Ultimate Danganronpa: Supernova at Sea

by gaiacseas

Summary

Waking up on a near-empty ship in the middle of the ocean would have already been weird enough. As it turns out, what Hibiki Kioku finds themself about to face is far more unbelievable.

A script-style fangon with narrative-like internal narration adapted to mimic the script style of the Danganronpa games, complete with a cast of seventeen Ultimate students and some pretty sweet art! Trials will be semi-interactive and readers will be able to vote for FTEs after Chapter 2. Endgame may contain spoilers for any and all main games, but for now there are only some vague spoilers for DR1 and DR3! Will update on a consistent fortnightly schedule, and hopefully resume a weekly schedule soon!

TV Tropes Page:
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanFic/UltimateDanganRonpaSupernovaAtSea

Current status: CHAPTER TWO: To Write A Will In Ice.

UDR Discord: https://discord.gg/aM2n46P

Notes
I'd like to start this off with a huge thanks to my friends and inspirations!! Sou (@gonta) and Kirby (@starrynova) both have wonderful fangans that have inspired me a ton, and they and a lot of my other friends have been a huge help in the development of this fangan, so thank you so much guys! Check out their fangans Dead on Arrival and Drowning in Bittersweet Despair, they're really amazing!!

Here's an explanation of the script format:

**Bolded** text is the protagonist, Hibiki's, internal dialogue.

Non-bolded text consists of dialogue and 'stage directions', which are really just descriptions of what the characters are doing in this context! Basically, it's this:

Character: [Doing this] I'm saying these words!

It's pretty simple! Hope that helped anyone who's confused :D

(By the way, sorry if any of the formatting is off!! I'm not a programmer by trade or even a hobbyist or anything, I kinda just take code off HTML guides, so... Some things might be a little janked. If there's anything I need to fix, let me know!)
PROLOGUE: Ahoy Mutual Killing! All Aboard the S.S. Despair!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In this world, there are two types of people.
That sentence has been finished infinite times and in infinite ways... But even now, I’m not so sure it rings true.

In the case of the ever-revered Hope’s Peak Academy, that dichotomy has always seemed to be between those who have talent, and those who lack it - but then, where’s the divide between the two? And what’s stopping one from becoming the other? The truth is, no one, Hope’s Peak included, can know everything or assess someone’s entire character at a glance. If there’s one thing my time in psychology has taught me, it’s that no matter how you define a person, there’ll always be more to them than their labels.

John Locke, an English philosopher, once said that each and every one of us starts out as a blank slate; that our experiences, upbringings and memories carve into us until we come out fully realised, our pasts etched into our minds and able to inform how we proceed in the present. Others would argue that we’re born fully sculpted into complete beings, and that life is just the kiln that’ll set our predestined actions into something fully realised.

As it turns out, the reality of the situation is something in between. You were always going to be you, but this version of yourself is unique to your circumstances and experiences. If someone were to wipe the slate clean and start anew…

Well, I don’t know what would happen then. I’d like to say I do, but I’m just as omniscient as everyone else - which is to say not at all.

...Speaking of which...

As I shifted my hands at my sides to finally clutch a bundle of too-soft duvet, the realisation sunk in that this wasn’t my bed. Which, a moment later, was accompanied by the added revelation that the entire world seemed to be swaying beneath me.

...Interesting. Well, no use in panicking. After a quick confirmation that my locket was still fastened safely around my neck, I propped myself up on the bed I’d found myself on and tried to gather my bearings.

???: Mmgh… What the hell…?
For just a moment, I opened my eyes. Even through the blurriness of a long and heavy sleep, I could make out enough to see that my desk - usually a wreck of loose sheets and sticky notes that dominated close to an entire wall - had apparently dematerialised overnight. I closed my eyes once again.

Hm. I have absolutely no idea where I am right now.

Fantastic.

…Current bullshit aside, I should probably introduce myself. My name is Hibiki Kioku, also well known as the Ultimate Psychologist… Or, soon to be known, at least. The school year was only just commencing, after all - not that I hadn’t made a name for myself regardless. Self-directing a groundbreaking research project on the nature and flexibility of human empathy at seventeen years old does tend to get you some recognition, and even if that had come along with its fair share of stress, I wouldn’t give it up for anything.
As for why I'm here, though...

Well, I seem to be running a little short in the information department right about now.

Still perched on the bed’s edge, I kept my eyes closed and tried to listen for any signs of where I was. The normal morning shrill of cicadas or rumble of trains was totally absent, but the creak of metal more than filled the void. It was coupled with another sound, though - one I hadn’t expected to hear for ages.
Hibiki: Huh…?

I walked over to one of the walls, where blue light seeped under draping, drawn curtains like the bed of a waterfall. Screwing my eyes shut, I flung the curtains open, threw back the sliding door behind them and stepped out onto the room’s balcony.

Even with my eyes open, I could barely believe what I was seeing - the vast, sprawling expanse of the sea was laid out before me, with a sky bluer than any I’d seen for years.

Hibiki: This… is a ship.

Hibiki: ...

Hibiki: What the *fuck* is going on.

Looking around, the place seemed pretty luxurious. The room I’d been in looked to be a suite, and judging by how low the water was beneath me, the ship had to be pretty tall, too. Definitely some sort of cruise ship, at least.

It was nice, but knowing why I was here and not at home under a mountain of blankets working on my next project would’ve been even nicer.

Shaking off the hypnotically salty breeze and rolling waters, I headed back into the suite. The room was unsurprisingly tidy, save for the bed I’d been lying on top of, which now had its sheets all messed up. My bad there.

Other than that, though, the room was basically pristine. From the polished wooden tabletops to the glittering chandelier (fastened safely enough to not come flying off in a storm, presumably), everything was bright, spotless and perfectly in place. The sandy tones of the walls and the washed out blues of the balcony’s drapes only helped to bring everything together. Honestly, the whole place looked like a beach resort. Any other time I would’ve loved being here, even if only to people-watch and get my prescribed relaxation time. Right now, though, even the groan of the ship’s skeleton was setting me on edge. I had to figure this out as soon as possible.
Just as I was about to continue my investigation, there was a knock at my suite’s door.

???: Hmm… Hey! Anyone in there?

I stopped in my tracks as my mind came to a screeching halt.

A second voice rung out from the other side, this one much more anxious than the last.

???: Um… Sorry to intrude on your privacy! If you’re even awake, that is...

???: …Are you sure there’s someone in there…? Or… Oh no, what if they got hurt!

???: Don’t worry! I don’t think this place is that dangerous.

???: [Dejectedly] Mm… I hope not.

