, I suppose.
I don't know how long it's been.
It feels like a week since I came back to my room.
.... The clock pointed at the number eight tells me that it is just an illusion.
"—, —, —"
My breathing, almost, stops.
When I had a terrible fever, it wasn't this bad.
My body doesn't move.
But my heart is racing.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

.... Akiha probably did this on purpose, I can't even move.
My arms and legs feel crucified to the bed with iron nails.
But still, if I want to, I should be able to move them a bit.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

My wildly beating heart seems to overpower Akiha's curse.
If my limbs are nailed down,
then it feels like my heart will burst out of this nailed down body.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

What is so exciting?

—Akiha with her red hair.

Just thinking of that makes those immobile limbs somehow convulse.
Probably, my body would move to do one thing.

Thump.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

.... What's in my head right now?
Akiha horribly filled with pleasure earlier?
That was certainly strange.
Certainly she has that in her character, but that was just too much.
It's like something that she doesn't even notice is controlling her.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.
Thump.

Did she absorb SHIKI's madness?
There had to be a reason for his insanity, and maybe Akiha consumed it without knowing it.
If that is the case..
It's just the same as Tohno Makihisa, just—
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.

"Shut, up—"
I try to suppress my raging heart.
Geez, what am I being so excited about?
If I keep going through this cycle, won't I actually start to feel that way?
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.
Kill.

"Ha—agh, ha, hagh—"
My throat hurts.
My body creaks.
Don't you get it?
I can't oppose her with this body.
If you want to kill,
if you want to kill that, then shut up for a second.
If you do, I will certainly destroy that demon without you telling me so—
"No.....!"

What, like I would ever.....!!!"

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

The mad pounding continues.

I, faintly, cycle between blankness and awareness, dream and reality.

—I can't last until tomorrow.

If this keeps up, I'll go insane first—

The sweat fades from my drenched body.

My roasting flesh begins to cool.

The feeling of a soaked towel is on my forehead.

My body is lifted and a cup is placed against my lips.

Gulp.

The sensation of cool water flowing down my throat.

—.

I sense someone nearby.

if flgR >= 1

turn to **405**

turn to **406**

405

I realize that someone is taking care of me.



"Good evening.
How are you feeling, Shiki-san?"
She speaks with her usual smile.
"Ah... Kohaku, san."
I somehow manage to speak through my tattered breathing.



"Ah, you do not have to speak.
I probably understand your condition better than you do."
She removes the towel from my forehead, still smiling.
—Was that thing before just an illusion?

Kohaku-san is acting normal.
She keeps smiling and continuing her portrayal of Hisui.
.... That.
Am I going to die here without being able to take off that mask?
"Akiha-sama told me everything.
She said that she would wait until tomorrow, but that may be too long.
Akiha-sama seems to have lost her ability to think clearly.
I don't think you'll be able to make it through the night like that, Shiki-san."
"_____"
wheeze *wheeze*

Kohaku-san's words are unmercifully true.



"Shiki-san, you told me before.
You said that you were numb to death.
Is that still true?
Are you still going to act against Akiha-sama hopelessly with a body like that?"
".....Kohaku-san?"
.... I'm surprised.
Kohaku-san's voice, it's completely different than before.
".... No way.
I told you that I am more attuned to death than most people.... So I think I understand the situation I'm in.
Without you telling me—I knew that surviving the night will be extremely difficult."
"Then you are not scared of death?
If you accept Akiha-sama then you will recover quickly, but you still do not.
There's something wrong with you."
".... Maybe.
But, I think it's okay.
I like the me that acts like this, and I like Akiha for liking me as I am.
.... Yes, and, well.. I enjoy small things like just being able to talk with you, Kohaku-san.
.... But I feel like if I lie to myself, all those small things would lose their enjoyment, and I'm scared of that—"
turn to **407**

406

I realize that someone is taking care of me.



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How are you feeling, Shiki-san?"
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I somehow manage to speak through my tattered breathing.



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She said that she would wait until tomorrow, but that may be too long.
Akiha-sama seems to have lost her ability to think clearly.
I do not think you will be able to make it through the night like that, Shiki-san."
"_____"
wheeze *wheeze*

Kohaku-san's words are unmercifully true.



"Shiki-san, I am amazed.

Do you not understand the danger your body is in, Shiki-san?

All Akiha-sama has to do is think it and you will die.

So why do you still act against her?

It is completely hopeless."

"——Kohaku, san."

.... I'm surprised.

Kohaku-san's voice, it is completely different than before.

".... I know.

I know that I can't last the night like this."

"Then you are not scared of death?

If you accept Akiha-sama then you will recover quickly, but you still do not.

There's something wrong with you."

".... Maybe.

But, I think it's okay.

I like the me that acts like this, and I like Akiha for liking me as I am.

.... Yes, and, well.. I enjoy small things like just being able to talk with you, Kohaku-san.

.... But I feel like if I lie to myself, all those small things would lose their enjoyment, and I'm scared of that—"

turn to **407**

I cough violently.
.... Probably because I am forcing myself to talk to Kohaku-san,
my body doesn't even allow me to do that properly.



".... Shiki-san.
Why don't you tell Akiha-sama that you love her?"
She asks the same thing again.
But this time, it's a little different.
Kohaku-san's voice seems—somewhat sad.
"If you do as Akiha-sama says, then you'll live.
Even if it's just lip service, you will die unless you do so.
I don't know what you're thinking, but isn't it better just to return her feelings?"

—Such a thing.
If I could do that, I would've already done it.
"—No.
I do love Akiha, but only as my sister and nothing more.
.... The one I like isn't Akiha, Kohaku-san.
I don't, want to lie to the one, I love the most."
I force the words through my ragged breathing.
Tick.
The second hand of the clock ticks in the short silence.



"Oh Shiki-san, that's no good.
You can't even do it just this once?"
"... Nope.
If my body is not free, I'd like at least my heart to be free.
If I lie just once then I'll have to continue lying.
If I surround the lies with more lies, then it will all end up being empty.
If that happens, I would—"

.... That girl that had nowhere to run.
"—Never be able to help the one I like the most."
And I just look at Kohaku-san.



She looks away without donning her smile again.
"... That is, pointless.
Don't you pity Akiha-sama?"
"Pity, Akiha...?"
"... Yes.
Every night she walks the streets and drinks someone's blood.
Akiha-sama is unable to make those from whom she sucks blood like herself in
the manner SHIKI-sama was, but she has the ability to steal from others."
"Akiha-sama knows this.
She knows that sucking blood is making her less human, but she doesn't stop.
.... She's only doing it to keep you alive.
So—even though she knows it's transforming her into a blood sucking demon,
she continues it for your sake."

"Ah——"



"Do you still refuse her when she does all that for you?
These past eight years, Akiha-sama has waited only for you."
"——"

.... I can't answer that.
In the first place, I'm dying because of Akiha.
But I've only lived until now because of her efforts.
I—have a debt to her that is too large for me to ever repay.
"——"

I can't say what is right and what is wrong.
But I still have something I can't give up and I can't permit.
.... So I know what I have to do.
"—I see.
Akiha will go out and drink blood tonight again."
I raise myself up.
The pain runs through me like an electric shock.
I manage to stand up while resisting the volume of pain.



"Wha.... Shiki-san, what are—"
".... No.
I can't let Tohno Akiha drink any more blood."

I laboriously take a single step.
Even though I may collapse at any moment, I continue forward.

I can at least.... make it to Akiha's room.
"Please wait."
Standing in my way,
Kohaku-san appears before me.



"You say you'll stop Akiha-sama.
Is that the blood of Nanaya speaking?"
"... That has nothing to do with it.
I just want Akiha to be Akiha.
That is, what I, as Tohno Shiki, really feel."



"..... You mustn't.
Akiha-sama will not have any mercy on you.
You realize it already.
The Akiha-sama from before no longer exists."

.... I know that.
That shimmering mirage behind her.
That thing is driving her away from being Akiha.
The way Akiha is now, she will see me as completely useless if I don't accept
her.
"Even still—I must stop her.
I'm, her brother, after all."



"....."

Kohaku-san doesn't say anything.

I push my way through to the desk.
Inside is what I brought from the Arimas, only a few things.
I take my knife out of the drawer.
.... And I see that which I haven't yet returned.

"Kohaku-san."
Gripping the final remnants, I walk.



"....."

Kohaku-san just stands there.

".... This might be the end, so here."

I hold out the white ribbon in my hand.

"It's a little late, but I'm giving it back.

Sorry.

You went through such trouble to give it to me, and I never even used it."

.... I don't know if my feelings were able to come out through my words.
And as gentle as I can,
I place the ribbon of promise into her hand.



"_____"

The sound of gasping.
She stands stock still like a doll, just staring in amazement at the ribbon in her hand.

"..... You knew, Shiki-san?"

".... Not right away.
It was only just recently.
.... I really should have realized it as soon as I came back."

Yeah.
I should've realized it after I returned to the mansion and Kohaku-san said "Welcome back."
Even still, she smiled when I asked if she was one of the children who was here back then.

".... I, don't have the right, but thanks.
I really was happy that you waited here for me."

.... For eight years.
Those were the words I always wanted to say as Tohno Shiki.

Tears.
Her face.
Her face is neither sad nor happy, but a single line flows down.
.... I don't know what it means.

But, naturally.
I hold her body close to mine.
.... I can feel her warmth.
My raging heart seems to become strangely calm from it.
".... Kohaku-san.
I'll stop Akiha, so you get away with Hisui.
.... And you don't have to come back.

.... You've been locked in this mansion for ten years.
You can be free, and—you don't have, to force yourself, to smile—"

"Shiki-san, everything, you.."

Her lips mouth the word "knew".
I didn't want her to say those words, so I close her mouth with my own.

—It was really just an instant.
Just a touch, a fleeting kiss, but unforgettable.

I raise my head.
I release her.
In place of the doll-like Kohaku-san, I smile with all of my heart.

"Well.
It was really short, but living here with you was a lot of fun.
—Yeah.
I really like you the best, Kohaku-san."

—Let's do this.
The only thing left is to stop Akiha.
"..... No, stop."
As I move to open the door, her voice rings out to me.
"..... No, Shiki-san.
You can't stop Akiha-sama like that."
"... Eh?"
I turn around—



"Shiki-san—you have to stop Akiha-sama."

Kohaku-san stands there, not with a smile, but with a truly sad face.

"Kohaku-san—why?"

Why does she look like she's about to burst into tears?

"Shiki-san.

Did you really mean that?"

She looks directly at me.

Her eyes implore me to confirm what I said about liking her.

"——"

I nod.

Kohaku-san shuffles over to me and holds my hand.

.... How long were we like this?

Kohaku-san doesn't say anything.

After holding my hand like a child, she smiles once more and places my hand against her chest.



"If that's the case, then please make love to me.

If you do that, then you should be fine without Akiha-sama's help."

"Wha—make love.. what are you-"

"I'm talking about having sex.

Hisui-chan and I were both brought to this mansion for that purpose you know."

Kohaku-san says such a thing with her usual smile as if discussing the weather.

"S-sex, but that....!"

It's too sudden, my voice comes out weird.

"Yes.

You may not know this, but we are called Synchronizers.

Simply speaking, we can project ourselves into someone else and increase their powers.

But it only works if.... the person is of the opposite gender.

Akiha-sama is a woman so we could not Synchronize.

That's why she had to drink my blood to form a fake bond."

"——"

Thump.

My body heat rises.

It isn't the wildness of my heart earlier.... it is the true feelings of Tohno Shiki coming to light.

"... B.. but, that, is—"



"You're unable to return her feelings, right?

So there's no other way.

Please, have me.

If we exchange our bodily fluids then I'll be able to help your condition.

If you do so, you can return to normal without Akiha-sama's help."

"Uu....."

.... I really can't ask for anything more.

If I won't be a burden to Akiha, she won't have to drink any more blood.

And really, I want Kohaku-san too.

"_____"

But.

I still feel there's something wrong about this.



"Shiki-san, were you lying when you said you liked me?"

Kohaku-san saying that with a smile—I start to lose control.

"—It wasn't a lie.

I.. always wanted you—"



"Then please let me give you strength.
If you don't, you'll die and be unable to stop Akiha-sama."
Saying that,
she embraces my hand tighter onto her chest.
Tender, yet firmly elastic.
Feeling the breasts of a young woman causes my head to spin.
"_____"

.... I understand.
Kohaku-san is just continuing her act.
I understand that she's just using me.
But still—that's something important to me.

"..... Is this alright?
Are you really okay with this, Kohaku-san?"
"Yes.
Because I love you too, Shiki-san."

—I know that smile is fake.

But.. I believe the words.

I want to believe in those words.

.... I draw her close to me.
When I kiss her, it's a violent, passionate, stealing kiss, completely different
than before.

I don't know how long it's been.
 Her tender lips.
 I push my mouth against hers as if stealing her breath and hold her tightly against me.
 "_____"

My capacity for logic has gone out the window.
 My mind is completely empty, without any serious thinking to fill it.
 All I can think about is making this moment last forever.
 "_____Ah."

But my body is at its limit.
 My legs sway beneath me.
 The arms embracing Kohaku-san fall to my sides, and I lean completely against her.
 "... Goodness, now look what happened, Shiki-san.
 That's what happens when you push yourself."

My body is about to fall onto the floor.

"Please lie on the bed.
 I'll make you feel a lot better soon."

I fall onto the bed.
 I can't even move.
 Even breathing is painful as the world warps around me like a smothering blanket.
 "....."
 Crap.
 In this condition, I can't even embrace Kohaku-san.
 Even though I can get better if I do what Tohno Makihisa did, if my body doesn't move, I can't even do that—
 "... Please relax.
 Just stay like that and I'll do all the work."
 She puts her knees on the floor.
 From my vision.
 Kohaku.
 Disappears.
 "... Kohaku.. san....?"
 The only response is the sound of something clattering from my hips.
 "_____Ah."
 My breath stops as I realize it's the sound of my belt being removed.
 The sound and feel of my zipper being lowered.
 "H, hey—Kohaku.. san....!"
 "....."
 No answer.
 Instead, Kohaku-san just carefully pulls back my underwear and bares me.
 "_____!"

My body feels warm all over.
Not from excitement, but from embarrassment as Kohaku-san stares at my manhood.
.... Certainly I couldn't hide myself if I wanted to do this, but still—this wasn't what I expected.. I only thought about the actual sex.
"Kohaku-san, that—"
".... Yes.
We have to start here if you want to get better."
Her breath touches my skin.
.... My shaft rises in response.
"Ah....."
I hear her gasp.
She gingerly sets my swelled manhood free from my pants with her little finger.
"—Kohaku.. san—"
Just a light touch.
It was only her little finger, but the sensation races through my entire shaft.
"Hm.... now now, Shiki-san.
.... Don't fight it.
Just relax."
She chides me as she begins to wrap her hand around me.
Her fingers slowly begin to squeeze.

Their coldness shoots right through me.
"Ha—ah, ah—"
My blood starts to gather up.
The embarrassment crumbles away as a gasp escapes my throat.
"Yes.... you can moan more."
Whoo.
As if cooling something off, Kohaku-san blows air over me.
"Mm——!"
Thump.
With that, I become completely erect.

"Haha... What's this?
You're really healthy right here, Shiki-san."
Her voice is sweet as she lightly rubs her nose against me.
It's a different.. sensation than her fingers.
As if trying to take in every nuance of my smell, Kohaku-san stimulates all around me with her nose.
"Hm.... Shiki-san, you're so cute.... Your smell is very faint but you're so large and handsome."
After sniffing, she slowly reaches out her tongue and touches my tip.
It's just for an instant, but the feeling of her wet tongue touching me sends a shock through my body.
"Ah——"
The gathering heat at the base of my rod causes me to speak without thinking.

That heat.

".... Haha.... You've finally warmed up, I see."

She happily brings a finger down to check.

Her fingers start to move.

Those four fingers start to caress me gently up and down.

Her delicate kneading causes me to harden even more.

The swelling increases as if to escape the caress of her fingers.

Not letting anything escape, her four fingers are joined by her tightly gripping thumb.

".... Ah.... you're really turned on, Shiki-san."

Kohaku says half-amazed, half-dreamily.

I look at the slit on the tip of my tool and see it already dripping.

"——"

My face turns red.

I turn away, embarrassed, but Kohaku's flushed face moves forward and sniffs the oozing fluid.

".... Hm.... things will start to feel even better."

My dry pole starts to overflow.

Her cute fingers now covered in that licentious fluid, Kohaku starts to stroke me earnestly.

.... Sliding, sliding, slide slide sliding.

"Ha—ah, —!"

I can't hold back my gasps.

Even though it is simply rising and falling, her strangely flexible fingers ensure the sensations are not that simple.

Her vivacious fingertips seem to be sucking my very skin.

"Hehe.... Shiki-san, you're amazing.

You're still growing."

"No..... That.. you are.. Kohaku—"

.... That's right.

Her fingers are stranger.

She's the one who.. is shaping me.. as if.. I was clay—

"Sto.... Kohaku.. san—you don't.. have to.. do that—"

.... I don't.. even care about anything else right now.. it feels that good.. but.... this isn't exactly what I wanted.

I thought I would be holding her.

This is.. a little different—

"It's.. enough—so you.. can stop now—"

Holding back my passion racked gasps, I barely manage to say that.

But she.. her fingers.. do not.. stop.

Her tongue, so red it looks like it's painted with fire, takes a lick.

"——!?"

The pleasure causes me to clench my jaw in shock.

She looks up at me with glazed eyes.

"Not yet.... not yet, Shiki-san.

This boy here tells me it isn't enough."
Her red tongue traces a line up my shaft.
It glides from my testicles to the very top of my tower.
"Ah.... m, u.... hu.... ah."
Her breath swirls around me.
The wild exhalations seem to burn with the same fire as I do.
"Mm.... more, you need to be more excited—"
Her tongue swirls around my tip.
.... It seems almost poisonous.
Even though it's so cute, its glossy, serpentine surface lengthens.
Red tongue.
It just creeps around my shaft like swirling blood.
"_____"
With just that,
it feels so good.. I may even.. pass out.
"Aahh—isn't.. that.. enough?"
I don't even know what I'm saying now.
She pushes down into the opening of my dripping shaft with the back of her tongue.
"Eh—ah, ah—!?"
The back of her tongue feels completely different.
She continues to caress me with her fingers while pushing down with her tongue.
Not just up and down, but side to side, sliding, pushing, pulling—
"Ha, ah—stop.. Kohaku.. I'm coming—!"

My shaft tightens.
The heat rises from the base of my shaft, and I can't hold it back anymore.
Kohaku's fingers stop it completely.
Her little finger, only holding me up until now, becomes an iron vice which stops the advance of my semen.
"Ko.. haku—what.. are—"
"Hm.... not yet.... you have to wait.... this is your very last bit.. so please.. release.. inside of me."
.... Her fingers separate.
As if begrudging me every drop, she kisses my convulsing shaft.
She lightly places her hands on my body.

"Ah—"
I fall back.
Kohaku quietly places herself over me.
"Nn..... Tight.....!"
Her hips fall.
Guiding my member into her sweet passage, Kohaku drops onto me.
"_____"
I can't see anything.
The sound of me entering Kohaku reaches my ears.

That sensation.
 I can feel this warmth at my tip.
 It reaches down my shaft and my world spins in pleasurable upheaval.

".... Ha.... ah.... mm.....!"
 Kohaku tries to hold back a cry but her breathing becomes labored.
 Are her eyes closed because she's trying to hold back pain?
 Exalting in the contact, Kohaku starts to bring me inside of her.
 "_____"

Everything is still dark.
 I—I don't know what just happened.
 I look, but I can't see anything.
 All I know for sure is that I can feel Kohaku.
 Warm.
 No, hot.
 Her insides are tight and continually pull me further in.
 To be honest, I feel that I have to congratulate myself for not releasing already.
 This is completely different than her tongue and fingers.
 Something feels strange.
 Is it my semen?
 Is it her wetness?
 The feeling of immersion and a tickling sensation coming from what feels like a
 multitude of soft folds.
 ".... Mm.... Shiki-san, you're so.... hard.. please—"

Sliding.

Her hips gradually lower.
 Her wetness flows all over me.
 "_____"
 I still can't see clearly.
 What's going on?
 She's lowering her body, but it feels like it's rising.
 Exalting in the sensation of our rubbing skin.. I want to hold Kohaku.. whose
 face is clouded as if resisting something.. closer to me.
 —So how come?
 My body is drowning in pleasure, but my mind seems to have stopped.
 I don't get it.
 Don't I want her?
 This feels so good, so why—
 "—N—too much—"
 Her hips stop.
 I feel something hard inside of her tightening body with the tip of my manhood.
 I can feel her tightening all the way to my very base.
 I am almost completely inside of her.
 Her hands push down on my chest as if stopping herself from going any further.

She breathes hard, as if she was in pain.
She doesn't lift her hips, as if she merely wants to wrap herself around me.

.... I realize even her anguished face is just too beautiful.
I really do love Kohaku.
"Ah.... just.. a little more——"
Kohaku's voice.
With a final thrust she begins to move downwards.
Her skin and mine fuse and she leans down against me.

A brief spasm.
My shaft, now fully embedded within her, voices its pleasure.
"Ah—a.... all of it.. inside me."
She leans her body against my chest.
Kohaku's face is full of ecstasy.
"————"
Seeing that face, I lose myself completely.

I feel her breasts through her kimono.
Her delicate, slender body contrasts with her licentiously spread legs and I almost pass out.
"Ahaa.... If I do this, I can be really close to your face."
Kohaku looks up at me from my chest.
"——Kohaku.. san."
"... Yes, you don't have to hold back any longer.
Please, like this.... give me as much as you want."
"————"
.... But.
This feels so good, but I can't even hold her.
.... I understand my uneasiness from before.
Because I love her so much—I can't just do anything as clinical as just "exchanging bodily fluids."
"No Kohaku-san.
I can't—"
"... Hm.... well then, I'll just have to move then."
"Ah——"
Not stopping to hear my response, she starts to move her hips.

"Hey——, ah, ahh——!"
My entire body shivers.
With me still inside of her, she rocks her hip in a circle.
Impaled as she is, she can't move around too much.
It feels like hundreds of tongues are licking all around me, and that number multiplies as the sensation of her moving overwhelms me.
"Ah—Ko.. Koha.. ku——!"

I close my mouth and resist as hard as I can, but that mouth keeps strangling me with pleasure.

"Ha—ah, ah.....!!!"

I want to die.

No, if I die here, I won't even care because it feels that good.

My manhood feels like it's in a dimension of pure pleasure.

The nucleus of pleasure rotates inside of Kohaku's body.

"—, —, —,"!

I can only breathe.

"Mm.... Shiki-san, please, use your.. hips—"

Engulfed in pleasure, Kohaku-san asks for the impossible.

The heightening waves of sensation crash through my head—

"Ah—yes, there—Shiki-san, any time you want—"

Her hair flutters freely.

As she asks, I raise my hips.

"—, —, —, "

I can't breathe.

—I want to release it all.

Everything is building to a head, but I can't release.

She tightens around me so much I can't let anything out.

.... There really must be something wrong with me.

This incredible pressure isn't painful.

That pressure mounts around the center of my shaft.

The skin around me is rather soft, so it isn't like it hurts.

"How is it.... Shiki-san, does it feel good....?"

Kohaku speaks with a bewitching voice.

"—, —"

That goes.. without saying——

".... Mm.... then I guess that's a yes...."

Her hips stop.

"Ah——"

.... I'm saved.

With this I won't have to—

"—,"!

Instantly.

With all the force of before, she tightens again.

"Ha——ah, gah.....!"

My hips rise.

Kohaku looks down at my face.

"—Aha, come inside me!"

Her voice rises like that of an innocent child.

That which I held back for so, so long rushes forth.

More than I thought possible for one spurt.
And.. it is all released inside of her.

Ah—ahh—ahh—ahhh.
The sound of my breathing is all that echoes in the room.
Kohaku gets off of me and places her hand against my forehead.
"Thank goodness, your body temperature has returned.
I guess we really are compatible with each other.
Usually, if you have previous bonds like me, once isn't enough."
She sounds extremely happy.

pant—*pant*—*pant*—
.... Certainly, my body is completely different than before.
Even though I'm breathing hard from exertion, for the first time in days I can
move as freely as I want to.
"That is so fortunate.
But you're tired, right?
I was worried I wouldn't accept you with just one attempt.
It seemed more than once for you right now would have been life threatening."
Straightening her kimono, she moves away from the bed.
She seems truly happy that I returned to normal.

pant——*pant*——*pant*
But, I'm not happy at all.
"Please rest until I return with some new clothes.
My powers will not work completely right away, so please just relax."
Kohaku goes to leave the room.
I can't resist seeing her smile like that.
"Kohaku-san—!"
"Eh——?"
I get up from bed and grab her hand.
"———"
I don't say anything, I just hold her slender hand in mine.



"....?"

Is there something wrong, Shiki-san?"

"....."

I look down and grit my teeth.

Her warmth flows through my hand.

If I let her go, maybe it will never have been real.

Even I know that I'm betting my life by trying to stop Akiha.

.... I only have now.

I can only love her for real right now.

So I don't want something like that.

"——Don't go."

"Eh, Shiki-san....?"

".... This won't work, Kohaku.

It wasn't enough."

Looking down and blushing furiously, I tell her what I feel.



"Ah.... I, I'm sorry....!"

I knew just once would not be enough to accept you.

Forgive me for making you say that.

Please wait, I will do it again in an easier——"

Kohaku looks distraught.

"No, that's already done.

My body has recovered.

.... It isn't my body that hasn't had enough, it's my heart."



"Huh...?"

Your heart?"

Kohaku's expression grows confused.

"Um—Shiki-san, it didn't feel good?"

With a serious look she asks me this unbelievable question.

But now is not the time to be embarrassed.

"That's not it at all...!"

Um... uh, it felt really good.

I'm being completely honest."



"Ahaha.

Shiki-san, you look so cute when you blush."

Kohaku smiles happily.



"So what wasn't enough?
I don't understand what you're saying."
".... Isn't it obvious?
What we did couldn't be called making love.
I didn't want to do it like that."



".... I don't get it.
I think that was the best method for exchanging bodily fluids.
And you have recovered, right?"
"I said, that's not it....!
When you said what we had to do, I was incredibly happy.
.... I was so happy that I even forgot all about Akiha.
I—like you so much that I couldn't care about anything else.
I don't care about Synchronizing or anything like that.
I just want to hold you."



"_____"
"It did feel good, but I don't like that.
It was only me, you didn't get to feel good, right?
.... I don't have that much experience, but I want you to feel as good as I did.
That's why it wasn't enough.
I just want to show you how much I like you.
.... This has nothing to do with Synchronizing, I just want to be with you."
I grip her hand tighter.
She looks up at me in surprise.



"Ah—I.. when you you say it like that, there's a problem.
I.. I've.... never done.. that."
Her face turns bright red as she says this.

Her previously dry hand suddenly becomes wet.
As close as I am, I can hear her heart pounding.
.... I finally realize something.
Until now, she's never slept with anyone out of love.
Tohno Makihisa looked at her only as a tool.
Kohaku simply accepted that role, too.
"....."
I can't believe it.
She was forced to do this almost every day, but she really—she really didn't
know the real meaning behind two people sleeping together.
"—Kohaku-san.
I.. I want to see you naked."



"N, no....!
What are you saying, all of a sudden, Shiki-san.....!!"
Her whole body turns red as she shouts.
".... I see.
I didn't really want to think of it this way, but what you did before was just an
obligation.
.... You're right, you can't get naked in front of someone you don't even like."



"Ah....."

She shifts her gaze away as her blush deepens.

She looks impossibly cute as she mumbles something in response, fidgeting with the edge of her Kimono.

".... Um, that's not true.

My body is dirty, so I don't, want to show you, Shiki-san...."

"I don't think so.

That's not true at all.

Even if it was, I would still think you're beautiful."

I pull her closer.

"——!"

I press her up to my chest.

After enjoying that moment, I move around behind her and begin to nuzzle the base of her neck.

"Ah——Shiki.. san——"

.... There's no stopping now.

Holding her trembling body, I began to tease her neck with my tongue.

After drawing a smooth glassy line, I kiss her gently.

"Mm——"

A faint sigh.

Her face still painted red, she silently accepts everything I do.

".... What's this?

Your skin, it's so clean... so beautiful."

I continue licking her fine porcelain skin.

"....."

Her eyes remained closed as she shudders slightly.

.... Maybe it really is her first time having someone treat her like this.

Her reactions are nothing like the seductive voluptuousness earlier.

For some reason—I feel this strong urge to tease her.

"Mm—you're sensitive here....?"

I whisper to her from behind.

"....."

With her mouth closed, she just shakes her head back and forth.
She answers one way, but her body responds another.

".... Oh really?"

Then it's okay if I do this."

I press my lips tightly against her neck.

I let my tongue firmly play all along her neck.

"..... Ah..... Shiki.... sa..... n....."

Her lips shake.

While still tasting her skin, I place my hands on her shoulders and begin to slide her kimono off.

"....."

As expected, she silently offers no resistance.

Swish.

Her kimono clears her shoulders.

".....,"

Her lips tighten.

.... She's probably embarrassed.

She still offers no resistance as she trembles.

Not in satisfaction—but in anticipation.

".... Kohaku.

You want this, right?"

"..... Ye..... yes....."

She speaks softly, as if she doesn't want to be heard.

Her kimono drapes to the side.

"_____"

Only one thought enters my mind—she really is beautiful.

Her fine white skin.

The vivid lines of her collarbone.

Her trembling white breasts.

Her white skin is now tinged a pale shade of red.

Seeing her with her eyes closed in embarrassment and lips slightly open with unease makes me love her even more.

"..... Ah..... Shiki.. san."

Her voice rises.

I instantly wrap my fingers around her exposed breasts, giving them a light squeeze.

.... Hot.

My fingers sink into her tender flesh.

Just touching them sets my brain afire.

".... Mm.... Shiki-sa.. n.... What.. are you.. doing?"

That's an odd question.

"What am I doing?—I'm making love to you."

I grip harder.

Her tender mounds shiver in response as I knead them.

".... Ooh, ah....."

She suddenly throws her head back and arches her back.
The fun has just started, and her nipples have already become as hard as bullets.

".... I don't.... believe it.... Shiki-san, I—"

Lips shaking, she desperately holds her voice back.

My teasing fingertips sense the rising heat of her body.

I can hear her panting.

Her breathing—it's the same as when she was riding on top of me.

"....?"

Kohaku, your breasts are sensitive too....?"

"Eh.... no, that's—not it."

Her words trail off as she gasps for breath.

"Haa..... ah, this is strange.... I—"

"Yeah.

You sound so.. horny."

"Ah——"

Kohaku's blush deepens.

Reveling in her reactions, I lick her neck once more.

".....!"

Shiki.. san..... That.. tickles—"

".... What's this?"

You said you weren't sensitive here.

So, I wonder if I do this—"

Holding her writhing body close to mine, I release my hold on her breasts.

"Mm——"

Kohaku gasps in response.

