**Katawa Yandere - Lilly Route by Akira!!UjNzln6KLxU**  **Feb 03 - Apr 02 2012**

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# Part 1

Hanako couldn't make today, apparently. You muse to yourself sipping tea in your usual tranquil room. You wouldn't have minded the company, but at the same time, silence has its own benefits as well. You've had nowhere near enough of it for what seems like an eternity. With the hectic festival preparations and that deaf bitch breathing down your neck every five seconds, things have hardly been peaceful. Still, here, for now at least, you have a brief moment of qui- the door creaks open: Misha? No, she wouldn't have eased the door open so much as attempted to break it down. And Hanako would have said something immediately. Setting down you cup with a light clink, you sweetly speak.

"Shizune, if that's you, I will murder your family with a shovel and burn down the hospital you were born in. I will destroy all record that you ever existed so that no one will ever mourn you."

A moment of silence, as per usual with that deaf bi-

"Um... I'm not her... Sorry?" It's a guy's voice. One you don't recognize.

"I'm really sorry if I interrupted anything, I was just lost."

"Oh!" You exclaim, embarrassed at such a blatant lapse in your self-control. "I'm sorry to startle you, it's kind of an inside joke. Please, have a seat."

There's a moment's pause between you last word and the actual sound of movement. That was hardly a proper introduction. Eventually, you hear the chair across from you being pulled out

"So you're a new student, I'm guessing?"

"Yeah, I, uh, just transferred in today."

"Please, have a drink." You say as you straighten, not waiting for him to affirm your request. It's better to save face right now. After a moment of practiced preparations during which you guest doesn't speak, you hand him his cup.

"I'm Lilly, by the way, Lilly Satou."

"Hisao Nakai."

"So, what room were you looking for, then, Hisao?" You speak, trying to demonstrate a laid-back attitude.

"The library, Shizu- Err... I was told it was on this floor."

"I'd be a little wary of listening to what she says all the time if I were you, Just some friendly advice."

"How come?" He asks, though not at all seeming confused; at least partially understanding it.

"That one has an agenda. Always."

"Yeah, I do kind of get that impression of her."

You giggle a bit before sipping your tea.

You exchange small talk for a while - fairly meaningless stuff. Clubs, students, faculty, and the like. He seems nice enough, if somewhat airheaded. He literally knew nothing about Yamaku before he came here. After a while, he awkwardly breaks off.

"Oh, wow, time really has flown."

"Pardon?"

"You can't see he sun sett- oh. Err, it's kind of late. Um, should the library still be open?"

You decide to take a more direct hospitable route and inform him that the school's entire security, nursing, and housing departments are actually staffed entirely by the same guy before producing a wine bottle out of your bag.

"Um, not sure I should..."

"And why would the library be so much more exciting?"

After a moment's pause, he takes the bottle, and you hear a glugging ended by violent coughing. You take it from him and down an equal amount.

"Lightweight."

"Hey, I'll show you lightweight!" He says before snatching it back and drinking.

"Hey, can I feel you fache?" You ask in a wavering voice.

"Um, shure?" He hics back.

It's a utilitarian thing for you - even drunk you can do it easily. A few practiced finger strokes and you've a very decent feel for what this new guy looks like. Usually though, you stop at that level, intoxicated, you start stroking his cheek.

This goes on for a few tense seconds before.

"Hey Lilly, I was looking for y-" A voice comes as the door casually swings open. A voice, that stops dead.

"Hey Hanako, wanna join the party?" You ask, waving the bottle in her general direction.

"Lilly, what the- No. Ok, you're spending too much time around Akira."

In a stiff motion, she jerks you to your feet before leading you out the door.

"Bye Lillyyyy." He calls back. You want to turn and answer, but Hanako is practically dragging you down the stairs, so turning around would likely send you both hurdling down.

"Ok." She begins after having pulled you back to your room. "What the h-h-hell were you thinking?"

She's trying to sound angry, but she just doesn't have it in her. She's more concerned than anything.

"Just a welcoming party." You say, trying to wave off the fact that it really WAS a pretty fucking stupid idea for a blind girl to go get drunk alone with a guy she just met a few hours ago.

"What'd you think of the new guy, Hisao? I thought he wash decent looking... hic!" You ask, using Hanako's obsession with appearance as a segue out of this topic.

"He looks like he woke up on the wrong side of the bed." She retorts back. "First day and he was edgy all through class."

"What's wrong with him? Did he say?"

"Nope. He's got all his limbs so something internal? Brain damage, maybe?" She sighs. "Look, forget him and sleep this off. I'll check on you in the morning."

Next day, you wake up slightly later than normal and wind up going to class at an uncomfortably fast pace. Over your shoulder, though, you sense the ultimate monster.

"WAHAHAHA - Class representative! Just who we were looking for!" No mistaking that voice.

As much as it would be an honor to your ancestor, sir Alasdair the Devastator, to savagely annihilate your enemy here, you know that discretion is the better part of valor. Also, you know for a fact that Misha's drills can deflect a shotgun blast. You duck into a classroom totally at random.

"Who's that - is someone there?" A marginally familiar voice calls out, but you don't recognize it. Whoever he is must be blind too. Whatever, they likely saw which way you went. How do you use the classroom and this single human resource?

"I think the student council wants to talk to you outside." You say as calmly as you can.

"Oh great, them. Shit. I knew they'd come for me eventually. Well I WON'T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT!" He roars before charging straight into the door. He then seemingly remembers that modern doors have handles and opens it before charging out of that.

You hear loud shouts from the hallway about how everyone should put on their tinfoil hats. To protect themselves from the Overmind. The sound of walls being punched at awkward angles and bizarre ranting about how this universe is a fictitious website creation. While he does that, you simply walk out of the classroom's back door.

Breathing a sigh of relief, you hear a familiar voice. "Oh, hey Lilly, right?" Hisao again. "What's going on out there?" He asks in a somewhat groggy tone, apparently less used to dealing with hangovers than you.

"Haha, you're even worse off than me, aren't you. Come on, I've got just the thing for that." Together, you make you way back to your usual tea room, doing your best to ignore the frantic screams for humanity to rise up against their Amazon overlords.

Once there "Oh!" Hey Lilly. And... um... h-h-hisssao..." The change in her voice is quite clear.

"Can you give us a minute, Hanako?" You say as sweetly as possible. Even without sight you can tell she must be giving you a somewhat suspicious look. "O-ok." She says before shuffling out of the room.

"Have a" He's already slumped down onto the table. "My, my..." You set about preparing Akira's signature hangover remedy - an insidious branch of scottish alchemy perfected during the middle ages. As the glass before you hisses while the Octopus blood permeates the coffee liqueur, you think it may be best to try and talk to Hisao.

"Hey Hisao." You begin softly. "About what you said, about your family, your classmates, leaving you alone. I realize that must have been hard on you, but you don't need to try and shoulder it all yourself, you know."

A pause, then. "It's more that there's not much for me to shoulder at all, really..." As you pass him the cup, which slightly emits arcane Pict chants as it moves, He begins to tell his story. How his heart stopped. How everyone deserted him, treated him like a pet in a cage. That he got a vague imitation of life back instead of the actual thing.

It's actually a feeling you know - you've felt that same way quite often when you've interacted with others. The sense that pity is just another form of scorn. You've tried so often to present a strong face to counter that perception. Is his supposedly grim face the same? Maybe... just maybe...

"You don't have to be alone, here, you know."

He gives a sign of relief. "Yeah... I'm starting to see that... thanks Lilly." He replies, chugging the slightly screaming liquid. You smile sweetly at him.

"By the way..." He asks as you perk your head up. "Who's your friend? With the purple hair?"

# Part 2

Going through your normal practiced routine of school, you notice Hanako's missed meeting you outside your own classroom at lunchtime. You'd rather not go to class as you've forgotten to complete your festival paperwork, but there seems to be little choice in the matter. This could go a few ways, you could get into a fight with Shizune, pick up Hanako and find out how she's doing, or possibly look around for Hisao, since Hanako did mention they were in the same class.

It's strange that he would be weighing on your mind like this after a while, but the thought is there. At the same time, you certainly don't want to neglect Hanako. And Shizune is unfortunately a part of your life whether you like it or not.

Mentally preparing yourself, you open the door.

"Lilly!" You hear her squeak after you've stepped into the room.

"Hanako? Ready to go?" You ask, barely managing to enunciate the word "go" as she takes your arm. "B-Bye Hisao" you hear her call back as she leads you out of the classroom to your usual tea room.

You stop, Hanako apparently being surprised slightly, but instantly understanding it. "Oh, is Hisao there?"

"Y-yeah. Hey Lilly."

"I-I was talking to him while I waited for y-you to get here."

"Well then." You say, smiling sweetly. "Thank you then, Hisao. And sorry to keep you waiting."

"Oh." He replies, exiting the classroom into the hallway after the two of you. "It's nothing. We get along pretty w-"

CRACK.

You feel as much as hear a massive impact through the air and Hanako emit a terrified squeak.

"Hisao?!" You gasp, listening for him. Asking for him, you hear Hanako give a slight gasp as she doubtless looks over. He doesn't answer you in any way. You can pick up his breathing, but it's labored. Strange, the blow didn't seem that heavy...

"Hey? Do you need me to get a nurse?" You hear a familiar voice ask. Emi's voice. You're about to start yelling at her before you hear Hisao reply in a half whispering tone. "N-no. I'm fine." It's calm. Actually, almost too calm.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

You hear a rummaging from inside the classroom. Followed by a questioning voice. "Hiichan?" Damn, StuCo inbound.

Ignoring Emi, you quickly kneel down to Hisao

"Hey, Hisao? Are you ok? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm fine."

"You're not fine, though, your breathing-" "I'm FINE." He almost yells at you. As you sit there stunned for a moment, you quickly hear him rise up. "Sorry. Seriously, it's nothing..." He apologizes before making a fast exit.

The classroom door opens and Misha/Shizune exit to find you, Emi, and Hanako in the hallway. "What just happened? We heard a clatter."

You ignore Misha (usually a difficult task, but not so much right now), take Hanako by the hand and make a fast escape. You can hear them start grilling Emi in the background for what happened.

Once in your tea room, Hanako takes over your usual job of making the tea while you just sit there in silence for a moment. You run over the event in your mind as best as you're able, but still lack a good idea of what actually happened. You turn towards Hanako's direction, "Hey, Hanako..."

"Why... what..." You stumble over yourself, trying to phrase some all-encompassing question. Hanako can't guess why Hisao would have upset you, so she assumes you're asking about the incident itself.

"Emi came charging around the bend. Slammed into Hisao as he came out in the hallway. He doubled over completely for a minute."

"Was... he alright?" You question before changing your query. "Actually, better question - what did I do? He seemed angry at me."

"Um... i-if I had to guess - I'd say you came off as pitying him... I know you don't like that feeling either." She pauses for a moment, then adds. "Over concern... i-it can b-b-be a little... degrading." She seems a little too invested, actually.

Listening to your friend, you feel utterly horrible about yourself. You know she's right. Maybe you should find him and apologize?

"Anyways, we were gonna go shopping later, weren't we?" She adds in a fairly transparent attempt to change the subject.

"Um... I should find and apologize to Hisao first, I think. Did you see where he headed?"

Hanako sighs. "He looked like he was going to the main entrance, so the dorms maybe?" "Thanks." You answer as you straighten. "Lilly?" Hanako asks, clearly puzzled at why this is such a big thing for you. "Um... nothing." She dismisses her own thought.

Finding your way to the male dorms, you locate Hisao's dorm and knock a couple times. No answer.

"Who's there?" You hear a familiar crazed voice over your shoulder.

"Contraband Inspection. Can you show me your room please?"

"FUCK" The response comes way too quickly. The door slams shut and you can hear a hectic banging as about ten locks click shut. That's weird, do the male dorms have that many?

Answering your own question, your hand automatically tries Hisao's door - it isn't locked at all.

"Hisao?" You call into the room, hearing no response. You ignore the constant stream of muffled banging and profanities behind you and take a step inside.

Bushing around the wall, to get a feel for the environment, you hand touches a bottle, then another, then another. Pill bottles? So many...

Making sure to take only a single pill from a bottle that must have at least sixty, you slip it inside your pocket and turn to head out.

Inside that strange person's room, you can now hear a loud retching sound. Normally, you'd be concerned, but for now you ignore it. You leave the building and retreat back to your own dorms.

Once there, you change into your pajamas and lapse into thought. You now have some way to find out what happened with Hisao. Even if he won't tell you himself, which would, of course, be ideal. You could ask Akira to look that up for you - no way she'd mind it. On the other hand, it is kind of late and you feel bad for just blowing off Hanako like that.

Akira can wait, as of right now, you show try to appear as normal as possible. Exiting your room, you knock on Hanako's door. "Hanako? It's me." You say. Her door couldn't have opened faster if you had kicked it in. "Lilly!" You hear her voice as she hugs you before taking you by the hand and leading you to a seat on her bed.

"I'm sorry for blowing you off like that."

"Oh, don't worry. I'm fine. I actually bumped into Hisao in the Library and told him you were REALLY sorry for what happened."

"You met him in the library?"

"Y-Yeah. I guess I've found a fellow bookworm, hahaha. He said to tell you it's nothing and he was sorry himself for getting mad."

"That's... good." You reply.

You don't discuss that particular topic any more. The rest of your night is dominated by small talk, eventually you leave Hanako to rest and go back to your room. You have difficulty sleeping, though - something about this situation unsettles you. You wake up a good hour before your already fairly early starting time and head to class, enjoying the silence. After taking the cafeteria Soylent Tan Special as your breakfast, you ponder what to do to kill time before class starts.

You decide to head to the roof and make your way up the stairwell. You push through the door and step out, hearing nothing but the wind. You've been told that the roof has a pretty good view, actually, but strangely there's almost never anyone up there. It's puzzling to you.

Stepping out to the ledge, you take a deep breath of fresh air and sigh. After a couple minutes, you become aware of a scraping sound.

"Hello?" You call, turning around. "Wait... don't move yet, that was a good pose." Comes a scratchy-voiced reply. "You can't see me no matter what way you're facing, right? So just keep looking over there."

"... Hello Rin."

"Just give me a second... This is just a gesture sketch. For now." A moment of pause. Then. "IkindofcameupheretomeditatebutIfellasleepandwokeupwithabirdbuildinganestinmyhairwhichIdidntrea

llymindbutEmisaystheycarrysomekindoffluandIdontwanthertobemadsoIshooeditawaybutfeltbadaboutitsoIwaskindofsulkingbeforeyoushowedupandyourhairkindofremindedmeofachocobosoIstarteddrawingyou."

Not knowing how exactly to reply... "I didn't think anyone else was up here."

"There's someone else up here?" She replies, before pausing, as if glancing around. "Oh, right, that's me."

Remembering that Rin mostly works off same logical system as the animaniacs, you decide that trying to talk with her would be a lost cause and simply walk back down. Reaching Hanako's classroom, you stop and straighten your collar before walking in.

"Excuse me?"

"Good morning, Lilly."

"Hisao? Good morning. You're here early."

"Couldn't be helped. The paramedics woke me up breaking down my neighbor's door at four in the morning. Apparently the idiot got it into his head that he was getting raided and ate a jar of magnesium powder, two rolls of electrical tape, and a spool of canon fuse before going into a rant and smashing everything he owned with a crowbar. He's in stable condition though... Well, as stable as he gets."

"Err... I'm 'sorry' to... hear that."

"Well-" Hisao is abruptly cut off by the classroom door imploding.

"Hi Hiichan! And look! It's the class representative!"

"Hi Misha, hey Shizune." Hisao says, seemingly directing the 'Shizune' portion to you.

"Actually, we wanted to talk to you, class rep. Today's the deadline to hand in your festival paperwork. Can we have that now?"

You're not happy that they interrupted your time with Hisao. And in this position, you can't leave the classroom without going right through them.

You can feel the burning urge to take a lunge at Shizune, having a decent fix on her location. No, though, you've already spooked Hisao once with that. Best not to exacerbate that worry.

"There's still time, isn't there?" You state blandly. "I'll get you everything this afternoon."

"Class Rep! We've been handling this same thing for every classroom in the school and we've finished! WAHAHAHA You're not getting lazy again?"

"..."

"I mean, if you didn't want to do anything you had your chance to hand it over to us. I mean, it's not like the first time you've done that."

"..."

"I mean, what were you doing with all this time?! Wahahaha Did you need to nursemaid your entire class?!"

"Shizune, chill out." Hisao finally cuts in. "No matter how much you yell - err - have Misha yell, if she doesn't have it right now, she doesn't have it."

"She should have had it!" Shizune redirects to him. "We did!"

"She hasn't been skipping class to do it." He replies vacantly. Something you're noticing is that Hisao's vocal inflexion doesn't really change much. "Besides, if you really need it, wouldn't the smarter thing to do be to let her get to it right now? As it is, you're just wasting everyone's time."

"Erm... Ok! You make a good point, Hiichan!" You have a feeling that was meant to be a reluctant grumble instead of Misha's cheery delivery. "Get to it class rep! We'll need that by five this afternoon."

You walk past them. "You'll have it." You reply, shooting your sweetest smile Hisao's direction as you pass through the door.

You keep reliving that short exchange throughout class. You're getting a better feel for Hisao's personality now. Also... Your phone rings and you quickly step outside to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Hey lil' Sis! How's it going?!"

"Akira? I'm in class right now."

"I know, sorry - but I had to get you before lunch. Listen, I'm in Yamaku right now. Long story, but I figured we could try to meet up. You free?"

It's always nice to hang out with Akira, and you could ask her about that pill you took from Hisao's room. On the other hand, you could also try to look for Hisao himself at lunch now that you have a better idea of where he hangs out...

In spite of yourself, you crack a smile. "Sure! I'd love to see you again!"

"Great, I'll wait by the front gate for you! Hahaha"

And with that, the conversation ends. This is actually shaping up to be a really nice day.

After class, you head out to the front gate. "Heyy!" You hear even before you've reached it. A quick series of footsteps and Akira's embraced you. You hug her back, partially out of affection, but also...

"Akira? Have you lost weight?" It's a rhetorical question. She definitely has. And she was pretty slim to begin with.

"Ahaha, a little. Come on, let's do something about that if you're worried." And with that's you've both entered her car and shot down the mountain at a speed that is definitely unsafe.

"So Dad's shipping company's in a bit of a bind. There was apparently some corporate espionage that resulted in the Japanese authorities getting on our case about some black-book shipments into Hokkaido. He's handling the spy on his end, but it's my job to stop the damage they've already done from sinking us."

"Did we do it?"

"Yes. But I'm not about to let a little thing like that stop me." She replies with a chuckle. You believe it. Akira has a knack for being able to do anything once focused. You really envy that mind of steel.

Half-parking, half-crashing the car, Akira hops out and helps you out, not losing a jolt of animation. "So, I'm gonna need to be doing a bit of leg work these next few weeks, and since Yamaku's right on the way, it looks like we'll get to be seeing each other quite a bit more."

"How about you, Lilly? How've you been this last little while?"

"I've been good actually. Hanako sends her love, of course - she's been doing well. And actually, here's... this new guy at school."

"Oho? What's he like?"

"He seems pretty grim a lot, but he has a good heart." Holding onto her arm, you feel Akira's muscles give a slight twitch.

"Although..." You trail off as you two enter the Shanghai and Akira greets Yuuko with a loud 'HEY!'

"The other day he had some kind of an attack."

"Was he ok?"

"He's fine, yes, but I'd like to know what it was and he won't tell me, so, um..."

Sitting down, you pull that single pill out of your pocket and slide it over to Akira. "Can you... find out what that is?"

A split second of silence that seems to last for an eternity, then. "Sure. I can do that. I'm guessing I should be discreet with it, though?"

"Is that a problem?"

"Nope."

As your food (and drinks) arrive. Akira downs her glass in one gulp and calls for another while the conversation lightens up. After a little while, Akira suddenly trailed off. "By the way, that guy. I'm guessing a slightly decaying athletic build, messy hair, about the same height as you?"

"H-how did you-"

"He just walked in the front door and took a glance straight at you. Just behind me, a little to your left."

Casting a wave in the direction Akira indicated as you hide your drink with the other hand, you do indeed hear a "Hey Lilly." You pick up his footsteps a couple seconds later, then-

"So, are you gonna introduce us?" Akira cuts in. "Oh, my my, where did my manners go. Hisao Nakai, this is my sister, Akira Satou."

"Nice to meet you."

"Nakai..." She mumbles. "Likewise."

He seats himself and Akira turns her attention back to you. "So, have you murdered Shizune yet?"

"Ahaha, no, no. I've gripped those first two canes you got me a bit tightly, but that's all." The one that opens into nunchaku and the one that conceals a rapier, to be precise.

"Not the third though?"

"Heavens, no."

"Good. Don't use 'that'."

Speaking with a spectator is never fun since you can't get into specifics. Even blind, you can tell that Hisao must be giving a very confused expression. Akira simply stands up. "Whelp, I've gotta get back to work. Got a bunch of people counting on me"

"So soon?"

"Unfortunately, but don't worry. I'll see you again real soon. For Hanako's birthday if nothing else. Nice to meet you, Hisao."

She head out at her usual unnatural pace, leaving just you and Hisao.

"Ok, Akira reminded me, Hisao. I'm going to be throwing a little party for Hanako's birthday. You seem to be on decent terms with her - is that the case?"

"Hm, oh, yeah, she definitely seemed shy at first, but she's a really nice girl. I like her."

"So then, would you like to join us?"

"I'd love to. Um... Not really sure what to get her, though."

"Don't worry, I haven't picked her out anything yet either. We can do our shopping the day after the festival. Does that work?"

"Of course."

"Great."

You head back to school together, making idle chit-chat. You've already gotten him to agree to two future meetings and as you walk you've also moved on from holding his sleeve to hooking your arm around his and he doesn't seem to mind. A definite good sign. He suddenly comes to a stop, though.

"... Rin?"

Not wanting to take chances spoiling such a good day, you give a tug on Hisao's arm. "Um... could we please hurry back to the school? Tomorrow's the festival and I've got a bit to prepare for."

"Oh? You're working the festival tomorrow?" He asks, seemingly forgetting about Rin for a second.

"Yes. We'll be operating a stall." You say as you start taking a few cautious steps to pull him away from the abomination. "Would you like to drop by? Do you have plans?"

"Well, Kenji said he wanted to 'celebrate' with me if he can 'survive the hospital nurses', but eh - he can wait."

"Great! I'll be sure to make you a special dish!"

As the two of you make your way up the mountain, you begin to notice Hisao's breathing growing ragged. Again, there's that nagging feeling in your gut about what's wrong with him.

You figure you'd prefer to find out by virtue of him trusting you, so you give a short tug on his arm, stopping him.

"Hisao? Are you... alright?"

"Huh?" That was the worst feigned surprise you have ever heard.

"Your breathing..."

After a pause, he sighs. "Yeah, it's alright, don't worry. I have a pretty screwed up heart. I had a severe arrhythmia resulting in a bad heart attack a few months ago and wound up here."

He sighs. "It's funny, I was never really in great shape, but now..." He trails off. Gently, you squeeze his hand.

"It's alright. There's no shame in living as you are, even if you're different from everyone around you. EMIYA SHIROU"

He squeezes back for a moment, then takes the lead again. You feel as if this was a superb personal victory to cap off the day.

The next day, you wake up early for the festival and ready yourself. After picking out the right cane, right ribbons, everything, you still have some time to kill before you start setting up the stall. What to do...

You decide you'd better put some extra effort into this cooking thing. You certainly don't want a repeat of Hanako's borderline lethal attempt to make taffy.

Heading into the library, you hear the customary skullbanging greeting of Yuuko. After inquiring for braille cookbooks, you head to that section of the library and flip through. After finding a good one, you begin intensely studying it. After all, it needs to be good. It NEEDS to be...

The next thing you know, several hours have passed and one of the students from your class has burst into the library, yelling at you to get down there because the stand is falling apart without your leadership.

# Part 3

Making haste, you take Hisao's hand in your free hand, your cane in the other, and lead him away from the approaching bestial sound of 'WAHAHA's. If you were to fight StuCo, it would probably be best to do it with no one else present. And you're not sure if you're equipped for it right now anyways.

"So, how have you been finding school?" You ask with a smile.

"I've been settling in. Misha's been trying to teach me some sign and Emi keeps trying to get me to run with her in the mornings."

The faintest twinge of disquiet crosses your mind; you didn't think he'd have made up with Emi so quickly after she nearly killed him, but that's just a bit that's quickly settled. Also you can mentally track Misha's laughter moving further away, a good sign.

"It was a little unsettling when Kenji barricaded off his room and OD'd on a cocktail of gunpowder and Pepto-Bismol but he doesn't seem any different for it. I get the feeling he's not exactly very health-conscious and something spooked him."

He sighs and continues on. Again, a good sign, in the beginning he seemed reluctant to open up.

"I find myself spending the most time around Hanako, really. I got into the habit of reading a lot in the hospital. Um... also, where are we going?" He asks as he seemingly realizes you've been dragging him along without actually telling him why.

"Oh, nowhere actually." You say, telling half the truth - it wasn't so much that you needed to be somewhere as away from those two. "Was there someplace in particular you wanted to go?"

He pauses, as if thinking.

"Hm... Well, I guess I'd like to see how Rin's mural turned out. Also, I haven't seen Hanako around anywhere. Do you know where she'd be in the middle of all this chaos?"

You give his words some thought. Rin gives you headaches, Hanako's likely going to be holed up in the library right now...

"I can't think of where Hanako might be." You reply. "That girl, honestly... She does seem to drift. "

Taking his arm, you lead Hisao towards the school building. "Come on, let's go look for her."

The two of you walk together at a slow pace. Partially because you're not actually trying to get anywhere, but also because you'd rather not put any undue strain on Hisao's heart. Maybe it would be a good idea to research what he told you about himself at some point.

Time flies as you meander through the building, talking about nothing in particular. You mention your foreign looks are due to your scottish heritage and go into a bit of detail about your estrangement from your family. He talks a bit about his former school life, mostly dull stuff, and a little bit about his four-month confinement to a hospital bed, which is actually rather depressing, but you appreciate the openness he's giving you.

Carefully avoiding the library, you eventually 'fail' in your search for Hanako and find yourselves wondering back to the festival grounds. At your suggestion, you both get some tea and find a spot at the park grounds for the fireworks display.

"But how did you know where the best spot would be?" He inquires. "I can guess where they're going off based on the noise. They haven't really changed much about the festival since last year. I brought Hanako that time."

"Really?" He asks as the first loud bang permeates the park.

You stay silent and cautiously nudge closer at every loud bang. By the end of the show you're leaning on his arm and he doesn't seem to notice when your movement took place. It's a nice feeling, really...

"Huh?" Hisao gives a startled noise, suppressing a flush, you pull back slightly. "What?"

"Oh, I thought I saw- err- there was..." A pause, then a contented sigh. "Never mind." A hissing sound followed by a loud series of cackling explosions marks the end of the fireworks show. In the calm afterwards, your ears both ringing, Hisao breaks the silence.

"I wanted to say, thanks, by the way, for being so supportive. Would you, um..." The way this seems to be being set up, you can feel your heart going a mile a minute. "Would it be alright if I joined you for tea like that day?" A bit of a plummet. Not quite what you were expecting.

Regaining your composure, you smile sweetly at him. "It would be my pleasure, Hisao." No other words are exchanged that night. Not quite what you were hoping for, but he's outright stated that he wants to spend time with you. So that's at least a minor victory.

The next morning, roughly two minutes after you wake up, your phone goes off. "H-Hello?" You grumble, suppressing a yawn.

"Hey, hey! How's it going, Lilly!?"

"Oh, good morning, Akira, how are you?"

"Oh, just doing some research."

Meanwhile, in a hotel in Hokkaido, Akira sits at in front of a cluttered desk with various items splayed out all across the bed, desk, and chairs. Before her right now is an empty bottle of Absinthe, a half-full bottle of whiskey, a medical reference dictionary, two derringers, an iPad, a fossil of the first snake to ever shed its skin, three mismatched socks, a manila folder labeled 'Hisao Nakai' complete with a "Confidential" stamp, a braille typewriter, and the Satou family photo album open to a page containing solely pictures of you two. The walls are plastered with maps and photos of Hisao at various stages of his life.

Back in Yamaku. "You know." She adds. "Looking into that thing you wanted."

"Thanks for that Akira." You say, happy that she's apparently taken this matter at least a little seriously. "What did you find out?"

"Oh, this and that." She replies. "It's probably better if we talk this over in person. Did you wanna meet up for lunch later? I should be able to make it down to Yamaku."

"Sure! We can do that."

"Great, see you soon."

And with that, the call ends. You're glad things are moving well on the Hisao front. Still, though, you do feel a little bad for blowing off Hanako like that yesterday.

Checking your clock, you register that you have some time before class starts. You could try to go make it up to her, or you could try to find Hisao before class, since he usually gets there pretty early himself, although that option has a high probability of running into the Student Council.

Dressing yourself for school and selecting your rapier-cane for today, you exit your room and knock on Hanako's door. "Hanako? It's me." A slight ruffling sound can be heard before the door clicks open.

"Lilly..." You hear her mumble as she hugs you. She clings on much longer than used to and now you feel doubly guilty over blowing her off. All for a good cause, though, well, not really, but a necessary cause.

Finally, she releases you from her embrace but keeps a firm hold of your hand and leads you inside at a zombielike pace. You remember that she's not exactly a morning person either.

"I missed you yesterday..." She mumbles.

"Hanako..." You say softly before gently pulling her towards you and hugging her. "I'm sorry. I was showing Hisao around and we never saw you."

"I-I was... in the library." She mutters into your chest.

"Well, that explains it. There wasn't much need to show Hisao that, is there?"

"I-I g-guess not..."

You kiss the top of her head. "I'm sorry if you felt lonely. I'll make it up to you, ok?"

"I-it's ok. You don't need to do anything special. I'll see you at lunch like usual today, right?" Fuck. Less than five minutes after Akira. Why does everything always happen at once? She's comfortable around Akira, so you suppose you could bring her along, but you might not be able to talk about everything you wanted...

"Actually, Akira's coming into town today. Would you like to join us?"

"Um... t-t-there w-won't be another incident like that time with the swords, right?"

"No. She's already promised she won't do that again."

"O-Ok then!" She perks up. "I'll meet you outside your class. We can go together."

Feeling a little better, you leave Hanako to allow her to get ready for school.

Heading to school yourself, you enter the building and eat a cold breakfast of scrambled eggs and Soylent Beige. Across the room, the cafeteria doors are violently blown open.

"WAHAHAHA! Hey Class Rep! Shiichan needs to talk to you!" Again? Is there some evil government satellite that tells her where you are all the time?

You grip your cane in one hand beneath the table and politely nod in the direction of Misha's audible skipping noises.

"And what can I do for the student council?" You ask as they reach you.

"For starters, you can stop stealing our members!" Misha says cheerfully, although you can hear Shizune's hands chopping through the air.

"Beg your pardon?"

"Hiichan! I'm talking about Hiichan!" Comes her reply.

"Again, I don't follow you." You say again in an aloof tone, although this conversation is already taking a sour twist.

"He was this close to joining the Student Council and now he doesn't want to after talking with you!"

"No one's wanted to join the council since Shizune took over. Am I responsible for everyone she's driven away?"

You hear a series of sharp, deep breaths. You hit a nerve and you know it.

"Hey! Don't make Shiichan feel bad!" Misha exclaims. "She was really upset yesterday!"

Upset? About... Hisao? You feel your hand tightening around you cane's grip. The cafeteria's nearly empty now, with most people having either already eaten their breakfast or decided to skip it.

"You think 'you' have some kind of right to Hisao? MONGRELS."

Your rapier flies out of its sheath and makes a rapid arc at Shizune’s head. CRANG. A shiver runs through your body like you've just struck a wall of solid steel as your attack is intercepted by one of Misha's drills. Strengthened by years of alien dyes and forbidden hair gel, their diamond like hardness easily repels your attack. Shizune hasn't moved at all while Misha charges forward. She swings her head down in a skull-bash that shatters the table you were eating at as you narrowly sidestep it.

Channeling the powers of your ancestor, Alasdair the Devastator, you unleash a rapid series of attacks on Misha before she recovers, tears deep gashes in the floor and tables, but every one is intercepted by those demonic drills. Several were definitely outside her field of vision, but those drills seem to move independent of her own will.

Lunging forward, Misha charges you, one of her drills rising to the center of her head like a charging rhinoceros. You hurl yourself out of the way as she smashes through a pillar with a thunderous battle cry of "WAHAHA!"

Coming into a crouch, you mentally begin formulating a series of combat strategies when the first bell rings.

"Um... Shiichan? Didn't Teacher say we couldn't miss anymore class after the festival was over?"

"!!!"

A rapid series of footsteps can be heard as Shizune runs up, grabs Misha, and the two exit the battle-damaged lunchroom. Come to think of it, you shouldn't miss class either. Hisao wouldn't like it if you got detention. Sheathing your sword, you also exit the lunchroom and head to class.

The rest of the morning is largely uneventful. You keep thinking about what Akira might have found. As the lunch bell rings, you step outside and "Lilly!" Hanako's voice strikes you at about the same time she does, half taking your arm and half tackling you. "R-ready to go?" It had occurred to you to go confront StuCo again, but you have Akira and Hanako both waiting on you now and you'd definitely rather not disappoint them again...

"Of course I'm ready. Let's go." You reply. Heading outside, you're greeted by loud "Hey, you two!"

"A-Akira!" Hanako peeps as Akira's strangely timed footsteps approach.

"Hey there, kiddo. This is a nice surprise. Lilly, you look a little ragged."

"Oh, ahahaha, I'm fine - messed up my uniform a little bit this morning. That's all."

"Okay then. Well, time to go."

With that, the three of you pile into Akira's car and blast down the mountain at horrendous speeds. A worry not helped at all that you could have sworn you heard a beer can open at least twice.

"You remember this place, right, guys?" Hanako gives a "y-yeah!" while you simply nod. A small karaoke bar on the edge of town. "A thought it might be nice to hear your singing voice again, Hanako, see if you've improved."

"B-b-but..."

"Oh don't worry, it's deserted at this time of day. You'll be fine. Besides, I'm sure Lilly would like it, too, wouldn't you?"

"I'd love to."

"O-ok." She agrees, perking up with your approval.

You all file in and find your seats while Hanako walks over to the machine and starts picking through songs.

"I didn't expect you'd bring her along..." Akira half-whispers to you, still seemingly fairly cheerful.

"Couldn't be helped. I felt bad about leaving her. Good thinking on your part."

"I aim to please."

"Ok, well, first things first. That drug you gave me was atropine - an alkaloid prescribed in serious cases of bradycardia. Only REALLY serious cases, since giving it to someone with a normal heart rate will make their heart race until it tears itself apart. It was commonly used as a poison in ancient Rome." The last piece of information wasn't really necessary, but Akira likes to show off a bit.

You feel rather unsettled, you had no idea that Hisao's heart problem could be this bad. And that was only one pill from a selection of seventeen...

"Of course, my spoils don't end there, I'm not about to let my darling sister fall for a bum." You move to protest this, but quickly realize the futility of doing so. She continues. "So I went and did some digging on 'Hisao Nakai'."

In the background, Hanako's found a song she likes and start singing along to it very lightly.

"What did you find?" You ask, curious at what Akira could have uncovered.

"Put together a decent personnel file for ya." She responds, sliding an envelope across the table. "I typed everything into Braille format this morning." She adds as you hear her stretch, cracking several bones before signaling for a drink.

You open the file and begin to run your fingers over the braille dots. Akira gives you a summary as you peruse the details.

"Hisao Nakai, age 18, suburbanite, average grades, no history of delinquency or drug abuse. Medical history is way cooler: Severe mitocardial infaction resulting from an undiagnosed congenital defect. His heart basically exploded on him. I looked everywhere in his file but couldn't find a cause." She concludes, sounding a little defeated.

"Isn't medical history confidential?" You ask.

"It's me."

"Fair enough, go on."

"His recovery lasted four months while they basically put the thing back together. They couldn't fix it all the way, though, hence the meds. I've got a full list of everything he's popping in there. During his stay he was suspected of developing Melancholic Depression but never diagnosed."

You're a little concerned Akira would've gone through these kind of lengths on such short notice.

"Akira... are you alright?" You ask as you hear her knocking back her third drink.

"More or less. Mostly just glad to be of help for once." She replies as she affectionately mashes your head a little. "It's a nice change to put my skills to a cause I actually care about."

She calls for another drink, but you put your hand on hers. "Try to take better care of yourself. Please."

She sighs and chuckles. "Alright... point taken. The boytoy keeps telling me the same thing."

Hanako's finished her song and you both clap.

"Encore!" Akira calls out.

"Um... D-do you really w-w-want m-me to?"

"Of course." You reply. "That was lovely." Which isn't actually a lie. It's true that you weren't paying attention to much of it, but the parts you heard were actually quiet nice. Hearing Hanako sing to you definitely makes for a much nicer background than your usual five-second loops of piano music.

"Anything else you'd like?" Akira asks.

"No, it's quite alright, Akira. You've done more than enough." You reassure her, squeezing her hand.

"Glad to be of service." She replies. "If you need anything else, don't hesitate to call."

And with that, a thoroughly flushed Hanako finishes her song and you both rise up clapping as she skips down to you both.

The rest of lunch is considerably more lighthearted in tone, with Hanako deciding to finish Akira's leftover drink and becoming mildly intoxicated after just one. Whether due to her low tolerance or Akira's choice of proof will never be known. Nonetheless, it's a small source of relief to both of you as she becomes less tense, even if a little awkward when she starts clinging to you and refuses to let go.

After Akira drops you back off, her driving strangely unaffected, you both decide to just take the rest of the day off and retire back to your dorm. While Hanako naps on your bed, you peruse the (likely stolen) files on Hisao. Today, battle lines were drawn and Akira got you what seems like the greatest gift you could have asked from her. Tomorrow, you and Hisao are scheduled to go shopping for Hanako's birthday. Tomorrow you'll see if you can make use of it.

# Part 4

Usually your internal clock is good enough to wake you up on its own, but today the screeching sound of your alarm is what kicks you awake, having stayed up late memorizing Hisao's file. Nonetheless, you're excited for today, so after chugging a cup of tea and a shot of whiskey, you're nice and ready to greet the day.

Selecting a casual outfit (after no small amount of internal debate, since this will be the first time Hisao's seen you in casual attire) and your third cane for today, you slip out of the female dorms.

It's quite early, easily two hours before you were scheduled to meet Hisao - you wanted to slip out before Hanako was awake since your gift-shopping is supposed to be a surprise.

As the cold morning air hits your face, you wonder what you should do to kill time until Hisao awakens.

Deciding that you'll probably not meet anyone interesting wandering around, or at least rationalizing it to yourself that way, you head over to the male dorms.

Finding Hisao's room, you have a seat outside his door and start casting about with your perceptions. The building's mostly silent - most guys at this school are usually quiet, you've noticed, not that you mind it.

Suddenly you detect a series of footsteps coming from the entryway. Remaining still, the footfalls seem unbalanced, staggered - as if a natural walking rhythm was being disrupted.

As they draw closer, you hear a voice call out, "Wait! Is someone there? You can't fool me! I can smell it! I can feel it! Is this an ambush? I'm warning you man! I've got pyrokinetic ninja skills, like that mummy guy from that one show! Show yourself!"

"Don't be alarmed, brethren. I'm undercover, here to bring you a message."

"Oh, thank god, man. I've been waiting for support. What's the passw-"

"Shh! They'll hear us."

"W-Wait what? Who?"

Pausing a moment to remember what Hanako told you the uniforms here look like, you reply in a grave tone. "The order, haven't you heard? They've mastered a new technology that can detect the speech of anyone who's wearing green."

"FUCKSHITJESUS" Comes a frightened reply, immediately compounded by the sound of tearing fabric. You don't wait for it to stop before continuing. "That's not all. There's going to be a bombing this afternoon, you have to get out to the school and trip the alarm system to alert everyone! NOW! Mankind is counting on you!"

"I'm on it sir!" He yells back and turns around, producing a loud crash as he runs straight into the wall.

"Make haste!" You call after him. "And remember to use a scorched earth policy when you hear our signal! It sounds exactly like police sirens!"

"Got it!" And with that, he disappears out the entranceway.

A stirring sound from Hisao's room. The noise seems to have awoken him.

You'd rather start the day off earlier if at all possible, so without missing a beat, you straighten yourself, flatten your clothes, and knock.

"Hisao? It's Lilly."

"O-oh. Give me a sec..."

Inside the room, you can hear a shuffling, and then the door eases open.

"Hey Lilly, you're here early." He's actually fairly coherent for someone who just woke up. So 'morning people' do exist after all...

"Good morning Hisao. I thought I heard you in there."

"I thought I heard, was there... Oh never mind, Kenji's probably just up to something boneheaded again.

'You have no idea, sweetie.' You muse to yourself.

"Give me a sec, I'll get ready."

You sit on his bed while he showers and changes. You've been here before, of course, but it's nice not to have a time limit and even nicer to be invited. Feeling out the room, you realize it's pretty spartan. He hasn't decorated or anything. Just books and pills, really. Sort of a depressing thought.

You detect Hisao's footfalls and turn your head towards him as he comes back through the door. "Sorry about that. I'm ready now. So, where to?"

"Oh, the bus stop. We can catch an earlier one. Also, there's a good place in the city as a breakfast spot."

"Sounds good."

You take his arm and let him lead you to the bus stop. In the still state of an off-day morning, it feels like you two are the only people left in the world. You really like that thought.

Waiting for the bus together is fairly uneventful for the first fifteen minutes or so. Then the school fire alarm goes off.

"What was-"

"Probably just another drill."

That explanation holds until the bus arrives. On the way down the mountain, you hear several sirens and Hisao says he saw a SWAT van hauling up towards Yamaku. You pay it no mind.

Once in the city, you have a bit of fun steering Hisao around for a while. Still, he's probably hungry and so are you, so you don't abuse that power and quickly locate an outdoor cafe.

Setting down, you take a moment to make a mental map of your surroundings - a common habit for blind people.

At the cusp of your hearing, you pick out a familiar voice. "...in ancient Rome the penalty for falling asleep on watch was death." Then a gurgling sound. "You didn't see that, right?" Another familiar voice answers. "I did not see anything." "Good kid."

"Hey Hisao, is Akira anywhere nearby?" You question.

"How can you pick ou- Oh! Yeah, just coming out of that office building, HEY!" He says as he rises.

"Hey you two! Fancy meeting you here!" She calls back, in that same manner. She comes over and joins you two.

"What happened to your jacket?" Hisao asks.

"Oh, er... 'something' spilled on me."

She hastily segues into introducing Hisao to Hiseaki and asks what you two are doing in the city, when you mention Hanako's birthday, her tone goes down a notch.

"Hm, hey, Hisao, can you give us a minute?" Akira says, not waiting for a response before lifting you up. "Folks didn't call you yet?" She asks once you're out of Hisao's earshot.

"No, they didn't. Has something happened?" You ask.

"Kinda." She explains the state of your aunt and conveys the message that you've both been summoned back to Scotland.

"So, yeah. We may have to hold Hanako's party a little bit early."

At this, you make a nose of discontent, which Akira picks up on right away.

"I can try to make some kind of excuse for you, but unfortunately, I can't ignore the summons. So if you prefer I can pick up Hanako for something between the two of us, but I won't be able to make the party proper if you don't wanna move it."

She puts a hand on your shoulder. "Yeah, sorry about that."

This is probably your best ever attempt at reconciling with your family, but on the other hand, your family here might need you. Especially Hanako, given how she was last year. And of course, Hisao...

"Sorry, Akira, but I've got too much going on here right now to just up and leave. I'll seriously owe you if you can get me off the hook." You state as gently as you can.

"Hehe! No worries, you won't owe me anything." She says as she ruffles your hair. "I'm sure I can come up with something."

She actually took that way better than you'd imagined. If anything, she seems cheerier.

"I'll call Hanako and see when she's free. Just keep going as you were."

"Thanks, Akira." You reply, hugging her.

"I won't be able to do much of anything for about a week, but you can still call me, of course. So, how are things?"

"Well, Hisao's been opening up more and more. I think that's a good thing." You mumble that last bit quietly.

"Hehe, aw..." Akira retorts affectionately.

"Although... Well, some others have been getting in my way in some minor ways."

"Shizune?"

"I guess it wasn't that hard a deduction, was it?"

"Well..." Her hand brushes down your arm to your cane. "You didn't use this one, I'm guessing."

"Not yet."

"Don't. At all if you can avoid it." She hugs you and whispers into your ear. "No need to mess up your clothes if you can get someone else to off themselves or each other."

She releases you and then casts her voice over your shoulder. "Hey you two? Ready to go, Hideaki?"

You hadn't heard them approach, fixed as you were on Akira's speech.

"See you guys later! Ahaha!" She departs.

"What was that all about?" Hisao asks, puzzled.

"Oh, well, my aunt's fallen ill, I'm afraid. My family wanted me to return to Scotland, but I declined it."

"Why?"

You don't answer, after a minute, you change the subject. "So? Did you have any ideas about Hanako?"

"Oh! Yes, actually. While I found this antique shop that had a chess set I thought she might like, also... Eh, never mind." It's his turn to be silent. You'd like to know what 'else' there was, but it's only fair since you just did the same thing.

"Really? What other kinds of things did they have there?" You inquire.

"Dolls, porcelain, instruments, and the like."

"My, my... actually it sounds like you've found something, can you lead me there?"

Taking your arm, Hisao leads you down a couple blocks into a quiet section of the city.

You spend some time picking through the antiques with care, asking Hisao what they're like.

A lovely series of dolls, some stuffed animals, a strange screaming book bound in human skin and bones, pocketwatches, a rack of classic-era dresses in the back, sets of victorian silverware, and the like.

You select a large plush teddy bear and exit with Hisao. Your shopping effectively over, the rest of your day is spent meandering about. It doesn't really matter what you're talking about anymore, so much as just spending time with Hisao.

Upon returning back to school, the state is utter cacophony. As you let Hisao lead you through the gate, you hear sirens, the hiss of fire hoses, lots of yelling, talking, and running around. Suddenly, Hisao stops dead. "Rin?"

"Hm?" You inquire.

"Um... I think Rin's in custody. One sec."

"No, I'll go with you, I'm curious what's going on, too." After all, how could anyone not be?

Together, you push through the crowd. After a minute, at about groin-level, you hear a voice. "Oh, it's Hisao."

"Um... Rin, what the hell happened here?"

"Beats me. A lot of people are asking me that."

"Um... do you have an idea of what happened?"

"I have a lot of ideas. Like that one about the inside-out walrus. But what everyone's saying is that one of the students had a psychotic episode, broke into the art room wearing only a scarf, beat the teacher to death with a crowbar saying he was the antichrist, and set the building on fire... So I guess club is gonna be cancelled tomorrow."

"So, why are they asking YOU about all this?" you ask, feeling a strong surge of pity for whatever police interrogator gets dumped with the task of trying to get logical answers out of Rin.

"Oh, I was in the room."

"You w- So how could you not have a good idea of what happened?" Hisao asks.

"I was taking a nap."

"You... slept through someone getting beaten to death?"

"Apparently."

Realizing that this is getting nowhere, you squeeze Hisao's arm. "We should be on our way."

"Oh, right." He exclaims, remembering that you're both still holding you large packages, he takes yours. "Where to? Where are we gonna put the gifts so Hanako wouldn't find them?"

"Oh, let's go to my room. I think I know where to put them so Hanako won't see."

"Ok then."

You make your way across the school grounds, your hearing picking up a series of crazed demands to be released before The Order devours him.

The dorms themselves are mercifully empty, with most of the students being either outside reveling in the school's destruction or inside barricaded against the world. Hanako is likely in the latter category.

Reaching your room, you lead Hisao inside. It occurs to you that this is the first time he's seen your room. It's the same as ever to you, but you can't help but feeling a little anxious since you can't tell how it 'looks'.

"Wow, you keep it clean in here, where do you want these?"

"Oh, that crate by the window is empty, just stick them in there."

A shuffling as Hisao stows the gifts and you move to close the door. After that, you hear the flopping of a paper envelope.

Hisao's folder.

That you left on your nightstand.

"What's this?" He asks with only a passing interest.

Inwardly, you remember that Hisao can't read braille and breathe a huge sigh of relief. If you'd had items in your room instead of paperwork, a mistake like that could have cost you.

# Part 5

Feeling ever so lucky for being a polyglot, you wave off the discovery that may have otherwise been a disaster. "Oh, that's just some history stuff I need to memorize. Would you care for some tea?"

"Sure." Hisao replies.

You set about preparing it while Hisao himself remains abnormally quiet. After you hand him his cup and saucer, he breaks it. "You know - that was nice, today."

"I thought so, too, Hisao."

He chuckles a bit - the first time you've actually heard him laugh, even if it does lack passion, it's a very nice change. "Really, I mean it. After everything that happened, leaving my old life, finding out about my heart, languishing in the hospital for a third of the year, getting transferred here... I've honestly felt overwhelmed."

You remain silent, appreciating that it finally seems like he's able to talk to you.

"It was nice, today, with you. I actually felt relaxed for the first time since... I can't even remember." He pauses for a moment; you realize the weight of what he’s saying. Something as simple as today – heading out to shop for a friend’s birthday… It’s probably the most normal thing he’s done since his incident.

"Would... would you like to do it again sometime?" You ask him, doing your absolute best to suppress your nervous trembling.

He remains silent for what seems like seven years, but is more like a second or two in reality. "Yeah, I'd like that Lilly."

The rest of your time together that night passes in a dreamlike blur, your heart essentially pounding in your eardrums. After he bids you goodnight and retires back to his own room, you flop down on your bed and breathe a contented sigh.

Going around together like that... it's practically a date, isn't it? You let that thought carry you off to sleep.

The next day, you wake up, still in an incredibly good mood, pick out your two canes, and almost skip out the door. Your morning passes uneventfully and before you know it, it's lunchtime. You realize that you and Hisao never actually agreed where and when to meet, so naturally, you want to find him and ask him. On the other hand, you know that Hanako might have been missing you yesterday and you'd rather not have her feel like you were shunning her, especially with her birthday morosity fast approaching...

Deciding that Hisao won't mind you dropping by his dorm later on, and also to avoid the risk of the Student Council spoiling your good mood, you head to the library to pick up Hanako.

"Yuuko?" You ask upon arrival, who greets you in the way of her people by jumping up and smashing her head against her desk. This girl really needs some fucking Xanax.

"Oh! H-Hi Lilly."

"Pardon me, but have you seen H-"

"LILLY!" A happy cry comes from across the room, compounded by a pace that can only be described as a sprint. Hanako reaches and hugs you. In spite of yourself, you giggle.

"My, my. Never mind, Yuuko, I seem to have found her." Taking her by the hand, the two of you walk to your tea room. Once there, you set about your typical clockwork process of tea preparation.

"So Lilly," Hanako perks up eventually, still seemingly happy just to be in your company again. "Where were you yesterday? I... um... went by your room... o-one or twice..."