???: Ah, anyway, if there’s anyone in there, please say something! We’re just trying to get everyone together, and… the lock says it’s engaged, so…

My legs finally began to move again, and I started to make my way over to the other side of the room. As I did, though, I noticed something that seemed out of place in the suite’s otherwise polished-to-perfection finesse. Sitting on a bench next to the entrance was a vase, a single greying daffodil limply dangling from its clutch. By the looks of things, its pollen and withered petals had wasted no time in making a mess of the carefully polished surface.

Something hitched in my chest ever so slightly, and my gaze lingered there with a slight sense of… apprehension? Vulnerability? Maybe that was too strong a word - it was just a flower, after all. But even so…

…I walked over to the vase to take a closer look.
C’mon, there’s gotta be someone in here…

...Right. There were more important things at hand than some flowers. I reached for the door handle, hoping to open it then and there - but it seemed the thing barely wanted to budge.

Hibiki: [Clears throat] I’m in here, yeah. Tips on opening the door?

My voice was hoarser than I’d expected… For a moment, I wondered just how long I’d been asleep.

There was a small shout of excitement from the other side of the door. Before long, a third, deeper voice spoke up.

Feh. It’s simple enough. There should be a keycard on the bench beside the card register. Take it and hold it to the front.

Aw, hey! I could’ve told them that!

Waiting for you to do so would have been inefficient. Leave the strategist to do the strategising, would you?

[Unfazed] Whatever you say, commander.

Ah, please don’t fight…!

Choosing to opt out of whatever argument the trio outside were about to have, I looked back to the bench. Funnily enough, the card was wedged just under the vase.

...Well whatever, I guess… [Speaking up] Just a second!
Yanking it out and brushing away some stray pollen, I swiped the card over the sensor. The reader’s light clicked to a luminous green with little protest, and with it, the door handle made the same sound. The steel handle searingly cold on my hand, I pushed down without hesitation and stepped aside as the door swung inwards.

Outside were, unsurprisingly, three individuals. Two of them seemed to still be bickering, but the third, a meek girl with a politely guarded gaze, looked to me eagerly. I stuck out my hand for her to shake.

???: I’m so glad to see you’re okay! Everyone else is already awake, and… Oh no, where are my manners! I’m so sorry! Do you mind if I ask your name…?

Hibiki: Not at all. Hibiki Kioku. You?

???: [Bows] Oh, no one important…

I frowned at that. She’d said it with a smile, but if anything, that’d made it even more concerning…

Hibiki: Of course you’re important. [Half-smiles] You don’t see me talking to those two, do you?

???: Hehe, I suppose not… Though they’re very nice, I promise! B-But anyway, um, my name i.

.

...

......

And just like a lifeboat flung into an ocean storm - it was all swept away.
I couldn’t see. It felt like I was drifting deep beneath the water’s surface, freezing liquid filling up my lungs, so cold it turned my body numb until there was nothing left to feel, to hear, to see.

It felt all too real. For the first time in as long as I could remember, I was terrified.

Waves crash without relenting. Cliff faces fall to the sea.

The slate is washed bare.

...

A flash of bright fuchsia engulfed my vision before I was plunged back into darkness. Before I could so much as gasp for breath, I was awake, safe and warm, sitting on a bed in the middle of a pristine room with nothing more out of the ordinary than a slightly pounding heart and a migraine to match.

The room was remarkable, but entirely unfamiliar. As I found my footing through an aching haze, I looked around the room.

Sandy walls, blue drapes, polished tables, chandelier.

I hadn’t seen anything this over the top for ages - at least, not since...

...Since...

I tried to pull up any kind of memory, some comparison or impression, but there was nothing there. It was like trying to grasp at mist, only to have it fall away in droplets, never quite tangible.
I didn’t remember much of my life at all. To be precise, absolutely none of it.

I put a hand to my temple.

???: …

...Amidst the vast, pulsating nothingness throbbing inside my skull, a couple of facts floated to the surface. Something I was sure of, even when thrust into unsteady tides.

My name is Hibiki Kioku… information coupled, for some reason, with the term ‘Ultimate Psychologist’. Something about the term is intangible - like I can’t quite remember what it’s supposed to mean - but it’s important. That, I’m sure of.
…But considering the fact that even my best efforts couldn’t yield more than what I guessed was a pretty average knowledge of psychology, maybe the idiot who’d called me that was off their mark.

Hibiki: …Whatever. It’s not like it’s my problem.

Steadying myself again, it was surprisingly easy to stroll past the ensuite door and over to the room’s exit. It was almost as if I’d expected the ground to be spinning at my feet.

Probably just the headache.
Over at the door was a long, shining bench. As I strode over to it, I cast a mostly-indifferent glance at a bunch of golden flowers that’d been nestled into a vase on its surface. Whatever they were, they seemed to be flourishing - my best bet was daffodils, but I’d never been much of a flower person.

At least, not to my memory.

…Well, whatever. Shoving the vase off to the side, I picked up a card that I’d spotted peeking out from beneath its edge. I swiped it against the card reader next to the door.

A little light blinked from red to green, and I opened the door to find-

???: —!!!

Hibiki: URGH!

-a very graceful, very pale, and very much on-the-floor-underneath-me girl.

Hibiki: Fucking hell…

???: [Draws hair back from face] …

For a moment, the girl stared in shock, her pale brown locks framing wide eyes. After a moment too long of staring in silence, I briskly pushed myself up off of her. She paused, blinked, looked to the side, blinked again, and promptly resumed her absent gaze.

Hibiki: …

???: …

Hibiki: …Christ, stop burning holes into my face. You think you’re looking at a fuckin’ ghost or
That seemed to snap her out of it. With an idle brush of her hand against her collar, the girl pushed down a (friendly? anxious? relieved?) chuckle. Curtains of her silky blue dress swept across the floor as she adjusted herself.

???: I, ah… Of course not, no. I guess seeing you was just a bit of a shock, is all… Your door’s been the only one still locked for quite some time now. [Smiles warmly] But I’m glad to finally meet the person on the other side!

I watched as the girl finally got to her feet. She was only wearing flats, but she still stood a few inches taller than me. Between that and the way her dress framed her willowy but curving figure, it wasn’t hard to believe she could be a model.

For a moment, she reached out her hand as if to offer a handshake. She must’ve thought better of it, though, because she quickly abandoned it in favour of just offering me a short bow.

???: Heheh… Admittedly, though, we were a little worried that something might’ve happened to you in there, so I guess the ghost accusation isn’t too far off…

Hibiki: “We”?

???: [Gasps softly] Oh, oh course! Well, it was Yoshida-san and I for a little while… He left to go look after something else not too long ago, though. I should really go thank him for staying as long as he did, now that I think about it…

Hibiki: …

???: …Ah. You wouldn’t know who I’m talking about, though… Sorry! I can be a little scatterbrained.