And then—I take my thumb and forefinger and squeeze a delicate pink nipple.

"Ah, ahhh.....!!!"

Her body jolts.

My fingers move harder.

Sensing her enjoyment, they twist even harder, and I use my nails this time.

".... Mm, haa..... oh... ah—"

Kohaku exhales forcefully.

This time it seems like it is almost painful.

".... Kohaku-san, is this...."

I didn't really think it, but—

"Is this the first time you've felt this good...?"

"Ah....."

She stops breathing for an instant.

Still looking down in embarrassment, she gives a slight nod.

".... I'm sorry.

I.. feel strange.

I know I should be servicing you, but—just your touch, makes my head spin—"

She breathes out again.

As if trying to force out all the heat in her body, she takes another breath.

"This is strange, isn't it—I've never.. felt.. this way.. before.

.... Nothing is happening and.. my body.. is still so hot—Shiki.. san.. what did.. you do.. to me?"

Her voice hesitates and falters.

I realize that she isn't even standing on her own.

She leans against me and I feel that if I let go, she will collapse.

Her arms and legs hang loosely to the sides.

".... Be honest, does this feel good Kohaku-san?"

"....."

She nods, ashamed.

".... I see.

Then, it'll get even better.

Kohaku-san, let's get rid of the rest of your clothes.

"Ah..... n, no....."

I pretend not to hear her soft denial.

Untying her obi while holding her—I quickly get rid of what's in the way of my body and hers.

—Her naked body is truly spectacular.

Seeing her bashful face and her tender, delicate curves causes me to lose control.

"Um.... Shiki-san, you're not.. going to take off your clothes?"

.... What she says is only natural.

But being naked now would expose that which has been yearning for quite some time.

"Soon.

Here, come to the bed."

Walking to the bed, I lay down on my back.

I undo my zipper and my swollen manhood immediately springs out.

"_____"

I hear her sudden gasp.

She's probably surprised to see it erect so quickly.

"Hey, Kohaku.

I need to pay you back, so come here."

I invite her over, still pointing at her without my finger.

"..... Yes."

She gets on the bed while breathing rapidly.

It's just like before.

She goes to ride on top of me, face-to-face.

"Ah, not like that.

Put your ass here, Kohaku."

"Eh—Shiki-san, what are you doing.....!?"

Kohaku tries to escape but my arms are much faster.

I grab onto her hips and jerk them towards my face.

"Shi.. Shiki-san, what are.....!!"

"I told you, I'm paying you back.
It's your turn to feel pleasure."
"Eh..... a, mm——"

Grabbing her tender cheeks, I lower her hips.

Before my eyes,
in place of the ceiling, Kohaku's most private place looms over me.
"..... Mm."
I lift my face between her legs.
.... Just seeing her from this angle makes my heart feel like it will explode.
Her delicious, white thighs.
And between them, her swollen lips.
I feel like sweet honey would pour from these passionate petals if coaxed by my tongue.
The sensuous curves of her bottom add another dimension of captivation in addition to her bewitching thighs.
"Ah..... Shiki.. san——"
Kohaku's voice quivers.
She must be embarrassed at having herself so open to me.
Drip.
A drop of her juice splashes onto my forehead.
".... Mm.... Kohaku, you're really getting into this."
"..... "
She doesn't say anything.
All I can hear is her ragged, desperate breathing.

I assail her with my tongue.
I narrow my tongue and penetrate her flowery gate.
Slide.
Her pale pink folds part to accept me.
.... I feel the passion burning inside her.
I enter only the slightest bit, as if only to taste her dewing liquids.
"Huah——oh, nnaah.....!"

Her hips jerk upwards.
Pushing down to prevent her escape, this time I caress the outside surface.
My tongue rolls up and down.
Lapping up her flowing juices.

".... Ah.... Haa, mm....."

Her breathing becomes even more wild.
It harmonizes with the sound of me licking her wetness.
Her breathing reaches its crescendo.

.... I lose myself completely as I give her pleasure.

All of a sudden, a shock runs up my spine.

"——Ko.. haku."

My tongue that was diligently massaging Kohaku stops.

"... Ah..... m, Ha..... Ah."

.... Her breath swirls around my erection.

A new sound of moist flesh.

Now it isn't just me expressing my love physically.

"Ha.... Shiki-san—so warm."

Kohaku begins to hungrily lick at the tip of my shaft.

"——"

My back arches as the sensation courses through me.

For a moment, I stop licking her and revel in the ecstasy her tongue gives me.

"N.... mm, ah..... oh."

With sweet, short gasps, she slowly plays her tongue along my skin.

She licks only at my very tip.

Hesitatingly, haltingly, slowly.

"Ko.. haku—it feels.. so good."

I resume.

My breathing increases in depth as her wetness rains down on me.

"Mm.....!"

.... Haa.... ah, ha.... Shiki-san, M.... more...."

Faintly whispering, she grabs me with both hands.

She gently pulls my slippery pole.

She starts to caress me with her tongue once more.

"Ha——kkk.....!"

This time, she doesn't hold back.

Completely different than before, she doesn't use any special technique.

She only follows the instinctual urges of her body.

This sets my body on fire—far more than any special technique.

"Ah.... nnn.... aah.... oh——"

Her breathing continues its ragged procession.

Does she enjoy caressing me that much?

Her sweet juices continue to flow unhindered from her passionate tunnel.

"Mm——, haaa."

I drink every last drop of that sensuous nectar.

.... There's a reason for this.

Kohaku, who is caressing me.

Kohaku, who is filling me with pleasure.

I don't want to miss a single drop of anything coming from her.

That's why I gather it all. with my tongue.. with my hand.

The sound of meeting flesh echoes through the room.

Not just the rubbing of our passionate places, but our whole bodies melting together.

Her breasts glide across my stomach.

Her arms touching my sides, her legs resting by my head and shoulders.
Sliding, sliding, sliding.

Rubbing.
Sweat, her wetness, my semen, our bodies.
Kohaku gasps continually—her wildness spreads to me.
"—I can't, take this."
Feeling my limit near, I look down.
Kohaku traces her fingers along my shaft and licks them clean with her red tongue.

—I wish this could go on forever, but I know it can't last.
The swelling in my loins becomes a burning cyclone.
"—Kohaku, lie down."
I tell her gently.
"... Eh... lie down...?"
She doesn't seem to understand but moves to do as I said.
She lies down flat on her back.
Propping myself above her in perfect symmetry, I admire the view before me.

"..... Ah....."
Crossing her arms bashfully, she looks up at me.
"... Her skin still enflamed with passion, the beating in her chest paints her cheeks red.
"... Shiki... san.
My, heart... is racing."
She speaks in a small voice, almost to herself.
"... I know.
Kohaku-san, you look like a little girl."
I speak the first thing that pops in my head.
Still blushing, she nods in response.

"... This is, strange.
I've done this, so many times... but I never had this incredible tightness in my chest."
Of course.
The one she slept with never had any feelings for her at all.
"... I see.
Is it.. bad?"
"..... No.
I am... so happy.
It—it makes me scared."
Her voice is full of hesitation.
This isn't the perpetually smiling Kohaku.
I think this is her true self.
I don't want to steal this lovely moment.

"But, I'm just as embarrassed.
.... Just having you look at me like this, my body—it's never been this hot before."
".... You shouldn't be.
I just love looking at you.
.... But it can't be helped.
I just love you so much.
I want you to feel good too."
"..... Stop.
Shiki-san, you can say those things so easily.
But I'm so embarrassed—I don't even know how to smile at a time like this."
Still blushing, she looks directly at me.

—Thump, Thump.
My blood starts to race.

There is no more need for words.
"—Kohaku."
I lower my body.
She shyly positions herself to accept me with her arms still crossed.
I spread her legs apart and lower my hips.
"Mm....."
I didn't even touch her yet and her face tightens in pain.
.... She really doesn't know how to respond.
Her pained expression is a mix of uneasiness and longing.
".... Kohaku, here I come."
"....."
She nods silently.
I hold myself right in front of her.
.... Between her legs.
Both of her thighs quiver uncontrollably as liquid anticipation flows freely from her lovely well.
My saliva has mixed with her wetness.
Sliiiiide.
I begin moving.

"Ah.....!"

Her body reacts sensitively.
My tip has been well lubricated by her saliva as well.
Entering is not a problem.
Our flesh begins its dance as my tip clears her lower lips.

"....!
Mm, oh....!"
Kohaku's body rises and falls.

.... Is she nervous?
 She's much tighter than before.
 I can only enter tip-deep, unable to go further.
 "... Kohaku, are you okay....?"
 "... Ye... ye.. s.... I want you, Shiki.. san—"
 Her hands strongly gripping the bed sheets, she looks up at me with moist eyes.
 "_____"
 I start moving again.
 I thrust my hips violently as if to break her tightness.
 "....!"
 Ah, ha—oh—!"
 She raises her head.
 Thump.
 My pulse runs through my body at full-speed.
 Kohaku's tightened flesh transforms into numerous, squeezing folds.
 "_____"
 This sensation is almost torture.
 There's something wrong with the way she feels.
 The sharp, burning pleasure seems to come not from my testicles, but from
 behind and rockets up my spine.
 "Tss.... ah, ha, ah—!"
 Resisting it, I move my hips.
 No matter what, I'm going to penetrate to her center.
 I begin to thrust in and out of her, not yet reaching her center.

Thrust, squeeze, thrust, squeeze.
 The sounds of our fluids and flesh mingle into a glorious cacophony.
 "—..... Ko.. haku—!"
 "Y, yes—Shiki-san, I—oh, ah, ahh.....!"
 Her back starts to arch.
 At the same time, the pressure increases.
 The pleasure causes me to grit my teeth in desperation.
 She hasn't climaxed yet, so no matter what, I can't end it now.
 But, really, why does it feel this good?
 Inside of her is a world of contradiction.
 She's flowing so much, but she's gripping me like iron.
 Her undulations and spiraling rotations cause waves of pleasure to crash into
 me.
 Every coiling of her tender skin feels completely different.
 "Ah—gg, ah.....!"
 Despite this, I force myself to continue without giving in to the sensations as-
 sailing me.
 "N, ngh, ah—!"
 Her sweet voice.
 But, she isn't.. the only one.. resisting something.
 In other words, I am..

This sensation.
Kohaku's warm envelopment—

"—Ha—ah,"!

Not buckling under the weight of the feeling welling up within me, I resume moving my hips.

"M, ah, mm.....!"

Her body springs upward desperately.
"——"

Our bodies are still fused together.
I thrust even harder.

"Ha, ah...!"

Shiki.. san—more.. gently—!"

Betraying her words, her body writhes and assails me with a passion that threatens my sanity.

"Ha—ah, Koha.. ku—!"

Slide.

Slide.

Slide.

I go crazy.

I move in to receive the ecstasy; I move out to escape the euphoria.

"Ha....., ah, n.....!"

An endless dance.

Our fluids coat each other's bodies.

"Haa, ah...!"

Deeper—deeper.....!!!!"

More.

Stronger.

Until I reach her center.

I can't stop until I touch every bit of her—!

"Ha—AH.....!!!!"

I savagely pierce her, as if I can't hold anything back.

"Hwa—ah, Shiki.. sannnnnnn!"

Her voice gradually becomes drowned completely in passion.

.... Her spread legs wrap fiercely around my back and push me deeper in.

"No—stop, I'll—I'm... ha, ahhh.....!!!!"

She doesn't seem to have much energy left.

I clasp her hands and desperately resist the nearing finish—

"Ha—ha—ah, ha—!"

A jolt runs through me.

It strikes deep into my very brain.

"Ha—n, ah, ha—!?"

But—finally, I penetrate to her full depths.

Her figure now writhes in ecstasy.

The cycle continues.

Having won my prize, I thrust to her very core, over and over and over.

"A—oh—Shiki.. sa.. n—!"

I sink.

Kohaku rises up to meet me.

"Ha—Kohaku, I'm gonna come—!"

I grit my teeth.

"Yes—!"

Come-come inside me, Shiki—!"

"———!"

I thrust my hips forth with all my strength.

"—Ngh, n, AhaaAaAa—!"

One last push.

Thump!

My convulsing shaft explodes as I climax deep inside of her.

"Ha—ah.... Ah——"

Kohaku's lips open and close, open and close.

—And.

She falls completely drained to the bed.

"———Ah."

My body presses down against her.

—She lies unmoving, as if sleeping.

.... Aren't I the same?

I'm exhausted.

My body still hasn't fully received all its energy—and the pleasure was so immense.

I ran my body past its limits, and I lay there, collapsed.

"..... I'm sleepy."

I catch my breath next to her.

.... My consciousness gets hazy.

Kohaku's profile moves in rhythm with her breathing.

"....."

And with just that—I feel relaxed.

I lie on my back and stare at the ceiling blankly.... I can't let myself fall asleep now as it'll be a waste.

I want to keep feeling her soft breath, and I resist the urge to sleep—

I blankly stare at the ceiling as I continue lying in bed.

Kohaku is nestled beside me.

.... I can only hear her breathing softly.

She's probably asleep.

"_____"

I reach out and clench my hand into a fist.

"—Alright."

I don't feel any more pain or dullness.

.... It feels like her warmth is still around me.

It hasn't gone through me completely, but I can feel my energy gradually increasing.

Soon I'll be able to move as I wish.

It's no use hurrying to Akiha's room, so until then—I want to quietly linger here with Kohaku-san.

"—Shiki-san."

.... Close nearby.

I hear Kohaku-san's voice.

".... Ah, please don't answer.

I just want to say something.

It's just my spoken thoughts, so please just listen."

Her voice is strangely calm.

"....."

I nod quietly and continue to stare at the ceiling.

I can feel her gaze shift towards me.

".... I'm not the girl that you think I am.

I don't have a sense of self of my own, even now may simply be just another act."

"....."

"A long time ago, I was always quiet.

I never understood why people smiled or frowned or could ever discover the meaning behind it.

.... But I think that I did have a self.

Until I was brought to this mansion, I really was alive."

".... After coming here, I was forced to know unbearable pain.

I think that is what destroyed my true self.

I just became this doll that was just there.

It was more bearable, and it was the only way I could survive."

"But, even though I did that, it didn't solve anything.

So—I searched for a purpose and started to act to fulfill my purpose.

I was a doll without any identity, so if I wore the right clothes, I could become anyone.

.... But, even if I became someone else, it was just an act.

I could laugh or cry.

But I could not understand if I was really happy or really sad."

".... Isn't it funny?

In order to protect myself I cast away my identity and became just a doll.

But the more of that I do, the more broken I become.

I became good at acting, an expert at lying, and could deceive anyone with my smile.

But as I try to fulfill my purpose like that, I keep losing my self that I wanted to protect.

Just what is happiness?

What is this thing called sadness?

.... I became unable to even remember the meaning of pain itself."

"But when I would remember one thing, my heart would become agitated.

When I would remember that boy who disappeared eight years ago, I would get this feeling I could not understand.

That boy who was always playing in the garden who knew nothing about me yet invited me with his eyes.

I didn't like him or hate him, I was just scared.

.... After trying so hard and becoming a doll that could endure the pain, I felt like I would realize it was all an illusion when I watched that boy."

".... When that boy lost his life in the garden, I was watching by the window.

He died saving a girl that was not even related to him by blood.

I couldn't pull my eyes from that scene.

The reflection of my face in the mirror was terrifying.

.... That was the first time I ever hated anyone.

Because I really was frustrated.

I hated him and only him.

I hated him to the point of tears.

".... I don't hate Makihisa-sama.

I really didn't feel anything at all towards him.

.... Towards SHIKI-sama who killed that boy, or Akiha-sama who was saved by that boy, I didn't feel anything at all."

"—I guess I was just taking it out on someone.

Because I couldn't understand why he did that.

I just kept watching his discarded, bloody body.

.... Did he value someone more precious than his own life?

Otherwise he would never have protected Akiha-sama like that.

But.... if he could do that, why didn't he ever help me?

Why—why were the people around me not as kind as he was?"

".... I don't know what that feeling was.

But in my emotionless days, only that boy was shining."

Slowly, Kohaku lifts herself up.

"But, that's it.

I don't understand this feeling right now.

I am very happy right now, but that just might be another charade, right?

Hey, is it alright, Shiki-san?

Believing in me, someone who doesn't know if she loves you like you do me."

"Didn't I say it before?

I don't even know what kind of person I am.

Since I'm just a doll, I can become any Kohaku that I wish.

So, this Kohaku that you say you love, it isn't me, it's just—"

It just might be another pretend Kohaku.

She speaks with a satisfied smile and a wavering voice.

—But.

That can never be true.

".... That's not true.

Acting, faking, that doesn't have anything to do with it.

You are you.

.... A truly mean-hearted person can't pretend to be truly kind.

No matter how you act, you are still the same inside, Kohaku-san."

.... That's right.

Even if it is just an act, Kohaku-san seems like she is having so much fun.

That means she is enjoying that role.

It was her dream that could become real if she really wished for it.

".... Yeah, even if everything was just a lie.

I would still like the another, new Kohaku-san.

Definitely."

"_____"

Kohaku-san nods happily.

"That's true.

I thought you'd say that."

Her lips draw close.

"Eh——"

She launches a surprise attack and kisses me.

Her tongue slides into my mouth.

I feel something hard.

"Uu——mph."

Something descends down my throat.

"H, hey—Kohaku-san, what did you make me swallow——?"

..... Huh?

Something, feels.... so good.

The ever-present pain in my body fades and drowsiness floods over me—

"Hey, Shiki-san.

I just have one last question for you.
 Which 'Kohaku' do you like the best?"
 Her close, yet so distant voice.
 "Mm—"
 I feel faint.
 Even still.... I have to answer her.
 "... I don't, know.
 But, I like this Kohaku."
 I speak as if in a dream.
 She looks at me in total surprise.

"Yes.
 I liked this Kohaku the best, too."

With an unmatched smile, she quietly stands up.

The sound of a kimono being changed into.
 She must be out of bed and putting it on.

"Well then, Shiki-san.
 I have to take responsibility for what I have done."

With a smile—one completely different than up until now, her true smile, she
 leaves the room.
 "—What are, you doing, Kohaku—"

My consciousness flickers off and on.
 What's, going on?
 My body has finally healed, but this time my mind, is, fading—

"What am I doing.....!?"
 I rouse myself awake.
 —Kohaku.
 What did she say to me when she left!?

—I have to take responsibility for what I have done—

".... You've got to be kidding me....!
 Why did she—"
 Why does she try to do everything herself....!?
 There isn't any need to continue acting or hide anything.
 I would do anything for her, so why—why is she still trying to go alone?
 Forcing me to sleep—was she just worrying about me.....!?"
 "It's really—beginning to piss me off—"
 I get up from bed.
 The desk is so far away.

".... Damn it.... what kind of drug, did she, give me.
.... I have to go, to her room once and—"
I have to clean out her room and take all her medicine away—
"Aah..... ah, ah—"
I somehow walk and collapse onto the desk.
On top is my knife.
I must have put it there after taking it out of the drawer—

"....."
Crap.
I fell asleep again.
.... What is this strong drowsiness?
No matter how hard I try to fight it, it won't help.
"..... Damn it..... Kohaku-san, I'll pay you back for this—"
I grab the knife.
Kachink!
It flies open.
I take it and—

Man, this is gonna be extremely painful.

—Thinking that, I slice into the nail of my middle finger.
"Gggah———!"
The acute, slicing pain drives straight into my brain.
"Ha—take that!"
I pull the knife back out from my nail.
Every time my finger feels pain, the sleepiness goes away.
Wrapping my finger with a handkerchief, I stop the bleeding.
"..... Well, if it's like this."
It won't stop me from gripping my knife.
.... All I really need to do is hold it, anyway.
I don't even need the physical strength required to cleave through things.
"Damn it, don't do anything foolish, Kohaku—!"
I jam the knife in my pocket and fly out of the room.
I can't let Kohaku-san and Akiha face each other.
If I can't prevent that, then something that can never be taken back will
happen—

I burst through the door.
"Kohaku-san.....!"
.... There isn't anyone in the room.
Neither Kohaku-san nor Akiha.
"—Are they next door!?"
I run to the bedroom, but they aren't there, either.
"Where—where did they go?"
I run my gaze to the clock.

It says—past midnight.
It's already tomorrow.
"—No way."
When did that happen?
I knew that I lost track of time when I was making love to Kohaku-san, but I didn't think it was this late already.
"By this time, Akiha has—"
Gone out on the streets to drink blood.

I leave the mansion.
There is no time to waste.
Kohaku-san left to stop Akiha.
But I don't think Akiha will listen to anything Kohaku-san has to say.
.... Akiha isn't normal right now.
If worst comes to worst, she'll see Kohaku-san as an obstacle that needs to be removed.
"It can't be—the school....?"

That dream of drinking someone's blood I once had after SHIKI was killed by Akiha.
I don't know how it happened, but if that was what Akiha was watching, that means Akiha has made the school grounds her feeding place, just like SHIKI.
Then—at this time, Akiha, who's a blood sucking demon, won't be anywhere else but there—

—And I return to the place.

It's quiet.
The giant building bathed in moonlight does not look like a building that holds hundreds of students.

—For a long time.

It looks just like a monolithic tombstone abandoned long ago, forgotten by memory, forgotten by time.

"——"

My head starts to throb lightly.
I ignore it and go through the gates.

My headache multiplies in intensity the instant I step inside.
My whole world wavers.
My heart awakens.
My fingers shiver in anticipation of battle.
"—She's here."
How vile.

Only the smell of blood sticks to the air.
The air is full of heat and burns on my skin.
The wind is dead.
The stagnant air transforms into a red cage of decay.
I see countless red strands of hair when I look past my glasses.
The red hair permeates the school grounds and the building like the web of a
thousand-year-old spider, not a hole anywhere to let its prey escape.
"Akiha—you—"

This place is already a different world.
It's not a world any human should enter.

"Have you gone that far?"

My headache does not go away.
The sharp pain of my cut fingernail.
My heart lifts up a rhythm of delighted sobs.

I take off my glasses and grip my knife.
.... How long has it been since I faced these "lines"?
I never thought I would take off the glasses I received from Sensei of my own
free will.
I didn't think even in my dream that I'd be using them to face my little sister.
"_____"
I don't have time to complain.
Everything is set.
All that's left is for me to cut through this Red Lock of Hair.

—Burning.
Entering inside, the temperature is even hotter.

—Burning.
I know what this heat is.
I saw it in the dream.
The vampire that attacked a young woman entered the school grounds, and
then—

———Burning.

Dragging that body, went into that place.

That room that the killer SHIKI was once using.

The silver moon looks down like a snake at the accused.

———Burning.

In this classroom.

"..... Akiha."

Nausea fills me as soon as I enter.

In between the desks lie the collapsed bodies of girls.

One, two..... three.

All of them have completely lost consciousness.

On their necks are trails of blood.

In the middle of it all, that red haired "monster" is laughing.



"Oh, Nii-san.

You couldn't wait until tomorrow?"

She greets me without a trace of malevolence.

—Thump.

That impulse assails me as soon as I see her.

I desperately suppress the urge with all my strength.

"——"

The moonlight streaming through the window illuminates her.

—Thump.

I haven't moved a step since I entered the room.

.... My instincts scream at me that this is bad.

That thing is something beyond what I expected.

The Akiha that exterminated SHIKI pales in comparison to this.

"I'm surprised.

You aren't supposed to be able to walk, yet you forced yourself to come see me.

.... I'm happy.

I guess you finally understand my feelings."

Her voice is full of happiness.

—Thu, mp.

My reason cries out.

Tohno Shiki cannot win against that thing.

So you can't make it angry.

Don't let it be your enemy.

If you do that, you will surely be annihilated.

—Thum, p.

Even still—I can't run away now.

"—Akiha, where is Kohaku-san?"



The air itself stiffens from her overpowering presence.

She grinds her teeth in displeasure.

"She's over there.

I don't know what she was thinking, but she's now receiving her punishment for raising a hand against me."

She looks to the wall beside me.

"—?"

I follow her gaze.

On the wall—is the crucified form of Kohaku-san.

"Wha——"

Her body is floating in mid-air.

No, it would look like that for someone else.

But—

—Thu, mp.

My eyes can see what is tying her.

Her body is pinned against the wall by something like red hair.

The hair creakingly tightens around her arms and legs.

.... Has she passed out?

Her head is hanging down—she really looks like a butterfly caught in a spider's web.



"Don't you find it strange?"

Suspending herself to the wall like that is quite a feat, don't you think?"

Akiha giggles.

"But don't worry Nii-san.

I don't kill cats that bite me once.

After she receives her punishment, I will forgive her."

"Wha——"

—Thum,p.

Everything goes hazy.

Kohaku's anguished figure and Akiha's red figure match up and all rational thought is disappearing—

"But let me warn you.

I don't care for pets that bite me.

I guess it doesn't belong to me anymore in my heart.
So there won't be a second time.
I have no need for those that aren't mine.
.... Hey, Nii-san.
I can be very cruel to those who betray me."
The sound of tightening reaches my ears.
The red hair binding Kohaku-san's arms and legs tightens even further, as if to rip her limbs off.
"Akiha, you—!"

I run towards the wall.
The hair binding Kohaku-san cannot be touched.
.... This is just an extension of her hair, only what Akiha is imagining.
By putting Kohaku-san in her sight, Akiha is trapping Kohaku-san to the wall with her willpower.
—Th, um, p.

.... The flowing power looks like red hair.
That is something she can't even see.
I think suddenly.
Weren't my eyes designed specifically for this sort of thing from the beginning?
And by facing death so many times, haven't they discerned the very concept of death—
"Tch—!"
Whatever, that doesn't matter right now.
If I can see it, then there isn't anything I can't cut.
I can't let this red hair do what it wants to Kohaku-san.....!

—I swing my knife.
Maybe it's because my heart is beating so fast.
My knife swings out with a speed that surprises even me.
It doesn't feel like I'm cutting through something.
My knife glides through the red hair with speed and accuracy, as if I was merely reaping the air for harvest.
Before I realize it,
I have sliced through all the hair binding Kohaku-san in one breath.

Her body falls.
"——"
I catch her and touch her cheeks.
She's still warm.
Her breathing is weak but it isn't stopped.
.... I can only see a few "lines" on her body.
I let out a sigh of relief.
I place her down on the floor.
—Thank goodness. If anything happened.... thank goodness she is safe.

"Nii-san—what, was that just now—"
 Her voice is shaking.
 I spin to face her, still gripping my knife in one hand.



"....."

She looks at me and gasps.
 Bringing her hand to her mouth in disbelief, she looks at my eyes.
 "—What beautiful—blue, eyes."
 "..... ?"
 "How come—?
 You shouldn't have any strength like that left—"
 Amazement permeates her voice.
 "Did.... you.."
 Akiha trembles.
 "Nii-san, you—made a contract with Kohaku?"
 Her voice quivers.
 It isn't full of hatred, but more like sorrow.
 "....."
 ".... This can't be.
 Then that means you chose not me, but—"
 She staggers.

She leans against the window with eyes full of stunned surprise.
 Her face is pale and she looks like she will vomit—
 "Uu..... ah, eh—agh!"

—No, she does.
 "Ah—, ghuu.....!"
 She vomits as if crying.
 Her red hair fluttering, she hides her anguished face as she continues vomiting.
 It's almost as if she was letting out her screams.

"—Thief Cat!
 I should have killed you."

"That's right," she says as she stares at Kohaku-san's collapsed figure.
She then laughs strangely from the bottom of her heart.



"Is this what you plan on doing, Nii-san?
You come here to betray me and then come after me?
.... Incredible.
You weren't satisfied with betraying me once, but you ask for help from Kohaku
and came to kill me again.
How thorough you are."
Her laughing voice fills the room.
The temperature of the room rises with it.

—Thu, m, p.

On one hand, my heart is raging forth and on the other hand, my reason is
screaming warnings at me.
The commands of "kill" and "escape" clash together.
"Stupi—that isn't it....!
I didn't come here to kill you....!"
"Liar.
You slept with Kohaku, didn't you?
Then you don't need my help anymore, do you?
So isn't that why you came here?"
"What did I just say....!
I said I didn't come here to kill you, only to stop you from drinking any more
blood.....!
You were doing this to help me, right?
So you don't have to anymore.
.... My body is fine again.
As long as Kohaku-san is near, I—"
"You intend just to cast me off now?
Hah.... I really must look stupid.
I thought of you so dearly, I loved you this much—but you don't even think of
me."

"Cast you off?
 Don't say stupid things like that.
 You are very dear to me.
 What—whatever you want, I—"
 I can't say the words "will do them."
 I know what it is she wants.
 But, I can't do that.
 I can't betray Kohaku-san again.



"—Liar.
 I have no need for someone like you."

The entire room screams.
 The air is burning.
 Her red hair expands without limit.
 This, is overwhelming, power.

"Ah——"
 I start to stagger.
 Unconsciously, my legs move back.

—Thump.
 "I told you, Nii-san.
 I have no need for pets that bite me once."

—Thump.
 Thump.
 ".... Nii-san.
 For me, you really were the most important person in the world.
 But that is all over.
 Because, however much I yearn for you, if I can never have you, then aren't you

just an eyesore?"

—Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

"—So, I will kill you, Nii-san.

You are the most important thing to me, so I will not let anyone else have you."

—Thump.

Thump Thump Thump Thump....!

"A—Aki, ha."

I can't breathe.

The air in the room is like a furnace, burning the inside of my lungs.

All around Akiha is that shimmering mirage.

My heart.

Even now, the impulses still fight between escaping and killing.



"Geez, what's the matter, Nii-san?

I'm being generous here.

If I became serious, then it would be all over, so I have to let you do at least a little bit, right?

Here, won't you come slash at me like you did when you saved Kohaku?"

"Tss.....!"
Her smile doesn't fade.
The murderous feeling in the air almost makes me want to puke.
Akiha, is completely—
"... I see, you're pretty weak, Nii-san.
You can't even bring yourself to kill me.
But I'm different.
I can't help but want to kill you.
.... Because I've been holding back for so long.
Your blood, your flesh, your warmth, your shape, everything.
I always dreamed about making them completely mine and mine only."

While she shakes, while her body shakes with each word, she smiles with pleasure.
—My heart feels like it has gone crazy.

This thing before me, it's already—no longer the Tohno Akiha from before.

I get a headache.
It feels like it will split apart.
The pain drives any thoughts out of my head.

—I'm about to go crazy.

My head.
If my head hurts this much, I will—
I will go crazy and feel like, fighting Akiha to the death—



"Well then, let's fight to the death, Nii-san.
The Tohno and Nanaya families have always had that connection.
There's no need to hold back, right?"

She takes a step closer.
Her red hair around the floor shakes.
"I don't care if you can't even do that.
A spew of lies like you should just die here."

She spits these last words.
Like the time she killed SHIKI, she stares at me.

"——!"
The ground jumps up at me.
That which cannot be seen, the red thing that looks like a fiery aura, tries to engulf me.