"Oh..."

"Oh, Akira had something she needed to talk to me about." You say - which isn't really a lie. She did. You just didn't know that until after you'd left.

"Oh... Y-Yeah... I h-h-heard about that." She says, lowering her voice almost to a whisper.

'You did?' - You don't say it but you think it, allowing Hanako some silence to continue.

"Yeah... Akira called. I'm really sorry about your aunt."

"It's fine." You reply without missing a beat. "I barely even knew her."

"Um... Lilly?" She asks. "Why... why are you staying?"

After pausing for a moment to think your answer, you smile sweetly at Hanako and say "My family here needs me."

Hanako don't press into the subject any further, but she doesn't seem at all dissatisfied with your answer. The rest of your lunch period together passes in tranquility.

After class, you go look for Hisao. Where to look for him, though?

You know he's something of a bookworm, just like Hanako, so the library's a safe bet. You could also probably try his room without any anomalies now that his strange neighbor's been incarcerated in a mental institution. It's possible that he lingered after class as well - but it's also possible that StuCo did as well...

You head over to Hisao's dorm room, having a better feel for the male dorms by now than you really should, to be honest.

The floor still has some of the debris from when the paramedics retrieved Kenji that first time, so you're doubly sure you're in the right place.

You navigate up to his room and listen closely. You don't hear any kind of activity. It's still not so late, but it isn't inconceivable that he's napping. It's also possible he's not there.

You knock on the door. "Hisao?" No answer. You try again, but slightly harder. Only slightly since if he truly has fallen asleep you know he'll have a difficult time getting back to it thanks to his pills. Again, no answer.

You'd rather not come across as possessive, even if you are... maybe just a little. So you call it at that and retire to your own dorm for the night, making a mental resolve to check up on him first thing tomorrow.

[Intermission]

At the nurse’s office, Hisao lays on a bed, sleeping connected to an EKG. In the next room, two figures are having a conversation.

“Man, just my luck. I finally get him to run with me and I push him too hard… Heh, I guess I just blew my chances, didn’t I?”

“Not necessarily. Now, he’s all the more aware of his weakness – he’ll seek out help to strengthen himself. And who else who he ask but you in that matter?”

“Eheh! Ehehehe!” An impish giggle. “Yeah! You’re right! I still have a chance! And that’s all I need!”

The male figure - tall, well built, wearing a long coat rises from his chair and faces the small figure sprawled on the office cot. “Your quest to win a competition in order to follow in your dead father’s footsteps and possibly find love along the way… Why do I feel like we’ve done this before?”

“I dunno? Maybe because it’s just an awesome wish to have?”

The standing figure chuckles. “Well then, REJOICE EMIYA SHIROU your wish will soon be granted.”

That same impish giggle.

[Intermission]

“S-sho when I ashked Lillyyyyy why she didn’t want to leaveee… HIC!” Hanako slurs after finishing her third glass of whiskey. “She shaid she couldn’t leave her family here!”

Holding their own little succession of birthday celebrations to make up for missing a party, Akira is seated just beside Hanako on a plush couch in the small apartment in Yamaku she’s been using as a base. On the table are two bottles of whiskey, someone’s shoe, four sets of keys, an old storybook with a Czech title and an illustration of a monster of the cover, a half-eaten cake, and three cell-phones.

“Really?! She said that, huh?” Akira replies, having had at least twice as many as Hanako, but seemingly completely unaffected, her crimson eyes still as sharp as ever.

“Y-Yeah! She said that! That’s ush, right?!”

“Yup, yup, kiddo!” Akira says, patting her head gently. “We’re the only family she’s got in Japan.”

“Lilly… caresh…” She trails off and suddenly begins snuggling into Akira’s modest chest with a broad smile. “She cares about us… We’re her family…”

Akira, well accustomed to much worse drunken behavior, isn’t taken aback and delicately strokes Hanako’s hair.

“Yes, yes we are…” She speaks softly. “We’re the only family she has. Us and maybe Hisao if she wants him…” She reaches into her jacket pocket and delicately pulls out her ticket to Scotland, staring at it with a serene smile. “We don’t need anyone else.”

[End intermission]

You awaken the next morning well before your usual time. In spite of yourself, you were worried about Hisao the whole night, a worry sleep did little to alleviate. Around midnight last night, you heard Hanako stumble back into her room, a fairly common occurrence wherever Akira is concerned, but otherwise the night was dominated by silence.

You reviewed Hisao's already-memorized file, readied your canes, paced back and forth. Your worries were probably unfounded, but you couldn't help it.

Realizing there's no way you'll be getting back to sleep anytime soon, you prepare yourself for the day, donning your school uniform and figuring out how to carry all three of your canes. (No small task, given that the rapier doesn't fold down and the third one doesn't actually function as a navigational cane - just resembles one.)

Coming out of your room, you cast about and hear dead silence. You wonder what to do... That school's nursing faculty is open 24 hours a day, you could check there if you're truly worried. You could stake out Hisao's room. Or you could try to check on Hanako, though it may well be more merciful to just let her sleep off Akira's influence.

Decided to allay your fears that Hisao's been injured, you head over to the Nurse's office. The school is silent in the early morning and eventually you find your way there. Opening the door, amazingly, you find the Nurse wide away at this ridiculous hour.

"Hello there, young Lady. What brings you here at this hour?" He asks in a chipper tone.

"Pardon, but I haven't been able to find a... 'friend' of mine. Hisao Nakai?"

"Oh, you're looking for Hisao? He's fine, don't worry."

That statement actually makes you more concerned somehow. "He's... HERE?"

"Yeah - there really wasn't much need for it but I kept him here overnight anyways just to be on the safe side."

Feeling your blood turn to ice water, a million thoughts, questions and ideas flow through your mind right now. If you didn't think before you spoke you'd probably sound like Rin.

"What happened to him?" You settle on.

"Minor heart flutter during conditioning."

"Conditioning?" You echo in a puzzled tone.

The nurse gives a cursory explanation of the need to strengthen atrophied muscle - especially in heart defects. He then adds "I guess he pushed himself too hard for some reason."

You feel sick, wondering what got into him.

He opens a door to the regular beeping sound of an EKG. Making your way over to him, you gently stroke his face. It's Hisao alright - a very peaceful visage about him.

"If you wanna know more about what happened, you can go talk to Emi, she was with him at the time." 'With him'? The echo runs through your thoughts. "She’ll probably be out for her morning run any minute now. Or you can just wait here with him. It's no bother either way. I'm gonna discharge him as soon as he wakes up anyhow."

As badly as you want to go confront Emi and hear the words of truth from a broken trachea, Hisao is much more important. You pull a chair next to his bedside and seat yourself. The nurse leaves and closes the door.

You simply sit there, in utter silence, for what must be over an hour in the early morning, gently stroking his face periodically. He truly is handsome...

Eventually, the chirping of birds tells you that it must be dawn. A slight stirring from Hisao, then... "L-Lilly?"

"Hisao?" You ask in an earnestly concerned voice, almost breaking, one that surprises even you. "H-How do you feel?"

"Lilly..." Hisao repeats your name. Normally you like that, but now there are more important things to worry about. Suddenly, you feel a pressure as he squeezes your hand.

"I'm fine. Seriously, it's ok." You realize you couldn't have been hiding your concern too well.

"I was just here for observation. I didn't even want to come here at all, but Emi insisted on it."

"Emi? What?"

Hisao gives a laugh. "I tried to race her. Guess I felt nostalgic for the days when I could do stuff like that..." He trails off, then he gently lifts a hand up and strokes your face. "Sorry I worried you."

You can't ask any more questions after that. Certainly, you want to, but your voice doesn't want to work. You just stand there, holding his hand to your face.

After a while (but not long enough) the nurse comes in. "Hey there, sunshine. I told you he'd be alright."

You simply nod in response.

"Mind giving us a bit now? I need to do a quick checkup before I let him go."

You nod and very delicately, so slightly that it could be easily mistaken for an accident, plan a small kiss on Hisao's hand before releasing it.

You exit the room, feeling much better now to know that Hisao's alright.

Burning inside you, you feel an unquenchable rage. With an anger born of tranquil fury, you head down to the athletic field, listening to the sounds of birds chirping and the early-bird students shuffling to class. When you arrive, you find the field empty - absent Emi's distinctive leg clacking.

You grit your teeth and clench your hand into a fist around your cane. Today she's evaded you, it seems. There though, feeling your face warmed by sunlight, you make a silent oath to yourself that her transgression WILL be avenged.

'thankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgodthankgod' - It's the only thing on your mind for several minutes. After a bit though, other thoughts begin to surface. Thoughts about how you should handle this latest development.

[Elsewhere]

Emi sits perched upon a cot as the Nurse inspects her prosthetics, an almost disappointed look on her face.

"Looks like you put a bit more wear on yourself than usual today." He states matter-of-factly.

"Couldn't be helped." She retorts. "I waited at the field just as you said, but she didn't show, so I just threw a few extra laps in."

"I see..." He purrs, finishing the alignments. "Either I underestimated her concern for him or her sense of self-control..." He then looks up into those saucer-like eyes. "OR, a third option is that I overestimated your sense of patience."

Emi's sole retort is to blow a raspberry and look pouty.

[Elsewhere]

Sitting in the student council room, two pairs of eyes, one blue and one gold, are watching the sun rise together.

[So, Shicchan, why have you been keeping us sidelined?]

[There was simply no need to intervene.]

[Does that mean you're giving up?] Misha signs, looking almost hopeful.

['Give up'? Have you forgotten who I am?] She snaps back with a choppy series of gestures.

[Shicchan...]

Shizune gives a sharp exhale and then walks over to the desk, settling herself down and tenting her fingers for a moment.

[Right now, the balance of power around Hisao is extremely delicate. There's something to be said for daring, but daring without control is stupidity.]

[What do you mean, Shicchan?]

[Letting your enemies fight each other while you hang back and watch is often a better tactic than even the most carefully coordinated offensive.]

Misha cocks an eyebrow. [So what do you want us to do, now, then?]

A thin smile creeps over Shizune's face.

[End elsewhere]

# Part 6

Your two-hour-long nemesis having evaded you, you stand at the edge of the athletic field for a while, basking in the sunlight's warmth as you make your oath to shield Hisao from all who would steal him away from you.

Unfortunately, in the process of basking and oath-making, you forget to check the time until you hear the first bell ring. Fuck.

Invoking the ancient Japanese ritual of late-class-transit, you jam a piece of toast into your mouth and haul your ass across the school grounds.

You arrive without having lost too much time and thankfully your teacher forgives it. Class itself seems to pass in slow motion, concerned as you are over Hisao's brief stint in the infirmary.

Finally, the lunch bell rings and you exit the classroom to the sound of "Lilly!" and a Hanako hugging.

She clings to you for a moment before saying. "Um... L-Lilly? You l-l-look a little pale. Is something the matter?"

"I'll tell you later, Hanako. For now, I see to check on something."

"Oh... O-ok." She squeaks and releases you. "I-I'll s-see you after class..."

Leaving Hanako, you make your way over to Hisao's classroom, keeping your hearing cocked for his voice. You hear nothing of note in the hallways save a few words of praise for whoever trashed the cafeteria a couple days ago.

Arriving in front of the classroom door, you straighten your collar before entering.

"Hisao?" You call inside, stepping cautiously through the doorway.

"WAHAHAHA! Hey class rep! Fancy seeing you here!"

Misha was the only one to greet you, so you can conclude Hisao's not in the room. Shizune and Misha might know since they have class with him, although you loathe the prospect of asking them for information.

You push aside your animosity with StuCo for a moment. Really, it's only Shizune that you actually dislike.

"Misha?" You ask sweetly. "Have you seen Hisao anywhere?"

"Oh! Hicchan?" She replies exuberantly. "I saw Emi snag him when he went out to the hall."

"I see." You acknowledge, trying to keep a poker face. "Do you know where they might have gone?"

"Hm...well, she usually eats up on the roof, so maybe you could check for him there?"

"Thank you." You turn and leave the classroom, but a skipping rhythm of footsteps from behind stops you.

"Um... Lilly? Is Hicchan ok? He seemed a little out of it in class."

Strangely, you only heard one set of footsteps. Is Misha asking this for her own benefit?

You decide that if Shizune wanted to know herself, she'd never actually ASK you about it. This has to be just Misha.

"Well..." You begin before giving a short description of Hisao's brief infirmary stint after running with Emi.

Making sure to protect Hisao's privacy to at least some degree, you lie and say you don't know how long he was there or what caused it. You don't mention that you spent a few hours at his bedside either.

"I see..." Misha says, actually using a quiet tone of voice for what must be the first time ever. "Thanks!" She calls out at her normal volume before vanishing back into the classroom.

Departing Misha, you ascend the stairwell as quickly as possible and open the door.

"Oh! Hi there Lilly." Hisao's voice instantly greets you. You feel a small wave of relief wash over you.

"Hey Hey!" Emi's voice comes in the same direction as Hisao's. "Come to join us for lunch up here?" A feeling of relief immediately soured.

"Always room for one more." Hisao adds. "Rin, can you scooch over?"

"As opposed to what? Pulling myself? Cartwheeling?"

You decide to swallow your disdain for now at least.

"Of course, it'd be my pleasure to join you all."

Rin vacates her seat and you sit down next to Hisao. On the small benches, you're almost pressed up against him. A nice feeling. And also Hisao decides to share his own lunch with you when you remember you didn't actually bring one, which is equally nice.

The conversation is significantly less interesting. Rin and Emi seemingly having mastered the ancient art of speaking passionately about absolutely nothing. Emi talks about pirates a bit, Rin interjects with comments that seem to bear no relation to sentient thought, such as whether Shiki can kill servants. You just stay quiet and enjoy your proximity to Hisao for the time being. Eventually, the lunch period ends and you all shuffle down the stairs.

"See you tomorrow, Hisao!" Emi calls out as she disappears down a hallway with Rin in tow.

He doesn't reply, so you assume he waved to her or made a glance or something.

You only have a minute or two before you get back to class...

Holding onto Hisao's arm, you stop him.

"Hey Hisao..." You say, unsure of what question you actually want to ask first.

"Hm? It's ok, I told you, I'm fine." He guesses at what you want to talk about, lightly tapping his chest. "I pushed myself way harder than I should have. Emi says it's common the first time someone starts exercising. She'll be keeping an eye on me next time."

"'Next time'?" You ask, doing your best to keep any murderous intent out of your voice.

"Oh, well, the nurse says I've got to do some kind of regular physical activity and Emi decided to make me her running partner. For the mornings, at least, she's down there all the time." He adds with a slight chuckle.

You mean to pursue this further, but the bell rings.

"Ah! Dammit! I'll see you later, Lilly!" He calls as he disappears down the hall.

The second half of the day passes much like the first: in slow motion. That seems to happen a lot when you'd rather be somewhere else.

When class finally ends, you have a few afternoon options to choose from.

You decide you have a bone to pick with Emi before you do anything else.

Recalling what Hisao said, you realize you should check the athletic field for her and walk there at a leisurely pace, letting the school grounds clear themselves out as all the student leave to go do homework or smoke pot in the bathroom.

Sure enough, as you draw closer, you hear the distinctive clacking of Emi's running blades.

"Heya, my favorite foreigner!" She greets you after a moment, dashing over. "Something I can help you with?"

"About what happened with Hisao this morning... You were with him?"

"Oh yeah..." She says, her voice losing its chipper tone. "That was scary..."

"What the hell were you thinking? Making him race you?" You say a bit snappishly.

"No harm in it..."

"Do you even KNOW about his heart?" He say almost in a growl.

Silence for a moment, then she responds with an edge to her voice. "Better than you do, I'd say."

"What... Do you mean by that?"

"The hell do you think I mean?" She snaps back. "Hisao needs to strengthen his heart if he wants to live past thirty! You don't care about that?!" Genuinely angry, she continues. "Have YOU been doing anything to help him heal?! Have you done anything at all for him besides make him tea?!"

Silence.

“You dare profess to tell me how to love?!” You cry, pulling your cane. “Mongrel! KNEEL BEFORE THE QUEEN OF SCOTLAND!” You bellow, drawing your rapier in one hand and nunchaku in the other, you lock onto to Emi and launch a double-pronged attack. However, launching is all you’re able to do as a lightning-fast body slam from a seemingly unprepared Emi smashes into your forearm, snaking through your initiative strike.

“Fine! Have it your way!” She says, almost laughing as she rolls back up into a crouched position. Concealed as part of Emi’s prosthetics, the girl breaks out a pair of thin-bladed cutlasses and spins them through the air, bracing for your onslaught.

Keeping your distance for the time being, you launch a series of randomly-angled attacks with your nunchaku, all of which pass through the air and ground. Weaving through attacks with easily enough force to shatter bones, Emi simply blows a raspberry at you.

“Speed like that’s no good. You have to do it like THIS.”

A small explosion kicks up as her leg-blades tear deep cuts in the ground and she catapults past your first cane. As Emi raises her twin blades, a flurry of slashes come at you. A rapier is not a defensive weapon, but thankfully Emi’s short limbs limit her angles of attack. After an almost rhythmic series of metallic clashes: Thuck. Emi sinks one of her leg blades into your gut. It feels as though you’ve been hit by a car – you’re sent reeling back several meters.

“Eheheheh!” Emi presses her advantage and closes in on you before you’ve managed to recover, pushing that perfectly conditioned body of hers to an incredible speed. You thrust your rapier squarely at her chest as she approaches, but at the last second she simply bends her upper half out of the way with a seemingly unnatural flexibility. Realizing the need to buy yourself breathing room, you hurl the grip of your nunchaku-cane with your other hand. With an impish giggle, Emi vanishes in an explosion of kicked-up earth.

As you rise, now wielding only one weapon, you mentally register Emi now more than ten meters away, casually bouncing one of her leg-blades up and down. You weren’t even able to track her path. In horror, you realize you know this technique. Akira mentioned it a long time ago; “Shukuchi” – a term you never actually believed in.

It goes by various other names in eastern martial arts, but the ideology remains the same: a means of instantly bringing oneself from complete rest to their full sprinting speed using extremely powerful leg muscles. To an observer, it’s said to look as if you’ve teleported a few meters. Against this health-devil, you realize you’ve got no chance of winning in a conventional battle situation.

No choice, then.

You draw your third cane, your deadliest. The reason you and Akira have kept referring to is as ‘that’ or ‘the third cane’ is because you’re not sure what exactly to call it: the thing doesn’t really resemble any weapon in human history.

Neodymium is a rare-earth magnet that became commercially available in the latter half of the 20th century. The magnetic field generated is several orders of magnitude stronger than that of conventional magnets. The attractive force between two magnets larger than a few centimeters is enough to break bones if you get pinched.

That’s your third cane: Thirty-three neodymium needles coated with a ceramic armor shell. Manipulating these with a field generator that forms the grip of your cane, you can fire a lethal barrage.

The reason you’re not supposed to use it is because magnets are not telekinesis, no matter how badly Hollywood would have you believe otherwise. They can either ‘attract’ or ‘repel’ – that’s it. And in this scenario, ‘attract’ means ‘You have thirty-three fucking knives flying directly at you’, so if you make a mistake in trajectory you might skewer yourself. Also, the amount of energy needed to sustain such a strong field is tremendous: even with your hi-tech battery you’ll only get about four minutes before you need to recharge it.

Pulling the trigger, you fire your barrage of needles as if from a gigantic shotgun. The air hisses and whistles as 33 sleek armored needles are flung out in a wide spiraling pattern, with the center fixed on Emi.

It’s an unavoidable attack, or at least it should be. If you were fighting anyone else but Emi, it would be.

Impossibly, her small frame and perfect physique allow her to evade your strike, hurling herself low and to the side. Reversing the setting to ‘attract’, you hope to catch her with a backside attack, but with her EX-ranked agility she avoids it; snaking through the lethal barrage as the air hisses around her.

“QUEEN OF SCOTLAND! DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH CANES?” She cries as she closes the distance between you in the blink of an eye.

You have time for one final attack and blast your hail of needles but even at this nearly point-blank range she avoids it, seemingly bending space itself around her by means of shear speed.

Shunk.

With a braced upward cut, Emi scissors her blades together and takes your hand off at the elbow. Before the pain of it has even fully hit you, she keeps the momentum of her attack going and body-slams into your torso. Unable to scream on account of being winded, you tumble together, with Emi controlling her balance and landing atop you in a straddling position. Giggling impishly, she rains a hail of savage hacking blows down on you.

In the moment of clarity one experiences before death, you realize so many of your mistakes. Mistakes such as beginning a deathmatch with Emi in the first place when you had no idea of her capabilities. The terrain you chose for it: a flat brightly lit field without any cover, where someone with sight would have the greatest possible advantage over a blind person, where there were no avenues for escape beyond trying to outrun a track star, and most importantly where Emi could make full use of her insane speed and agility.

As all feeling in your body in replaced by an icy coldness, Akira’s waning echoes in your mind – that it was best to win your battles without actually fighting.

“Ehehe” You make out that same impish giggle, then. CRACK. A final stroke of a cutlass splits your skull.

[Bad end]

[Continuation]

Your bloody body lies still along the grass as you experience the taste of death, then...

Flash. "THIS... ISN'T... REALLY HAPPENING!!!!"

You scream out, doubtless drawing strange looks from passing students.

Heart racing, you settle yourself as you quickly walk away from the school entrance.

Getting bad vibes from the track field, you take a swig of liquid courage and head over to the female dorms to go spend some time with Hanako.

Her door springs open after just one knock and she greets you with her customary Lilly-squeak. It's good to know that her birthday blues haven't started affecting her yet...

She leads you into her room and you both sit down on her bed together. She puts her arms around you and nuzzles into your arm a bit.

"So Lilly..." She asks after a moment. "What was the matter earlier today?"

"Well, actually..." You bring Hanako up to speed on the events of this morning, how Hisao got hurt due to Emi's carelessness.

"I see... So that's why he wasn't in class earlier..."

"What? You KNEW?!" You yell in surprise. Hanako nearly jumps through the ceiling.

"I-I-I k-knew t-t-t-that he w-wasn't in c-class." She almost whispers. "I'm s-sorry I didn't say anything, you never asked..."

Taking everything about this scenario in, you feel a mix of emotions; guilt, anger, longing, kinship, love, determination... So many thoughts and feelings run through you before you turn your inner focus back to Hanako.

Hanako seems genuinely sorry for not telling you, which you are not at all happy about. But on the other hand, how was she supposed to know about how important Hisao was to you?

You get the feeling that keeping her in the dark might be unwise, but at the same time, you're not sure of her own feelings, either.

"Hanako, I'm sorry..." You speak softly as you draw her into a hug and rock her back and forth a little. "I..."

Your heart catches in your throat for a moment, but you push through it.

"I... love him..." You whisper. "I love Hisao."

Silence permeates the room for a moment that seems like a year, then Hanako reaches her arms around you.

"Lilly..." You feel her head shift and realize she must be looking at your face. You don't even need sight to be able to tell that you're blushing. "If he'll make you happy, that's all I need."

She snuggles up against you. You feel as if a weight was lifted off your chest now that you've actually said it. And even better is the fact that Hanako accepts.

The rest of your night is spent talking about Hisao. You tell Hanako of the time you've spent with him and some of the things you've been doing in your quest to make him yours.

Hanako confesses that she had a feeling about that already. "But... I'm happy that you still made time for me."

She goes on to talk about how she's been spending time with him at in the library - getting book recommendations on things like chemistry or physics as well as novels. How they sometimes play chess together. His behavior in class... The rest of the night is spent filling each other in on all the blanks you've both been leaving.

"He really seems nice... I'm happy for you..."

[Elsewhere]

At the airport, Akira, temporarily a brunette, steps through the customs check and hands over an immaculate fake passport. After a moment of checking, she's warmly welcomed home.

She hasn't slept in easily 36 hours, but pushes through it. This was something that had to be done.

Reaching the cell-receptive part of the airport, she checks her phone. No calls from Lilly, so that's good, she supposes.

Walking out to the parking lot, she makes a mental note to call her sister first thing in the morning. She's had something of an epiphany.

She'd done a bit of reading on the long flight, pouring over Hisao's dossier over and over.

Something jumped out at her perusing his medical records. Something she hadn't noticed before. Something which might help answer some of the riddles.

There was one name that showed up more than any others. One person who saw Hisao more than anyone else, but wasn't even related to him.

One name.

"Iwanako"

[Elsewhere]

Emi sits on her bed with Rin, who has a long black bag slung over her shoulder.

"So, it looks like Lilly might be my main rival here..." She concludes.

"Cool." Comes Rin's flat reply. "Since art club's been canceled, I've got free time to help you with."

"Glad to hear it, Rin - the Nurse said something similar."

"I'll start making our tie-dye camouflage tomorrow."

"Rin... Where the HELL is that gonna help us blend in? Do you think we'll be going into battle at a Grateful Dead concert?"

Rin looks up, as if pondering this possibility. "So what did you have in mind, then?"

Emi responds with her devilish smile.

[End elsewhere]

Awakening the next morning, you feel more relaxed than you have these last few days. It was kind of Hanako to hear you out.

Dressing and arming yourself for the day, you wonder if you should drop by Hanako's room for an early morning tea. It's been a little while since you've done that together.

Hisao's condition still bugs you, even though you have his history, you're no doctor. You debate dropping by the nurse's office to ask him about what 'conditioning' might actually entail.

As for Hisao himself, you know he'll be training with Emi this morning, so dropping by his room would be pointless since it'd be empty. Actually, so would Emi's if you wanted to have a look through there... Though that has risks for obvious reasons.

You decide it would be nice to go see Hanako. Readying yourself, you leave your room and knock on her door.

"Hanako? Are you awake?"

No response.

"Hey, you should be getting up for class soon, anyways..."

No response.

You keep this up for a couple minutes, getting the same result. Deciding that she's overslept, or at least hoping that's the case, you leave and head to class.

Taking your breakfast in the outdoor cafeteria that the school hastily set up after you and Misha wrecked the old one is actually a nice change. Still, the environment has a bittersweet flavor to it.

It seems rather quiet right now. Between getting into all sorts of fights, doting on Hisao, and trying not to forget Hanako, right now, having no real obligations is actually a lonely feeling...

Deciding that you should let Akira know recent developments, you get out your phone and dial her.

Elsewhere, Akira awakens to the sound of your ringtone in someone's bathtub, clutching a slotted spoon in one hand and wearing a bloodstained tie around her head like a bandana. After a moment, she picks up.

"Hello?" You hear her voice.

"Good morning, Akira, I hope I didn't wake you." You hear a slight shuffling on the other end.

"Eh, I needed to be woken up anyways." Then you hear a child's voice. "Hey lady, why were you in our bathroom?" A gunshot.

"Sorry about that. So how are you? Is everything alright?"

You launch into an explanation of how you've been these past couple days, ending with Hisao's heart trouble and Hanako.

"Hm..." She says, analyzing everything you've told her. "Emi Ibarazaki... I'll try to gather some intel on her. I should be in Yamaku by later tonight, so we can talk at length then."

You breathe a contented sigh. "Thanks Akira, I'm really sorry about asking you for all this when you're getting ready to leave for Scotland..."

"Oh, somehow I doubt that'll be an issue. Anyways, try to keep things calm for right now. Rushing in without intel is never a smart move. Which reminds me..." She pauses. "Has Hisao ever mentioned anyone named Iwanako?"

Your turn to be silent as you run back over everything he's said. "No. Why? Who is that?"

"No idea. Going over Hisao's visitors list while he was in the hospital, she saw him more times than his own parents. But I can't find any connection between the two..." She gives a yawn and then continues. "Though I haven't really had a chance to do any real digging lately... Hm..."

After a moment of internal debate, you decide. "Never mind this Iwanako for right now. If she was a real factor, I'd definitely have at least heard about her. Emi's a much more immediate threat."

"Yeah, you're right." She replies. "I'll get in to Yamaku sometime this evening. We can grab dinner together and do some recon. Sound like a plan?"

"You're the best, sis."

And with that, you hang up. Class goes by in its usual blur. You're really starting to wonder why you even bother showing up.

Finally, when the lunch bell rings, you step outside and "Hey Lilly."

You clasp your hands in front of you in mild surprise. That's not Hanako's voice...

"Hisao?"

"Yup, that's me." A moment of awkward silence, then "Hey... Um... Do you wanna grab lunch together?"

# Part 7

Doing your best not to outwardly jump for joy at Hisao's invitation, you immediately take his arm and let him lead you off.

It's not like this sort of after-class pickup is unknown to you thanks to Hanako, but having Hisao do it makes for a pleasant change of pace.

Sadly, the mood sours a bit as events unfold.

He doesn't talk much on your way to the temporary cafeteria, and even after you arrive he doesn't say much of anything apart from when you both grab something marginally edible and find your seats.

You manage to make some small talk, but he seems distant somehow...

"Hisao?" You ask delicately. "Is something the matter?"

"Not with me, but yeah, kinda..." He sighs. "You're Hanako's friend, right? I mean, she always says such nice things about you whenever we hang out."

"I try to be, yes." You answer.

"Well..." He trails off, getting his thoughts in order. "Well, yesterday... She had something like a panic attack... She just locked down in the middle of class..."

Your thoughts freeze. Yesterday, when you saw her, she didn't mention anything even vaguely like that.

"And today..." He continues. "She just didn't show up for class at all. Is she alright?"

You remember showing up by her door earlier, but hearing nothing. Given how she was last year... You'd hoped she'd gotten better, but if she did it apparently wasn't enough.

Even worse is that Hisao seems genuinely worried by the tone of his voice. What to say?

"Hm..." You say. "Would you like to go check on her now? We can probably make it back before class."

"Yeah, ok." He replies, taking your hand.

Together, you walk across the school grounds towards the female dorms. You use the topic at hand to segue in a few questions about how Hisao and Hanako seem to know each other.

"Well we kept bumping into each other at the library... Started playing chess at lunch..." He replies. "I don't know, I guess she's kinda like me... Just, you know, without the panophobia." He sighs. "So how about you? How do you two know each other?"

He asks as you walk into the dorm entranceway.

You give a cursory explanation of how you met. "We just sort of fell in, I suppose..." You addend.

Although actually, that's a question that catches you somewhat off-guard. Just what exactly IS the nature of your relationship with Hanako? You've never really thought about it at any real length...

Reaching Hanako's door, you both freeze.

You put your hand on Hisao's chest. Ostensibly to stop him, but of course, you leave it there a bit longer than you need to.

You rap your hand lightly against Hanako's door. "Hanako?" You call out, keeping your ears cocked for any sounds. "It's Lilly."

You decide against mentioning Hisao for right now.

"Are you in there?" You ask rhetorically. She has to be, there's nowhere else she'd be.

No response. Dimly though, you can make out a breathing pattern behind the door.

You breath a short sigh and turn back to Hisao.

"Is... Is she ok?" He asks, concerned.

You understand why he might be, actually, given the circumstances. The last time he saw her, she wasn't in the best of conditions, now this...

You gesture at the door. "You give it a try."

"Huh? Well... ok." He steps over and knocks softly, clearly trying to emulate you but lacking your dexterity.

"Hanako? It's Hisao. Are you alright in there?"

You've kept keeping your hearing focused completely on Hanako's room while he does this.

Behind the door, as soon as Hisao speaks, you make out a sharp gasp. Then... utter silence. Not even a breathing rhythm, as if she was holding her breath now. The atmosphere is dead still for several tense seconds.

Hisao moves to knock again, but you put your hand on his arm. "I think she just needs to rest right now." You tell him. "Don't worry, I'll check up on her again later tonight."

"Well... ok." He replies and takes your arm. "Has this sort of thing happened before?"

He asks as he leads you back to class.

"Unfortunately, yes..." you reply. "About this same time last year, she did more or less the same thing. She locked herself in her room and didn't come out."

"What? Why?"

"I don't know." You reply. "I left her food a couple times but in the end I couldn't get her to come out."

"Lilly." He squeezes your hand, which you take some measure of comfort in.

"It'll be alight Hisao. She came out on her own eventually. Just give her some time."

He stays silent for a moment, as if weighing your words, then says "Yeah. You're right." He exhales in a small sign of relief. "Thanks, Lilly."

Without enough time to actually return to lunch, the two of you go on a small stroll through the school grounds together. It's a nice day and serves to relax the both of you a bit.

When the time comes for you to head back to class, Hisao stops you just before you part ways.

"Hey Lilly. A-are you free this weekend?"

"Hm? Yes. Why?"

"I just fancied getting out for a bit, kind of like before. Only without any shopping this time." He adds that last part as a joke, but you're too enraptured by that first part to remember to laugh. Collecting yourself...

"That sounds lovely, Hisao." And you both part ways.

Having successfully scored another not-date, your day brightens considerably. The rest of your dull class passes quickly and after a short amount of time, it's over. This was about the time Akira said she'd be getting in, but strangely, she hasn't called you yet.

You decide to check Hanako's door again. You doubt she'll actually answer, but you can at least leave her some food.

The school cafeteria kitchen is emitting those strange screaming sounds again, so you doubt you'll find anything good there.

You wind up ducking into the student council room after listening closely for the sound of 'WAHAHA's to make sure you're in the clear and appropriate a lunch tucked into a cabinet. You'd like to set the place on fire or something, but decide stealth is better right now and make a fast exit.

Having successfully raided Shizune's base and stolen her f00dz, you go try Hanako's door again. As predicted, she doesn't answer. After a moment, your phone goes off.

"Hey hey, Lilly! I'm back! Waiting by the front gate right now, where are you?"

"Oh, Akira!" You reply. "I’ll be there in a just a minute" You hang up and speak clearly into the door.

"Hanako, I'm leaving you some food. At least eat properly, ok?"

As you move to leave, you hear a small squeak from behind the door. "t-thanks"

Akira's never really been hard to find when she wanted to be found and you've detected her car in no time.

"Lilly!" She calls out, drawing you into an uncharacteristically firm hug as you approach. "Always good to catch you."

"Likewise."

You both file into her car and blast away to the rhythm of beer cans opening and shitty 80s music.

Taking Akira's offered beer can, you down some and then ask. "My my, Akira, you seem to be in a good mood."

"Oh, you know." She replies. "Just feeling free for the first time in... really ever..."

You're about to ask her to clarify when she tosses something on your lap. A folder.

"There's that bit on Iwanako I told you about. I did a marginal amount of digging on her, but as you requested, I put most of my focus on Emi."

Same school as Hisao... You muse to yourself, thumbing over the brail. Were they close friends or something?

You shake the thought from your mind and refocus on Emi, the more pertinent threat.

"Did you find out anything on Miss Ibarazaki?"

"A little, but not much, securing confidential records takes time, unfortunately."

Her car smashes into something solid and stops, but evidently this was supposed to happen.

"We're here." Akira declares, kicking her door open before coming around to get you. "You don't mind if we eat at my temp here, do you? I ordered out before I got you."

"No, of course I don't mind." You say, taking Akira's arm as she leads you inside.

Akira's temporary apartment in Yamaku has sort of a strange smell but the layout is quite utilitarian and casting about with your cane you quickly get a feel for it - a few pieces of hastily dragged-in ikea furniture covered in miscellaneous items: a braille typewriter, a couple laptops, binoculars, what appears to be a fish, a four-barreled derringer, a wig, a meditation wheel, two dolls, and of course, several liquor bottles.

You quickly sink down into an easy chair and Akira tosses a takeout box of Mongolian beef into your lap.

"Actually..." You say as you both begin eating and your sister slides a glass of wine of to you. "I'm afraid Hanako's not well..."

"What do you mean?"

"Well..." You take a sip. "Like last year... do you remember what I told you about that?"

"Oh..." her voice falls a couple notes. "Yeah..."

Silence for a moment, then you detect Akira taking a long drink of her own. "Do you want me to try and talk to her?"

"No, it's quite alright." You reply. "It all worked out for the better last time. It's best not to put any undue pressure on her."

"Roger that." Akira replies, pouring herself another glass.

The rest of your night is spent pouring over low-clearance personnel records which Akira can legally get as a lawyer.

"For the heavier stuff, I'm gonna need to do a little legwork." She tells you. "So the safest course of action would be to wait a little bit until we have a better view of the whole picture."

"How long do you need?"

"A couple days, maybe."

"A couple... Wait, what about your trip to Scotland?"

"I'll cancel it."

"Akira?!"

She giggles, setting a sugar cube on fire above a glass of Absinthe. "Relax. It's less of a concession than you might think right now."

She doesn't go into any further details and together you go over some of Emi's school records.

Emi Ibarazaki; currently age 19, missed a grade due to medical reasons, grades slightly below average, but innumerous awards and merits for athletic ability.

"In other words." Akira concludes. "Might not be the best idea to straight up fight her."

"Then what are you proposing?" You ask.

"Hm... nothing 'yet'... I still don't have a very good feel for her. It'd really help if we knew what she was after. What exactly she sees in Hisao... Do you have any ideas? Has he ever talked about her at all?"

Well... you really don't know her so well either, but if you had to guess...

You make a monumental effort to put aside your prejudices for now and actually cast yourself into Emi's mind. It's hard, given how little you actually know about her... Still...

"Maybe she wants to try healing someone... the same way she was healed."

"Hm... Like a messiah complex... with a scary seasoning of adolescent hormones?"

"Nothing wrong with having a healthy adolescent sex drive." You reply before gnashing your teeth. "She just picked the wrong guy for it."

Akira chuckles and makes another Absinthe. "Okie-dokie, then. Her medical records are gonna need to be the first thing I check in that case. Psych profile can wait a bit. Your school nurse - what's his name?"

"Um... Hm..." You take Akira's glass out of her hand and down a small swig before passing it back to her. "I don't actually know..."

"Hm. We're already off to a bad start then."

The two of you pass the rest of the night in a mixture of doing bare-bones research and getting plastered.

The next morning, you awaken curled up atop what appears to be Akira's kitchen counter with your hair styled into liberty spikes for some reason.

You stagger to the bathroom and wash that out before anything else. Then comes Akira's voice over your shoulder.

"Heya! Glad to see you're up! I was worried I'd have to come wake ya."

"Akira... please... not so loud... Wake me? For what?"

"Um... school? Isn't today a school day for ya?"

Fuck. It actually is. How does Akira do this every day?

"Ugh... Yeah, school. I can do this." You reply and begin readying yourself as best as you can while Akira mixes up some of her signature anti-hangover scottish death elixir.

Taking some in the car on the drive over, you feel marginally better... Or at least no longer likely to puke.

"So yeah, I made some calls in the early morning while you were karaoking 'Be Prepared'. I'm due to meet someone later today to try and get those medical records."

"You're sure this person will cooperate?"

"Oh yes."

And with that, Akira drops you off in front of the main gate.

You make you way to class without much enthusiasm. All throughout the day you keep alternating between trying to figure out Emi and trying to reestablish a good sense of inner balance.

Exiting class to the sound of now obnoxiously loud lunch bell, you find Hisao waiting for you again.

"Hey Lilly."

"Oh! Hello Hisao."

He moves to take your arm again and then stops. "You don't look so good, is something wrong?"

Although mildly alarmed at first, you begin to find it sweet at a second glance. That he'd be concerned about your well-being...

"Oh, slight cold. Pay it no mind." You reply, smiling earnestly. It's actually so easy to smile when he's around.

"So, how was your morning?" You ask, hoping the breathmints do their job, but not being too worried. Akira tends to be really good with drinking-related advice.

"Weird, actually. Outside of class, I spent it with Rin."

"Rin... Tezuka?" You ask, puzzled.

"Yeah - Emi didn't show for track practice today, so I just didn't even bother." He pauses. "There must be some kind of bug going around the whole school, I guess. Because the nurse said she's sick, too."

"My, my, that's such a pity." You reply with the barest pretense of sincerity, secretly praying that she caught the ebola virus.

You draw closer and take his arm. "Shall we go to lunch then?"

"Let's." He says immediately.

Given your slightly discombobulated state, you lean into him rather than simply letting him lead you, which he actually doesn't seem to mind in the slightest.

You take the opportunity to nuzzle slightly into his shoulder as you walk together.

This day... although off to a somewhat shaky start, now it really isn't so bad.

# Part 8

You let Hisao lead you to your usual secluded spot in the outdoor cafeteria, nuzzled against his shoulder for support. Really. That's all. For "support".

The odd 'WAHAHA' barely on the cusp of your acute hearing gives you a little cause for concern. Thankfully, the distance seems to be increasing. StuCo better fucking not ruin this moment for you...

Getting a slightly twitching lunch from a cafeteria lady who bids you farewell with the words "Cthulhu Fhtagn", the two of you take your seats just at the edge of the enclosure.

He speaks a bit about his class, how his teacher, Mutou, dropped the idea of forming a science club with him as the founding member.

"Not sure, I mean, yeah, physics is pretty easily my best subject, but still... I've always tried to avoid clubs." He admits a bit shyly. "What do you think?"

You put your hand on his and smile. "I think it's a great idea, Hisao." you reply in earnest.

"I'm glad you've found something to pique your interest."

It's rare for Hisao to get excited about anything at all, but you really do like it when it happens. You might as well explore this avenue.

"Yeah, ok. I'll give it a shot." He responds.

The rest of your lunch passes idly, but pleasantly.

Not much else of meaning is exchanged. Mostly just idle chitchat about where you could hit up tomorrow. Then, at the end of lunch period as Hisao's leading you back to your classroom, he pauses, as if remembering something.

"Oh, by the way, I'm trying to avoid getting killed in English. Would you mind giving me a hand studying after class today?"

English is a cinch for you, of course. All the better if you can put it to use here.

"Sure, Hisao, I'd be delighted to be of help. I'm just gonna check on Hanako first, alright?"

"Great, thanks a bunch." He pauses. "She didn't answer for me earlier, so if you see her, give her my best."

The ringing of the lunch bell brings an end to your conversation and you both shuffle off to the monotone mixture of hellish boredom and perverted daydreaming that is high school.

After class, you mix up a small do-it-yourself meal in your tea room and carry it over to Hanako's dorm.

You set it down and knock once. "Hanako?'

No reply. Hardly unexpected.

You decide that even though it's almost a certainty that she's in there, you need to at least hear her voice.

"Hanako? It's Lilly. Are you alright in there?"

No response again. You'd rather not smother her, but...

"Hanako. Please, just say you're alright. I'm really starting to worry."

"I'm fine." Comes her flat reply through the door at last.

You breathe a sigh of relief that she's not catatonic at least, still, is that enough?

"Ok, Hanako. I'm glad to hear it." You reply in the direction of the muffled voice. Having good sound recognition really pays off in situations like this.

"I'm leaving you some food, ok? I'm afraid it's nothing gourmet, but you should eat it if you haven't had anything else today."

She doesn't reply; you set it at the foot of her door and straighten.

"Alright, come find me if you want to talk." You turn and start down the hallway. After a couple steps, you hear her voice again. "T-Thanks."

Having pacified your mind with Hanako, you head to the male dorms. Knocking sharply, he opens up.

"Hey Lilly. Thanks for coming."

"My pleasure, Hisao."

The rest of your evening is spent helping Hisao navigate the nightmare that is the English language.

You review conjugations of possessives, especially 'your'; try to show Hisao that 'an hero' is probably not what he wants to call someone; and it really says a lot about these strange people that they actually have a word for "the act of throwing someone out of a window". (You suspect the Glaswegians are responsible.)

After teaching for who-knows-how-long (you sort of lost track of time) you realize that Hisao hasn't said anything in a while.

"His-" You start to call out before picking up his breathing rhythm. It's slow and light. He's sleeping.

It's kind of cute, actually, you can't help but smile.

Deciding to take advantage of the opportunity, you quietly stand up and begin delicately prodding through his belongings.

There really isn't much to look through. Feeling the walls and sparse furnishings, you still find no decorative items. All his pill bottles are still there - a harsh reminder of his heart condition which sends a chill down your spine. Pushing that aside, you continue.

He's in possession of several large piles of books - which you can't read, but can at least make out most of the titles based on the indented print on the cover. Mostly physics, a few chemistry, and surprisingly large collection of novels. He has something of a taste for old literature, it seems. Not unlike Hanako's. It matches what she herself told you about him.

Other than that, you find nothing of great interest. His life seems fairly empty, almost to a sorrowful degree.

Settling yourself back down, you feel somewhat conflicted between the feeling of assurance that his life is largely as you thought it was and a slight sense of guilt for not trusting him.

You debate that for a minute and decide it was all for a just cause; then pull a blanket over him and leave, retiring to your own room for the night.

[Meanwhile]

In Emi’s room, the petite girl is laying beneath a set of sheets pulled up to her waistline as she’s slouched against the wall holding a cup of tea. Rin is staring out her window while the Nurse, who remains standing, tosses a trio of manila folders onto her desk.

“So you were able to put together a those histories like I asked?” Emi observes.

“Indeed.” He replies, before flipping the top one open. “There’s not much on Lilly, sadly. In either medical or psychological profiling, there’s nothing written that’s incredibly interesting.” He pauses and listens to the organ music playing out of fucking nowhere for a moment.

“Lilly Satou: An aristocrat of mixed Japanese/Scottish decent, privately educated before coming to Yamaku. Grades are top-tier, IQ moderately above-average, emotional intelligence is almost off the charts. No records of delinquency, no administrative trouble at school, and no lengthy hospitalizations. As I said, her written profile is somewhat bland.”

“How about what isn’t written?” Rin chimes in, not breaking her gaze out the window. “You know? Like negative space for people?”

The Nurse actually gives a smile in response.

“Those… were my thoughts exactly, Miss Tezuka.”

He closes Lilly’s folder and raises an open palm. “Her intelligence alone isn’t enough to justify her academic performance, so we can assume it’s the result of mental focus. Additionally, she’s consistently been a record of some sort of club or student governing body her entire career…”

“Meaning?” Emi asks blandly, sipping her tea.

“Her most dangerous ability isn’t any kind of great intelligence or athletic skill. It’s her overwhelming sense of charisma. The girl has a natural ability to make people follow her…”

“Meaning we should pay more attention to her coterie?”

“Exactly so.” He elaborates, picking up the next folder.

“Hanako Ikezawa. Currently her closest friend. Age 17, substandard grades ostensibly due to chronic truancy. Her medical and psych profiles are much more entertaining. You can read the details yourself…” He says, tossing the folders over to Emi. “But in summary, the girl was disfigured in an accident as a child and developed a cluster of comorbid anxiety disorders when trying to reintegrate after medical discharge.”

“To someone like her, almost lacking a real sense of self, the charisma of Lilly Satou must have seemed an irresistible font.”

“Is that written in her file?” Rin asks blandly, finally turning away from the window and flopping down onto Emi’s bed.

“Of course not, there’s a lot of conjecture involved in these things.”

“Who’s this third folder?” Emi asks, opening it.

In response, the Nurse furrows his brow a bit.

“I did some research into Lilly’s family history: that file is Akira Satou, her older sister…” He trails off at that and moves for the first time, taking up Rin’s previous spot looking out the window somewhat wistfully before elaborating.

“Her personality file is nothing short of ‘bizarre’… Constant records of delinquency, underage drinking, fights at school… She clearly holds no regard for authority or the law, yet she became a lawyer. Estranged from her family, yet took a position in her father’s company. Unqualified to be a parent, but became Lilly’s guardian.”

He turns back to Emi and Rin. “The lack of consistency in her actions borders on lunacy. It’s as if she doesn’t have morality, goals, or actual motivation, but she still pushes herself forward for no reason at all.”

A moment of ominous silence follows the end of this lengthy exposition. This is curtly broken by Emi sneezing directly into Rin's face.

"Hehe. Sorry..."

Elsewhere, in a darkened file room illuminated by a single flashlight, Akira lays slouched into a wall by an opened metal cabinet, coming to a similar conclusion about the Yamaku Nurse...

[End meanwhile]

You awaken early the next morning, having a troubled night.

You rise and ready yourself for you trip into town with Hisao. Right clothes, right perfume, right hair... Everything has to be right.

Truthfully, you've been daydreaming of it ever since he asked.

To him, it may be nothing more than going to blow off steam and hang out with a friend. To you, though... Well, it holds a bit more meaning.

You giggle at the thought and check your hair for what must be the fifth time. You then arm yourself with your canes, wishing a horrid death to anyone who would wreck this day for you.

Still, despite your meticulous grooming, it's still fairly early by the time you finish and you're left wondering what to do.

You decide to check on Akira and see if she's made any progress on the intelligence front.

The time matters rather little wherever she's concerned. The girl is just as liable to be sleeping (read: passed out) at three in the afternoon as at five in the morning.

You flip out your phone and dial her.

Elsewhere, Akira lays sprawled out across the backseat of her Lancer, Hideaki having temporarily taken over driving duties.

Next to her are a pair of folders, two empty and two full bottles of Jack Daniels, the corpse of an unknown twintailed teenage girl with the phrase "ONEESAMA" carved into her forehead, a mop, and half a box of crispy-creme doughnuts.

Despite actively working on her third bottle while her accomplice drives, she easily slicks out her phone as soon as your ringtone pops up.

Back at Yamaku, Akira's chipper voice rings loud and clear through the receiver. "Hey hey, Lilly! What's your reason for being up this fiiiiine morning?"

Blandly, you realize you didn't actually tell her about your not-date with Hisao. Another of several conversation topics...

"Oh, actually, I have an... appointment with Hisao today." You reply happily, not bothering to hide it since Akira knows anyway. This sends her into a fresh fit of giggles.

"HAHA - Aw, you confessed?" She asks.

At this, you feel your cheeks reddening. "Nononono, nothing like that, it's just us going into town for a while... Just the two of us..."

Akira redoubles. Come to think, that may not have been the best choice of words for a denial. After a moment, she subsides.

"Town, huh? That'll be perfect if you'll let me interrupt you lovebirds for just a little bit."

"My, my. You found something, Akira?"

"Yup yup. Got what you wanted." She states. "I'll fill you in on the details in person, but..." Her tone drops a few notes. "Don't start anything trouble at school for a bit, ok? I'll fill you in on why later today."

"Ok, no problem." You reply.

"Goodie. Oh - and one more thing. Before you head out, can you go grab a map of your school grounds and a school calendar?"

It's an odd request, but nowhere near as weird as some of the things she's asked for in the past. You can just drop by the library before heading out if you hurry.

"No problem."

"Great! Seeya later, sis." And with that she hangs up.

Your slow morning suddenly becoming busy, you head out the door and double-time it to the library. The stuff Akira needs you to print out will be on there, but...

BUMP. Yuuko's customary brain-damaging greeting. "Oh! Hello Lilly. I was just... Um, wait, I'm really sorry, but the, um, the library's not actually open yet. Can you come back later?"

"I'm terribly sorry, but I need to make a few really fast printouts. Can you please overlook it this once?" You ask as sweetly as you can.

"Oh... Um... A-alright. Just don't tell anyone, please..."

"Thanks, Yuuko." You reply and head over to the computers.

Even at a school as well-funded as Yamaku, high-school computers are always shitty windows 95s and pulling up those two simple things to print takes much longer than you anticipated.

You hate computers. Humanity should have just stuck with scrying orbs.