No kidding, huh.
Hibiki: Yeah. Anyway, where the hell am I.

As I said that, I took a cursory glance down the hall. Pristinely polished wood doors stared back from nearly every angle - there had to be a dozen of them, at least. Each one was accented with little golden fixtures that shone out amidst the brightly lit space, matched perfectly with more of the same on the sprawling navy carpet beneath my feet.

The girl followed my gaze, hummed in thought for a moment, and proceeded as I continued looking away.

???: Oh, well…! I’m not the best person to ask, really. I haven’t been too far beyond here… But if you head out, you’ll be sure to find something interesting!

Hibiki: Mh. Alright then.


???: Hm? …Oh! Oh, of course. It’s a pleasure, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: Likewise…

...Riiiiight.

???: [ Brushes collar] I suppose I should introduce myself too! It would be rude not to return the favour, after all.

???: So…! [Clasps hands] My name is Mizuki Kamiya. Ah, and I’m also the Ultimate Fashion Designer… I’m not sure I’ll be able to get a lot of work done here, though.
Oh, fuck. The Ultimate Talent shit is gonna be some whole big thing, isn’t it.

Fabulous.

I coughed. Kamiya glanced my way expectantly, maybe even eagerly, as I continued.

Hibiki: So what… makes you an Ultimate, exactly?
Kamiya: Hm? [Taps chin] Well… As a fashion designer, I suppose what makes me stand out is my skill set and range. I've been really fortunate to have the opportunity to design and make clothes for all kinds of people - music stars and pop culture celebrities, but also more everyday wear… I think everyone deserves to be able to feel good about themselves, and maybe what I make can help with that. That’s my wish, at least!

Kamiya: Oh! And I also sew everything myself - like the dress I’m wearing, for instance. I have some experience working as a seamstress, so… Ah, I don’t mean to brag, though! I just… since you asked, and all.

...Right. I’m guessing this is some sort of prodigy program, then. Good to know.

Kamiya: [Chuckles] Mm, but that’s enough about me… I’m sure you’re far more interesting, Kioku-san. What did you say your Ultimate Talent was again?

Hibiki: I didn’t. But it’s Psychologist.

Kamiya: The Ultimate Psychologist, hm…? That sounds really interesting! I’m sure you’ve helped a lot of people, Kioku-san… I mean, being the best teenager in your field and all, of course you have!

"Best teen", huh... Guess that’s that on that. Now I’ll just have to bullshit the rest.

Hibiki: Yeah, well. I wish I could tell you about it, but my work is… confidential. Just, uh, theorise whatever you want.

Kamiya: [Giggles] Will do!

Kamiya’s expression was quite mild, but there was a glint in her eyes that was amused. She was easy to read - non-confrontational and humble, but more in-tune than she seemed to let on.

I was starting to remember how predictable other people were… Lord, please don’t let everyone in here be like this.
...Right. As much as I wanted to get this over with and move along, there was still something I should ask.

Hibiki: You said you haven’t left this hall all that much. Surely you know something about what’s going on in here, then.

Kamiya: Ah! [Twirls hair around finger] Wellll…

Kamiya hummed and threw a glance over her shoulder, and I once again did the same. The doors lining the hallway (there looked to be sixteen, including mine) were each coupled with a small LED display on the wall, just to the side of and above the handle. Though a gaze back proved that the light on mine had flicked to red, it seemed that the rest were a dull amber.

The only other red-lit ones were just a short ways up the hall - two sets of double doors, each facing each other from opposite walls, had slits of crimson LEDs that spelt out ‘ENGAGED’. Another two identical sets were on the other end, one lit up in red, one in green.

Kamiya: [Playing with hair] Everyone seems to have woken up in rooms like the one you came out of just now… I was one of the first ones awake, so I’ve gotten to see a fair few people coming out and passing through.

Hibiki: Hm…

Narrowing my eyes, I fished my keycard out from my pocket. A quick swipe of it against the reader beside my door turned the LEDs a cheerful green. Opening and closing the door, though, quickly made it flicker to red again.

Kamiya: What’s that you have there, Kioku-san? Another keycard?

Hibiki: Well I’m not unlocking the door with a fucking drugstore loyalty card, am I.

Kamiya: [Blinks] I… suppose you wouldn’t be, no!
I held up the card with mild disinterest, turning it over in my hand. On closer inspection, this thing was... more of an ID card than just a keycard. Or, at least, it had my name printed on it. Beside that, there was a large graphic in gold - a ‘U’ shape, of sorts. Upon another glance, I noticed a golden fixture of the same character on the upper half of my door.

Hibiki: I had to use this thing to get out of my room earlier. It was just on the table... And “another,” you said?

Kamiya: Ah, yes, well... I have one too, actually!

Sure enough, Kamiya quickly produced a near-identical card from a hidden pocket in her dress. The only glaring difference, aside from the name printed on it, was that the graphic on mine had been instead replaced by a cyan ‘P’ sort of shape.

Kamiya: I don’t think my room was locked, though... Actually, none of them have the red light on, do they?

Hibiki: Glad you finally noticed. [Puts card away] The red means engaged, and the green means unlocked - which only ever seems to be when the door is open, so it must do that automatically. Orange means... idle, I guess.

Kamiya: Oh, so do you think those ones are always unlocked, then...?

**Kamiya wandered to the door closest to mine - one lit up in orange - and tried the handle once, then again with more force. It didn’t budge.**

Hibiki: ...No. I was going to say they’re just out of use. Locked all the time.

Kamiya: [Clasps hands] That would make sense! Great deductive skills, Kioku-san. I’m glad we know that now!

Kamiya: Though it strikes me as a little odd that they’re all locked but yours...
Hibiki: Meh. I’ve got a pretty good idea of what it means.

As far as she needs to know, at least.

Hibiki: Anyway, that’s all for this area, then. Aside from the doors down the end.

Kamiya: [Taps chin] Right! Ah… Well, I think so. One of the sets of doors on the far end is the stairwell entrance, and the other one… I guess you’ll see when you get down there. It doesn’t seem to want to open… [Looks aside] Oh, but there are also these two!

Hibiki: They’ve got the red lights, hm.

I strode over to one set of doors and promptly stared up at it. I’d been ready to sweep my own card against the reader - but looking at the door, there was a metal character nailed to it, as had been done for my door. This one, however, looked just like the graphic on…

Hibiki: Kamiya. Swipe your card on the reader.

Kamiya: Ah? Oh, sure…!

Kamiya fumbled through her pocket for a moment before once again producing her card. The reader quickly glowed green once it’d verified Kamiya’s card, and I wasted no time in opening the door after it clicked.