"——"
The sound of something striking the ground echoes through the hallway.
"——Huh?"
.... There's something wrong.
The instant before I was to be enveloped by that fiery aura, my body instinctively sensed the danger and jumped back.
I took a giant leap backwards and jumped again once I landed.
With that, I made it this far.
"Ah....., ahh."
My breathing goes wild.
This speed isn't natural.
I was so fast that I disappeared from Akiha's vision in an instant.
If I didn't do that, there was no way I could have escaped that fiery aura.
In that dream, Akiha plundered SHIKI's body with just her stare.
.... I am in the same position SHIKI was.
Akiha only needs to look while I need to close in.
There's too much difference in our abilities.
"No—!"

I said I didn't want to fight you.....!"

—THROB!

My headache increases.
It feels like my head's going to split in two and grow wings.
The burning red aura flows out from the classroom door.
She is transforming the entire air into pure vermillion and comes out into the hallway after me.

About a classroom's length lies between me and her.



"Amazing.
Just what kind of body do you have, Nii-san?"

Her hair waves around.
The air in the hallway starts to increase without limit.

"Even if it is night, disappearing from my view like this is strange.
.... Your legs really are amazingly fast.
It isn't that you are hiding your body behind anything, you're just moving faster than my eyes can track."
My forehead throbs.
My headache multiplies in intensity.

"But, that is over as well.
I won't make the same mistake, and you can't escape my vision here."

—Certainly this is worse than the classroom.
The stairs are a long way behind me.
No matter how fast I run, Akiha will simply seize my back with her fiery aura.
But if I run into another classroom, I'll just be a caged rat.
She'll probably destroy my arms and legs one by one, like pulling the legs off a bug.



"First—that's right.
I'll destroy those wonderful running legs of yours....!"



Her eyes fixate on my legs.
The air itself smells of burning.

"——"

I jump back.
The air around me turns to that fiery aura and wraps around my arms and legs.
I swing my knife.
What I see is satisfactory.
This headache tears at my right brain.

Slice.
I slice apart the red hair with the air around it.



"K———!"

Akiha moans and stares at me full of hatred.

"———"

But I am also in pain.

Even though I sliced it apart quickly, my arms and legs feel a lingering burning sensation.

My headache gets worse and it feels like it really will split apart.

"Again—why can you do such things.....!!?"

She walks over towards me staggering.

She must think that it doesn't work because she cannot focus on my distant figure.

.... Well, that's probably right.

Her power works proportionally to the clearness of her vision.

Because we're in a building in the middle of the night, her fiery aura is slow in catching me.

If it was daytime, her vision and the fiery aura would probably be the same speed.

If that was the case, I wouldn't be able to kill that aura fast enough.

"Gg.....!"

I pull back with the burning still in my legs.

Akiha follows.

Since we are cautious of each other, we keep our distance as we shift down the hallway.

——And then.

A figure emerges from the classroom we were just in.

"———"

My mind freezes.

My headache and my heartbeat disappear.

—This can't be happening.

Why did you come out?
Why couldn't you stay passed out in the classroom?

"—Akiha, sama."

Akiha turns to face the voice behind her.

—I feel despair creeping all around me.

"Please stop.

If you do this, you will only hurt yourself, Akiha-sama.... Even if you keep drinking blood and go insane like SHIKI-sama, you will still suffer."

Swaying, wavering.

Like she will collapse at any moment, Kohaku-san walks towards Akiha.

"—Stop!"

My outcry can't reach her.

To get to Kohaku-san, I have to go past Akiha.

How—can I do that?

".... You can still make it, Akiha-sama.

But if you kill Shiki-san, you really will—turn into a Tohno demon."

"....."

Akiha looks at me and Kohaku-san.

And then—



"It's too late.

I already am a blood sucking demon.

I won't listen to what you have to say anymore.

Suffer?

You don't know anything about what I'm feeling so don't try and lecture me about it, Kohaku.



This feels wonderful.
 I can understand what SHIKI was feeling.
 This is the first time I've ever felt this kind of freedom.
 So I can't go back now."
 "You're wrong...!
 That is only what you are telling yourself.
 Isn't it just that you killed SHIKI-sama and Shiki-san found out about every-
 thing, so you want to make everything like it never happened....?
 But that is something you cannot do.
 No matter how crazy you may act, you're really—"



"Silence.....!
 Don't try and act like a good person after setting us up to kill each other....!"

Akiha's hair dances in the air.
 This is entirely different than the amount of power she directed against me.

"You must be satisfied.
 Just like you planned, Nii-san and I are fighting to the death.
 Your revenge is now complete, right?"
 "Ah——"
 Kohaku-san's words are cut off.



"I see, Nii-san doesn't know.
That Kohaku was merely manipulating you so that you won't be confident in yourself, Nii-san."
Akiha directs her gaze towards me as if she was winning a debate.
"Didn't you think it was strange?
Going to sleep early every night, having your memories obscured, that was all Kohaku's doing.
She prepared you drugs instead of medicine.
And then all she had to do was whisper in your ear while you were high.
'You are the killer stalking the streets' was all she had to say."
"And after making you a killer, she tried to get you to kill me.
No, even if you didn't become the killer, you just had to walk the streets at night.
While she made this elaborate play pitting you and I against each other, Kohaku prepared everything with a smile.
In order to carry out her revenge against the Tohno family, Kohaku deceived even you, who had no connection to this, and completed the situation we are in right now."
"....."

—Yeah, it seems so clear now.
That's why Kohaku-san would always appear at the right time, always telling me what I wanted to know, always giving me medicine when I couldn't sleep.
But, still.



"For Kohaku, you and I were just pieces to complete her play.
Don't you understand?
To Kohaku, you are nothing more than a tool.....!"



But still, but still you choose her over me....!?"
.... Yes.
Akiha says this tearfully.

—But, still.

"..... I knew.
All of that, I already knew it, Akiha."

"—Eh?"

A questioning voice.
I wonder which of them said it?
"About Kohaku using me, I knew that a long time ago.
.... But, that doesn't matter.
I love Kohaku-san.
So no matter what she does—I just believe in her."



"....."

A gasp.

She really is surprised.
With distant, longing, unreaching eyes, she looks at me.

"-Ha.
Ahaha, ha."
Akiha's dry, doll-like laugh.



".... Then I'm just some sort of clown?
Rejected by the one I love the most who is being used as a tool by the one he
loves instead?
Still—you still want to steal him from me!
Don't be ridiculous, Kohaku...!!!!"

"Akiha——!"
Her hair starts to flow.

—I run.
Even if Akiha ends up killing me, even if I can't make it, I don't care.
I run and I reach out my hand.

But, I knew the cruel reality.
That the instant she walked out of that classroom.

That my hand, will never make it, to her.

A sickening sound.
Akiha's hair pierces Kohaku's chest like a spear.
Shocked, no, as if she was accepting it, she didn't even try to dodge.
She collapses.
Her kimono wavers in the air as if it was all in slow-motion.
My brain doesn't want to confirm it and lags behind the flow of time.

—I was just taking it out on someone.
I remember those words.

—I couldn't understand why he did that.
Did he value someone more precious than his own life?
She, always wanted, to become, that precious someone.
But that did not happen, so she lived alone.
And as if saying this is the only result that she could end up in.

—If he could do that, why didn't he ever help me?
..... That sin.
Not just eight years ago, but it returns even in this instant.

—I thought it was so strange.
Why—why were the people around me not as kind as he was—
Her falling body.
In that instant.
Even with her eyes clouding over—I see Kohaku smiling at me, or so I think.

"————"

My legs stop.
I can't speak, I can't breathe.

My piercing headache is the only thing that continues.



"—Hmph.
A fitting end for a Thief Cat."
Akiha laughs.



This piercing headache.
"I can't go back.
I killed SHIKI, even Nii-san rejected me.
Then, I have nowhere else to go.
I'm free now, so there shouldn't be any pain."
She faces me.
The air burns again.
Her hair coils around her like a snake.
It seems like every one of them has a mind of its own.

This piercing headache.
Headache.

"—Didn't you want to kill me?"

This headache.
Headache.
Headache.
Headache.

"Not Kohaku-san—wasn't I the one you wanted to kill, Akiha?"

Headache.
 Headache.
 Headache.
 Headache.
 Headache.
 Headache.
 I'm angry.
 I'm angry.
 I'm angry.
 At myself, who could not save her.
 At myself, who's still living right now.
 At Akiha, who could not save her.
 At Akiha, who's still living right now.



"What, did you want to die quickly, Nii-san?
 Well, I wouldn't forgive her even if she apologized.
 I would have killed her sooner or later.
 Because it's not like she had any reason to live.
 She was broken a long time ago, so isn't it doing her a favor to throw her away?"

—I see.
 If someone breaks, then it's a favor for them if you throw them away.

So——
 "..... You, aren't Akiha."

She isn't the Akiha that I know.
 I was just refusing to acknowledge that she was already possessed by the mirage
 so long ago.

"Fine, Akiha, as you wish."

Eight years ago.
 Like when we ran in the garden.

"C'mon—let's begin our fight to the death."
My headache stops.
Tohno Shiki dies.
Nanaya Shiki saunters out of the dark night.

I visually gauge the distance between me and my enemy.
It is about ten meters.
I need two steps to get into knife range.
To ensure a kill, I need to take three steps.
There isn't any cover in the hallway and it's not big enough to hide myself by moving around.
Even if I use the walls or the ceiling, I will have difficulty avoiding her gaze.
Even if I take two steps, Akiha can easily fix her eyes on me in one motion.
That is the situation.
From this distance, I will die faster since she will be slightly faster.



"—I see.
You're finally in the mood, Nii-san."

Akiha takes a step forward.
Even though it's dark, with this distance, she can see me clearly.
Another step.
If she takes another step, that will be my signal.
Do I kill her now or pull back?
If I make a mistake, I will end engulfed in Akiha's hair like SHIKI in that dream.
—Another footstep.

"_____"

—Kill her now.

turn to **408**

—Pull back for now.

turn to **409**

408

—Before that footstep even fades, I spring into action.

"Here——!"

Akiha's voice is a mixture of malice and pleasure.
Enjoying the tension of battle, she smiles as she looks in my direction.
"——"

That carelessness is my only chance and her only reason for loss.
"Not good enough, Nii-san.
No matter how fast you are, you just get clearer as you get closer to me——!"
Her voice is full of delight.

Her eyes catch a hold of me.
Then, the rest is simple.
I won't be able to reach her, as she'll evaporate my arms and legs, and collapse to the floor.

—Well,
that is, only if she can fix her eyes on me until I am completely burned away.

My view reverses.
"——-Eh?"
Her voice is full of surprise.
In that same instant, the red hair that was to burn my arms and legs vanishes.
It's fortunate that the hallway is just a straight line.
Akiha, who thought I would only attack directly, can't see me as I climb up the wall and jump to the ceiling.
Proceeding up the wall like a spider, my foot touches the ceiling only once.
It's not like I can actually be a spider.
Turning my body, I'm just using the ceiling for a foothold.

The distance is good enough.
Before my body falls, I use my legs to thrust off the ceiling.

"Uh, eh——?"
Akiha's gaze shifts upwards and the burning sensation returns to my arms and legs.
The feeling stops in an arm and a leg.
They probably don't exist anymore.
But, I don't need them any longer.
My body has the speed it needs.
Like this——

"Kyaa——!?"

I collide into Akiha.

"Why, you——!"

Akiha lifts her head.

Being this close to her, she can easily find me and disintegrate my body.

So,

before that happens, I cut it apart.

That delicate neck.

I cut it horizontally through her pulsing veins.

Making no differentiation between her skin, her muscles, her arteries, her bones, without mercy or compassion, like plucking a lily, without even any resplendent pain.

Thud.

On the hard floor, something that's shaped like a bowling ball drops.

It's all over.

Her eyes are cluelessly looking at the wall of the hallway, and probably will continue to do so for all of eternity.

"Is that the last thing you saw?"

Her eyes being lower than that of a dog or a cat's, she fixes her gaze towards the dirty wall.

Everywhere is darkness.

Dying while watching this scenery, it's like a bad joke.

".... Didn't the old man teach you that taking pleasure in killing is shallow, Akiha?"

.... Well, that would've been useless.

Tohno Makihisa was shallow, so her messing up like that was inevitable.

".... What a shame.

Even though you were this talented, the fire that formed you was too weak."

That's why I could kill her so easily.

Doing useless things like enjoying killing.
You did that, so you died.
In this place, all alone.
Forever alone, staring at that wall that no one ever watches, not even letting
out the final agonies of death.

"..... Ha."

Hmph.
Even though she is my sister, she looks so pathetic.
"——Ahh."
My stopped breathing resumes.
My burnt body feels power flowing into it once more.
... Because Kohaku-san died, my body was losing its power.
But since Akiha died, it seems like I am returning to normal.
Well, in the first place,
this body, this head, this heart, even if I embrace them and live, there is
nothing——
pant—*pant*—*pant*—
My breathing returns.
My numb arm and leg still seem to be holding their shape.
On the floor, Akiha's blood finally starts to spill outward.
"Aah——ah."
Crawling to the wall, I manage to stand up on one leg.
I open the window and fresh air streams in.
The cold wind blows through the baking hallway.
"——Aha.
Hahaha, ha."
This wind feels extremely good.
It cools my burning body and my headache ceases.
"—Haha... ha... ah—"
So why?
Only my thoughts, as if my head is becoming empty.
Everything feels the same and my vision does not return to normal from the
red world I'm in.

——Above my head is the crimson moon.

I remember that one dream.
That moon looking down at that killer.
Even at that time, it was a beautiful moon, so why?
Why can't it evenly illuminate me tonight?

——Like a snake.

Like an inflamed red eye, it stares at me.

Staring.

The red eye looks down on me intently.

Red.

Red, red, red eye.

"... Ha... haha... I understand it now—"

That made it all clear.

What Akiha was looking at in her last moments wasn't the wall.

She was looking at Nanaya Shiki as he approached to mechanically slice her neck.

"... I see.

Then—it won't go away, will it."

Then, the moon will always be red.

In her eyes, the killer is still burning.

That can't be erased.

That's why even though everything is over, I have nowhere to go.

I lost Kohaku-san, I even killed Akiha.

There really is nowhere I can go.

All purpose, even my self, has disappeared.

Despite that, my only leg limps down the hallway.

—The sky overhead still has that giant eye.

With Akiha still watching him, Nanaya Shiki walks off to somewhere.

!

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **452**

No.

turn to **1**

409

—It's too early.

To absolutely ensure my kill, the enemy needs to be defenseless.



"You made a mistake, Nii-san.
That was your last chance to kill me."
The enemy stops.
Her breathing and stare are full of confidence.
"_____"

That means, this distance right now is her maximum range in this dark hallway.
"You were so quick earlier.
I thought I would still lose sight of you even in this narrow hallway with your speed.
But, that won't happen with this distance.
I am close enough to see the color of your eyes, so I can easily track you."
"_____"

No matter how fast I dash, she is saying she will kill me before I get close.
But—that's only if I dash toward her.



"....."

She narrows her eyes.
Is she bothered by the fact that she has my life in the palm of her hand, or that
I am so calm?

.... Or, does that cause her to hesitate?
Whichever one it is—just like SHIKI thought, she really doesn't understand what a battle to the death means.
"—You look like you're planning something, Nii-san."
She says the obvious.
There's no need to answer.
"—Is she stupid?"
I mutter and switch my knife to the other hand.
I take it from my dominant hand and place it in my left.
I have figured out her range.
All that's left—
"—Ridiculous.
You're getting scared now."



"I—I'm not scared....!
You're the one being scared and not able to move!"
"... Okay.
You can kill me, right?
Then you should do so.
If you do nothing, I'll kill you the next time you blink.
—I'm about sick and tired of seeing your face."
"—!"
The air around her swirls.
Her desire to kill starts to embody itself in her red hair.



Her gaze, and the surrounding air that turns crimson and tries to wrap around my arms at the same time.

"——"

I leap back.

More than anything, I slice the red hair coming to wrap my dominant hand.



"Ah——!"

Akiha's clipped voice.

I then switch the knife to my freed dominant hand.

I slice the hair around my left arm.... It took a bit to free myself on this hand.

"Feh——"

I can't feel my left arm.

I can't see any wounds, but there isn't any sense or feeling.

"I see now—that's what it does."

I jump back even more.

—The red hair chases me.

It isn't as quick as before, but still wraps around my limbs.

.... No, chasing isn't the right word to use.

There is no way to escape this red hair.

When she sees me, it is already wrapped around me.

It is wrong to imagine dodging it or avoiding it.

If it's there, it's there.

If it's not, it's not.
 Like the air touching my skin, the red hair is already wrapped around me.
 Therefore, there was no way to escape from that attack.
 If there is anything I can do, it is—before Akiha steals something from me, I have to cut that pipeline.... that red hair of hers.
 The interval between her seeing something and stealing from it is only an instant.
 But if the target isn't clear in her vision, there is a small time before she actually steals from me.
 Before she can steal too much from me, I cut the hair to avoid a fatal wound.
 That's all I'm doing.
 Even though I can see her image of "red hair", it doesn't make a difference that her ability is overpowering.

—Maybe she's taking it easy, but she follows me without running.

"——"

I cut the hair that comes to bind my arms, legs and body continuously.
 The left arm that I sacrificed to confirm her power doesn't move at all.
 There's no pain.
 There's no blood.
 But despite my clothes, I can tell that a big part of the flesh is taken away by burn wounds.
 "——Tch."
 What's making me uneasy is that the open flesh sends sickening cold air into me.
 Thanks to that, I can't concentrate fully on escaping.
 My efforts to escape Akiha's gaze gradually become slower and I soon stop.
 —And, it now becomes Akiha's range.



"—Oh, what's this?
 All you can do is run away?
 I told you, my prey will only end up burning."
 She must be confident that I've been driven into a corner.

She stops walking and glares at me.



"It's over, Nii-san.
Isn't it going to be fun?
You're going to be killed by me without leaving a trace—!"

—I told you.
Talking like that is a useless excess, Akiha.

—Crash.
I jump back to the stairs, and jump down them without using the steps.

"What—!?"

.... I hear her voice coming from above.
I was only jumping straight back this whole time, so she could not react to me moving sideways.
.... Well, I planned to reach the stairs while moving back, so it's no coincidence.
"Why you.....!
Stand still.....!"
Akiha looks down the stairs to try to see me.
"—Now,"
Before she can do that, I jump down one more time.

"G....."
Flying down the stairs a second time causes my knees to protest in agony.
I ignore it and run to the hallway.
I hear the dry sound of Akiha's footsteps rushing down the stairs.
"—Window."
This is the second floor.
I can jump down outside and still be okay.
"—"

But then, I'll end up like SHIKI.
I have repeated what happened in that dream this much, so I shouldn't have to copy what SHIKI did to every detail.

I enter the hallway.
Even on the second floor the red hair fills the air.... They're like live blood vessels.

"—!?"

The feeling in my leg disappears and I collapse to the ground.

"Cra—"

My left leg is wrapped in hair.

—Did she see my leg as I went down the stairs?

I'm outside her visual range, so this won't be fatal, but—

"Shit.... she's more wicked than I thought."

I cut the hair.

My left leg—It's now just like my left arm.

"——"

The sound of footsteps comes closer.

Before she enters the hallway, I dash into a classroom.

"——,——,——"

Holding my breath, I lean against the wall between us.

.... I don't believe it.

Half of my body might as well be dead.

I was aware of it, but I didn't think I'd end up copying that dream this much.

.... Tap, tap, tap.

The footsteps draw nearer and nearer.

"——"

In my dream, SHIKI was killed right after this.

.... SHIKI's decision wasn't incorrect.

He just didn't have a full understanding of Akiha's ability.

The burnt smell of the air.

The temperature's scorching resemblance of deep summer.

And the body parts that disintegrate with burning pain.

All of these facts made SHIKI think that Akiha's power was 'burning' the enemy.

But the truth is just the opposite.

Akiha entangles her target with her red hair and completely steals their "heat".

This causes instant freezing followed by vaporization, making it look like it disintegrated.

If it truly was burning, then matters would be hopeless once the flame was lit.

No matter how many times the red hair is sliced, it's not possible to cut off your own body.

But—that is just stealing and taking in.

Therefore, even if I get completely wrapped by the red hair, as long as I can cut off the hair before I am completely drained and kill Akiha herself, then there's

no problem.

While she lives, she can turn her target into an inferno.

But that illusion of fire will die when Akiha dies.

.... Tap, tap, tap, tap.
"_____"

I was already prepared to have my left arm burned when I stuck it out.

I was prepared to cut it off from my shoulder once it lit up, but there was no need for that.

Akiha's ability will not kill me if I can stop Akiha herself.

Since Akiha is not a true flame user, a surprise attack cannot end up in mutual death if she dies before me.

"_____"

I hear a sound.

I hear her footstep right behind my back.

Without a doubt—Akiha is about to pass the classroom without even noticing I am here.

Kill her before she notices me.

turn to **411**

Wait until she walks by and attack her from behind.

turn to **410**

410

"————"

The footsteps pass by.

—I only have one chance.

The instance she passes by the classroom, I'll jump out into the hallway and attack her.

If the distance is too great, I'll be killed just like SHIKI.

"————"

The footsteps keep moving.

.... About a distance of two meters.

At her stride, that should be about eight steps.

"..... Okay."

I sneak silently over and place my hand on the door.

Tap, tap.

The hard sound of her footsteps come closer.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

ve.

Six.

Seven.

Eight....!

The footsteps stop there.

She hasn't passed the classroom yet.

She just stands on the other side of the door.

"Wha——"

Time stops.

Thump.

The inside of my head torques painfully.

"————"

Does she know?

Does she know?

Then what should I do?

She cannot come in the classroom unless she opens the door.

She needs to come in the classroom in order to see me.

So—as long as this door is closed, she can't kill me.

"——"

.... Then I don't care.

If she tries to open the door, then that's fine.

It'll just be a battle between what is faster: my "slicing" or her "looking".

Calm.

I take a deep breath.

But it still doesn't change the fact that I'm at a disadvantage.

All Akiha needs to do is look.

But I have to see the "lines" on her body and then slice them with my knife.

Since I have to make an extra movement, even though this is my range, I can't say it's my advanta—

"——-Eh?"

All of a sudden,

A crash comes from the window.

"Wha——"

My brain freezes.

I instantly lose all feeling in my arms and legs.

My heavy body rises up and is slammed against the wall.

"Ha——ah——!"

My field of view cuts off.

The water in my eyes evaporates instantly and I can't see anything.

I don't know anything about what is going on in the outside world.

All I can understand is what I'm doing.

I'm suspended in mid-air, and just like Kohaku-san earlier, I'm crucified to the wall by Akiha's hair.

"How careless.

It's nothing compared to a natural-born assassin like you, Nii-san, but I can still hide my presence.

Well, that's what I did and while you were paying so much attention to the hallway, I came by from the next classroom.

Next time, you should learn from experience and pay attention to the balcony, too."

She giggles.

"Ah——gg!"

My neck is being constricted.

My limbs have no feeling, as if they were cut off.

My body is being saturated with Akiha's hair.

"Ah, that was rude.

There is no 'next time' for you, Nii-san.

Besides, I'm sorry, Nii-san.

I rudely ate you instantly.

Even though I consumed most of you in the heat of the moment, you are still

conscious, right?
Please forgive my lack of manners since I'll do this right this time."

—Well then, I will have you.
Farewell, Nii-san.

"_____"

My body burns.
The Red Lock of Hair sears both my body and my very soul.

Thump.
I can hear my last heartbeat.

.... How, stupid.
Even though I knew so much, Nanaya Shiki has still ended up the same as Tohno
SHIKI.

Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **453**

No.

turn to **1**

411

This is it.

I don't plan on ending up like SHIKI in that dream.

I will dismantle Tohno Akiha right here and now.

"————"

I focus on the "lines" running along the wall.

.... On the other side, I can hear her footsteps.

More intently, I stare hard at the wall, as if my brain would fry.

.... The footsteps are right in front of me.

Across this thin wall, Akiha is walking, completely defenseless.

"————"

.... If I do this well, I don't even have to do it myself.

Tohno Akiha will die, being crushed by the wall.

.... No, the wall is too thin.

That won't kill her.

"————"

So, then.

Cutting that long hair and dismembering her body is my role.

Kill.

Akiha.

The no longer human Akiha.

She is someone I can kill.

..... She is no longer human.

But, still.

But, Akiha is, Tohno Shiki's, younger sister.

Do that.

Just because she isn't human anymore?

——Throb

"Kk——ah."

Headache.

I thought the headache was gone, so why?

——Throb Throb Throb

This headache.

The pain feels like my eyes will burst from my head.

.... It's because I tried to see the lines on the wall.

My head, it hurts.

.... Ah.

If it hurts this much, my recent self feels like it will go away.

——Throb Throb Throb Throb

"Ah——-ah."

Don't think!

Ignore the headache.

If I think right now, I will definitely—recognize my mistake.

Before that happens—before I return to Tohno Shiki, I have to kill Akiha before she kills me.

"———!"

I swing my knife with all my strength.

A dry sound.

With one giant swing, I draw a circle in the wall with my knife that cuts cleanly through the wall like butter.

And then.

Facing the hallway, I kick down the cut wall.

"———Eh?"

Akiha's voice almost sounds comical.

.... That's only natural.

Having a large circle suddenly appear in the wall and burst out against her, she should be surprised.

And, it's all over.

I jump through the opening in the wall and into the hallway.

Over here—my figure is completely hidden from Akiha's view by the wall.

"———"

The collapsing wall rushes towards Akiha.

The red hair wraps around it.

.... It even steals heat from inorganic things?

The wall starts to break apart.

But.

Before she can break it down, my knife dismantles it.

Pieces.

The wall falls into clumps of varying size.



—————Throb

It all happens in an instant.
This scene, it lasts for one instant.

Her hair races back up.
It wraps around my body.
But—it is too late.
I slice through both the wall and the fiery aura around her.
She won't be able to instantly put out more heat, not that it matters.

Because my knife is far faster than her hair as I push her down and get on top of her.

"Ah——"
Akiha's, voice.
My knife is raised.
All I have to do is pass through the "line" running from her left collarbone to her right lung.
But, Akiha's hair is wrapping around my arm.
It flows around my neck, around my body.
I know that if I wait, in an instant, my body will be vaporized.

—————Throb

But, this headache does not go away.
My head hurts, Akiha.
Even though the command to kill repeated itself so many times in my head,
and I hated you so much,
but still——

.... Why?

Why did I wake up?
 Why did Akiha suddenly look like her old self?
 If it wasn't for that, I would have brought this knife down.

But still——

.... My skin is burning.
 The hair that wraps around my body steals my heat.
 My vision starts to fade.
 I can't force Akiha down.
 With a breath.
 My body is so light now that it feels like Akiha could blow me over with one
 breath.
 But—my arms are still alive.
 I can still make it.
 If I don't die, victory is mine.
 As long as I can kill her now, she can't steal any more of my heat.

But still——

"——"

But still, for some reason, I can't bring down my knife.
 How incredibly naive.
 Akiha will kill me without hesitation.
 I already know that.
 Because Akiha, she's not the Akiha from before.

——But still.

But still, such a thing.
 I just can't, do it.

——Throb

.... Headache.
 It has bothered me many times, but I have to thank it this time.
 I was wrong.
 Thinking that just because she isn't human, she isn't like the old Akiha, it's
 acceptable to kill her.
 No matter how much she changes, Akiha is Akiha.
 Always helping me, always waiting for me, my dear sister.

—That.
Why did I think I could hurt her?
..... Thro, b

My headache disappears.
The strength in my body also disappears.
As my mind dims, I put all my strength into my arms so my knife will not descend on Akiha.

"Why... won't you, kill me?"
Akiha's voice.
"I am a vampire, right....?"
A monster that feeds on human blood at night; I'm trying to kill you right now and I even killed Kohaku.
So why—why do you have that sad look on your face?"

My heat is still being stolen.
.... Unlike me, Akiha really has no mercy.
Already.
My body feels cold, as if I already died.
".... Stop it.
It's not fair to die looking like that.
.... I'm the one to blame here, so you should hate me to the end.
Can't you even say that you hate me for killing Kohaku?
Kohaku had to hate me too.
I'm the daughter of Tohno Makihisa, and I kept her bound to the mansion while I knew her feelings."
".... That's why I thought it would be okay if it was Kohaku.
If she wanted revenge on the Tohno family, then I would play along.
Even if drinking her blood made me less than human—because she hated me, I thought it couldn't be helped."

—I see.
Akiha was the same as me.
She knew.
She knew that Kohaku-san plotted on our downfall, but still—
"But it couldn't be helped, right?
I had no way of making it up to her.
.... If she wanted it, then the most I could do as a member of the Tohno blood was to support her."

"..... That's wrong."

I surprise myself as I voice my thoughts.
I'm still—alive, it seems.
".... What?"

Nii-san, I can't hear you well."

".... That's wrong, Akiha.

Kohaku-san doesn't hate anyone.

She didn't wish for all this because she wanted to."

—That's right.

It's just that she couldn't find any other purpose, so she only desperately acted out that plan.

.... That, that was all she could do.

All she could do was try with all her might to deceive herself into thinking that she had a purpose to live.

"Akiha.

I think I led a happier life compared to you or Kohaku-san.

.... So, I'm sorry.

I don't know.

Neither your pain from being bound to the Tohno family, nor Kohaku-san's pain, where this was all she could do."

How ironic.

".... No one.

No one is to blame.

Not me, not you, not SHIKI, not Kohaku-san.

.... No one is to blame—"

So why?

Why did we end up choosing to kill each other?

".... Nii-san.

Maybe you can still make it."

Akiha still being pinned, she looks up at me aimlessly as she says this.

".... You'll die soon, Nii-san.

But if you kill me, I think you can make it.

.... Well, Kohaku is no longer alive, so I can't say that for sure."

Her eyes turn serious as she looks up at me.

".... Right?

So please hurry up and swing down your knife.

That will save you."

Akiha sulkily says those ridiculous words.

"....."

.... Geez.

I'm saying that if I could do that, I would've already done it a long time ago.

".... Fine, if you can't do that, then I will be the one who survives.

Okay?

Starting tomorrow, I will turn these streets into a painting of pure hell.

Not just Hisui, but I will make people like your dear friends suffer."

.... I can tell she's pretty serious.

"..... Idiot.

If you did that, a scary person from somewhere would come and make things difficult.

.... I bet there's a skilled vampire hunter out there that would fight you both day and night."

.... So, don't think about painting a scene of pure hell.

If at all possible—I want her to resist sucking blood even though it might be hard, and just live like she did before all of this.

"—Why?

Why do you look at me like that, Nii-san?

.... I'm no longer the Akiha from before.

Even now, I want to bite into your neck.

Just like SHIKI, I'm a crazed, possessed monster, right?

Then you should return to how you were like before and kill me once and for all."

She pouts and looks as if it was all my fault.

.... She says I should kill her.

That's certainly my own words from before.

But, that.

That isn't good.

"—I can't do it.

I can't kill you, Akiha."

"You're thinking about me from before?

But I'm different.

I'm not the Tohno Akiha you know."