Nevertheless, you finally manage to get your things printed and head back out. You can't print maps in braille, though, so you just sort of hope the right thing came out.

"D-Did you find what you needed, Lilly?" Yuuko asks, stopping you as you exit.

"Actually, Yuuko, can you double-check this for me, please? It's not in braille."

"Oh!" BUMP. "Sure!" She says, literally jumping up out of joy to be of service and smashing her head it the process.

As she takes the map, you empty a shot-bottle of vodka into the coffee cup on her desk. This girl needs to chill the fuck out for a while.

"Oh, it's our school map. Planning an event, Lilly?"

"Yes." You say, taking it back and smiling. "Planning a surprise party for a friend and wanted an ideal picnic spot. Please don't tell a soul."

"Got it!" She says with enthusiasm.

With that, you exit the library and check the time. Hisao should definitely be up by now.

Will he have gone for his morning run today? Or will he still be at his dorm?

You decide it's unlikely that Hisao will have gone for his run, not today, at least you hope not. You head to his dorm and hear signs of activity behind his door before knocking.

"Hisao?"

"Oh, hi Lilly. Come in, it's not locked."

You enter through to open door.

"Good morning Hisao." You say, giving him a fast hug. Nothing overly long or lecherous, nothing friends couldn't do. It's just enough to break the touch barrier.

Also, it doubles as an aid to get a feel for what he's wearing. He's switched out his school uniform finally for what appears to be... A sweater vest?

"So, ready to go?" You ask, pulling back.

"Um... Yeah. Just give me a minute." He replies. You make out a rustling sound, and then what sounds almost like gagging.

"Hisao?!"

"m'fine Lilly." He replies before sighing. "I wonder if these things would still work if I just made a milkshake or something out of them..."

He just gulped down his pill-set right in front of you?

"Anyways." He continues, taking your hand. "Shall we be off?"

"Let's." You reply with an earnest smile.

Your journey to the city is considerably lest strained than last time; no obligations to the now M.I.A. Hanako, no manipulating unstable students into terrorist attacks. It's just the two of you together, chatting about nothing. It's nice.

The bus ride passes in no time and you both settle in to the same cafe you ate at last time.

Besides their delicious omelets, there's another reason for this cuisine choice. It's the spot where Akira usually finds you. And sure enough, after a few minutes...

"Hey hey, you guys!" You hear an upbeat voice coupled with the smell of alcohol.

"Hey Akira." Hisao greets her.

"Hehe. You two look good together. Is this a date?" She replies as she reaches your table. Taking a sip of your drink when this happens, you nearly inhale a teabag.

"Wa- I- Um- I-" Hisao sputters.

"Only joking." She says, giggling. "You mind if I borrow Lilly? I promise, it'll be short."

"O-Ok."

Akira takes your arm and leads you aside.

"You look nice today. Put a little extra effort into yourself for the occasion?" She jokes.

"Akira- Wha- Please." You stutter, failing to suppress a flush. "Don't tease me like that."

"You we're the one I was teasing." She responds, chuckling. "That was just an added bonus."

"Wha-"

"Hisao went bright red. It was actually cute." She elaborates, giggling.

"Anyways, down to business. Don't want to keep you two apart." She segues and hands two folders to you.

"Emi Ibarazaki and her affectionate caregiver." She explains. "There wasn't one on Rin because her therapist went insane. Same as her parents."

You hear her stretching.

"You can review the details yourself there, but to summarize: they're a real duo. An insanely driven athlete practically addicted to physical conditioning and a genius surgeon who should have a much higher position than he does. He's a real weird one..." She trails off.

"I got those things you wanted." You hasten to say before you forget, withdrawing the two neatly folded papers from your bag.

"Ah, goodie. I knew you wouldn't disappoint."

"What did you need those for?" You ask as she takes them.

"Field work." She replies simply. "I've learned mostly everything I can from the sidelines. It may be time to get my feet wet soon..."

You smile - a mix of machiavellian satisfaction and earnest appreciation for your sister.

"Thanks Akira."

"Don't mention it." You hear her shift slightly. "We can talk more tomorrow; I'll be in your neck of the woods. As of right now, wouldn't want to keep Hisao waiting much longer, now, would we?"

You nod in response.

"Right. I'll skim over these tonight. But as of right now..."

"Ehe!" Akira giggles again. "Yup, don't let me keep you from your undate, Lilly." She says, patting your arm.

"Thanks."

At the sound of Akira's retreating footsteps. You can't help but grin to yourself. Today, you've already made great strides in your quest for Hisao and it's just barely after breakfast.

You turn and begin heading back over to where you left him.

Now to try and top that opening act with the rest of the day...

# Part 9

Departing Akira and sliding the dossier on Emi and the Nurse into your bag for later review, you make your way back to Hisao at a brisk pace.

"Hey Lilly!" You hear his voice call out and smile.

"Hisao." You greet him back, walking up to him. "Terribly sorry about that."

"No problem at all." He replies, taking your arm in his, which you quite willingly lean into. He hesitates for a moment, then "Is something the matter?" He asks in a delicate tone.

That's right, all he actually saw was Akira show up and spirit you off for a minute. You realize that the only thing Hisao knows about Akira is associated with her pending trip to Scotland.

Not something you want him to dwell on.

You'd like to take his mind off it, but even if that was the best course of action, Hisao won't believe just anything...

"Oh, nothing at all." You reply in an upbeat tone. "She just wanted to give me some contact information for her trip."

"Ah." He makes a noise in comprehension. "You two are really close, aren't you?"

"Eheh. I suppose you could say that."

Pondering Akira, you realize you've only heard Hisao talk at length about his own family once. And that time you were both drunk as shit.

You know from Akira's intel that he's an only child. You wonder, is he lonely?

"It's not that strange is it?" You reply. "Do you have any siblings, Hisao?"

"Nope. I always kind of wondered what it'd be like, but never got one." He chuckles to himself under his breath as he finishes his sentence. "Emi said the exact same thing, actually."

"Really." You state as you grip your cane tightly at the sound of that name. "Do you ever get lonely?"

He stops walking for a moment, as if weighing those words. "Actually, I did used to sometimes. And all the more while I was in the hospital..."

You cut him off at that by stroking his face with your hand. This is supposed to be a happy day, dammit.

"It's not like that anymore, Hisao. You don't have to be alone... never again..."

He breathes a contented sigh after a minute before giving a much more lighthearted chuckle.

"Thanks, Lilly." He picks up a more upbeat tone of voice. "So? Where did you want to go?"

"Hey there." You say with a small giggle. "That's cheating. You asked me here. You have to pick out what to do."

He laughs aloud at this and them quiets himself, deep in thought.

"Hm... Oh, I know!" He gives a small tug on your arm. "Come on, this way!"

After a small sojourn, the two of you wind up going to a concert hall. Despite being perfectly willing yourself, Hisao pays for both your tickets.

"It'd be ungentlemanly otherwise." He remarks as a joke as you move into the building.

It's a good thing that theatres are dimly-lit, you muse to yourself, because you're pretty sure you failed to keep your blush hidden.

As you enter the hall and take you seats to the backdrop of instruments being tuned, you turn your head to him and smile.

"My, my, Hisao. I didn't know you liked music."

"Well..." He replies. "I figured it'd be something we could enjoy together."

Yeah. It's a very good thing...

[Meanwhile]

In the silent female dormitory hallway, a figure deftly slips over to Hanako’s door.

Pausing for a moment, a single moderately-sized package is placed on the ground before her door. Afterwards, the entity straightens, extends a hand, and gives two sharp knocks.

Not waiting for a response, the figure swiftly pivots on their heel and darts off.

[End meanwhile]

Several hours later, the two of you emerge, Hisao hissing a bit as you exit the building.

"What's wrong?" You ask, concerned.

"It's so bright out here. Especially after sitting in that dim hall for so lon- OH." He halts mid-sentence. "Sorry."

You giggle and place a hand on his shoulder.

"Think nothing of it. Really."

"Ok." He checks the time. "Hm... We should probably start heading back in a little."

"It's not so late." You reply. "Even with homework, we can still stay here a bit longer."

"Hm?" He makes a questioning noise.

"Well." You ask sweetly. "Would you like to get some tea, somewhere?"

"Sounds lovely, Lilly."

Your pace is a bit slower, this time around, since you're leading. You still haven't released his arm, though, so you're in no hurry at all.

After a while, you reach an upscale cafe.

"What kind of tea would you like, Hisao?"

"Er. I don't know, actually. Whatever you're having works fine."

You order two R'lyeh Vanillas and get a piece of pie to split. Truthfully, you're not that hungry, but indirect kisses will have to do until he's ready to give you the real thing.

You hope that's soon...

"So Lilly?" He asks, taking a sip of his tea. "What's your relationship with Akira like, anyways?"

It's an odd question, but you can tell he's genuinely curious. Still, you're not sure if you really want to talk about her right now.

"Oh, Akira was sort of my guardian after my parents left Japan." You reply, deciding there's no harm filling in the blanks that don't involve murder.

"Left?"

"Mhm. They both left Japan when I was twelve. I lived with Akira after that."

Hisao says nothing, so you just fill in the silence.

"She's a good girl. Great lawyer. Good sister. She probably could have been valedictorian at our old school if she hadn't been suspended so many times..."

"What was she suspended for?"

Well, the first time a girl cheated with her boyfriend at the time and Akira dropped a running lawnmower on her head from the roof. The next, she collected are the school bibles and set them on fire in the music room whilst playing a drum solo. Next she started dual-wielding broken liquor bottles at a track&field day and put seven people in the hospital...

"Fights." You say ambiguously.

The rest of the afternoon is uneventful, but pleasant. It's peaceful, letting Hisao lead you around. Something you could get used to...

"We're here." He chimes in.

Before you know it, you're both stepping off the bus at the Yamaku front gate. It must be nightfall because you can hear cicadas chirping. This is a foolproof way to check the time all over Japan. Everywhere. All the time.

'Damn.' You muse to yourself. 'Tempest Fugit.'

"Hey, thanks for today, Lilly." He says, squeezing your hand. "I really mean it, thanks..." He trails off for a bit.

You smile and tug his hand slightly, then lean in and kiss his cheek.

"It was a pleasure, Hisao." You say, beaming, then turn and walk back to your dorm, accentuating a teasing demeanor.

You don't hear him move as you go. He certainly didn't seem to hate it, but it's understandable if he's a bit dumbstruck by that.

Walking into your room and making sure the building is silent, you break into a small giggling fit. That was definitely a fun not-date.

After a moment of savoring it, you reach into your bag and pull out the folders Akira gave you, spreading them out on your desk.

To get rid of that whole "not" part... For that you'll have to do a bit of work...

The next morning, you're awoken by a loud knocking on your door.

It's an unwelcome sound. You were up late last night reading over the files...

Taking your third cane in one hand, you move to open your door.

"Hello?" You greet whoever it is.

"Miss Lilly Satou?" A man's voice. Unfamiliar, too.

"Who are you?" You ask in a voice neither hostile nor inviting.

"Inspector Ran. Police." He replies. "Um..." You hear him make a noise of uncertainty and shift about.

Realizing that he must be trying to show his badge, you extend your empty hand and feel it.

Satisfied, you respond. "Yes, I'm Lilly Satou. What's this about, inspector?"

He exhales, then replies in a professional tone. “There’s no easy way to say this; your parents are dead.”

“What… do you mean?” You ask.

“Three days ago, just on the outskirts of Inverness. Sextuple homicide, there were no survivors.”

You suppose you should be more distraught then you actually are, but you barely even knew your parents. You're not sure how you should feel about this...

In a collected manner, you form a reply.

“What happened?” You say in a tone that could plausibly constitute disbelief.

The officer sighed. “The entire household, everyone died: your parents, their butler, and both their bodyguards. All killed with exactly the same MO: a single .22 magnum bullet fired at close range directly into the center of the brain.”

“How did this happen? What?”

“The Satou family home had reinforced architecture with top-of-the-line locks and alarm systems." He pauses, clearly trying to recall all the details.

"To bypass that, the bastard who did this brought in a professional criminal, a lockpick – and then killed him too once his job was done. Then he, well, after that, your family…”

He trails off, not knowing how to phrase ‘killed your family’ in a delicate fashion.

You cast your mind back a bit... Just a couple days ago... Did anything happen? Was anyone absent?

"Are... A-Are you s-sure it was t-t-them?" You ask, doing your best to imitate Hanako for a convincing stammer.

He sighs. "Positive. The bodies weren't discovered until this morning and the murder was fast and quiet. But your father was a well-known figure. We got several positive IDs already."

He sighs and puts a hand on your shoulder. You give him a look as if a giant beetle just landed on you and he withdraws.

"I'm sorry, kid."

"I'm... It's... D-Do you have any leads?" You say, figuring you might as well find out what they know.

The officer sighed. “None. There’s no forensic evidence of any kind at the scene – nothing left behind, nothing taken, no tampering with the bodies, nothing. The killer apparently just walked in, murdered everyone, and left.”

"I see..."

The officer sighs. "The only thing we have to go on is motive... And as a corporate head, your father had more than a few enemies..."

He sighs and asks what he clearly came here to ask. "Do you know of anyone who had a recent grudge against your family?"

You shake your head. "I'm sorry. I... I haven't even met my parents in six years... I don't... I don't..."

You shake your head again. Inspector Ran sighs and hands you a card, which you take only for appearances.

This must be a practiced gesture, because since business cards aren't in braille, it's utterly useless to you.

"If you think of anything, give us a call."

"I will... I-I need some time alone n-now..." You say, turning away slightly and giving a pained expression.

"Of course... Sorry to wake you. And sorry... about all this..."

He departs and you shut your door.

Well, that's certainly an interesting way to start your day.

After debating for a minute, you take out your phone and dial Akira.

At her Yamaku apartment, Akira sits at her desk, playing with a strange bloodstained deck of tarrot cards while lighting another Absinthe sugar cube.

Finishing her reading, she begins flipping them over. "The Sword, the Dark, the Windy..." She's interrupted by her phone going off.

Back in Yamaku, her voice comes in loud and clear. "Good morning, lover-girl! How was your date?"

"It was actually... really nice." You say, reminiscing on your kiss before pulling yourself back to the present. Might as well get this over with.

"Akira, our parents are dead."

A pause then. "Huh. Sucks to be them."

You hear her stretch then continue. "Well, I'll console you over lunch if you still wanted to meet up today."

"Yeah, I'll see you at lunch."

"Cool. You'll like what I have for you this time, sis." And the line goes silent at almost the exact same moment your alarm goes off.

It seems you didn't lose that much sleep after all.

You ready yourself in your usual manner, ribbons, canes. All good.

Given circumstances, you could probably be a bit late for class without consequence...

You decide that since class usually passes in a soul-crushing amorphous blur, you might as well skip it and do something that actually matters.

You exit your room and knock on Hanako's door.

"Hanako? It's Lilly. Are you in there?"

No response. You sigh.

"Can I... talk to you for a while? Please?" Apparently, your tone is right, because the door clicks open.

"Lilly?" You hear her quiet voice. "Is something wrong?"

"A little. May I come inside?"

"Sure." She replies, taking your hand. She guides you inside and you sit down on her bed together. Hanako doesn't say anything, seemingly waiting for you to break the silence. You do.

"Well, I just got word from Scotland. My parents are dead."

"D-d-dead? H-How? Lilly..." She sputters out, seemingly almost snapping out of a sleepwalking state.

You don't change your expression. "They were murdered, apparently."

"Lilly..." Hanako pulls you into a hug. "I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry."

You smile a little and stroke her hair. "Don't be."

You feel her head tilt upwards as she looks at you.

You shrug and change topics.

"What about you? How have you been?"

At this, she releases you from her hug.

You hear her sigh and her voice drops back to monotone.

"I've been good. Thank you for the food." She replies disinterestedly.

"My pleasure, Hanako."

No response.

You sit together in silence for a while, each waiting for the other to say something. Eventually, you decide it's fruitless and rise.

"L-lilly?" You hear her peep as you take a step towards the door.

"Hm?"

"Are you sure you're alright?"

You exhale and turn, then walk back to her bed and take a seat next to her. Might as well explain your feelings. It’s Hanako, after all. You trust her.

"I barely knew them, after all. And they left me here..." You give a sigh. "Really... It doesn't actually bother me. They didn't even feel like my family."

You smile at her. “You and Akira feel more like my family, really. Now my true family’s dead and I don’t feel anything over it.” You smile weakly at her. "Is that strange?"

There’s a moment of silence and then. “Not at all.”

Hanako takes your wrist and draws your hand up to her face – the scarred side. You feel the rough texture that seems more like tree bark than actual human skin.

“You can’t choose your family, but you can choose your friends… Isn’t that how the saying goes?” She speaks softly. And strangely clearly. “But… Us… You and me, Lilly… We actually have chosen our family…”

She nuzzles into your hand slightly for a moment.

“That day… The day everything burned…” She trails off, then. “I used to get so miserable every time I thought of it. Now, though…”

Again, she falls silent, as if looking for the right words. “Since I met you… it doesn’t feel that way anymore…”

“Every time I think of that day now…”

Beneath the texture of her scarring, you can still feel her face muscles. It dawns on you now that she’s smiling.

“It seems… beautiful.”

She giggles.

“I’m glad, Lilly.” She keeps nuzzling into your hand. “I’m happy that I’m not alone in feeling that way…”

You're not sure what kind of face you should give in response. After a second, it occurs to you that you're already returning one. You're smiling back.

The two of you pass the rest of the morning hanging out in her room, talking just as you used to. Hanako strangely seeming at peace.

Eventually, your alarm goes off. Your lunchtime alarm for Akira. Really? How long did the two of you sit there together?

“Hm? What’s that, Lilly?”

"Oh, I have an appointment to keep." You say as you rise. "Would you like me to come visit you again, afterwards?"

"Ok! Yeah!" She replies happily. "I'd like that, Lilly! You'll come back soon... Right?"

"Of course."

And with that, you depart Hanako's room and head out to the gates, finding Akira waiting there.

"Hey hey, Lilly!" She greets you in her usual carefree manner.

These days, you're starting to get used to all this dissonant serenity.

Hugging your sister, you both file into her car and blast off down the mountain at about two-hundred kilometers, strangely not killing yourselves due to Akira's A+ riding skill.

"So, my boytoy'll be getting in later tonight." She talks as she drives, passing you a beer can while she simultaneously pops another one open herself.

Wait... then how is she steering?

Akira continues. "So I should finally be able to blow off some steeeeam..." A hard bank around a bend.

"How about you, Lilly? How goes your elite-raid quest for love?"

Well...

[Meanwhile]

“Well… I’m glad to see you’re ok, then.” Hisao speaks, standing in a sunlit room with a somewhat puzzled look on his face. "Emi was... um... worried about you..."

While he tries to find appropriate words for the bizarre situation, he slips a bottle from a desktop into his pocket. “Um… I guess I’ll see you later, then.”

Hisao turns to go, then-

“Wait.” A scratchy voice stops Hisao right before the entranceway. “Let me walk you to the door…”

Rin lays on her bed, staring at Hisao with an insane grin and several empty medicine bottles scattered about her living space. “It’s the least a gentleman can do.”

She rises and takes an unsteady step towards him, then a smaller one as she notices it’s not a good idea to take big steps.

He braces to catch her if she falls down…

# Part 10

You nurse your drink for a moment as Akira shuttles you both into town and decide you should bring her up to speed on Hanako.

"I saw Hanako just earlier today." You begin. "She seems... much better..."

"Hehe! Great! Better how?"

"Well..." You relay your conversation earlier today. You can't decide if Hanako seems cuter like this. Akira certainly thinks so, laughing softly as the car lurches to a halt.

"Hehe! Glad to see she's recovered. Or..." She trails off in thought. "More appropriately... been 'reborn'."

Akira gives an affectionate sigh as she helps you out of the car. "You always did have a talent for that, Lilly."

The two of you enter the Shanghai and take your seats.

"So our lovely family here is all settled in, except Hisao... For now." Akira muses while you giggle a bit at that last part. "All for the bargain price of our old useless one. Fine trade if you ask me."

You smile at her and wonder how you should go about making this good situation perfect.

"So, what did you find out about our 'fitness problem'?" You ask as your drinks arrive.

"Eheh. Well, like I said, I think it'd be a bad idea for you to fight them directly, so I'll lend you a hand myself there."

You here the rustling of a paper unfolding.

"This track & field event at your school this week." She elaborates, doubtless looking at your school calendar.. "Emi should be running there, right?"

"Of course. She's in everything."

"Goodie goodie. Well..." The other paper unfolding. "I looked over that map you gave me. The woodlands around your school have a clean line of sight onto the athletic track. And that's a level, open field. Perfect shooting gallery."

"Um... Akira - that's kind of far." You note.

"Heh." She scoffs. "Who the hell do you think I am?"

You debate it for a moment, but really don't see any alternative.

No, better to move as quickly as you can without being reckless. You'd like it if Hisao confessed to you, but Emi might not have that preference...

"Alright." You reply. "Get it ready, but be sure you have some kind of an alibi or scapegoat."

"Already figured that out, Sis." She replies as she ruffles your hair.

The rest of your lunch together is mostly comprised of small talk. Akira talks about her guy a little and you find yourself a bit in envy. You fill her in on your latest sojourn with Hisao.

After lunch, Akira rockets you back to school.

"I'm going get everything set up." She concludes. "I'll call you later tonight, possibly."

"Thanks, Akira."

"Give my love to Hanako!" She says before speeding off.

Left by the gate and in a fine mood, you wonder how you should spend the rest of your day.

You already missed morning class and your excuse is no less valid now, so you could just go back and hang out with Hanako some more.

You head back to your dorm to visit Hanako. Rounding the bend to your hallway you hear "Lilly!" and a pattern of footstep before being hugged.

You smile. It's good to see her in such fine spirits. You hope it lasts.

She takes your arm and the two of you both head into your room this time, deciding that she might need a change of pace.

"So?" She asks. "How's Akira?"

"She's fine." you reply before stopping. "Wait... I didn't tell you I was going to see Akira."

"Ehehe... you kind of smell like liquor."

"Oh."

"So, is she well? Have you confessed to Hisao yet? Is there anything I can do on that?"

"My, my. One thing at a time, please, Hanako..."

"Actually, you might be able to do something if you're up to it, Hanako."

"Hm?"

"Would you mind keeping an eye on Hisao? I clearly can't." You joke, gesturing at one of your useless eyes. "And also... Can you follow anyone who seems to be showing an interest in him?"

"Yeah!" She replies cheerfully. "Yeah, I can do that." She responds cheerfully.

"You're not too anxious about going back to class?"

"Hm... I'd rather not, but I'll gladly do it for you."

"Thank you, Hanako." You say with a smile.

You pass the afternoon away playing chess and hypothesizing about the true malevolent nature behind Misha's hair.

"Pink..." You trail off, wondering what this concept actually is. "Is that really so strange for a hair color?"

"In anime? No. Around here? Yeah, kind of." Hanako replies, taking your rook.

With that, you make out the final bell ringing, class is out now.

You bid Hanako farewell and depart, having a decent feel for the route her takes back to his dorm.

"Oh! Hi Lilly!"

Remarkably, you hear his voice almost as soon as you've exited the female dorms.

"I was just coming to check on you. Someone said you weren't in class."

You take his arm as he talks, partially out of habit, but doubling so he doesn't see you flush. "Um... is everything alright?"

Well..." You say, taking Hisao's hand. "Can we go inside for a bit?"

"Huh? Yeah, sure."

You lead him back to his room. Yours is closer, but you'd rather not risk an accident like last time. Also, you can probably snuggle a pillow that smells like him while you talk.

Upon arrival, you discover this is exactly the case and take one off his bed.

After a moment, you break the news. "Hisao... I... just got word from Scotland this morning. My parents are dead."

Hisao stays silent for a moment, stunned. After he snaps himself back, he puts a hand on your shoulder.

"Lilly..." He trails off, apparently not knowing what to say apart from your name.

Discarding the pillow, you decide to give him some guidance and gently wrap your arms around him, nuzzling into his chest.

"It's alright, Hisao. Really..."

Not at all a lie. Pressed against him like this, everything does feel alright...

He has a slight aroma of sweat about him, but that's not at all unpleasant coming from him. Not at all.

Also... with your head pressed against his chest you can actually hear his off-tempo heartbeat...

Hisao says nothing more and strokes your hair. You simply stay there, holding each other.

You have no idea how long it's for. Time doesn't matter right now...

No more words are exchanged that night. None need to be...

[Elsewhere]

‘The halls of a sanitarium always have kind of an eerie ambiance.’ Akira muses to herself, walking down a fluorescently-lit corridor lined with padded doors. ‘It’s a necessary sacrifice for our scapegoat, but still… They’re always either dead silent or filled with inane crazed ramblings.’

To her right, a man in a straightjacket smashes his face up against the window of his cell. “MY THE RATS EAT YOUR EYES! I AM NOW-“

Akira interrupts him by knocking on his windowsill right next to his face. “Wrong game, dude.”

“Fuck.” He withdraws back inside.

Turning back to the hallway, Akira finds the room she was looking for and opens it up with a slightly bloodstained set of keys.

“I knew it.” A crazed voice emanates from within. “I knew the conspiracy would send someone to silence me.” Kenji, wearing hospital whites, steps forward from the corner of the cell he’d been imprisoned in. “You’ll never prevail. The world will never be yours.”

Akira sighs and shifts her weight slightly to one leg as she surveys the crazed child with an unconcerned gaze.

“I don’t want it.”

Smiling, she fluidly raises an open hand to Kenji’s face.

Then with a sleight-of-hand trick akin to a magician producing a flower, she flicks a four-barreled .22 magnum derringer into her hand and shoots him in the head.

[End elsewhere]

You awaken the next morning in exactly the same spot, on Hisao's bed nestled into his chest.

It was such a nice feeling... Having him hold you like that...

Not quite the manner in which you'd most want to wake up with Hisao, but definitely not too far off.

He hasn't moved either and his breathing is in a sleeping rhythm.

You supress a giggle thinking that it must have been relaxing for him as well. Either that or he really is quite the gentleman. Both are welcome.

Your arms have fallen asleep due to the awkward position you both drifted off in, but it's still nice regardless...

You stretch as best you can and knock his alarm's plug out of the wall socket, taking exceeding care not to disturb him as you move.

Satisfied, you smile to yourself and nuzzle back into him. You're going to enjoy this moment as long as you can...

Really, this 'getting shot' business is probably the best thing your parents have ever done for you.

The dorm is silent. The only sounds are Hisao's breathing and his erratic heartbeat. Truly wonderful sounds...

Losing yourself in him again, you let the world pass in a warm blur for an unknown period of time...

BANGBANGBANGBANG

A loud smashing on Hisao's door jerks you both rudely awake.

"Huh? What? Oh..." Hisao stammer as reality floods back to him. "Lilly..."

That same loud knock interrupts you before you can respond.

"Hey Hisao!" A voice yells into the door. "Hey! You missed our run! Get out here!"

Emi's voice.

Doing your best to keep a murderous expression off your face, you ponder how to respond.

Just being silent won't work with someone so persistent. If Hisao opens the door alone she'll just drag him off.

Or... alternatively you could open the door together and let her imagination torment her... Though you have no idea what'll happen after the initial period of shock.

You take Hisao's hand in yours and walk him to the door, smiling.

"H-Hey, wai-"

You open the door.

"Good morning, miss Ibarazaki." You say with your most saccharine smile. "Is there something we can do for you?"

The atmosphere freezes. Neither Hisao nor Emi say a word and you're too hard-pressed fighting down you giggles.

For the first time in memory, you genuinely regret being blind because you wish you could see Emi's face.

Finally, after several minutes of everyone gaping at each other, Emi breaks the silence with a phrase you NEVER expected to issue from her of all people.

"I-I-I... IVEGOTTOGODOSOMETHING!"

And with that, she blasts away down the hall, almost producing a gale in her wake.

"E-Emi?!" Hisao calls after her, but it's too late. She is LONG gone.

"Well, I'm so terribly sorry for the rude awakening." You tell Hisao before hugging him. "Shall we go get breakfast?"

"Oh... em... er..." He pauses as he wraps his mind around whatever the hell just happened. "O-ok."

The two of you are already dressed, so there's not much preparation to do. You simply just walk out together.

The cafeteria mystery lumps are as bland as anything, but the company is exquisite. Strangely, though, Hisao remains fairly quiet. He isn't rude, by any means, always answering when you talk to him, but you get the feeling that something's on his mind.

Deciding not to stress him out further, you refrain from asking and simply enjoy the moment until the bell rings.

Class passes in its usual state of dullness. You wonder to yourself if Mutou is a more interesting teacher, making a mental note to ask Hanako.

When the lunch bell rings, you file out to the sound of "Hehe - hi there, Lilly." Hanako's voice.

You'd gotten used to Hisao's in her absence.

"R-Ready to go to lunch?" She asks, stammering more out of excitement than nervousness.

[Elsewhere]

Emi sits in her room, hugging a pillow close to her chest and sobbing.

“Hisao… Hisao…” She whimpers repetitively for a moment.

She then throws it at the wall and begins stabbing a crudely drawn picture of you.

“Damn you, bitch. Damn you. DAMN YOU!”

The door opens up and Rin wanders in, casting about the scene of Emi’s misery with her usual vacant expression. Her gaze finally comes to rest on the impaled drawing.

“Your proportions are off.”

[End elsewhere]

"Actually, I was thinking we could find Hisao and have the three of us eat together." You reply sweetly, taking Hanako's hand.

"Hisao left." She answers simply.

"L-left?" You ask. "What do you mean?"

"Just this morning right before class started." She replies before hastily adding. "I was keeping my eyes on him just like you told me to!"

"Good girl." You say, stroking her hair so that she doesn't feel dejected. "But tell me, please. What happened?"

"Oh, just before class started, he was settling in and unpacking his stuff." Hanako narrates.

"Then Shizune and Misha came up to him and delivered him this weird-looking yellow envelope. There was this letter inside, but I was too far away to read it myself. He opened it, read it, then just sort of staggered out in a daze."

"A letter?"

# Part 11

You remain still for a moment while you process what Hanako told you.

Hisao received a letter holding some kind of news that shook him.

A letter delivered by the student council, which is never a good sign.

You wonder what it could be. Did Shizune want to destabilize Hisao for some reason? If not her, then who?

You're brought back to reality by Hanako holding and nuzzling into your arm. "So?" She squeaks. "Ready to go to lunch, Lilly?"

"Y-yes." You reply after a moment of thought, reasoning that you can always go catch Hisao later. "Let's go, Hanako."

The girl gives an enthusiastic nod and practically drags you down the hallway and into your tea room.

Once there, she sets about the process of preparing the food while you make signature R'lyeh Vanilla tea.

Once prepared, Hanako slides you a plate and you bite into a delectable slice of cake. She seems to have gotten better at cooking.

"So Lilly." Hanako asks, taking a seat practically on top of you as opposed to her normal one across the table. "I've been keeping my eyes on Hisao ever since you told me to. The whole time. Just like you asked, hehehe."

She giggles and rubs her face into your shoulder. "Wanna hear what else I found?"

"Of course I'm interested. Thank you, Hanako." You reply, stroking her hair.

"Well, he's been jogging with Emi in the mornings and sometimes in the afternoon. I think he's starting to see whatever it is that she sees in it."

She pauses, thinking.

"Also, he's been spending more time around Rin lately. Yesterday Misha and Shizune made fun of him a little for doing a drawing of a bird instead of classwork, but I really didn't think it was that bad..."

She nuzzles into your arm again. "The one he seems to be spending the most time just hanging out with is you, Lilly... Although you've been kind of busy recently, so Emi or Rin seem to take over for you when that happens..."

She concludes her report, then, with the speed of a snapping-turtle, chops down your forkful of cake and hums happily as she chews.

You ponder how to respond…

After some internal debate, you settle on your age-old nemesis: Shizune. And Misha, you suppose, as your sort-of-nemesis-by-association.

"Has the student council been doing anything weird?" You ask.

"Not really." She replies. "They keep bringing Hisao food every once in a while and Shizune keeps coming up with bizarre gambling games, but that's about it."

Hanako pauses in thought.

"Come to think, Misha actually called after Hisao when he left class earlier. So I don't think she knew what was in the letter even if Shizune did..."

Her body suddenly goes stiff. "I-If you trust my opinion, at least..."

"Oh course I do, don't be silly." You put your arms around her and check the time. Only a few minutes until lunch period ends...

Class is a bleak and soulless ordeal, so you don't mind skipping. Hisao's more important to you by far.

"Hey Hanako?" You ask. "Do you have any inkling where Hisao might have gone off to?"

"Probably the athletic track." She responds. "He seems to do that a bit."

Thanking your friend and prying yourself loose from her, you head out in search of Hisao.

Nearing the field in the sunlight's warmth, you do indeed hear a paced set of footfalls emanating from the track as you draw near it. It's not Emi's leg-blades and there's no track meet today...

"Hisao?" You call out.

The running stops. "Oh. Hey Lilly." You hear his flat voice before he jogs over to you. His tone is neither happy nor sad... Just... distant, more or less.

"Something up?" He asks as he nears you.

You can't really tell him you've been spying on him. How to approach this?

"You seem a little distracted." You ask in a motherly tone." Is... something on your mind?"

He stays silent for a moment to consider this.

"Really? It's that obvious, huh?" He sighs. "Well... I don't know... Just thinking about everything, I guess... About how it all wound up like this."

"Like what?"

"Yamaku as a whole, I suppose. My heart. How it all began..."

"Hisao." You say, taking his hand. "I've told you already, that's nothing you should feel bad over."

"I know, Lilly. You're right. I don't feel bad, really... Just kind of overwhelmed? I feel like everything just dropped on me, I guess..."

"Hisao." You speak softly, taking his hand in yours. "Why is this hitting you all now?"

He stays quiet for a moment, then sighs. "I got a letter." He states simply.

"A letter?"

"From this old classmate of mine... She, well, one time, she..." He trails off.

'She what?' You want to ask, but decide it's best to let him tell you on his own.

"She said she loved me." He finally spits out.

"That time... I was nervous, excited, scared - everything at once... Too much at once... It's what set off my first heart attack. That very thing that brought me to Yamaku..."

He sighs and grips your hand a bit. "I mean, it's a congenital defect... Something was gonna set it off sooner or later... But still, like that? A girl confesses to me and I keel over? That's pretty fucking pathetic."

He gives a dry, joyless laugh at himself. "Just got me thinking about what I've been doing here... I just decided to go for a run and clear my head."

You squeeze his hand and stroke his face lightly, giving a smile.

"It's nobody's fault for being born the way they are, Hisao. I've never apologized for my blindness: you shouldn't feel guilty about your heart. Seriously. Don't feel bad about it."

You feel his face shift slightly as he turns his gaze to you. You smile earnestly, glad your words have had some effect.

"It's not like anyone decides to be born. We're all just kinda stuck here. You DO get to decide how kill time, though." You quote Akira, doing your best to imitate her voice - which is difficult, since it's deeper than yours.

Hisao actually gives a laugh at your rather off-key attempt, which sounds nice.

"Well, not exactly sure I've been doing too well on that front. Emi seemed pretty upset this morning..."

"Hm..." He remarks, as if remembering. "I might wanna go find her and apologize for upsetting her..." He remarks somewhat worriedly.

That thought completed and showcasing his return to reality, he sighs fondly and squeezes your hand.

"Thanks Lilly. Really." He says in a relieved tone. Your hand still on his face, you can tell he's smiling.

"Have you eaten yet?" You ask.

He exhales sharply, as if contemplating that idea for the first time today. "Hehe, no. I just came straight here and started running."

He pats his abdomen. "Actually, yeah. I'm hungry!" He says with a laugh.

"My my. Well, let's see what we can do about that." You state, beaming before taking his slightly sweat-dampened arm.

Together, you both leave the track together at a brisk pace.

At the other side of the Athletic track, a rather miserable-looking Emi steps off the path in her athletic uniform.

“I guess I’ll just run it off. Just like I always do…”

She sighs, for the first time taking almost no real comfort in that idea.

“Huh?” She squeaks as she espies something from across the track.

The two of you, leaving together, your arms interlocked.

Emi doesn’t move, just stands there, dead still, staring as her eyes moisten.

“Ehe.” She giggles flatly as a tear rolls down her face. “Ehehe. Ehehehe.”

You awaken early the next morning, having enjoyed a peaceful night.

You're happy with yourself. Happy that you could comfort Hisao. That's... what a wife would do, right? Comfort her man?

Being alone, you have absolutely no need to hide the massive blush that crosses your face at that idea.

On impulse, you place both hands on your face as well and smile dreamily.

Checking your clock, you realize you have a decent amount of time before class starts.

You could go hang out with Hanako for a while.

It's also early enough that you could go grab Hisao before he goes for his morning run with Emi.

You decide to go see Hisao and ready yourself, making sure you look your very best for him.

You dip into your emergency rations and take out two of the boxed meals you keep in case of emergencies, such as when the school cafeteria serves mystery stew. Still, any time with Hisao is enough to merit appropriate measures.

You head over to Hisao's room and knock twice.

"Hisao, it's me."

"Oh, hey Lilly. Come in, it's unlocked."

You enter and smile at him.

"Good morning, Hisao."

"Morning, Lilly."

You display the bag you're carrying. "Would you like to take breakfast together? It's a warm morning so I figured we could have a little picnic."

A moment of hesitation, then the sound of running shoes being tossed into a corner.

"That sounds lovely."

Together, you find a quiet spot and settle into the grass.

After a little while, you can feel the sun's warmth. "Is it nice, Hisao?" You ask. "The sunrise?"

He's silent for a moment, then replies. "Yeah... It is." A chuckle. "You know... It's strange... But I don't think I've ever actually watched a sunrise before."

You snuggle up to him and smile, happy that he accepts the contact so readily. "I'm glad I could share it with you, then."

The rest of your morning is passed in a harmonious silence, both of you savoring the moment.

Classes pass in a blur and before you know it, it's lunchtime. You exit your classroom to the sound of... silence.

It seems strange to you. You've grown so used to either Hisao or Hanako waiting to greet you...

You decide to check for Hanako. It’s definitely out of character that she isn’t there.

In the hallway, you bump into Mutou, who, smelling slightly of liquor, informs you that she never showed up to class.

It’s not like that’s uncommon, but usually you can see it coming…

You head back to her dorm and knock on her door. “Hanako? It’s Lilly.” No response. You try the door and find it unlocked. “Hanako?” Entering, you cast about and find it empty.

A bit worried, you decide to try Hisao’s room. It’s not like she doesn’t know where that is…

At a faster-than-normal pace, you make your way to the male dorms.

Reaching Hisao’s door, an overwhelming odor greets you. A smell you know thanks to Akira. The smell of blood.

“Hisao?!” You call, stepping through the portal and quickly casting about with your cane.

On the ground, you strike something squishy, bending down quickly while readying your cane for battle. Your fingers brush a mop of bloody hair. Beneath that… a cold, scarred face.

“Ehehehe.” An impish giggle issues from Hisao’s bed. “She tried to stop me, you know.” Emi. Speaking in a euphoric, crazed tone of voice. “She tried to stop me from making Hisao mine.”

Dumbstruck, you rise, gripping your cane tightly, but Emi doesn’t move.

“She tried to stop me from making him mine. Just like you did. Eheheh. But that’s not an issue anymore. No, Hisao will always be mine. We can be together forever now. Without anyone else. Without these crippled bodies. Ehehehe! I’ve freed him! I’ve freed us both... Now… together… we can at last be free…”

SHUNK. A noise coupled with a fresh scent of blood. Emi continues giggling, a sound growing fainter and fainter. Then total silence.

Feeling about the blood-splattered room, your hand brushes over Emi, the girl’s cutlasses gripped in her hands with the blades buried deep into her own body. And also…

Your body goes numb.

Sprawled across Emi’s lap is another form. A third cold corpse with two deep gashes carved into the heart. Shaking, you run your hands up and feel Hisao’s still face.

[BAD END]

You smile at Hisao. "I'm glad I could help."

With that, you kiss his cheek, turn about smiling to yourself, and head back to class.

As you leave, you hear the faint clacking of leg-blades in the background.

On your way back to class...

"Lilly!" Hanako cries as she deactivates her wallflower stealth and glops onto you.

"I fell asleep at the library and had this really scary dream that Emi was carving me apart." She shivers.

"Anyways? Did you find Hisao? Is he better now?"

Her childlike concern strikes you as touching. You wonder if she can be trusted with the full knowledge of your quest for Hisao.

Hisao's feeling better..." You say before embracing Hanako. She accepts it gladly and nuzzles into your chest.

"Hanako. Can you come with me? There are some things I have to tell you... about Hisao and me."

She continues clinging to your arm while the two of you walk back to your dorm.

Once you've closed yourselves off, you prepare some tea... and then add a shot of everclear to either cup.

Between assault, grand theft, burglary, vandalism, probably thousands of weapons-ban violations, invasion of privacy, blackmail, DUIs, and possibly more than one count of murder, this is going to be a long discussion...

Several hours later, you inhale deeply and finish off your third cup.

Hanako remains pensive for a moment, then... "So all this... you've been doing to make Hisao your family?"

You stay quiet for a moment, then. "A part of it, yes."

"Aw... Lilly!" She says as she tackles you onto your bed and snuggles into you. "That's so sweet..."

"Then... you're ok with it?" You ask.

"Mhm!" She replies. "If he makes you happy, that's enough."

You can't help but breathe a massive sigh of relief at this.

"He's nice to me anyways, yeah..." She soliloquizes, still nuzzling into you. "Yeah, I think he'll make a good dad."

You begin to realize that Hanako seems to have come to peace with a childish role in life... Well, if that's what makes her happy, it's perfectly compatible with you.

Bending down, you kiss the top of her head. "That's right, Hanako. We can all be a family together."

You simply hang out and talk about Hisao for a little before Hanako leaves to go get some food. You realize that she probably hasn't been taking lunch breaks on surveillance duty...

You feel tired, yourself. Talking for so long wore you out.

Checking the clock, you find it's late afternoon. Hisao should be back in his dorm by now if you wanted to visit... Or you could get an early night.

Picking yourself up, you go to visit Hisao.

Reaching his room, you hear him call "It's open." before you've even knocked.

Smiling to yourself, you enter his room.

"Hello Hisao." You say sweetly.

"Nice to see you, as always, Lilly."

From the location of his voice, you find he's on his bed and sit down next to him.

"Feeling better?"

"Yeah." He says, as if in relief. "I was able to calm Emi down as well as just me."

"That's good."

He chuckles and does a squeaky Emi-impression 'Jerk! You nearly gave me a heart attack of my own!' You both laugh at it before he continues. "So yeah, I think we're in the clear... for now, at least."

"And you, Hisao?" You ask the question that actually matters. "How are you?"

"Much better." He takes your hand despite you both being sitting. "The letter's been shredded, burned, and dammed."

He pauses pensively.

"I think I've managed it, Lilly. I think I've managed to cut the tether to my old life..."

"Thanks." He breathes in a whisper, then pulls you into a hug. "Really, Lilly. I mean it. Thank you." He softly speaks right into your ear.

Smiling broadly into his shoulder, you reply. "My pleasure, Hisao."

[Elsewhere, in the quiet of Yamaku’s small-town evening]

Hanako walks through the street alone, glancing about with a contented smirk on her face.

Reaching her destined apartment, she smiles and rings the doorbell. After a moment of waiting, Akira swings the doorway open wearing a long button-down shirt. ONLY a button-down shirt.

With just a single button hastily fastened across the chest, her shirt is simply draped over her sweat-dampened frame, her pale legs are bare apart from what appear to be an extension cord wrapped around her left calf, and her hair is messily shooting out in random directions… although that part might be just Akira.

“Heya Hanako.” She greets the girl cheerfully and beckons her inside.

Somewhat hesitant for a moment, Hanako bites her lip slightly and walks into Akira’s place. A simple one-bedroom apartment that almost feels more like a storage space than a dwelling due to the clutter and randomness of the items.

Akira, ever being a conscious hostess, pours two glasses of whiskey and passes one over to Hanako before downing her in one gulp. “Aaahh… I wasn’t expecting company tonight, but it’s not unwelcome.”

Hanako is continuously shifting her gaze. Given Akira’s current attire (or lack thereof) she’s not really sure where she’s supposed to look…

“So, what brings you here?” The blonde girl asks.

“There’s… an idea… For this week… I want to discuss it with you.”

Akira’s eyes give a bright flicker of understanding. “Ahaha… Yes. We can definitely do that… But first…” She shifts uncomfortably, then rises.

“Need to finish my boy, be right back.” She says, taking a few agile steps back towards her bedroom before pausing, turning around, and blinking. “Unless you want to join? I wouldn’t mind.”

“… Y-No. I’m fine.”

“Ok, back in ten.” She replies, twirling about.

The walls mercifully appear to be soundproofed, so Hanako simply sits alone in silence for a moment, before shrugging and rising from her seat.

To occupy herself, Hanako prods around the place for a little, rummaging through all the miscellaneous clutter. A strange collection of artifacts, weapons, jewelry, items of indeterminate origin… It’s as if Akira’s trying to collect all the treasures of world.

Rummaging around, she discovers an effigy resembling a warped angel, shaped from dark green emerald, which hovers effortlessly above a pedestal. Should Hanako claim this Artifact?

“Ah…” Akira’s voice interrupts in a contented sigh as she saunters back into the living room with a slight background noise of coughing and gasping. “Much better.”

Hanako decides to leave the choice for a later date and walks back over to the couch.

“So?” Akira asks as she begins preparing a couple glasses of Absinthe. “What kind of fun did you have in mind?”

Hanako giggles.

# Part 12

You awaken to the dreaded sound of your alarm clock and fight down the urge to stab it. You're not a morning person at the best of times and last night you stayed with Hisao until late before retiring back to your room.

It was nothing exciting, but you're sure that will come in time...

Rising, you enact the ancient scottish ritual of awakening and whip up a cup of coffee liqueur, pondering what you should be doing today.

Today is Hanako's birthday - and given her recovery (if you call it that) she definitely wouldn't mind a small celebration. You make a mental note to run the idea by Hisao.

Tomorrow is Emi's track meet, so really, all you need to do on that front is kill time.

As you finish readying yourself, you wonder who you should go see first. You've come to realize that class is fairly worthless, so being slightly late probably wouldn't matter so much.

It's Hanako's birthday, after all. It's only logical to start the day with her.

You cross the hallway and rap a few times on her door. Inside you hear a shifting as she awakens.

"H-Hello?" You hear her groggily call.

"Hanako? It's Lilly."

In the next instant, the door is practically yanked off its hinges and Hanako (still in her bedclothes despite it being well past time to start getting ready) wraps her arms around you.

"Mornin' Lillyyyyyy" She greets you, yawning that last bit.

"May I come in?"

"Of course!" She replies and leads you inside. You sit together on her awkwardly still-warm bed.

"So Lilly, what's the occasion? N-not that there needs to be one of course, haha, just wondering. Just in case." She adds quickly.

"The occasion?" You muse. "My, my. Nothing special for now, Hanako." You stroke her hair. "Just wanted to visit."

"Aw. Thanks Lilly," She squeaks back and nuzzles into you.

You allow her to cuddle you for a moment, then she asks. "You didn't get back until late last night, did you? Did you spend it at Hisao's?"

"H-Hanako?!"

She giggles a little. "Ooooh. You did! You did! Didn't you? Did anything happen? Diiiid it?"

It is definitely a break from tradition for Hanako to be the one teasing you. And a little unsettling that she knew... Still, you have an image to maintain.

"N-Nothing like that Hanako. Don't be absurd."

She stays silent for a moment, then. "Did you want it to be?"

"Of course not, Hanako." You reply. "I'd never do something so scandalous."

Lies.

You take her hand. "Although that does remind me, Hanako. Are you free this afternoon?"

"Hm?" She replies, perking up.

You smile at her. "Just fancied having a little tea party in my room later this evening. Are you free?"

"Yeah! Of course! I'm free all day! I'm free right now, actually!"

She darts off the bed and you hear her opening a drawer.

"D-do you want to play chess?" She asks, taking out the board you two usually use.

"I'd be delighted." You tell her.

Just like all high schools, class is worthless. You mostly show up out of habit and to derive a false sense of value.

Also it is her birthday, after all. It's only courteous to make her happy.

Together, you and Hanako play several games, pausing every now and again to make tea or Caribbean Bellinis.

You lose every game quite soundly. She seems to have improved a lot...

Ding Daung.

Throughout the building, you hear the muffled stock-footage school bell. It's lunchtime? How many games did you play?

"My my." You say, putting a hand to your face. "Is it lunchtime already?"

"Y-Yes." Hanako squeaks.

Realizing it's usually time to go catch Hisao for lunch, you rise, cracking your back slightly.

An offset of your balance as Hanako, seemingly on impulse, reaches up and grabs your hand.

"L-L-Lilly? A-Are you g-g-going?"

"Well, I usually meet Hisao for lunch around this time." You tell Hanako.

"O-Oh."

Instead of releasing her hand, though, you gently pull her to her feet and smile sweetly at her. "Would you care to join us?"

Hanako stays dead silent for a minute, then seemingly becomes aware of her own silence and almost shouts at you. "Y-Yeah! Yeah! Yeah, I'd love to!"

A hectic banging follows as Hanako half-removes, half-rips-off her nightgown and pulls on her normal school clothes.

"Don't leave!" She tells you, despite you showing no such intent, sitting calmly on her bed. "I'm almost ready, almost ready... Done!"

She takes your arm in one hand and a basket in the other. "Let's go!"

Together, you walk across the schoolyard, stepping over a passed-out drunken Mutou on the sidewalk on your way there.

Reaching the school entrance, you feel Hanako stiffen, then relax and give a small noise of confusion. A second later, you hear the reason why.

"WAHAHAHA! Hey there, you two!" A cheery voice calls from down the hallway.

"Shizune's not with her..." Hanako softly whispers to you, explaining her confusion.

There's an anomaly.

You could try to talk to Misha, maybe even find out where Hisao is?

Or you could try to slip off before she reaches you. Damn whatever she wants.

Whatever you do, you better do it fast, as you hear a strangely rhythmic step beginning...

You decide you wouldn't really mind chatting with Misha, as long as her evil puppet master isn't present.

"Hello Misha." You say as her skipping comes to a halt right before you and Hanako. "Something I can do for you?"

"Well, um... kinda..." She says, fumbling over her words a bit. "Um... it's about Hicchan..."

That perks your interest for more than one reason.

"Um..." She hesitates, seemingly a bit conflicted and you feel Hanako stiffen, as if Misha was looking at her as she hesitated.

"Oh, you don't need to mind Hanako." You say, giving your friend's hand a reassuring grip.

"WAHAHA! Ok then!" She pauses again and her voice drops a few notes.

"Um... Hicchan seemed kind of depressed yesterday... After he got that letter. He seemed ok again in class today, but... Um... Is he really alright?"

"Hisao?" You reply, unsure of whether or not he really cares for that nickname. "He's fine. I talked to him a bit yesterday."

At this, Misha breathes a small sigh of relief, which you find odd.

"Why do you ask?" You continue.