For the most part, the room was fairly average - just not quite in the same way that mine had been. Four bunk beds flanked the walls, the only significant gaps being left for a dresser and a pair of doors which I could only assume led to a closet and bathroom. It definitely wasn’t the kind of setup typical for a cruise ship, but… Hell, whatever. Maybe someone was just really bad at interior design.

Kamiya: [Leaning over to peek into room] Ohh… Say, what do you think this is, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: [Closes door] Can’t say I particularly care. It’s pretty boring.
Kamiya: Hmm… Fair enough, then! Maybe you’ll find the deck more interesting. After all, that’s probably where a fair few of the others have ended up…

Not that I’m at all eager to have to interact with pretty much anyone, but I guess if she’s right, it’s worth checking out. No matter what kind of situation this is, knowing my competition can’t hurt.

…I was going to remember that room, though. Odd that the other suites are locked, but that one opens… Not that it really matters.

Hibiki: Sweet. Well, I should get going, then.

Kamiya: Mm! [Clutches pendant; waves] Well, it was a privilege to meet you, Kioku-san! Good luck!

A privilege? I mean, obviously, but the wording’s a little odd even still. I must be the only tolerable person she’s met all day, or something… Which doesn’t bode well for me.

Shrugging off Kamiya’s lingering gaze, I shoved my hands into my pockets and continued my walk down the hall. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary until I reached the end, where the two sets of double doors lay. One, presumably the entrance to the stairwell, stood slightly ajar. A halo of green light shone reassuringly above it.

The other doors, however, were less welcoming. The words “CAPTAIN’S QUARTERS” were engraved in a fine gold font across their glossy surface, looming overhead alongside the same oppressive red ‘ENGAGED’ sign I’d seen before. Whatever that door was, I probably wasn’t getting into it for a while, but it did tell me that I was either on a ship or a very weird plane.

All that lay at the end of the hallway aside from the doors was a classy wooden table with a little boat in a bottle on display… Probably on a ship, then.

There were way too many stairs for my liking, with an excess of extravagant locked doors on
navy-carpeted landings to match. They all probably just led to more rooms anyway, but it was pretty fucking inconsiderate of whoever stuck me here to put me on the top floor.

Blue light began to flood the stairwell, and I soon found myself at the bottom and in the open. What the new space yielded was something I was pretty sure I’d’ve never expected to see. A sprawling lacquered deck lay before me, pool lounges and tables bejewelling the outside from under a reaching white shelter. On the other side was what looked to be an entire building finished with the same shining wood, its glass-windowed doors leading into the only other undercover part of what seemed to be the entire storey. The centrepiece, though, was what was in the middle. Two huge pools were splayed out across the deck, each one lined with pearly tiles in intricate patterns that rolled like waves. In the centre was a pair of diving boards that backed an elevated spa bubbling over with soap.

The whole place was nothing if not flashy - not a single corner had been cut. Probably a cruise ship, then.

As I strode out from under the shelters, I looked up. What lay before me was infinitely more interesting than some upmarket pools.

A glass dome spiderwebbed with support beams stretched out over my head, fish flitting around behind it in what could only be the sea.

Hibiki: …What the fuck.

???: Hm?

I turned to my left to see a kid quite literally curled up on a pool lounge. A dark green hood covered his head, hair peeking out from underneath it in loose spikes and curls that covered half his face. His feline eyes were lined with deep red highlights. He looked sketchy… more than that, though, he just looked like an angsty thirteen year old.

Might as well bite the bullet. If nothing else, maybe he’s seen more of the place than I have.

Hibiki: Hey. Any clue why the hell I’m on a cruise ship under a glass dome? Which also seems to be, uh, under the fucking ocean.
The boy took a moment to gather his bearings. Then, with a stifled yawn, he rolled onto his back, head lolling off the end of the lounge. He folded his hands over his stomach as he looked up at me blankly.

???: Mmm… Not really, sorry. Do you want to introduce yourself?

Hibiki: Not really.

???: ...It wasn’t really a question.


???: Psychologist… [Tilts head] Really?

Hibiki: Got a problem with that?

???: No, you just… Well, you don’t act how I’d imagine a psychologist to act, is all.

Hibiki: Right. And what’s that supposed to mean?

???: ...Nnnothing. I doubt you were gonna ask, but. [Sits up] My name’s Daichi Yoshida. I’m the, uh… Ultimate Luck.
Yoshida: [Scratches nose] It’s really supposed to be *Good* Luck, I think, but um… [Looks up at the dome] I’m honestly just not going to jinx it. The whole ‘waking up surrounded by people I don’t know in a place I’ve never seen’ thing is shitty enough.

Hibiki: Uh huh. So the girl up there sews her own clothes, but you just win lotto tickets or some shit.

Yoshida: … [Blinks] First of all, Kamiya-san is very talented, yeah… But uh, no, I wish. My luck’s kinda volatile at best. If I even have any at all, that is.
Hibiki: Hm. How so.

Though Yoshida had been sluggish before, his tone started to pick up as he talked. He crossed his legs underneath himself and leaned forward.

Yoshida: Ok, so like... I'll be playing a board game, right? Like, uh, Monopoly. So we’re a half hour in, and it's going pretty well. Got my fair share of good properties, my sister keeps landing on my stuff, whatever. Life’s going good and I’m looking like I’m gonna win, because nobody else in my family can finance in a board game because risk assessment is a foreign concept to them. [Eyes widen] Like… seriously, Tomoe keeps jumping down entire flights of stairs for shits and giggles. I love her, but there’s only so many times you can do that before you roll an ankle. It’s ridiculous and I can’t get her to stop.

Hibiki: Ok?

Yoshida: And then I fuckin’ run my mouth and say something, or someone else says something, like… like ‘Oh Daichi, wow, you’re totally beating us’ or whatever. And they jinx it, and suddenly the only numbers my hand knows how to roll are the ones that end with me paying rent to my little brother and he’s screaming in my face and its really really obnoxious and kind of hurts my ears, but anyway, the point is that this all usually ends up with me going bankrupt. Cheated by fate at the last second. We’ve played every Sunday for the last… however many years, and I don’t think I’ve won ONCE. A-And holy shit, don’t even get me started on bingo. That game is just out to kill me.

Hibiki: Wow. Sounds like your life is a tooootal struggle.

Yoshida: Haha… Well, I’m coping.

The way he said that, it almost didn’t sound like a joke. Wonder what heart-wrenchingly tragic backstory he’s got going for him.

At least the guy didn’t seem like the worst possible person to be stuck with. A little more nervous, tired, and enthusiastic than me, somehow all at once, but he could take my sarcasm a lot better than the fashionista. Expecting more than that would probably be setting too high a bar for this bunch.

Yoshida fiddled with his hood for a moment, and raised his eyes to meet mine. He frowned as
he scanned me up and down.