"—No, that has nothing to do with it.

Even if you were possessed and it was to destroy that—as Tohno Shiki, I can't harm Tohno Akiha."

.... I love this black haired girl who forgave me so much these past eight years.

Even if I love her as a sister, different from the way she feels.

"Akiha, you're my dear sister.

I can't—ever hurt you."

"————"

Akiha opens her eyes.

Her shoulders fall as she lets out a deep breath.

".... What are you saying?

You have always hurt me, Nii-san.

If you can't even realize that, then you really are dense, aren't you?"

Her whispered voice is very gentle.

And then, she brings both her hands on my stopped hand.

"————A.."

With just that, I can see her intentions.

I try to pull back, but I have no strength.

.... Just like she said, I lost the freedom to control my body a long time ago.

"Sto——stop it, Akiha.....!"

I frantically raise my voice.

Akiha pretends not to hear me and smiles.

".... Geez.

That's why I have to do it all myself even now."

Her smile seems happy, but also full of sadness.

She puts power into her hands.

——The knife descends.

But that's not where the line is.

Just her heart.

If that is pierced, it will be fatal and painful.

"A——Aki, ha.....!"

I can't stop my arm.

I can't prevent Akiha from doing this.

How——how can this happen?

In the end.

I tried to save two people important to me.

Yet, I'm about to lose them before my very eyes——

"Noooo——!"

——?

What is it?

My arm is stopped.

Akiha's two hands pressing down on my hand.. As if embracing them, someone drapes over them as well.

Akiha looks disbelievingly at that figure.

I——just like Akiha, stare blankly.

"Ko——haku?"

"Yes....!"

Akiha-sama, it is me....!"

It is me, so please——please let go....!"

With a face close to tears, Kohaku-san pulls the knife away from Akiha.

"..... Ko, haku."

Akiha is in a daze.

As if the demon that caught a hold of her has completely left, she stares at Kohaku-san in surprise.

"..... I see.

You were alive, Kohaku."

"——Yes.

Akiha-sama, you only made me lose consciousness.
At that last instant, you held back from killing me."
"_____"

Her eyes flicker with sadness.
.... Even while possessed by fury, there was still humanity deep within Akiha.
That—was what saved Kohaku-san and Akiha.

Akiha sighs.
She closes her eyes as she lets out that breath.
"—Goodness.
I guess this means you've won everything.
You're alive, and this is the end of the Tohno bloodline.
.... But, maybe it's for the best.
To be honest, I was thinking of resting, too."
Her arms drop to her sides.
"Go ahead, Kohaku.
.... Nii-san wasn't able to, but you can kill me, right?
I tried to kill you, and I am the daughter of the hated Tohno Makihisa."
"....."
Kohaku-san holds the knife and stares at Akiha.
And she shakes her head.

—It is, terribly quiet.
Like melting ice, time flows by calmly.
"..... That's strange.
I wonder why even Kohaku can't kill me."
With her eyes still closed, she speaks softly as if she was sleeping.
"Of course.
It is because I like you, Akiha-sama."
Clang.
The knife Kohaku-san was holding clatters to the ground.
"No matter how much you hate me, I want to always serve you.
So Akiha-sama—if you feel sorry for me at all, please do not die.
If you die like this, I—will go back to being the Kohaku from before."
"..... You're asking something pretty difficult."
A deep sigh.
Akiha averts her gaze as if she was pouting.
"But, I guess it can't be helped.
I owe you from before, so I won't do anything for now.
.... Same for you, Nii-san.
I will think that it's good enough for you to love me as your sister."

—Her hair flows.
The binding around my body disappears and I collapse to the floor.

At some point, the sky became deep and clear.
The silver moon.
The pale hallway now shows no trace of the fiery aura.
Akiha's hair is still red, but the mirage that burdened her is long gone.
Now—with Kohaku-san here, Akiha should be okay.
"————"

My mind starts to recede.
My cold body starts to drift towards sleep.
But before that,
I watch the peaceful moonlight and think.

After a while, after I've gotten used to living in the mansion.
I think selfishly that we'll be living happily like right now—

"Shiki-sama, please wake up.
Shiki-sama."

.... I hear a voice.
Hisui's voice that I have heard so many times.

"It is past time.
I do not think it is a good idea to keep sleeping like this."

.... Hisui's reserved voice.
But, with that, it's impossible to wake me up since I was so excited last night,
I couldn't get to sleep.
"—Shiki-sama.
Please wake up or I think Akiha-sama will be mad at you again."

—That instant.
My mind snaps from its dozing.

"———!"
I jump up from bed.



Hisui stares at me from the side as I panic.
I can hear the voices of cicadas from outside.
It's still morning, but the sun is streaming in pretty strong, and my sweat drenches my pajamas.
Well, that is, it's a pretty typical summer morning.
"Ah—morning, Hisui."



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."
Hisui gives a succinct bow.... She acts very calm, but I get a bad feeling about all this.
"Hisui.
Don't tell me Akiha hasn't left yet....?"



"Yes.
Akiha-sama is waiting in the sitting room until she sees your face, Shiki-sama...."

That's right, I think she has been waiting for about an hour now."

"_____!"

I look at the clock.

It tells me it is around ten in the morning.

"Damn—why is she waiting around so late today, of all days....!?"



"Because it is the morning that you leave for your trip, Shiki-sama.

I think it is only natural for Akiha-sama to see you off."

"..... Ah."

Her gaze is painful for some reason.

.... That is supposed to be a secret, but maybe Hisui and Akiha already know about it.

".... Got it.

Anyway, I'll go to the sitting room right away.

Please go there ahead of me."



"As you wish.

Then, excuse me."

.... Hisui courteously exits the room.

After changing into the clothes I got ready yesterday, I sling a bag over my shoulder and leave my room.



—I see Akiha in the sitting room, and she really doesn't seem to be in a good mood.

"Hey, good morning, Akiha."



"Good morning, Nii-san.

You're taking things slow for the morning of a trip, aren't you?"

She looks at me with a sharp glance.

".... Sorry.

I couldn't sleep last night and was awake till early morning.

This is still getting up early for me."

"Oh?

Looking forward to a trip so much you couldn't sleep?

How cute.

Nii-san, are you looking forward to playing with Inui-san so much?"

"Why do you sound like that?

Of course a trip is fun."

"I see.

You seem almost drunk with happiness.

You've been waiting for this day since the start of summer, right?

I don't know where you are going with Inui-san, but there has to be something really good waiting for you there, right?"



-2 0

"Akiha-sama.

I do not think that is quite right.

Something good is something that is there, not something that is waiting."



-2 0



"Ah, that's right.

It would have to be a person to be 'waiting'.

There must be something wrong with me.

I guess I was just waiting for Nii-san too long."

"....."

.... These two.

They seem to be in harmony all of a sudden.



-2 0



"Well then, Nii-san.

How long will you be gone?"

".... Seven days.

Why do you ask?"

"Oh really?

That's pretty short.

Since you can only see her once in a while, I thought that you would spend your whole summer break there.

Nii-san.

Don't you feel sorry for Kohaku like that?"

"Wh—wh, wh, what are you saying?

I'm just going on a random trip with Inui, I'm not going to see Kohaku-san at all....!

Anyway, I see her all the time.

She's still coming here every weekend, so there's really no need for me to go see her....."



-2 0



-2 0



"_____"

"..... There's really no need, but.... she probably is lonely, and....."

I stare down at the floor.
—Damn it, what's wrong with it?
It is summer vacation after all, so they should pretend to not notice that I'm going to go see Kohaku-san.



"—Oh, it's already late.
I can't let her wait any longer, so I'll let you go for today, Nii-san."
Akiha sounds like she's having fun as she rises from the sofa.
"I'll leave it up to you, Hisui.
I will be back in the evening, so we can maliciously gossip about Nii-san then."
"Yes, let's."

.... So....
What's with all these shifts in Akiha's personality, and even Hisui's?



"I will be going.
Nii-san, you should be going as well.
I'm not hoping for any souvenirs, so please relax."

Akiha disappears towards the lobby.
And then.

"Man, I want to find a good man too!"

She leaves her last complaint loudly.

"..... She seems to be getting more cheerful each day."

I really didn't think things would end up this way.

.... It's been about a year since then.

There's has been a lot that has changed, but the biggest changes were in Akiha and Kohaku-san.

Simply put, Akiha is still like back then.

Her hair is still red, but she dyes it black.... No, it's not like she uses any chemicals, but it seems she can change it with her will.

.... She still has the urge to drink blood, so every once in a while she will suck on a blood pack used for transfusions.

Akiha absorbed some sort of evil spirit from SHIKI.

That's why she originally went on a rampage, but since then, I guess she has control over it.

Simply put, it weakened when it transferred to Akiha, and its only influence is making Akiha strong-willed.

.... Well, she's more like a bully than strong-willed, but if I tell her that, she will get angry, so I'm not going to.

Not only did it make her a bit more honest, but it also increased her power.

Thanks to that, Akiha can exert better control over her Tohno blood.

That's probably why she can hide the color of her hair.

.... To say the results, she's pretty much invincible, and as her dear Onii-chan, it's pretty troublesome to keep her under control.

—With regards to Kohaku-san, she became independent after the new year started.

Because Akiha is now fine by herself, and maybe because she is planning something, Kohaku-san left to work in a mansion of a branch of the Tohno family in the mountain recesses of Nagano.

.... But at the end of the week, she comes back here and the four of us pass the time together like always.

Before, I asked her why she decided to do that, and she answered that there was something she wanted to investigate and that I should wait patiently until she is done.

Because I love her, I couldn't refuse, so all I can do now is wait.

Since then, even though Kohaku-san and I can meet at the end of every week, being alone together is difficult because of Akiha and Hisui.

Also, Kohaku-san and Akiha are on very good terms.

Kohaku-san likes Akiha, and Akiha cares for Kohaku-san.

.... About me and Kohaku-san, Akiha has acknowledged it openly.

She did, but..

"That's fine.

If you're going to do as you please, Nii-san, then I will just do as I please."

She added that random exclamation which can really mean anything.

..... *sigh*

That's how it was, and in the midst of all that complexity, I received a letter from Kohaku-san.

The letter said that there was something she wanted to show me, so she wants me to go to Nagano during summer break.

After seeing that, I planned this insane trip immediately.

I am supposed to be spending the week with Arihiko.

But Akiha and Hisui doubt me.... Geez, those two, what do they think of me?



"Shiki-sama."

"Uwaaa!"

.... My heart skipped a beat.

I wish Hisui would stop sneaking up on me and suddenly speaking like that.

"Shiki-sama, if you do not hurry, will you not miss the train?"

"Ah—crap, this isn't the time to be spacing out."

Always one to be prepared, Kohaku-san arranged transportation for me out to Nagano.

I have a reserved seat on the train, so if I miss it, I'll have to pay out of pocket to ride.... For a poor student without a job, that would be like suicide.

"Sorry, I'll be off.

Sorry for being in a rush this morning.....!"

Carrying my bag, I exit the sitting room.

From behind me,



"Yes, please send my best regards to Nee-san."

Hisui's soft voice reaches my ears.

——The train continues forward.

Bathed in the fragile, white sunlight, it runs past the mountain countryside. Maybe it's because this is a really rural area, but I'm the only one in this car. Sitting by the window, I stare at the flowing scenery. The radiant sun illuminates my vision while the wind wafts comfortably on my cheeks.

"——"

I glance down at the letter.

There is a picture included in the letter, and the address of where we're meeting. I say address, but there really isn't one.

It's more of "take a left here, a right there, and down this path" sort of place without an address.

This picture has to be of that place.

"——A place to return to, huh?"

Where it is, I do have a feeling without it being said.

.... Kohaku-san probably remembered where it was.

Those trivial words that Tohno Makihisa said.

Just working off that information, she must have found that forest.

That black forest.

Hidden from sight, the old mansion in the heart of the mountains.

Long ago.

The place where Nanaya Shiki spent his childhood.

"——"

.... It'll still be a while until I reach my destination.

Is it because the sunshine is unusually strong?

Closing my eyes, I lean back against the seat—

—like that, I fall into a dream.
The sunshine that is so white.
The smell of the air untainted by the touch of civilization.
The endlessly pure sky, the shimmering summer air that rides on the wind.

The wild grass of spring.
The starry sky of autumn.
The cold ground during winter of my home.
In summer, it was—the bright flowers that steal your breath away.

—There, she is waiting.

In front of a sea of flowers.
The overwhelming scent of summer.
A radiant smile that outshines even those sunflowers.
In the midst of the burning heat, she greets me.

—Welcome back.
This time, it is for real.
As if fulfilling that childhood promise at last.

gsetvar clearkohaku + 1
gsetvar cleared + 1
gsetvar clearkohakutruue + 1
!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **454**

No.

turn to **1**

412

—Concerned about what happened this afternoon, I come to my school.

.... Thinking back, Arcueid was strange when we were here earlier.
There's no logic to it, but if she's just wandering around, I think she may end up here.

There's no sign of anyone; not even a single sound.

"....."

But still, I feel like there's someone in the building.

Something.

Without the presence of the sun,
the school building has changed into an ominous "place".
".... Let's go in, Shiki."
I don't have time to hesitate.
Encouraging myself verbally, I walk inside the building.

—There's no one on the first floor.

—I feel a numb sensation behind my neck.
Ignoring it, I walk up to the second floor.

—I arrive on the second floor.

No one here.

No one here.

No one, here.

But.

On my back,
A soft, cold sensation like the belly of a snake covers me.
"—Who's there!?"
I whirl around.

I think there was..



14 0

"Eh—?"

I hear a stabbing sound.
In the next instant,
My chest is sliced open.

Blood flows forth.
I'm stabbed from behind, as if to open my old wound.
"Ah—"
My body falls.

—I don't know what's going on.

Everything fades.
In the last instant,

I see a scene from a distant summer day, repeating in my mind.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **426**

No.

turn to **1**

413

pant *pant* *pant*

I can't breathe properly.
 Senpai's eyes don't even appear interested in my death.
 Her dagger is poised directly in front of my heart.
 A situation where I'm a second away from being killed.
 pant *pant* *pant* *pant*

"That's odd.
 You've killed so many people, yet you are frightened to die yourself."
 Her voice, tinged with disgust.
 Her eyes, rimmed with contempt.

Her dagger, ready to kill me.

I will be killed.
 I will be killed.
 I will be killed.
 I will be killed.
 I WILL be killed.
 I WILL BE KILLED.
 Then.

If I kill.
 If I kill.
 If I kill.
 If I kill.
 IF I Kill.
 IF I KILL.
 It's alright?

"—Ha—ha, ah."

I.

"Goodbye.
 Please die here, Tohno-kun."

Can hardly.

"—Haha—a—ha, ha—"

Breathe.

But, I was faster.
Before she can plunge her dagger deeply into me, my knife runs through the
'line' on Senpai's neck.

"A——"

Which one of us said that?
The sound of a head hitting the ground and the sound of gurgling.
The neck, "neck", / face?
/ it rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls.

"Ah——eh?"

But, that's strange.
It had to have been the same time.
But only I am alive.
Senpai's head, HEAD, is the only thing rolling and rolling and rolling.
"Haha—a!"

In other words.
From the very beginning,
Senpai never.. intended.. to kill me.

"A, haa, a, haahaahaahaa, haha!"

My throat seems stuck.
Senpai's body is so red.
The hallway gets wet.
Red paint coats everything.

"Haha—"

Once someone is decapitated, it seems they add a different function.
Spurting.
Like a sprinkler, spraying red blood everywhere.

"Ha, haha——ha."

My whole body is now crimson.
More than my knife, from my hair to my shoes, it's sickeningly speckled red.
"—What's this?
This isn't a big deal."

Yeah, it really not a big deal.
I thought there would be something more, but I only have this floating feeling.

"If it's like this.. my dreams were more.."

Lively and real.
I stand up and start walking.
My feet splash with each step.
Before me lays the head of the woman named Ciel.
Her eyes seem to stare at me.

"How stupid, Senpai.
I don't know how much confidence you had, but there's nothing that can't die."

So, it was your mistake.
Mistake.
Mistake.
Mistake.
Mistake.
No.

What's mistaken is everything.
The illusion is over.
Even though I desperately denied it until now, this confirms it.
I am just a killer.
With my own hands, I destroyed what shouldn't have been destroyed.
The foundations of my being are crumbling away.

"Kk—what's this, Yumizuka?
It's just like you said."

I start to laugh.
It seems I have gone insane.
The truth that I am the killer seems so funny to me.

Outside the window, the far, distant moon shines.
My vision has turned red with no signs of returning normal.
But my mind on earth has been swapped with that from some other planet.
The years of accumulated perceptions exceedingly enumerate towards unknown equations of evolution.
Nothing is even remotely the same.
You can not tell the difference between the crimson you see and the crimson I see.
Alas.

It seems I am broken.

Or was everything just a humorous lie from the beginning?
In that case, please let it all disappear tomorrow.

.... The stage set in the dark forest begins.
I don't quite understand, but if I am a killer, I must act like a killer.
To begin with, let's go out into town and continue my dreams.

I catch a random person.
I take them to the alley and wait for the person to awaken.

After a while, the person's eyes open.
As gently as possible, I offer a welcome with both arms spread wide.

—Now then,
welcome to this wonderful killing chamber.

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **445**

No.

turn to **1**

414

I don't have anything to do, so I hurry up and leave school.
.... Come to think of it, I hadn't left the school by the main entrance since the entrance ceremony.
"I guess this'll be the way to and from school from now on since I live in the mansion."

Leaving from the main gate, I come to the intersection that leads to the residential district.
This is the point at which the paths to the city and the residential district, where the mansion is, part—



"Oh, it's Tohno-kun."
Suddenly, I run into Yumizuka.
"Hey, it's Yumizuka-san."
Yumizuka-san looked at me, bewildered.
"Uh.. Yumizuka-san?
Is there something on my face?"
"Um, I was wondering what you were doing here, Tohno-kun.
Isn't your house in the other direction?"
"Ah.. Well, it was until yesterday, but I'm living somewhere else starting today.
From now on, I'll be living at the place at the end of that residential district,
on top of the hill."



"Ah, so that's what you were talking about this morning."
Yumizuka claps her fist and hand together in understanding.
.... Well, all flattery aside, that gesture seems incredibly cute.
".... That's right.
I guess there's no point hiding it from you, since you already know.
I'm leaving my guardians, the Arimas, and going back to my real house today."



"Your real house.. You mean the Tohno-san mansion?"
"Yeah.
I don't think it really suits me, either."



"I see.
You're really a prince on top of a hill, after all.
It was a secret only Inui-kun and I knew, but now I guess everyone's going to find out."

With a faint smile, Yumizuka casts her gaze into the distance.
She looks out at the horizon, as if looking at the Tohno mansion, off in the distance on top of the hill.
"But will you be alright?
Even if it is your house, you've been away for eight years, right?
Aren't you afraid, or worried?"
"Yeah.
I'm actually kind of uneasy.
I never liked that mansion to begin with, and now it's going to feel like someone else's house too.
But still—"

.... I can't lead a carefree life on my own and leave my sister Akiha there all by herself.
No matter how uneasy I am, I have to return to the mansion.
"—In the end, it's still my home.
I think it's only natural for me to go back."
".... I see.
Ah, sorry for stopping you, Tohno-kun.
You must be in a hurry, right?"
"No, not really.
I was just having a stroll on the way home."
"Ah.. I see."

For some reason, Yumizuka looks downcast and falls silent.
".... What's wrong, Yumizuka-san?
Are you feeling sick?" I ask her.
But she continues to stare downwards without raising her head.
"...."
I can't just leave her there, so I continue to stand there, looking at her.
—And then.



"U.. um!"
"Yeah, what?"

"Um.. uh.. I'm going home along the same way as you, until we reach the hill.."

"Really?"

Then let's go together for part of the way."

".... Eh?"

Yumizuka's eyes widen and she stands there stiffly for a moment.



"Y.. yeah!

You're right.

We're going back the same way, so it wouldn't be strange for us to go together for part of the way, right!?"

She says this all with an excessively cheerful voice and comes right beside me.

"Just at the right time, too.

I'm not too familiar with the streets around here, so would you mind guiding me?"



"Sure.

Then, let's go down this street.

It's a back street that leads all the way to the street on the hill."

—I walk home while chatting with Yumizuka.

Talking to Yumizuka isn't anything particularly special, but it is enjoyable in a peaceful kind of way.

.... Yumizuka Satsuki has a gentle air about her, and I feel safe when I'm with her.



"—Huhu."

While we are talking, Yumizuka suddenly laughs as if she had remembered something.

"What is it, all of a sudden?

Did I say something funny?"

"No, that's not it.

It's just that starting tomorrow, I'll be taking the same route to school as you."

She laughs, looking truly happy.

That honest, smiling face is enough to also make me happy as I watch her.

.... I didn't realize it up until now.

Even putting her looks and mannerisms aside, Yumizuka Satsuki is kind of cute.

I am slowly beginning to understand why the boys in our class had been so worked up over her for so long now.

Our conversation ceases.

I'm simply fascinated by Yumizuka's smile and the two of us fall silent.

Without saying anything, we walk towards the residential district in the sunset.

Suddenly—

"Hey, do you remember what happened during the winter vacation of our second year of middle school?"

Yumizuka murmurs.

"....?"

I tilt my head to one side.

The winter vacation of the second year of middle school was when I had applied to stay for extra lessons at school because I felt bad about staying at the Arimas. I remember it well enough, but I still don't understand why she had asked me about it.

"Just as I thought.

Someone like Tohno-kun would never have remembered."

Disappointed, Yumizuka's shoulders droop.

"There were two sports sheds at our middle school, remember?
One was a new shed used by the big clubs, and the other one was an old one used by the smaller clubs like Badminton.
The old shed had a certain problem where the alignment of the door was bad, so there were often times when it wouldn't open."
Old shed.. That little concrete building at the back of the gymnasium..?
"Ah, that shed.
The one which they stopped using after some students got trapped inside."
"Yeah, that's the one.
The students were second years from the Badminton club."
"—Ah!"

Yes, something like that did happen.

It was early in the new year, on a cold winter's day.
The first three days of the new year having passed, I had applied for extra lessons and requested to stay behind at school and help out because I felt bad about staying at the Arimas.
But even that was only until five in the evening.
It had become dark, and I was forced out of the the classrooms as all the teachers were going home.
The middle of winter.
Even if it was only five, the surroundings really had darkened.
The weather report had predicted snow for that day, and the cold was extra harsh.
And so, just when I had decided to head straight home for the day, I heard a banging sound from the old shed and I went to check things out.
—Is anyone in there?

I asked, and I heard the voices of several female students in reply from inside the shed.
They had been trapped in there for two hours.
While packing up the club equipment, they had closed the door because of the cold, and now it wouldn't open again.
They couldn't open the door no matter what, and wanted me to call one of the teachers for help.
.... But the teachers had all gone home.
Even if I were to call them now on the phone, it'd at least take another hour.
The cold on that day was truly terrible.
In the kind of cold that should have prompted snow, I thought it would be cruel to leave those girls stuck in the shed wearing only their PE uniforms for another hour.
After some hesitation, and confirming that no one else was around, I took off my glasses and cut the "line" on the shed door.
The door opened, and about five female students, eyes red from crying, poured out—

"... Come to think of it, there was something like that.
But I'm surprised you know about it.
The captain of the badminton club who had been trapped had told me, 'This has to do with the club's survival, so don't tell anyone else.' It was almost like she was threatening me."

"Oh, Tohno-kun!

You had no interest in knowing who was trapped inside there, did you?

Listen.

I was one of those badminton club members."

Yumizuka sounds like she's pouting.

Eh.. So in other words..

"—I still remember it well.

When I think about it now, it was only being trapped inside a shed, but at the time, it was cold and dark, and I was really worried.

Everyone thought we were going to freeze to death like that.

My stomach was growling from hunger, too.

I was just about to collapse."

"Hmm.. That must have been rough."

I can't really empathize with her, so I give a half-hearted response.

Unconcerned, Yumizuka continues her recollections, bringing up old events anew.

"And just when everyone was trembling, you came along and asked, 'Is anyone in there?' in your usual unexcited voice.. and then the captain got angry and shouted, 'Can't you tell just by looking!?'.. Do you remember?"

"Yeah, I remember.

There was a loud bang when she threw a bat at the door.

I was really surprised."

"That's right!" Yumizuka says, laughing.

"But when we heard all the teachers had gone home, we really lost all hope.

We couldn't stand being there for even a minute longer, and we had to face the prospect of being trapped until the next day.

Just when we were thinking about how miserable the world was, you knocked on the door and said 'I might be able to open the door, if you can keep it a secret.'"

"Yeah.

And then I heard another bang, and someone said, 'If it opened that easily, we wouldn't be suffering in here!' She was really angry."

"Ahaha.

Yeah, the captain felt responsible for us getting trapped, so she didn't have much patience to spare.

But soon after that, the door opened.

Everyone was happy that the captain's knocking with the bat must have worked and ran outside, but I was watching you, standing by the door."

Yumizuka looks at me warmly.
.... But that only troubles me.
To me, it meant nothing, so I can't really appreciate her gratitude.
"I was crying really hard at that time.
My eyes just felt like they were swelling up, and they looked terrible.
What do you think you said when you saw me like that?"
"I don't know.
What did I say?"
.... I really don't remember, so I ask, as if it were something someone else had done.
Despite this, Yumizuka still looks at me happily.
"You put your hand on my head, and said 'Hurry up and go home, and eat some Ozouni'.
I was a little embarrassed because I was trembling so much from the cold."
"...."
"Hmm." I knit my brows.
I don't know what I meant back then.
"I think you meant for me to warm up my body by having some Ozouni."
".... I see.
It was right after New Year's, after all."
.... That does sound like the stupid kind of thing I would say.
Now that it's put to me like this, I regret not having picked something better to say.
"Back then I thought, there are plenty of reliable people at school, but if I ever really need to be saved, it will be someone like Tohno-kun who saves me."
"You're exaggerating.
Look, it's like how a baby chick thinks the first human it meets is its mother.
I just happened to help you."
"That's not true..!
Ever since then, I really believed that you'd come and help me no matter what the problem was."
Her expression is quite resolute.

"You're giving me too much credit, Yumizuka-san.
I'm not that reliable of a person."



"It's alright.
That's what I believe, so let me keep believing it."
She pronounced while staring straight at me, and I am too embarrassed to offer a rebuttal.
"—Well, I guess you can believe what you want."



"Isn't that right?
So if I'm ever in a pinch, you'll come and help me, right?"
Yumizuka asks me, smiling.
.... To be honest, that would be kind of troubling.
Despite what she thinks, I'm not the sort of guy who can do everything.
I'm not.. but when she faces me with that smile, I don't want to destroy that faith she has in me.
"Yeah.
If it's within my power, I'll help you."
"Yep!
Thank you, Tohno-kun.
I know it's a bit late to say this, but I was really happy because of what you said to me back then."

So saying, Yumizuka suddenly stops.
Naturally, I stop too.



"I've always wanted to talk with you like this, Tohno-kun."

Somewhere in her voice was a hint of wistfulness.

Perhaps it's because of the red light from the sunset, but somehow, Yumizuka looks lonely.

".... What do you mean?"

You can talk to me anytime."

"No, I can't.

Inui-kun is always around you, and besides.. I can't become someone like you, Tohno-kun."

With that reserved answer, Yumizuka draws away from me.



"Well, my house is this way, so I'll see you at school tomorrow."

"Bye-bye!" Smiling, Yumizuka waves her hand and begins walking down another street.

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turn to **19**

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"Shiki-sama, it is morning.
Please wake up."

.... I hear a familiar voice.

"Shiki-sama.... Please wake up.
If you are late like yesterday, you will break your promise with Akiha-sama."

.... A voice partly tense, partly relaxed.
"Shiki-sama.
Is it okay?
Akiha-sama will end up scolding you again."

.... No, it's not okay at all.

".... I'm up.
I'm up, so hold on."
Still under the sheets, I respond as I slowly open my eyes.



"Good morning, Shiki-sama."

"Ah, mornin'."

I give a sleepy greeting in response and put on my glasses.
It's past seven in the morning.
Hisui came at her usual time and managed to wake me.

"I will prepare your breakfast.
After changing, please head towards the dining room."

Hisui disappears from the room after a bow.
I give a big yawn.
After a nice stretch, I get up from bed.
I change into my school uniform and cast a glance at my desk.

.... On top is the knife I will not ever use again.
The curtains sway in the wind.
Hisui must have opened the window; the sky is refreshingly clear.
It's just a little cold though.

I approach the window to close it.

—As it turned out,
I ended up waking in my own room.
It seems Senpai carried me here.
Fortunately, Akiha and the others didn't know I left.
It's been one week since that night.
Tohno Shiki's life hasn't changed a bit from what it was before.
My relationship with Akiha is a bit uneasy at times, but of course we're brother
and sister.
Except for that passageway being repaired, the school has not changed at all.

.... No, it did change.
At school, there's no senpai called Ciel anywhere, nor does anyone remember
her.
The instances of serial murders haven't occurred once since then.
Since there's been no official arrest, the city streets are still relatively empty at
night, but it'll probably return to normal in a month.
As for me,
I carry an unfillable void in my heart, but I continue on as I did before.
.... Or rather, I can bear it all.
At times, I get overwhelmed when I am assailed by memories, but I don't think
I'll go insane or anything for now.

Some day.
Will I go crazy after not being able to bear these memories or will I just return
to living normally after getting used to them?
Perhaps it's about a fifty-fifty chance.
—But until then,
even if it is a little girlish, I will keep the final promise I made with her everyday.

"—Autumn is drawing to a close, isn't it?"

The blue sky outside is enough to take my breath away.
Taking a large, deep breath, I shut the window.

I will keep my promise.

turn to ??

I will never forget Arcueid.

turn to ??

416

".... Um.... Senpai, if you say it's a bother, then please take them off."

"Is that so?"

Well, it doesn't really have a prescription, so it could be a bother, but are they alright?"

"....."

Thinking she's making a big deal, I decide to tell her directly.

"You don't have to worry about strange things..."

Um, you're going to go through so much trouble anyway——"

"Ah——"

Senpai gives a quiet reaction.

"Yes.... That's true.

Then please wait in the room."

.... I hear a knob turn and the sound of spraying water in the shower.

"....."

Plopping down on the bed, I look down at myself.

I really am erect in complete disregard to what I'm thinking.

Senpai said it would be better to have someone else do it.

She didn't say the method directly, but I can kind of see what it will be based on how she is acting.

"—Hm."

The instant I think about it, my heart jumps.

"Damn it, what am I thinking?"

I try to calm down by shaking my head.

Ciel-senpai said it was just a method to suppress Roa, so it does not have any sexual meaning.

Roa's consciousness is quiet now, so I can't be excited myself.

".... Calm down, calm down."

I repeat it over and over like a mantra.

While I do that, Ciel-senpai comes out from the bathroom.

"——"

My jaw drops down.

Ciel-senpai enters the room in a shocking outfit, wearing only a shirt and panties.