"Huh? Why? WAHAHA!" After laughing, her voice lowers to what might be considered a normal speaking tone. Unheard of for Misha.

"Well, because... Hicchan's my friend... I guess I really don't have too many of those these days..."

"How come?" Hanako pipes up, perhaps due to her familiarity with that subject. "What's stopping you?"

Misha pauses at this, saying nothing, making a noise or two every once in a while as if beginning to speak, but then freezing.

This continues for a moment before you decide prolonging the conversation is fruitless. Misha strayed from your guidance. Better to work on saving people already in your flock rather than ones trying to get back into it.

"Actually, Misha." You break the stillness. "I was just looking for Hisao. Do you know where he is?"

"Oh! Yeah!" She replies, perking back up.

"Hicchan went out for lunch just when teacher started breaking into his third bottle of Grey Goose."

"I see. And where did he go?"

"Oh. Emi and Rin snagged him outside of class. I think they all went up to the roof together."

You're not sure you like the sound of that.

Actually, you know you don't. Better wrap this up.

"Thanks a bunch, Misha." You reply sweetly before giving Hanako's hand a tug.

Together, the two of you make for the roof at a faster-than-average walking pace, leaving Misha standing there in the hall.

"Why..." She repeats quietly.

Almost blowing open the door to the roof, cane firmly clenched and Hanako tensed up, you're greeted by an odd mix of scents: mostly paint and cigarette smoke.

"Oh, hey you two!" You hear Hisao's voice call.

"Oh! Hello." Emi's voice.

"I wonder what purple tastes like." You don't really need to guess who that is.

"Hisao?" You ask, taking some cautious steps towards him. "What are you doing up here?"

"Oh!" Emi cuts in. "Hehe... Hisao seemed a little off-tempo yesterday, so Rin and I prepared a get-better feast!"

"I wanted to serve roasted Drop-Bears, but the trap was empty this morning." Rin drones.

Casting about , you perceive a blanket spread across the ground with two baskets placed on it.

You don't smell anything fresh: mostly packaged store-bought food? This is hardly a feast...

"You two are welcome to join if you don't have plans already." Hisao offers.

Incredulous, you turn to Emi. "You call this a feast for Hisao? Mongrels. Behold, and acknowledge your folly."

You reach into your bag and pull out one of Akira's signature bottles of wine. An ancient Roman recipe from the time when wine fields were often fertilized with the corpses of your enemies.

You're not exactly sure how strictly Akira follows that recipe, but it's definitely the best you've ever tried.

"I-I brought food too!" Hanako perks up, placing her basket down on the blanket. "I made some cake."

"Great! Have a seat, you two." Hisao says happily.

And thus the Feast of Yanderes is underway.

The five of you sprawl out together. Four of which would probably be ripping each other's throats out under different circumstances, but in Hisao's presence, an unspoken truce looms over you all.

"So I've been working on a Bas-relief of this squid-thingie I saw in my dreams..." Rin monologues. "I think it's coming out ok. But while I'm working on it I keep hearing these weird voices..."

You shut out Rin and lean up against Hisao. "Oh, by the way Hisao." you whisper into his ear. "Don't overindulge. Our party idea for Hanako is back on for later tonight." You say, ever so slightly twitching your head in the direction of Hanako, who is apparently trying to comprehend Rin's offhand comment about how it's not safe to save right now because the darkness is coming.

"Got it." He tells you, squeezing your hand in place of a smile.

"So Lilly?" Emi asks you. "What is it that you and Hisao have been doing together so often? Decided to include anything that might help him?"

It's a barely hidden barb, but Hisao doesn't seem to pick up on it.

You smile back at Emi.

"I don't restrict myself to any single activity, Emi." You reply, squeezing Hisao's hand and giving a smile. "It's a matter personal preference, but I find it makes a person so dreadfully dull."

Rin appears to be showing Hanako her favorite music track. From what you can hear from the headphones, it seems to consist of a loop of various people crying, intermitted with the sounds of an axe being sharpened.

Emi falls silent for the merest instant, then replies. "I understand, not everyone has the focus or willpower to stick to any kind of routine." She scooches over next to him and leans into his arm on the side opposite you. "Hisao's special like that."

Hisao himself cuts in. "Ahaha. I wouldn't say that, Emi. I mostly just followed your lead."

You feel a slight vibration through Hisao's body as Emi nuzzles against him.

"Oh, don't think anything of it. True friends empower people they care about. Maybe Lilly doesn't get that?"

Your mind flashes briefly with images of the girl being horribly murdered, but being an aristocrat, you keep up your air of immaculate dignity.

There's a strength in flexibility, Emi. Eclecticism gives you a much broader spectrum for life in the long term."

She falls silent for a moment, contemplating your words. "Hm... I suppose there's some level of merit in that."

The closing moments of the feast are passed in relative silence, with everyone sipping their corpsewine and contemplating the philosophies of everyone else.

It's true that Hisao's condition has bothered you. You've often wondered how to best alleviate his problem, it's not like you're the authority when it comes to physical activities...

Well, there is one in particular that you wouldn't mind doing as many times as necessary.

With that thought, you sigh fondly.

"Lilly?" Hisao asks in response to your seemingly out-of-place reaction but is interrupted by the bell ringing.

"My, my. How time flies." You remark. "Shall we be going, Hanako?"

"I'm gonna help these two clean up." Hisao says. "See you later!"

And with that, the Feast of Yanderes draws to a close, everyone becoming silent enemies again.

Taking Hanako's arm, the two of you head back to her dorm.

"Hm... Rin said I should go pick up that sculpture..." Hanako muses to herself as you walk. Mutou is still there on the sidewalk as you pass back.

Once there, you and Hanako resume your little habit of playing idle games with each other. After being destroyed in chess a few more times, you break out Risk and begin a fierce battle over Australia.

After a while, you check the time and realize it should be about time for Hanako's party.

Hisao'll be coming by your room. And as for Akira... you don't actually know if she'll be able to make it, come to think.

Making an excuse, you flip out your phone and dial Akira.

"Heya! How's it hanging?"

"Decently. I had an odd lunch, but it's been a nice day." You cast your perceptions back to Hanako, who doesn't seem to be listening. "Are you going to be able to make the party?"

"Me? Miss a party? Who the hell do you think I am?"

You smile to yourself. "Glad to hear it."

You'd like to go into more details, but detect Hanako approaching. "See you soon!" You cheerfully say into the receiver and hang up.

You move your game into your room and idly pass the time sacking Rome before hearing a knock.

"Lilly?"

You smile broadly, a gesture Hanako notices and giggles at.

"Might that be Hisao?" You reply teasingly. Of course it's him. You've been at this voice-placing thing for a while, after all.

"Hanako, would you kindly get the door?"

She gives an affirmative "Mhm!" and hops up. "Hi Hisao." You hear her say as the portal opens.

"Hisao." You greet him.

"Girls." He replies as he takes a seat next to you and you lean into him, happy he's become accustomed to this kind of contact.

Hanako settles back down into her seat just across the table from you.

Content that the setup has gone so well, you smile cheekily at Hisao.

Hanako either doesn't notice your exchanged glance with Hisao or assumes it's to do with your feelings for one another.

"Shall we, Hisao?" You ask.

"Let's." He replies.

"Happy birthday!" You and Hisao say together, each extending your gifts.

"... ... ..." Hanako seems to be at a loss for words at suddenly becoming the center of everything.

You're suddenly worried that she may be regressing, but then you hear a small sniffle. "You two... Lilly... You remembered..."

"Of course." You reply as she gently lifts the parcel out of your hands.

Awestruck, Hanako takes her time delicately unwrapping each one. Hisao's chess set. And your teddy bear.

She stays silent for a moment, apparently gaping at them whilst you snuggle against Hisao.

"You guys..." Hanako comes to her feet, springs up, and tackles you both, drawing you both into a hug with one arm around either of you. "Thank you. Seriously. Thanks... I love you two..."

"Hey hey! Just them? No love for me?" A voice cuts in from behind.

"Akira!" Hanako squeaks, jumping to her feet and crash-tackling her too from the sound of it.

"Hehe! You're gonna love my gift just as much, trust me."

You perceive two thuds on your table.

"Are these... wine bottles?" You hear Hisao ask.

"Yup. One red, one white."

"Why are they jewel-encrusted?" Hanako asks.

"All the treasures of this world should belong to me. To us." Akira answers cheerfully before breaking out the glasses.

You smile and take Hanako's hand - a gesture she reciprocates by pulling you into a strong hug.

"Lilly..."

"Happy birthday, Hanako!"

# Part 13

As Hanako's birthday party progresses into the 'party' portion as you all sample Akira's personal choice of wines.

As the evening unfolds, you realize it must be the same kind of spirits Alexander the Great was fucked up on the night he burned down Persepolis.

After the first bottle, your world is spinning and you're using your rapier-cane to cut up slices of cake. If anyone is sober enough to notice, they don't seem to care.

Hisao is slumped up against you with his tie around his ankle and wearing one of your porcelain sugar-bowls as a hat.

And based on conversation snippets, Hanako's somehow managed to turn her nightgown around backwards and is asking Akira to feel her scars.

You're not actually attentive enough to know if she accepts that offer.

"Ugh... Whair dihd you ghet thiiis shit, Akakiraaaa?" Hisao murmurs as he finishes his glass and tries to settle back into his seat, banging his head against your shoulder.

Your sister, of course, barely seems to have more than a light buzz. "Oh, I just have this little game going to collect all the beautiful things in this world." She giggles, then you hear the second bottle being lifted.

"So, who's ready for round two?"

"Me!" You pipe back with a crazed grin. Partly due to the wine and also because you sort of like having Hisao slouched on you. "Les' DOTTHIS."

"Aye, 'as mah sis 'eir." Akira muses happily in English.

"Wut the hell wassat?" Hisao asks.

"It means shut up and get ready for round 2." You translate loosely, putting your arms around Hisao and cuddling him as if he was a teddy bear.

The second bottle is uncorked and portioned out. You have at least a mild alcohol tolerance and Akira's in on the level where she could probably ingest battery acid with no ill effects, so you suppose it falls to you two to be their shepherd.

"Hey! Where's mai glasses?" Hisao asks.

"Dude, you don- you don't wear glasses." Hanako returns.

"I don't?" He lifts an arm off your lap and feels his face. "Fuck, that explains why they're missing."

"What I want to know is how Rin managed to get changed and everything in her crazy-studio if Emi wasn't there." Hanako drones.

"Wut.. the fuck are you talking about?" Hisao asks.

"Huh... I... don't know... What am I talking about?" Hanako says, hyperventilated slightly as if shutting out the signals from an alternate universe. She then takes another drink.

You giggle and follow suit, taking another sip, mentally surveying your companions.

You decide to nurse Hisao. After all, you're not best sure how well his meds will handle an interaction with alcohol.

There's also the fact that he's apparently trying to build himself a suit of armor out of your porcelain tea set.

"Hey Hisaooo." You remark, yanking him back down. "How're you doing?"

"Imma good." He replies. "I kinda wish I had a porcelain claymore to complete the set."

"We'll getcha one for next time." You say, snuggling into him.

Pressed against his chest, you hear his heart rhythm. It's erratic and off-tempo, but not too fast or too slow.

"So, you liek dolls, Hanako?" You can hear Akira saying. "Check this out!" She begins giggling madly as you start hearing a duffle bag opening and a thudding sound. "Akira's puppet show is in town!"

Judging by the sound, it must be a human-sized puppet. One that smells kind of like blood.

"Grr.. I r humanity's last hope!" Akira pantomimes. "Damn feminists."

Hanako bursts out laughing.

Realizing she might not actually be using a puppet, you reach up and yank Hisao's porcelain-hat over his eyes.

"Hey Lilly?" He asks, not losing a drop of the jolly mood. "Cha doing?"

"Oh, just want to try a little exercise." You reply sweetly, leaning against him.

"Hm..." You wonder what you might do now... With Hisao...

"Wait just a minute, Hisao." You say sweetly, touching the tip of his nose.

"Alright you guys." You say, turning to Akira and Hanako. "I think this party's about over with."

"Yeah... you're right." Akira says as you hear her tucking away whatever heretical marionette she was using. "Let's go crash in your room, Hanako."

"Um.. Um..." Hanako actually seems nervous. "O-Ok!"

Huh. You expected more resis-

WHAM.

Hanako's body collides with yours at full force and she nuzzles into you as if trying to start a fire.

"Thank you Lilly! Really! I really mean it! Thank you! THANK YOU!" She cries over and over as she cuddles you.

You smile broadly and kiss the top of her head, stroking her hair. "My pleasure. Happy birthday Hanako."

And with that, your sister and best friend depart, leaving just you in the room, alone with Hisao.

You breathe deeply and smile to yourself at this prospect.

"Um... Lilly... are yo- MMM?" He replies, but is swiftly silenced as you press your lips against his and snuggle into him.

You've kissed him before, of course. But unlike last time, he actually presses back. It feels like your own heart might be the one to explode from happiness this time.

"Lilly..." He gasps as you finally break apart, the strong scent of alcohol on both of your breaths. "What... are you...?" He asks as you feel him begin to try and remove the makeshift porcelain blindfold from his eyes.

You stop him with one hand and press a finger against his lips with the other.

"You're dreaming, Hisao." You tell him as you nuzzle back into him and plant another kiss on his neck.

Given how fucked up you both are, you really might as well be.

"Hehe." He laughs as he puts his arms around you. "Then may I never awaken."

[Meanwhile]

About the silent athletic field beneath a starry sky, two figures are walking together in utter silence, two pairs of eyes darting about: one blue and one gold.

[Shicchan… I’m sleepy… Can we just call it a night?]

[Don’t be such a baby. This is reconnaissance.]

Misha gives a confused eyebrow-cock.

[But I don’t even know what we’re reconaissing. Reconaissancing? Reconing?] She alternates between random gestures, trying to guess the verb form. [What we’re looking for.] She decides on.

[Places near the track that might hide explosives, vantage points, anything that could be used as an ambush-stage.]

[Shicchan…] Misha signs, possibly wanting to whine but realizing its futility.

[What is it?]

[Are you really even sure they’ll be doing anything at the track meet tomorrow?]

[Of course.] Shizune replies with hesitation, continuing to cast an analytical gaze across the topography.

[How could you know that?]

Those icy eyes cast a glare at Misha. [It’s what I would do.]

[End meanwhile]

The next morning, you awaken to the lovely aftereffects of dehydration and balance-issues.

"His-?" You ask, feeling where he was last you knew, but finding only a single origami figurine where he was.

You chuckle to yourself and carefully unfold the thing. You and Akira used to leave secret messages for each other like this when you were kids.

Unfolding it, you find the braille is crude, having apparently been made mostly by stabbing the paper with something blunt, but it's readable, at least.

'Hey Lilly. I checked up on you earlier this morning. Took Hisao back to his room so you'd have time to prepare. Also left you some of our family's hangover elixir. Drink it."

You shred the note and cast about, finding what appears to be a mug made out of a human skull on your nightstand.

You chug the bitter liquid and straighten, feeling your head clear.

All you and Hisao really did last night was make out, still though, it's a pleasant thought to ponder as you get ready.

Slightly less pleasant is the fact that your porcelain set is still missing. You hope Akira didn't decide to drunk-prank Hisao...

Finishing dressing, you arm yourself and wonder where to go first.

Emi's track meet isn't until later in the day, but Akira should probably be setting up now.

[Meanwhile]

Akira steps through the woods, a large black duffle bag at her side and a longer but thinner one slung over her back.

This was a mission that required a lot of gear, so she was way too overburdened to bring her briefcase.

It's a marginally uncomfortable feeling, but if all goes well, she wouldn’t need it.

‘This is the place’ she muses to herself as she reaches the hilltop she selected as her vantage point.

Kneeling down, she unzips the first bag and dumps out Kenji’s body onto the grassy knoll. She supposes it’s a fitting place for him to be found.

Next, she unravels the thinner bag and begins assembling her Intervention rifle.

[End meanwhile]

You decide you might as well tend to Hanako. After all, Akira's experience in caring for drunk friends easily surpasses yours. You trust that she tended to Hisao properly.

Exiting your room, you head over to her door and knock loudly.

"Hanako? It's Lilly."

You detect a series of thuds as the girl tries to rise too quickly and falls over. Then a patter of footsteps before the door comes open and she embraces you.

"Hey Lillyyy..." She mumbles into your chest. You smile and hand her the skull-mug. "Here, drink this."

"What is it?"

"An ancient Scottish alchemical secret. Passed down in our family for generations. Just drink it, trust me, you'll feel completely normal in about ten minutes."

That last bit seems to be all she needed to hear. "Thanks, Lilly." She takes the mug and downs the evil mixture.

"Ugh. Tastes like blood."

There's a reason for that... But Hanako doesn't need to know it.

Gently, you take her hand and lead her back to her bed, settling the two of you down.

You wonder what you should discuss with her as the slender girl clings to you, waiting for you to say something.

"So?" You ask. "Does Hisao meet your approval?"

"Y-Yeah!" She replies instantly. "I told you he did. And even drunk, he doesn't seem so bad."

She giggles to herself as she reminisces on last night. "I usually dislike the whole 'white knight' thing, but I don't think that applies to armor made from porcelain."

You laugh together. "Maybe he was planning to kill guybrush threepwood."

Hanako recovers quickly, thanks to your sister's evil powers.

"I wonder where Akira got that wine..." She wonders.

"She has a tendency for finding things... Of all varieties. Just roll with it."

She giggles and snuggles into you once again.

"Wanna play chess? I could help you work on your game, maybe?"

"Not now, Hanako. I should check on Hisao." You pick up the mug. "You know, I think he might need some of this just as badly as you did."

She giggles and releases your arm. "Y-Yeah. You're right, Lilly. I've got to go do something anyways."

You smile at her, happy that she seems more at peace, and take your leave.

Reaching Hisao's door, you give a knock.

"Ugh. Im sick. Goaway, please." He murmurs through the door.

You smile. "It's Lilly. And I've got some special medicine just for your condition."

It takes a moment, but he rises and opens the door.

"Come on in."

You hand him the mug. "Drink it, trust me, it'll make you feel better."

"Um... what's in it?"

He's really better off not knowing. You furrow your brow a little. "You don't trust me?" you say, giving a sad face.

Apparently that's not the case, since he chugs the mixture almost as soon as the last word is out.

You stay with him for the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, mostly making small talk while you keep a hand on his wrist, discreetly checking his pulse in case there's some kind of adverse reaction between his pills and the alchemic mixture. Suddenly, he breaks the silence.

"Oh? What time is it?"

"Hm? About three in the afternoon. Why?"

"Oh. I've got to go to Emi's track meet today."

He sighs and begins to rise.

"My my." You say. "What a favorable coincidence. I was just going to head there myself."

You rise, wrapping your arm around his.

"May I accompany you?"

He doesn't hesitate or even ask why you, of all people, would be attending a track meet. He replies simply and quickly.

"I'd be delighted, Lilly."

Arm in arm, you leave Hisao's room and head down to the track field together.

[Meanwhile]

About the equipment shed at the far end of the track, Rin is wandering aimlessly, wondering if there’s a way to talk to butterflies.

Suddenly, a movement catches her eyes as Hanako comes tearing out of the building like a bat out of hell and makes for the woods.

Rin watches her impassively for a moment, then nonchalantly kicks off a sandal, picks up her ritual brush, and draws a circular pattern of purple runes around her, channeling the overwhelming power of her insanity.

Magormor Pargon Pargon Antorbok Pargon Pargon Mantorok.

A rushing sound about her as she feels the powers of madness flow into the weapon on her bag.

Satisfied, she starts after the retreating Hanako at a casual pace.

[Meanwhile]

“So, you think Hisao’ll come and watch me?” Emi chirps happily as the nurse finishes inspecting her prosthetics.

“Of course. You share a tight bond in the sport. To say nothing of your other ties. Don’t fret. He’ll come.” He replies with his foxlike smile.

“Hehehe!” Emi giggles with a flush.

The call goes out for the runners to head out and begin warming up.

“Yeah!” She remarks as the two walk out onto the field together. “I can feel it! This’ll be an exciting day!”

And with that, the clacks out onto the field, leaving the nurse standing there, watching proudly. After a moment, someone taps him on the shoulder.

He turns to see a silent, blue haired-girl standing there. She smiles, presses a note into his hand, and walks away.

With a slightly raised eyebrow, he reads the note. Upon finishing, his expression turns grave and he crushes the note dramatically in his hand.

But no one’s watching him. He gives a sad face.

[End meanwhile]

You reach the track and settle into the bleaches with Hisao, enjoying both his and the sun’s warmth. Though really, you’d be more than ok with just his.

“Huh?” You hear Hisao make a noise of confusion.

“Hm?” You ask. “What is it, Hisao?”

“Oh… Hm… I could have sworn I just saw Hanako running off into the woods way off in the distance. Huh.”

That’s odd… what would she be doing there, of all places?

"Hanako's here?" You say with earnest concern, rising. "Which way, Hisao?"

"Oh... way off in - to the south. I'm not even really sure it was her..."

South? That's the opposite direction from where Akira set up... Why would she be there?

"Thanks Hisao." You say softly to him before turning and starting off in that direction.

"Lilly?" He remarks. "You're gonna miss the race."

Indeed, you hear all the participants lining up, along with a distinctive hateful clacking sound.

You smile sweetly at Hisao. "Save me something good."

And with the bang of the starter's pistol, the runners are off on their first lap and while you head off to find Hanako.

Positioned on a wooded hilltop nearly a kilometer away from the track, Akira lays prone on the ground, surveying the race through a rifle scope. She’d let the first race go to get a feel for Emi’s running rythym and make the calculations for movement, wind, humidity, gravity, and the Coriolis Effect.

Everything was ready now. No matter what kind of tools or conditioning Emi Ibarazaki had, there is no defense against a depleted uranium CheyTac round to the chest. Fixing her crosshairs above and slightly to the right…

SWISH.

Akira’s reflexes were just barely good enough to hurl herself to the side as a razor-sharp pair of long knives came whizzing through the space she’d been laying in. Instantly recognizing this new threat, she registers a blue-haired man in a long coat barreling at her, withdrawing an identical set of knives from his coat into his hand.

She doesn’t hesitate and flicks her hidden derringer into her hand, unloading four .22 magnum bullets on his head in the blink of an eye. A move the nurse counters simply by raising his arms to shield his face, producing an audible series of thuds.

‘A bulletproof doctor’s coat?’ Akira deduces as he closes in. “Fuck.” She states in a bland tone of voice.

On the other side of the forest, Hanako slips through the trees, giggling.

“Lilly will be so happy! Lilly will be so happy!”

“Really?” A monotone voice calls out.

Before her stands a being radiating madness, staring directly at her with a pair of vapid, soulless eyes.

“Rin?”

The girl walks towards her into the clearing. “I come here a lot, you know. It’s nice and quiet.”

She stops and tilts her head slightly. “You like quiet places, right? Good. Then this’ll be a nice grave for you.”

And with that, a massive force tears through the clearing, ripping apart the space Hanako just barely managed to hurl herself out of.

Whirling in the direction of her opponent, she sees Rin standing on a tree branch, the bag over her shoulder now empty; she clutches a long crystal scimitar between her teeth.

It’s almost as long as she is, but has a short grip which Rin is biting down hard on. The blade is made of some kind of translucent crystal, resembling glass. Her eyes, of course, remain vacant.

ZOOSH. Kicking off with those powerful legs of her, Rin lunges from her perch, arcing her body in another nightmarish sword-slash, which Hanako hurls herself to the side to avoid.

“Ah!” She squeaks as a wound opens up on her arm. It only lasts a second though.

Gritting her teeth, she makes a flicking motion with either hand and a set of slanted knives shoot out of her elongated shirt cuffs and link onto her fingers, forming a pair of claws. Squaring off against her, Rin shows no emotion.

Back in the forest, the nurse silently closes on Akira and launches a vicious serious of strikes. Sensing that the sniping mission was bust anyways, Akira seizes the barrel of her rifle and swings it as a staff to deflect the attacks. With the screeching sound of cleaving metal, the rifle itself is sliced apart, but serves its purpose of breaking the enemy’s charge.

With only a split second before her opponent recovers, Akira pulls her FiveseveN-and-Sykes-knife CQC combo and sprays from the hip. The nurse lunges off to the side as the rounds whiz around him.

It was the correct tactical decision: the armor on his chest would be enough to stop those rounds, but they could still shred his less-protected limbs.

He hurls off a trio of knives in Akira’s direction as he ducks behind a tree.

The first, she ducked, the second, she managed to deflect with her own blade before it pierced her heart, and the third plunged through the lower left quadrant of her abdomen.

She simply yanks out the blade and slinks back into cover. ‘Nothing vital that was hit.’ She observes. ‘I can keep going.’

At the other end, Hanako is faring much worse, barely managing to defend against Rin’s savage onslaught. It’s the fighting style of a lunatic: crazed and chaotic.

Everything about it seems to emphasize optical illusions.

For starters, Rin’s insane flexibility, strange movements, and odd grip on the blade render her movement impossible to read.

Next is the sword itself: nearly translucent, it’s practically invisible in motion. How is one supposed to defend again attacks they can’t even see?

Another savage strike, just barely perceptible, almost tears off Hanako’s leg as she barely hurls herself away.

With a bestial quickness, she lashes out with her claws, but Rin bends away and snaps back with another slash which Hanako partially catches on her shoulder. She didn’t see the blade at all that time and misjudged its reach.

Rin lunges away, preparing for another attack run, gazing down on Hanako with those soulless eyes of hers.

Suddenly, a second wave of pain shoots throughout Hanako’s damaged body, radiating from her wounds as if she’d been slashed again.

But… Rin was all the way over there… How could she… what was this insanity?

“T-This isn’t good…”

Akira and the nurse were playing a lethal game of tag now, the nurse having to launch his attack from random angles and quickly retreat before he caught a bullet in the face.

Akira was having a hard time locking on with the blinding level of speed…

Crash. As he hurdles out of the bushes, Akira takes a gambit and instead of trying to evade, she deflects his attack with her knife.

It was a risky maneuver: she was severely outclassed in terms of knife-fighting and indeed, almost the moment their blades clash the nurse yanks up his knives in a nearly point-blank slash that tore up her left arm.

It was worth the pain, though; Akira’s gun-hand was free and his momentum was halted.

She had time to blast off four shots before- CRACK.

The nurse drives an elbow into her wrist, knocking the gun out of her hand.

Utilizing instincts honed by years of bar-fights, Akira reciprocates the invitation to brawl by smashing her skull into his face as hard as she can and dives for her gun before checking to see what kind of damage had been inflicted.

Rising, re-armed, she finds the Nurse gone again.

‘Damn.’ She muses, ripping off her sleeve and tying a makeshift tourniquet. ‘I’d hoped to finish him off with that trick.’

Hanako was now hunched over, heaving heavily, having taken at least half a dozen deep slashes.

Her insidious red-headed opponent had barely broken a sweat.

If only she hadn’t used up her trump card earlier… if only… she might have a chance…

ZWISH.

Another strike nearly rips her apart as she only partially sidesteps an attack.

Only partially, though. She takes a deep cut to the abdomen.

Bleeding and in a burning agony, Hanako crumples to the ground.

Her breath shaking, she tilts her head up and stares into those blank eyes. Such dark eyes… The devil’s eyes…

It was over for her. Rin kicks off , arcing a single executioner’s strike on her enemy.

“Lilly…” Hanako breathes with a small smile as that final slash approaches to end her life. “Be happy.”

CLANG.

Instead of flesh, Rin’s blade slams into a hurled nunchaku, shattering it, but her attack losing all momentum.

You barrel into the clearing, taking up your rapier in one hand and your needler in the other. “Hanako!”

“L-Lilly!” She squeaks, still crumpled over.

It takes you the merest instant to survey the situation. Hanako’s wounded. Bleeding and shivering in pain.

Inwardly, you feel a seething rage at the soulless monster impassively surveying you from the treetops.

Hearing Hanako shivering in pain, you focus all your hate on Rin.

"You think you can harm my subjects? My friends? ZASSHU."

And with that, you blast your hail of needles at Rin, who lunges out of the trees to avoid them - but takes at least two through one of her atrophied arm-stumps.

Now Rin's unpredictable attacks are being faced with your own. And unlike you, she's still reliant on sight.

Rin charges you, slinging her deadly blade directly at you. The blade, however, is clearly perceptible as far as you're concerned and you managed to sidestep it, before reversing to setting and firing a backside attack on Rin.

She has just enough time to turn her head and perceive it.

WHAM.

Rin slams herself facefirst into the ground as a rather clumsy, but efficient way of avoiding your attack. One clips her shoulder as she goes down, but the rest rip apart the trees in front of where she was standing.

Whipping up as if a coiled snake, she hurls her crystal blade at you.

It's a mighty attack that you don't have time to dodge, so instead you swing your rapier up and into it.

Charged with Rin's full muscle mass, it cleaves your rapier and deflects off to the side.

Not hesitating, Rin charges after it, her sleeves billowing after her, knowing she has to reclaim her weapon before you bring your own down on her.

Bringing your Needler to bear, you summon the needles to you as Rin's powerful leg muscles carry her ever closer to her blade.

Click. The needles ready for another attack, to reverse the setting and blast a hellish spiral of death upon Rin.

She lunges in a front roll, seizing the grip of her blade in her teeth as her inertia sends her tumbling.

This time, however, she catches an arm on that deadly spiral across her calf and gives a muffled scream into the grip of her blade.

Rising, she takes a lunge at you with blinding speed.

You raise the cleaved half of your rapier to defend and are blown back a good ten or so meters as you meager defense is pressed to its limit.

As you fall, you reverse the setting and send another hail at Rin.

This time, lacking the mobility to defend, she raises her blade and slinks into a low stance that minimizes frontal exposure.

You hear a flurry and packing sounds and clangs as some of your needles rip through her flesh whilst other ricochets off her blade.

She sacrificed a hell of pain to protect what mattered and managed to evade a critical hit.

Bloody and wounded, Rin surges back up and charges you.

Pressed to the ground as you are, you have to hope of either evasion or defense.

You raise your Needler, gritting your teeth.

Your only hope is to kill her before she kills you.

Channeling the full power of your noble phantasm, you blast the needles at Rin as a backside attack as she draws closer to you.

A lunging step carries her closer.

You can hear the hiss of your needles singing through the air.

Another step; you're close enough to smell the paint on her.

A final step as she draws into striking distance and launches an arc cleanly at your central mass.

FWFWFWFWFWFWFWFWFW.

Before the attack is completed, the mad girl is grilled from behind by your complete set of needles and blown to the ground, her scimitar flying off as her body goes limp.

Maintaining your composure, you straighten and stride towards the smell of blood: towards Rin.

You can just barely make out her breathing, faint and gurgling, but there.

If she gets immediate medical attention, she just might be able to survive.

Standing over your defeated enemy, you sense... nothing.

No fear, no sorrow, no joy: a lunatic facing the prospect of death with complete apathy.

Hanako, slumped into the ground, can just make out the scene: You standing over Rin's mangled body as she simply stares up at you with a vacant, soulless gaze.

Without changing your expression, you pull the trigger one finally time.

Thirty-three armored needles plunge directly through Rin's body and deep into the earth, staining the field with blood as she's shredded to death.

The sight of Rin's eyes is visible only to Hanako: they look exactly the same dead as alive.

Without lingering, you simply turn and calmly walk back to Hanako, helping her to her feet.

“Sorry Lilly… I’m really sorry…” Hanako mutters, weak from her wounds as you support her. “I’m sorry to make you worry… I used up my best trick already…”

“Your ‘best trick’? On what?” You ask, fighting down the flurry of questions that raises.

Hanako giggles weakly.

“Something… that’ll make you happy.”

Back in the forest, Akira had abandoned her knife. More accurately, she just let it fall to the ground.

Thankfully, she could still feel her arm – indicating no nerve damage; but less fortunately, the muscle-damage was great enough that she couldn’t move it. The limb was shredded.

The nurse, on the other hand, had ducked into cover, having received a compound fractured nose, two shots to the thigh, and two to the abdomen. She’d likely been trying to use her gun’s muzzle-jump to speed up his body to his head.

The attacks to his abdomen had been absorbed by his armor, but both shots to his leg had carried through the thinner fiber and worse, one was a solid hit to the femoral artery: his right leg was badly damaged now.

Now both combatants were looking at a time-limit before they succumbed to a severe set of injuries.

The Nurse made the first move, flicking three knives into each hand and hurling them out in in two dispersing arcs.

Akira dove through, allowing one to glance off her shoulder in exchange for avoiding the others.

As she evaded this attack, the Nurse made a lunge directly at her, pressing his body to the utmost limits of his speed and tearing apart his damaged leg as he exacerbated the gunshot wounds.

Rising and seeing the trio of claw-gripped knives, Akira managed to fling her body weight back and they tore through into the side of her gut rather than her heart, as originally intended. Pinning his enemy with one hand, the nurse brought forth his second clawed fist to finish her off.

Now that his agile but brittle opponent was trapped, unable to break away, he had her.

Back at the race track, Emi, unsurprisingly pulled up into first place with an astonishing burst of speed, hurdling towards the finish line.

Pulling ahead of everyone else with a crazed grin on her face, the girl catapulted through the finish line, the ribbon wrapping around her abdomen as the crowd roared with the thrill of her victory.

FWOOSH.

A split second later, that same ribbon burst into white-hot flames.

Too weak to talk as you carry her back, Hanako simply giggles and smiles to herself, musing over her plan in her mind.

Emi Ibarazaki always won, so it had been little conjecture as to who would touch the ceremonial finish line first.

In the storage shed, Hanako had smeared it with a thin coating of gel based on greek fire.

She smiled to herself.

Hurling herself into her runs with such passion, the girl had literally charged straight into a fire trap.

The naptha-fueled flames burning at several times the intensity of ordinary fire, Emi went down in an instant as her clothes disintegrated and she crashed into the ground, hurdling along with the inertia of her run as wrapped in flames.

It was like watching a shuttle crash.

Strangely, she didn’t seem to be in pain yet, her eyes simply widening in an expression of mild surprise.

The crowd erupted screaming and the racetrack quickly descended into pandemonium.

“Medic!” The announcer screamed. “Medic! To the track NOW! Emi Ibarazaki is down, I repeat Emi Ibarazaki is down!”

In the forest, the same impassioned cry echoed out.

“Medic! Emi Ibarazaki is down!” The announcer’s voice crackled from the race track.

This was the one thing that could have broken the nurse’s concentration.

Hearing Emi’s name, his instincts as a doctor overcame everything else and for the briefest instant his focus shifted from his opponent to Emi.

This moment of hesitation was all Akira needed.

The second his speed slowed gave her enough time to use a simple sleight-of-hand trick to flick out her .45-70 derringer and blow his heart out with a contact shot.

# Part 14

Clutching a basket in one hand and a normal navigational cane in the other (definitely a change of pace) you make your way through the halls of the infirmary.

Your thoughts upon returning from the forest with Hanako could be best summarized with the phrase "What the fuck just happened?"

The school track field was in chaos, you smelled smoke, you had no idea what was happening with your sister, and Hanako was badly injured.

You were able to get Hanako to the medics in time and they took over on tending to her.

Then, while waiting anxiously on her treatment, your hearing picked up an admittance of someone with a 1.70 blood-alcohol content and learned that Akira had been admitted also, but was stable.

You have no idea what happened there.

Now you've had time to make a fast swing by your room and grab a pair of sequestered get-well presents.

Having little idea what happened in the forest past what you were present for yourself, you wonder whether to visit Hanako or Akira first...

Hanako's condition is stable and you know what caused it. Akira, on the other hand, is a mystery to you.

Makes sense to check on her first.

You find her room and enter.

"Akira?" You ask tentatively.

"Hey hey, sis!" She greets you, cheerful as ever.

“Hey there you two!” Akira greets you in your usual manner.

“Akira?” You ask, making your way to her before your cane strikes something hard. A wheel? She’s in a wheelchair?

“Akira? Wha? Ho? Are you?”

“Don’t worry, I’m fine.” She responds, not missing a beat. “Mostly just muscle-sheath damage. Would you shut the door please?”

In a haze, you comply and the portal emits a shifting sound as it’s closed and locked.

Satisfied, Akira chuckles to herself. "So, what would you like to know first?"

"What happened to you?" You ask one of several questions burning on your mind.

She gives a 'pomf' and begins to elaborate.

“I got into a tough fight that I wasn’t equipped for.” She summarizes. “Took a few nice slashes and puncture wounds.”

“Akira…” You begin, but she puts her hand on yours and gives a reassuring squeeze.

“Eh, don't worry about me. I thought it was just gonna be a simple sharpshooting gig, so I was armed for that instead of a CQC fight.”

You hear a light thumping as she pats her briefcase at her feet and for an instant her voice drops to a soft, threatening purr. “For a fight of this nature… I should have been carrying ‘that’.”

After a moment of ominous silence, she perks back up. "So yeah, the sniping gig was a bust, but from what I've been gathering in here, seems it wasn't really necessary."

"Who did you fight, Akira... and how did that happen?"

"Emi's doctor-friend. He was actually pretty good." She laughs softly. "Something worthwhile in this world. It's always nice to find those hidden treasures. You have any liquor on you, by the way? I've been running on fumes since Kenji was taking up most of my fridge space."

You giggle to yourself. Yeah, she's fine.

"Here." You reply, passing her a smuggled bottle of scotch, which she takes with a hearty "Thankye" and begins chugging.

"But Akira..." You continue. "How'd he know where you were?"

She finishes and makes a humming sound as she thinks. "Hm, now that I don't know. I wasn't followed. That's certain... Any chances you've been being spied on? Or that our communications were compromised?"

"Hm..." You muse as you think. "Do you think it's possible Shizune and Misha had something to do with it?"

Akira mulls this over for a minute, then responds. "It's possible, yes. I wouldn't put it past Shizune to simply figure it out if she had incentive."

She shifts about as if hoping for another bottle, which you have and give her. "It depends; how discreet have you been with Hisao? You done anything that might catch her eye?"

Come to think: too many to count, actually. You haven't been very discreet at all.

"Hm... yes... It's... erm... 'possible' I may have drawn a few eyes." You say, fidgeting slightly.

Akira hums for a minute, then takes another drink before replying. "Well, yeah, quite likely then. Did you notice anything at the track?"

With the absurdity of that question, you realize Akira doesn't actually know about your battle with Rin.

Or Hanako - who suddenly jumps back to the forefront of your mind.

Pausing a moment, think of how to summarize concisely, you say. "I... wasn't actually at the track, Akira... Hanako got into a spot of trouble."

"What kind?"

"The kind where a sword-wielding psychopath jumps you." You rise and release Akira's hand. "I'll go check on her now if it's ok with you. I'll bring her over when I'm done."

Your sister gives a wistful sigh. "Alright... I'll wait."

"Thanks, Akira." And you leave her behind you as you exit the room.

Locating Hanako's room after a few moments of search, you delicately ease the door open as you knock.

"Hanako?"

"Lillyyyy..." She purrs in a dreamy voice - possibly due to your presence or possibly a bit hazy on pain meds.

You enter and shut the door before crossing over and settling down on her bed. Even in her current state, she manages to slither up and hug you.

"Are you alright, Lilly?"

"My, my. I should be asking you that, Hanako. What did the doctors say?"

She continues clinging to you as she explains. "A bit of blood loss, muscle damage, two cracked ribs, with a lot of burn wounds..."

She seems as confused by that as you are. What kind of madness was Rin using?

"I-I'm definitely going to be adding to my scars... Y-You won't mind it thought, r-right?"

She seems to be nervous again for some reason.

You pat her head. "Of course not. Don't be silly, Hanako... I'm just happy you're alright. What were you doing out there?"

"Well, I t-t-thought that since Emi was in your way... I could do you a favor... Rin came out of nowhere..." She trails off.

After a moment, she suddenly becomes more animated. "I-I saw you lose two of your canes.. I'm really sorry about that, Lilly."

You stroke her hair, but decide to pick her mind a little more. "So... what exactly did you do?"

She nuzzles into you for a moment, then begins. "W-Well. It started last Sunday when Hisao left me that book on Byzantine alchemy. After you came to me later on, I started wondering how I could help you... and there was a recipe for Greek fire in there..."

'Wait, what?' You think to yourself.

"I dropped by Akira's to get the materials and make sure I wouldn't be in her way. I set up a fire trap for Emi."

'Sunday?'

She giggles and nuzzles into you. "I-I think it worked. Did it work? Are you happy, Lilly?"

You smile at her and put your arms around her. "Yes. I don't even know whether or not it worked but your devotion means a lot to me..."

Still...

"But Hanako?" You remark. "Sunday? Last Sunday... Hisao was in the city with me... the entire day."

You feel Hanako's head shoot straight up as she looks straight in the direction of the sky for no reason at all.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEHHH?!?!?!?!"

[Meanwhile]

In the student council room, Misha is building a card castle while Shizune monitors the casualty reports from the massacre earlier.

Kenji is officially being dubbed the ‘monster of Yamaku’ – responsible for two murders and several critical injuries. Checking the computer, she already finds /b/ mocking him for not killing enough people.

Giving a contented sigh, she leans back into her chair and stretches before signing to Misha.

[Well, that went off nicely, I think.]

[I hope it was worth-it] Misha replies, her eyes bearing the dark rings of sleep-deprivation. [So Shicchan… Does this have something to do with why you left that book for Hanako?]

She presses a finger against her glasses and smiles.

[Or course. It was just common sense that she’d accept it. I found that Lilly’d been leaving Hanako food while I was attempting to track down the doughnut box that disappeared from the council room.]

Misha perks up. [Does that mean you’re going to apologize for calling me fat?]

[No.]

She hangs her head dejectedly. “wahaha.”

Shizune doesn’t respond and continues. [I knew that’d she’d been growing more unstable and figured that the probability of her developing an unhealthy attachment to Lilly was high: if she had a chance to help Lilly, she’d do it. All I had to do was put the gun in her hand.]

Misha doesn’t answer, but gives a slight twitch at the mention of Hisao.

After a moment. [So did things turn out the way you wanted?]

[More or less. I was hoping Akira and the Nurse would kill each other, but one dying and one being injured wasn’t a bad consolation prize.]

She twirls a pencil with one hand and signs with the other. [Emi worked out about as well as I’d hoped. Rin’s death was an unexpected outcome, but not at all an unwelcome one.]

She smiles and rises.

[Now Lilly’s been considerably weakened and three very troublesome obstacles are removed. All without us having to dirty ourselves.] She crosses the room and gives a contented smile to Misha. [Swords can only defeat one enemy at a time. Tactics can defeat many.]

Misha gives a half-hearted smile and stares at her with those gold eyes.

[Alright Misha.] Shizune signs. [NOW it’s time to make our move.]

[End meanwhile]

Back in Hanako’s room, you simply allow the slightly inebriated girl to cuddle you for a moment.

“Oh, by the way, Hanako.” You say, reaching into your bag. “I got you a present.”

She perks up. “H-huh?”

From your bag, you withdraw an intricate porcelain doll and hand it to her.

“It used to be mine when I was little, but I think you’d be a better owner.” You tell her with a broad smile.

She takes it breathlessly. You seem to have timed it right.

To lighten the mood a bit, you scrunch your mouth in thought and monologue. “For some reason – my family’s always owned a lot of porcelain stuff… Our tea sets, the ceramic weapons Akira and I use… There’s even a family legend that one of our ancestors used a porcelain dagger to kill the mighty pirate Threepwood.”

You turn and kiss her forehead. “My former family, that is. The one I have now is so much better…”

“L-lilly…” She purrs.

You smile and hug her for a moment.

You’re glad her mood has improved. You’d feel alright with letting her rest now, seeing as how she’s half-asleep already.

You give Hanako a light goodnight kiss to the forehead and rise.

"Alright Hanako, just rest now. I'll be by again to check on you later."

As you rise, she loses her support and flops back to her bed, still clutching your doll to her chest. "A-Alright, Lilly..."

With a final smile, you exit the room and gently close the door behind you.

You meander back towards Akira's room at a slow pace, debating how to best summarize this new information and its implications...

In Hanako’s darkened room, the girl lays there in a daze, staring at the beautiful token of friendship you’ve given her.

“We really are a family… We really are…” Hanako mumbles, doting on your kindly smile.

Although she’s glad she could help, she feels a strong pang of remorse at the way things played out.

Battling Rin, you dodged death by a hair’s breadth. It’s exactly that kind of situation she wanted to avoid.

Furrowing her brow, she makes an oath to herself that she needs to become stronger for you. By any means necessary.

She closes her eyes.

Delving deep within herself, she feels her long-suppressed emotions. The sorrow of being alone, the rage she felt at being belittled. The anger, the longing.

With a smile, she brings all these emotions to the forefront of her consciousness – burying whatever sense of timidity or weakness that remained.

Hanako feels herself change and basks in the feeling.

Sitting there, alone in the dark, she breaks the stillness and emits a low, eerie giggle.

Back in Akira’s room, you finish relaying the situation as you understand it.

Your sister sighs. “Well then; sounds like you’ve made some good progress towards Hisao, although the cost was high, it’s nothing irreconcilable.”

True, Akira’s wounded but in no danger. Hanako should be discharged within a day or two. You’ve lost some combat strength, but managed to keep everyone alive, at least.

“I won’t be able to run around for a couple weeks while my muscle sheath regenerates.” She sighs. “Why couldn’t I have been in some shitty shounen series where mortal wounds heal in fifteen seconds?”

“Akira…” You say in a concerned tone.

She hushes you by reaching up and squeezing your hand. “So I’ve decided to stay at Yamaku while I heal up. I can at least offer advice.”

“Akira? Are you sure that’s safe?” You ask.

She actually laughs at your concern and once more pats her briefcase. “No worries at all. I was caught unprepared in that forest. Now though… I have ‘that’.”

It’s true and you know it. The ultimate prize of the person actively seeking out everything beautiful in the world… The perfect treasure…

Akira’s noble phantasm.

“So don’t worry about me.” She concludes, or seems to, but then makes a noise of hesitation before restarting her speech. “Although… I’d still like it if you could visit once in a while…”

You wrap your arms around your sister and hug her, smiling. “Of course I will.”

“Hehe! Great!”

You linger there for the rest of the night, making small talk, playing games, and pondering the tactical situation.

You’ve been weakened… but not defeated. Emi's been removed from the picture. All that remains between you and Hisao’s heart is your lifelong nemesis…

“Shizune.”

# Part 15

You linger in Akira's room for a while, spending a bit of time with her.

Hanako's resting in her room and may be discharged soon, as her wounds aren't debilitating. As for her mental health... you're not really sure whether that's worse or better.

Passing a flask back and forth, Akira entertains you with some trivial stories of her exploits since you've moved to Yamaku.

"So then my buddy told us all not to speak Russian...."

Inwardly, your mind trails off and turns towards Hisao.

From what you overheard from the staff, it seems that he went to the ER with Emi...

There's no way she'd be receiving visitors, though, even if she isn't dead already.

He might just be skulking in the waiting room.

Your stomach churns at the thought.

Having made sure that your sister and best friend are in one piece, you might want to see how he's doing now.

Deciding that you should go check on Hisao, you rise once you feel Akira's at a decent stopping point.

"Pardon, Akira. But I think I should go check on Hisao... I'm rather worried."

"No problem. It's completely understandable."

"I'll be by to visit you again soon, ok?"

"Sure."

And with that exchange, you exit and head through the halls of the infirmary. It's nighttime now and the halls are mostly silent.

As you approach the ER, though, you hear a pacing rhythm of footfalls, back and forth, back and forth...

"Hello?" You call.

"Huh? Oh... Hey Lilly..." You hear Hisao's voice answer dryly before he resumes his pacing.

"Hisao?"

No response.

He seems only half-there... not unlike how Hanako was at her birthday last year... It stings your heart to think of him in that same way now.

Better trend delicately here...

"So Hisao?" You ask in a low but positive tone. "How are you doing?"

He stops pacing and silence permeates the room for a moment, then flatly replies. "I'm fine."

This is somewhat less than convincing.

"Hisao..." You say, walking up and taking his hand.

He sighs deeply, then states. "Emi didn't make it."

The flush of joy you feel at this news is offset by the impact it's seeming to have on your man.

He breaks away from your grasp and slumps into one of the waiting room chairs.

"Hisao?" You ask.

"Heh. I wonder... Could it have been this way for me?" He doesn't seem to be speaking to you. It's more like a monologue. "When I was first rushed into the ER... I came out... But it really could have gone this way, too, couldn't it?"

You have a seat next to him and gently put your arm over his shoulder.

"Hisao... it's alright. Really... It's not your fault. There was nothing you could have done."

He hesitates for a moment, then simply states. "Yeah. I know."

His mood doesn't seem to have improved.

You sit there in silence for a few minutes, then he adds. "Emi... made me feel strong."

After that, he quiets himself. You make a couple other attempts to make him talk, but none of them work.

Maybe you should have brought him a coffee or something... Anything to get a reaction. This catatonic state is crushing.

You sit there in silence with your arm around his limp frame until one of the nurses kicks you out.

You head back to your dorms in silence. Hisao blankly returns your 'goodnight' and vanishes, leaving you with a major factor to consider.

The next morning, your internal clock kicks you awake earlier than usual.

After all, you wanted it this way. There's oodles to do now.

Preparing yourself for the day, you twirl your needler absentmindedly as you debate who to attend to first.

Smiling, you make a fresh thermos of R'lyeh vanilla tea and head over to the infirmary to see Hanako.

"Lilly..." You hear her call as you ease the door open and smile to yourself.

You were trying not to wake her in the offhand chance she was sleeping. So much for that idea.

"Good morning, Hanako." You reply as you enter. "Feeling better today?"

She gives a low giggle as you draw closer. "Starting off my day like this... how could I not be?"

You tilt your head slightly, not comprehending her statement. Then you simply shrug it off and pour two screaming cups of tea.

Hanako holds your hand for a bit longer than usual as she takes it.

"Eheheh. So Lilly... How about you?"

"Hm?"

"How about you? Lilly..."

She sounds out your name slowly and softly before continuing. "How are you doing?"

"I'm doing rather well, actually." You reply, giving your hand a reassuring squeeze. "Emi's no longer a factor, after all."

"Hm?" Hanako purrs.

"Oh, she succumbed to her injuries last night." You give her a smile. "Thank you ever so much for that, Hanako."

She remains speechless for a moment, then erupts into a fit of low giggles. "Ehehe! Ehehehe... Yay..."

She tugs your hand and pulls you over into a hug.

"I knew it'd be alright... I knew it... All I had to do... was kiiiii-iiillll heeer..." She actually sings that last part. "I'm happy that you're happy."

"My, my, Hanako. I'm glad to hear it." You reply as she releases you.

"They should be letting me out of here either today or tomorrow... What else is there? What else can I do for you?"

"Hm... Well, there may be something you could do later..."

"I'm all ears Lilly."

You smile. "When you get out... try to keep an eye on Shizune and Misha? They're my last obstacle before Hisao's all mine..." It's your turn to trail off dreamily with that last bit.