Yoshida: …Hey, weird question, but you… You haven’t met me before, right? We don’t know each other?

Hibiki: Why would we. I just woke up.

Yoshida: That’s not what I… Um, never mind. I just… You sort of remind me of someone, I think.

Hibiki: You think?

Yoshida: Well, it’s, uh… [Sighs] Never mind. Um… You want me to introduce you to the people over at the pool? …And yeah, I know you don’t want to, but do you think that maybe that’d be a good idea?

Hibiki: Ugh… Yeah, sure.

Well, he was quick enough to catch on. Maybe he would be a little less boring and predictable-as-shit than most of the other people here were sure to be.

As I made my way over to the pool, I scanned over the group around it. Two people stood in front of the glorified puddle of water in the midst of what looked (and sounded, from what I could make out) like a very pretentious and one-sided discussion - more of a dissertation, quite frankly. The person delivering it, a pale and lithe-figured individual with a mass of rose gold hair, seemed oblivious to everything but their own voice as they rambled on about something to do with “the often-squandered value of a good first impression.” Their audience, a man with a shock of orange hair that had had its weight doubled by wax and gel, watched on through his pilot shades with stalwart attention.

What both of them had very clearly failed to notice was the third person on the scene. Perched on top of the pool's diving board with a promisingly enthused grin across her face was a dark-skinned woman in a full body wetsuit.

This was very obviously going to be a disaster… Which was pretty much the first incentive I'd
been given all day to socialise. Nothing quite like getting to watch shit go down absolutely blame-free.

Keeping my eyes on the unwitting pair, I held an arm out and stopped Yoshida from walking any closer.

Hibiki: Cats don’t like water, do they.

Yoshida: [Scratches cheek] Uh, no… Why?

Hibiki: Just stand back.

Yoshida did as I said, and I watched from the corner of my eye as the girl on the diving board got up, sprung into the air and began her plummet down to the water’s surface in flawless cannonball form. One of the two in front of the pool noticed and jumped away from the pool with time to spare, but the rosy-haired one in heels, eyes still too busy examining their own hands, was a lost cause.

The girl hit the water’s surface, and I watched with just a bit of amusement as the suit-clad stranger got absolutely drenched by the splash.

???: [In shock; soaked head to toe] … … …

Yoshida: …Oh, that’s why.

???: [Laughing] WOAH! That was a close one, hey Ryuumatsu-kun! You know, I nearl- [Looks over; face sinks] …Oh boy. Are you okay? Are you gonna cry? You look like you might cry. Please don’t! I can help- AH, I mean, cry if you want to, I respect your authority on the decision, it’s not a demand, sir, I just don’t want this to ruin your day, and…

By now, the blonde-haired guy - ‘Ryuumatsu’, apparently - was shaking violently from either the cold or a feeling not too far from pure, concentrated fury. It didn’t take more than a few seconds after the culprit had resurfaced from the pool for it to become clear which.
Ryuumatsu?: Y— Y-YOU! I— This is downright DESPICABLE behaviour! W-What do you— I mean, honestly— w-what on… Do you even know who I AM???

???: [Smiling proudly] Not a clue. [Raises eyebrow; smug] Which isn’t even remotely my fault, for the record. I’d’ve remembered your name if I’d ever heard it. Names are important.

Ryuumatsu?: I-If you haven’t even heard it, th-that only speaks to your ignorance. I’m far from being some no-name run-of-the-mill paralegal fresh out of university, thank you very much.

???: Dude. When I tried to introduce myself half an hour ago you couldn’t get over yourself long enough to even tell me who you are, which is on a whole new level of self-defeating egoism. Honestly, I’m almost inclined to congratulate you!

Ryuumatsu?: W-Well, I-

???: Not to mention that I actually tried to tell you my name, too. [Grins] Happen to remember what it is?

Ryuumatsu?: Of course. It’s S… Sh-Shu… Shun…

The woman’s grin grew more and more amused as Ryuumatsu stumbled over his words for a moment. His companion mercifully took the opportunity to pitch in.

???: Of course he remembers! How could we forget you, Sumire-kun?

Sumire?: See! Thank you, Orutoku-san. [Looks to Ryuumatsu?] You better be grateful for this guy. What a trooper.

Orutoku?: [Rubs neck; flustered] Awh, it’s really no trouble! Just doing my job!
Orutoku?: Speaking of which - are you alright, sir? Anything I can do?

Ryuumatsu?: [Wrings out hair and grimaces] I-I’m… perfectly fine, thank you. Plankton such as her cannot be allowed to ruin my day.

Sumire?: [Flicks pool water] I’ll have you know that plankton are very important to ocean ecosystems!

Ryuumatsu?: Irrelevant… [Pouts] Now if you’ll e-excuse me, I need a towel.

Orutoku?: Oh, I’ll get you one!

Ryuumatsu?: I appreciate your generosity, Orutoku-san.

As the only non-soaked member of the trio went to fetch a towel, I stood back for a moment to consider my options. Getting at all involved with that Ryuumatsu prick was an abysmal idea… But hey, they could at least be fun to mess with.

After deciding I’d try my luck with the other person present first, I strolled over to the pool’s edge. The girl who’d dove into the water had hauled herself out of the pool and was laughing, her violet braid splashing water through the air as it jostled against her broad, well-built form. She looked up at Yoshida as she pulled her shirt over her arms and smiled.

???: Hey, Yoshida-san! Who’s your friend?

Yoshida: [Scratches cheek] Hey, Sumire-san. This is, uh—

Hibiki: —Hibiki Kioku. Ultimate Psychologist, if that matters.

Sumire?: Ooh, sweet talent! Seems like all of us here have got one. Nice to see there’s another scientist of sorts around, though!
Hibiki: Yeah... Right.

Sumire?: [Narrows eyes] Mhm... [Shakes it off] Anyway, the name’s Saori Sumire! Ultimate Marine Biologist.
Hibiki: Hm… Recognise any of the fish out there?

I pointed to the dome above us, and Sumire watched as a school of fish flitted about overhead. She squinted at them for a few moments before humming discontentedly and pursing her lips.

Sumire: I might be able to if I could get a little closer, but from here I can’t figure out much. Since the ship’s on sand and the dome hasn’t completely collapsed, we probably can’t be that deep. It’s likely we’re just off the coast of some part of Japan, I suppose.

Sumire: [Murmuring] That would explain me not being able to tell what they all are from a glance, anyway…

Yoshida: [Perking up] Oh, are you not from around here, Sumire-san…?

Sumire: [Puts hands on hips proudly] Oh, I’m from Japan! I just lived abroad on the east coast of Australia for a little while.

Yoshida: Ooh… Why was that? An exchange trip or something?