"Se, Senpai!

Wh, wha wha, why are you dressed like that.....!?"

I wave my arms in surprise as Ciel-senpai gives an embarrassed smile.

"Um, is it that strange?"

I dressed like this to help you out."

"H-help?"

With what!?"

".... Um, I tried hard so I could help you be more turned on...."

Ciel-senpai gives a mumbled answer.

"___"

I'm speechless.

Being stared at in surprise, Ciel-senpai looks away uneasily.

".... I'm sorry.

I guess I should've known it's not sexy at all for me to be dressed like this."

"Wha-what are you saying!?"

Of course you look sexy in that!"

I respond instantly, and realize I blurted out too much.

"Oh—um, well, um, I'm, thankful for that, but.."

.... That outfit is not good, Senpai.

At this rate, I will go mad before Roa does.

"Tohno-kun?"

"___"

I look away from Ciel-senpai.

The contour of her shoulders under that white shirt.

The color of her concealing underwear.

Her tender-looking thighs.

Looking at them directly causes me to go out of control.

.... I know she's intending to get me turned on to refresh me, but still—

"Senpai, I think we should stop.

I don't have that much confidence."

"Please don't worry.

I heard males are quite sensitive, so I think even I can refresh you."

"Uh, no, that's not what I meant by not having confidence."

I meant I didn't think I could hold myself back.

"Then, let's begin, Tohno-kun."

"Wha, what....?"

"Can you take off your pants?"

It's alright if you just unzip them and pull it out."

"Ah—uh."

Senpai is ready.

And she doesn't seem that embarrassed about it.

".... Senpai.... um, aren't you embarrassed?"

"Well, I am a little uneasy, but your body won't last much longer if we don't do anything.

I'm just thinking of it like lancing a boil."

"A boil.... That's a pretty direct expression."

"Oh, Tohno-kun.

While I do this, please don't watch too much.

I can't concentrate with people watching me."

Saying that, Ciel-senpai draws closer.

I—get more confused inside as Ciel-senpai stays calm.

"Wait, we should stop.

This is wrong.

Senpai, I still—"

want to go all the way, but I don't want to do it for a reason like this.

"Tohno-kun.

I have to leave you here tomorrow morning.

This is the only time I have with you, right?

If I don't do this right now, you will be like this the whole time I'm gone."

"That.... right."

"Yes.

It's okay, so please just sit there.

I'm not experienced, but I'll try my best."

Her cheeks coloring faintly, she looks directly at me.

.... I see.

Senpai is embarrassed too.

She's prepared herself, so I can't just stay here and fret about it.

".... I understand.

Um, is this good?"

I draw my zipper down and lower my underwear.

Seeing my fully erect shaft, Ciel-senpai suddenly freezes.

".... Senpai....?"

Um, should we stop after all?"

"N-no, that's not it!

I was just thinking that this really is you."

Taking a deep breath, Ciel-senpai walks towards me.

"Um, please just look at the ceiling, Tohno-kun."

Her body disappears from my view.

Ciel-senpai sits between my spread legs.

She faces my shaft so close that I can feel her breath on me.

.... Her fingers touch me.

With one hand, she takes her hesitating fingers and runs them down my length.

"Tohno-kun, how does it feel?

Tell me when it feels good."

"_____"

I can't answer that.

.... How can I put it?

I kind of feel guilty.

She touches me hesitantly, as if cradling something fragile.

"..... Mm."

With just that.

She is only touching me, but my mind is going crazy.

My mind is going crazy, but my shaft doesn't feel anything at all.

"Hm.... you're a little harder than before...."

Saying this, she wraps her delicate fingers around me.

.... It seems what she's doing doesn't feel good, as my tool hasn't even let out anything yet.

As dry as I am, Senpai continues to try to "calm" me down.

.... This awkward, unpleasant feeling continues for a few minutes.

Her fingers, originally light and hesitant, now grip me harder.
 Even though she's still simply moving up and down, she does so with a tighter grip.

"... That's odd.... why isn't it doing anything, Tohno-kun?"

She sounds troubled.

My mind is about to go crazy just from hearing her voice.

Being stroked by Senpai's fingers does feel good, but it's far from making me come.

But more than that, right now—the better Ciel-senpai's fingers feel, the more I want to wrap my arms around her.

"Mm...."

Her voice becomes more full of heat.

It might be because she's embarrassed, or trying that hard to caress me, but her breath really does feel hotter.

"N.... ha, ah.... m, mm...."

I can hear her breathing become wilder.

Then I realize she's now using both hands.

"... Haa.... ha.... h, ha.... ah."

With both hands, she carefully embraces my member.

It's probably because of her diligent work, but I finally start to feel some pleasure.

A spark runs up my spine.

But it isn't because of Ciel-senpai's fingers.

Just the fact that she's trying so hard is exciting me more than her touch.

"Ha, m, m—"

Her voice becomes quieter.

Then—

"Gh—!?"

A pleasure different than the previous touching sensation makes me arch my back.

"... M, mm, ah—"

Her voice seems more labored now.

She sounds as if she's having difficulty breathing.

But the breath I feel is hot and close to me.

And more than that—my dry rod is starting to get wet.

"Ah, m—"

... Her breath grows even hotter.

"Hey, Senpai...!?"

Unable to resist the temptation, I look down without thinking.

"——"

My mind goes blank.

That's what's causing the chills of pleasure.

My hardened, twitching shaft.

The delicate fingers wrapped around it.
The face close enough to breathe all over me.
And,
The red tongue licking at me as if it had a mind of its own.
"N, m, ha, n...."
With her eyes closed, she twirls her tongue enthusiastically around my crown.
The feeling of her tongue is on a whole different level than her fingers.
.... This is bad.
If I see this kind of thing my mind will get excited, too.
In reality, I'm already too excited, swelling even larger as if trying to escape her grasp.
"M—!?"
Ciel pulls back in surprise, but quickly wraps her fingers around me once more.
.... I start to come alive even more.
A thin, sticky line oozes from my tip, and she wipes it with her finger.
Then drenches my member with it.
Her red tongue licks me once again.
"Tohno, ku, n—"
Her words are broken by soft licks.
From her lips, a line of saliva forms between me and her.
"Ah—"
This is bad.
Really, seeing her like this is going to drive me insane.

"Senpai, stop....!
If you keep doing this, I'll go crazy before I let it out....!"
"N.... no, Tohno-kun.
It doesn't matter.
We have to keep going."
Another sensation shoots through me.
Her tongue has licked the back of my shaft.
"... Let's stop....!
I won't be able to hold back like this....!"
"Please don't hold back.
If you release what's inside of you, you can calm down."
"But I can't, since it's you....!
It's okay, let's stop Senpai.... I know it's bad to say that after you've gone this far, but I can't calm down with you doing this....!"
"Please don't worry about me.
I.. don't.. mind.. really."
Saying this, she continues caressing me with her tongue.
"—Ah!"
I let out a small gasp.
.... If she thinks this is only a chore, I guess I have to think of it that way, too.
Trying not to look at her, I do my best to focus on just letting it out.

"Ah..... m, mm—"

I can hear her small breaths.

Her tongue feels as if it's trying to taste all of me,
and her captivating fingers torture me unrelentingly.

The sound of my heartbeat and Ciel-senpai's breathing echoes through the room.
This much pleasure.

I'm being assailed by so much sensation I would've normally come already, but
my shaft is still not responding at all.

It got wet for a while earlier, but now it's just back to being erect.

"N.... m, ha, haa.... ah....."

.... Ciel-senpai's breathing becomes even harder.

Maybe I felt like I was going to let it out back then because I saw Senpai's face,
not because of the pleasure.

"Mhaa.... ahh..... ah.... ahn....."

".... Senpai?"

She sounds so pained, I look down at her.

Senpai's body is twitching.

Maybe it's because she's been in the same spot for so long, or because it's hard
to do it in that position, but she seems restless.

"Senpai, is this position too difficult for you?"

It looks like you're uncomfortable."

"Eh—why do you say that?"

"Well, you're breathing pretty hard.... If it's too hard for you, should we stop?"

"Eh.... no, I'm not out of breath because it's difficult.... but you're right, I'll
move.

It seems like you're not feeling anything, either."

She seems a little displeased.

".... Hey."

She doesn't seem to understand that I was feeling more than enough earlier.

"Then get up on the bed.

You were kneeling on the floor so long, I'll bet your knees hurt."

"Eh—oh, yes.

I'll do that.

Please look away."

".....?"

I don't quite get why, but I look away.

Ciel-senpai gets on the bed and tells me to look at the ceiling again.

".... Senpai.

I think it would feel better if I could look at your face.. do I really have to look
up at the ceiling?"

"O-of course!

I-if you see me like this, I'll die!"

"Die?—how come?
If it's really nothing more than lancing a boil, then it shouldn't matter if I look at you."
"Um—well, that's true, but..."
Her blush deepens and she tells me to just look up at the ceiling.
"____"
On all fours, Ciel-senpai reaches towards my groin.
"....."
I steal a glance at her as she does.
.... Her body looks even hotter than before.
I don't know why, exactly, but for one thing, the skin on her thigh is tinted red and reflecting the light.

....?
Reflecting... huh?
"—Oh."
My mind jolts as I realize what it is.
"—Senpai, wait."
"Mm... wha, what.... is it, Tohno-kun?"
"Just.. lie down."
"Eh—kyaa!"
I push her down on the bed.

"Ah—"
Her face stiffens.
"... Senpai.
Why are you wet down there?"
"Ah—Ah."
Ciel-senpai's face turns red.
"... Hmm.
You said it was nothing, so why are you like that?
You soaked through your panties, and you're even dripping down your leg."
"N—no—no, that's just—"
Ciel-senpai blushes brighter as she stammers.
"No?
What is it then?"
I place my palm on her thigh.
"N—!"
Her whole body shakes.
When I pull back, a sticky line forms between my hand and her thigh.
"N—no...!
Don't, please don't look, Tohno-kun...!"
She's so embarrassed she's practically crying.
But this kind of reaction is so cute, it makes me want to tease her more.
"Ok, I won't look if you tell me not to, but at least tell me why you're like this before you make me look away.

I'll look up at the ceiling if you tell me that much."

"Why?"

How—can I say such a thing?"

"You can't say it?"

Well, then I guess I'll just have to ask your body."

I put my hand on her thigh again.

Then, following the slick trail of juices, I move my fingers up to the juncture between her thighs.

"Nah.....!"

Her hips instinctively pull back.

"Wow.

You're really wet.

It's pretty selfish of you to be feeling this good when I was worried that I couldn't come.

.... I see.

You were having fun by teasing me."

"N, no—!"

I really was trying to help you calm down, but you didn't react at all, so—"

"So?"

I push with my index finger.

I press through her well-soaked panties and into her slick folds.

"Ah.....!"

She cries out with embarrassment.

That voice.

Seeing that face, hearing that voice, my heart starts pounding even faster.

"C'mon, answer.

Why is your body reacting this way, Senpai?"

".... I... started feeling hot while I was touching you—and I thought it was strange myself, but my mind just blanked out, and I—"

"Used your tongue and licked me like I was a lollipop?"

"——!"

Her face turns so red it looks like it's on fire.

"But, I didn't do anything myself....!"

Just touching you made me hot, and—"

"You soaked right through your panties?"

You're more perverted than I thought, Ciel-senpai."

"To.. Tohno-kun!

Y-you're being mean!

I told you, so please stop looking....!"

Hearing her voice convinces me.

Blushing so much and becoming so aroused just by touching me.

No wonder everything beforehand didn't work.

It has to be her.

More than her fingertips or tongue, just seeing her face makes me feel the most pleasure.

".... Senpai.

I have to have you."

"Eh—Tohno-kun?"

"I finally figured it out.

No matter what you do, if I can't see your face, it's no good.

I won't feel it unless it's you.

I probably won't be able to come unless I'm doing it with you, Senpai."

"Um.... I'm flattered, but—"

"It doesn't have anything to do with Roa!

Even if he never existed, I'd still want to make love to you.

Being—being alone with you when you're so cute, I just can't hold back."

"——"

Ciel-senpai looks at me in surprise.

Her shyness seems to fade away.

"Tohno-kun.... are you serious?"

"You think I would joke about this?"

.... But, if you don't want to, then I'll stop.

I don't want to do anything to hurt you."

"Ah——"

After a brief, radiant smile, she suddenly looks downcast and averts her gaze.

"I.... want to do it with you too, Tohno-kun.

.... But, is it alright?"

I've always held back, but isn't it different for you?"

Even your body, it's just Roa's influence arousing you——"

"Idiot—I'm the one who's been holding back.

All this time, I've always wanted to touch you, Senpai."

"N——!"

Before she can reply, I seal her lips with mine.

Breathing wildly, we explore each other's lips.

First tentative contact, then hungrily mixing together.

"Ha, ahh, aha——"

Ciel-senpai's breathing.

Her body is already burning with passion, so it seems like I won't have to do anything to prepare her.

"Tohno, kun."

".... Senpai.

I'm going to undress you now."

I peel her shirt and panties from her.

The pure beauty of her naked body beneath me is enough to cause my brain to melt down.

Her skin glowing with sweat.

Her taut, perfect little nipples.

Her firm, sizable breasts, shuddering with every heavy breath she takes.

And, below that.

Her pink slit is already soaking wet, her swollen nub reflecting the light.

".... What's this?"

Already this turned on, Senpai?"
 With the tip of my finger, I gently caress her bud.
 "Ahwa.....!"
 Being touched in the most sensitive part of her body, she jumps in response.
 "N, nah, gg—!"
 As I roll one finger around it, I slip a second inside her.
 A wet sensation.
 She's soaking wet inside, too.
 If she's like this, I wouldn't have any problems entering her at all right now.
 "—Senpai, I'm going to put it in, alright?"
 "Ah—y, yes, but, Tohno-kun."
 Speaking in a faltering, hesitating voice.
 Ciel-senpai looks directly into my eyes.
 "... Can you... please stop calling me Senpai?"
 I want you to just call me Ciel."
 As she asks this, her eyes are brimming with tears.
 "—Okay.
 Then, I'm putting it in.
 Lift your legs a little, Ciel."
 "O—okay."
 She raises her legs off the bed.
 Supporting them with my hands, I gently take my shaft and ease it into Senpai.... Ciel.

"Nah——!"
 The sound of flesh meeting flesh tortures my ears as I enter her.
 Stretching, pushing.
 It feels like I'm pressing myself between two, thick walls as I push into her.
 The feeling of it,
 Of merging, is unbelievably good.
 Even just this small movement sends strong waves of pleasure racing through me.
 "Hn... inside, you're inside me...!"
 As I plumb her depths, Ciel cries out.
 I pull back, then push in once more.
 "Agh....!"
 Ah, ahn, ahn—"
 Her sweet, short sighs.
 I make only small movements, as if matching her breathing.
 It feels like I'm hitting her with something heavy—
 "N, nah, ah—!"
 Tohno-kun, ama—zing!"
 Maybe because my shaft is more erect than usual, it seems like I'm squeezing into her rather than just entering.
 Ciel is so, tight.
 She squeezes me so hard it feels like she could tear me off if I try to pull out.

pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*—!

But I keep going.

In rhythm with her wild breathing, I push into her over and over.

"Ah—nh, haa, ah—"

She almost sounds like she's crying.

Blushing furiously, she tries to resist the competing embarrassment and pleasure.

"Ha, ahn, ahah, aah—ah—"

Ciel's body oscillates.

I put my hands on her shaking breasts.

I squeeze them as I thrust my hips.

Her tightness feels so good.

I caress her nipples with my fingers and slowly bring my tongue to bear on them.

"N—Tohno-kun, that's good—"

A different reaction than before.

It seems she's really sensitive there.

I want to hear her voice spike like that again, so I lick harder.

"Ah—Tohno-kun, gentle—!"

I can hardly hear her.

My breathing reaches a feverish pitch.

I just move.

Ciel's passage is so hot, I feel like I'm melting inside her.

My body is already on the edge.

It could explode right now.

ah—haa, aahh, ah—!

But, I keep thrusting into her.

It's not the time to hold myself back.

It's not, but, if I can... I want to be connected like this with her forever.

"N, nah, hah, aha, ahn—!"

She grips me even tighter.

Ciel's passionate voice,

her nearly crying eyes,

I don't want to let go.

"Ci, el—just, a little more—"

"Y—yes, Tohno-kun, harder—!"

I can hardly understand her.

Just matching our heartbeats, I push into her with all my might.

And then,

I finally reach all the way to her core.

"Hwa, ugah, ooh...!"

Does it hurt?

She tightens all around me.

She keeps gripping my shaft, the most sensitive part of my body.

Ciel's eyes are brimming with tears.
 But she doesn't seem like she's in pain.
 I, only feel love for those eyes right now.
 "Ciel, I love you, Ciel.....!"
 —I really, don't understand.
 My mind is completely shut down.
 Those are the only words I can even understand.
 "Yes—I, I love you too—!"
 Ciel's voice strikes the very center of my brain.
 And, it becomes the last straw.
 "I'm—coming....!"
 From my hips,
 from my very center, liquid passion starts to rumble forth.
 "—!"
 I hurriedly pull away from Ciel's body.

A shock rises up from my testicles.
 And abruptly, my semen bursts forth, coming out closer to jelly than fluid.

"Ha—ah."
 I breathe heavily.
 Lying collapsed on the bed, I suck in air.
 "I'm—spent."
 I feel as exhausted as if I just ran a marathon.
 But, more than my tiredness, I felt great pleasure from Ciel's body.
 Just thinking back on it causes me to zone out.
 "Oh.
 Ciel—"
 I lift myself up and look at her.
 "... Hu, h?"
 That's a little surprising.
 I thought she would also be savoring the feeling, but she looks incredibly full of energy.
 "Ciel... um, you're not tired?"
 "Eh... um, are you tired...?"
 She seems surprised, as she covers her mouth with her hand.
 "I see—Ciel, you didn't really move much.
 I guess I'm the only one who's tired—"
 I sigh and fall back to the bed.
 "But, I had no problem releasing everything.
 Thank you Ciel, I'll sleep soundly now."
 "Yes..... that's, true."
 She doesn't really sound too happy.
 "... What is it?
 Is something wrong?"
 "Well, um—I was just thinking that you got dirty there."

"Oh—"

Come to think of it, she's right.

Geez, I guess I don't have any sensitivity at all.

"S, sorry.

Can I use a tissue or something?"

"Oh, I'll clean it up.

Just lie down."

"..... R, really?"

Thanks."

I don't know what she's thinking, but I lie down.

sigh—

I take a deep breath.

Now that I've calmed down, I can sleep soundly.

"N—?"

I shake at a sudden burst of pleasure.

Ciel is wiping me with a tissue.

"Ah—"

It feels good.

I really do enjoy the feeling of her fingers over the tissue.

Slowly, she wipes me down.

It was pretty thick, so it's probably a hard task.

She is cleaning me carefully and diligently.

"..... Uh."

.... Men really are like wild beasts.

Just being touched by Ciel, I start to harden again.

"—"

I can't.

I can't.

I tell myself to calm down.

—And then,

A chill runs up my spine.

My deflated member gets larger.

Not just from her fingers, but... the sensation of her tongue causes it to rise once more.

"Hey, Senpai....!"

I look up without thinking.

There—

The sight of what Ciel is doing makes me stare in amazement.

Using her tongue, she laps at the semen still clinging to me.

"Ah—"

This sensation.

The feeling of her tongue running over me... and the fact that she's licking my semen off of me.

From just that, I'm fully hardened once more.
 "Ah—Hey, Cie, l—"

Engrossed in caressing me, Ciel doesn't hear a word I say.
 The earnest movements of her tongue.
 Her fingers stroke me up and down and I start to leak pre-come already.
 "... Man, and I just came already—!"
 I'm a little bothered by how simply I got aroused.
 But, can it be helped?
 Would any guy be able to resist those kind, passionate caresses?
 But, more than that—Why is Ciel going so far to make me happy...?

"..... Oh."
 And it hits me.
 Maybe, but, she must be—
 "Ciel.
 Um, don't tell me, you didn't get to come....?"
 "—"

She pulls back from me and, blushing furiously, gives a nod.
 "Then, then you got me up again so that, um....."

She wants another round, I guess....

".... Ciel, you couldn't come?"
 ".... No.
 Um, I, want to be with you again, Tohno-kun."
 Looking down, she blushes to the tips of her ears.
 "——"

It hits me pretty hard.
 Having heard that, no, having made her say that, I'm a little embarrassed.
 "... You're right.
 This isn't enough for me, either.
 We won't be able to see each other after tomorrow, so I should be with you as
 much as I can.
 If we do this until I collapse, my body would probably be calm for a long time."
 "That may be true... but Tohno-kun, you sound rough."
 "What?
 Weren't you the one looking for more?
 We can stop if you don't want to do it."
 "Oh—no, um—s,sorry!"
 Embarrassed, she apologizes with all her might.
 "Sorry, I was kidding.
 Being all energetic like this, I want you too.
 But I really am tired, so can you be on top?"
 "Eh—on top, on top of you??"
 "Yeah.
 I can't really move a lot, so it's your turn this time."

It's what they usually call a "cowgirl".

"Um—like, this?"

On her hands and knees, like a cat, she walks over and positions herself over me.

"... Wow, what a great view."

From this angle, I can see every bit of Ciel's glorious breasts.

"N, ah—!"

Looking away, Ciel lowers herself onto me.

A wet sensation.

Without any resistance, she takes me in.

"Oh—it's in."

"Yeah it's in.

It was in before, right?"

As soon as I say that, she blushes even more.

... I can't tell if she's easily embarrassed or really outgoing.

"Can you move?"

You can start slowly if you want, then when you get used to it, you can go faster."

"O, okay—"

She starts to rock hesitantly up and down.

A slow, gentle tempo.

Is that enough to please her?

She's already breathing heavily.

"Mm... oh, ah, oh—"

She slowly starts to make bigger movements.

She leaks her warm juices all over me.

Our groins are soaked with sticky fluids.

"N, nah, ah, ahn, ahn—!"

The sound of flesh meeting flesh meeting fluid.

Probably because I'm not moving this time, nothing but pure pleasure flows into my brain.

... But, just to stay like that is boring, so I decide to move too.

Ciel's hips rise, and fall.

Matching her timing, I raise my hips.

"Hya—!?"

The sensation of her weight bearing down on me.

It feels like I'm thrusting all the way into her stomach.

"Ah, ha... oh, aaooooh.....!!"

Ciel moans loudly.

But she doesn't stop sliding up and down, and I continue to match her rhythm.

"Ah, so... good, Tohno-kun, wonder, ful—!"

Her back arches in pleasure.

She's so wild it looks like she might fold herself in half.

"... Mm, ah, oh, hwa... ah, ngg, ah....!"

Seeing her getting so worked up causes my breathing to become wilder as well. Thrusting in this position is more tiring though.

"—"

My arms aren't doing anything.

I place one on her leg, the other on her hip.

"Mm—it feels, so, goo, oo-d....!"

Ciel's body rocks as if she is longing for more pleasure.

Her well-developed breasts and her black hair sway in time with the movement of her hips.

Feeling her hot breath on me, I move the hand on her hip around to her back-side.

Gently, I grab her soft yet firm cheek.

"Ah... ahn, nmm....."

Her expression changes.

It's a little different reaction than before.

With one palm still on her hip, I bring my finger down to her butt.

Between those ample mounds, my finger slips through the soft, soft flesh.

And buries itself between her cheeks, lightly covering her other opening.

"K, ah—!?"

Her back arches again and she stifles a cry.

And tightens around my shaft even more than before.

"Ciel... are you that sensitive?"

"Ah—well, when you touch it, I feel a bit weird—"

"Oh?"

.... It feels weird, Ciel-san?"

I slip my finger inside.

Just a bit, just halfway past the fingernail.

"——Hwaaa....!"

But she responds more to this than any of my other caresses.

"Ah... ah, gg—Tohno-kun, please, stop that."

She's breathing so heavily I can hardly understand her.

Her cheeks aren't red just because she's hot, but she must be really embarrassed to have that done to her.

"....."

I feel excited too.

Unthinkingly, I just want to tease her.

"I see, you like it there, huh?

You should have told me earlier."

"Eh—Tohno-kun....?"

"Let's switch up.

I'll move this time."

I pull away from her and stand up.

"Ciel, put your hands and knees on the bed."

".... Um... like this?"

She gets down on all fours.

Her juices drip almost nonstop.
She's leaking all the way down to her ankles.
"Hm—You really are bottomless, Ciel.
You were soaking before, but it's still dripping out."
Starting at her ankle,
I lap the juices off of her body.
"Ha.... mm, Shiki-kun.. please, don't, do that."
"Why?
You did it to me, Ciel.
This is just.. *payback*."
"N..... *hah..... ah*."
From her ankle to her knee.
Behind her knee, tracing a helix with my tongue all the way up to her thigh,
and then from her thigh to the pink wellspring between her legs.
".....!"
Her hips pull back.
Chasing her, I bring my mouth right between her thighs.
I push my tongue in.
Unhesitatingly, I move my tongue around inside her warm, moist hole.
And drink the juices that seep forth.
"No—that, that's, dirty."
Ciel's voice quivers.
Her voice is mixed with embarrassment and pleasure, and it looks like she doesn't
even know what she's saying.
"It's not dirty at all.
This is what made both of us feel so good.
Or were you faking it?"
Stopping my kiss, I bring my finger up to her slit.
"Hwaa—ah, it—feels, good."
"I see.
But, I think you really feel much better here than there, Ciel."
Up between her legs.
Using the hand drenched in her juices, I spread her cheeks.
With her own fluids, I completely coat the area around her anus.
"N—!
Tohno-kun, don't tell me, you're...."
"That's right.
I heard it's better not to grit your teeth, though, cause it hurts less if you
breathe through your mouth."
"Hey—Tohno-kun you idiot!
Don't, touch there—ah!"
Holding onto her as she tries to escape, I bury my face between her cheeks.
Holding her tight, I lick her twitching asshole.
Barely teasing the outer surface.
"Ha, n—!
Ah, aha, aaooh, oh....!"

She stops trying to escape.

"You really like this, don't you Ciel?"

"No—Tohno-kun, please.. don't.. lick.. me there—"

Hearing that only makes me want to do it more.

I only licked the outside at first, but this time I put my tongue in.

Working diligently, I soak her ass with her own juice and my saliva.

"N—!"

Haah, ahn, aaa.....!"

Having her react so strongly to just the tip of my tongue, I'm almost afraid to see what might happen next.

But, I've gone this far.. I can't stop now.

And more than that, I want to see what it will feel like.

"—Well, I guess it's about time."

I bring my rod right onto her opening.

"—!"

Ciel's body twitches.

Holding her firmly, I slide it inside her.

It feels completely different.

She tightens all around me, her much smaller hole resisting my advance.

I gradually push in deeper, forcing my way through.

"Nah, aaaaaaa—!"

Ciel practically screams.

It's only natural.

This hole wasn't designed to receive a man.

Pain, and another sensation, are probably mixing inside her.

"—Gg."

But it's also tight here.

I slowly push myself in as she tightens around me, as if resisting the foreign object sliding into her.

The pressure around me is enormous.

I fight to spread walls that shouldn't be opened.

It's the same for me—I'm feeling more pain than pleasure.

"Ah, hwaa, ah, ah—"

Her frantically rising voice.

"—Ti.. ght—"

Not giving in, I push harder.

.... But, maybe because I lubricated her with my saliva and her juices before, once the tip is in.. it becomes easier than I thought to stick the rest of it in.

"Gua—ha, no, something that big, won't, fit.....!"

Sweat beads on her forehead.

.... It has to be because I'm forcing myself into such a small hole.

She has to feel it twice as much.

"Ah, uh, oh, oh, aaa—!"

She tightens even more.

Tight doesn't begin to describe it.
The pressure increases around me a thousand fold, as if to punish me for entering her this way.
"—K—ha, ha, hah."
I'm out of breath.
It hurts.
It hurts, but this—strangulation is pleasure too.
"Amazing... This is, the first time—your ass is so good, Ciel."
It feels like it won't go in again if I pull out too far, so I withdraw slightly and push back in.
Only a bit.
Pull, thrust.
And it gets me in a bit deeper, so I pull back just a little, and then push back in.
.... I repeat the cycle over and over.
"Mm, mm, mm—, ha.....!"
My voice slips out as I thrust in.
"Ah, haa, Tohno.. kun, haa, oh.....!"
Ciel is the same way.
As the pleasure starts to win over the pain, she starts to accept me.
"Mm, ah, haa, ah, ah, ah.....!"
Just a bit.

"Ah—n, it feels good, Tohno-kun.....!"
Just a bit.

"Hwaa.... ah, aah, ah—more, Toh, no, kun."
Just a bit.

"Ah, nn, mm, ah—Tohno, am, nn—Tohno-kun, deeper, more—"
Me too.
"Deeper, deeper—!"
I've reached my limit.
"Ciel, I—"
"—No, no.... I won't, let you, finish, already....!"

—Ggh!

My withdrawal is halted.
She tightens around me like an iron clamp.
I can't get out.
I can only move a little bit.
I'm on the verge of release, but she won't let me.
"Why... you....!"
I thrust once more.
My shaft penetrates deeper.

"N, ah—!"

Ciel's arms collapse.

As if she had no strength left, she lifts her hips as she collapses on the bed.

Even still—I don't stop moving.

"—Ah, aah, Tohno-kun, you're in, so deep."

Ciel grips the sheets as if resisting the pleasure.

"Gg—"

I also try to resist the heat welling inside me.

Holding back, I thrust deeper.

I've already put myself in all the way to the base.

I feel like I'm almost in her stomach.

"Hu—ng, nah, ahn—"

Once.

"I, I—I can't, take it anymore—"

Twice.

"Ah—nah, n, nn, nn—!"

Three times.

Ciel's body tightens.

This really is the end.

I'm there too.

I have to pull myself out of her.

"—Tohno-kun, inside, do it inside me—!"

Her voice is pleading.

"—"

Instead of pulling back, I thrust deeper inside her.

"Ngg—!"

She arches her back.

Her hands frantically grip the sheets, her limbs tense fiercely.

Ciel's body tightens around me as if it never plans to let go.

I just, wanted all of her.

"—I'm, coming, Ciel!"

"Y, yes....!"

Come, please come, Tohno-kun!"

I thrust harder than ever before.

Thump!

The feeling assails me.

The feeling of spurting forth is so intense, it almost feels like I'm releasing hot magma inside of her.

"Ah—aha, ahh—I, I—!"

Splurt.

Splurt.

Splurt.

Over and over, it doesn't stop with just a few times.

I just keep shooting into her.

"Ah—ha, ah."

Ciel's body begins to buckle.

As she grips the sheets, a line of tears forms around her eyes.

"——"

Ciel collapses onto the bed.

"Ts——"

Even though she's collapsed, the tightness of her ass doesn't fade.

I manage to take my tool out with a large, heavy popping sound.

As soon as I do,

a large amount of my come flows out of her.

"—N—Shiki—kun—"

She gasps my name.

.... Like how I called Senpai, "Ciel".