"Yeah... I'd be happy to do more..." She tells you before softly giggling again.

"Thank you, Hanako."

"Anytime. Ehehe."

As Hanako begins a humming an odd tune under her laugh, the bell rings. Bidding her farewell, you head off to class.

Normally it's useless and you know it, but Hisao's still attending class as far as you know. Better to put yourself closer to him.

Sadly, you don't manage to 'accidentally' bump into him in the hallway and head off to another hypnotic boredom-seminar.

After an uneventful morning session, you ready yourself for lunch. Still though; who to have it with?

Concerned as you are about Hisao, you decide you should go spend some time with Akira.

After all, she was injured fighting for you without the proper equipment.

Heading over to the infirmary with the bestial sound of WAHAHAs echoing through the hallway, you arrive to utter stillness.

You don't hear anyone speaking.

Your cane strikes a still body on the floor.

They're dead. Everyone's de-

One of the bodies suddenly lurches to life and vomits.

Oh, they're not dead. Just drunk.

You're glad to see Akira's settled in already.

Making your way through Akira's alcoholic temple, you open her door.

"Hey hey!" You hear her call to you from the direction of the window.

"Hello Akira." You greet your sister with a smile. "How are you?"

You hear a tapping sound begin coupled with footfalls. Akira must be using a cane for now.

"Oh, I'm ok. Been making myself at home, as you've probably noticed."

"Eheh." You giggle. "I may have noted something of the sort."

Akira flops down in her chair with an exhale. "So, what can I do for ya?"

"Oh nothing." You reply, settling yourself down next to her in the oversized easy chair and poking one of her hair-spikes. "I just came to visit you. No other occasion."

"Ehehe!" She laughs heartily. "Aw. Thanks. Much appreciated."

Leaning up against her, you realize that you can actually feel her ribs.

"Akira... Are you... alright?"

"Huh? Nothing's happened since you saw me yesterday."

You scrunch your face up a bit in disapproval. "I meant in general." You poke her side. "You've lost weight, haven't you?"

"Oh, that." You feel her shrug. "I just haven't been paying much attention to the Akira-channel lately, I guess." She puts her arm around you. "Not to worry, though. I took care of everything 'you' asked me to do with the utmost care."

She sighs. "That said, I kinda wish I'd had the time to fix my own Needler. You know, the original model I based yours off of... That would've been small enough to carry..."

She sighs and trails off, leaving you wondering exactly how much she really did neglect for your sake.

You shrug and snuggle again her. "Well, don't let that happen again, ok, sis?"

"Hehe. Roger that!"

She doesn't get it. You sigh, then lift your hand and feel Akira's face. "I mean it. About yourself. Seriously... don't let yourself go like that again."

"Lilly..." With your hand on her face, you can make out her expression as a pleased brand of startlement.

"Seriously, Akira. I didn't want you to run yourself down like this... Please... take better care of yourself."

She smiles. "...ok. I promise."

The rest of your lunch session is passed reminiscing about some of the times you spent together as children. Akira seems much happier when she talks about that...

After a bit of pleasant nostalgia, the bell rings and you head back to class.

It passes in a daze. Really... what the hell were you thinking? Treating someone so close to you as an exploitable resource... That's something Shizune would do.

And speaking of people close to you...

The ending bell rings and you wander out, turning your thoughts to Hisao. Your hope for a future to couple to the pleasant past you shared with Akira.

On that note, Hanako also factors in... for some reason, you have a feeling that she'll want to be a part of this future as well... Perhaps you should go visit her if it's necessary.

Or maybe you should just sit on everything for today. It seems to have worked out well enough.

Yes... Hisao's had some time to mull over his circumstances...

You may as well drop by and see him.

You head over to the his dorm room and knock.

"Hisao? It's Lilly."

No reply.

You cast your sharpened hearing into the room and detect nothing. No sign of life; no movement, no breathing rhythm.

Odd... where else would he be?

There's the library... That odd club he was starting with Mutou...

Normally you could just ask Hanako, but unfortunately she was sidelined today.

Shizune would definitely know, but there's no way in hell she'd tell you...

Hm? What about Misha?

You've helped her out a couple times so she may return the favor...

You decide that it wouldn't be that much of a stretch to ask Misha to help you and make your way to her room.

She's considerably easier to find. You simply head over to her dorm and knock.

"Hello?"

A shuffling sound instantly greets you, followed by a dragging sound. Then the door opens.

"Uhh...." You hear her yawn. That's right... she does usually go to bed early... "Oh, good morning Lilly... Or is it night? Wahaha."

You smile to yourself.

"Still early afternoon, Misha."

"Oh... ok then..." She seems to be lacking in her usual energy.

"I'm sorry to disturb your slumber, but would you happen to know where Hisao is?"

"Huh? Hicchan?" She replies, thinking. "Oh right... he wasn't in class today."

"What? Really? Why?"

"I dunno..." She yawns again. "I saw him coming back here though... he was running laps around the track field... Maybe he's still there?"

You smile and pat her shoulder. Oh, she's wrapped in a blanket... that's what the dragging sound was.

"Thanks Misha. I appreciate it."

"Don't mention it." She pauses and sighs. "Make him better, ok? Wahaha."

And with that, she heads back into hibernation and you make for the track at a brisk pace.

Sure enough, you detect a rhythmic set of footfalls once you arrive.

"Hisao?!" You call out.

They stop. "Oh. Hi Lilly." He dryly calls back before making his way over to you. "Need something?"

"Oh, well, I just wanted to make sure you were alright..." You answer. "I mean... you seemed a bit... perturbed yesterday."

He scoffs. "I'm ok." There it is again, that distant tone of voice reminiscent of Hanako's.

He turns to go, but you catch him by the hand. "Really, Hisao? This... isn't like you..."

You can catch the scent of his sweat on the breeze...

It's a heavy scent.

How long has he been running down here? Is this safe for his heart?

"Really... I'll be ok." He replies in that same flat voice. He might be in a state of runner's high right now.

You sigh inwardly. It's a bit agitating that he's distanced himself so much. You wish he'd talk to you...

"I'm fine." He repeats, tugging away slightly.

One thing you're certain of is that he's clearly not 'fine'.

"Hisao..."

“Hisao, please.” You reply. “You’re not ‘alright’. I can tell.”

He sighs and chuckles a bit. “Can you? Really? What gave me away?”

You dislike that morose tone. “Hisao… you’re not talking to anyone. You’re working yourself way harder than you should be. You skipped class. This thing’s eating you… Please…”

He’s silent for a moment, then. “How’d you know I skipped class?”

“Misha told me. She’s worried about you, too, Hisao.”

He breathes a sigh. “You asked Misha about me?”

“She’s worried about you. We all are.”

He tugs away again. “Just… let me be…”

“Hisao. Please… this isn’t healthy… Emi wouldn’t have wanted you to be this upset either.”

“… You don’t get it…”

“Hisao? What? Tell me. What don’t I get?”

“Just… leave me alone.” He replies quietly.

“Tell me. What is it, Hisao?"

Suddenly, with a violence you've never seen before, Hisao rips his arm out of your grasp.

“Yes. You’re right! I’m damaged, ok?! I'm broken! I'm really and truly fucked up! I’ve said it, are you happy?!” He’s shouting at you now, genuinely angry.

“I get reminded choking down pills every day when I wake up or try to fall asleep! When I lie awake because of the insomnia! When I try to climb a hill and find myself heaving! Everything I fucking DO reminds me of that!”

You’re speechless. You’ve never heard him even raise his voice.

“Emi was the only person who didn’t treat me like I was made out of fucking glass. I almost felt like I was a normal person again! And now that’s gone?! Now you think I need to be ‘fixed’?!”

He gives a dry, mocking laugh, completely devoid of actual joy.

“Just… Leave me alone. Seriously. Go.”

And with that, he turns and heads back to the track, leaving you standing there speechless.

The breeze blowing against you might as well be a tidal wave. You feel as if you’ve had something vital drained out of you.

Where… did you go wrong? Did you love him the wrong way? How… did you drive him to this?

You run over this loop a thousand times in your mind as you stand there, dumbstruck. Replaying these questions over and over. Even when you know it’s fruitless.

There’s nothing you can say now. Nothing you can do. There was a finality in his voice when he told you “Go.”

Realizing that, you crumple to your knees and begin to sob. Hisao is lost to you.

[BAD END]

# Part 16

"Oh... Hey Lilly..." Hisao gets you dully as you move onto the track. "Did you need something?"

"Hm? Oh, nothing at all, Hisao." You reply with a calm smile. "I was just in the area and wondered you could be down here."

"Oh. Yeah... Just me." He responds.

"Do you mind if I stay for a bit?"

"Hm? No. I guess not." He replies in a puzzled tone, given that there's really nothing for you to do down here.

"Thank you." You say, sliding to a seat on one of the bleachers.

After a moment of silence, Hisao resumes his laps around the track. Mentally, you keep a close watch on his position - quite easy given that you two are the only people down here.

This continues for a time, then after another round, Hisao breaks from the tracks and slumps into the bleachers next to you, panting.

You're concerned for his heart... but he seems alright. You wait for him to talk... if he feels like it.

"Hehe." He begins a dry chuckle after catching his breath. "Beat my record..."

"Congratulations." You say, putting your hand on his - which is still a bit sweaty, not that you mind.

"Haa... Well... I guess I need to set the bar higher next time..." His voice takes on an airy quality, as if quoting someone. "Just set try for better next time..."

You're about to inquiry what he's getting at, but suddenly a rustling off in the direction of the path back to school catches your attention.

You stay silent and keep your hand on Hisao's for a little until he hears it too. Then you address them.

"Who's there?" You inquire.

...

No answer. That means it's that fucking deaf bitch.

A stiff pace of footfalls comes over towards you and Hisao frees up his hands so he can sign to her.

She doesn't linger though, just stuffs a note into his hand and retreats.

"Hm?" You make a noise of inquiry. "My, my. Was that Shizune?"

"Oh, yeah." Hisao replies as he slips the note into his pocket before giving a laugh.

"Hehe... She's calling in a favor I owe the Student Council. Apparently, now I have to go help them with some graduation paperwork."

He laughs again. "Seriously? Now, of all times, Shizune?"

It doesn't seem like that most tactful thing to you either, but it seems as if Hisao's taking it as a joke.

"Ha... Yeah..." He muses, half to you, half to himself. "She's right, actually... Life has to go on..."

You scrunch your mouth up a bit, but say nothing.

It's a simple message that you both understand. 'Events only have as much significance as you yourself place on them. Dwelling on an event only exacerbates its severity."

You smile to yourself... Perhaps you'll make Shizune's death a quick one.

My, my... What do you owe those two for?" You inquire.

"Oh... They kept covering for me whenever I'd miss class to be with Emi.”

He sighs and then continues. “After all, we don't all get Hanako's leniency there."

Before you can think of a good comment on that, he suddenly and sharply inhales as if remembering. "How IS Hanako, anyways? I mean, not to pry, but I heard she'd been admitted to the infirmary when I was there."

He quickly clarifies his outburst, then pauses for a moment and addends. "Um... Is she alright?"

It’s a sharp change of tone, as if he’d just been jolted awake.

As for what you should say about Hanako…

"Oh, Hanako?" You reply with a smile. "I saw her just earlier today, actually. She's doing quite well."

He sighs. "Well, that's good to hear."

Feeling that he'd be a bit more open to contact now, you nudge closer and squeeze his hand. "Would you like to come with me to see her tomorrow?"

"Huh? Me?"

"Of course. She'd like it, I think."

"Hm... ok, yeah. Yeah, we can do that."

You smile and let the silence of the evening breeze take hold for a moment, then-

"Lilly?"

"Hm?"

"Um... you're... ok, too... right?"

"Hisao?"

"After yesterday... I mean..."

You blush slightly at his concern. "I'm quite well, Hisao."

Actually, you missed being horribly murdered by Rin by about a tenth of a second, but he doesn't need to know that part.

Hm... actually... that gives you an idea. Rin's weapon... it still might be there...

The two of you sit together in silence for a little while, enjoying each other's company. You're quite glad Hisao seems to be coming out of his angst, though your sense of victory in that is very much soured by the fact that Shizune helped...

After a bit, you feel Hisao rise and stretch. "Uh... My, my, I'm tired." He stops dead. A freezing, all-consuming silence permeates the world around you both. "Holy shit. Did 'I' just say 'my, my'?!"

You unsuccessfully try to fight down a fit of giggles. "Ehehe... It's addicting, it's it?"

You both share a small laugh at this unholy anomaly.

"Well, I'm gonna be heading back in." Hisao finally says. "Would you like me to walk you back to your dorm?"

"Hm... I think I'll linger around just a while longer, Hisao." You reply with a small smile.

"Ok then." He replies. "I'll see you tomorrow then." He turns to leave and takes a few steps before stopping. "And Lilly... thanks."

With that closing statement, he departs, leaving you seated on the bleachers with a contented smile on your face.

You wait a bit, basking in daydreams 'involving' Hisao until the boy himself is well away.

You then pick yourself up and head to the forest where you fought Rin.

Night has fallen, but one of the benefits to being blind is that it doesn't really matter so much to you.

You easily locate the clearing and cast about with your perceptions.

The madness of Rin permeates the clearing, corrupting everything in the area.

Two squirrels are trying to strangle each other, you pass a stray cay drawing smiley faces in its own blood, more than once your cane strikes a tree-root that's begun to grow up. In the treetops over you, a family of owls is chipping the tune of 'crazy train' by Ozzy Osbourne.

Thunk. Your navigational cane strikes a hard substance.

There, embedded in the trunk of a tree which it struck when Rin released it, is the crystalline blade.

The sword in the tree.

Still charged with the full might of Rin's madness, insanity permeates the environment surrounding it.

The air feels heavy and tastes like paint.

Sounds register as if from underwater.

You feel the darkness in your mind flaring up as you face the evil weapon.

There's a powerful aura about it... A mighty weapon... but... charged with the most malevolent of auras...

You delve deep within and summon forth all your majesty and charisma.

Impassioned, you cast aside your useless cane and cry out.

"I, LILLY SATOU, HEIR TO THE LEGACY OF SIR ALASDAIR THE DEVASTATOR AND THE CHOSEN REGENT OF SAINT ANDREW HEREBY LAY CLAIM TO THEE AS THE RIGHTFUL LEIGE OF SCOTLAND!"

And with that, you thrust out your hand and seize the hilt of the malevolent blade.

A tempest erupts throughout your mind as the madness of Rin permeates your being.

Horrific images flood through your soul.

The scent of blood fills your nostrils.

The gritty feeling of pastel shavings covers your body.

Gnashing your teeth, you feel the soulless gaze of Rin creeping over your body and hurl every fiber of your being into resisting the unholy power.

Her emptiness attempts to dominate your being.

You hear voices telling you that this universe is a fictitious website creation.

You can feel butterflies landing on your skin.

You wonder what white tastes like.

The environment around dissolves in a cacophony of screams, you hear the sound of an axe being sharpened.

Rin’s soullessness attempts to consume you, shooting tidal waves of lunacy throughout your very being.

Your personality begins to wash away under the torrent of eternal darkness.

No.

Biting down, you contort your face into a mask of focus and stoke your inner radiance.

Even if the darkness shall crawl within you forever, you shall never relinquish yourself.

FWOOSH.

And then, just as suddenly as it began, the battle of wills ends.

Utter stillness.

You are left standing there, alone in the silent clearing, clutching the gleaming scimitar, pulsating with brilliant purple energy.

Wait… purple?

How do you know that?

You just… do. It feels… purple.

You reach a hand up and touch your hair… It’s blonde.

Drooping your eyelids to half-mast, you slowly leave the clearing, cradling the blade of insanity in your palm.

Your trophy from the clash between the madness of Rin Tezuka and the charisma of Lilly Satou.

It’s a strong weapon… Yes. Perfect for slicing apart Shizune and using her brain matter as a pigment vehicle.

As you walk, you become dimly aware of the butterflies encircling overhead.

You smile vacantly as you walk. “Mymythatwasaratherexhilaratingaffair.”

Having done all that you needed to, you head back to your dorm and crash for the night.

The next morning, you awaken reluctantly and stretch out before preparing yourself.

Feeling the texture of the cloth as you don your uniform, you wonder why exactly Yamaku uses Slytherin-colors.

You shrug.

Finishing preparing, you ponder who you should go to visit first.

It's actually a rather nice feeling to be popular...

You decide to go visit Akira, wondering if she can offer any insight as to how you can channel the power of your new weapon.

Also, you wonder if her hair is the same color as yours.

You walk to the infirmary at a casual pace, taking in your surroundings as you go.

Reaching Akira's section of the hospital, you find it largely unchanged since the last time you were there.

Everyone's either dead or drunk. Or dead-drunk. And several are groveling outside her door, offering prayers of praise to the true king.

"Heya!" She greets you cheerfully as you swing the portal to her room open. "Gooooood morning."

"Good morning, Akira." You say, giving her a smile.

"Oooooh." You hear her emote as she observes your insidious scimitar. "Shiny. That new?"

"Yes... It's new... Kind of..." You say, holding it up.

You launch into an explanation, delivered with a bit more rapidity than is typical for you, about Rin's fall and how you claimed the blade last night.

"Huh." She replies in an amused tone as you finish. "Cool."

Before you can stop her, she reaches her own hand out and takes the scimitar in her own hands.

A rush of wind permeates the room as the lunacy of the blade assails your sister's mind just as it did yours.

The horrors, the darkness, a burning hatred for whoever made acrylic paint so lumpy. All the terror, all the insanity of Rin permeates Akira. And...

She chuckles.

"All the madness in the world? Bring thrice that if you want to stain 'me'."

Unconcerned, she flops back down into her easy chair and begins to ponder the evil scimitar.

After twirling the sword around in her hands for a moment, she stabs it into the floor and leaves it there.

"I see. A cursed blade, huh? Kind of like that one with the eye I took from that dude with blue armor."

Akira having taken the blade, you feel a bit lightheaded and slink down next to your sister. "So... you're familiar with it, then?"

She giggles and puts her arm around you.

"Yup yup. It's in my wheelhouse. What do you want to know?"

"If you're familiar with it, then tell me..." You ask, snuggling up against her lean figure. "Is there a way to control it? To channel the madness?"

Akira doesn't say anything, but strokes your hair for a moment as she thinks.

"Not really 'control' per se - but there are ways to suppress it, yes..."

You sigh. There's always a catch.

"And how would that work?"

"Easy, I just build you a purifying sheath. I could even make it look like a cane... though obviously you won't be able to fold it."

Akira ruffles your hair and then takes a long swig of whiskey before continuing. "Would you like me to do that?"

You smile at Akira. "Would you Akira? Would you please? I'd be ever so grateful..."

"Hehe! No problem!" She replies and cuddles you. "It'll take me about a day. Maybe two. Drop by and see me later, ok?"

You nuzzle against your sister. "You're the best."

With that, the school bell rings and you shuffle off to class.

Class happens. You know how this shit goes. As far as high school is concerned, you could be smoking paint-thinner in the parking lot and get the same level of education.

When the lunch bell rings, you exit and...

"Hey Lilly." A voice you've sorely missed.

"Hisao." You reply with a sweet smile, taking his arm. "Ready to go?"

"Mhm!"

You walk there in silence, savoring the feeling of nuzzling against him again. He seems a bit tired, but otherwise back to normal.

"Oh by the way..." He breaks the stillness as you walk into the building. "I heard your sister was admitted... Akira?"

"Oh, don't worry about her... She's been through way worse. You should have seen her after Fuyuki."

"Well, if you say so..."

It's actually kind of touching that he'd be showing concern to someone her barely knows because of their connection with you.

You suppose you could have a small visit with Akira if you wanted... Let those two get to know each other a little better since they're both sober.

Or at least he is. Akira probably has extra organs for processing liquor by now.

On the other hand, you did originally come here to visit Hanako, although she doesn't know that...

You decide it's best to just stick with the original plan and go to see Hanako.

Opening her door, you're greeted by a 'Lilly... Oh... And Hisao? Hiiiii..." The sings softly in an airy voice.

"Hey there, Hanako." Hisao begins. "How are you feelings?"

"Gooood... Gooood... How about you, Hisao? Are you feeling good? 'Blessed' maybe?"

"Er..."

Intervening, you take one hand off Hisao's arm and take Hanako's hand. "We're both quite well Hanako."

She seems to accept this and giggles.

"We decided we'd drop by and have lunch with you." Hisao indicates.

"Aw... That's so sweet."

Hisao dolls out a trio of bentos and you all dig in.

What to talk about?

"So Hanako?" You ask as you finish up. "Do you know when you're expected to get out?"

"Oh." She piques up. "They said I should be released later tonight, actually."

"Really?" Hisao ask. "That soon?"

"Ehehe.. Yup, yup... I was able to fool them into thinking some of my injuries were scars I already had."

She giggles.

"Losing a leaf within a foooorest..." She hums to herself.

Hisao (justifiably) doesn't know how to respond to that and shifts to you to take over.

You gently squeeze her hand. "My, my. Just take care not to overdo it. Ok, Hanako?"

"Ehe! Aw..." She caresses your hand a bit. "Ok, Lilly. I'd hate to make either of you two sad..."

The rest of your lunch break is passed with idle chit-chat. Hanako informs you both that the quality of hospital food has gotten better since her last visit.

"Really? Holy shit, I'd hate to think what it was like before my turn..." Hisao shivers.

You move to make a comment, but the bell rings and you both bid farewell to Hanako and head back to your respective classes.

In afternoon period, your teacher has a seizure. A nice change of pace.

Getting out for the day, you wonder who you should spend your afternoon with...

You decide to go and escort Hanako back.

You're sure it would make her day... Of late, she's giving the impression that she literally 'needs' you.

Arriving at the infirmary, in the hallway, you're greeted by the soft sound of "Lilly..." and then a quick almost dancelike set of footfalls as Hanako skips over and embraces you.

'Her movements always used to be so stiff...' You muse to yourself as she snuggles into your chest. You smile down at her and stroke her hair.

"I came to walk you back. You don't mind that, do you?"

"Nope nope... Please... Let's waaaalk away." She replies without hesitation.

She releases you for the briefest of moments to finish filling out the paperwork and promptly re-attaches herself to you.

"Lilly..."

You can only smile at her as you both head back to the female dorms.

Walking back with her, you find Hanako oddly quiet. And always facing you, occasionally stopping to nuzzle against you.

“So Lilly…” She tells you as you both get back to her room and shut yourselves in. “Please… tell me… tell me… What’s happened while I’ve been bedridden?”

“Hanako…” You reply as you go about the process of setting up your normal tea set with a slight smile. “As I said, I’d rather you not exert yourself…”

She catches your arm.

“Please…” It’s a genuine tone of pleading. “I want to be helpful…”

You pause for a moment, then return a smile and nod. Evidently it’s the reaction she wanted, because she starts giggling softly as you both settle down onto her bed.

Where to start…

[Meanwhile]

In Hisao’s room, he holds a sobbing Misha, who snuggles against him.

“Really… I really tried… I tried so hard… to make her happy…”

Her head is buried into his chest, as if she’s speaking directly into his scar.

Those gold eyes, normally so bright, are flat and moist with tears. “It’s… like she won’t ever let me in… Like she can’t talk to me for anything past work…”

She shivers and clutches him, shivering, devoid her normal enthusiasm or cheer.

“Like I’m… a bad friend…”

“Misha…” He replies, holding her to him at a complete loss for words.

She raises her head and stares into his eyes for what seems like an eternity.

Finally, she speaks softly.

“Please comfort me, Hicchan. Just for today.”

# Part 17

(Previously, on Katawa Yandere)

>"If Shizune re-obtains the one ring, then all the world shall fall under a reign of eternal darkness..."

>Emi lunges through the air, gunning down hordes of stampeding zombies with Akimbo gun-fu

>Taking a sip of wine, Akira smiles wryly at Hisao "Well, if you have no wish in mind... then why not wish for joy?" It’s the look of the serpent from the Garden of Eden.

>The world ablaze with strange colors, Rin's ethereal companion asks her softly. "How about it Rin? Would you like to be a magical girl?"

>Pushing away his electron-microscope, Mutou grimaces. "In all my years of research, I've never seen a virus mutate that quickly."

>Hisao battles a Tyrant, blasting away chunks of it with a fearsome battle-cry, but his magnum begins dry-clicking as the creature barrels towards him...

>"There is no truth in the force, exile..." Lilly tells Hanako softly. "But there is truth in you..."

>"Please comfort me, Hicchan. Just for today."

AND NOW THE CONTINUATION.

You awaken the next morning in Hanako's room with the girl draped over you, having spent the majority of last evening catching her up on the current situation.

She was ecstatic to help your cause and quickly vowed that she'd be keeping an eye on StuCo.

Rising, your mind drifts towards Akira... she might have your new weapon ready by today...

Hisao is also a presence in your thoughts, as always, but especially so now for whatever reason...

You’re broken from your thoughts by the sound of Hanako stirring and snuggling up against you.

“Lilllll-lyyyy….” She mutters.

It’s a bit awkward, so you squirm away from her as delicately as you can. “Good morning, Hanako.” You greet her. “Ready for class?”

“Of course…” She mumbles as she stretches with a drawn-out squeak.

“Ok then.” You say as you take a few steps to the door.

“L-Lilly?” She stops you.

“Hm?”

“I was… thinking we might visit Akira… Before class…” She sighs fondly. “She was so nice to me when we were both in the hospital… She felt so much like you…”

You disregard her disproportionate affection and ponder the proposition.

True, it might be good to drop by and see your sister. Still, you’re also a bit concerned about Hisao. What to do…

"I can't right now, Hanako." You tell her gently. "Give her my best though, ok?"

"Ok..." She replies with a small sigh before hugging you and beginning to put a get-well basket together.

Exiting the room, you make your way over to Hisao’s dorm.

The world seems somehow less vivid than it did when you held Rin’s sword of insanity.

Still, the lure of Hisao’s presence more than compensates for that.

Reaching his door, you give two sharp knocks. Contrary to previous visits, it opens almost instantly.

“Oh! Good morning, Lilly.” He greets you.

“Good morning Hisao…” You purr, pleased that he seems to be intact.

Still, there are a few things amiss…

"Oh, I was just thinking we could walk to school together today." You say, putting a hand on his arm and smiling at him. "Sound good?"

He gives a contented sigh. "Sounds great, Lilly."

Already mostly ready for the day, he steps out into the hallway and simply does his tie while you walk.

It wasn't that late in the morning... did he wake up earlier than usual?

Together, you head to the cafeteria and, flouting the authority of the insidious cafeteria overlords, purchase your breakfasts from some shady guy who smuggles hostess pastries behind the bushes.

Sprawling out together, you and Hisao settle in. He seems in a good mood, but distant.

He actually seems distant fairly often… It occurs to you that he might think too much…

“My, my… You’re awfully quiet today…” You observe aloud. “Is something on your mind today, Hisao?”

He sighs. “I guess…” and trails off into thought.

“Hm?”

“Well…” He sighs and puts his hand on yours. “I don’t mean to pry but… Lilly? Do you know what’s between Misha and Shizune?”

“Pardon?”

He seems at a loss for words, fumbling over himself, but finally elaborating. “They seem… so… ‘conflicting’.”

You’re not best pleased that the day had to be darkened by mention of Shizune, but this still might play to your advantage.

"Well, yes... there is a bit between those two..."

You sigh and gather your thoughts, wondering how to best summarize.

"Lilly?"

"Well, a bit of this is conjecture, since I mostly only knew them through student council duties back in the day..."

You go through a basic outline of the events as you know them, how Shizune took control of the council and prompt drove it to ruin.

She had guile, she had intelligence, she had skill… But she lacked empathy... She lacked charisma.

Not unlike most of 4chan, she thought that she could succeed on intellect alone and neglected her skills with people.

She was too judgmental, too critical, too confrontational. She only saw others as tools or toys.

It was this manner of hers that broke the council in the end. Its members left one by one.

In the end, only you and Misha were left…

DING.

You're broken out of your monologue as the school bell summons you both to class. Dammit. For a gamer, it is so easy to forget that talking is not a free action.

As Hisao rises, you clench your fingers loosely around his hand. “I don’t think we’ll miss anything important in class… do you?” You say with a rueful smile.

“Eh… no. Not really.” He replies and sinks back down.

You don’t let go of his hand… You like the contact.

You continue your story about how you and Misha stayed on longest…

You attempted to salvage the council’s reputation, but it backfired. Students started coming directly to you for help, regarding you as separate from the council itself.

‘Mongrels.’ You muse to yourself before continuing.

Misha stayed on though, never complaining…

“Why?” Hisao interjects.

With a smile, you explain Misha’s unrequited crush on Shizune… You weren’t there to see her confess, but from her miserable state afterwards, you can guess how it turned out.

She stopped coming to class, stopped attending meetings. For a while, it seemed as though she’d lost her will to live.

Suddenly, Hanako drops out of presence concealment at your shoulder.

“H-hanako?!” Hisao stammers, clearly being broken out of his train of thought.

“Hello Hisao…” She murmurs cheerfully before bending over and whispering in your ear.

“StuCo said they’d come find Hisao and they’re heading this way.”

Damn. Sure enough, you can dimly make out the sound of ‘wahaha’.

“M’liege. It is not safe here.” She concludes.

You’re fairly sure that Hisao’s safe with those two. You could just leave, or try to take him with you, but evading those two with Hisao in tow might be tricky…

"My, my." You emote, rising and taking Hanako's arm. "I'm so terribly sorry but it I've forgotten a prior engagement with Hanako here."

"Oh, that's fine." Hisao remarks, seemingly in a daze.

"I told you all the important parts anyways."

He stands up and suddenly hugs you. Hanako doesn't move and you wonder as to her reaction... for the merest instant.

Hisao-cuddling time is FAR more important.

“Thanks, Lilly.” He whispers into your ear, producing a not-at-all unpleasant tingling sensation.

He releases you and you both head off.

“So that’s why…” You hear him mutter to himself as you and Hanako duck into the next hallway.

“HI HICCHAN!” A loud voice cuts in from the direction of the room you were in. You’re quite grateful that Hanako was there to give you a head’s up.

“Thanks, Hanako.” You tell her, placing a hand on her shoulder.

She nuzzles against you. “Always… Always.. so very happy to help, Lilly…” She replies, giggling in a soft, dangerous tone.

It dawns on you that Hanako... she really has done so much for you, her espionage, her work against Emi, everything.

You smile and pull out your Needler.

"Kneel."

"Hm?" She says even as she complies.

"Hanako Ikezawa!" You state in an authoritative tone. "As the chosen regent of Saint Andrew and heir of Alasdai MacColla, I, the rightful Queen of Scotland, Lilly Satou, do hereby recognize thee!”

The hallway fills with the holy power of the monarch and you continue.

“In recognition of your incredible gallantry and service to the crown, I here forth dub thee” You tap her shoulders. “Lord Privy Seal.”

All across the school, classrooms erupt in applause and fireworks go off in the sky for no reason at all. Chewbacca lumbers out of the classroom right next to Hanako and roars in recognition.

He’s actually telling you that Alasdair MacColla had no claim whatsoever to the royal succession, but you don’t need to know that.

“Aw…” Hanako coos, shivering with glee. “Lilly…”

“Rise, knight.” You say.

She doesn’t so much ‘rise’ as ‘lunge forward and hug you’ but it’s all the same. She wraps her arms around you and nuzzles into your chest with the very broadest of smiles.

The school quiets down as the moment passes and you cuddle Hanako to you for a bit…

You cuddle you newly-minted lord privy seal for a moment, then release her.

“So Hanako… How was Akira this morning?”

“Oh!” She peeps, not releasing you. “She’s quite well. She’s recovered enough that she’s able to move around with a cane. She’s already started wondering around the school grounds.”

You smile. It’s good to hear that your sister’s recovery is going so well.

“Oh… she also said that she had something for you…” Your heart skips a beat, but you maintain your serenity. “Did you want to go look for her?” Hanako concludes.

“My, my. Of course.”

Where to look for her, though? If she’s started wondering around Yamaku, probably drinking, she won’t be in her room… And Akira’s not the type to let security stop her… She really could be anywhere.

Where could she be?

“Well… The roof’s a good drinking spot… Or… so I’ve ‘heard’.” You tell Hanako unconvincingly, tugging on her arm.

Together, the two of you ascend the stairs to the top of Yamaku.

Opening the doorway to the roof, you’re greeted by a familiar scent… The scent of alcohol.

“Akira?” You call out.

“Oh! Hey hey, you two!” She calls back cheerfully.

There seems to be other voices and footsteps around her… it doesn’t seem like she’s alone.

“Oh, don’t mind them.” Your sister replies as she starts towards you at a slow, relaxed pace. “I was teaching these kids that fun childhood game of mine.”

She sighs fondly as you hear two students taking turns walking along the building ledge. “You know? That one I learned as a kid from that nice Czech guy.”

Akira hums to herself for a moment as you savor the breeze. “Hm… actually… I wonder what happened to him? I think he got shot.”

She reaches you and affectionately puts a hand on Hanako’s head.

“So? What can I do for you two?”

“Actually…” You tell Akira. “I’ve appointed Hanako Lord Privy Seal.”

“Huh…” She makes an interested noise as she surveys Hanako. “You’re sure of that call?”

“Beyond all doubt.” You say confidently.

“Alright then!” Your sister replies cheerfully. “Then your court is coming together for when you finally retake the throne…”

A surge of burning passion resonates between you and Hanako as you accept Akira’s judgment as turn your mind towards retaking the throne of the Britons.

You shall rally all who oppose the false kingship.

All shall burn beneath you as you drive forth the pretenders…

Actually, first conquests first. Hisao’s more important.

“Akira…” You begin to ask, but stop yourself, unsure if Hanako should be let in.

She IS the lord privy seal, after all, so she should know. Still…

You smile and squeeze Hanako’s hand. “Actually Hanako, Akira’s been working on a sword for me...”

“Huh… cooool….” She says dreamily as she clutches your arm.

“That one I took from Rin… endowed with all her madness.” You elaborate.

“Is that safe?” Hanako asks.

A wet smacking sound as one of the students plummets to their death.

None of you care.

“For short periods, Lilly should be able to handle the insanity.” Akira mentions. “I wouldn’t recommend you trying it out though.”

“Huh? How come?” Hanako inquires.

You’re not sure how to reply without stepping on her feelings, but thankfully, your sister defuses the situation with an oddly passionate statement. “It’s bad manners to lay hands on the king’s treasures.”

“Oh! Of course…” She says as she snuggles against you. “I’d never want to disrespect you like that…”

Satisfied, Akira continues. “You might also be able to channel it into other stuff. ‘That’ cane is no less deadly.”

You smile. Yes, they would make a formidable combination. “So… you have it then?”

“Right here.” Your sister replies in a smug tone as she places a porcelain cane in your hands. That’s the sheath – crafted with the darkest secrets of Scottish alchemy, restraining the madness of Rin.

“Akira…” You breathe, taking the evil weapon. “Thank you.”

Your hand tightens around the grip and suddenly, the world becomes more vivid. All the senses you can perceive now come with a sense of color…

“Go ahead and use it like that in small doses if you want.” Akira elaborates. “Just take care not to overindulge.”

You wonder what purple tastes like for an instant before releasing your tight grip.

“Ehehe. Thanks Akira.” You say as you pat her should and become aware of her slender form.

You bask in the feeling.

Yes. It’s a powerful weapon, and now in the hands of a strong-willed owner, you can move to claim your true coveted treasure…

Hisao ‘will’ be yours.

# Part 18

You remain on the roof for a moment, basking in the insanity of your new evil weapon while Akira cheerfully instructs the other students on how to make mustard gas.

Hanako remains fastened to you, not that you really mind the contact, though it’s not the kind you’d like most…

Speaking of which, it might be a good idea to go find Hisao, assuming StuCo has released him from their evil clutches.

Actually, it's likely a good idea for his sake in the opposite scenario, as well.

If they haven’t, you might need some kind of distraction… You can’t murder anyone with Hisao around, sadly.

“Lilly…” Hanako coos. “You’re thinking about… ‘him’?” She says, lapsing into that inexplicable gaming trend of referring to someone with pronouns only even if everyone actually knows their name. You wave it off.

“Yes.” You reply. “Would you happen to know where they are?”

“I… thiiiiiink so.” She hums as she nuzzles against you.

You smile to yourself. Hanako’s intel is usually reliable. Now how to approach the issue…

“Come on Hanako.” You say cheerfully, tugging your arm slightly. “Let’s go find Hisao.”

“Okkkaaay…” She says, not letting go.

“Akira?” You call back to your sister. “You think you can keep yourself amused here?”

“No problem.” She answers, breaking out her Russian Roulette playset.

With that, you and Hanako depart the roof, now having exchanged your conventional navigation cane for Rin’s legendary-tier blade of insanity (-1 char, +3 str, +20% crit).

Making your way through the halls with Hanako acting as guide, your hearing begins to pick up the dreaded ‘WAHAHA’ emanating through the hallway.

Preparing yourself for a brutal rescue mission, you swing open the door and cast about.

“HI Class Rep!” An enthusiastic voice greets you immediately.

“Oh!” Hisao’s more comforting tone. “Hi there, Lilly.”

“So what business do you have here?” Misha questions happily, though clearly channeling the malevolent energy of that fucking deaf bitch.

“I’m afraid Hanako here lost her ID card.” You say, giving her a slight nudge.

“Yeah…” She says lazily. “I’m afraid I’ve been a bit… distracted lately…” She plays along seamlessly.

“When are you two not?” Shimisha jabs. You cast an evil glare to where… you assume Shizune is.

“…” A barely audible sigh.

“Wait here. We’ll go make a new one.” Shizune speaks through Misha. Without another word, she rises and grabs Hanako. They exit the room together.

You pray neither of them does anything foolish… Not now.

Now left in the room are you, Misha, and Hisao. The sane membership (or ex-membership) of the student council.

You lower yourself into a seat. “So what were you all doing here?” You ask.

“Um… we were playing D&D. While Shizune was demanding help with the upcoming festival preparations…”

“That’s not very nice, Hicchan…”

“Ok, shizune was… er… ‘asking’ for help.” He clarifies.

You feel a slight surge of anger and in response your evil Rin-blade calls to you…

It’s telling you to touch Misha’s drills and see if pink is really that odd a hair color.

Pushing that down as best you can, you reason that Hisao hasn’t mentioned this… So it might be new to him as well.

You wonder what your next conversational move will be…

Giving in to the power of madness, you grip your evil cane, raise your hand, and press a slender finger to one of Misha’s drills.

Instantly, your mind is flooded with images of unholy color: you detect a typhoon of swirling evil pink, set with gems of false light.

An unholy power courses through these sorcerous drills.

If feels as though a corrupted light, passed through a filter, or a tainted bonfire.

A barely controlled despair, forged into a weapon beyond belief, emanates its blight beneath the touch of your fingers.

This is it… Misha’s Gae Drills.

“L-lilly?” You’re broken from your entrancement by a startled squeak from Misha, seemingly taken aback.

Hisao says nothing either. All three of you are frozen in silence for different reasons.

In retrospect, you realize this was kind of a weird move.

“Oh!” You exclaim with feign surprise as you invoke the power of your sheath. “I misjudged my reach. I’m ever so sorry.”

You make a mock bow of sincerity in an effort to save face.

The purifying sheath does its work and you feel the psychosis of Rin being suppressed.

“Oh… ok…” Misha says in a deflated tone.

Silence permeates the room.

You didn’t get drilled at least, but this is rather awkward…

“A-Anyways!” Hisao cuts in. “Shizune was just asking for help fixing up the next batch of stalls. Ehehe… guess I got drafted.”

It’s clearly an attempt to break the stillness, but it serves its purpose.

You’re not best pleased at ‘her’ mention, but Hisao’s opened the door to a few new interesting topics…

“My, my.” You respond with your signature verbal tic. “Drafting you to help? Shizune seems to do that a lot, right, misha?”

“Well… yeah…” She answers quietly. “wahaha.”

It's odd... Her laugh lacks her typical enthusiasm.

“Misha…” Hisao interjects, sounding earnestly concerned for some reason.

BLAM.

With a thunderous sound, the council room is blown open.

“Liiiiiillyyyyyy…” Hanako’s voice sings.

“Oh, hi Shicchan!” Misha elaborates the other presence as her hands slice the air.

“Well, your understudy has her new ID” Shizune states. “I know it’s a foreign concept, but would you mind leaving us so we can actually get something done?”

You wonder if the middle finger is ACTUALLY sign for… Oh never mind, that would be improper.

“Actually.” You reply, smiling sweetly. “I think I’d like to sit in if you don’t mind.”

“Eeeh?!” Hisao, Misha, and Hanako all emote simultaneously.

“For old time’s sake, if nothing else. I’d much like to know how you’ve fared in my absence.”

It’s a blatant lie, obviously.

The school can burn for all you care. Actually, you’ve already done that at least partially, as well as destroyed the cafeteria, started several human stampedes, murdered the head physician, given Akira free range to start a Dionysus-style death cult…

“Aw, Lilly!” Misha cuts in, seemingly having regained a chipper tone. “Does this mean you’re coming back to the Student Council?!”

You smile slyly and take advantage of the fact that you’re sitting right next to Hisao.

You softly place a hand on his leg and answer Misha. “Seduce me.”

You can’t exactly determine if Shizune saw the gesture on not, but you can detect at least two murderous intents in the room.

“Fine then!” Shizune replies, though clearly not having the verbal edge she wants due to Misha being… Misha. “Maybe you can make yourself useful for once.”

Wish that, she yanks Hisao, chair and all, to your left and sits down between you two and begins to lay out the groundwork plans.

It sounds just like the last festival… just later and with yukata. Hm… what to contribute.

“Hm… It seems a bit bland.” You note. “Perhaps we could liven it up with a fireworks display?”

“Oooohh…” Hanako notes. “Fire is always pretty…”

Hisao is apparently the only person who finds that statement strange.

“Heyy!!” Misha pipes up. “Yeah! That would be a great idea! Wouldn’t it Shicchan?”

“And where exactly would we get the funding for that?”

“Hm…” You ponder, debating possible sources.

“Oh!” Hisao cuts in. “Just use the old art club’s budget. That’s available after the teacher’s heartbreaking death.”

“Heartbreaking? Hicchan, we had a party for that. You showed up. You drank to the ‘hooray Nomiya’s dead’ toast.”

“Who didn’t?” Shizune elaborates through Misha.

“No objections then?” You conclude.

None can be made.

“Fireworks!” Misha and Hanako declare in unison.

“Fine then, I’ll set things up. This student council meeting is adjourned.” Your deaf nemesis declares.

With that, you all rise. Misha and Shizune don’t move. They seem to be signing to each other. Hisao, on the other hands, leaves with you and Hanako.

He stretches. “Ugh… That was lively… but I’ve gotta say… I’m looking forward to this next festival.”

You give a sinister smirk. “I think we all are, Hisao…”

Well, it was a productive meeting, what to do next?

“I think I feel like taking an afternoon stroll.” You say, smiling up at Hisao as you grasp his arm.

You turn your head in Hanako’s direction – easy to find since she’s clinging to your other one. “Hanako? Could you be an angel and go bring Akira up to speed?”

“Ok…” She replies quietly before departing without another word.

Hm… actually, you realize, she won’t be able to catch Akira up on the malevolent force you sensed from Misha’s drills. But you can do that yourself later.

This takes precedence.

You nuzzle into Hisao as she heads off. “Shall we?”

“Yeah… let’s.”

Together, the two of you take a stroll in the cooling afternoon air, debating the subtleties of late.

He talks about his progress in class, gravitation towards a professional career in science, some of the grunt-work he’s been doing for the student council, and the like.

At that last part, he hesitates for a minute. “Actually, I’ve been doing a little too much maybe, the other d-“ He stops abruptly and stills himself for a second.

“Actually…” He verbally grasps. “How’ve things been going for you?” He settles on.

[Meanwhile]

As an interesting historical fact: in ancient Greece, at the ritual festivals of Dionysus, there are records of men getting drunk-and-drugged enough to actually castrate themselves onstage and hurl their testicles out into the audience like some kind of bizarre carnival beads.

Worst. Hangover. Ever.

On the roof of Yamaku, surrounded by followers and bearing a serene smile, Akira is sitting on the roof, handing out wine made with that exact same recipe.

This can only end well.

Hanako is slumped against her, nuzzling into her chest with a broad smile as she finishes giving her report.

“Hm… So it seems Lilly wants a tranquil festival…” She muses as she strokes Hanako’s hair.

She makes a slightly sour face, but it brightens almost immediately. “Well, I wish I’d had more gaming opportunities, but it’s ultimately her call, after all.”

A scream goes out as one of the students somehow lights themselves on fire using an iPod.

Both of them watch it, taking casual sips.

“She’s gonna claim Hisao, huh?” Hanako asks as she snuggles against Akira with her eyes closed.

The Golden King laughs softly to herself, swilling her drink. “Yeah… It’s all in motion now…”

[End meanwhile]

Hisao” You ask, clutching his arm gently at his hesitation. “Are you alright?”

Your charisma has dulled slightly by keeping the evil of Rin in check, but it’s still quite sharp. You don’t sense much danger from the situation.

He sighs. “I had a flutter the other day.”

“Hisao?!”

“A small one.” He quickly adds, stopping your walk and placing a hand on your shoulder. “I was working on one of the Council’s stalls… I guess I overdid it…”

You become so much more aware of his touch on your arm.

“Shizune was really worried… So was Misha…”

You must be wearing a concerned expression because he actually hugs you lightly. “Really… I’m fine…”

Everything else in the world is suddenly drowned out. You feel… lightheaded. Happy…

You sink into a gentle embrace unconsciously…

“Hisao…” You manage to mouth, no doubt wearing a massive blush.

He releases you after a moment… you wish it’d lasted longer… you’re still wrapped in the feeling…

“I’m fine Lilly…” He makes a small noise as if to say something, but then stops. “… I’ll see you tomorrow.”

And with that, he heads off, leaving you standing there, breathlessly, leaving you to analyze what just happened.

Hisao… May be yours already… Maybe… At least getting there...

‘But…’ Your thoughts turn towards Shizune’s malevolence.

Can you… keep him?

# Part 19

You follow Hisao for a bit after he’s bid you farewell.

Because you’re concerned for his health, of course. This is totally not stalking.

It turns out to be an uneventful viewing: He doesn’t exchange words with anyone else and heads straight back to his dorm, where he falls asleep almost instantly.

He was exhausted. You wonder how hard Shizune’s been working him…

Actually, does she even know about his heart?

Gritting your teeth, you head back to your own dorm, pondering how exactly to proceed with this new situation.

You mull this over as you ready yourself for bed, then comes a knock.

“Hello?”

“Lilly… It’s me…” Hanako’s voice answers in a low purr.

It’s kind of rare for her to drop by this late, but not so unorthodox.

You answer your door immediately. “Hanako? Is something the matter?”

“I couldn’t fall asleep…” She replies lazily. “Can I sleep with you tonight?”

Without actually answering, you beacon Hanako inside and take a seat at your table.

“Is something on your mind, Hanako?” You ask softly.

“Um… kiiiinda…” She replies before following you.

She pulls her cushion next to you and settles down, nuzzling against you slightly.

This does make the preparation of tea a bit more difficult, but you manage it and slide a cup over to Hanako.

She takes a sip before elaborating. “I’m happy with our family…” She nuzzles against you as she trails off. “But…” She just stops dead there.

“’But’?” You echo, adding a shot of tea liqueur to your cup before offering it to Hanako.

She takes the bottle and mixes in quite a bit before taking a sip and continuing.

“Well… I just... I wish Hisao would spend more time with me…” She says softly. “I mean… we used to play games or read together all the time…. Now though…”

She sighs and finishes her cup in one gulp before mixing another.

It’s true that they hung out together quite a bit in the beginning. Since then, though, Hisao’s mostly been dividing his time between council duties, and, well, you.

You’re not exactly sure how to respond…

“Well Hanako?” You answer. “How about if I distract Shizune and Misha tomorrow?”

“Eh?!” He peeps.

“That could give you two some time together, wouldn’t it?”

“Lillyyyy…” She breathes your name. She then wraps her arms around you in a tight embrace and nuzzles against you feverishly. “Thank you… thank you. Thankyouthankyouthanyou.”

You giggle and stroke her hair.

“My, my. It’s nothing, Hanako. Just enjoy yourselves.”

She releases you and makes an affirmative sound as if a silent vow. She then takes another swig of her spirited tea.

“Thanks Lilly…” She repeats one final time.

Satisfied with your proposition, she then segues. “So can I sleep with you tonight if it’s ok?”

“Oh fine.” You say with a mock defeated sigh.

You sink down on your soft bed and make a sweeping gesture. “Welcome aboard.”

“Ehehe! Ehehehe!” Hanako giggle before practically lunging over and tackling you.

Easing down as Hanako snuggles into you, your mind wanders a bit.

For two people, your bed’s actually not that large, you realize as Hanako presses into you. (Though you have a feeling she’d be doing that anyways).

It’s a regal bed, one that Akira picked out for you, which is very soft (She was a bit evasive as to what it was actually stuffed with) but not that big.

There’s a logistical issue to consider…

If you want to share it with Hisao at some point, your Yamaku bed is inadequate.

Although the usefulness of Yamaku itself will soon be over to you.

You smile slightly at the thought.

Hanako presses her face into your chest and snuggles a bit.

You make a startled noise, but she doesn't seem to notice.

Smiling, you simply stroke her hair.

She coos for a bit before falling still.

You ponder how best to fulfill your promise for a bit before following suit...

You awaken the next morning with Hanako still clinging to you.

It’s not quite time to be getting ready for class yet, though you know you won’t fall back asleep.

'To distract StuCo'… You ponder. There are a few ways you could do it.

You could drop by Hisao’s room and tell him Hanako needed him for something. You could also feed some kind of story about logistics to Misha and let her pass it up the food chain.

Hanako makes a snuggling motion against you and at the corners of your mind, you hear the evil powers of Rin questioning what her scars look like exactly…

You let it flow about for a moment as your mind drifts.

It’s equally possible to just play it by ear.

What to do…

You wriggle free of Hanako and scribble a fast note.

With Rin’s touch-vision, it’s actually much easier than it used to be.

Preparing for the day takes no time at all.

Picking up your Needler by its wrist-strap and taking Rin’s sword of insanity in the other, you head over to Misha’s room.

It’s a very short trip, since she’s also in the girls’ dorm.

Actually, all the girls likely have their rooms within the same few dozen meters.

That in mind, you wonder why they don’t show up in each other’s routes more often.

You push it out of your mind and knock on Misha’s door.

Contrary to last time, it nearly blows open as soon as your fingers have made contact.

“HI LILLY! WAHAHA!” Misha answers, likely waking up more than a few people since she’s shouting at this hour.

Actually, it’s strange for her to be up at this hour as well. Normally, she sleeps all the time.

Isn’t hypersomnia a symptom of depression actually?

Another factor you put aside for later consideration. You still haven’t returned her greeting…

You smile at the bubbly girl. “Good morning, Misha…

… How are you feeling this morning?” You decide on, flashing a kindly smile.