Sumire: Well, it was because the Great Barrier Reef is there! It’s absolutely fascinating - an abundance of coral, more species of tropical fish than most people could see in their lives anywhere else, a diverse ecosystem full of just about anything you can think of… It was starting to die not too long ago, but I’ve made my fair share of efforts towards keeping it thriving.

Yoshida: Oh wow. [Tilts head] So… why’d you come back to Japan, then? Sounds like it was pretty great over there!

Sumire: Oh… [Folds arms] Just family business. But it’s totally cool! The reef is doing a lot better now.

Hibiki: Sweet.

Yeah, don’t really give a shit.
I spent a moment wondering if I should just hurry up and fuck off already - but before I could, I was interrupted by the sound of pounding footsteps against the deck.

?????: Sorry for the wait, Ryuumatsu-kun!

...Sure enough, the Orutoku guy - whoever he was - was dashing back over from one side of the deck, a towel tucked under his arm as though it were precious cargo. Before he could get too close, I spared a glance back to his friend. He was just… glaring disdainfully down his nose at Sumire, lip upturned in disgust and chin raised high in the air.

What a pretentious fuck, honestly.

His lackey finally made it to his side, and he half-smiled as Orutoku held the towel out and dipped into a shallow bow.

Ryuumatsu?: [Takes towel] Thank you, Orutoku-san. Your dedication is duly noted.

Ryuumatsu?: [Glances over] ...Oh, Yoshida-san. And, er… You.

Oh, come the fuck on. He’s literally been standing there listening to me talk for the last three minutes.

Hibiki: Yep. Me.


Orutoku?: [Grins] Hi Yoshida-kun! And hi Yoshida-kun’s friend!!! Sorry I haven’t introduced myself yet!!

Orutoku?: The name’s Katsuo Orutoku! [Adjusts sunglasses] Ultimate Security Guard, at your service!
Orutoku: Nice to meet you guys! Or, well, we’ve already met, Yoshida-kun, but still!

The two of them… certainly made for quite the pair. With Orutoku’s clean-cut, almost dorky jock look and Ryuumatsu’s tamely formal clothing choices, any reasonable person would probably think they’d hate each other. Not that it mattered - I sure as hell wasn’t warming up much to either of them, so that compensates well enough.

Hibiki: Hm. You two know each other or something? You’re awfully… [Squints] Close.

Orutoku: Oh, no, no, no. I’m not a bailiff or prison guard or anything fancy like that, so I can’t imagine we’ve ever seen each other before in our lives, actually! Some people are just real buddy material.

Orutoku smiled as he threw an arm around Ryuumatsu’s shoulders.
Orutoku: [Grins] Ain’t that right, Ryuumatsu-kun?

Ryuumatsu: …Precisely. I’d appreciate it if you’d… ever so kindly remove your arm from around me, however.

Orutoku: Ah! My bad! [Salutes] It won’t happen again, sir.

Yoshida: [Leaning over to Orutoku; hushed] Hey. I’m always up for hugs if you wanna give one.

Orutoku: [Beams] I’ll keep that in mind!!!

Ryuumatsu: Do whatever you like. Regarding the two of us knowing each other, I doubt I would have seen Orutoku-san even if he were a bailiff. Very few of the cases I take warrant me going to court… Largely, the work I tackle is corporate. Commercial.

Orutoku: Really? I didn’t even know there was such a big difference!

Ryuumatsu: [Folds arms] There is, make no mistake about it. The dealings of criminal cases are quite different from much other work.

Ryuumatsu: I have taken a fair few criminal cases myself, and there’s no question I could, if I wished, become a successful prosecutor or something of the sort, but yes. Most of my cases are civil.

Sumire, who’d been observing from halfway into the pool, finally spoke up. Ryuumatsu twitched just at the sound of her voice. He clearly hadn’t been looking forward to speaking with her again.

Sumire: Like on Judge Judy?

Ryuumatsu: [Glares; eye twitches] …I have no idea what that is, but fine.
Talk about a wet blanket. The guy’s smart in the blandest, most basic sense, but he’s also all talk. At least his buddy knows he isn’t the one in charge here.

Ryuumatsu: Anyway, I have much better things to do than to stand here losing brain cells. Orutoku-san, if you could meet me at the buffet in five minutes?

Orutoku: Of course, sir!

And just like that, he was off. Orutoku waved him goodbye cheerily before turning back around.

Sumire: [Hand to temple] Good riddance.

Hibiki: Tell me about it.

Orutoku: …?

Orutoku: [Fiddling with sunglasses] Uh, anyway! I’m sorry, I don’t think I know your name, ma’am!

Hibiki: Don’t call me ma’am. Or sir, for that matter. It’s Hibiki Kioku. Ultimate Psychologist.

Orutoku: [Bows] My apologies, Kioku-kun! It’s great to meet you! I hope you have a good time aboard the S.S. Despair!

Hibiki: The what? Are you a staff member here or something?

Orutoku: Ah! No, I’m just as lost as everyone else... It just says the name on the side of the ship. Bent over the edge to see it, yeah?

Sumire: The S.S., you say?

Orutoku: That’s right!

Orutoku: [Shoulders slumping] A-Ah… Is that an issue…?

Sumire: …Not at all. You’re fine, Orutoku-san.

Orutoku: [Wipes forehead] Phew! Well, let me know if there’s anything up! I’m always happy to lend a helping hand!!!

Yoshida: [Smiles] Same to you, Orutoku-san.

Sumire: Seconded!

Hibiki: …

Yoshida glanced over to me. After a moment, Sumire did too. They were both followed by Orutoku, who very clearly was just following their gazes and had no clue what was going on.

Ugh. If I have to play nice to keep myself out of hot water, then fine. No point in having everyone on my back all the time…

Hibiki: … [Shrugs] Same here, duh.

Orutoku: Aw! Thank you so much, guys! [Thumbs up] I promise I won’t let you down!

Sumire: I’m sure you won’t, don’t worry. You seem like a reliable dude.

Sumire shot a glance in my direction as she said that. I returned it with a half-lidded stare.
Hibiki: [Looking blankly at Sumire] Super reliable.

Orutoku: I’m so glad you think so! You seem exactly the same way, Sumire-kun! And Yoshida-kun too!

Hibiki: And me?

Orutoku: Urp… Y-Yep! You too, Kioku-kun!!!!


Orutoku: Ha ha! Yeah! It, uh, so is!!!!

**Could this guy be any worse at lying? God, he’s gonna be so fun to mess with.**

Orutoku: [Tugging on neckerchief] W-Well anyway, I should probably go find Ryuumatsu-kun before he gets upset… Great to meet you guys, though! A-And I’ll make sure to tell Ryuumatsu-kun your name, Kioku-kun!

Sumire: Ugh, he didn’t even ask when he was introducing himself, did he. Typical.