In the end, she called me by my first name.

"—A, ahhh."

Finally, her tightness eases.

I pull back.

A sticky line connects us.

At the same time, come is oozing out of her ass.

.... How do I say this?

Well—even though this is the first time I've had sex with her, I realize I may have done too much.

"Ciel—Are you, okay?"

".... My ass, it hurts."

"I-I see.... I'm sorry, you were just too cute, I wanted to tease you."

".... No.

I won't be fooled by that."

Lying down, she glares up at me.

".... What do you mean?"

You liked it too, in the end.

I was in pain too, you know.

Ciel, you're always swinging that heavy weapon around, but did you train your ass muscles too?"

"Wha, what are you saying, Tohno-kun!?"
Ciel gets up and hits me in the head.
"Ouch!"
So violent!"
I lift up my hands in protest.
Ciel lets out a sigh.
"... Geez, you won't even let me savor the moment.
We won't be able to see each other after tomorrow morning, so can't you treasure the mood a little more?"
"... That's true, but we were pretty wild.
Shall we take a shower and change the sheets?"
Ciel reacts like she just found that out now.
"Th-that's right!
Then, I'll go take a shower....!"
Ciel runs to the bathroom.
"—Ha, haha."
I start to laugh.
I am carrying a bomb called Roa, but I don't even feel worried about that now.

.... The person who I thought I lost so many times is here with me now.
As long as she is here, there's nothing to be worried about.
I embraced her at school.
But that was more out of sadness than love.

But this is different.
This is only love.
I love her so much, I almost want her to just stay here.

.... In the end, the two of us ended up in bed, staring up at the ceiling without sleeping.

If I said something, I'm sure I would not let her go.
So, without speaking, I just felt her breathing and her warmth next to mine.
When morning came, she left the bed.



"I'm going.

I'll be back as soon as I can, so please don't leave the room, okay?"

It seems like she's bought enough food to last two weeks.

I'll leave aside the fact that most of it seems to be curry.

"Please don't run off with some floozy while I'm gone.

I get really jealous."

She says a scary thing with a deep smile, and exits the room.

It's before five o'clock in the morning.

This is how the last Monday in October began.

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"Please wear them."

"... Tohno-kun?"

"I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you very well..."

"I said, please wear them."

For a few seconds after my declaration,
only empty silence greets me from across the door.

"Um... Yes, I understand.

Then please wait in the room."

... I hear a knob turn and the sound of spraying water in the shower.

"....."

Plopping down on the bed, I look down at myself.

I really am erect in complete disregard to what I'm thinking.

Senpai said it would be better to have someone else do it.

She didn't say the method directly, but I can kind of see what it will be based
on how she is acting.

"—Hm."

The instant I think about it, my heart jumps.

"Damn it, what am I thinking?"

I try to calm down by shaking my head.

Ciel-senpai said it was just a method to suppress Roa, so it does not have any
sexual meaning.

Roa's consciousness is quiet now, so I can't be excited myself.

"... Calm down, calm down."

I repeat it over and over like a mantra.

While I do that, Ciel-senpai comes out from the bathroom.

"——"

My jaw drops down.

Ciel-senpai enters the room in a shocking outfit, wearing only a shirt and panties.

"Se, Senpai!"

"Wh, wha wha, why are you dressed like that.....!?"

I wave my arms in surprise as Ciel-senpai gives an embarrassed smile.

"Um, is it that strange?"

I dressed like this to help you out."

"H-help?"

"With what!?"

"... Um, I tried hard so I could help you be more turned on..."

Ciel-senpai gives a mumbled answer.

"——"

I'm speechless.

Being stared at in surprise, Ciel-senpai looks away uneasily.

"... I'm sorry.

I guess I should've known it's not sexy at all for me to be dressed like this."

"Wha-what are you saying!?"

Of course you look sexy in that!"

I respond instantly, and realize I blurted out too much.

"Oh—um, well, um, I'm, thankful for that, but.."

.... That outfit is not good, Senpai.

At this rate, I will go mad before Roa does.

"Tohno-kun?"

"—"

I look away from Ciel-senpai.

The contour of her shoulders under that white shirt.

The color of her concealing underwear.

Her tender-looking thighs.

Looking at them directly causes me to go out of control.

.... I know she's intending to get me turned on to refresh me, but still—

"Senpai, I think we should stop.

I don't have that much confidence."

"Please don't worry.

I heard males are quite sensitive, so I think even I can refresh you."

"Uh, no, that's not what I meant by not having confidence."

I meant I didn't think I could hold myself back.

"Then, let's begin, Tohno-kun."

"Wha, what....?"

"Can you take off your pants?"

It's alright if you just unzip them and pull it out."

"Ah—uh."

Senpai is ready.

And she doesn't seem that embarrassed about it.

".... Senpai... um, aren't you embarrassed?"

"Well, I am a little uneasy, but your body won't last much longer if we don't do anything.

I'm just thinking of it like lancing a boil."

"A boil.... That's a pretty direct expression."

"Oh, Tohno-kun.

While I do this, please don't watch too much.

I can't concentrate with people watching me."

Saying that, Ciel-senpai draws closer.

I—get more confused inside as Ciel-senpai stays calm.

"Wait, we should stop.

This is wrong.

Senpai, I still—"

want to go all the way, but I don't want to do it for a reason like this.

"Tohno-kun.

I have to leave you here tomorrow morning.

This is the only time I have with you, right?"

If I don't do this right now, you will be like this the whole time I'm gone."

"That.... right."

"Yes.

It's okay, so please just sit there.

I'm not experienced, but I'll try my best."

Her cheeks coloring faintly, she looks directly at me.

.... I see.

Senpai is embarrassed too.

She's prepared herself, so I can't just stay here and fret about it.

".... I understand.

Um, is this good?"

I draw my zipper down and lower my underwear.

Seeing my fully erect shaft, Ciel-senpai suddenly freezes.

".... Senpai....?"

Um, should we stop after all?"

"N-no, that's not it!

I was just thinking that this really is you."

Taking a deep breath, Ciel-senpai walks towards me.

"Um, please just look at the ceiling, Tohno-kun."

Her body disappears from my view.

Ciel-senpai sits between my spread legs.

She faces my shaft so close that I can feel her breath on me.

.... Her fingers touch me.

With one hand, she takes her hesitating fingers and runs them down my length.

"Tohno-kun, how does it feel?"

Tell me when it feels good."

"_____"

I can't answer that.

.... How can I put it?

I kind of feel guilty.

She touches me hesitantly, as if cradling something fragile.

"..... Mm."

With just that.

She is only touching me, but my mind is going crazy.

My mind is going crazy, but my shaft doesn't feel anything at all.

"Hm.... you're a little harder than before...."

Saying this, she wraps her delicate fingers around me.

.... It seems what she's doing doesn't feel good, as my tool hasn't even let out anything yet.

As dry as I am, Senpai continues to try to "calm" me down.

.... This awkward, unpleasant feeling continues for a few minutes.

Her fingers, originally light and hesitant, now grip me harder.

Even though she's still simply moving up and down, she does so with a tighter grip.

".... That's odd.... why isn't it doing anything, Tohno-kun?"

She sounds troubled.

My mind is about to go crazy just from hearing her voice.

Being stroked by Senpai's fingers does feel good, but it's far from making me come.

But more than that, right now—the better Ciel-senpai's fingers feel, the more I want to wrap my arms around her.

"Mm...."

Her voice becomes more full of heat.

It might be because she's embarrassed, or trying that hard to caress me, but her breath really does feel hotter.

"N.... ha, ah.... m, mm...."

I can hear her breathing become wilder.

Then I realize she's now using both hands.

"... Haa.... ha.... h, ha.... ah."

With both hands, she carefully embraces my member.

It's probably because of her diligent work, but I finally start to feel some pleasure.

A spark runs up my spine.

But it isn't because of Ciel-senpai's fingers.

Just the fact that she's trying so hard is exciting me more than her touch.

"Ha, m, m—"

Her voice becomes quieter.

Then—

"Gh—!?"

A pleasure different than the previous touching sensation makes me arch my back.

"... M, mm, ah—"

Her voice seems more labored now.

She sounds as if she's having difficulty breathing.

But the breath I feel is hot and close to me.

And more than that—my dry rod is starting to get wet.

"Ah, m—"

.... Her breath grows even hotter.

"Hey, Senpai....!?"

Unable to resist the temptation, I look down without thinking.

"——"

My mind goes blank.

That's what's causing the chills of pleasure.

My hardened, twitching shaft.

The delicate fingers wrapped around it.

The face close enough to breathe all over me.

And,

The red tongue licking at me as if it had a mind of its own.

"N, m, ha, n..."

With her eyes closed, she twirls her tongue enthusiastically around my crown.

The feeling of her tongue is on a whole different level than her fingers.

.... This is bad.

If I see this kind of thing my mind will get excited, too.

In reality, I'm already too excited, swelling even larger as if trying to escape her grasp.

"M—!?"

Ciel pulls back in surprise, but quickly wraps her fingers around me once more.

.... I start to come alive even more.

A thin, sticky line oozes from my tip, and she wipes it with her finger.

Then drenches my member with it.

Her red tongue licks me once again.

"Tohno, ku, n—"

Her words are broken by soft licks.

From her lips, a line of saliva forms between me and her.

"Ah—"

This is bad.

Really, seeing her like this is going to drive me insane.

"Senpai, stop....!"

If you keep doing this, I'll go crazy before I let it out....!"

"N.... no, Tohno-kun.

It doesn't matter.

We have to keep going."

Another sensation shoots through me.

Her tongue has licked the back of my shaft.

".... Let's stop....!"

I won't be able to hold back like this....!"

"Please don't hold back.

If you release what's inside of you, you can calm down."

"But I can't, since it's you....!"

It's okay, let's stop Senpai.... I know it's bad to say that after you've gone this far, but I can't calm down with you doing this....!"

"Please don't worry about me.

I. don't.. mind.. really."

Saying this, she continues caressing me with her tongue.

"—Ah!"

I let out a small gasp.

.... If she thinks this is only a chore, I guess I have to think of it that way, too.

Trying not to look at her, I do my best to focus on just letting it out.

"Ah..... m, mm—"

I can hear her small breaths.

Her tongue feels as if it's trying to taste all of me,
and her captivating fingers torture me unrelentingly.

The sound of my heartbeat and Ciel-senpai's breathing echoes through the room.
This much pleasure.

I'm being assailed by so much sensation I would've normally come already, but my shaft is still not responding at all.

It got wet for a while earlier, but now it's just back to being erect.

"N.... m, ha, haa.... ah....."

.... Ciel-senpai's breathing becomes even harder.

Maybe I felt like I was going to let it out back then because I saw Senpai's face, not because of the pleasure.

"Mhaa.... ahh..... ah.... ahn....."

".... Senpai?"

She sounds so pained, I look down at her.

Senpai's body is twitching.

Maybe it's because she's been in the same spot for so long, or because it's hard to do it in that position, but she seems restless.

"Senpai, is this position too difficult for you?"

It looks like you're uncomfortable."

"Eh—why do you say that?"

"Well, you're breathing pretty hard.... If it's too hard for you, should we stop?"

"Eh.... no, I'm not out of breath because it's difficult.... but you're right, I'll move.

It seems like you're not feeling anything, either."

She seems a little displeased.

".... Hey."

She doesn't seem to understand that I was feeling more than enough earlier.

"Then get up on the bed.

You were kneeling on the floor so long, I'll bet your knees hurt."

"Eh—oh, yes.

I'll do that.

Please look away."

".....?"

I don't quite get why, but I look away.

Ciel-senpai gets on the bed and tells me to look at the ceiling again.

".... Senpai.

I think it would feel better if I could look at your face.. do I really have to look up at the ceiling?"

"O-of course!

I-if you see me like this, I'll die!"

"Die?—how come?"

If it's really nothing more than lancing a boil, then it shouldn't matter if I look at you."

"Um—well, that's true, but...."

Her blush deepens and she tells me to just look up at the ceiling.

"——"

On all fours, Ciel-senpai reaches towards my groin.

"....."

I steal a glance at her as she does.

.... Her body looks even hotter than before.

I don't know why, exactly, but for one thing, the skin on her thigh is tinted red and reflecting the light.

....?

Reflecting.... huh?

"—Oh."

My mind jolts as I realize what it is.

"—Senpai, wait."

"Mm... wha, what.... is it, Tohno-kun?"

"Just.. lie down."

"Eh—kyaa!"

I push her down on the bed.

"Ah——"

Her face stiffens.

".... Senpai.

Why are you wet down there?"

"Ah—Ah."

Ciel-senpai's face turns red.

".... Hmm.

You said it was nothing, so why are you like that?

You soaked through your panties, and you're even dripping down your leg."

"N—no—no, that's just——"

Ciel-senpai blushes brighter as she stammers.

"No?"

What is it then?"

I place my palm on her thigh.

"N—!"

Her whole body shakes.

When I pull back, a sticky line forms between my hand and her thigh.

"N—no....!"

Don't, please don't look, Tohno-kun....!"

She's so embarrassed she's practically crying.

But this kind of reaction is so cute, it makes me want to tease her more.

"Ok, I won't look if you tell me not to, but at least tell me why you're like this before you make me look away.

I'll look up at the ceiling if you tell me that much."

"Why?"

How—can I say such a thing?"

"You can't say it?"

Well, then I guess I'll just have to ask your body."
I put my hand on her thigh again.
Then, following the slick trail of juices, I move my fingers up to the juncture between her thighs.
"Nah.....!"
Her hips instinctively pull back.
"Wow.
You're really wet.
It's pretty selfish of you to be feeling this good when I was worried that I couldn't come.
.... I see.
You were having fun by teasing me."
"N, no—!
I really was trying to help you calm down, but you didn't react at all, so—"
"So?"
I push with my index finger.
I press through her well-soaked panties and into her slick folds.
"Ah.....!"
She cries out with embarrassment.
That voice.
Seeing that face, hearing that voice, my heart starts pounding even faster.
"C'mon, answer.
Why is your body reacting this way, Senpai?"
"... I... started feeling hot while I was touching you—and I thought it was strange myself, but my mind just blanked out, and I—"
"Used your tongue and licked me like I was a lollipop?"
"——!"
Her face turns so red it looks like it's on fire.
"But, I didn't do anything myself....!
Just touching you made me hot, and—"
"You soaked right through your panties?
You're more perverted than I thought, Ciel-senpai."
"To.. Tohno-kun!
Y-you're being mean!
I told you, so please stop looking....!"
Hearing her voice convinces me.
Blushing so much and becoming so aroused just by touching me.
No wonder everything beforehand didn't work.
It has to be her.
More than her fingertips or tongue, just seeing her face makes me feel the most pleasure.
"... Senpai.
I have to have you."
"Eh—Tohno-kun?"
"I finally figured it out.
No matter what you do, if I can't see your face, it's no good.

I won't feel it unless it's you.
 I probably won't be able to come unless I'm doing it with you, Senpai."
 "Um.... I'm flattered, but—"
 "It doesn't have anything to do with Roa!
 Even if he never existed, I'd still want to make love to you.
 Being—being alone with you when you're so cute, I just can't hold back."
 "_____"

Ciel-senpai looks at me in surprise.
 Her shyness seems to fade away.
 "Tohno-kun.... are you serious?"
 "You think I would joke about this?
 But, if you don't want to, then I'll stop.
 I don't want to do anything to hurt you."
 "Ah—"
 After a brief, radiant smile, she suddenly looks downcast and averts her gaze.
 "I... want to do it with you too, Tohno-kun.
 But, is it alright?
 I've always held back, but isn't it different for you?
 Even your body, it's just Roa's influence arousing you—"
 "Idiot-I'm the one who's been holding back.
 All this time, I've always wanted to touch you, Senpai."

"N—!"

Before she can reply, I seal her lips with mine.
 Breathing wildly, we explore each other's lips.
 First tentative contact, then hungrily mixing together.
 "Ha, ahh, aha—"
 Ciel-senpai's breathing.
 Her body is already burning with passion, so it seems like I won't have to do anything to prepare her.
 "Tohno, kun."
 ".... Senpai.
 I'm going to undress you now."
 I peel her shirt and panties from her.
 The pure beauty of her naked body beneath me is enough to cause my brain to melt down.
 Her skin glowing with sweat.
 Her taut, perfect little nipples.
 Her firm, sizable breasts, shuddering with every heavy breath she takes.
 And, below that.
 Her pink slit is already soaking wet, her swollen nub reflecting the light.
 ".... What's this?
 Already this turned on, Senpai?"
 With the tip of my finger, I gently caress her bud.
 "Ahwa.....!"
 Being touched in the most sensitive part of her body, she jumps in response.

"N, nah, gg—!"
As I roll one finger around it, I slip a second inside her.
A wet sensation.
She's soaking wet inside, too.
If she's like this, I wouldn't have any problems entering her at all right now.
"—Senpai, I'm going to put it in, alright?"
"Ah—y, yes, but, Tohno-kun."
Speaking in a faltering, hesitating voice.
Ciel-senpai looks directly into my eyes.
".... Can you.... please stop calling me Senpai?"
I want you to just call me Ciel."
As she asks this, her eyes are brimming with tears.
"—Okay.
Then, I'm putting it in.
Lift your legs a little, Ciel."
"O—okay."
.... She raises her legs off the bed.
Supporting them with my hands, I gently take my shaft and ease it into Senpai.... Ciel.

"Nah——!"
The sound of flesh meeting flesh tortures my ears as I enter her.
Stretching, pushing.
It feels like I'm pressing myself between two, thick walls as I push into her.
The feeling of it,
Of merging, is unbelievably good.
Even just this small movement sends strong waves of pleasure racing through me.
"Hn.... inside, you're inside me....!"
As I plumb her depths, Ciel cries out.
I pull back, then push in once more.
"Agh....!"
Ah, ahn, ahn—"
Her sweet, short sighs.
I make only small movements, as if matching her breathing.
It feels like I'm hitting her with something heavy—
"N, nah, ah—!"
Tohno-kun, ama—zing!"
Maybe because my shaft is more erect than usual, it seems like I'm squeezing into her rather than just entering.
Ciel is so, tight.
She squeezes me so hard it feels like she could tear me off if I try to pull out.
pant, *pant*, *pant*, *pant*—!

But I keep going.
In rhythm with her wild breathing, I push into her over and over.

"Ah--nh, haa, ah--"
 She almost sounds like she's crying.
 Blushing furiously, she tries to resist the competing embarrassment and pleasure.
 "Ha, ahn, ahah, aah--ah--"
 Ciel's body oscillates.
 I put my hands on her shaking breasts.
 I squeeze them as I thrust my hips.
 Her tightness feels so good.
 I caress her nipples with my fingers and slowly bring my tongue to bear on them.
 "N--Tohno-kun, that's good--"
 A different reaction than before.
 It seems she's really sensitive there.
 I want to hear her voice spike like that again, so I lick harder.
 "Ah--Tohno-kun, gentle--!"
 I can hardly hear her.
 My breathing reaches a feverish pitch.
 I just move.
 Ciel's passage is so hot, I feel like I'm melting inside her.
 My body is already on the edge.
 It could explode right now.
 ah--haa, aahh, ah--!

But, I keep thrusting into her.
 It's not the time to hold myself back.
 It's not, but, if I can... I want to be connected like this with her forever.
 "N, nah, hah, aha, ahn--!"
 She grips me even tighter.
 Ciel's passionate voice,
 her nearly crying eyes,
 I don't want to let go.
 "Ci, el--just, a little more--"
 "Y--yes, Tohno-kun, harder--!"
 I can hardly understand her.
 Just matching our heartbeats, I push into her with all my might.
 And then,
 I finally reach all the way to her core.
 "Hwa, ugh, ooh....!"
 Does it hurt?
 She tightens all around me.
 She keeps gripping my shaft, the most sensitive part of my body.
 Ciel's eyes are brimming with tears.
 But she doesn't seem like she's in pain.
 I, only feel love for those eyes right now.
 "Ciel, I love you, Ciel.....!"

—I really, don't understand.
My mind is completely shut down.
Those are the only words I can even understand.
"Yes—I, I love you too—!"
Ciel's voice strikes the very center of my brain.
And, it becomes the last straw.
"I'm—coming....!"
From my hips,
from my very center, liquid passion starts to rumble forth.
"—!"
I hurriedly pull away from Ciel's body.

A shock rises up from my testicles.
And abruptly, my semen bursts forth, coming out closer to jelly than fluid.

"Ha—ah."
I breathe heavily.
Lying collapsed on the bed, I suck in air.
"I'm—spent."
I feel as exhausted as if I just ran a marathon.
But, more than my tiredness, I felt great pleasure from Ciel's body.
Just thinking back on it causes me to zone out.
"Oh.
Ciel—"
I lift myself up and look at her.
"... Hu, h?"
That's a little surprising.
I thought she would also be savoring the feeling, but she looks incredibly full of energy.
"Ciel... um, you're not tired?"
"Eh... um, are you tired...?"
She seems surprised, as she covers her mouth with her hand.
"I see—Ciel, you didn't really move much.
I guess I'm the only one who's tired—"
I sigh and fall back to the bed.
"But, I had no problem releasing everything.
Thank you Ciel, I'll sleep soundly now."
"Yes..... that's, true."
.... She doesn't really sound too happy.
"... What is it?
Is something wrong?"
"Well, um—I was just thinking that you got dirty there."
"Oh—"
Come to think of it, she's right.
Geez, I guess I don't have any sensitivity at all.
"S, sorry.

Can I use a tissue or something?"
 "Oh, I'll clean it up.
 Just lie down."
 "..... R, really?"
 Thanks."
 I don't know what she's thinking, but I lie down.
 sigh—
 I take a deep breath.
 Now that I've calmed down, I can sleep soundly.
 "N—?"
 I shake at a sudden burst of pleasure.
 Ciel is wiping me with a tissue.
 "Ah—"
 It feels good.
 I really do enjoy the feeling of her fingers over the tissue.
 Slowly, she wipes me down.
 It was pretty thick, so it's probably a hard task.
 She is cleaning me carefully and diligently.
 "..... Uh."
 Men really are like wild beasts.
 Just being touched by Ciel, I start to harden again.
 "—"
 I can't.
 I can't.
 I tell myself to calm down.

—And then,

A chill runs up my spine.
 My deflated member gets larger.
 Not just from her fingers, but.... the sensation of her tongue causes it to rise
 once more.
 "Hey, Senpai...!"
 I look up without thinking.
 There—
 The sight of what Ciel is doing makes me stare in amazement.
 Using her tongue, she laps at the semen still clinging to me.
 "Ah—"
 This sensation.
 The feeling of her tongue running over me.... and the fact that she's licking my
 semen off of me.

From just that, I'm fully hardened once more.
 "Ah—Hey, Cie, l—"
 Engrossed in caressing me, Ciel doesn't hear a word I say.
 The earnest movements of her tongue.

Her fingers stroke me up and down and I start to leak pre-come already.

"... Man, and I just came already—!"

I'm a little bothered by how simply I got aroused.

But, can it be helped?

Would any guy be able to resist those kind, passionate caresses?

But, more than that—Why is Ciel going so far to make me happy....?

"..... Oh."

And it hits me.

Maybe, but, she must be—

"Ciel.

Um, don't tell me, you didn't get to come....?"

"—"

She pulls back from me and, blushing furiously, gives a nod.

"Then, then you got me up again so that, um....."

She wants another round, I guess....

".... Ciel, you couldn't come?"

".... No.

Um, I, want to be with you again, Tohno-kun."

Looking down, she blushes to the tips of her ears.

"——"

It hits me pretty hard.

Having heard that, no, having made her say that, I'm a little embarrassed.

"... You're right.

This isn't enough for me, either.

We won't be able to see each other after tomorrow, so I should be with you as much as I can.

If we do this until I collapse, my body would probably be calm for a long time."

"That may be true.... but Tohno-kun, you sound rough."

"What?"

Weren't you the one looking for more?

We can stop if you don't want to do it."

"Oh—no, um—s,sorry!"

Embarrassed, she apologizes with all her might.

"Sorry, I was kidding.

Being all energetic like this, I want you too.

But I really am tired, so can you be on top?"

"Eh—on top, on top of you??"

"Yeah.

I can't really move a lot, so it's your turn this time."

It's what they usually call a "cowgirl".

"Um—like, this?"

On her hands and knees, like a cat, she walks over and positions herself over me.

"... Wow, what a great view."
From this angle, I can see every bit of Ciel's glorious breasts.

"N, ah—!"
Looking away, Ciel lowers herself onto me.
A wet sensation.
Without any resistance, she takes me in.
"Oh—it's in."
"Yeah it's in."
It was in before, right?"
As soon as I say that, she blushes even more.
... I can't tell if she's easily embarrassed or really outgoing.
"Can you move?"
You can start slowly if you want, then when you get used to it, you can go faster."
"O, okay—"
She starts to rock hesitantly up and down.

A slow, gentle tempo.
Is that enough to please her?
She's already breathing heavily.
"Mm... oh, ah, oh—"
She slowly starts to make bigger movements.
She leaks her warm juices all over me.
Our groins are soaked with sticky fluids.
"N, nah, ah, ahn, ahn—!"
The sound of flesh meeting flesh meeting fluid.
Probably because I'm not moving this time, nothing but pure pleasure flows into my brain.
... But, just to stay like that is boring, so I decide to move too.
Ciel's hips rise, and fall.
Matching her timing, I raise my hips.
"Hya—!?"
The sensation of her weight bearing down on me.
It feels like I'm thrusting all the way into her stomach.
"Ah, ha... oh, aaooh.....!!"
Ciel moans loudly.
But she doesn't stop sliding up and down, and I continue to match her rhythm.
"Ah, so... good, Tohno-kun, wonder, ful—!"
Her back arches in pleasure.
She's so wild it looks like she might fold herself in half.
"... Mm, ah, oh, hwa... ah, ngg, ah....!"
Seeing her getting so worked up causes my breathing to become wilder as well.
Thrusting in this position is more tiring though.
"—"
My arms aren't doing anything.

I place one on her leg, the other on her hip.
"Mm—it feels, so, goo, oo-d....!"
Ciel's body rocks as if she is longing for more pleasure.
Her well-developed breasts and her black hair sway in time with the movement of her hips.
Feeling her hot breath on me, I move the hand on her hip around to her back-side.
Gently, I grab her soft yet firm cheek.
"Ah.... ahn, nmm....."
Her expression changes.
It's a little different reaction than before.
With one palm still on her hip, I bring my finger down to her butt.
Between those ample mounds, my finger slips through the soft, soft flesh.
And buries itself between her cheeks, lightly covering her other opening.
"K, ah—!?"
Her back arches again and she stifles a cry.
And tightens around my shaft even more than before.
"Ciel... are you that sensitive?"
"Ah—well, when you touch it, I feel a bit weird—"
"Oh?"
"... It feels weird, Ciel-san?"
I slip my finger inside.
Just a bit, just halfway past the fingernail.
"—Hwaaa...!"
But she responds more to this than any of my other caresses.
"Ah.... ah, gg—Tohno-kun, please, stop that."
She's breathing so heavily I can hardly understand her.
Her cheeks aren't red just because she's hot, but she must be really embarrassed to have that done to her.
"....."
I feel excited too.
Unthinkingly, I just want to tease her.

"I see, you like it there, huh?
You should have told me earlier."
"Eh—Tohno-kun....?"
"Let's switch up.
I'll move this time."
I pull away from her and stand up.
"Ciel, put your hands and knees on the bed."
"... Um.... like this?"
She gets down on all fours.
Her juices drip almost nonstop.
She's leaking all the way down to her ankles.
"Hm—You really are bottomless, Ciel.
You were soaking before, but it's still dripping out."

Starting at her ankle,
I lap the juices off of her body.
"Ha.... mm, Shiki-kun.. please, don't, do that."
"Why?
You did it to me, Ciel.
This is just.. payback."
"N..... hah..... ah."
From her ankle to her knee.
Behind her knee, tracing a helix with my tongue all the way up to her thigh,
and then from her thigh to the pink wellspring between her legs.
".....!"
Her hips pull back.
Chasing her, I bring my mouth right between her thighs.
I push my tongue in.
Unhesitatingly, I move my tongue around inside her warm, moist hole.
And drink the juices that seep forth.
"No—that, that's, dirty."
Ciel's voice quivers.
Her voice is mixed with embarrassment and pleasure, and it looks like she doesn't
even know what she's saying.
"It's not dirty at all.
This is what made both of us feel so good.
Or were you faking it?"
Stopping my kiss, I bring my finger up to her slit.
"Hwaa—ah, it—feels, good."
"I see.
But, I think you really feel much better here than there, Ciel."
Up between her legs.
Using the hand drenched in her juices, I spread her cheeks.
With her own fluids, I completely coat the area around her anus.
"N—!
Tohno-kun, don't tell me, you're...."
"That's right.
I heard it's better not to grit your teeth, though, cause it hurts less if you
breathe through your mouth."
"Hey—Tohno-kun you idiot!
Don't, touch there—ah!"
Holding onto her as she tries to escape, I bury my face between her cheeks.
Holding her tight, I lick her twitching asshole.
Barely teasing the outer surface.
"Ha, n—!
Ah, aha, aaoh, oh....!"
She stops trying to escape.
"You really like this, don't you Ciel?"
"No—Tohno-kun, please.. don't.. lick.. me there—"
Hearing that only makes me want to do it more.

I only licked the outside at first, but this time I put my tongue in.
Working diligently, I soak her ass with her own juice and my saliva.

"N—!

Haah, ahn, aaa.....!"

Having her react so strongly to just the tip of my tongue, I'm almost afraid to see what might happen next.

But, I've gone this far.. I can't stop now.

And more than that, I want to see what it will feel like.

"—Well, I guess it's about time."

I bring my rod right onto her opening.

"—!"

Ciel's body twitches.

Holding her firmly, I slide it inside her.

It feels completely different.

She tightens all around me, her much smaller hole resisting my advance.

I gradually push in deeper, forcing my way through.

"Nah, aaaaaaa—!"

Ciel practically screams.

It's only natural.

This hole wasn't designed to receive a man.

Pain, and another sensation, are probably mixing inside her.

"—Gg."

But it's also tight here.

I slowly push myself in as she tightens around me, as if resisting the foreign object sliding into her.

The pressure around me is enormous.

I fight to spread walls that shouldn't be opened.

It's the same for me—I'm feeling more pain than pleasure.

"Ah, hwaah, ah, ah—"

Her frantically rising voice.

"—Ti.. ght—"

Not giving in, I push harder.

.... But, maybe because I lubricated her with my saliva and her juices before, once the tip is in.. it becomes easier than I thought to stick the rest of it in.

"Gua—ha, no, something that big, won't, fit.....!"

Sweat beads on her forehead.

.... It has to be because I'm forcing myself into such a small hole.

She has to feel it twice as much.

"Ah, uh, oh, oh, aaa—!"

She tightens even more.

Tight doesn't begin to describe it.

The pressure increases around me a thousand fold, as if to punish me for entering her this way.

"—K—ha, ha, hah."