“Oh… I’m fine! Great! As always!” She answers enthusiastically. “Wahaha!”

You’re less than convinced, but realize that directly pressing the issue is likely fruitless.

“Um… Lilly?” She asks in the same tone but at a lower volume. “I heard Akira was getting better… Is that true?”

It’s a bit off-topic, but actually not so strange an inquiry, you realize...

Right… those two never really knew each other ‘well’ but they were on pretty good terms once…

Hm. How to answer?

“She’s recovering quite nicely.” You tell her with a smile. “Actually, we have enough time before school starts. Would you like to come visit her with me?”

“WAHAHA! OK! YEAH!” She replies right away, picking something up.

Together, you and Misha head over to the infirmary.

Walking is a bit awkward since her skipping pace is so much faster than your casual stride.

“Lilly?” She asks, stopping suddenly. “Um… do you think your sister actually remembers me?”

You actually laugh at such a ridiculous question. “You’re the only human being to ever survive a drinking contest with her. Of course she’ll remember you.”

“WAHAHAHA!” She laughs at this, possibly recalling that night.

You recall some snippets of it as well.

In a sea of blood and empty whiskey bottles… Hanako had passed out on your shoulder, Shizune was conked out wearing a Pikachu costume, and Misha and Akira were chugging jaeger bombs while jousting on the backs of rhinoceroses.

Death toll the next day was 57.

Good times…

'Though better ones still are in the making.' You annotate to yourself, thinking of Hisao...

Coming back to reality, you wonder briefly if you should talk to Misha a bit while you walk.

“My, my, Misha.” You say as you draw closer to the infirmary entrance. “Why are you so concerned for Akira today?”

Misha stops, hesitates for a minutes, and finally says. “I guess I don’t have too many people I could call ‘friends’.”

After a short pause, she resumes skipping, leaving you to ponder.

It’s true, but an enigma to you.

Misha’s always been an outgoing and upbeat person… But she’s always seemed somewhat lonely…

You speculate it’s because of her association with Shizune, who’s practically social kryptonite.

“Ah!” Misha breaks you from thought as you stop through the doors. “Smells like alcohol and brain-matter in here.”

“That’s my sister for you.” You say, passing Misha with a smile.

If Misha’s taken aback, she hides it immaculately, resuming her cheerful skipping pace through the body-strewn halls.

Suddenly, she stops dead in front of Akira’s room.

“Um… Lilly? Do you want to open it?” She asks in a barely audible tone of voice.

“No, you go ahead.” You reply with a smile. “I’m sure she’ll be delighted to see you.”

“Really? Ok!” She yells, bursting through the door with a thunderous cry of ‘WAHAHA!’

Perhaps not expecting company, in response to this disturbance, the golden servant begins taking out a sword.

A strange sword…

“Hi Akira! I brought you some breakfast!” Misha greets her with a carefree smile, showing off her basket.

“Oh!” Akira emotes, returning it to its resting place. “Hehe! Aw! Really? For me, Misha?”

“Yup yup!”

At this, you enter. “I ran into someone who also felt like visiting you.” You elaborate Misha’s presence, tossing a smile to your sister.

“I woke up early to come visit you anyways.” Misha says loudly. “I just happened to find an even better excuse. WAHAHA!”

Misha’s loudness isn’t really is issue here. Around Akira, everyone’s dead, drunk, insane, or some combination of the three.

“Aw… you guys…” Akira purrs happily. “This calls for a celebration!”

And with that, she produces more of her personal wine stash.

“Really Akira? For breakfast?” You say, giving a slightly discontented look.

“Huh?” Akira makes a quizzical sound. She genuinely doesn’t get it.

You decide that to lecture Akira on her drinking would spoil the moment, so you stay silent as the first goblets are filled.

You’ll try to distract Akira from refilling when it comes to that.

Setting up your strange picnic, Misha breaks out her basket and sets up a decent amount of food for everyone.

“Mmm…” Akira emotes, nibbling at a piece of pie. “You’re a surprisingly good cook, Misha…”

You take a bite of grilled fish. Actually. Yeah. She ‘really’ is.

“Wahaha, glad you like it!” She responds happily.

“I used to try and cook for Shicchan, but she just started preferring takeout for some reason…”

You hear a glugging as she downs her glass before giving an obligatory post-drinking gasp. “Wahaha… wow… And you’re really good with your wines, Akira-chan!”

“My treasury houses only the best.”

You take a sip as well, it’s splendid.

Although not actually your intention, you’ve somehow thrown together a very nice regal breakfast…

You nurse your drink and allow Akira and Misha to catch up.

You realize that it’s been a while since they’ve seen each other, not since you left the student council over a year ago actually…

Akira entertains Misha with some stories of her exploits – a few of which could probably be considered war crimes.

Misha takes about student council work a bit. ‘Shicchan’ this. ‘Shicchan’ that.

Eventually, Misha seemingly loses some enthusiasm and just drinks for a bit.

A moment of silence is broken when the first bell rings for class.

Really? You were here for a while… Time flies when you’re having fun.

Also, you realize this could work to your advantage.

“You two can just catch up.” You say as you rise. “I’ll make your excuses, Misha.”

“Waha…ha?” She answers. “But… I’m supposed to help Shicchan later…”

“I’ll cover for you.” You tell her, smiling sweetly. “I haven’t forgotten how Council festival preparations are.”

“Um…But Lilly… don’t you need me to translate?”

“Hisao can do that, can’t he?”

“Waha… yes… but…”

“Oh, don’t worry so much, Misha!” Akira chimes in, refilling her goblet. “Just relax for a bit!”

She seemingly gets some energy back from that. “WAHAHA! Ok! Thanks, you two!”

And with that, you leave.

You stretch and sigh as you head over to the school building.

You didn’t really drink that much and Mutou’s usually outright plastered, so you doubt it’ll be much of a concern.

Moreover, you’ve successfully distracted Misha. There’s half the council.

Now you just have to do something about Shizune and you’ve fulfilled your promise to Hanako.

Heading over to class, you try to come up with a few things that would necessitate the council president’s attention...

Deciding that a riot is in order, you blow off class and busy yourself sowing the seeds of discord throughout the school.

You head over to the athletic department and trash the place, carving the dreaded insignia of physics into the wall.

Next, you head down to the clinic, which is mostly empty thanks to Akira mind-raping most of the staff and randomly switch everyone’s medications around.

Short tempers and out-of sorts mentalities are what you need.

For your next trick, you also pocket two large medicine bottles before you leave, one of amphetamines, the other of psychadelics.

Without wasting any time, you head over to the cafeteria and murder the only non-lunchtime staff worker with your needler.

After feeding the body into a burger machine, you set about dosing the food…

[Meanwhile]

Akira is lazily sprawled out on her unmade bed, staring at a seated Misha with a curious smile.

“So if you feel so unfulfilled… Why keep doing as you’re doing?” She asks softly.

“I just… don’t know...” Misha answers Akira with a sorrowful expression.

A moment of silence passes between the two.

The pure golden eyes of the Drill Knight meet the aberrant crimson gaze of the King of Spirits.

“Wahaha. I’ve tried to make people give me their affection… but it’s never worked…” She cows her head. “No matter what I actually did…”

Akira’s serene smile doesn’t change, but there’s a twinkling in her burning eyes.

“Nothing really surprising about that.” She annotates. “In general, people take everything for granted. No matter how nice you are to them, it’s unlikely they’ll give anything back. Reciprocity is a myth.”

She lowers her drilled head sadly.

Akira exhales and then smiles. “Almost invariably, it’s better to ‘make’ whatever you want yours.”

“Huh?” She says, raising her head and cocking an eyebrow.

“If asking for something doesn’t work, then isn’t the most logical next step taking it?” Akira elaborates, still keeping a relaxing gaze on Misha.

“But… Doesn’t that devalue its worth?” The pink knight says after a minute.

“A devalued treasure is better than nothing at all.” The Golden King answers. “And if the quality is high enough, the defacing really isn’t that noticeable.”

She sips her wine. “Besides… Mutilated things are tastier.”

Misha weighs this for a moment, then blinks once and replies. “…Does that still apply if the treasure is too beautiful to even think about defacing?”

The pink knight gives a rueful smile. “Wahaha… I don’t think so…”

Akira purses her lips, genuinely contemplating these words. Then…

“Misha Mikado…” The King of Spirits repeats the other’s name as she smiles calmly, swilling her wine. “Suddenly… I have a newfound interest in you…”

[End meanwhile]

Once your yandere-cooking session in the cafeteria is over, you smile to yourself and head out.

You head up to the administrative office and kill the secretary.

Afterwards, you take the shield off your needler and set about using the magnetic field to fry the communications.

Making use of Rin’s touch-vision, you also access Hisao’s student records and change all his current grades to As.

Satisfied, you smash the computer and leave.

It’s a shame you can’t do anything about cell phones, but the land lines alone are better than nothing.

Now that enough pieces are in place, all that remains is how to extradite Hisao and Hanako before the bodies start dropping…

Yuuko could help with that, actually… They both know her and she usually leaves for the shanghai anyways.

Also, you’d rather not have such a useful pawn perish if possible.

Alternatively, you could try to pass on the message yourself, but it might be tricky to do without Shizune noticing…

The Library is your next stop.

Grinning to yourself, you head over and make your way to the front desk.

BANG.

“Hello Yuuko” You say with a sweet smile. This really doesn’t bother you anymore.

“L-lilly!” She emotes, shifting nervously.

“Yuuko? Would you kindly do me a favor?” You ask.

“Huh? Um… uh… W-W-What is it?” She asks, trembling in fear.

“At lunchtime, would you take Hisao and Hanako with you to the Shanghai? Perhaps say you need to discuss a book order with them?”

“Um… b-b-but… all t-their orders are fine…”

You place your hand on hers and bring your face a bit closer, trying to stoke her confidence.

You smile gently, caress her hand a bit, and speak in a motherly tone which you know she’s comfortable with.

“Please Yuuko? It’s just an inside joke with Hanako. She’ll know what it means… You can do that, can’t you? Just play a game with Hanako?”

Your charisma resonates with her and you hear her take a deep breath. “Y-yeah… ok…”

You embrace her warmly. “Thank you, Yuuko. I knew I could count on you.”

Having steeled Yuuko, you bid her farewell and head to your tea room.

Once there, you break out a bottle of tea liqueur, crack the window open, and begin casting about with your sharp perceptions - augmented by the madness cane where needed.

A projection of the school is fed into your mind.

This is something which you’ll want to ‘see’…

The lunch bells rings.

After a few moments, just at the very edges of your perception, you detect Hanako and Hisao’s voices as they leave the school grounds with Yuuko.

A good thing, too.

Casting about, you detect the embers of discord beginning to catch.

People are arguing over nothing.

Many people are beginning to show signs of hallucination.

Anger, rage, and hate are flaring under your influence.

Everywhere, students and teachers alike are breaking out knives, guns, swords, katars, whips, maces, scythes, golf clubs, tasers, crowbars, chainsaws, and all sorts of other implements.

You’re not sure why everyone’s so heavily armed.

Perhaps Akira had something to do with it, or perhaps everyone was simply crazy anyways.

You smile and droop your eyelids to half-mast.

“My, my. Time to drop a cloth doused in oil onto this open flame.” You muse to yourself.

You unsheathe the Blade of Insanity and send its aura pulsating through the school as you unleash the maximum amount of madness you deem safe to yourself.

‘Splat’ in the cafeteria, someone is slaughtered.

At this, the school erupts.

The condition of the school explodes into absolute carnage.

The sword of splatters, explosions, gunfire, and screaming rings out and builds to a fever pitch.

Everywhere across the school, personal grudges - some real, some imagined - boil over and break into violence.

People are tearing at each other with bare hands.

One of the janitors smashes someone’s head open with a vacuum cleaner and then begins strangling their next victim with the extension cord.

In the cafeteria, the state is pandemonium.

Cohorts are lunging at each other as if feral beasts, mutilating each other.

One student smashes their opponents through a table and then savagely beats them to death with a war maul.

A second later, he’s filleted by a barrage of strange black darts.

Atop a pile of ripped-up bodies, the true assassin faces her prey with a feral smile.

“Ki MiKiKiKi KiKiKiMiKiKiKMiiKiKiKiKiKiKiKiKi Miki!”

Standing atop a field of corpses, Miki skewers another hapless assailant with her evil black darts, laughing maniacally.

She purses her lips cheekily as the chaos spreads around her.

She then stoops, places both hands on his face, and rips it off.

Laughing as the smell of blood fills the air, she peels away the flesh and places the fresh skull mask upon her face.

Time to go all-out.

She rips away the bandages from her arm, revealing its true hideously deformed shape and delved into her noble phantasm – borrowing the arm of Satan to attack the heart.

Her spiderlike palm glows bright red as she hurls it outwards.

All around her, the chests of her peers explode in palm-shaped surges of blood and flesh.

She laughs elatedly as the gore splashes her face.

Across the cafeteria, Naomi weaves through a hail of hurled knives and dashes behind Natsume who rips off her glasses and frees the binding seal on her cursed eyes.

Her nerves burn. That evil pupil twists into a shape no life form should have and instantly a geyser of black flames erupt from anything beneath her line of sight.

The cafeteria bursts into flames as its inhabiting luckless combatants die in the murderous blaze.

With a Cheshire cat’s smile, she extends her arms as the world around her shifts into a portrait of hell.

Takashi slithers through the flames, brandishing a hideous spiked mace, covered in fresh brain matter.

Her other eye locks onto his and into pupil shifts into a shape.

He freezes just outside his attack range as her petrification spell solidifies him into place.

Blood begins to flow from her sockets as she brings her other mystic eye to bear and burns him to death in an instant.

At the entrance of the cafeteria, a ghastly figure observes the massacre with an impassive look.

A slender, delicate-looking albino, unsuited for this sea of blood.

Rika observes the battle for a moment, then calmly flips down her unturned collar to reveal an odd-looking black choker, set with strange wires and electronic equipment.

Rika’s true power now activated, her face twists into a broad, evil smile.

“KEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKEKE!”

The area around her explodes in a maelstrom of death.

The ground is torn to shreds and the air itself morphs into a weapon at her touch as she sends out the invisible blades.

Everyone around her is shredded.

A double-tap to her heart is vector-changed and rebounds back to murder its assailant.

She calmly walks through the massacre, tearing apart people as she picks up mundane objects and fires them as if bullets.

With simple flicks of her wrists, the albino’s evil power rips people to shreds as if blows from a mighty demon.

Washes of dark maroon emanate all around her.

Wading ankle-deep through blood and body parts, she reaches out her hand, seizes an opponent by the throat, and rips his body apart with her bare hands.

“KEKEKEKEKEKEKEKE!!!!!”

She stabs her finger into a wounded combatant as she tries to crawl away and then vector-changes her blood.

The body is shredded into an artful pattern of carnage.

Back within your tea room, you smile to yourself with the serene expression of a monarch watching a play.

Viewing the massacre through your mind's eye, you sip your drink and watch your script unfold.

True, you’d still prefer to be with Hisao, but a performance like this is hardly a bad consolation prize.

The massacre lasts throughout lunch break as everyone kills each other in a haze of drugs and eldritch insanity.

You remain seated in your tea room, drinking yourself into a pleasant buzz as hell descends to earth at your decree.

Finally, things boil down and everyone goes their separate ways.

The entire school is devastated.

The cafeteria is knee-deep in blood, severed body parts, and shredded organs.

About half the school is on fire.

Several of the overhead lighting fixtures have been broken and their wires used as nooses to hang people from.

Some of the outdoor street-poles have had people impaled upon them.

There are a few dozen fresh crucifixes set up in the athletic field.

The door outside Mutou’s classroom now has several freshly-severed human heads mounted to it with a nail-gun.

But that’s just trivialities. You’ve kept your promise to Hanako and ensured she’ll have had a couple hours to herself with Hisao.

You finish your cup and rise.

Hanako, Hisao, and Yuuko should be getting back about now. You could go wait for them at the gate.

Or you could pop by Akira and Misha back at the hospital wing and see how they’ve fared with each other.

“Ara, Ara…”

You decide you might as well go visit Akira and Misha.

Hanako can likely distract Hisao well enough by herself.

Yes, best to let them make the most of their day together.

Smiling, you head out the doorway and go towards the cafeteria at a leisurely pace.

The hallways are full of broken glass and dead bodies.

"Mongrels." You decree softly as you navigate through them.

Every now and again, you detect a gunshot, but most of the fun is over by now.

You smile to yourself and twirl your needler a bit as you meander through the fields of carnage.

The hospital wing is largely as you left it, basically an unorganized morgue.

Well, thanks to you it meshes quite well with the rest of the school now.

“Akira?” You ask as you ease her door open.

“Hey hey!” She answers right away.

“WAHAHA! Hi Lilly!” Misha chimes in a second later.

Akira’s suit jacket is tossed on the floor and Misha’s ribbon is dangling from the doorknob.

The entire room smells like a preservation jar.

You can’t imagine how fucked up they must have gotten together in your absence.

Casting about with your cane, you brush innumerable empty jar and bottles.

Knowing how strong these two like their drinks, it’s actually a wonder they’re not dead, let alone conscious.

Suddenly, Misha lunges forth and hugs you. “Wahaha… Glad you could join ush…” Feeling her snuggle again you, she seems to be wearing a pair of defibrillators as a necklace.

“My, my.” You say in an earnestly surprised tone as Misha presses her soft frame against you. “I just thought I’d pop in and see how you were doing together.”

“Aww… We had Loadsh of fun… hic!” Misha elaborates, almost falling over. “We found this really cool movie to watch together.”

Instead of the TV, she gestures in the direction of the window.

“Yeah…” Akira emotes, flopping back onto her bed with a contented sigh. “Definitely a good show.”

You feel her gaze upon you.

“A show… hic… befitting royalty…” She giggles. “Did you… play a part in itsh production?” She asks, clearly already knowing the answer.

You return a guilty smile.

“Ehehe… Well…”

# Part 20

As the afternoon rolls along, you hang out in Akira's chamber, sipping wine with Akira and Misha for a bit.

It's actually a nice feeling - it reminds you a bit of how Misha used to be prior to Shizune's evil.

You entertain yourself with those two while the paramedics, fire department, Red Cross, and army arrive and frantically begin trying to deal with the aftermath of your lunchtime trolling.

You smile, pleased that you were able to give such a nice gift to Hanako.

“So when I sometimes shadowed my father on his business trips to Europe when I was a kid and Lilly was still a little one.” Akira casually tells a story in the pleasant serenity of the afternoon. “And while he was working, there was this nice Czech guy who used to babysit me… huh?”

She’s suddenly interrupted by a stomping set of footfalls emanating from the hallway.

WHAM.

The door is blown open.

“Hi Shicchan!”

You should have guessed.

“…!” A sharp exhale followed by a rumble of kicking through the sea of bottles that mats the floor.

“Did you have a hand in this?” The deaf one questions you through Misha.

You give your most smug smile. “Why, whatever do you mean, Shizune?”

You hear a chopping of the air as Shizune gestures, but Misha doesn’t translate. So you actually doubt it was a formal sign.

“So you’ve just been swilling wine here all day, being generally useless sociopaths?” She decides on a second later.

“Now, now, Shizune.” Your sister cuts in. “Don’t be so judgmental. In ancient Greece, that’s exactly what the gods did.”

“…!” She almost seems to suppress a laugh, but then becomes serious again.

“Well, if nothing else, it seems we have a marginally smaller student body to manage…” Misha gaily speaks for Shizune as someone screams in agony from the medic’s tent outside.

“But we have to redraw the plans now - Aw. Really, Shicchan? – Yes really, come on Misha.”

With some reluctance, whether due to actual emotions or intoxication, the Drill Knight groans and rises from her seat.

As she does so, you weigh your options.

It might be a good opportunity for damage assessment, actually.

Or you could try to catch some Hisao or Akira time.

You let Misha head off with Shizune and the sound of skipping gradually grows distant down the hallway.

“So, I there’s another festival then?” Akira pipes up after a minute.

“Oh!” You realize you haven’t actually talked to Akira alone in a little while. “Yeah… Tanohata.”

“Sounds fun. Need a hand planning the games?”

“Um… not right now, sis.”

Generally, when she does that, they involve crimes against humanity.

You sigh and sink down onto the bed and lean up onto Akira.

She refills your glass and you sit together in silence for a moment.

“Eheh. Misha seems to have changed a bit…” She muses.

It’s an odd comment that catches your attention. But there’s other things you could talk about, too.

“What did you mean by ‘changed’ Akira?” You inquire, curious what they got up to together.

“Hm….” She hums, thinking of how to phrase it. “She seems wearier, I suppose. In both body and mind… But…” She turns to you. “I think you’d know more about that than I would.”

“What do you mean?”

She laughs softly. “You’re her schoolmate, after all. And you used to be on fairly good terms.”

“Well, yes, but I haven’t really talked to her that much since I left the council… I didn’t want to get into needless fights with Shizune.”

“Huh…” She actually seems interested by that response. “I wonder how many others have had the same thought process…”

She trails off and chugs the rest of her glass.

Suddenly, perhaps in response to your use of its power today, Rin’s evil flares up in your mind, telling you to feel Akira and reassess her appearance.

Not fighting it, but not giving in either, you let your thoughts drift and check the time absentmindedly.

It’s well into the afternoon, you think you’ve fulfilled you promise to Hanako by now.

Channeling the holy powers of the Monarch of Scotland, you suppress the madness of Rin and stand.

“Well Akira, it’s been lovely as always, but I think I should be finding Hisao and Hanako now.”

“Okie dokie.” She replies as she rises with you and affectionately ruffles your hair. “I think I’ll go take an afternoon stroll around campus.”

“Steer clear of the Athletic field.” You advise. “Miki and the athletic team decided to try and re-enact Golgotha until they got it right. Place is covered in crucifixes.”

“Gotcha.”

And with that, you both head out.

Leaving the athletic field, you sigh contentedly and take a deep whiff of fresh air. Well, slightly fresh; it mostly smells like blood, shit, and rotting flesh.

It reminds you of Inverness.

You wonder where exactly those two might have gone… They were with Yuuko, so they may have headed back to the library.

Or they might have headed over to one of their dorms.

Well, Hanako’s dorm maybe… You’re not sure if she’s ever been to Hisao’s room.

Deciding that it’s unlikely Hanako would have taken Hisao through Yamaku before the place had been cleaned up a bit, you go to Hanako’s room.

The school grounds are pleasant enough – there’s a background noise of whimpering and a large murder of crows circling overhead, but that’s not so unbearable.

You can already make out the survivors starting to quarrel with each other for extra dorm space.

Actually, that’s not so bad an idea. Maybe you should look into an upgrade.

You arrive at the female dorms (Which has been partially burned down and has the entranceway is missing its doors) and make your way up to Hanako’s room.

It’s still in rather good condition in comparison to the rest of Yamaku.

“Hanako?” You call out, knocking on her door. “Oh… Lilllllyyy…” Her voice perks up right away. The door swings open and she cuddles you.

“Nice to seeee yoouuu…”

“Likewise Hanako.” You say, putting your arms around her.

“Hey Lilly.” Hisao says over her shoulder. “We were just playing a game of chess. Wanna watc- er observ- um… uh… Sit on Hanako’s bed?”

You giggle. Yup, he’s fine.

You allow Hanako to lead you over and settle down on her bed.

“You threw a party here… diiiiidn’t you…” Hanako says, giggling softly. “Aw… I kinda wish I’d been here for it…”

You smile at her, then direct it at him and beam.

All for him...

You allow Hanako and Hisao to resume their game for a little while, remaining silent.

The sound of Hisao’s breathing alone is rather nice…

After a moment, you ask about something that’s been curiously prevalent in your mind for a bit. “So Hisao, whatever became of that porcelain armor you borrowed?”

“Hm?” He asks, directing his focus to you.

“You know, the night of Hanako’s party. That porcelain gear set you used as a reagent to make your epic platemail armor?”

“Oh!” He emotes in recollection.

You’re actually a bit surprised he remembers as well, given how plastered everyone was.

You wonder what else he remembers…

“I don’t know actually.” He breaks you from your thoughts.

“Ara? Pardon?”

“I’m not sure… I’m pretty sure I was wearing it when I somehow made it back to my room… But when I woke up, it wasn’t there anymore.” He says in an earnestly confused tone.

He trails off. Hanako remains still as well.

Dead silence permeates the room. The air itself becomes heavy with an ominous feeling. You feel as if the very fabric of reality has somehow been distorted.

“Um… I’m really sorry I lost it…” He says sheepishly.

At this, you exhale and smile. It’s actually kind of cute.

“My, my, don’t worry Hisao.” You say sweetly. “I’ll let you make it up to me.”

He gives a laugh at that, which steadily becomes more nervous. “Eheh… Ok, fine, I’ll do that.”

You breathes a sigh. “Heh… I seem popular these days…”

“Ooooooh? What do you mean by that, Hisao?” Hanako questions for you as she takes his bishop.

“Oh, just that Shizune wanted me to help out building stalls tomorrow…” He stretches out, producing a few detectable cracking sounds along his spine. “Man, and just after all that paperwork, too… She really is merciless…”

Hisao and Hanako sigh together while you let off a small killing intent.

That girl clearly believes in ‘tough love’…

Whichisntactuallyloveatallitsjustarationalizationbypeoplewithhorrendouspersonalskillsinacrudeattempt

tojustifytheirowntotalinadecacyinrelationships-

Shut up Rin.

You clear your mind and turn your thoughts towards how you might safeguard Hisao…

“Well Hisao?” You say after a moment’s internal debate. “How about I tag along to give you a hand tomorrow?”

“Huh… You can… I mean, can you…”

“Ehehe.” You giggle, cutting off his stammering, which is actually so cute, but a bit intrusive at times...

Back to reality.

“Of course I can help out. I did a good job organizing my own class in the first festival, didn't I?”

“Huh. Good point. Yeah, actually, that’d be a real help Lilly.”

More like you used your A+ charisma to enslave your cohorts and had them build everything for you.

And you’re not really sure how many of them were actually killed in the riot you started earlier today.

“Oooooohhh…” Hanako purrs. “Can I help, too?”

Hisao seems to be at a loss for words.

He clearly didn’t come here to recruit help, but it doesn’t seem like he wants to refuse it either…

This one’s to you.

You slide down to the floor with them and clap Hanako on the shoulder. “The more the merrier. Welcome aboard.”

Hisao, next to you, reaches over and squeezes your hand. “Thanks.”

You smile at him. “My pleasure, Hisao.”

The two of you enjoy the contact for a moment, then-

A grip on your opposite arm.

Perhaps jealous at the attention, Hanako’s scooched closer to you and snuggled up against you, gripping your other arm gently, but firmly.

Hisao doesn’t show any sign of backing away either this time around.

He seems more comfortable with Hanako being around the two of you.

The absurdity of the situation hits you and you start laughing to yourself like a lunatic:

Hanako gripping one outstretched arm, Hisao holding the other – with a chessboard spread in front of the three of you like a table.

“What is it, Lilly?” Hisao asks quizzically.

“Oh…” You say, calming yourself for a moment. “I’ve been told ‘The Last Supper’ looks something like this.”

Evidently, it does, because after a moment of silence, likely spent glancing about, Hisao and Hanako burst out laughing as well.

Your strange little family shares a trivial, but genuine light-hearted moment together.

Just laughing at minor little things like this… You hope they’ll be many more such moments in your future.

For all of you.

After a bit, the moment passes and you relax as Hanako slouches into you while Hisao rises and stretches his legs.

He then makes an interested noise and takes a step away from you towards the bed.

“Hisao?” You ask.

“Oh, speaking of porcelain, Lilly?” He says as he bends over, still evidently stuck on the tea-armor a bit.

“Hm?”

“Oh, I noticed when you came in, actually.” He extends his hand… towards…

Your heart suddenly stops.

“Did you get a new cane?”

# Part 21

With a spine-chilling offhand comment, you become aware of Hisao’s unknowingly lethal curiosity as his hand draws closer to the psychotic weapon resting on the bed.

Rin’s evil voice whispers through the air.

‘Complete the circle… Release me from this prison… Whichactuallyisn’tthatbadaprisonsinceI’vealwayskindofwonderedwhatitwouldbeliketobealittletallers

oIcouldgetbetterdownwardsperspectivesbutyou’reaboutthesameheightasLillysoitshouldbeok-‘

You smash down Rin’s insanity with your desire to save Hisao and quickly grasp the situation.

There’s only a second remaining.

You could try to make a lunge, but you’re not sure if you could stop him in time.

If it was anyone else, you could shoot them, but that would kind of defeat the purpose here; you’d need to use something non-lethal.

No time to be clever.

With only a split-second to spare, you make your decision.

Pushing yourself to your fastest possible reaction speed, you spring from your seat at the chessboard – accidentally knocking Hanako in the jaw as you do so – and make a lunge at Hisao’s legs.

Actually, not so much of a ‘lunge’ as ‘hurling yourself with the elegance of a drunken bullfrog’ – but your sloppiness buys you initiative.

You hurdle across the room and crash into the back of Hisao’s knees.

In the instant this took – everyone plummets to the floor.

Hanako flops onto her back stunned, but unharmed, you skid into the carpet, and Hisao comes crashing down on top of you.

You wince a bit at the unpleasant indoor road rash, but the slight sting from that goes away as you realize you made it.

Hisao’s hands are empty and your cane is in its original position.

Also…

Hisao… is lying on top of you.

You flush.

Anywhere else in the world, such a thing might be written off as an easily forgettable accident, but this being Japan, the environment freezes to a deathly stillness and proximity makes your heart skip.

“Ow…” Hisao moans. “Wha… What just happened?”

“Oh…” You breathe softly, forcing your vocal chords to work. “I… tripped… trying to get up… I’m ever so sorry.”

It’s a stretch and you know it, given the speed of your dive and the distance you covered.

Thankfully, there’s no way Hisao, who was facing the other way, could have known that.

You suppose sight can be a bit restrictive at times.

“Ah!” He exclaim, quickly shuffling off you. “I… Oh… um… it’s fine…”

He stammers a bit, as if searching for the ‘right’ thing to say. “Oh! Hanako!” He seemingly decides on as he notices she’s down as well. “Are you ok?”

“…” She doesn’t say anything.

“Hanako?”

“I’m… fine…”

There’s little room for continuing that conversation tree, so he clams up and the room remains silent for a few seconds, then. “Um... Wow…” He seems a bit nervous suddenly.

So are you, but you’re not sure if it’s for the same reasons.

“Hanako?” You ask, pulling youself and edging over to her. “I’m sorry…” You embrace her as you talk.

“Really… It’s fine, Lilly…” She softly says into your ear, regaining some of her inner fire.

She nuzzles her face against you.

“Well, ok then, Lilly’s managed not to kill anyone today.” Hisao jokes.

Not at all true. But at least no one in this room.

The mood lightens and you pass the rest of the afternoon having a bit of a tea party; you whipping up your signature blends of Eldritch tea while Hanako devastates you and Hisao together at chess.

You’re wondering if you should buy her a 3D set…

That train of thought is disrupted by Hisao rising and stretching. Checking the time, you realize it’s actually grown a bit late. Strange, you don’t feel that tired…

“Well, I think I should be getting back to my room before curfew.” He announces. “I’ll see you both tomorrow morning, I guess?”

“Of course…” Hanako hums.

“Wouldn’t miss it, Hisao.”

With that, he bids you both goodnight and exits.

It’s odd that you’re not tired. Hisao certainly was and Hanako seems a bit fatigued, as well, but to a lesser extent.

You’re wondering if you should talk to her now that you’re alone…

Or you could go visit Akira.

Actually, no reason you couldn’t bring her along either if you think she’s up to it.

“So Hanako?” You say, holding her to you. “How was your day with Hisao?”

“Ehehe….” She giggles earnestly. “It was nice actually. Not really that meaningful, but nice.”

“Oh?”

“We just had some tea, talked about our favorite books, and walked around town a bit…” She trails off and makes a humming sound. “Actually… That reminds me… He was way more exhausted by that than he should have been…”

It’s a very astute observation – and it also makes you realize that Hanako doesn’t know about Hisao’s heart condition.

You’re debating telling her when-

“So Lilly… Ehehe… I saw that there was some… kind of a ‘party’ here…” She dubs your massacre.

Then she actually lifts her hand up and strokes ‘your’ hair for a change. “Are you… alright?”

“I’m quite well.” You say, ruffling her hair. “But Hanako, about the fatigue you noticed in Hisao…”

You launch into an explanation of Hisao’s arrhythmia, blending what he himself told you with the rather vast amount of illegally acquired medical information courtesy of Akira.

After some time has passed, you feel you’re able to give a decent explanation and rise to make some more tea while Hanako digests the information.

“Hm…” She muses as you hand over her teacup. She produces a bottle of your liqueur flavoring and stirs it for minute. “So that… explains a bit… About both him… and you…”

“About me?”

“Yes…” She seems a bit lost in thought. “I was wondering why you were so concerned for him… I thought it seemed a little strange… But it turns out that I just wasn’t concerned enough…” She concludes a bit gloomily and chugs the rest of her drink.

“Oh Hanako… don’t say that.” You tell her, putting your arm around her. “I don’t want you to be overly worried.”

“Are you… saying you’re not?” She questions as she declines a second cup and simply chugs the bottle straight.

“Oh… it’s different for me, of course.” You tell her with a smile. After a moment, though, it fades and you sigh. “Although… It’s true… I do worry quite a bit about him…”

“Hm… Yeah...” Hanako replies airily, nuzzles up against you as if to comfort you.

“I can get that… There really has been a lot of horrible stuff going on…” She cuddles you as she talks. “I mean, at this very school… There was that terrorist bombing at the athletic field-“

“Um, Hanako? That was you.”

“Oh, right. Well… there’s also been that mass-murderer roaming around Japan-”

“That’s Akira.”

“Well how about that horrible massacre just earlier today?”

“I did that.”

“Huh... We’re bitches.”

You both go silent for a moment, then simultaneously break out laughing together. After a few seconds, Hanako passes you the bottle.

The rest of the night is passed in a more pleasant tone. Although awkward at first, the fact that you trusted Hanako doesn’t seem to be lost on her.

Sleep gradually comes onto both of you after your fifth bottle goes around.

The next morning you come to with somewhere approaching twelve empty bottles scattered around the two of you.

You’re wearing a kilt of a completely unknown origin and Hanako is curled atop the chess board wearing lamellar samurai armor.

Also, for some reason, you taste blood in your teeth.

Still nowhere near as bad as half the situations Akira’s dragged you both into.

You stagger over to the bathroom, picking feathers out of your hair, and brush your teeth.

You feel much better after all that’s done.

Checking the time, you find you still have some time to kill before you’re to meet Hisao…

Deciding that you might as well visit Akira, you make sure Hanako at least has a pulse and head out the door.

On your way to the hospital wing, you note that the school ground have been cleaned up somewhat since yesterday.

Most of the rubble is gone and the broken glass has been cleaned up, although from what you can perceive, the crucified bodies in the athletic field still seem to be untouched.

Huh. Maybe they thought it was a good aesthetic choice.

Unconcerned, you head in to the hospital wing and follow the scent of alcohol.

You find Akira in the burn unit busily replacing all the surgical outlines with concept sketches for Darth Vader.

“Good morning Akira.” You greet her.

“Hey hey! My cute baby sister! How’s it hanging?”

You decide to talk about the festival and launch into a passive explanation of the planned events and general layout of the festival.

She listens politely as you elaborate, passing a bottle back and forth.

“Seems a bit tame.” She concludes as you finish.

You give a contented sigh. “Well Akira, I’d rather avoid complete carnage if either choice is possible.”

“How come? Carnage is tastier.”

You share a laugh together.

“Although…” She muses. “Is there… perhaps a reason you want it to be tame?”

Your heart skips a beat. “Huh?”

“Well… If there was a right time for a confession… It’s usually better to have a bit of peace…” She leaves it at that.

“Ehehe… Stop it…”

She laughs, kills the bottle, and calls for a new one, carried in by a drunken slave wearing a necklace of shrunken heads.

“Seems to me like all that’s in your way is Shizune.”

Huh. Interesting choice of words.

“You don’t think Misha’s a threat to me?” You ask as Akira takes up the bottle and dismisses her attendant.

The affairs of kings are not for the ears of mongrels.

“Hm… Well, not directly, no…” She trails off in thought. “But Shizune most certainly is… And Misha’s ties to her run rather deep…”

Together, you and your sister run over possible implications of this assessment. As true royalty of the British Isles, you both have a heightened awareness for sniffing out conspiracy.

“Well… deep, yes… But as you said earlier, there’s a weariness to them.” You note.

“True. Even she’ll have limits, of course… And…” Akira takes a sip before continuing. “I don’t think Hisao is something she wants to give Shizune, either.”

You grin. “In other words, she might want to shirk on her duties.”

“And her desires might be easily tipped, as well.”

Having held a short, but productive regal meeting, you rise and head out to the festival grounds.

The school outdoor area is quite silent, although it really isn’t that early anymore. You suspect most of the student body being wounded might have something to do with that.

You wonder where you should wait; Hisao should be coming from the male dorms while Hanako should be coming from the female lodgings.

On the other hand, so should the student council.

You head towards the female dorms, not in any real hurry, as you still do have a bit of time...

With little warning, Hanako drops out of presence concealment at your side. “Lilly…” She embraces you. “Good morning… I’m not late… am I?”

You laugh a bit and ruffle her hair. “Nope. Exactly on time.”

“Good…” She snuggles against you.

Having linked up with Hanako, you both double back to the festival grounds.

“WAHAHA! HIIIII!!!” A jovial greeting rings out before you’re even marginally ‘close’

“Oh, hey you guys!” Hisao calls shortly after.

There's a third malevolent presence which is silent, but that’s hardly unexpected.

“So, for some reason, we’re not allowed to move the crucifixes.” Misha elaborates as you draw closer. “Shicchan thinks they add a nice ambiance, but it’s going to take a bit of running around to do the preparations around them.”

“I kind of like them, too…” Hanako purrs at your side.

“Um…” Hisao’s not really sure what to say to that.

“Hisao and I are working together!” Shizune speaks through Misha, producing a small sting of anger within you. You loathe the idea of turning him over… especially not to her… “Wahaha. On the other side of the field, we should ha-

“I’ll take Misha and go.” You cut Shizune off.

“Huh?” Misha, Hanako, and Hisao all say in unison. Shizune likely had a similar reaction.

“Um… Lilly… I need to stay with Shicchan to tr- Huh? ‘Hisao can do that?’ You’re sure?”

“Well…” Hisao cuts in. “I could try, I guess…”

“Um, ok then. WAHAHA!” Misha takes your arm and nearly yanks you off your feet.

“Let’s go get this over with Lilly!” She says, dragging you away.

As you’re ferried to the other side of the field by the unholy beast of pinkness, you wonder how best to strike up a conversation…

So, do you have any plans for the festival, Misha?” You ask.

“Waha-ha? Um… Not really, I guess.” She replies.

“Really? You’ve spent so much time organizing it and you don’t want to enjoy the fruits of your labors?”

“Hm…” She trails off as you two arrive at the scene. “Well, I was going to spend it with Shicchan… But she said she’s busy.”

You go about the task of setting up stands.

“Wahaha! This seems a little tame, though.”

“What?”

“These festival ideas… Shicchan didn’t seem like she wanted anything overly elaborate.”

“My, my. Akira said something similar just earlier…” You note absentmindedly, a bit distracted by the ‘busy’ bit earlier.

At this, Misha emits a hearty laugh. “Really?! Waha, what sort of events do you think she’d come up with?”

You want to get off this topic, but at the same time, you don’t want to seem like you’re prying.

You smile a bit wryly at the inquiry.

Although your senses weren’t as sharp back then, Akira’s party ideas are hardly unknown to you…

Your sixteenth birthday celebration claimed more lives than some small wars.

“Um… Trust me, Misha… You’re really better off not knowing…”

“WAHAHA! Aw… Ok! I won’t pry!”

And with that simple assessment, she goes back to working.

“Actually, Misha.” You ask before the widow’s passed. “Do you know what Shizune might be doing during the festival?”

The formerly passionate hammering stops dead.

“Well…”

“HISAO!”

A voice surprises you both. Hanako’s voice.

The girl crashes out of nowhere at a dead sprint, startling both you and Misha.

“Hanako?!” You call. It’s definitely rare to see her yell.

“Hisao!” She repeats, slamming into you and clutching your sleeve. She pants for a minute, and then tells you in a rushed but clear tone of voice:

“Hisao collapsed while he was working!”

# Part 22

Together, you, Hanako and Misha hasten to the site where Shizune and Hisao were working.

‘If Hisao dies because of Shizune…’ You snarl to yourself.

Several cathartic activities flood your mind which involve turpentine and a pizza slicer.

Such wonderful daydreams will have to wait, however.

You need to ascertain his condition for yourself.

With a cheerful skipping pace that almost resembles a gallop, Misha easily outpaces you both – Hanako practically dragging you along, but you make fast time anyways.

All three of you seem genuinely concerned for different reasons.

“Hisao?” You call out as you arrive.

Nothing. That’s the sound you dreaded most, then Misha pipes up.

“He’s not here, Lilly. Neither is Shicchan.”

“You think she tried to get him to the infirmary?” Hanako asks.

“I would.” And without any further elaboration, Misha heads off in that direction.

“Misha! Slow down!” You call after her pounding footfalls.

“But… I’m worried about Hicchan…” She calls back.

“So are we! Now stick with us!”

“Waha…” She slows to your pace, but seems discontent for a minute, then. “Um… Oh! I know!”

Without warning, she seizes the both of you by the arms and blasts off with her extremely powerful thigh muscles.

It’s hard for blind people to balance when being dragged and you almost fall flat on your face more than once, but luckily Hanako stabilizes you.

Even borrowing Misha’s speed, your breathing becomes ragged rather quickly as you run…

Emi seriously thought this was ‘fun’?

As you approach the infirmary entrance, Misha suddenly releases the both of you and gallops ahead.

As she does so, one of her demonic drills comes alive and spirals about her fist like a gigantic drill bit.

With a battle-cry of “WAHAHA!” she blasts in the entrance.

The infirmary entrance simply ‘shatters’ as much as ‘implodes’ until the fury of the Gae Drills – blowing a crater into the side of the building, which she charges through.

She actually could have just waited a couple seconds for the automatic entrance to open, but whatever, that works too.

You enter the now battle-damaged hallway and cast about.

Misha’s already reached the admittance desk.

Deciding to keep Hanako with you right now, you head through the now-devastated hallway and catch up to Misha.

“Ok! Hicchan’s under observation now. Shicchan brought him in!”

She skips off down the hallway without saying anything else.

She seems genuinely worried, but obviously not to the same degree you are.

No one could match your concern right now…

You have to know how Hisao’s doing. This is starting to drive you insane-er…

After a moment, Misha stops without going into any room. It’s the open-area waiting room.

You and Hanako head in pursuit, then “Hi Shicchan! WAHAHA!”

Just the sound of her name, coupled with this situation, sends surges of anger through your spine.

Hisao’s heart trouble…

It’s the result of her negligence…

The psychosis of Rin’s sword flares up with your anger and speaks to you: 'Hanako’s at your side to counter Misha… She doesn’t need to kill her, just occupy her…'

Not much more needs to be said for that line of thought.

But Hisao...

Together, you and Hanako skid to a halt in the hallway right in front of Misha and your silent nemesis.

# Part 23

You suppress your righteous urge to slay Shizune in the name of Scotland. For now.

“What happened?!”

“Oh, you certainly took your sweet time getting over here.” Shizune digs. “Aw, really Shicchan? She ran as fast as she could but she’s just out of shape.”

Not helping, Misha.

“Quiet, Misha - But then how will I talk for you?”

The two seem to be getting into a small argument which you really do not have time for at present.

“HISAO?” You state loudly, catching Misha’s attention.

Shizune apparently enjoys seeing you squirm, but Misha also seems to be genuinely concerned, so she relents.

“Hicchan and I were setting up one of the large booths – I gave him the task of dragging in the game stands. After a bit, I went to look for him and found him collapsed, so I sent your minion to go get you while I dragged him over here.”

“Minion?” Hanako echoes questioningly.

If you were hoping that explanation would assuage your fears, it really doesn’t.

“What did the doctor say?” You ask. “Is Hisao alright?”

Shizune takes a second that seems like a year to reply through Misha.

“They took him into the OR, but didn’t need to do anything invasive, thankfully. I’ve been asking about that every two minutes.” She tosses a handful of crumpled notepad-sheets at you.

“Aw… that’s… sweet Shicchan…”

“And how is he now?” Hanako cuts in a second before you can.

“He’s stable, but they’re gonna be keeping him here for a while.” She finally gets to the point.

You breathe a HUGE sigh of relief.

“So you might want to tell that crazy sister of yours to tone it down a little while he’s here.” Shizune adds.

You furrow your brow at that. It’s a cheap shot, but still a valid point.

“Do you know when we can visit him?” You ask.

“No idea. He’s sedated right now, so likely not for a while.”

You bite your lips, forcing down the urge to hurl innumerous Scottish curses at shizune, if only because you doubt Misha could translate them well.

“Hanako?” You ask sweetly, , turning your face to her. “Would you kindly go let Akira know what’s happened?”

Two drunken nurses skid by on rollerblades, playing street hockey with a severed head in the hallway.

“And also ask her if she could quiet things down just a bit?”

“Ok…” She says dejectedly. “I’ll come right back…”

And with that, she vanishes, leaving you with Misha and Shizune.

‘Yeah. Sending away your numeric balance. That was a smart move.’ Your insanity cane echoes to you.

Suddenly, you detect a wave a malevolent energy surging into Misha’s drills. Those drills which can slay any mortal…

You grit your teeth.

Then just as suddenly, it stops, accompanied by the sound of hands cutting the air in quick signs. The drills power down and Misha then flops into a chair next to Shizune.

It seems at least one of them didn’t want to risk a fight where there was a chance of Hisao getting hurt.

You settle down into a chair across from them and wait.

Time passes rather slowly as you wait, and of course, Shizune, the person responsible for all this, is just across the room.

Your temper running a bit high, Rin’s sword of madness keeps echoing through your head, asking you what purple tastes like, how you’ll decorate the palace once you seize control of the Britons, and other such nonsense.

You sigh. It seems like nothing will happen for a while now.

“So Misha?” You ask.

“Hm?” She perks up.

“How are you going to get the stalls built now that Hisao’s out of commission?”

“Hm…” She makes a thinking noise as her hands cut the air, possibly asking Shizune for a reply in her own stead. “No idea.” Is all she comes up with after a while.

“Student Council isn’t going to keep working?” You ask.

“As if you’d be one to criticize for that.” You’re pretty sure that was Shizune. “Waha? Really? We’re out?”

A small silence as they sign to each other.

“… Shicchan says that she’s staying here to keep a watch on Hisao. Um… does that mean I’ll have to do everything? Oh, phew, thank god.”

You assume she signed a ‘no’.

Before you can comment further, a soft patter of footsteps materialize at your side. “Oh, Hello, Hanako.”

She hugs you. “Lilly…”

You take Hanako’s hand and guide her into the seat next to you, where she promptly tugs you over a bit and begins nuzzling into your arm.

“So Hanako?”

“Hm?”

“What did Akira have to say?”

“Oh…” She trails off, trying to summarize. “She says she’ll keep all the chaos out of the hospital ward, at least.”

“Um… Doesn’t that mean she’ll be subjecting all of Yamaku to it instead?” Misha asks.

“Something like that. But Hisao’ll be fine, at least.”

“WAHAHA!” She laughs, seemingly getting some energy back at that statement. “Yeah! You’re right.”

Hanako snuggles against you and Misha makes a noise of discontent. You’re about to follow up on that when the doors open.

“HISAO!”

“Hisao?!”

“Hicchan?!”

“…!”

The four of you rush over as his bed is wheeled out.

The doctor explains that he’s fine, but should be sleeping until tomorrow morning and gives you all his room number before carting him off.

A moment of silence, then -“WAHAHA! Ok then! We’ll be staying here tonight, too! Time to go get our sleeping bags, Misha! Wait, I’m Misha…”

“…”

Misha sighs. “Ok, I guess we can do that! It’ll be like camping! Yay!” And with that, the student council departs to the evil marching beat of 'WA-HA-HA' leaving you and Hanako behind, if only temporarily.

“So… What are we gonna do?” Hanako asks.

Good question.

“Let’s go set up base camp in Akira’s room.” You tell Hanako with a smile.

She seems a bit apprehensive, so you stroke her hair and smile.

“Oh, come on. Hanako. It’ll be like a slumber party! Just with a lot of gossiping, plotting murder, and philosophizing about why the world needs to burn.”

“So in other words, exactly like a slumber party.”

“Yes.”

"In."

With that, you both head on over to Akira’s room. As if expecting it, she’s quite receptive.

Actually, she seems almost too happy, almost yanking you off your feet as she hugs you.

You call for bedding from the staff and set up in no time.

Although the primitive bedding of a hospital is unbefitting of a monarch, it’ll do for now.

“So Akira.” You say as you finish. “You got the gist of the situation from Hanako?”

“An idea, yes. You’ll be staying a while, then?”

You furrow your brow. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Akira laughs. “’Mind’? Fuck that. Let’s celebrate!”

And with that, she produces a trio of forbidden liquor bottles.

The night livens up rather quickly.

Perhaps because you’re both nervous, but you and Hanako start chugging it away as soon as the bottle as passed around.

Akira is, as always, Akira.

You debate some of Akira’s carnival ideas as the second round goes out.

“So yeah, I was thinking we could have a game like, where you all fight to the death on this shifting platform…” Your sister elaborates as she tucks into her sixth bottle.

“Imnot shure…” Hanako slurs. “I kindaaaa liked your decapitation contest idea…”

You giggle. “I would’ve liked a Russian Roulette atat- attact- ‘game’.”

“Well, all jusht ideas now, anyways.” Akira concludes.

You bring Akira fully up to speed on the Hisao and StuCo issue to the best of your ability, but that’s a short-lived sober moment.

After drinking round number… you don’t actually know, the atmosphere has livened considerably.

You’re clad in a bedsheet wrapped around you like a cloak and are practicing your rousing pre-battle speech for when you seize the throne of Scotland, waving around your possessed scimitar.

Hanako has changed into full medieval plate armor and is seizing on the floor in a fit of giggles. Every now and again, leaps up to add another body part to her ‘patchwork doll’.

Akira’s working on a high score and has broken out a screaming demonic spellbook. She's making a grand show out of summoning demons in between chugging sessions.

Her last massive summoning to call forth the Kraken results in… nothing.

“Huh… oh… yesh…That one showsh up in the nearest body of water… What’s the nearest large body of water here, Lillyyyyy?”

“Um… The fish- phyc- ‘physical’ therapy swimming pool.” You answer.

“Huh. Sucks to be them.”

You memories of the rest of the night are rather faded, but the fragments are pleasant at least.

[Meanwhile]

Shizune and Misha are leaned up against the wall in Hisao’s room, with the orderly’s body hanging from the ceiling, eating some hastily-procured takeout food and passing a jug of whiskey back and forth.