Orutoku: I’m sure he just forgot… Ryuumatsu-kun’s a nice guy, y’know? U-Uh, not that I don’t respect your opinion or anything like that! I—

Sumire: —It’s cool, Orutoku-san. I know you’re trying your best.

Yoshida: He’s probably just acting out ‘cause he’s stressed… Can’t really blame him, what with, uh. [Leans back; glances up] Y’know.

Orutoku: Right! You’re right. [Looks up at the dome] I’m sure that there’s a reasonable and totally safe explanation for this… And if not, then I guess that’s what we’ve got a security guard here for,
right? It’ll be fine.

Orutoku: [Slaps forehead] AH! But it won’t be if I’m late to meet up with Ryuumatsu-kun!!! I should go!! Sorry to cut things short!

Sumire: No worries, Orutoku-san. Good luck dealing with the eel.

Yoshida: Yeah! See you around!

Orutoku: [Bouncing on toes] Thank you so much! Seeya!!!

Aaand just like that, he was off. I watched him enter a structure towards the front of the ship as Sumire and Yoshida continued to chat for a moment about something completely irrelevant to me (and therefore worthless), then spotted Ryuumatsu making his way over a minute or two later. Jackass.

As Yoshida and Sumire’s conversation came to a close, I tuned back in. Finally, Yoshida turned to address me.

Yoshida: So… Anywhere you think we should go next? I, uh… [Squinting] I think I can see someone over by the bar?

Sumire turned to look over as Yoshida laxly lifted a finger in the direction of a man who’d seemingly just wandered over to lean against the wall. Even if he was too far away to make out in any detail, I could at least see that he was dressed in what was clearly a very garish orange coat. The sneer on Sumire’s face as she spotted him was worse than any I’d seen from her yet.

Sumire: Oh, that guy. Haven’t met him yet?

Yoshida: I… Don’t think I have, no.

Sumire: You really are lucky, aren’tcha? Heads up. He’s a jerk.
Yoshida: Oh jeez… Um, okay. Thanks for the warning.

Hibiki: Jesus. We’re leaving that guy for later.

Yoshida: Really? I mean… We’re gonna have to meet him at some point, so…

Hibiki: Yes, really. [Turns to Sumire] Anywhere else on this thing worth checking out?

Sumire: Well, if you don’t want to go over to the buffet… [Turns] There’s an area up the back of the ship that I was checking out before. I’m sure there’d be more people up there by now.

As if on cue, a loud bang came from the back of the ship, followed by a chorus of laughter. A… ball of some sort, whatever it was, came soaring up in an arc, presumably only to fall onto the sand below.

Hibiki: …Sure seems like it.

Yoshida: Sounds like they’re having a good time, at least!

Hibiki: Yeah. Well, I’m heading over there, then. [Waving noncommittally] Bye, Sumire.

Yoshida: Ah! [Waves] See you around, Sumire-san!


As we wandered over to the ship’s rear, I slowed down to fall into step with Yoshida. He looked over to me and quirked his head.

Hibiki: You and Sumire friends or something?
Yoshida: Um… Sorta? We’ve only spoken twice. I just like, y’know, being nice. Feels good.

Hibiki: Hm? Why aren’t you that nice to me, then?

Yoshida: Because I don’t think you’d appreciate it.

Hibiki: ...Yeah, fair enough.

As we neared the end of the deck, I quickly took note of the twin sets of stairs flanking either side of the bigger staircase I’d come down before. Unlike the central staircase, these sets were out in the open - each of them only seemed to be a single storey tall, both heading back to some space tucked away from sight.

Every few moments, I could hear the sharp, quick click of what seemed to be golf balls being hit into the air. A commotion loud enough to be heard from the main deck would pick up afterwards each time.

Hibiki: Alright, well. I’m heading up. I guess you’re going to follow me.

Yoshida: Um… That was the idea, yeah. I thought this was a thing we were doing.

Hibiki: *Thing?

Yoshida: Mm. Y’know, like… A sidekick thing. I follow you around, give mediocre one-liners, say some weird shit that ends up inexplicably foreshadowing things that neither of us had any idea were ever actually gonna happen… I thought it could be a nice change of pace.

Hibiki: What the hell are you talking about.

Yoshida: Ugh… [Shakes head] You know what, it doesn’t really matter. You aren’t telling me to leave, are you?

Hibiki: [ Shrugs] Meh. You could be a lot worse.
With a slight nod at Yoshida, I started the hike up the staircase. When I finally found myself on the landing, I was faced with what was... actually the most peaceful scene I’d come across so far. Four people stood around a lush astroturf-laden minigolf course, each with a classy, polished putt in hand.

One, a blue-haired girl who managed to be about 5’5” and still the second tallest there, was grinning and putting balls confidently into the hole, the gakuran over her shoulders swaying as she did so. A much more petite girl with dark eyes and darker makeup stood under a small shade sail to the side, looking on with mild amusement. The long-haired, short-statured boy beside her was bent down and fiddling with a golf tee on the floor.

The final person there towered over the other three - he had to be the better part of seven feet tall. With his placid aura, turtleneck sweater, and soft platinum locks, though, it was pretty clear that his broad build probably wasn’t owed to the kind of meatheaded shit I might’ve expected otherwise.

As the shorter boy placed a golf ball on the tee and stood up, putt in hand, his face finally became clear. If the masses of lavender hair and his already esoteric fashion choices hadn’t been weird enough, his eyes were entirely covered by a violet strip of fabric that seemed to be holding most of his hair in a ponytail at the back of his head.

Yoshida: [Quirks head] Is he, uh... Blindfolded?

Hibiki: Oh come the fuck on. There’s no way he can hit the ball. He can’t fucking see.

Yoshida: [Squints] Hrm... Maybe he’s the Ultimate Golf Pro or something?

Hibiki: Right, because that’d make seeing through a blindfold sooo much easier.

Yoshida: H-Hey...
A mischievous cackle cut through my conversation with Yoshida. I turned to watch as the blindfolded guy grinned in a way that could only be described as devilish.

???: [Tightens blindfold] Fuhuhuhu… Now, ladies and gent, if you would please keep your eyes on the ball…!

The kid took a step back, raised his putt high in the air behind him, and swung faster than what should probably have been possible. There was a harsh crack as metal met plastic, and the ball went rocketing upwards.

A sudden clang rang out through the dome as the ball crashed into it and plummeted to the sand. The blindfolded guy broke out into hysterics as the gakuran-sporting girl looked around in complete bafflement.

???: [Pretends to wipe a tear from blindfold] Oh man, did that just hit the sky?! Pfft—

???: [Fumbling with brim of cap] Ohhhh my gosh. It- It didn’t break, did it? PLEASE don’t let the dome break. That— I mean— Th-That’s the only thing separating us from about t-ten trillion TONNES of water!!!