I'm out of breath.

It hurts.

It hurts, but this—strangulation is pleasure too.

"Amazing.... This is, the first time—your ass is so good, Ciel."

It feels like it won't go in again if I pull out too far, so I withdraw slightly and push back in.

Only a bit.

Pull, thrust.

And it gets me in a bit deeper, so I pull back just a little, and then push back in.

.... I repeat the cycle over and over.

"Mm, mm, mm—, ha.....!"

My voice slips out as I thrust in.

"Ah, haa, Tohno.. kun, haa, oh.....!"

Ciel is the same way.

As the pleasure starts to win over the pain, she starts to accept me.

"Mm, ah, haa, ah, ah, ah.....!"

Just a bit.

"Ah—n, it feels good, Tohno-kun.....!"

Just a bit.

"Hwaa.... ah, aah, ah—more, Toh, no, kun."

Just a bit.

"Ah, nn, mm, ah—Tohno, am, nn—Tohno-kun, deeper, more—"

Me too.

"Deeper, deeper—!"

I've reached my limit.

"Ciel, I—"

"—No, no.... I won't, let you, finish, already....!"

—Ggh!

My withdrawal is halted.

She tightens around me like an iron clamp.

I can't get out.

I can only move a little bit.

I'm on the verge of release, but she won't let me.

"Why... you....!"

I thrust once more.

My shaft penetrates deeper.

"N, ah—!"

Ciel's arms collapse.

As if she had no strength left, she lifts her hips as she collapses on the bed.

Even still—I don't stop moving.
"—Ah, aah, Tohno-kun, you're in, so deep."
Ciel grips the sheets as if resisting the pleasure.
"Gg—"
I also try to resist the heat welling inside me.
Holding back, I thrust deeper.
I've already put myself in all the way to the base.
I feel like I'm almost in her stomach.
"Hu—ng, nah, ahn—"

Once.

"I, I—I can't, take it anymore—"

Twice.

"Ah—nah, n, nn, nn—!"

Three times.
Ciel's body tightens.
This really is the end.
I'm there too.
I have to pull myself out of her.
"—Tohno-kun, inside, do it inside me—!"
Her voice is pleading.
"—"

Instead of pulling back, I thrust deeper inside her.
"Ngg—!"
She arches her back.
Her hands frantically grip the sheets, her limbs tense fiercely.
Ciel's body tightens around me as if it never plans to let go.

I just, wanted all of her.
"—I'm, coming, Ciel!"
"Y, yes....!"
Come, please come, Tohno-kun!"
I thrust harder than ever before.
Thump!
The feeling assails me.
The feeling of spurting forth is so intense, it almost feels like I'm releasing hot magma inside of her.

"Ah—aha, ahh—I, I—!"

Splurt.

Splurt.

Splurt.

Over and over, it doesn't stop with just a few times.

I just keep shooting into her.

"Ah—ha, ah."

Ciel's body begins to buckle.

As she grips the sheets, a line of tears forms around her eyes.

"——"

Ciel collapses onto the bed.

"Ts——"

Even though she's collapsed, the tightness of her ass doesn't fade.

I manage to take my tool out with a large, heavy popping sound.

As soon as I do,

a large amount of my come flows out of her.

"—N—Shiki—kun—"

She gasps my name.

.... Like how I called Senpai, "Ciel".

In the end, she called me by my first name.

"—A, ahhh."

Finally, her tightness eases.

I pull back.

A sticky line connects us.

At the same time, come is oozing out of her ass.

.... How do I say this?

Well—even though this is the first time I've had sex with her, I realize I may have done too much.

"Ciel—Are you, okay?"

".... My ass, it hurts."

"I-I see.... I'm sorry, you were just too cute, I wanted to tease you."

".... No.

I won't be fooled by that."

Lying down, she glares up at me.

".... What do you mean?"

You liked it too, in the end.

I was in pain too, you know.

Ciel, you're always swinging that heavy weapon around, but did you train your ass muscles too?"

"Wha, what are you saying, Tohno-kun!?"

Ciel gets up and hits me in the head.

"Ouch!

So violent!"

I lift up my hands in protest.

Ciel lets out a sigh.

"... Geez, you won't even let me savor the moment.

We won't be able to see each other after tomorrow morning, so can't you treasure the mood a little more?"

"... That's true, but we were pretty wild.

Shall we take a shower and change the sheets?"

Ciel reacts like she just found that out now.

"Th-that's right!

Then, I'll go take a shower....!"

Ciel runs to the bathroom.

"—Ha, haha."

I start to laugh.

I am carrying a bomb called Roa, but I don't even feel worried about that now.

.... The person who I thought I lost so many times is here with me now.

As long as she is here, there's nothing to be worried about.

I embraced her at school.

But that was more out of sadness than love.

But this is different.

This is only love.

I love her so much, I almost want her to just stay here.

.... In the end, the two of us ended up in bed, staring up at the ceiling without sleeping.

If I said something, I'm sure I would not let her go.

So, without speaking, I just felt her breathing and her warmth next to mine.

When morning came, she left the bed.



"I'm going.

I'll be back as soon as I can, so please don't leave the room, okay?"

It seems like she's bought enough food to last two weeks.

I'll leave aside the fact that most of it seems to be curry.
"Please don't run off with some floozy while I'm gone.
I get really jealous."

She says a scary thing with a deep smile, and exits the room.

It's before five o'clock in the morning.
This is how the last Monday in October began.

turn to **292**

418

.... I can't do it.
There's no way I can do that.
Akiha didn't do anything wrong.
She didn't do anything wrong, so why—does she have to end like this?

"....."

The sound of my knife dropping.
My arm has lost all strength without me knowing it.
The knife that fell out of my hand sticks in the tatami floor.
The room is drenched in blood.
The room I was living in when I was still Nanaya Shiki a long time ago.
.... The room she came to see me in so many times when my old man wasn't looking.
"——"

Just a day ago.

We felt everything about each other here.
Had Akiha already accepted this outcome back then?
All I could do was refuse.
Even though Akiha told me everything, I tried to push it away.
I didn't want to accept those facts and vaguely, I was wishing it wouldn't happen.

—That is my crime.
I told Akiha I loved her, yet I couldn't protect her.

"Aki—ha."

.... I have to compensate for the crime I've committed.
I can only protect Akiha from now on, no matter what happens.
Even if Akiha has become a creature that only kills people, and even if she could only recognize me as another creature.
Starting now, probably until I die, I will..
Live for Akiha and tie her to this world.
.... That is the way to end the show for Tohno Shiki, who could not save anything.

I open my eyes.
Endless blue soaks my sleepy mind.
Slightly warm sunlight and a slightly cool breeze.
A world with only the smell of grass and the sound of trees.
It might be that this mansion's forest is in a different season.
It's almost winter, but this place still feels like autumn.
"——"

I look up at the blue sky as I lie on the ground.
The sun is already way up in the sky.
.... I guess I fell asleep.
I guess it was my fault for lying down here on the grass after breakfast.
Well, I didn't have anything to do anyway.
Doing this here.
Falling asleep deeply, even forgetting my name, can't be that bad.
—Bottomless blue.

The clean sky is far away.
Thinking like a child, I keep on watching the sky.
A far sky like in a dream.
The view is so beautiful, I can't even let out a sigh of amazement.
"Shiki-sama...?"
Are you over here, Shiki-sama?"
I hear Hisui's voice from the courtyard.
"....."
It's that time already.
I guess I fell asleep again.
If I forgot time while watching this blue sky, it makes no difference if I was sleeping or not.

Hisui arrives, composed.



"Shiki-sama, Akiha-sama is calling you."
"Alright."
I guess I was asleep.
Sorry for being so troublesome, Hisui."



"Not at all, it is nothing of the sort...."

Hisui looks down as if she wants to say something.

.... I know what Hisui wants to say, but even if she did, I wouldn't be able to give her an answer.

"I'll get going.

Can you tell Kohaku-san in about an hour or so?"

"Ah—"

I turn my back to Hisui and head to the detached building where Akiha is waiting.

In the room lives a girl.

No, the term "lives" is not right.

The girl cannot move of her own will.

She only moves as a living thing when she eats, and she just sits there like a statue when she isn't.

So instead of "live",

"exists" is a more correct term, since she is more like a doll.

"I'm sorry Akiha.

I fell asleep and couldn't make it in time."

I enter the room and close the shouji.

Akiha sits there and does not move.

"Whoa, your hair is messed up.

It looks like you haven't changed yet either.

Didn't Kohaku-san come by this morning?"

Akiha does not say anything.

She looks in my direction with a blank stare.

.... No,

it just seems like she's looking.

"Alright, let's at least make your hair look good.

I touch Akiha's hair.

She makes no motion to fight it.

Quietly, as softly as I can, I let my hands go through her hair.

Her long hair flows in my hand.

Akiha does not say anything.

After some time like that,

Akiha suddenly moves her arm.

"Akiha—?"

There's no answer.

She just takes my arm and brings it to her mouth.

After a hard sensation,

Akiha bites on my arm and starts to suck out my blood expressionlessly.

Her white throat gulps down my blood.

The blood that spills out of her mouth drips down her throat and stains her kimono red.

"Ghu—u"

I grit my teeth and hold on until Akiha is full.

.... There is no proper quantity for Akiha.

She stops only when she's full, and I can't predict when that is.

So all I can do is wait like this for her to be full.

"..... Ah."

I feel dizzy.

But I don't pull back.

.... Hisui was against this until the very last minute.

I decided to give Akiha my own blood ever since she could only take in human blood.

It wasn't a sense of responsibility.

If Akiha could only survive by taking in blood, I wanted to limit the amount of victims, and most of all—

—I did not want Akiha to drink anyone's blood except mine.

I guess Akiha really likes my blood.

She has never gone outside since then.

But, it is really dangerous for my body.

I do not have much blood to start with, and I am not healthy enough to keep feeding Akiha blood.

I faint most of the time when I come here once a day to feed her.

Although I'm getting blood from transfusion, it takes my body a while to get used to other people's blood.

.... My body is getting weaker by the day.

I guess the reason for Hisui trying to say something every time she sees my face is to tell me I should care more about myself.

But such a thing..

It's many times easier since I can feel the pain, unlike Akiha.

—Akiha lowers her arm.

I guess she's happy now, as she lets go of my arm.

Then she goes back to being a doll once more.

I clean the dripping blood off her face and change her dirty kimono.

Akiha does not fight back.
She just accepts everything I do.
—There,
Akiha's proud look is nowhere to be seen.
"——"
I'd be lying if I said this isn't hard on me.
But still—my feeling of happiness is greater.
Akiha is alive.
She is alive and she is here right now.
Then, someday, Akiha might return to the Akiha she once was.

"Alright.
See you, Akiha.
I'll come back tomorrow so listen to Kohaku-san at night."
I say the same phrase as yesterday, no, the same phrase as always, as I hold
Akiha's hands.
Slender fingers, small hands.
I cover them with mine.
The warmth.
The fact that she is alive.
It almost makes me cry.
".....!"
I suppress that feeling and smile.
I want to laugh so that I won't have room for any sadness.
It's easy to feel sad about the situation I'm in.
Even if Akiha doesn't understand, I have to keep on smiling in front of her.
One day, if Akiha ever finds herself again, I don't want her to remember how I
was sad.
I want her to think that this was nothing—that this was one of the happy times
too.
So I have to keep on smiling.
Even if Akiha doesn't understand right now, so that Akiha wouldn't regret the
past when she finds herself again.
—I keep on waiting, holding her hands.

Even if Akiha's eyes are not staring at anything, I will keep smiling until the
end of the world.

So that one day, when Akiha wakes up,
I will be able to greet her like it was another normal day and say "Hi".

!
Will you take 'Ciel-sensei's lesson'?

Yes.

turn to **448**

No.

turn to **1**

419

In my dream, I'm staring at the moon.
I can't remember where I am or why I'm looking up at it.
Maybe I looked up into the night sky not wanting to see anything, and the moon
happened to be there.
My back creaks.
Coursing through my veins is an image of coldness.
A solitary darkness that makes me dizzy.
A radiant moon that sickens my heart.
.... Strangely.
The overwhelming coldness feels more like a sense of nostalgia.

"—Shiki-sama."

.... I can hear Hisui's voice mingling with the morning light.

"—Shiki-sama, it is time.

Please wake up."

Her inflectionless voice awakens me.

"——"

As soon as I wake up, terrible things enter my vision.
I get a headache like I was just shot in the head.
"Ah—"
I almost lose my just awakened consciousness.
Before I fade away completely, I quickly grab my glasses.



"Shiki-sama....?"

Are you not feeling well?"

".... No, I'm just a little tired from yesterday.

I'll be alright, so don't worry."

Lightly shaking my head, I clear my head of what I was seeing.

.... It seems that not being able to find Arcueid last night has cast a dark
shadow in my heart.

"Good morning, Hisui.

Thanks for coming to wake me up, as always."
Sitting up in bed, I do my best to smile naturally.



"No, this is my duty.
There is no need for you to thank me, Shiki-sama."
"Really, but I am grateful.
You are infinitely better than an alarm clock."

I stand up.
It's not yet seven o'clock—about ten minutes earlier than I usually get up.
"... Hmm, breakfast?
I'll be there soon, so please go ahead of me."
"Yes, I will wait for you in the sitting room."

Giving a bow, Hisui exits the room.
—Well then.
I'm still feeling a little sluggish, but it's not so bad that I have to skip school.
I'm sure after I eat the breakfast Kohaku-san prepared, I'll feel a lot better.

As usual, Akiha is sitting on the sofa and Hisui is waiting by the wall.



"Good morning, Nii-san.
Did you sleep well last night?"
"... Good morning, Akiha."

You're up early today, too."



"No, I'm like always.... Nii-san?"

She looks uneasy for some reason.

"Hm—Is there something on my face, Akiha?"



"No, that isn't it.... Nii-san, are you really alright?"

You still do not look well, so if you are still sick, maybe it is better if you just rest today—"

"No, I'm really okay.

I'll be better sooner or later, so please don't look so worried."



".... Okay.

If you say so, Nii-san, then I will not say anything."

She goes quiet, still looking worried.
"Hm, it's quite rare for you to be convinced this quickly.
It's not like you."



"Hey, I'm always sensible.
I only warn you because you're the one with the problems.
So please do not blame me for your imperfections."
She glares at me.
"Oh, that's more like it.
Hey Hisui, doesn't it not feel like morning unless Akiha gets harsh?"



"....."
Is it because I suddenly called out to her or because she doesn't know what to say?
Hisui neither confirms nor denies my statement.
"See?
Look, Akiha, Hisui thinks so, too."
"Don't be foolish.
Hisui doesn't say anything because she is surprised."
Wrinkling her forehead in a frown, Akiha glares again.



"Also, I've always wanted to say this, but you rely on Hisui too much. You don't take lessons or anything, so you can go to sleep early, right? But you always wake up late. Are you slacking off because Hisui does not say anything?"
"Wh—You make it sound like I'm causing her trouble!"



"Not 'like', you are causing her trouble. Hey, don't you think so, Hisui?"
"....."
Hisui still doesn't say anything and stands there quietly.



"See?
Hisui says she thinks so too."
"No way!
She didn't say anything!"



"....."

Hisui is silent.

But her silence feels like she is agreeing more with Akiha.

"..... Oogh."

I feel like it's now two against one.

"Shiki-san.

Breakfast is ready ."

With great timing, Kohaku-san's voice echoes through the room.

"Um, I'm gonna go eat."

I quickly head towards the dining room.



"....."

I feel the silent pressure of the two behind me drilling into my back.

After breakfast, I head back to the sitting room.
Akiha isn't there, and Hisui is the only one standing.
"Huh?
Akiha left for school already?"



"Yes.
It is time for you to go to school as well, Shiki-sama."
"Ah, it's already twenty after?
I guess I should get going soon."
.... To be honest, I still don't feel good, but I'm sure I'll return to normal soon.
"Sorry, Hisui, but can you get my bag from my room?
I'm going to wash my face."
"As you wish."

After getting all my preparations done, I leave the mansion.
Holding my bag, Hisui sees me off at the entrance.
"I'll be going.
I'm not sure when I'll be back, but probably by dinner."



"Yes, I will be waiting."
She gives a silent bow.
.... There's a trace of uneasiness in her face.
"Hisui?
Are you feeling sick?"

"No—it is not me, but you do not appear well.
I am unsure if it is a good idea to let you go."
She speaks hesitantly.
"I'm alright.
I don't feel great, but just a little heavy.
Geez, both you and Akiha like to worry a lot."
"... Is that so?
If it is just us, then that will be fine, but.."
"... Geez.
I'll come back early today and rest, so that should be good, right?
I won't overdo anything, so don't look like that."
"..... Yes.
Forgive me, Shiki-sama."
She still looks very worried.
"I'm off.
I'll be better by the time I get back, so please relax."



"Ah—Shiki-sama—"

I ignore her and leave the mansion.
The image of Hisui watching me uneasily remains in my head.

I head towards school.
My feet are heavy and it feels like I'm in another person's body as I head down the hill.
.... It's probably just the weariness from last night.
Even though I thought I would recover right away, the sluggishness doesn't fade.

It's ten minutes until eight.
The school gate is flooded with arriving students.
"—Ah."
By the gate, I see a familiar figure.
"... Ciel, senpai."
It's a completely normal, morning scene.
But, what I saw that time—

If it wasn't for that, it would be a normal morning.

"___"

Not even knowing what I plan on doing, I chase after Senpai.

"Senpai!"

I call after her.



"Oh, good morning, Tohno-kun.

It's unusual to meet you out here."

"... Yeah, I saw your figure from behind so I ran after you, Senpai.

Um... there was something I wanted to ask."

I sneak a look at her face.

"Yes, what is it?"

She faces me with her usual, gentle smile.

"... Uh, Senpai.

Three nights ago, were you near my house?

In a black coat and a skirt flowing in the wind?"



"...?"

What is that?"

"Um...!"

well-yeah, the high-laced boots suited you.

I was kind of fascinated, you looked, really cool."



.... "Huh?" Senpai tilts her head.
She frowns like she doesn't understand my words completely, and then denies it.



"Um, I don't quite understand, but you're saying that I was near your house
three nights ago, looking like that?"
"Yeah, that was you, Senpai, right?"



"No way.
Tohno-kun, are you saying I look like I really have that much free time?"

—Senpai is really angry.
She can't be playing dumb or lying.
"Ah—no, that's not it, but I just.... saw someone that looked like you in the
park last night, so—"
Senpai gives a sigh.



"Tohno-kun, that wasn't me.
I don't have that kind of hobby."
"Ah—yeah, I know.
I just wanted to ask."
.... Certainly after having her say that, she is right.
Ciel-senpai and the person that night aren't related at all.
In the first place, Senpai's just a normal person, and if she was actually there—
she had to have seen me fight that bandage guy with my knife.
If she saw such a gruesome scene, there'd be no way she could talk with me
normally like this.
".... Sorry, please forget about it.
I guess it was just someone else."



"That's fine, but.... did that person really look like me?
That weird person?"
"Well, I'm not too sure.
It was dark, and far away..... huh?"
Yeah, it was far and I couldn't make out her face.
So why did I think it looked like Senpai....?
".... Hmm.. Maybe there is something wrong with me."
I cross my arms and think.

Then, the ten minute bell rings.

"—Crap, we'll be late.
Bye, Senpai, see you later!"

I dash into my classroom.
It's still five minutes before class, so it's very noisy inside.
"Arihiko, isn't here."
Knowing him, he'll probably come in around second period.

Lunch time.
It looks like Arihiko's not coming.
.... Inui Arihiko and Yumizuka Satsuki are the two people absent today.
Yumizuka Satsuki has caught a cold or something and she will be absent for a while.
".... Senpai doesn't seem to be coming either, so I guess I'll eat by myself."
I say that, but I'm not hungry.

.... What is it?
I didn't feel so good to begin with, but after coming to school, I feel a lot worse.
It's not just my body feeling heavy.
The scar on my chest is irritating; it's an annoying sensation.
".... Maybe I shouldn't have come to school."
.... For a brief moment, I see the worrying faces of Hisui and Akiha in my mind.
Maybe the fact that I ignored Akiha's wishes for me to rest last night and instead went to see Arcueid might've caused this.
Being worn out by just sitting, I start to feel a strange uneasiness.

.... Class has started already.
Which class was it?
I can't remember today's fifth period lesson.

Even though I look at the blackboard and stare at the marks left behind by the teacher's chalk, I still don't know what class this is.

I can't read it.
The letters start to flow like water and mix together like some sort of hallucination.

"Ugh....."
I feel like I'm going to throw up.
Dizziness.
My mind starts to slide away.

Click, click.

Tremble, tremble.
Creak, creak.
Wobble, wobble.

Those noises stick out.
Incompatibility.
Where is that inconsistency coming from?

I can't settle this feeling of something being out of place throughout my body.
It fills me to the brim.
As if my bones are sliding out of place in their joints.

Yes, since my joints are out of place, it causes this unnatural feeling.
My corpse is burning unseen smoke and crumbling away.

Click, click.
Tremble, tremble.
Creak, creak.
Wobble, wobble.

I fall from my chair.
A girl screams.
I hear the footsteps of the teacher running to me.
I.
Even though I've completely passed out, I calmly watch myself from far away.
.... What follows is like always.
Collapsed from my anemia, I was carried to the clinic where I slept until I recovered.
Since I had a fever of over 38 degrees Celsius past seven o'clock, the school's closing time, the nurse called my house for someone to pick me up and went home.

And this resulted in..



"Are you okay Shiki-san?
You still have a fever, so please do not hesitate to lean on my shoulder."

—Yeah, that's how it is.

"... No, I'm alright.

I can at least walk, so please don't worry."

Stepping away from Kohaku-san, I attempt to bluff my way out of it.

.... Geez.

It's embarrassing enough for Kohaku-san to come pick me up.

The day I lean on her shoulders, I'll die.

"Oh that's not good, forcing yourself like that.

It isn't your fault that your body is weak, Shiki-san.

So you can ask for help a little.

I won't tell Akiha-sama or Hisui-chan, so it's okay to depend on me for now."

With a gentle smile, she takes my hand.

"Ah... yes, sorry."

Blushing furiously, I meekly do as she says.

.... Certainly I might collapse if I continue to be stubborn.

"There is a car waiting outside, so please hold on until then."

Pulling my hand, Kohaku-san starts to walk.

"Ah—"

.... This isn't good.

Just walking makes me incredibly dizzy.

I depend upon Kohaku-san to lead me to the stairwell as I hold onto my consciousness.

Hu—h?

Why—am I going up, to, the second, floor?

"Um... Kohaku-san, this, isn't, the right way."

I call out to her.

There's no response.

No, not only that—I don't feel her hand, or even see her.

"Kohaku.... san?"

I use all of my foggy consciousness to look around me.
There's no one in the hallway.
Only the moonlight streaming from the window is vivid.

"——"

It comes suddenly.

"Ah——"

The sound of my heartbeat.
And a chill that races up my spine.

Thump.

Tap.

Thump.

Tap.

Thump.

Tap.

Thump.

Tap.

Thump.

Tap.

Thump.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

In the darkness, the footsteps draw closer.

—This is..

This is similar to the fear I felt that one time.

"Kohaku, san....!"

I call her name.

Not to call for help, but to tell her to escape, I frantically call her name.

"Kohaku-san, Kohaku-san, Kohaku-san....!"

Where is she?

I don't see her anywhere.

The footsteps are near me now.

So, at least.
 I want Kohaku-san to escape here unharmed.
 "It's useless, Shiki.
 She's already finished."
 I hear a voice.
 In the darkness in front of me,



14 0
 the bandaged man who tried to kill me that night.
 "—Ah."
 Why is it?
 I feel like I know this person's face.
 "You sure aren't lucky.
 If I knew it was like this, I wouldn't have waited for you in front of the mansion."

.... The footsteps draw closer.

"Ka..... aah."
 I try to move.
 But I can only totter along.
 I guess I pushed my body too hard every day.
 It seems like my body, at the very last moment, broke down.
 "This is the end, so I'll tell you.
 This is my lair now."

I hear a stabbing sound.
 In his hands, a knife.
 The silver blade pierces directly into my heart.

—I collapse to the ground.
 I feel death working its way from my very fingertips.
 My mind fades away, drop by drop.
 In that process.
 With my fading mind, I look up at the sky.
 I have nowhere else to look, so I just look there.

The blue moon is in the night sky.
.... How stupid.
I'm about to die, but I.
I am charmed by such an ordinary thing.

When is this memory from?
In a forest like a black veil.
On that terrible night.
Just like this, I was staring only at the moon—

!
turn to **1**

教了!! 知得留先生



Bonjour!

This corner is for the bad Tohno-kun, who rather easily ended up at a Dead End.

It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

We'll be seeing a lot of each other from now on, so please give me your best regards.

By the way, my students are the thousands of Tohno-kuns out there all over the country, and..



"What-nya?"

What's with this difference in our treatment?"



Tsukihime's main heroine, Arcueid-san.

Now, we will start first period!

Goodness, this won't do at all, Tohno-kun.

This dead end is just too much, right?

I know exactly how you feel when you do not wish to make friends with that suspicious vampire, but you've just got to bear with it here.

In order to live, one must have endurance, and they say that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Please, just try to demonstrate the Japanese quality of not being able to say no.

Oh, and since you ended up being dog food without a chance, you'll have to restart from an earlier point and do a make-up.

Also, you have freedom to choose what response you make in the alley, but I think it is not a good idea to run away.

Well, that's all for first period.

Second period will be a lecture about wild animals.

It will be called "Shakes 'n Shivers Animal Land".

Well then, goodbye everyone.

turn to **1**

教了!! 知得留先生



Bonjour!

This corner is for the unlucky Tohno-kun, who easily ended up in a Dead End again.

It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

Now, we will start second period.

This time, we will present the first "Shakes 'n Shivers Animal Land" from the series that gives detailed observation of wild animals.



"Sensei, I have a question before that.

That name sounds really stupid.

In Japanese, you can read your name as Chiel."

Question denied.



—Now then, Tohno-kun.

I think it's good to be prudent, but this time, it seems to have backfired.

Basically, you are a hero, so a little recklessness will be forgiven.

It will be forgiven, but in a case with an absurd animal like a shark, I guess you couldn't do much.

You'll just have to abandon Arcueid this time around.



"Heeeeyy!"

I don't want to hear that from Chiel!"

—Abandon her!



"Kyaah!
No violence!"

Anyhow, please prepare yourself to explore the hotel alone.
Inside, you'll find a whole animal kingdom.
As the representative of mammals, let's show the beasts what we've got.

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得由先生



..... *sigh*

What on Earth were you doing, Tohno-kun?

I never thought you would come to the rare third period lesson, the second "Shakes 'n Shivers Animal Land".

—Well, Tohno-kun.

Unfortunately, I'll have to ask for a make-up.

It seems you have just drifted through every day without paying any particular attention to Arcueid, Ciel-san, or Akiha-san.

To tell you the truth, this is the most important part of Ciel-san's route.

But the fact that you still died means you have not received a charm from a certain person.

The moral of this story is you should pay more attention towards your Senpai at school!

First, go to the tea ceremony room after class.

Second, you should honestly recognize the mistakes you have made.

If you keep the above in mind, you should have no problems with the exam.

That's all for the third period lesson.

Please try hard so you won't end up here again next time.

turn to **1**

教了!! 知得留先生



Bonjour!

And now the hint corner for the sake of the mischievous Tohno-kun who quickly ended up in a Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

Well then, now for the third of the ever-popular series, "Shakes 'n Shivers Animal Land".

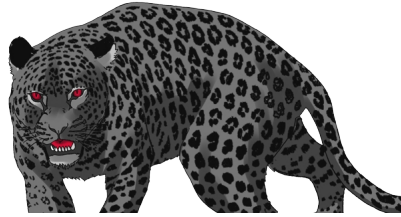


"Liar!

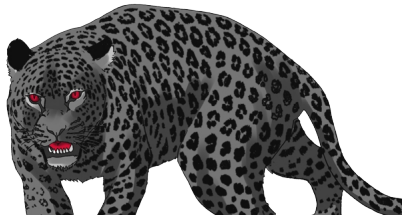
I don't see any animals coming out!"

Denied.

No Longer Human (Pet's Name), Go!



"Killing junkie "



"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa..... hunyaa!"



Well then, the third in our animal series.
Why did Tohno-kun end up dying?
This time, we have brought a special guest lecturer.
I have called in this person who was wandering about after finishing his task
earlier.
Professor Nrvnqsr, please go ahead.



-51 0



"Nothing."

.... Um.

"Nothing.
I will only speak when I am victorious."

.... Um, if we're here, it means you have won in a way, Professor Nrvnqsr.



-51 0



"—I see.
That is a sound argument.
But there is nothing to be said.
I do not know of anyone who would miss a once in a lifetime opportunity.
Return to the choice before and correct yourself."



Um.... Yes, thank you very much.
This concludes our fourth period lesson.
Please continue enjoying the main storyline.

turn to **1**

424

教了!!
知得留先生



"I am deeply sorry.
Ciel-sensei is now on her lunch break.
Please wait until she returns."



"She's neglecting her duties and snacking on curry bread!"



"Get over here, stupid Ciel!"



"I feel the same way, but if she is not here, it cannot be helped.
You cannot do anything about someone not here, and it is just too miserable to
just complain about how much Nee-san cannot clean or tidy things up.
Now then, we shall begin the customary correction corner."



".... Shiki-sama,
hiding things does not give good results.
If you learned from this experience, please trust Hisui next time."



.... That is all.
I will now return to the mansion.
Please continue enjoying the main storyline."



"Nyaaa.... That woman, I smell another cat-like character...."

turn to **1**

425

教了!!
知得留先生



Hello!

The hint corner for the poor lost Tohno-kun who ended up in a Dead End without knowing his left from his right,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

.... I see.

You have come to the fifth period.

I think there are lots of Tohno-kuns who fall into this end.

Well, it is your divine punishment.

Regret your own unluckiness for associating with such a woman.





"Why?"

You're not one to talk, Ciel.

After all, your goal from the beginning was always **—"



—Now then.

Normally there would be no chance of salvation, but some of you came here in spite of rejecting that sunny vampire.

(Sunny even though she's a vampire, I'm picking a fight)

So I'll throw out a lifeboat.

There are about three reasons you came to this Dead End, but to avoid it,

You have to reassure your sister sometimes,
you have to indulge a stupid woman's selfishness sometimes, and to find a dirty vampire, try going to a very dirty place.

That's about it.



"Hey Ciel.
I don't get this."

—Question denied.
... Or so I'd like to say, but there seemed to be many questions on this, so I will answer it.
DNM is..
D is for "dizzy", N for "not healthy", M for "moon".
It has the same initials as "Dark Night Moon", it's a small play on words.

"I see, that's weird."



(... Why, that little...)
Well, this ends the lesson this time.
Everyone, please remember to use proper Japanese!

turn to **1**

426

教了!! 知得留先生



Hello.

I am the teacher of this classroom, Ciel.

For the sixth period class, let's think about the basics of finding people.