Wrapped in at least three sleeping bags as if a caterpillar, Misha looks over to her silent friend.

[So tell me Shicchan?] Misha signs. [Why were you driving Hisao so hard?]

She pushes aside her plate of Mongolian beef and replies. [I know it’s repugnant, but I had to drive him into a corner.]

Misha looks even more confused. [A corner? What?]

Shizune grimaces at her. [His heart? You know? The one that gave out ealier?]

Misha cocks an eyebrow.

[You… ‘wanted’ that to happen?]

[Yes.]

She looks understandably horrified at that and pauses a moment before replying.

[Why?]

Shizune gives a sharp exhale. [Easy.] Her expression changes to a smile as she signs out slowly, as if savoring it. [I was there for him when she wasn’t.]

Her face takes on a catlike grin. [He’ll not soon forget that.]

Misha’s eyes widen a bit [Is that why you’ve been in such a foul mood?]

[Kind of. All just means to the same end.] She smiles at Misha and strokes her face. [You know, he’s been coming to me a lot, lately. Just hanging out, but we all know that’s just part of the courtship dance.]

Misha looks a bit forlorn. [Do we?]

[Well, an extreme version of it, at least.]

The blue-haired caster leans back and explains herself. [Stockholm syndrome is the basis of all brainwashing. Also it’s used to train Disney animators. If I kept a tight leash on Hisao, it was inevitable that we’d grow closer eventually…]

Almost as if feeling some backlashed remorse, her expression wavers.

[What I have to accept is that I’ll never have Lilly’s charisma.] She hangs her head dejectedly for a moment. [So I have to use other methods.]

[Other methods?] Misha flashes back with minimal enthusiasm. [You’ve been acting that way… for that?]

[Yes, and it worked. He’s been seeking me out all the time, hasn’t he? And now I have this to work with.] Shizune traces her finger over one of those evil drills. [I’m sorry if the game was too much for you.]

“Wahaha.”

She pats Misha for a while, then snickers to herself. [I thought he’d fight me more than he did, actually. I guess he kind of likes being dominated.]

She purses her lips and stares at the ceiling. [I wonder if he’s into bondage...]

[End meanwhile]

You awaken the next morning sitting upside-down on an easy chair wearing a crown made out of what seems to be human ears.

You cast about and find that Hanako is curled up, occupying Akira’s bed, and your sister herself is gone.

After taking the time to mix up some of your blasphemous Scottish blooddrink, you ponder what your first move of the morning will be as your hangover dispels.

It’s unlikely Hisao will be up yet, but if nothing else, you can feel his face.

Hanako will be fine if you leave her your hangover cure, but she might like it if you stayed anyways.

Also, you wonder what Akira might be getting up to since her hospital antics have been relocated.

Deciding to visit Hisao, you leave a goblet of your dark elixir on the stand by Hanako’s head.

You feel the madness of Rin calling to you to feel her scars, but you suppress it for now.

You prim yourself a bit before heading out and remove your ear-crown- Actually, nah, just leave it on.

Satisfied, you head over to Hisao’s room.

As you walk, you note that Akira seems to have kept to her word about releasing the infirmary staff. They seem to be functioning professionally and your navigational cane never once gets stuck in anyone’s entrails.

You enter Hisao’s room. “Hisao?”

No reply.

At least not from him. After second, you detect a loud yawn.

“Oh… g’mornin Lilly…” Misha replies, sleepy-voiced.

Your mood sours, but you don’t let it show. “Oh, good morning you two.”

Misha yawns again. “Just me. Shicchan went out to go get some breakfast.” She shakily rises. “Hicchan’s still here, too, but he’s not up yet.”

You beam at Misha. “Oh, why thank you for the update.”

She replies with another unenthusiastic yawn. Mornings seem difficult for her.

No one here to stop you from face-time then…

Also, Shizune’s not with her evil knight of the pink right now… A rarity.

# Part 24

You remain in Hisao’s room with Misha and decide that later will be the proper time to deal with Shizune.

As Misha struggles to pull herself into a state approaching wakefulness, you saunter over to his bed and delicately stroke his face, taking in the details.

Rin’s touch-vision adds a new layer of detail – the tone of his skin, his hair…

You smile slightly to yourself.

It’s such a nice face… His body as a whole is nice… You’d like to feel the rest of it, but somehow you doubt that’s a good idea with Misha in the room.

The madness of Rin flares up in your mind and asks what color his eyes are. It calls to you to lift up his eyelids and poke them, but you battle that urge down.

It’s harder to do when you’re actively using her power, but with a bit of mental effort, you manage to control Rin’s evil.

A few paces behind you, Misha finishes chugging her thermos of coffee, gives a sharp exhale, and turns to you.

“Hicchan seemed like he was having a nightmare earlier, but it didn’t last.” She says.

With no small measure of reluctance, you tear your attention away from Hisao for a moment and focus on Misha.

“And you?” You ask, smiling at Misha. “How are you feeling this morning?”

She yawns loudly. “Wahaha. Tired… But otherwise I’m alright I guess.”

Shaking herself up, she trudges over to Hisao. “Well, Hicchan’s alright, I guess. And that’s more than enough.” She pats his shoulder lightly.

She sighs. “I wish we’d been able to do the festival… but something tells me I wouldn’t have liked it much anyways.”

“Oh?” You emote, thinking back to the time when you two hung out regularly. “You always seemed to like parties.”

She puts a finger to her lips and hums. “Hm… I kind of do, but there always seems to be something missing…”

“What do yo-“

BLAM.

You inquiry is cut off by the door being violently blown open.

“Hi Shicchan!” Misha elaborates, mustering her pep again.

“…!”

“Wahaha! Shicchan wants to know what you’re doing here, Lilly.”

“Oh, I just came to check on you two.” You reply sweetly and make a gesture at her drilled familiar. “After all, Misha here seems a bit worn out.”

“Oh? You’re concerned about the Council’s well-being? There’s a change.” Shizune replies, walking past you and placing a stack of takeout boxes on the table.

Rin’s raspy voice echoes through your mind, telling you to rip off her face and wear it as a Halloween mask.

Maybe later.

Keeping your composure, you reply. “We’re all prone to doing things we typically wouldn’t in dire moments, aren’t we? I mean it’s rather unlike you to show concern for others.”

On the other side of Hisao’s bed, she clicks her tongue.

“And how would you know? Busy as you are playing-“

A groaning sound stops Misha’s translation in its tracks. Hisao’s.

All three of you lose interest in whatever was just happening as he stirs.

You and Shizune approach from opposite sides of his bed. Probably for the best.

“Huh? Shizune?” He mumbles, then shifts his head a bit. “Lilly? Misha?”

You all freeze as he collects himself. “What… how did I get here?”

“You collapsed working for Shizune.” You summarize quickly.

“Oh, yeah…” He trails off and groans as if remembering. “That’s right…”

You detect him shifting about as he takes in his surroundings.

“How’d I get here?” He asks.

You hesitate for a moment, then. “Huh?” He directs his voice towards Shizune.

“Oh, thanks…” He emotes, seemingly not remembering to sign it himself. Thankfully for her, though, Misha misses nothing in that regard.

You’re not sure what they signed, but suddenly he gives a dry laugh before turning back to you. “Oh… um…”

Seemingly not knowing how to deal with both you and Shizune requiring different modes of communication, he just gives up and directs his voice at Misha.

“Um… How long have I been here?”

“Half a day.” You respond.

“Oh…” He notices the sleeping bags smashed into a corner. “Were you two… Here all night?”

Misha emits her spine-chilling ‘WAHAHA’ before answering directly. “Ehe! Yup Yup! We took turns on watch, Hicchan!”

“Me and Hanako are just down the hall in Akira’s room. We’ve been making rounds, too.” You add.

He stays silent for a moment.

“Lilly…” He breathes your name in a tone that might be romantic under different circumstances.

As it is now, though, it just sounds condemned. “Misha, Shizune…” He sighs. “Sorry.”

At those words, you fluidly raise your hand and slap him across the face, producing a sharp and distinct packing sound.

Everyone falls dead silent at this action.

You detect a surge of killing intent from Shizune. And oddly, Misha seems more than a little bothered as well.

“Don’t apologize Hisao.” You breathe. “Just… never apologize for what you are.”

“…” Hisao seems in a state of shock for a minute, then-

“WAHAHA! She’s right, Hicchan!” Misha gaily cuts in. “Just keep going, right?!”

He suddenly begins laughing. “You guys…”

After a minute, he takes your hand in his… and puts his opposite hand on Shizune’s.

A beautiful moment ruined by an addendum.

You and Shizune...

You’re each holding one of Hisao’s hands… and each trying to kill the other with your mind.

He exhales fondly, not seeming to notice.

It seems you brought him out of his funk, if nothing else.

“Alright then. I’ll try to keep going. Any idea of when I’ll be getting out of here?”

You freeze, not actually knowing the answer to this question.

Shizune takes the opportunity to jerk Hisao towards her and sit down on his bed up against him, ostensibly for freeing up her hands so she can sign.

‘Die bitch. Die bitch. Die bitch. Die bitch.’ You’re not sure if this is you or your Rin-sword.

“You should get out in about three days! Just in time for the festival Hicchan! WAHAHA!” Misha interprets.

Unmoving from her perch, Shizune passes one of the takeout boxes his way.

“Oh?” He chuckles, signing something. “Thanks Shicchan!” Misha translates what he signed as if second-nature.

This is too confusing.

You realize it might not have been the best idea to try and take over talking yourself, especially given that most of your knowledge was secondhand.

“So is it alright?” He asks as he opens his newly anointed breakfast. “I mean, how’d you smuggle this in?”

“Shicchan has her ways, Hicchan.”

[Meanwhile, one of infirmary nurses has been stuffed into a janitor’s closet with all her skin ripped off.]

You simply smile, pleased that he’s come back around, but not so much with the method…

What to do, what to say…

“My, my, Hisao.” You chime in, suppressing Rin’s callings to bathe in Shizune’s blood with some reluctance. “That smells delectable. Would you like some tea with that?”

He chokes a bit. “Aha. I guess, I mean... if you were gonna be getting some anyways...”

“But of course. I know my teas.” You reply with a smile.

Hisao can’t talk much with his mouth full, and nor can he sign, so the room falls silent as you rise and enact your ancestral Scottish rite of teaness.

Dark highland hymns flow through your mind as you call forth your alchemical tea preparation.

Misha laughs and them begins digging into her own takeout box.

After a moment, you hand him a cup and have a seat right next to Hisao, scooching up against him in a manner similar to Shizune.

Hisao chokes a bit and then accepts your cup. After dirnking, he laughs. “Um… thanks, you guys, but, um…”

He seems to have begun to feel a little crowded by you both.

"Um..."

“Hicchan-pile!” Misha calls out and then flops across his legs.

None of you know what to say anymore.

In should be noted that most hospital beds are only suited for a weight limit of about 160kg, so four people all sprawled out on it is starting to push it…

“Um… Good morning?” A familiar voice calls from the hall.

“Hey… Hanako?” Hisao replies, guessing, as his view of the hallway is obstructed by your abdomen.

Not that you mind that in the slightest.

“My, my. Let’s give Hisao a bit of space, shall we?” You say, rising.

“…” Shizune follows suit with some reluctance.

“WAHAHA! I can stay here, right?”

“…!”

“Ok, fine…”

Misha gets up also.

“Good morning, Hisao…” Hanako says, walking towards him at a shaky pace.

“Hey Hana-!” Hisao begins, but is promptly cut off by her outright tackling him.

“You idiot!” She says, starting to sob. “We… we were worried sick about you!”

She nuzzles up against him, actually shaking.

None of you seem willing to break the silence that follows. Finally Hisao raises chimes up.

“I’m sorry. I’ll be more careful in the future, ok?”

Another silence as Hanako calms a bit, then-

“WAHAHA! Yeah, you better, Hicchan! Otherwise Shicchan and I are gonna kick your ass!”

“Yeah… Me too!” Hanako agrees.

“And my CANE.” You pledge.

“Ahahaha.” He chuckles a little nervously. “Well, glad to have some motivation, I guess.”

Hanako seems satisfied and gets up. She promptly takes her usual position and fastens to your arm.

“So… when are you all heading to class?” Hisao asks.

“Oh, right now, actually.” You say, running your hand over his hair. “I just thought I should wish you good morning before I went to class.”

“Lilly… You didn’t have to.”

You smile. “Yes I did, Hisao.” And with that, you bend over and give him a quick kiss on the cheek.

He flushes. Misha giggles. Hanako stays silent. Shizune telekinetically broadcasts waves of hatred into your back as you and Hanako retreat.

With that wonderful Parthian shot, you exit with Hanako at your side.

As soon as you’re out in the hallway, your smile fades. “Hanako, I need you to keep watch over Hisao while I’m gone. Stay out of sight.”

She makes a soft sound, but then agrees. “Ok…”

She releases your arm gracefully.

“And if something happens? I might be able to take Shizune, but probably not Misha. And definitely not both of them together.”

You smile and run your hand through her hair. “It’s fine. They won’t start an actual fight with Hisao in the mix. Just stay hidden, but stay close to Hisao.”

“You’re sure of that?”

You return a somewhat sour expression. “It’s how I would handle it.”

She accepts this. “Ok, stay safe, Lilly…” And with this, Hanako Ikezawa, Lord Privy Seal of the Britons, melds into concealment.

Satisfied, you head out into the morning air.

Walking about you feel… A craving… It’s not hunger… It’s as if needing a caffeine fix… But far more intense.

You do your best to suppress it, but it’s a strong and irritatingly directionless craving.

Suddenly, as you traverse the school grounds, you detect the art class having an outdoor session, seeing as Kenji destroyed their room proper.

‘They’ll do. Eat their minds.’

The voice echoes within you rather than without.

Suddenly, you realize what it is. You’ve been overusing Rin’s Scimitar of Insanity… Especially this morning, seeing as it was almost euphoric to lose yourself in the details of Hisao’s face…

That raspy inner madness is now calling to you for nourishment.

‘Eat them.’

‘No.’ You declare inwardly. ‘I decide when to feed.’

Delving into your soul, you bring forth the holy energy of the true monarch of the Britons, drowning Rin’s insidious voice in that radiant energy.

Only the voice is suppressed though, you still feel the cravings as you head off.

On your way to the school administrative office, you detect another group of mongrels outside.

Then you catch the scent of alcohol of the wind.

A second later, “Hey hey, sis!”

“My, my. Good morning, Akira.” You say, hugging your sister as she approaches you. “What might you be doing out here?”

“Oh, I’ve decided to take over your class’ history session.” She says, taking your arm. “Today I’m having them re-enact the story of William Tell.”

“Um… Akira? My class was for blind students.”

“Oh. That explains it.”

Someone screams in the background.

You both shrug.

“So how are you, Lilly? You look a bit pale.” Akira continues cheerfully.

You give a sigh. “Actually…” The two of you walk together through the school grounds as you fill your sister in on your newfound craving for souls to the melodious backdrop on your classmates killing each other in a drunken frenzy.

“Hm…” She hums in thought after you’ve finished.

“I thought that sheath was supposed to control the madness.”

“Assuming you don’t use it, it will.”

You sigh. “But it’s such a lovely experience…”

Hisao’s face… To say nothing of how you’d like to take it the rest of his body…

Akira shrugs. “Then feed it.”

You both stop and let the warm midmorning breeze flow over you for a moment. Akira gives an explanation.

“Rin possessed incredible psychosis, but the emotional intelligence of a fish. Her madness was literally trapped within her. You, on the other hand, have a genuine God-given talent for reaching into people.”

She chuckles and ruffles your hair. “It’s one of your best qualities. But in this instance, it’s also the perfect vehicle for her insanity, so if you decide to use that power a bit, they’ll be some bleed-over.”

“She’s not going to take me over.” You declare.

“True. Rin’ll never win a battle of charisma against you. But if you’re going to use the sword’s power, you’ll need to feed it. Just like how athletes need to eat extra nutrition.”

You sigh to yourself and lean again Akira, pondering this.

[Meanwhile]

Shizune is nestled up against Hisao, gazing down on his sleeping face with a twinkling in her dark eyes.

[So Shicchan.] Misha signs, nestled against the foot of Hisao’s bed, kicking her feet around a little. [Do you think Lilly will get her class excuse?]

She strokes Hisao’s hair lightly, then turns. [I have no doubt she will.]

Misha cocks an eyebrow. [Is that ok with you?]

Shizune smiles. [Of course. I’d made preparations for it turning out this way.]

She goes back to playing with Hisao’s ahoge for a moment. Then she turns. [Although you did remind me.] She gives a devilish smile. [I think it’s time to go get ‘our’ class exemption]

Misha sighs. [Roger that.] She calmly walks out the door, lowering her golden eyes to half-mast.

[End meanwhile]

You smile and suppress Rin’s madness channeling the holy power of Scotland.

Your perceptions grow a bit dimmer as you drive down her insanity.

Satisfied, you turn to Akira and smile. “I’ll keep it under wraps unless I really need to.”

Your sister exhales and ruffles your hair. “Ever with the middle-ground.” She chuckles. “Well, that’s ok. Seeking compromise is a large part of nobility.”

You smile and lean again her, savoring the peace of the day, slightly interrupted by faint tortured groaning on the breeze.

“So, what were you here for, anyways?” Akira asks. “Come to play some games?” She guesses, sounding hopeful.

You giggle. “Sorry, but not now, Akira. I have to go see the administrative head about getting a pass from classes.”

“Oh, easy.” Your sister emotes before yanking out a piece of paper and scribbling on it. “There you go.”

“Um… ‘you’re’ the administrative head?”

“The old one was killed in your riot and his replacement died playing Russian Roulette earlier.” She states blandly. “So I had the surviving administrator vote me in when they were drunk.”

She hands it to you. “There you go. Pass from all your classes.”

You laugh and take it. “Thanks, Akira.”

She giggles. “So that means you’re free, right? Wanna go play a little?”

You sigh affectionately and nuzzle against your sister. “Alright, sure, we can play for a bit.”

Akira breaks out in a genuinely happy laugh and hugs you. “Alright! Glad to hear it!”

It’s genuinely a heartwarming thing to see her in such a good mood.

She takes your hand. “Ok! The Satou dynasty is in the house!”

Laughing with your sister, you head off together on a tour of your Yamaku fief.

In the cafeteria, you and Akira barge in before lunch and set about teaching them your sister’s special recipe for Las Plagas Delight.

“I learned the recipe from the strange English guy.” She explains while you encourage the staff.

You smile to yourself. You suppose it is good to get some cooking experience.

Once you’re satisfied with their performance, you head off again.

Giggling to each other, you both trot along at a merry pace and commandeer the chemistry class.

You play with them for a while, teaching your loving subjects how to build pipe bombs.

The two of you see them off with a wave and leave them to tinker around.

Akira’s genuinely happy, and you’re having a rather nice time, too.

Fucking with your subjects is an ageless pastime amongst royalty.

After that, you both make your way to the athletic department in high spirits and split up for a bit.

You coat the football player’s equipment with broken glass while Akira spikes all their Gatorade stores with Everclear.

[Meanwhile]

Mutou lurches along the path outside Yamaku, having finished class for the day.

He sighs, having expected the rest of Yamaku to have been inspired in physics by Rika’s impressive use of vector change in the massacre the other day.

Sadly, this wasn’t the case. They’re as lazy as ever.

Suddenly, he stops and looks ahead. A formidable figure bars his passage.

“Hi teacher! WAHAHA!”

He gives a disdainful look. “Misha? What is it? I’m in a hurry.”

The Pink Knight gives a wistful sigh.

“You always were like that. Always too preoccupied for little ones like me…” Suddenly, she jerks her head back and laughs. “WAHAHA! But you don’t need to be anymore.”

Misha’s drills begin spiraling as if a cyclone, pulsating with malevolent pink energy.

“You don’t need to worry about anything anymore.”

Each drill on either side of her head snakes down to her clenched hands, enveloping them and spiraling outward.

“Wahaha.” She breathes almost quietly.

Either of Misha’s hands are now covered by a structure akin to a knight’s lance – extending several meters before her and enveloping her fists with a rotating handguard.

Demonic energy of pinkness surges through the gyrating demonic weapons.

“WAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!”

[End meanwhile]

Having enjoyed a lovely day of regal trolling, you and Akira stroll back together on the path back to the infirmary.

Off in the distance, you can dimly make out a horrific cacophony of explosions and a sensation of hideous evil powers.

It’s not in the direction of Hisao’s room, though, so it couldn’t matter less to you.

You'll look into it later, perhaps. For now, it's irrelevant.

Enjoyably fatigued, you smile and nuzzle into Akira’s arm. “My, my, that was quite a pleasant time.”

Your sister ruffles your hair a bit and laughs gaily. “Wasn’t it?”

You smile. “Yeah… That worked wonders for blowing off some steam.”

“It’s important to do something pleasurable whenever you can, isn’t it?” Akira states simply.

You smile to yourself.

That it is.

And heading back, your thoughts turn towards what would easily be the most pleasurable thing in the world to you.

Your lips curl into a smile and you mouth that name to yourself. “Hisao…”

# Part 25

Arm in arm, you and Akira happily stride back into the infirmary wing.

Casting about with your perceptions, you detect nothing out of the ordinary: doctors going about their impersonal checkups, nurses shuffling back and forth, most of them ditching their workloads…

Comparing it to the prior excitement of your lovely day, you come to a realization.

“Huh, you’re right.” You emote.

“Hm?” Your sister replies.

You smile at her. “It really 'is' boring as a rule.”

Together, you laugh.

“Still, it’s necessary for Hisao’s well-being…” You say once the moment passes. “So peace is a rule we ‘must’ abide by.”

“Hehe. Gotcha.”

Actually, that reminds you; you’ve been having Hanako keep a watch on Hisao while you were away.

You were going to visit Hisao first and get her report later, but perhaps you should speak to her right away in the off chance something happened.

As the environment seems peaceful enough, you deem there to be no immediate threat to Hisao.

You decide you might as well hear if Hanako's subterfuge bore any fruit and head through the hallway, making a secret motion with your hand as you walk.

You enter Akira’s room with your sister and close the door the door, then-

FWOOSH. Your Lord Privy Seal phases out of her concealment.

“Lilly…” She purrs as she snuggles up against you, not bothering to wait for an exchange of greetings.

You giggle a bit. She’s so cute.

[Meanwhile]

Faced with the knight of the demonic drills, Mutou grits his teeth and prepares himself.

Laughing maniacally, Misha catapults at him, closing the space between them in the blink of an eye as her rotating drill-lance shatters the earth around it.

‘I wasn’t expecting that degree of speed….’ Is all he can muse to himself as the scientist lurches into action.

Thinking fast, Mutou reverses the vectors at his feet and flares off the earth, narrowly dodging her attack.

Then the gale of wind whirling about the lance catches and blasts him off his feet.

As Misha slides to a halt, he staggers to his feet and grimaces.

“Time to light up the night.” He raises his hand and promptly yanks it down, channeling the powers of science.

At his command, a stream of explosive gases rocket out of the sky and arc downwards upon Misha, leaving a blazing trail of flames in the air.

[End meanwhile]

"My my." You muse with a smile. "Were you noticed at all, Hanako? Are you alright?"

She gives a contented sigh as she snuggles into you. "No, I don't think so. If they did notice me, they didn't do anything about it."

You stroke her hair before sinking down to the bed.

"I'm quite relieved then." You tell her. "So did you observe anything of note?"

Akira sets about preparing some tea liqueur while Hanako rocks a bit on her feet.

“Not really. Shizune stoking his hair and his face a bit, but that’s all.”

At this, you grit your teeth a bit. A motion which does not escape her.

“Aw… Lilly… I… figured you wouldn’t mind if I let something so small go to keep hidden…” Her tone drops a few notes. “Please don’t say you’re angry… Should I have stopped her?”

[Meanwhile]

From the center of the impact crater, a massive gust blasts away the flames. Every fiery bolt was a direct hit, but Misha didn’t even try to dodge.

She didn’t need to. Her evil drills expanded and shielded her body from the devastating attack completely.

Her clothes aren’t even singed.

“WAHAHA!” She bellows as she kicks off with another lethal charge.

There’s almost no time to even recognize the threat.

Bearing down upon him, to Mutou her gleeful skipping resembles a gallop.

It’s as if gazing up upon a mounted knight bearing down upon a footsoldier.

He quickly summons up the earth about him and compresses the solid molecules to form a reinforced gem-shield.

Her lance blows through it as if paper.

It misses him only because he moved to the side as soon as he was out of her visual field.

The gust of those gyrating drills alone is enough to send him careening off, smashing into a tree several dozen meters away.

‘This isn’t good…’

[End meanwhile]

“No, it’s quite alright, Hanako.” You reply, taking her hand in yours. “Your choice was the correct one.”

She breathes a sigh of relief and arcs her body down to hug you. “Yey… I’m glad…”

Not letting go, she nuzzles against your chest. “Don’t worry, Lilly… We’ll kill that bitch eventually…”

She says it casually, in an airy tone of voice.

You smile dreamily upon hearing those words. “That we will, dear.”

Akira flops down next to you and passes out the teacups.

Taking a sip as Hanako nuzzles into you, you ponder...

[Meanwhile]

His mind blazing, Mutou changes the state of the water in the air, forming a milieu of razor-thin lenses made of ice crystals.

Misha stops and blinks as she’s suddenly viewing over a hundred distorted images of the real Mutou.

“You should have stayed awake when we covered thin-lens equations, Misha.” He remarks from… somewhere.

She stays quiet for a moment, then perks back up. “WAHAHA! Ok! How about I just pick all the answers?”

She raises one of her spiraling drills – which suddenly emits a hail of unholy hair-glitter-sparkles as darts.

"WAHAHA!" She laughs. This was no way to fight her Gae Drills.

The legend of Misha’s powers is already a well-known one. From the ritual holy weapon of ancient Germania; to Gungnir, the spear of Odin; to the demonic weapon Gae Bolg of Cú Chulainn; there had been an archetypal legend in European legend of an insidious mystic spear.

And as it progressed through the ages, whenever it showed up later in history, its powers had increased.

The spear of the ancient German gods had the power to “always kill”.

The lance Gungnir had the power to “Always kill and never miss”.

And most recently, the demonic weapon of Cú Chulainn had both aforementioned powers, as well as the ability to “strike down many at once”.

This is the same weapon which Misha inherited and nurtured. And it’s this power which she now invokes.

Every one of Mutou’s illusions is skewered.

He himself narrowly catches a dart to the arm as he hurls himself away.

Wirling about in a spiral of blood, he smacks into the ground, making a pained hissing sound as a fresh red stream pours out onto the earth.

With at least three cracked ribs, a gash to his head, and now a deep puncture wound to the arm from a dart he suspects was poisoned, he can barely stagger to his feet again.

[End meanwhile]

“So how’s Misha?” You ask calmly, nursing your drink.

Hanako hums as she thinks.

After a moment, she summarizes. “Well, the three of them played Risk together and she seemed rather happy from that.”

A pause, then. “And when Hisao went to sleep, she stayed with him for a while. She left the room just a bit to get back.”

“Why?” You inquire.

“No idea.”

You shrug. “Probably to go grab some dinner.”

Misha wasn’t sent against you and Hisao’s stable, so that’s really all that matters.

[Meanwhile]

With a final monstrous lunge of those mighty leg muscles, Misha brings herself in on her opponent in the space of an instant.

Lacking the necessary stamina to dodge anymore, Mutou grits his teeth and invokes the power of math.

In response to his insidious calculations, the armor of vector change envelops his body as the evil lance hurdles in.

SPLAT.

Mutou’s chest explodes outwards in a fountain of blood.

His expression as he falls back is one of mild surprise. The hydraulic shock of having his heart blown out killing him before he even felt any pain.

The teacher’s failing was that he was a scientist and not a historian. Although his thinking was correct from a scientific point of view, it had not accounted for the power of the cursed lance.

In this universe, at least, effect follows cause. He had used his formidable science to reverse the vector of Misha’s thrust.

But Gae Bolg was a weapon which inverted the laws of cause and effect. It started out with the conclusion of the enemy’s heart being pierced and warped reality to create an explanation for it.

When Mutou reflected the attack’s vector, it had simply pierced his heart from the opposite side.

The limp body of Misha’s former instructor unceremoniously smacks the ground with a wet packing sound.

She shrugs. “Ok! Shicchan should be happy with this!”

And with that, she merrily skips off.

[End meanwhile]

Smiling pleasantly, you take a sip of your tea.

“So Akira?” You ask. “Do you still feel that Misha might be assuaged?”

“Of course.” Your sister replies, breaking out another regal liquor bottle. “Shizune’s had a long time to work on her, but of course that also means she’s been feeling neglected for more than a bit. She can easily be made to step aside, if not outright recruited.”

“You think?”

“All she needs is a little hope and some encouragement.”

You nod. It’s sound reasoning.

After waiting for Hanako to finish her drink, you rise and straighten your clothes. “So then? Shall we go pay our respects to Hisao?”

Hanako giggles. “Ok…”

Akira stretches. “Eh, count me out for right now. I’ll meet up with you two in a little.” She laughs. “And I’ll bring a nice ‘get-well’ present.”

Knowing what you do of Akira’s presents…

You giggle at the proposition and smile in your sister’s direction. “By all means, Akira, we’ll be waiting.”

Taking Hanako’s arm, you let yourself be led out of the room.

You make your way to Hisao’s room and enter.

“Hisao? I’m back.” You call in sweetly, your expression an earnest smile.

A slight groaning followed by a series of ear-shattering angry snapping sounds are what greet you.

You glare in the direction of the snapping, trying to force-choke Shizune somehow. Then-

“Lilly…” Hanako whispers. “Hisao’s asleep.”

“Oh…”

[Meanwhile]

Misha steps along the path back to the infirmary, cradling several boxes of takeout food.

Suddenly, she comes to a stop, staring at a golden figure before her, heading the opposite direction.

“Hi Akira!” She calls with a broad smile, almost dropping the stack with her automatic impulse to wave.

Not surprised at all, Akira waves from the wrist. “Hey, hey!” She comes closer. “How’re you doing, Misha?”

She sighs and makes a weary expression. “Shicchan’s been having me run errands for her, but I don’t mind.”

The King of Spirits makes a motion as if to pat her head, but stops midway, perhaps having some premonition that this isn’t a good idea.

“You know…” Akira replies, taking a couple swaggering steps to the side. “There’s a school of medicinal philosophy which says a disease is its symptoms rather than its cause.”

Misha raises an eyebrow at this rather random comment. “Huh?”

“But on the flipside, that can make treatment rather easy.” She turns and the two share a moment of eye contact. “You seem… ‘unhappy’, Misha.” There’s a small glint in the golden servant’s eyes. “Can you treat that symptom?”

[End meanwhile]

You pull up a seat next to Hisao, trying not to think about the searing waves of hatred being broadcast at you by the deaf one.

Hanako doesn't pull up a seat at all and instead just plops down on your lap and rests against you.

You breathe a contented sigh and focus in on Hisao's breathing.

It's such a calming sound...

You'd like to listen to his chest, but you doubt he'd approve of that...

Shizune remains seated next to Hisao, definitely closer than you’d like, but unfortunately you can’t kill anyone with Hisao in the room.

After a while, you shut out the feeling and sit there, listening to the melodious rhythm…

BANG.

The door is blasted open as if by a battering ram.

The only one who doesn’t lurch forward in surprise is Shizune.

“Hi HICCHAN!” Misha calls in as she enters.

“Wha?” Hisao calls groggily, having fairly obviously been awakened by the Misha-alarm. “Oh!” He takes note of you all. “Sorry, I must have dosed off…”

“All good, Hicchan. You’re supposed to be resting.” She says, placing a stack of something decent-smelling onto the table.

“Oh, welcome back to us, Hisao.” You say, placing your hand on his. “Did you sleep well?”

He yawns loudly, and then chuckles. “I guess so, good morning, all.”

“WAHAHA! Hicchan, it’s dinnertime!” Misha remarks, tossing a takeout box on his lap.

He shrugs. “Food is food.”

Misha passes one box to you also. “Here you two go!”

Together, you all take your meal in a harmonious silence.

After a little, Misha speaks up in an odd soft tone of voice. “Oh, and by the way Hicchan… you won’t have to worry about making up your work, class is canceled.”

“Huh?” He remarks. “Well, that’s good, I guess. Why?”

“Oh… teacher had an accident…”

The room falls back into a state of stillness for a moment, then-

“Mutou? What happened?”

“Some kind of heart trouble.”

“Is he… alright?”

“I’m afraid not, Hicchan.”

Hisao falls still.

You don’t even need eyesight to tell you how hard that hit him.

“Really? What happened, Misha?” You ask, curious.

“Oh, I really don’t know much… Just that he had something happen to him after class today.” Misha replies a bit gloomily.

“Where?” You inquire.

“I think in the wooded part of the school grounds? Wahaha.”

“The woods…” Hisao cuts in before giving a dry, joyless chuckle. “Talk about déjà vu.”

“Hisao…” You say, giving his hand a squeeze.

He doesn’t reply, then suddenly, he gives a confused noise. “Huh?”

You’re curious what it is as well and strain your hearing, but don’t detect anything noteworthy.

After a second, you pick up a series of swishing sounds and deduce what it is. Shizune’s signing something rather quickly to him, hands cutting through the air.

It’s weird that Misha isn’t translating…

“Hisao?” You ask.

“Oh… yeah…” He answers almost automatically, turning his head back to you after signing something back to Shizune.

“Um… sorry, Lilly…” He says in a dazed, but earnest tone of voice.

Having finished his signing, he rests his hand on yours.

“What’s on your mind, Hisao?” You ask, enjoying his grip on your hand, but not letting it show.

“Just… Thinking…” He chuckles. “Mutou always seemed to at least have an idea about what I should do with myself, at least.”

A pause as he thinks, but then after a few slow seconds, he gives your hand a squeeze.

“But, well, he wasn’t anywhere near as good at that as you.”

You flush and your voice catches in your throat. A hint of deaf rage can be felt in the air.

“And you’re still here, so I think I can manage.”

You giggle and place your other hand on his. “That’s the spirit, Hisao.”

The atmosphere livens a bit after that. The subject isn’t approached again by any party.

You and Hanako don’t bother returning to Akira’s room that night, being sure to stay at his side until you’re sure he’s asleep.

Only then, with your hand on your needler in the event on an ambush, do you let yourself drift off.

[Later]

At a pond behind the infirmary, Hisao is standing in his hospital robes, having slipped from his room after awakening in the early morning.

He stares out at the surface of the water with a flat expression.

In this state, a noise behind him catches his attention.

“Hello?” He calls without bothering to turn.

No response, but the noise approaches.

After a moment, he finally turns to find Shizune standing before him.

“Oh.” He exclaims before remembering he needs to sign it. [Couldn’t sleep either?]

[I’m not the one who needs it.] She states with a matter-of-fact expression.

He chuckles. [Oh. I guess I’m not in a sleeping mood.]

[That’s no good.] She signs back. [You’ll never be back on your feet if you stymie your recovery.]

He stares at her for a minute and then looks down with a wry smirk. [You really can just keep moving forward, can’t you?]

She tilts her head and gives a slight smile. [Of course. What other direction is there?]

He laughs at this, then sighs fondly. [I always did like that aspect of you.]

Shizune lifts a hand to her mouth and gives a catlike grin [I know.]

Hisao returns a confused expression, seemingly not knowing how to respond to that, so he just remains still. As does she.

After a moment, Shizune lifts her hand up and grabs Hisao’s collar.

She rises up to her toes to even out the height difference and cranes her chin forward…

# Part 26

Your senses take in the pleasant sensation of a breeze through an open window as you awaken the next morning.

Amongst the other sounds, Misha’s snoring is quite audible.

And Hanako never moved from her position clinging onto you.

So they’re both accounted for.

“Hisao?” You call softly in the chance he’s still sleeping.

No reply.

Hardly unexpected as you confirm it’s still fairly early. You might be sleeping as well normally, but you have a feeling that today might be a busy one.

And more so with the festival tomorrow. You’ll need to prepare for that.

Hanako remains draped over you in slumber, so prying yourself loose takes a moment as you disentangle her arms while being as gentle as possible so you don’t wake her.

Casting about as you rise, you realize you can’t detect Hisao’s breathing rhythm, though it’s possibly masked by Misha’s snoring.

“Hisao?” You repeat as you feel his bed.

It’s unmade, but he himself is absent.

You furrow your brow a bit.

Odd.

You head down the hallway and enter Akira’s chambers.

“Akira?” You call as you enter.

“Heya! Good morning, Lilly.” She replies in a cheerful manner from the direction of the window.

She rises and cross the room to embrace you before placing something in your hand.

“Hm?” It’s an urn of some sort.

“Coffee liqueur. The very best. I figured Hisao might like it since you mentioned he was a coffee drinker.”

You giggle. How oddly thoughtful. Although that reminds you…

“Akira, Hisao wasn’t in his room when I awoke.” You say, trying to keep your tone from sounding unreasonably worried. “Could you help me look for him?”

“Hehe. Of course.” She says merrily.

Your sister stoops to her briefcase and withdraws an object similar in form to your needler, although much longer. A cylindrical weapon… a sword which is not a sword.

“Okie dokie.” She says, slinging it up to her shoulder. “Let’s go.”

You nod with a smile and produce your needler.

Together, the Satou sisters exit into the hallway, ready for battle if there’s one to be had.

Now where to look for Hisao…

There’s the library, of course, but there’s no way he would have done something as stupid as trying to make it all the way there… is there?

On a less worrisome note, he might have just stepped out to get some breakfast. He may have gone for a walk.

Where to look…

“Hehe. So where to first, sis?” Akira asks.

“Hm… Let’s check about the grounds first, he may have just gone for a walk. After all, it’s fairly pretty around here in the mornings.”

“Huh?” Akira asks as she follows you. “And how do you know that, now?”

You sigh. “Back when I was using the Rinsword, I could smell colors and shapes on the breeze.”

It’s a bit mournful that the weapon had to be evil…

Why do possessed swords always work like that?

Akira seemingly picks up on the downer-note and changes the subject. “So, it’s a summer festival tomorrow. You ready?”

Is she talking about your plan to confront Shizune?

“What do you mean?” You ask, taking her free arm.

“Well, do you have a yukata? Are you gonna wear one?”

Oh…

“Oh!” You exclaim at your sister’s question. “I don’t have one actually. Um…”

You lean against her arm. “Could you… please help me get one on short notice?”

You’re certain that Hisao might like to see you in it.

“Hm…” Akira hums as you walk the grounds together. “I might be able to come up with something suitable… Do you mind if I cannibalize that medieval thing of yours?”

“Hm? Oh, no, of course not. Do whatever you need.”

Your sister laughs gaily and quickly winds down to a chuckle before replying. “Ahaha… Aw… a move to impress huh? Okie Dokie. I’ll commandeer your school’s home economics classes today to make the arrangements.”

You beam and cuddles against her. “Thanks, Akira.”

She strokes your hair. “I’m not one for the ‘regal’ thing. That’s all you.”

You smile and turn your thoughts back to Hisao…

What if he’s had another attack?

What is that deaf bitch did something?

What if he’s-

“Oh, hey you two!”

Right in front of you.

Approaching the pond behind the infirmary, you detect Hisao’s voice and breathe a barely audible sigh of relief.

You wish he wouldn’t wander off like that… Once you claim your rightful place as the British monarch, you’ll need to set up another branch of the spy network…

“Huh. You look tired, Hisao.” Akira breaks you from your train of thought as you halt near him.

“Oh… I couldn’t sleep.” He replies.

Oh?” You say in a mildly concerned tone as you let go of your sister’s arm and snuggle against Hisao’s. “Is something the matter? How are you feeling?”

“Oh… I…” He sighs. “Nothing major, my heart’s been fine. I guess it was all the hospital drugs…”

A pause, then he continues. “Also, I kept thinking about Mutou a bit… And Emi, too…” He shakes his head, pondering his fallen friends. “Life… really is fleeting, isn’t it?”

There’s a small period of reflective silence.

Then, without warning, Hisao puts his other arm around you in a light embrace. “You’re staying, right?”

You flush wildly, but thankfully, you don’t think he sees it.

You nuzzle against him slightly and purr. “Of course, I’m staying right here with you.”

Forever and ever and ever…

That thought repeats in your mind as a crazed grin creeps across your face.

He laughs fondly. “Good.”

“So Hisao?” You ask, not letting go of his chest.

You like it there.

“Do you have any plans for the festival tomorrow?”

“Oh…” He replies. “Well, Shizune asked if I’d accompany her…”

Rage unlike anything you thought possible floods your mind.

“But apart from that, no.”

You use all your regal self-control to keep your voice calm and collected. “Ah, well, you can still spend some time with me, right?”

You release him and tilt your head with a smile. “After all, I need to show you my Yukata, don’t I?”

Hisao remains silent for a moment, then replies. “As if I would ‘ever’ miss that.”

The three of you share a laugh as you pray Akira comes up with something good for your wardrobe…

She’s actually the one to speak first after the tense moment ends.

“Oh, by the way Hisao. If you need a pick-me-up, here.”

She passes him the flask of coffee liqueur and he takes a sip before making a surprised exclamatory noise. “Mmm.. Wow…” He takes another sip. “Where’d you get this?”

Your sister gives a nervous giggle. “Ehehe… Don’t ask unnecessary questions.”

In a surprising move, she walks over and takes Hisao’s arm herself.

“I’ll keep an eye on Hisao for today, sis.” She tells you. “Hanako said she had something to discuss with you.”

What? When did they speak?

Well, it’s not as if you can discuss ‘those’ kinds of activities with Hisao present anyways.

She laughs and tugs his ahoge a little. “Don’t worry, I’ll keep him safe.”

It’s true that Akira, above all others, is someone you trust, and if anyone should be able to keep him safe from StuCo, it’d be your sister.

Still, the prospect of handing Hisao over…

It’s no cause for concern, you trust your sister.

After all, you don’t get any sort of malicious vibes from her and after everything she’s done for you, it makes no sense to betray you now.

You smile. “My, my. Be sure to be gentle with him, Akira. He ‘is’ still recovering, after all.”

She laughs. “Roger that!”

Akira take’s Hisao’s arm in hers and the two walk off at a relaxed pace, chatting casually.

“So whatever happened to that porcelain tea set, Hisao?” Akira asks.

“Huh? I thought you took it off me.”

“No. You don’t still have it?”

“No.”

“Huh…” The two of them make a pensive noise together.

You sigh fondly and head back into the infirmary.

Time to recruit your Lord Privy Seal for your preparations today…

[Meanwhile]

Having finally awakened, but not completely, a groggy Misha is shuffling about the festival grounds for tomorrow.

She stops and reviews some instructions from a piece of paper before withdrawing a strange card, seemingly printed on a thin slab of human bone.

She raises an eyebrow looking at the sticky-note her not-girlfriend attached to it.

“’I am da bone of my sword’ Wha?” She crosses her arms and pouts a bit. “Sheesh, shicchan, you know my English isn’t that good…”

It doesn’t matter, for a pre-prepared ritual, the incantation is enough.

She sighs and places the card on the ground next to one of the booths.

Satisfied, she reviews her instructions and shuffles off to the next site, beginning to break into a skip as she awakens more fully.

[End meanwhile]

You head back into the infirmary and head to Hisao’s room before-

“Lilly…” That familiar cooing sound as Hanako drops out of stealth and embraces you.

Accepting of this arrangement by now, you sigh affectionately and lightly hug her back. “My, my. Good morning, Hanako.”

She snuggles her face into your chest. “G’mornin Lillyyy…” She yawns, not letting go and seemingly treating you as a pillow.

“So, What was it you wanted to speak to me about?” You ask, stroking her hair.

“Hm?”

“Akira said you needed to speak to me.”

“Oh… that…” She says, tearing herself off of you with an obvious reluctance. “Just a thought I had…” She says as you both enter Akira’s vacant room.

“I’m quite open to your opinions.” You tell her with a smile, ruffling her hair a bit as you sit down on the bed.

“Well… Shizune might try to rig the festival grounds tomorrow…” Hanako says. “After all, she knows we’re going to be there…”

“So you think we should head there and sniff out traps?” You ask.

“Or have your class do it.” Hanako affirms. “That could free us for some other stuff.”

You smile as you mull this over.

It’s true that you could probably inspire your mongrel subjects to comb the grounds until they pass out if you desired.

You could also do this yourself, but that would be sure to eat up your day.

Another thought enters your mind which makes you giggle, it would be a perfect slap to Shizune to show how you can wield the influence she only ever dreamed of.

How to handle this...

The aspect of humiliating Shizune being too tempting to resist, you decide on that course of action. “Let’s go address my subjects…” You tell Hanako with a smile.

“Ok…” She says before giggling.

She takes your arm and together the two of you head to the school’s main office.

Upon arriving, one of the secretaries greets you. “Hello, may I help you?”

Hanako releases your arm and steps forward, withdrawing an engraved flintlock pistol.

Giggling, she then blows the mongrel’s brain out.

“My, my, Hanako.” You say observing this. “Whatever might that be?”

“Oh, this…” She hums, playfully spinning the previously unknown weapon about her finger. “It was in this weird hollowed-out book I had Yuuko import about the European witchhunts…”

She places your hand on it and lets you feel the engravings.

You wish you could perceive more, but you’ve walled off Rin’s malevolent powers…

Unfortunate.

“Isn’t it pretty?” She asks. “I’ve never had to reload it either.”

To demonstrate, she fires three times into a wall.

You hear a body strike the floor on the opposite side.

“See?” She emotes, giggling impishly. “I told you…” She snuggles against your arm once again. “I told you I’d protect you, Lilly…”

You return a confused smile and file this away for later debate.

Now is not the time for such things.

You stride over to the PA system and press the call button.

“Attention, please. Would all students kindly gather in the auditorium for a special announcement? Thank you.”

[Meanwhile]

Shizune slips through the trees in the forest just beyond the festival grounds, surveying the surroundings with an analytical gaze.

Misha’s handling the preparations for the festival grounds themselves, but here is where she needs to lay her counter-strategy.

She comes to a halt before a large tree and flips out a small, aged booklet, bound in human skin and hair.

Scream begin to emanate through the air as she opens the evil text. Screams of agony, of torment, and pleas to be released.

Pleas in Latin… betraying the identity of this malevolent tome.

Canidia’s Spellbook.

An evil arcane tome gradually written and perfected from a line of Roman witches.

One of the Roman Republic’s most distinguished branch families, said to have turned to witchcraft when their family fortunes began to run dry.

Over generations, they imported black arts from all across the known world, eventually masterminding their own blend of dark arts based on a hybrid of Celtic and Greco witchcraft.

Their fortunes rose higher and higher until, in a Machiavellian stratagem, they were betrayed and executed by their ally Augustus Caesar.

‘But…’ Shizune muses to herself with a smile. ‘They left a record for the ages.’

It’s her secret to countering the power Lilly will undoubtedly bring to bear on her… and also how her family never lost its standing in spite of her father’s idiotic financial sense.

“…!”

The silent girl makes a strange flicking motion with her fingers. The pages on the tome flip about as if propelled by some unseen force, and a blood-red arcane circle appears on the tree trunk.

Satisfied, she closes the small booklet and walks on.

There will be many more areas to cover… Lilly’s charisma is formidable.

The deaf girl bites her thumb as she steps through the brush, mentally analyzing her game pieces…

She has to keep the thirteenth legion in reserve in the event she has to fight Lilly, but a lesser summoning should suffice against her minions.

‘Not that it matters so much…’ She thinks with a smile.

As long as the Knight of Drills stands at her side, defeat is impossible…

A catlike smile creeps across her face.

[End meanwhile]

You and Hanako make your way to the auditorium at a leisurely pace and arrive well after the majority of the students have filed in.

Upon entering, you walk through a parting gap in your mongrel subjects as Hanako leads you by the arm, giggling to herself.

Judging by the level of noise, you’d say that about two-thirds of the school survived your massacre the other day.

A bit lower than what you’d hoped for, but sufficient.

You let Hanako lead you up to the center stage.

As if basking in the radiance of their sovereign, the chamber grows quiet.

Now what to say…

“My beloved subjects…” You begin, showing a smile. “The time for justice is at hand…”

You pause, letting the silence break slowly before continuing.

“We have all suffered at the malevolent policies of the Student Council for eons… Their oppression, their despotism!”

You raise your free arm as Hanako snuggles against your other one.

“But such need not be the case!”

A cheer goes out amongst your mongrel audience. You open your hand as a call for silence.

“You need not submit yourself to their tyranny! You need only submit yourself to mine instead!”

Your charisma flows into your onlookers with your words, energizing and invigorating them.

The crowd roars in approval, replete with the battering of weaponry and cries of affection.

What next…

[Meanwhile]

A couple classrooms over, Akira is slouched into a plush chair in the home economics room as a battalion of drunken students toil over your yukata.

“Be sure to use the viridian thread for embroidering the lilies.” She says, swilling an urn.

She turns to Hisao, who’s slouched up against her a bit buzzed, but definitely not incoherent.

He’s actually rather good at moderating himself.

The King of Spirits smiles. “You said green was your favorite color, right?”

He nods, glancing about questioningly. “Um…”

A battle-cry resonates throughout the school from the direction of the assembly room.

“Um… did you just hear Lilly’s voice talking about tyranny?” He asks, cocking an eyebrow.

“Of course not, you’re imagining things.”

He shrugs acceptingly.

After all, one of the side-effects of his many medications is “Hallucinations”.

Just the other day, he could have sworn he saw two nurses playing street hockey with a severed head.

He sighs and leans back into his chair.

“You know, Akira. I sometimes think I may be going crazy.”

She passes him the bottle making an unconcerned whistling expression. “We all wind up there eventually.”

[End meanwhile]

You place your hand upon your face and give a small laugh before continuing.

“The Student Council has attempted to quash our sense of adventure! To control our passions!”

You gently extend an open palm towards your audience.

“I say ‘no more’.”

A massive cheer goes up amongst the student body.

They clash their swords and chainsaws together, they beat their chests in approval, and several cry out that they love you.

You smile and utter your forbidden incantation of control.

“My, my…”

The audience falls deathly still, hanging on your words.

“So at the festival tomorrow, I say to be yourselves… To unleash your passions and desires…”

You smile.

“Prepare yourselves!” You cry, channeling the holy powers of the British monarch.

“I command thee to be free as your true and rightful sovereign!”

The auditorium booms with approval and cheers as your message resonates within the mongrel listeners.

Satisfied, you allow them to celebrate and quietly saunter backstage with Hanako on your arm.

“Well, I think they got the message.” Hanako says in approval. “Now a bunch of them are sure to go down to the festival ground to scope out good spots and trip some traps prematurely.”

You smile and nod, pleased at having set your subjects to purpose.

Now what to do…

“Let’s go find Misha.” You tell Hanako.

She giggles and nuzzles into you. “Okie Dokie…”

You make your way offstage and stride towards the exit as your subjects part ways and fall to their knees to worship you.

As you exit, one student asks. “Um… isn’t it a little late to fight for freedom? We have, like, a week of school left.”