To be straightforward, Tohno-kun does not know how to find people.

Please consider the reason why she ran away; why, where, and to do what.

If you piece these together, you will find an answer.

In other words, she got hungry, so she went into the alley to do some sucking.





"Nonsense!
Violent Ciel!
Glasses!
Indian!"

.....

This session is finished.
Please continue enjoying the main storyline.



"Nya?
What is it, Ciel?
Why are you pulling out something like a shotgun, and a machine gun, and a vulcan cannon?"

Arc!
India has nothing to do with it.
Nothing!

"Oh my, Glasses got pissed off-nyaa!
Whoosh (sound effect)"

turn to **1**

427

教了!!
知得由先生



This is the last lesson for the day, but let's all have high spirits.
Yes, since it is a long story, you might get sleepy, or hungry, or your fingers might get tired, but please plan accordingly so your schedule and energy levels allow you to keep on playing.

Now, it is after school.
The reason is obvious, right?
It irritates me to defend her, but if you've come this far, you have to keep going until the very end!
.... Saying that, maybe such an end is happiness for Tohno-kun though.
Maybe the title "Cream" defines everything.
It really does tug at the heart strings.

This concludes the day's lessons.
Let's meet again on the second day of lessons!

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!

Now for the hint corner for the poor Tohno-kun who reached a Dead End in midst of the climax,

It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

It would have been better to quit, but this corner is already into the second day. At this rate, we might go on until the third day, which makes me feel a little sick.

Then, let's begin the first period lesson.

Oh geez.

That's why I told you, Tohno-kun.

You shouldn't trust Arcueid.



"No.
That's not my fault."

It's your fault no matter how you look at it.

"Unyaa!"



—Well then.

To the Tohno-kun who came here.
It's hard to say, but you have to resubmit from quite a while back.
The feelings for you that were born inside of Arcueid were unfortunately weaker
than her urges as a vampire.
Please go back one or two days and try strengthening the bond with her.

Oh yes, and one more thing.
Tohno-kun, even though you were enchanted, I don't think it's good to easily
go crazy.



"It's nyaat my fault...."



"Shiki, you idiot!
Blockhead!
Insensitive oaf!"

!
turn to **1**

429



You have reached Arcueid's True Ending.
Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings,
a True Ending and a Good Ending.
After reaching one of the endings, please go back a little and readvance through
the story.
A different event should await you.
Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.
Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

430



You have reached Arcueid's Good Ending.
Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings,
a True Ending and a Good Ending.
After reaching one of the endings, please go back a little and readvance through
the story.
A different event should await you.
Oh, and another thing.
If you have save data where you cleared at least one heroine, it may be a good
idea to restart from the first day.
You may have more choices than before.

Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.
Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

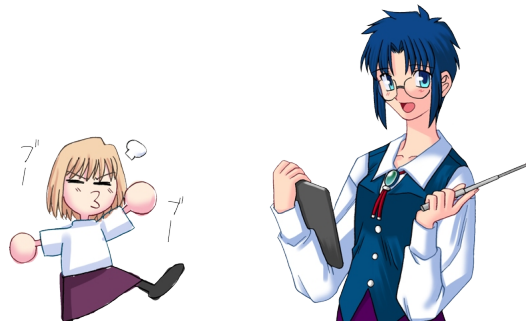
教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!

The hint corner for the out-of-luck Tohno-kun who ended up in this terrible Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

And now, we will start the second period lesson.
I see, there is a distinct reason for this.
The fish that got away this time is big.
It's your dear Senpai, so talk your hearts out with her and make peace with her.
Even if it's an opponent you can't beat by yourself, it's easy using the power of love between two people.
You don't need Arcueid's help at all!



"What?
Aren't you the one dragging him, Ciel?"

You, quiet!



-64 0



"Deer."



"And nyeow for the only-used-once animal series, nyaa, nyaa, nyaa....."
Hey now, no private conversations during class!
Now that the loud and annoying person has been kicked away, please continue
to enjoy the main story.

turn to **1**

432



.... The third period class was a sad story.
You really were splendid in trying to resolve everything by yourself, but it seems to have backfired this time.
Consult your reliable Senpai, and please make your way through this trouble.
—And!
For you Tohno-kuns who came here for some other reason.
Unfortunately, even though you were so close to the climax, your bond with Ciel-san was not deep enough.
I have to ask you to resubmit.
Please go back a long time, and make good friends with Ciel-san.
There are a lot of places you can do this, but the most important one is what happens on the sixth night.
Tohno-kun, when it came time to choose between Ciel-san or Arcueid, did you choose that idio**c woman?

This is the result.
If you have learned your lesson, please go back to the night of day six and think again about who you should choose.

..... Okay!?

turn to **1**

433

教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!

Time for the fourth period lesson.

.... Oh, too bad.

Showing your back like that in a fight, you're still no good, Tohno-kun.

There's too much difference in experience between an expert fighter like Ciel-san and Tohno-kun.

You should have acted in a way Ciel-san would not expect.



"Hmph, attacking someone from behind like that, it really shows your character, Ciel.

Are you showing your true self nyaa?"

.....

"Unyaa!
You stabbed me, you just stabbed me when the camera couldn't see us, nyaaa!"

.....

"Unyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"



Extermination of the noisy cat has been completed.
Goodness, a vampire like you who takes away someone's lover has no right to say anything.
Now then everyone, please enjoy the rest of the main story!



"Nyaa, what is this?
I haven't done that yet."

"Yet" means you're going to do so in the future?

"Ehehe.
I'll leave the answer to that for later."

turn to **1**

434

教了!!
知得留先生



"Young one, do you have a question?"



"Hey, that's dirty.
You're trying to stand out by coming out here too, Nrvnqsr."



"Don't be ridiculous.
Ciel-kun went to the curry shop.
I am the substitute."

"Alright.
Then give us a hint."



"Fighting punishes both parties.
Do not kill needlessly."



"I'm not convinced.
Even if you don't want to fight Ciel, there's some people who unconditionally
took off their glasses.
What is up with that?"



"Thou shalt not steal, rape, or deceive others.
It might sound familiar for some of you.
If so, then go on a journey through time to this morning.
Yes.
Come to think of it, the princess might have an idea of that, no?"



"Nya, w-what?
I don't understand what you're talking about."



"... Well, what happens to others is just a trivial matter for me.
Then, I shall watch how the end plays out for all of you from here—"



turn to **1**

教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!
Congratulations!
It's Ciel-san's Good Ending!

.... Eh?
..... Huh?
..... Huh?
Huh???
Wait just a minute!
What is this?
What is this ending!?



"..... Sneak, sneak."

Hey you!
Stop, you thief cat—!



"Owieeee!
Don't be so violent!
Ciel-sensei, you shouldn't resort to corporal punishment!"



—Dismissed.

.... Oh, geez, okay!

Each heroine has two different kinds of endings.

This is Ciel-san's Good End.

Please return to a previous choice and choose a different story!

That will be the True End!

Oh, and one more thing.

Ciel-san's and Arcueid's routes are the Near Side of the Moon routes.

But there is also a completely different story: the Far Side of the Moon route.

It is the "Tohno Family" route, associating with people like Akiha-san.

It seems difficult to know what requirement is needed to be able to choose that route, so I will give you a little hint.

On the first day, you should not go meet Ciel-san.

It might be better to stay in your classroom during lunch.

And most importantly.

I think that if you don't meet the vampire called Nrvnqsr, this current storyline will never happen.

So first, how to cause the new storyline.

During that specific time, if you do not try to perform that one action, a completely different event should be waiting for you.

Well then, let's meet again once more in the main story!

turn to **1**

436



You have reached Ciel's True Ending.
Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.
A True Ending and a Good Ending.
After reaching one of the endings, please go back a little and readvance through
the story.
A different event should await you.
Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.
Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

437

教了!!
知得由先生



Merci!

And now, time for the fifth period lesson of the second day.
The corner for the sake of the unfortunate Tohno-kun, who has met yet another
Bad End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"
Let's see, the mistake this time is—.

.... Oh, no.

That won't do.

This event Tohno-kun is involved in right now is not something you can solve
by yourself.

Don't be so persistent and trust the people around you.

You should ask for their help.

I don't want to see Tohno-kun become a killer.



"But, in a few years, Shiki will be called Shikiller, and will team up with the Knight of Vengeance to go hunt down the Dead Apostles."

Arc-san, that is just what you hope for, not a fact.

Alright, Tohno-kun.

Ignore the person who doesn't even get one appearance in this route and enjoy the rest of the main story.



"Awwww.

I haven't done anything wrong, so why don't I get to appear-nyaa?

I'm supposed to be the main heroine."

turn to **1**

438

教了!! 知得留先生



Merci!

And now, the hint corner for the sake of the insane Tohno-kun who has come so far only to reach this Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

It is finally the sixth period of the second day.
We are getting closer and closer to the end.



"I envy you, Ciel.
You get a lot of appearances.
I'm the main heroine, but they still treat me like this scribble."

Hey you, don't say weird things.

That's fine.

At least you have more dignity than me, the do-it-all character.



"No-!!

Unsatisfactory!

I want to be dressed like you and be called smart!!"

.....





"No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!"



"No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
Ciel-glasses!
No appearance!
No Ciel!"



"No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
Ciel-glasses!
Ciel-too plain!
Ciel-get out!
Ciel-glasses!
Fake-Frenchie!
Gun-fetish!
Ciel-India!"

..... (Anger)

"Kyuuuuuuuuuu....."



—Well, let's start the lecture.

To say it directly, you need to re-submit.

It looks like Tohno-kun could not attract Hisui-san's heart well enough.

Go back to the fifth or sixth day and please try again.

turn to **1**

439



You have reached Hisui's True Ending.
Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.
A True Ending and a Good Ending.
After reaching one of the endings, please go back a little and readvance through
the story.
A different event should await you.
Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.
Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

440



You have reached Hisui's Good Ending.
Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.
A True Ending and a Good Ending.
Since you can't reach Hisui-san's Good Ending without seeing the True Ending,
you have now finished Hisui-san's route completely!
Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.
Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

"Ciel-san.
I also have something I must impart."

Huh, Professor Roa?
This is rare indeed for you to come to a place like this."



"This circumstance is unique.
I will get to the point right away.
Now that you have cleared Hisui-san's route, there should be another choice for
you on the first day.
This is the unlocking of the last route in Tsukihime.
.... Well, even if I do not tell you this, it is very clear if you go to the graphic
mode."

That's right.
Well then, please continue on and enjoy Tsukihime!

turn to **1**

441

教了!!
知得留先生



Bonjour!

And now the hint corner for the sake of the precocious Tohno-kun who easily meets another Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

Now, the first period lesson of the third day.
The only remaining lessons are about Akiha-san's route.



"Nnya?"

Sensei, why would Hisui's lessons be done before Akiha's?"

Question denied.

Now, Tohno-kun.
I understand how you feel, but Yumizuka-san is in big trouble.

"????"

Isn't Shiki the one in trouble?"

Enough, it is big trouble.

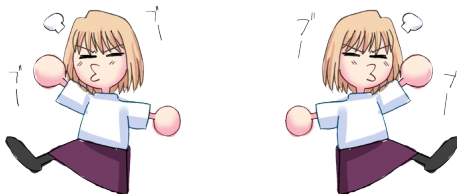
A girl your own age is in trouble, so this is no time to be shying away from danger.

Please go back a little earlier and be sure to investigate the back alley.

Well then, see you in the next lesson!



".... I don't get it.
Why would Hisui be done before Akiha?"



"I just don't get it.
I'm the main heroine and I don't get much screen time, and Shiki ignores me!"



"Yeah, I don't get it!
It's just me, and even Ciel has an appearance!
But you only get to see me from behind.
What's more, Sacchin is acting more like a vampire than I am!
What the heck is this, Kinoko!?"









"I just don't get it.
Don't get it, don't get it!!!"

turn to ??

442

教了!!
知得由先生



Bonjour!

Now the hint corner for Tohno-kun who has met yet another Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

The second period lesson of the third day will be about filial love.

The reason you died this time is simple, Tohno-kun.

There wasn't enough incentive in you to pull Yumizuka-san off of you the instant
she bit you.

Bonds of family are very important.

Classmates are also important.

You have to make sure you concern yourself with being a good Onii-chan, and
you have to somehow answer your classmate's love.

Yes, you have obligations to both of them.

So a little piece of advice.

Tohno-kun, it's probably good if you go back and show Yumizuka-san some
sincerity.

Well then, let's meet again in the next lesson, everyone.

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!

Now, the hint corner for Tohno-kun, who has regrettably ended up in this Dead End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

In this third period of the third day, I will teach you about the importance of cooperation.

See, that's no good, Tohno-kun.

This situation you are involved in right now is not something you can solve by yourself.

Let's see, the mistake you made this time—

.... Ah, no good.

This situation you are involved in right now is not something you can solve by yourself.

You have to search weird places around your house,

and don't be so persistent; you should trust the people around you and ask for their help.

I don't want to see Tohno-kun become a killer.



"But, in a few years, Shiki will be called Shikiller, and will team up with the Knight of Vengeance to go hunt down the Dead Apostles."

Arc-san, that is just what you hope for, not a fact.

Alright, Tohno-kun.

Ignore the person who doesn't even get one appearance in this route and enjoy the rest of the main story.



"Awwww.

I haven't done anything wrong, so why don't I get to appear-nyaa?

I'm supposed to be the main heroine."

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得留先生



Merci!
We're finally in the fourth period.
The hint corner for Tohno-kun, who has unluckily ended up in this unjust Dead
End,
It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"



"I envy you, Ciel.
You get a lot of appearances.
I'm the main heroine, but they still treat me like this scribble."

Hey you, don't say weird things.
That's fine.

At least you have more dignity than me, the do-it-all character.



"No!!
Unsatisfactory!
I want to dress like you and be called smart!!"
.....





No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!



"No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
No appearance!
Ciel-glasses!
No appearance!
No Ciel!
No appearance!
Ciel-glasses!



No appearance!
Ciel-too plain!
Ciel-get out!
Ciel-glasses!
Fake-Frenchie!
Gun-fetish!
Ciel-India!"





..... (Anger)

"Kyuuuuuuuuuu....."



—Well, let's start the lecture.

The cause of death is clear this time.

Your eagerness to try and solve this incident by yourself is splendid, but this is something you cannot solve by yourself.

It's the way of the world to lose something to obtain something.

It's also sad for me, but you should part with Ciel-san just this once.

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得留先生



.... It's now time for lunch during our third day.
I usually go outside to get lunch, but this time, I don't feel like doing so....



"You got your head cut off.
Even if you eat, it won't get to your stomach.
Shiki does some nasty things, but isn't it your own fault, Ciel?"
Hahaha, shut up.
It's better than not even appearing.



"Ugh.

You're right!!

Why don't I get to appear?

It's stupid!"

I bet it's your karma, but I have no time to play with you right now.

Tohno-kun.

Please go back to the previous choice and choose the selection that's more in tune with your character.

With things like the way they are now, neither I nor Tohno-kun will be saved!

turn to **1**

446

教了!!
知得留先生



Bonjour!

The hint corner for Tohno-kun, who has ended up in this Dead End with only a bit left to go,

It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

The fifth period is about battles with vampires.

I have brought Professor Roa as a special guest.

Professor Roa, what is the reason for Tohno-kun's loss this time?



"I have to say he was a bit careless.

Finding out about your enemy's weapon is the top priority in a battle against the transcendent race.

Well, in this case, I think that he knew about it, but didn't act very intelli-

gently."

I see.

Excuse me, Professor, but why does SHIKI-san in this route look different than you?

I've been wondering about this for a long time.



"Yes, I think it's just a difference in tastes.

When SHIKI's mind was weak, Roa's preferences surfaced and I dressed like this.

But in this case, SHIKI-kun completely lost his mind for some reason, and Roa could not come out since he relies on taking control of someone's mind.

That is my theory on what happened."

Oh really?

So in Akiha-san's route, SHIKI-san is the real Tohno SHIKI.

.... They say Tohno-kun is like SHIKI-kun, but they're not alike at all...

turn to **1**

447

教えた!!
知得留先生



Bonjour!

The hint corner for Tohno-kun, who has ended up in this Dead End with only a bit left to go,

It is time for "Teach me, Ciel-sensei!"

The fifth period is about battles with vampires.

I have brought Professor Roa as a special guest.

Professor Roa, what is the reason for Tohno-kun's loss this time?



"I have to say he was a bit careless.

Finding out about your enemy's weapon is the top priority in a battle against the transcendent race.

Well, in this case, I think that he knew about it but, didn't act very intelli-

gently."

I see.

Excuse me, Professor, but why does SHIKI-san in this route look different than you?

I've been wondering about this for a long time.



"Yes, I think it's just a difference in tastes.

When SHIKI's mind was weak, Roa's preferences surfaced and I dressed like this.

But in this case, SHIKI-kun completely lost his mind for some reason, and Roa could not come out since he relies on taking control of someone's mind.

That is my theory on what happened."

Oh really?

So in Akiha-san's route, SHIKI-san is the real Tohno SHIKI.

.... They say Tohno-kun is like SHIKI-kun, but they're not alike at all...

turn to **1**

448



You have reached Akiha's Normal Ending.

Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.

Usually, they are called "True Ending" and "Good Ending", but Akiha-san's are called "Normal Ending" and "True Ending".

Akiha-san's route is different from everyone else's in that how much Akiha-san likes you does not determine which ending you receive.

It also differs from all other routes in that it has an extra Normal Ending, which is what you are reading right now.

While this ending is called Akiha's Normal Ending, it will not register as an ending in the game.



"Nya?"

What is this?

You're talking nonsense!

Take it up with the game designers if you must.

Tohno-kun, please proceed to play through Akiha-san's route to reach her real Normal Ending.

Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.

Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

449



It is time for the last lesson.

The seventh period is about the end of this one particular person.

... No one can truly understand the feelings of Tohno-kun, who kept his promise.

There is nothing for me to advise.

But if Tohno-kun wishes for a different outcome, please go back a bit and choose a different course of action.



"Uhh, but if Akiha doesn't like you enough, you don't even get a choice."

—Ah.

In, in that case, please go back a couple of days and deepen your bond with Akiha-san.

If you do that, a different fate should await you.

turn to **1**

450



You have reached Akiha's True Ending.

Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.

Usually, they are called "True Ending" and "Good Ending", but Akiha-san's are called "Normal Ending" and "True Ending".

Akiha-san's route is different from everyone else's in that how much Akiha-san likes you does not determine which ending you receive.

Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.

Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

451



You have reached Akiha's Normal Ending.

Well done.

Each heroine (with one exception) has two different kinds of endings.

Usually, they are called "True Ending" and "Good Ending", but Akiha-san's are called "Normal Ending" and "True Ending".

Akiha-san's route is different from everyone else's in that how much Akiha-san likes you does not determine which ending you receive.

Well then, thank you very much for playing up to this point.

Let's meet again somewhere in Tsukihime.

turn to **1**

教了!!
知得由先生



Thanks for waiting!
Time for Ciel-sensei's What & Why corner.
Due to popular demand, here is a supplementary lesson (number one)!
Oh my, Tohno-kun has gotten really serious.
That's a no-no.
Even though Akiha-san has turned on her invincible mode, you shouldn't try to kill her.
When it comes to killing, you are by far the expert.
You have some leeway, so you should just observe Akiha-san for now.
Well, we'll end this lesson now.
The conclusion of Tsukihime is near.
Do your best so you don't have to receive any more supplementary lessons.

turn to **1**

453

教了!! 知得留先生



Thanks for waiting!
Time for Ciel-sensei's What & Why corner.
Due to popular demand, here is a supplementary lesson (number two)!
.... Oh my, Akiha-san is like a monster.
Maybe she had something pent up all this time against Tohno-kun, but she has gone pretty crazy.



"I don't think so.
That's nothing."
Yeah, yeah, I don't recall ever asking a nonhuman like you anything.
Heroines that don't even appear should just be quiet.



".... Unyaa!
I was treated like this until the very end.
Do you want to eat Ramen?"



—Well then.
This time, the cause was your carelessness, Tohno-kun.
SHIKI-kun showed you that method was not going to work, but you repeated
it anyway, right?
I'll make this a re-submit, so please go back and try again.
—After this, it will finally be the end.
This will be the final lesson.
Thank you so much for listening up to now!

turn to **1**

454



You have reached Kohaku's True Ending.
Well done.
There is only one ending for Kohaku-san.
If you have come this far, you should understand that Kohaku-san's story is the
propman of "Tsukihime", the story to tie up all the remaining events.
Thank you so much for all your hard work.
After a long time, their stories have ended.
—But, please wait.
There is still one person remaining.
Yes, that is this story's main character.
His story is not over yet.
In the heavens is the cold, round moon.
But even that moon cannot be eternally the same.
After the end of all stories,
the story of Tohno Shiki is waiting to be finished there—

turn to **1**

455

—Suddenly, I wake up.

A vast night.

In the midst of a grassy field that extends as far as the eye can see, I stare blankly at the moon.

There is no one else here.

No signs of human presence; no sounds from any animals.

Maybe it's because I've pushed myself too hard these past couple of days.

I just wanted to lie down quietly and be alone, but it seems I fell asleep.

It was a bright darkness.

Probably because the moon is hanging so low.

The grassy field that looked like a black sea last night is bright, like some sort of a stage.

A clearing illuminated by sharp, sharp moonlight.

I thought it was like a theater somewhere.

Only, there are no curtains around.

This field that sweeps far and wide is devoid of any curtains of trees, nor is there an audience or stage crew.

There's nothing here.

The only things here are the moonlight and the white darkness.

The wind does not blow and the grass does not even sway.

—How quiet.

I laugh quietly as it feels like all the commotion until yesterday was just a joke.

No, if you talk about jokes,

then my life until now was so happy that, looking back at it, it seems like it was just an illusion.

A lot of things have happened.

There were a lot of amazing things that occurred, and my life changed pace quite often.

The expected, and the unexpected.

Everything was illusory.

Looking back, it seems that no matter how trivial things seemed, all those coincidences built on each other.

The days were only a repetition of each other, but no two days were quite the same.

Then, that means

Perhaps each and every one of them was an irreplaceable moment I can never return to.

I recall many things that happened.

The memories are so nostalgic, it makes me smile.

Just the thought of the new experiences awaiting me in the future, different from those of my past, makes me dizzy.

Truly a mix of emotions. Happiness, excitement, and enough worries to give me a headache.

—Thump.

My heart beats loudly once.

What comes after is my usual anemia.

The dizziness continues for a while, but eventually disappears.

Even though the wound on my chest healed, my anemia didn't go away.

It seems like my fragile health wasn't caused by the wound on my chest alone.

Well, of course.

Being able to perceive the shape of death means I stand much closer to death than others.

To be honest, I never thought about living a long life, like ordinary people.

Thump. The sound of my heart beating.

It's not like me to think of this, but I wonder just how long I can keep running through time.

The conclusion is rather uninteresting.

Because, even if it stops tomorrow, or in a few decades, still—

"Hey you. It's dangerous just lying around like that."

—And.

I hear a familiar voice.

"Eh?"

"What do you mean, 'eh'? You have an awful lot of free time on your hands if you can just sleep around here in the middle of the night. I was this close to kicking you, so you better watch out."

She says this grumpily while carrying a trunk in one hand.

"Oh? Kicked? And by who?"

I lift myself up.

"Isn't it obvious, stupid? You and I are the only ones here, so who else could it be but me?"

She declares this confidently as she folds her arms.

"Ha——"

Stiffing the laughter spilling out of me, I gaze up at her and the moon.

"I can't believe it I somehow felt that I'd meet you, but I didn't think that day would be today."

"What a coincidence. I didn't expect to see you here, either.

I heard you were here, but we never did meet up, did we? So I was thinking that it was our fate this time not to meet. Although"

"If we did see each other, it would have caused trouble, right?"

"Right. I am a member of the Association, after all. We're not quite on good terms with the Church."

She laughs without any hint of guilt.

It really is hard holding back my laughter.

It makes me happy that this person hasn't changed one bit since that day we met.

"And, since I ran out of things to do, I was going to leave here tomorrow.

See, this incident was partially my fault, you know? So, I stopped by here for a

final check, and I almost ended up kicking some ordinary person."
 "Then we were fated to meet. To be honest, I felt we would meet up again."
 I smile.
 "You're right. I welcome this sort of fate."
 She flashes me an identical smile in return.
 "Long time no see. You've grown up, Shiki."
 "Yes. You seem to be doing well too, Sensei."
 Returning her plain greeting, I look back at Sensei with serious eyes.

We sit in the field of grass and talk.
 We talk about senseless things, just like the old days.
 It was only briefly that we talked about what had happened and what we were going to do in the future.
 "It's about time. I don't plan on staying here long. I'm leaving before dawn, so we'll have to part here."
 Saying that, Sensei stands up.
 I try to stand up with her but I collapse.
 " Shiki?"
 I can hear her voice.
 I take a few deep breaths and stand back up.
 " Dang. It seems like no sleep or rest until last night just hit me."
 "Looks like it. That dizziness is your biggest weakness.
 You don't look like you have any injuries. Is your body alright?"
 "Yeah, thanks. Unlike you, I have a normal body."
 "Hmm If you say so."
 She glances at me meaningfully, then looks directly into my eyes.
 "—Shiki You know you're not going to last much longer?"
 Her clear words.
 "————"
 I'm surprised.
 It's not that I'm surprised by her words, but rather, I never thought she would say them.
 "—Well, yeah I kind of know about it already."
 "Is that so? But you seem pretty calm.
 Even now, you strain your body over something that has nothing to do with you.
 I would have a hard time believing it, but are you really not afraid of dying?"
 She stares at me, somewhat peeved.
 "No way. I think I'm more afraid of death than most people."
 But that's something in the future.
 It may be tomorrow or next year, but I can't think about the future too much.
 "I can't think about the future too much. I prioritize what I want to be doing now."
 "I see, so you can see your own death as well. That's why you're more afraid of death than others.
 That makes sense Even for me, I'd be shivering if I could see the thirteen steps

to the gallows."

"No, it's not like that. It's not like I can clearly sense when I'll die."

"It's almost the same thing. Let's see can I ask you something, for reference?"

You ended up with a body weaker than those of others. It would only be natural to curse it and fear your life.

Hey, Shiki. Don't you find it difficult living life with such a body?"

Sensei looks at me openly, yet with unreadable eyes.

Those are the eyes of a magus, her side of which I'm not familiar with.

"—Isn't that right? You can no longer have 'normal' happiness like everyone else. As long as you have that body of yours, all that awaits is suffering."

"—That may be so but"

I think it's not that bad.

"But, I'm probably happy.

Because up until now was a lot of fun. So, it'll probably be fun in the future, too."

"_____"

The sound of her gasping.

With a large sigh, she changes back to her usual self.

"Shiki."

She seems sad as she calls my name.

"To be honest, I do feel some regret.

I feel like I said something to you that I shouldn't have back then."

I look straight into her eyes.

It's different from before Back then I had to look up to see her eyes, but now she is looking up into mine.

"God doesn't give excessive power without reason. And I told you that if you have that power, there has to be some meaning to it.

But, you know, it's up to the individual to decide what that meaning may be. There's no room for anyone else, especially something as ambiguous as a god, to interfere.

So it would have been alright if you did nothing.

Even if you denied those eyes of yours and did nothing, it still would have been alright.

I'm regretting my words, because you could have lead a normal life more suitable for you, as Shiki."

" Sensei."

"Didn't I tell you earlier that you should live your life with an honest heart?"

You really did, Shiki.

But, that's something difficult to do.

It would have been easier for you to stray from your path a little, because your eyes draw you to disaster.

Isn't it ironic that a killer more skilled than anyone else also hates killing more than anyone else?

If you lived a normal life, or had your heart deviated from the true path, you wouldn't have had to go through so much pain."

"Yeah that may be true, now that you mention it. If I gave up, it may have

been a little easier.

But, that has no meaning. It would have only made things a little easier, and to start out with, I never thought of it as particularly painful.

You have the wrong idea, Sensei. Everything I did, I did because I wanted to. It's not like I'm a saint or anything.

I like myself just the way I am.

That's why I was glad that you told me back then to become an adult by living just the way I was.

Sensei. I don't regret anything, so there's no reason for you to regret anything either."

I really feel that from the bottom of my heart, and I smile at her.

As if dazzled by a radiant light, she narrows her eyes, then closes them briefly.

"—I see

Man, it seems you really have become a wonderful young fellow."

Her hand reaches for her trunk.

"Yeah, you're fine just the way you are, Shiki.

My world is full of devious individuals, so associating with someone like you balances things out. It might be hard on you, but if you don't mind, then I guess it's alright."

With a "see you," Sensei turns her back to me.

"_____"

I can't stop her, and there's no reason to.

I can feel that this really is the last time.

All I can remember is the one thing I forgot to say.

That day.

In an ocean of grass, an important friend who had spoken with me, who was about to disappear.

"_____"

There's no wind.

The grass does not sway and the only thing that changes is her figure, which gets farther away.

She didn't turn around suddenly back then, and she won't now.

"—Sensei."

I call out to stop her.

She halts in her tracks.

"What?"

She doesn't turn around. Only her voice drifts to me.

"_____"

I know what I must say.

The words I've always wanted to say.

It's just that if I say these words, I really won't be able to see her ever again.

But still—I have to say them.

She told me, "All I'm saying is live true to yourself, and become a man in the manner that you think is right."

She also taught me that it is important to accept my mistakes, and to be able to apologize for them.

That's why.

That's why I have to say it.

"—Thank you. I'm glad I met you, Sensei."

That's what I felt as a child.

Those words were the ones from the bottom of my heart that I once could not say, because I was filled with the sadness of parting.

From behind, it seems Sensei is surprised.

She stands there, lowers her head, and turns toward me with her usual expression.

"—Take care, Shiki. Let's meet again if we are fated to do so."

She says this as if it was nothing, and the wind suddenly gusts.

Swoosh.

It rustles through the swaying grass, and the moon's light disappears.

After that,
as if abducted by the wind, she disappears.

"————"

For some strange reason, I'm not shedding any tears.

I feel sad, and I don't want to part.

But not shedding tears also means that I've grown up since then.

The grassy field becomes silent once more.

Gazing up, it looks like the moon is about to vanish from the sky.

All things pass by, just like the moon disappearing.

And yet, after a long time, there may be the chance to meet again.

And so, tonight's moon disappears.

"—Well then"

I close my eyes just once, as if lowering the curtains.

In the sky, dawn is drawing closer.

Just like the moon that has just fallen,

for the time being, the curtains are lowered on the long story for Tohno Shiki—

The heavens soar high above.

I look up, while embraced by the clear, brisk night air.

All things are uncertain, just like a waking dream.

The past is all an illusion.

It doesn't leave behind a tangible form, and even the most vivid of memories are really just transient.

Yet, I believe that the moon's image will never fade away.

Even that is fragile.

Even though I know it will end one day, I don't care.

The memories continue on.

I'm sure that even the end will be a happy one.

—The lunar eclipse is far away.

Everyone races through their remaining time, and passes on.

Fin.
turn to **1**

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