Hanako shoots him in the head.

Together, you exit as she snuggles up against you.

You’re a bit remorseful that unlike yours, her corruption has endured, since she accepted it of her own will in order to protect you…

Well…

You smile and stroke her hair.

All’s fair in love and war, right?

Heading outside as the rest of the student body ditches class to go prepare for the festival tomorrow, you cast your hearing about, searching for the sign of ‘WAHAHAs’

After a moment, you locate Misha’s voice coming from above you and make your way to the roof.

Reaching the final stairwell before the rooftop door, you pause.

Should you take Hanako with you?

Or should this be a one-on-one interaction?

“Hanako, dear.” You say sweetly. “Would you mind giving Misha and I some privacy for this?”

“Hm?” She emotes. After a pause, she nods. “Okay…”

And with that, she releases your arm and you ascend the stairwell alone.

“Misha?” You call, detecting the scent of hair gel on the breeze.

“Hm?” She replies. “Oh. Wahaha. Hey, Lilly.”

The Drill Knight stands at the edge of the roof.

You return a warm-hearted smile and approach her.

How to begin this…

“So Misha.” You begin. “The big festival is tomorrow.”

“Wahaha. Yeah. I’ve never really liked festivals, though.” She replies.

“Well, maybe you’ll come to like them in the future?” You say as you take a position right next to her. “Have you given any thought to what you’ll be doing later?”

She sighs. “Too much.”

“My, my. Whatever do you mean?” You say, dropping your smile.

You get the feeling you should avoid seeming smug here.

She seems unstable.

Misha slinks down and sits against the ledge, humming as she thinks.

“I came to this school to become an interpreter… But that idea’s lost its appeal…”

A pause as the breeze blows over both of you and she breathes a mournful exhale.

“Have you ever felt like that, Lilly? That an idea that used to seem beautiful just totally lost its appeal?”

You get the feeling she might be scrutinizing for honesty here…

“Yes, I have.” You tell her, taking a seat next to her. “After all, I did used to be a class representative who honestly and truly tried to improve life for everyone I met.”

Misha doesn’t move. “You don’t feel that way anymore?”

You answer honestly. “No.”

The philanthropist within you died when you decided to pursue Hisao.

After that, everyone else was just a tool to accomplish that purpose.

You smile slightly to yourself, thinking about Misha’s question in your own context.

That’s another reason you love him: he helped you see what a hideous waste that was.

“Looking back on it, I’m amazed I stayed with it as long as I did.” You continue. “I used to try and give so much of myself to others. I thought I could save everyone.”

Misha looks up at you. “Wahaha… I… used to feel the same way about my council work.”

She sighs and snuggles up against you.

It’s an odd feeling to have someone besides Hanako doing that, but you don’t really mind.

“I didn’t mind when I stopped thinking that because I found something even better…” She trails off for a moment. “But that idea’s coming to a dead end, too.”

“I think that happens to us all, changing our motivations.” You philosophize. “You may just need to find a new wish.”

“Wahaha…haha… ha…” She sniffles a bit. “But that’s just it, Lilly… I can’t think of any new wish.”

She shivers. “Nothing appeals to me… At all…”

“Well…” You say, grinning. “Then why not wish for joy?”

“Huh?” She asks, possibly not understanding what you’re getting at. “Joy?”

You nod. “It seems a simple concept, Misha, but so few people in this world actually follow it. Everyone chases ‘greatness’ or ‘power’ or some kind of dream.”

Misha says nothing. You let your words sink in and continue.

“Really, so few people actually do what they ‘want’. They do what’s ‘proper’ or what they ‘have’ to do.”

You think of Hisao and smile.

“Freedom is simply the ability to do what you ‘want’ without worrying about context or obstacles.”

You stand up and speak softly to Misha.

“Just recognize what you ‘want’ or ‘don’t want’ and then pursue it.” You conclude. “That’s what ‘joy’ is.”

Feeling that you’ve made a point, you head off and leave Misha to ponder your words.

She doesn’t move as you make your way back to the stairwell, sitting motionless beneath the open sky as she ponders your speech.

You’ve definitely made an impact in the Drill Knight this day. You don’t know if it was the right one, but you affected some aspect of her heart.

The rest is up to her now.

You link up with Hanako after descending the stairwell and head back to regroup with Akira and Hisao in a pleasant mood.

Between the commissioning of your regal yukata, the summoning of your cripple-army and your discourse with Misha, you feel that today was quite a productive one.

You’ve done all you can today.

Tomorrow is when everything will be decided.

# Part 27 Finale

You awaken in Akira’s room the next morning in a pleasant mood.

Heaving a contented sigh as you listen to the breathing of a lightly-sleeping Hanako, you quickly feel the excitement of the day coming on.

Today’s the day… The day of the festival… The day you make Hisao yours… or die in the attempt.

Your yukata’s been made – a lovely outfit. From what you’ve been told it’s a white one embroidered with green lilies.

A union of yours and Hisao’s favorite colors…

Such a lovely concept.

You flush a bit as you hope he likes it.

Akira headed off late last night, saying that she was gonna be picking up some supplies for the obligatory post-battle celebration, but said that she’d make it back in time for the festival itself.

You rise and stretch out, check your weapons, and spend some time meticulously priming yourself in the bathroom.

Once that’s done, you open Akira’s door and a folded piece of paper, wedged into the doorway, flutters to the ground.

“My, my…” You mutter softly. “How odd.”

Deciding that whatever this is shouldn’t be ignored, you walk over to Hanako and touch her shoulder lightly.

“Hanako?”

“Mmm?” She emotes as she stirs. “Oh… good morning Lilly…”

You smile down at her. “Good morning, Hanako.”

You pause a moment as her consciousness returns, then you extend the letter.

“This was wedged into the door. Would you mind reading it for me… please?” You ask.

“Oh… yeah… No problem, Lilly.” She replies in a perky tone, seemingly happy to be of service.

The slight sound of rumpling paper, then silence as she reads it.

“Oh, it’s from Hisao. ‘Decided to get an early morning start. I’ll link up with you at the festival later.’”

You furrow your brow slightly. “You’re sure that’s his writing?”

“Hm… Pretty sure… I’ve worked with him a few times in class and it looks like his. It’s definitely not Shizune or Misha’s.” Your lord privy seal replies.

Hm…

You trust Hanako’s judgment. But this still is a little bit disheartening…

Breathing a fond sigh, you assess the situation. “My, my. He truly can be difficult to manage…”

You giggle to yourself.

“Well, Hanako, let’s let him have his space, shall we? We have some preparations of our own to attend to.”

“Ok!” She says, rising to her feet.

Together, you both take some time and change into your festival yukatas.

Feeling a bit insecure, you must have had Hanako reassure you it looks nice at least half a dozen times before you accept it.

“Lilly… you’re beautiful.” Hanako tells you, taking your hand. “Don’t worry about it at all.”

Finally, you return a relieved smile to her. “Thank you.”

It’s comfortable if nothing else, you’re thankful to your sister for considering that aspect.

Having groomed yourselves to a satisfactory degree, you ponder your next course of action.

Hanako’s not going to be leaving your side on such an important day, so you can make full use of someone’s eyesight for now…

But what to do?

“Well, let’s head to the Library, shall we, Hanako?” You suggest.

“Ok…” She purrs, taking her assigned position latched onto your arm. “I still need to thank Yuuko for importing that book for me…”

"Now seems a proper time." You agree.

She snuggles against you and then makes a surprised noise. “Ooooh… Your yukata’s soft…”

You share a small laugh together and head out of the infirmary, heading towards the main building.

If nothing else, your loyal servant Yuuko will be spared this day

[Meanwhile]

At the Athletic track, Hisao is jogging around the field, breathing heavily, but actually feeling rather decent.

After a bit, he winds down and begins his cool-down walk.

It does him some good to see that he seems to have recovered.

But…

It’s not enough…

He heaves a sigh as he walks through the midsummer rays.

He was out here trying to clear his head, but his mind is still racing just as it was before.

“What to do…” He mutters to himself, looking at the festival crucifix decorations. “What to do…”

Feeling torn, he halts and shakes his head, feeling the light morning breeze on his skin.

“Shizune…”

“Lilly…”

His expression is one of complete and earnest confusion.

[End meanwhile]

With Hanako clinging gently to your arm, the two of you stroll over to the main school building, with Hanako pointing out visual fixtures for you.

It's mostly minor things, but they add a pleasant layer of detail to your world.

The cafeteria, having been destroyed twice over, is a completely abandoned wreck, covered in blast-craters and smelling of rotting flesh.

Or maybe it always smelled like that.

Mutou’s now-obsolete office still has its severed-head ornaments mounted to it.

In the gymnasium, Miki and the survivors of the athletic team are sharpening knives and scimitars as they mark their faces with war paint.

You smile, taking in such pleasant memories of your quest for Hisao…

Eventually you reach the library.

“Yuuko?” You ask as you enter.

BANG.

But of course, some things never change.

“O-oh… Hi Hanako… A-a-and L-lilly… Hi. How are you?” Yuuko asks as she fidgets.

“Rather well.” You reply. “And yourself, Yuuko? How are you?”

“M-me?” She says, seemingly taken aback by the question. “Um… I-I don’t think anyone’s ever asked me that, before… Um… I’m ok, I guess?”

Her manner is somewhat less than convincing.

“Really, Yuuko?” You say, smiling benevolently as you approach her. “You seem uneasy.”

She sighs. “Oh… well… I-I just… Well… it’s like this most days…”

“Really?” You say it a motherly tone. “The job is that strenuous for you?”

“Well… someone has to do it…”

Hanako releases your arm and takes Yuuko’s hand.

“Yuuko… You really deserve some tranquility…” She purrs.

You’re beginning to see why they always got along so well.

The librarian’s tone drops a bit, as if she were worried about eavesdroppers. “That… would be nice, yes… But… it can be so demanding here…”

“Well then…” You chime in. “How about you take a vacation?”

“Huh?” She emotes.

Hanako giggles. “Yeah! You should really do that, Yuuko…” She takes her hands. “You’ve earned a respite.”

“Um… you… t-think so?” Yuuko asks.

“But of course.” You say. “I think you should take that trip to Athens you were talking about.”

“Hm…” She chuckles a little bit. “Ok… yeah… that does sound nice…”

Evoking your golden rule skill, you slip a wad of yen notes into her bag as you place your hand on her shoulder.

“So then? What are you waiting for? Go head out now.”

You can sense her feelings and shape your speech to match them.

It’s not in her nature to make snap decisions like this… Which is precisely why is sounds appealing to her as a vacation.

She laughs as your regal charisma settles her nerves. “A-alright… Yeah!”

She gathers herself and begins to head for the door.

“Um… I will… see you both again… r-right?”

“Of course!” You and Hanako say together.

“Good…” She says softly. “I don’t want to lose anyone else…”

She heads out. “Bye you two! See you later!”

You both wave.

And with that, Yuuko departs the school.

It’s a satisfying feeling...

But one to be savored at a later date… What to do now while you wait for the afternoon to roll about?

“So Hanako?” You ask, smiling. “What would you say to the prospect of another tea party?”

She remains silent, as if this was unexpected, she then breaks out into a fit of giggles and snuggles up against you.

“Y-Yeah!” She replies elatedly. “I’d really like that, Lilly…”

“Well, let’s be off then.”

She practically drags you along the familiar path to your tea room and together you arrive in no time.

Once there, you go about your timeless routine of preparing your signature tea blend.

The environment is pleasant, with you and Hanako simply talking about rather meaningless things, just having a rather relaxing time together.

After a little… Hanako breaks a silence in a rather stilted manner.

“Um… L-Lilly?”

“Hm?”

Silence, then. “Never mind.”

She puts her hand on yours.

It’s the only even mildly awkward moment between you. The rest of the day begins to pass in a blur.

It’s a nice feeling, sharing an enjoyable time with your best friend like this…

The calm before the storm.

[Meanwhile]

Having cleaned himself up and changed into his +2 Sweater Vest of Oblivion, Hisao wanders about the festival in the mid-afternoon warmth.

Due to the student council ceasing their activities halfway through, the ‘festival’ aspect is somewhat lackluster, but it’s no less pleasant.

There are only a few booths set up and for the most part, the grounds are a simple large field next to the woods.

It resembles a community picnic if anything.

Every so often, he passes an out-of-place pile of ashes or a sculpture of a student who was turned to stone, their face a very believable expression of agony.

Rin herself probably couldn’t have drawn it better…

‘Rin…’

He sighs and moves on.

He hasn’t seen either Lilly or Shizune yet, but the day is still young, and from what he’s heard, this is predominantly a nighttime event anyways.

Reflecting on his time in Yamaku… He feels a sense of wonder..

He more or less came he expecting to die… But what he found… was something beyond beauty…

Suddenly, his vision darkens.

“Guess who?!”

He sighs, this being routine.

So routine, that he doesn’t notice Shizune's approaching footsteps.

She saunters past Misha, withdrawing her insidious spellbook…

[End meanwhile]

Time flew in the tea room together with Hanako, and before you know it it’s time for the festival.

Hanako takes your arm and snuggles against it as together, you head to the grounds.

As you approach, you detect nothing out of the ordinary, Hanako points out a few mongrels who were kind enough to trip some of Shizune’s traps for you, but other than that, the atmosphere seems fairly relaxed.

A nice midsummer festival…

You smile as you turn your thoughts towards Hisao.

Now where is he…

[Meanwhile]

At a secluded grove in the forest, Shizune is sitting Japanese-style on a picnic blanket, cradling Hisao’s head on her lap.

His expression is quite peaceful. She took the utmost care to put him to sleep with the bare-minimum amount of force.

She smiles happily as she plays with his ahoge.

He’ll awaken as if from a simple slumber…

She blushes a bit as she thinks back on her time together with him.

He’ll awaken to a truly beautiful dream…

She exhales sharply and stares at him with a hollow tone to her eyes…

She’ll never have to be alone again. This is something she’s longed for her whole life…

A world for just the two of them…

Suddenly, she feels a pang.

Lilly and her minion have arrived.

Her expression turns deadly serious and she lifts up her heretical booklet.

It’s now time for her to fight… To make that dream a reality.

[End meanwhile]

The woodlands about the festival grounds explode in a torrent of hellish energy.

Dozens, no, hundreds of rifts are torn in the fabric of reality and all manner of unholy demons and beasts break out from them.

They cry in agony as the world of the corporeal assaults them, feeling their hunger grow exponentially.

Sensing flesh, they begin a shambling march towards the festival grounds.

You sense the dark energy right away and grip your needler with one hand, steadying Hanako’s arm with the other.

An energy coming from the forest.

That must be where Shizune is.

And if Misha still choses to fight with her… you don’t know what you’ll do.

It isn’t safe for Hanako by your side, but it isn’t here, either… And you may need her help.

“Lilly?” Hanako asks, sensing the approaching dark presence as well.

You release Hanako’s arm and unsheathe your scimitar, brandishing the blade, your trophy of battle.

“Hanako! Rally to me!” You say, accepting her as your truly comrade in arms.

She draws her weapon. “Always, Lilly.”

Together, you face the demonic horde.

Together, you prepare for battle at the end of all things.

“For queen and country! For Scotland! For love!” You cry, twirling your twin weapons about you.

And with that, the two of you charge off into the forest, invigorated and charged with the holy powers of the monarch.

Hanako begins shooting before you’ve even registered the enemy, but from the bestial pained cries, all of her shots are lethally accurate.

You break into the initial wave and begin cleaving a path, whirling your sword about you in a dance of death as you blast further into their loose ranks with your needler.

Hanako follows suit, blowing holes in attacking beast and tearing out chunks of flesh with a clawed gauntlet as they draw closer.

You surge through in your pre-emptive strike.

These monsters are fierce, but not strong, not compared to a holy warrior of the Britons.

No, this is but Shizune’s strategy to counter your followers.

In chess, the pawns go first.

You and Hanako carve deeper into the forest as the bulk of the demonic forces mass at the edge of the festival ground.

[Meanwhile]

The unholy minions of the student council shamble into the light of the dying day, which glistens off their scaly hides.

All across the festival, a cry goes up as the massive force enters the grounds.

The horde amasses as the regal cripple-army begins to form ranks.

Miki surges to the head of the Yamaku ranks, tearing off the bind on her cursed arm of Shaytan and brandishing a katana in the other.

“Forth, and fear no darkness!” She cries. “Arise! Arise, Riders of Yamaku! Spears shall be shaken, shields shall be splintered! A sword day... a red day... ere the sun rises!”

A hellish gleam enters her eyes. “DEEEEEAAAAATTTHHHH!!!”

The student body at her back erupts, crying out alongside her. “DEEEEAATH!”

A surge goes out as the Yamaku student body pledges themselves to battle in the name of the sovereign.

Following your charisma, they unleash their inner darkness.

Facing the demonic onslaught, the student of Yamaku are producing swords, shotguns, flails, spears, bows, katars, axes, bazookas, flamethrowers, and other types of weaponry.

Sensing their prey, the army of monster begins to emit a series of shrill, piercing cries as they break into a sprint, barreling at the student body.

Rallying to Miki’s standard, they unite their warped minds, crying “DEATH” as one.

With that, she begins running and the rest of the crowd follows her, the sunset rays glistening off of the vast array of weaponry.

The two sides charge at each other, both radiating an unrestrained bloodlust.

[End meanwhile]

In the forest, you carve apart a horror and bludgeon the corpse with its own arm before blasting apart another abomination with your needler.

Most people would be at a loss fighting a demon for not knowing what spots to aim at, but your finely-tuned hearing picks up their heartbearts as easily as anything.

You slice a swathe through you enemies and charge through the spray of blood, a crazed grin creeping across your face as you do battle in the name of love.

Hanako digs her claws gauntlet into a monster’s throat, jams her pistol directly into its eye, and blasts its brains out at point-blank range, giggling psychotically all the while.

She pops in an out of presence concealment, raining lethally accurate holy bullets upon her assailants as she slips into your wake to regroup.

You cleave off a fiend’s front legs and your partner shoots in in the head.

You giggle to yourself as you slice apart something serpent-like.

Even without the unholy powers of Rin, the scimitar is still a lethally sharp unbreakable blade.

All your battles since meeting Hisao have led to this.

You spear a demon through the face and blast another’s chest open with a hail of needles.

Hanako jumps over you and begins ferally tearing out chunks of an unholy beast with her gauntlet.

A monarch and her faithful knight, carving through a sea of battle as if one.

Together, you press forward, charging through a mist of unholy blood.

Finally, drenched in blood and entrails, you break into an eerily silent clearing.

[Meanwhile]

The festival grounds have devolved into as absolute slaughter as the Regal Army of Lilly Satou engages in savage battle with the Demonic Horde of the Student Council.

Several students with wheelchairs have coated their carriers in broken glass and attached motorcycle engines and are swooping in an out, charging over the Lovecraftian horrors.

A packs of monsters akin to wolves falls upon Taro and devours him without mercy in a spray of blood.

Natsume delves into the unholy power of her cursed eyes and blasts through her assailants in waves of black fire as she battles back-to-back with Naomi.

Saki fights alongside Miki at the front of the charge, brandishing a cane covering in obsidian razor blades.

A tentacle snakes past her defenses and seizes her leg, dragging her off.

Her eyes widen, as death comes to embrace her.

Suddenly, Miki hurls out of the fray, covered in blood, and slices off the beast’s member.

Deciding that this is no time to be subtle, Suzu downs her entire bottle of amphetamines in one gulp.

She begins twitching psychotically as she draws a shotgun and enters a warp-spasm.

Across the battlefield, Miki grits her teeth as she ducks a hurdled set of spines.

The numbers of their horrid foes seem endless…

Cradling Hisao’s head absentmindedly, Shizune calmly analyzes the battle with her tactical mind.

The royal army is holding the line… Barely, and they’re taking losses too.

They won’t be able to keep it up too much longer…

Lilly and Hanako have broken through the initial wave, but this too is according to plan.

Cutting a general off from their support is a fundamental rule of battle.

She gives a weak grin.

Now it’s time to test their mettle.

A trickle of blood issues from her mouth as she channels the full unholy power of her evil tome, calling out her sorcerous trump card.

[End meanwhile]

As you and Hanako stride into the clearing, wiping the carnage off your faces, suddenly, at Shizune’s bidding, the field around you explodes with malevolent energy.

Hundreds, no, thousands, of sinewy corpses rise up from the earth, each bristling with weapons, clad in banded armor and wearing cloaks.

Dammed Legionnaires, drudged from the depths of hell to serve their new insidious master.

A wall of armor and blades flies up before you, reborn through this blasphemous ritual.

In a cacophony of groans, shrieking, and the grinding of steel, the Legion of the dammed quickly responds to their unheard tactical commands and shuffles into a Roman Manipular Formation, barring your path to their mistress.

Hanako takes position at your side.

“All for you… Lilly…” She purrs, not at all concerned for her own life so long as she remains by her liege.

You smile and stroke her bloody hair.

“My, my…” You sing to her with a soft smile.

Together, you ready your weapons and charge the monstrous army.

Surging forward behind a hail of armored needles and holy gunfire, you and Hanako smash into the Legion's front and begin cleaving forward.

The formation buckles, but doesn’t break.

A counterattack surges forward as a storm of blades flies out at you both.

You fall back, parrying with several rapid strokes of your scimitar.

Hanako lunges back and looks up to find a hail of razor-bladed javelins flying down on her.

With her catlike agility, she snakes through the rain and resumes blasting holes in your assailants as you also fall back.

The ancient warriors, powerful in their own right, are made stronger still by the dark energy of Shizune’s evil magic.

There weapons are sharpened past what even modern power-sanders could accomplish. Their armor regenerates itself after breaking – as do the legionnaires themselves.

You charge forward again and blast holes into the formation with your needler, but the gaps are quickly reinforced from behind by reserves.

Your momentum is halted and you engage in a short, but savage swordfight at nearly point-blank range.

Just as it seems you might be making some progress, in response to a hail of hurled javelins, you’re forced to retreat.

Shizune’s grasp of tactics is flawless.

Striking forth again with Hanako, you grit your teeth and savagely attack their formation.

You carve a series of opponents apart, shields and all, while Hanako rips one’s head off before shooting the flanking forces.

But it doesn’t make enough of a dent.

“Well, your toys are strong.” You say as if to issue a battle-taunt to Shizune, even though you know she’d never hear it.

In a flash, you whip your scimitar about your body and carve a swathe around you. “But not even a tenth as strong as me.”

Still, that’s less of a boast than it sounds. You’re not fighting ten. Or even a hundred, but thousands.

Even with the racial buff Scots get when fighting Romans, it isn’t enough…

Suddenly, a Lancer Evo hurdles out of the bushes and smashes headlong into the attacking zombie legionnaires.

That’s a new one.

Akira sets out of the driver’s seat. “Hey y’all!” She calls merrily before killing a bottle. “How’s that for an entrance?”

“Hey Hideaki.” She calls back into the car. “Go find a place to park.”

“If you say so.” Comes the flat reply as he shuffles into the driver’s seat.

The car crazily speeds off towards the festival.

Satisfied, the Golden King turns an apathetic glance to the demonic legion.

“Mongrels.”

She raises her scepter, the sword which is not a sword.

The segments begin to gyrate at an insane speed and she fluidly swings it down.

Emanating outward from her stroke, a massive wave of superheated plasma flows outwards and blasts through the formation.

Heat radiates outwards in all directions and the air itself explodes as the energy wave surges through it.

Everyone is awestruck by the power washing away matter as a flood would destroy a card-castle.

This is Akira’s noble phantasm, the Sword of Rupture…

There is no defense or recovery against this attack. The unfortunately targets simply vaporize.

A massive gap is blown before you, a wide road paved with glass made from fused earth.

“You two go play.” Your sister tells you. “I can party with these guys for at least a couple minutes.”

“Thanks, sis.” You say, shooting a heart-warming smile her way as you hurdle past her.

Another stroke sends another superheated wave through the clearing as you and Hanako head towards Shizune’s grove.

Elsewhere, Hideaki parks the Lancer in the forest and one of Akira’s wine bottle rolls over to his feet.

He looks down at it. Then looks up. Then looks both ways to make sure no one is watching…

[Meanwhile]

Miki and the others have fallen back and are battle desperately on all sides.

Twitching insanely, Suzu fires her shotgun as if an automatic and then begins beating a monster to death with the grip as she runs out of ammo.

Ignoring several wounds, Miki hurls out her cursed arm.

It gleams with crimson energy as it rips through he unholy assailants.

She grits her teeth as even more beasts clamour over the bodies of the ones they’ve just finished killing.

Suddenly, a massive crash emanated from behind the demonic ranks.

A Lancer Evo hurls out of the forest at an insane speed, mowing down demons as is careens wildly.

A geyser of blood and body parts fly through the air.

Akira’s car has been reinforced with alien composite alloys and has seen them both shrug off countless DUI-crashes.

The nitro-burners, there for outrunning the police, flare up, blasting the vehicle to insane speeds.

In a cacophony of hellish screams, it breaks through the demonic ranks and begins mowing down the Yamaku students as well before making a random U-turn and plowing back into the demons.

A random arcing motion sends the evil vehicle plowing over Molly before it slams back into the monsters she was facing.

Whether Hideaki is battling for his sociopathic sister or his incestuous crush is something which shall be forever lost to history.

It matters little, anyways.

Lacking Akira’s divine tolerance, he’s fucked up enough that to him everything looks like jigglypuff wearing an S.S. uniform.

The already chaotic warzone descends into absolute pandemonium as now both sides have to contend with an underage autist crazily drunk-driving a tank around the battlefield.

[End meanwhile]

Finally, after immeasurable bloodshed, you and Hanako break through the brush into the forest grove.

“Shizune…” Hanako elaborates for you.

There, right before you, your deaf nemesis is kneeling upon a blanket, cradling the head of an unconscious Hisao.

Misha, the Drill Knight, stands at her side.

The deaf witch is wearing a weak, catlike grin.

This, too, was according to Shizune’s plan.

Even if you two had somehow managed to break through the Thirteenth Legion, you still had Misha to contend with.

With a sigh, she rises and faces you.

“Wahaha. Hey, you two.” Misha translate, lacking her typical enthusiasm. “Glad you could make it.”

She gives a wistful sigh as she walks past Shizune and bars your path.

You make a motion to Hanako to back down and walk towards Misha, sheathing your sword.

“Huh?” Everyone but you seems astonished by this action.

“Misha…” You breathe her name softly. “Do you recall what we’ve spoken of? What we’ve shared?”

“… I do.” She says in a voice so quiet it’s almost inaudible.

“Then… Listen… Not to me… Listen to yourself…”

You smile softly at the beleaguered knight.

“You seem so weary… Misha… please…” You speak honestly and truly. “Follow your own heart.”

Stillness permeates the clearing.

Then, suddenly, a wave of dark power unlike anything you’ve ever felt begins to emanate from Misha.

“Wahaha.” She breathes as her Gae Drills form lances around her clenched fists.

“Wahaha.”

The ground beneath her explodes as she kicks off it with her inhumanly powerful legs.

SPLAT.

A wave of blood flies through the air.

But not yours.

Misha’s lance impales Shizune directly through the heart.

It’s over.

It doesn’t matter what kind of unholy protection Shizune had. Nothing can survive a hit from those malevolent drills.

The Drill Knight stands deathly still, holding the corpse of someone she once cherished.

Tears stream down Misha’s otherwise strangely blank face.

Shizune’s expression remains fixed in her catlike smile.

She died instantly, never having even seen the threat.

She died. Sure that she had won.

The grove remains deathly still as the Yamaku grounds also fall silent, the unholy horde having dissipated as soon as its summoner was killed.

Stillness covers the grove like a fog.

None of you move.

Or speak.

Finally, Misha breaks the silence, tugging her drill-lance out of Shizune’s body and letting it fall to the earth.

“Wahaha.” She speaks in an emotionless tone.

You’re at a loss for word as she quietly turns and leaves Hisao lying there.

“Hisao…”

Your heart skips a beat as concern for your love floods into your mind.

Misha walks past you without any acknowledgement, completely uninterested in this affair now. “Wahaha.”

You take a step towards Hisao’s still form…

The heart in your own chest feels like it might shatter.

You have no idea whether or not he’s injured…

“Misha…” You say, turning to her.

She stops.

Um… You didn’t have anything planned after that…

You sigh and speak from your heart. “Misha… it took courage to rid yourself of her… You…”

A pause as you search for the right words to say.

Finally, “Thank you.” You decide on. “And thank yourself too. You’ve closed the chapter on this part of your life. Your life is now your own. “

She doesn’t reply for a moment.

Then, finally, she responds in a hushed, pensive tone of voice. “The chapter… is closed… huh?”

You nod. “Consider this moment to be an awakening from a nightmare. That’s all this whole thing has been.”

“Wahaha…” Misha replies in a voice containing a hint of… some emotion.

Even you can’t tell what.

"Just... a nightmare..."

She breathes a shaky sigh as inwardly, she lets go of the hell Yamaku had been for her.

“Thanks, Lilly.” She tells you simply.

And with that, she departs.

After Misha leaves, you and Hanako rush over to Hisao.

His pulse is steady, as is his breathing… And he doesn’t seem to be injured anywhere…

Satisfied that your love is in no immediate danger, you two clean the carnage off yourselves, not wanting to startle him when he awakens.

You rest his head on your lap as your wait for him to awaken, stroking his face pensively.

Just as you did on the day you met…

As you smile in remembrance, Hisao begins to stir.

“Ugh… Lilly?” He asks as he comes around, taking in his surroundings.

“Hisao…” You say softly, doing all you can to prevent your voice from breaking.

You honestly feared you’d lost him when the battle began.

It was such a horrible sensation that words can't give it form.

Now… having him back…

The feeling is overwhelming.

“Did I… have another attack?”

Neither you or Hanako answer. It’s probably better if he doesn’t know what happened for right now.

He takes your silence as a ‘yes’.

“I’m sorry… Really…” He says in a voice that’s close to breaking himself. “Lilly…”

In a delicate motion, he lifts his hand up and strokes your face.

“I… I never wanted to worry you.”

“Don’t apologize, Hisao…” You say for the last time. “Never apologize for what you are…”

The forest grove grows quiet as you hold Hisao to your chest.

In spite of his flaws… Hisao is beautiful… In spite of everything…

“…”

“I love you, Hisao.” You finally state, tears welling in your eyes.

Tears of both joy and concern… Everything just flows out of you at once.

“I love you. I love you. I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!” You cry over and over again as if a prayer.

“Please… I love you… Just… Stay with me… Please…”

Hisao remains silent for a moment, his voice momentarily taken away by your confession.

“Lilly…” He breathes your name.

Then, out of nowhere, he laughs softly to himself.

“Don’t… be ridiculous…”

“Hisao?!” You exclaim.

“Of course I’ll stay with you. I’ll stay with your forever.”

Your heart flutters in your chest as you take in those words you’d wanted so badly to hear.

“I love you too, Lilly.” He replies in a calm, blissful tone of voice.

And with that, he cranes his head up and kisses you on the lips.

The feeling of his lips against yours is a joy you never thought existed.

The sound of his words is a music more beautiful than anything you thought possible.

You hold him to you, holding the kiss for as long as you can, feeling a wave of absolute euphoria wash over you.

The moment seems to last an eternity, but it’s sadly not enough.

After a time, he breaks away and rests back down into your lap.

“Hisao…” You say breathlessly, stroking his face. “Hisao… Hisao… Hisao… Hisao… Hisao… … …”

# Epilogue - Ten Years Later

Wearing a regal platinum circlet inset with diamonds and a silken dress embroidered with gold thread, you sit in your palace library, slouched against Hisao.

He strokes your hair absentmindedly as together the two of you go over the official novelization of your conquest of the British Isles together, casually nitpicking details to be released to your mongrel subjects.

“Hm…” He muses, flicking his fingers over the braille dots and brushing up against yours in the process.

You giggle slightly, no matter how many times that happens, you still enjoy the feeling.

“I’m not sure about including the details over the Massacre at York.”

You giggle a bit before craning your head a bit and kissing his cheek. “My, my. You worry too much, dear. I wouldn’t have had them ‘all’ crucified if I didn’t want it to be known.”

Hisao laughs a bit before setting down the book and drawing you into his arms. “Yes…. I remember… ‘A clear sign to the English that there was nowhere to hide’.” He echoes you in an airy voice.

You smile and tilt your chin forward.

Hisao meets your lips with his own and you share an affectionate kiss, wrapping your hands lightly around his neck as he cradles you by the waist.

You maintain it for several moments before allowing him to break off and sink back into the padded cushion of your chair with a contented sigh.

You take his hand in your and absentmindedly draw patterns into his palm as you muse aloud. “After all, that’s the elegant simplicity of life, isn’t it? To recognize what you want... and make it yours...”

[Meanwhile]

In the battle-torn ruins of a forgotten cyclopean city, Akira steps casually over the last broken bodies of the Knights of Life.

“Mongrels.” She remarks, making a flicking motion with her fingers.

She whirls her scepter about her playfully, surveying the carnage.

“WAHAHA!” Another thunderous presence follows her as Misha emerges, covered in blood and armor fragments. “You knew they’d have to try ‘some’ kind of last-ditch attempt to stop the awakening.”

She giggles and leans against the wall, taking a drink from a porcelain urn. “Yeah. I knew, but that doesn’t make it any less trite.”

She passes the urn over to Misha and walks forward at a relaxed pace as her drunken black-robed cultists filter in through the shattered entrance, many of them sheathing swords and daggers from their role in the preceding battle.

They encircle a massive obsidian platform as Misha and Akira walk towards its center.

“I’m sure you’re noticed it by now.” The golden king remarks as they stride together to the alter. “In all our travels together… Just how… ‘Monochrome’ the world is these days.”

“WAHAHA! Of course!”

Akira produces another bottle and takes a chug as the ritual circle is completed. “I can’t have that. Uniformity is ugly. And repetition so much more so.”

Her drunken cultist followers begin to chant. “Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn”

Akira and Misha reach the center of the ritual circle.

“We need more contrast.” She smiles, before killing the bottle and peering down into the blackness beneath her.

In response to the Ritual of Awakening being led by the King of Spirits – something begins to stir…

[End meanwhile]

“Mommy?” A quiet, controlled young girl’s voice echoes from the entrance.

You smile in her direction. “Why good day to you, young lady.” You reply and pat the cushion next to you. “Have a seat.”

A pattering of footsteps as the young girl quickly skips across the room and clamors onto the couch to be with her parents.

She flops onto you as she ascends and you stroke her hair.

Your beautiful child, yours and Hisao’s, born mercifully free of either of your conditions.

You giggle to yourself as your ponder...

The British Isles alone are too meager an inheritance for such a jewel…

“I was having a bit of trouble understanding what this meant.” She exclaims, shuffling about a little.

Your daughter presents and old story book – a fable of a love story between a prince and princess.

The kind of archetypal fairy tale anybody would have read at least once.

Together, your family enjoys a simple, pleasant moment as you and your husband explain a plot point to your daughter.

The point of how the prince and princess fell in love.

Such a lovely notion.

“So Mommy?” Your daughter asks.

“Yes, dear?” You reply, stroking her hair.

“How did you and Daddy fall in love?”

Together, you and Hisao exchange a giggle.

“Well…”

[Katawa Yandere - Lilly Route End]

# Gaiden (Misha vs. Lilly battle)

Facing Misha, you return her mournful sigh, feeling perhaps the merest twinge of remorse for what must be done.

It didn’t have to be like this… If only you had reached out to her…

Then maybe… just maybe…

She could have been saved.

But such thoughts are baggage. Your quest for true love cannot be halted here.

In the forest grove, the sounds of battle echoing all around you, the four of your face each other in stillness.

For a moment, your visage forms a sad smile… and then hardens into your battle-expression.

“Hanako! On Shizune!” You cry, whirling your twin weapons about the air.

Your faithful knight squeezes your hand and whispers softly. “Lilly…”

And with that, she vanishes, homing in on the dark president.

The ground beneath Misha’s powerful legs explodes as she kicks off it, the deadly force of her Gae Drills enveloping her clenched fists to form a set of gyrating lances.

Bringing the full might of her malevolent power to bear, she charges you.

Shattering the earth beneath her with the force of her legs, the Drill Knight closes the gap between you in the blink of an eye.

“WAHAHA!” She bellows her battle-cry as her demonic lance zooms in on your heart.

“!!!” Trusting your instincts, you hurl yourself straight back, recognizing the futility of trying to counter such an onslaught.

Using ever ounce of strength in your body, you blast backwards as Misha's evil lance rushes in.

The Drill rips through the empty space where your body was, narrowly managing to miss you.

Suddenly, you feel as if a flurry of razors has struck you as the gale encircling Misha’s weapon tears over you, shredding your Yukata as it sends you hurdling through the air.

You’re blown clean out of the small grove and crash to the ground, skidding to a halt and frantically trying to rise.

Wincing in pain, the sound of ‘WAHAHA!’ echoes through your mind.

Misha is already smashing through the trees, her horrid pink lances blasting apart the space around her in she readies another chivalrous charge.

You grit your teeth, whirling your scimitar about and bringing your needler to bear on the charging knight.

[Meanwhile]

Just outside of Shizune’s field of vision, Hanako melds out of the shadows and mercilessly blasts a barrage of holy gunfire directly at her chest.

Narrowing her eyes, Shizune thrusts out her arm, weaving the incantations for a spell as signs with her hand.

An azure shield phases out of the air, deflecting the attacks with a loud series of explosions.

Hanako charges in, whirling her pistol around at odd angles, trying to sneak a shot past the barrier, but every one is deflected as the protective charm flies through the air to intercept her attacks.

Shizune, already weakened from channeling her demonic energy for too long, coughs up a fair amount of blood as she delves within her evil tome.

“!!!” She makes a snapping motion and a hail of daggers fly out, zeroing in on the approaching Hanako.

Caught off-guard, she flings herself to the side, weaving through the deadly volley as she hurdles away, then-

“EEA!” She breathes a muffled scream as a flying dagger slashes her thigh as she tumbles down. Another on clips her shoulder.

But she’d managed to survive.

Recognizing this attack was a failure, glares at the StuCo leader and phases back into the shadows.

Clutching her dark tome, Shizune stares at the now-vacant spot, panting slightly.

[Meanwhile]

The fairgrounds have devolved into a chaotic melee-a-trois as Miki leads to Regal Cripple Army in a battle against the demonic hordes, crying out funneling orders to direct the insidious Lancer-Evo.

The King’s chariot flies through a quickly-opening gap as Natsume shoots a mystic gaze inside at the driver.

Paralyzed momentarily, Hiseaki is unable to move as the vehicle smashes through a festival booth and pancakes the demons behind it as he plows back into their ranks.

A demon’s body plasters itself across the windshield, momentarily blinding him until he can regain enough of his senses to fumble for the windshield-wipers.

Suzu remorseless drop-kicks a demon and sprays out a 360º barrage of shotgun fire as she becomes encircled.

Natsume falls in behind her and burns out an escape route for the girl with her cursed eyes.

“Miki! The Forrest!” The heterochromic girl cries out. “The summoning seals are there!”

Miki smashes a demon down and Suzu slide in alongside her, shooting it in the face.

Breathing heavily, she raises her sword, rallying her frontward unit. “On me! Charge!”

And with that, Saki, Natsume, Naomi, Suzu, and the survivors of the frontal assault team rally behind their bloodthirsty captain and charge the demonic ranks.

[Meanwhile]

Back in the clearing , you blast your needler at the Drill Knight as she hurdles in at you, kicking up debris in her wake.

The gyrating pink drill around her fist expands with a lightning-fast rapidity, blowing aside the armored needles with a loud series of chiming sounds.

You lunge to the side as you reverse the polarity and summon the needles around to her back.

“WAHAHA!” Misha laughs as she twirls around, the protective spiral of evil hair now enveloping her entire body.

Every needle is deflected by those demonic drills.

The ground explodes as Misha smashes back down to it and kicks off, basting in on you in the blink of an eye.

You slide your feet into a firm, low stance, and execute a powerful braced slash of your scimitar, meeting Misha’s evil attack with a mighty blow of your own.

As the scimitar of madness collides with the drill-lance, the air explodes with demonic energy.

The atmosphere takes on the texture of steel.

It feels as through your arm might break.

The scimitar, fueled by the holy power of Scotland, just barely manages to parry the attack. The gale blasts you backwards, but you manage to keep your footing as the dark wind bruises and cuts your skin, shredding your Yukata.

You gnash your teeth as you brace through the secondary wave.

Suddenly, you register Misha sliding in on you in a follow-up attack, raising her other drill as she laughs her joyless battle-cry.

[End meanwhile]

Unable to deal with Misha’s savage attack in such rapid succession, you take a gambit and fire your hail of needles into the center of Misha’s deadly spiral and scissor your scimitar in behind the barrage in an upward slash.

An explosion of dark energy, combusting air, and cacophonous noise blows you both apart.

You tumble to the ground while your drilled foe slides back, her feet tearing deep ruts in the earth.

“WAHAHA!” She bellow as she raises her lances and blasts out a hail of unholy-hair-glitter projectiles at you.

At least fifty… you can’t block them all…

Narrowing your sightless eyes, you lock your needler forward and slink into a low stance.

You shoot your hail of needles directly into Misha’s, countering her barrage with one of your own.

A series of sharp pangs echo through the devasted clearing as your projectiles ricochet off each other, shredding the surrounding environment.

Suddenly, Misha barrels through the devastation of the barrage and hurls her lance out with a speed you though impossible.

You slink to the side, but this time it clips your shoulder, shredding your flesh and blasting you off into the distance as if a rag-doll.

Your needler comes out of your hands as you fly through the air and smash into the base of a tree.

The living wood shatters along with some of your bones as you crash to a halt in a barrage of splinters.

The shock blows through your body.

You feel your muscles tear.

You taste blood…

Just a glancing attack… but with such force... and such dark energy…

The Drill Knight skips into the clearing and brings her powerful lance smashing down on your fallen weapon, shattering it.

Broken and beaten, you fall back in awe… and sorrow…

Misha begins skipping towards your damaged frame as you lie against the shattered tree.

“My… my… This… is how it ends?” You mumble with an odd serenity.

‘Do you want it to?’ A voice echoes through your mind as if in response.

You freeze.

That dark voice… A monotone raspy voice... The voice of madness, bleeding through your weakened mental barriers...

Rin.

‘It doesn’t have to be that way, you know.’ It echoes through you.

Dimly, you feel the madness of Rin… The barrier between your souls…

Rin’s insane power to create… And your charismatic ability to reach out…

The hand and the arm…

Two pieces that could fit together to form a perfect weapon.

You grit your teeth as you contemplate the seal between your souls…

And the Knight in Pink advancing on you.

You sense the tempest of madness on the other side of you cordoned soul.

With a light sigh, you smile softly, realizing what you must do.

You grasp the conceptual seal on between your soul of light and Rin’s of darkness.

“No choice then…” You say with a smile.

This is the price you have to pay for your love.

So you’ll accept whatever is necessary.

Armoring yourself with the holy power of the British monarch, you grasp it and shatter the barrier.

Instantly, the world explodes in a torrent of unknown sensations and screaming.

Horror washes over you as your mind is forced through the convoluted mentality of Rin.

Your fused minds vie for control of your soul.

The horrors of Rin flood your mind, the despair this girl sequestered throughout her life.

You feel whatever remained of your morality wash away beneath a surge of questions.

The red haired girl smiles slightly in your mind’s eye.

This world of madness…

This environment cannot support life, yet here she stands.

Amongst this hell, the mad girl strides forward to claim your soul…

No.

You will ‘not’ relinquish yourself.

In a haggard voice, you speak. “I… Lilly Satou… As the true monarch of the Britons… WILL. NOT. FALL.”

And with that, you seize the power of your charisma and send it surging into the mind of Rin.

Those green eyes widen in shock as the unknown energy envelops her.

“This mind is mine… This soul is mine…” You say, feeding your holy power through the conduits of Rin’s madness.

You smile weakly. “And even if your soul compounds it… ‘I’ shape my own fate.”

And with that, you smash the holy power of the Scotland into Rin’s mind, eradicating her completely.

Her eyes as she falls to your charisma are a simple mild state of shock as she curiously feels the unknown sensation of personal connection for the first and last time.

And then all ends.

The now-visible world floods into your mind and you perceive the Drill Knight charging in to finish you.

In a state of serenity, you rise to your feet, barely feeling the pain of your injuries anymore.

The strength of your fused souls floods to your fingertips.

‘Reality Marble: Unlimited Artworks’ isn’t usable.

Unsurprisingly, you and Rin have different internal realities.

You grasp the power of madness and extend it outwards into the world of reality.

So what you have to do instead is use this strength to carve out something even better.

“Trace, on.”

Through Rin’s powers, a tremendously detailed concept sketch of a shield appears in your mind’s eye.

“Trigger, off.”

For the material, you channel the holy porcelain of the Satou family.

“Set.”

Misha barrels in on you as you weave your powers together.

“Porcelain Blade Works.”

A perfect duplicate of the sacred shield Svalinn, forged a gleaming holy porcelain is carved out of reality in the line of Misha’s attack.

She doesn’t back down and swings her drill directly into your defense.

An explosion erupts through the clearing as her lance strikes the shield of the sun.

Beneath the demonic fury of the lance, it shatters, but serves its purpose of breaking the enemy’s charge.

Not wasting any time, you cast about for your next move.

Porcelain, which is essentially glass, can hold a keener edge than metal, but it’s far more brittle.

As your newfound power reflects this nature, each weapon you project will break after only one use.

But for that singular use… Its power may actually surpass that of the original.

Smiling, you extend your arm and conceptualize a rain of sacrificial Aztec daggers.

The noble phantasm breathes life into them almost immediately and a storm of porcelain blades smashes into Misha’s drill-defenses.

The air seethes with dark energy and glistens with white shards as your attack shatters against the power of the Drill Knight.

Breaking through your attack, Misha skids out and fires her dark needles at you.

You counter by materializing a storm of Artemis’s moonbeam arrows.

They blast into Misha’s barrage, breaking the attack.

Using the perceptive strength of Rin’s soul,

Not wasting any time, you call forth Rhongomiont, the spear of King Arthur, and send it flying at your foes before she can recover.

This weapon, charged with the holy power of the Britons, blasts through her defense and pierces her shoulder, producing a pained cry as she’s blown back.

You rush forward to pursue, abandoning you now-useless cane-sword.

And then stop dead.

Misha rises, whimpering, but no less determined as she pulls out the shattered lance.

“Wah… ha… ha…” She breathes as she invokes the secret power of the Gae Drills.

The final power she had awakened when she had intaken the demonic legacy in despair a year ago…

She breathes quietly and focuses the power of her drills.

The pink energy permeating Misha’s hair is channeled off onto her arm and rages about the limb in a tempest of magical energy.

Her hair returns to its former straight, light-brown state as she focuses her energy into the Drill of Longinus.

You skid to a halt, taking in the unfathomable energy of the weapon.

Casting about for a defense, you find… nothing.

Even Rin’s creativity can offer no shield against that attack.

So then…

You need a surefire kill before she reaches you.

But what?

Misha smashes off the ground, her hair billowing behind her as she raises the unstoppable attack.

Your heart beats wildly as you channel the madness, searching for something… anything…

“!!!” You gasp.

A bow, unfathomable in beauty, surges to your mind.

You have no idea what it is.

It just… feels ‘right’.

That’s all you need.

You extend your hand and grasp the porcelain bow as it materializes before you, summoning a single divine arrow to notch.

“A blind archer”’ You muse to yourself as Misha draws in on you with the reflexes of a predatory beast.

You’re going to do something you can’t.

Just because you can.

Both of your attack have no defense.

You will both die.

It matters little.

With a serene smile, you release your bolt as Misha brings her sacred drill in for a kill-shot.

Your divine arrow and Misha’s sacred thrust close in…

Closer…

The air ignites from the radiated energy of the two attacks.

Closer…

Determination steels the hearts of both you and Misha.

And then-

You blows don’t cross and instead strike each other tip-to-tip.

An explosion of holy power destroys the clearing around you.

Not willing to die since that would limit your ability to be with Hisao, you sacrificed a surefire kill for the infinitesimally small chance of shot at the very center of Misha’s lance.

It worked.

The two unstoppable attacks meet and annihilate each other.

However, since yours was a fired bolt, you were removed from the clash, while Misha, holding the lance, is spiritually skewed by the incredible backlash.

A wave of power washes over the clearing as you gnash your teeth, bearing the damaging radiance.

After a moment of agony, the torrent subsides.

As the field about you burns in a sea of white fire, Misha’s body goes limp and slams into the earth barely a step away from you.

Breathing heavily, in a state of utter mental exhaustion, you gaze down on her.

Her now-purified hair offers no flutters softly in the updraft and her golden eyes are glazed in shock.

But somehow, incredibly, she’s still breathing.

Even after an attack like that…

It’s unbelievable… But there it is.

Only Misha’s monolithic tolerance for suffering could have saved her.

But only barely.

The battle is over.

You stand over Misha’s still form as the battleground returns to silence, save for the crackling of the flames.

With an impassive gaze, you considering executing Misha for a moment, but then lower your arm.

“It’s done.” You tell her in a calm tone of voice.

Misha can’t reply, or even give any indication that she hears you, but you’re sure she does.

You kneel and stroke her hair... It's actually rather soft...

You smile at her. "It's ok."

Just as her hair has now been purified from the evil of her drills, she is no longer marked as your enemy.

As the monarch of Scotland, you pardon her for the crimes she committed in the name of love.

It’s not as if they were somehow worse than yours, after all.

You smile down at her as you rise. “If you want to know where to go next…” You suggest. “Seek out the King of Spirits.”

And with that, you depart.

# Appendix – Akira’s pastebin and links

<http://pastebin.com/u/Akira333> - Akira’s pastebin

<http://pastebin.com/iPPe6sBr> - Katawa Yandere - Lilly Route pastebin

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/60824471/ - Part 1

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/60867712/ - Part 2

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/60922658/ - Part 3

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/60970469/ - Part 4

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61060453/ - Part 5

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61254800/ - Part 6

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61307966/ - Part 7

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61542556/ - Part 8

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61593013/ - Part 9

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61646311/ - Part 10

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61742576/ - Part 11

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61937832/ - Part 12

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/61993797/ - Part 13

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62090908/ - Part 14

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62280140/ - Part 15

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62291050/ - Part 15 (cont)

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62332074/ - Part 16

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62342483/ - Part 16 (cont)

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62603098/ - Part 17

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62731883/ - Part 18

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62912704/ - Part 19

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62927376/ - Part 19 (cont)

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62965147/ - Part 20

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/62970135/ - Part 20 (cont)

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/63051366/ - Part 21

http://archive.foolz.us/a/thread/63146241/ - Part 22

http://suptg.thisisnotatrueending.com/archive.html?tags=Katawa%20Yandere - The Specialty /tg/ Archive

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18445565/ - Part 23

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18457468/ - Part 24

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18518956/ - Part 25

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18531180/ - Part 26

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18542169/ - Part 27 (Finale)

http://archive.foolz.us/tg/thread/18617164/ - Gaiden