From underneath the shade tarp, the second girl smirked a little.

???: I dunno, being crushed by however many metric tonnes of ocean sounds like a pretty metal way to die. Beats going up in flames.

???: … [Raises eyebrow] Also, don’t you think ten trillion is kind of overkill? There’s still plenty of natural light coming down here. We can’t be that deep.

???: Gasp! There is? I couldn’t see it at all!

???: Hm. Your blindfold wouldn’t have anything to do with that?

???: [Swoons despairingly] I can’t believe you would doubt me like that, Kim-san! Of course not. If
my eyes worked at all, I’m sure they’d be able to stare right through all solid objects and into the very soul of God.

Kim?: Well, if you ever manage that, let God know she’s a bitch and I want a refund on life. And a sick ass motorcycle, if she can pull that.

Still jittery and seemingly downtrodden, the gakuran girl sighed.

???: A bit of divine reassurance that we aren’t all doomed would be nice, too… [Looks up] This dome thing is pretty freaky.

Kim?: I’d’ve thought you of all people would love this, Hashikawa-san.

Hashikawa?: W-Well… I guess I like the view…

???: I don’t! It’s all just more and more eternal void! Very boring.

Kim?: [Snorts] Pffft. Hear that? Just be more like Alix over there. No need to take this whole thing so seriously. It’s probably a prank or some dumb shit like that… [Eyes widen] Or I had a really wild night out last night. That’d be wicked.

Hashikawa?: [Fists trembling] H-How can you…

Though she’d looked quite deeply upset for a short moment, Hashikawa seemed quick to reconsider. She backed down quietly, clutching her gakuran close around her hunched frame.

Hashikawa?: …No, um, you’re right. Sorry for stepping out of line.

Kim?: [Waves hand] It’s fine, girl. There are no lines. We live in anarchy.

Alix?: Ooh la la. Spicy.
Alix?: [Gasps] And HEY! Did nobody appreciate my awesome shot?

Hashikawa?: Shot?... OH! [Hits forehead] You mean the golf shot! [Under breath] Stupid, stupid, stupid!

Alix?: [Playfully] Aw, stupid? That’s a little harsh—

Hashikawa?: N-N-No! I didn’t mean, um- …

Alix?: …

Kim?: …

Hashikawa?: …It w- It was a good shot, yeah.

Hashikawa shuffled awkwardly, curling even further into herself under Kim’s gaze and blindfold guy’s… Well, whatever you could call him facing in her direction without actually being able to see anything. I considered saying something or maybe just laughing, but before I could, Yoshida made a point of creeping a few steps back down the stairs and very loudly re-entering as though he hadn’t been there to witness Hashikawa thoroughly embarrassing herself.

Yoshida: [Loudly] Oh my gosh, WHAT a surprise! Hi Kim-san!

Hibiki: Are you seriously doing this.

Yoshida: [Hushed] Shh! Yes! [Walking towards the group] It’s nice to see you again, haha! You should introduce us to your friends!

Kim?: [Meanders over] Oh. Hey, Yoshida-san. I’m sure they’ll do just fine introducing themselves…

Kim threw a glance over her shoulder to, for the first time since I’d arrived, acknowledge the
tall platinum-haired man standing silently to the side of the minigolf course.

Kim?: …Well, two outta three, at least.

Yoshida: He’s, uh… Really that unresponsive…?

Kim?: Yeah. Total space cadet… To be fair, he absolutely refused to shut up earlier. [Chuckles] Got a killer migraine trying to wrap my head around half the shit he was saying.

Hibiki: Sounds fun. Maybe he lobotomised himself.


Hibiki: How very non-specific and disconcerting.

Kim: [Winks] Yeah, I’m mysterious like that… In all seriousness, though, I’m the Ultimate Demolitionist.
Hibiki: Wow. You really do blow shit up, then.

Kim: Yyyup. [Clicks tongue] Used to do architecture for a family biz, decided I needed a change of scenery, now I’m here. Can’t say exploding anything is the only part of my job, but definitely the most exciting. At least from what I remember.

What she remembers? That’s… interesting.

Hibiki: What, you hazy on the details or something?
Kim: [Shrugs] I’m just groggy, man. I imagine you expected to wake up here just as much as I did. Still kinda getting my thoughts together, y’know?

Hibiki: That’s… fair.

???: Ohohoho! Are those some new disembodied voices I hear? Bonjouuurrr~!

There was a clatter as his golf club hit the floor, and then the kid in the blindfold - Alix, probably - came quickly bounding over. The bells tied to his ankles jingled obnoxiously along the way.

Lagging behind him, the other girl began to unsurely insert herself into the circle, too.

Alix?: [Rocking on feet] Hmm… You guys stopped talking. Am I facing the right way?

Kim: [Pats Alix?’s arm] Right here, buddy.

Alix?: Oh! Thanks! I almost thought you guys vanished into incorporeality for a sec. That’d make things REALLY interesting.

Hashikawa chuckled quietly, then cleared her throat as she caught me looking at her.

Hashikawa?: Ummm… Would you like to introduce yourselves? If it isn’t any trouble, of course…

Yoshida: Oh, yeah, sure! I’m Daichi Yoshida, Ultimate Luck. And this is my…


Yoshida: [Scratches ear, mutters] Acquaintance? That may be the nicest thing you’ve said in the twenty minutes I’ve known you!
Hibiki: And you’re complaining?

Yoshida: Nnnope.


Hibiki: Thanks, smartass. Any reason you chose to dress like a complete and utter clown when you woke up this morning?

Alix?: Funny story! I was inspired by you, actually. Don’t be too flattered.

Hibiki: Wouldn’t count on it.

Alix?: [Flops sleeves around] Oh, I won’t. I can’t count anyway.

You know, I’d almost believe that. At least this guy has a sense of humour… or is honest-to-God just exceedingly stupid and very, very proud of that fact.

Hashikawa?: Sh… Should I be concerned by that?

Alix?: Nah, don’t be. It’s just ‘cause I’m blind. Same reason I can’t read.

Hashikawa?: Oh! Well, that makes sense.

It… really doesn’t.

Yoshida: [Smiling awkwardly] Um… Would you guys like to introduce yourselves?

Hashikawa?: [Jolts up] Oh!
Just briefly, Hashikawa closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath. When she made eye contact with me again, it was with a salute and a bright, confident grin.

Hashikawa?: Alright! Yo, I’m Tsuruko Hashikawa, Ultimate Sailor!

- TSURUKO HASHIKAWA: ULTIMATE SAILOR -

Hashikawa: Totally awesome to meet you guys!
…Interesting.

Yoshida: That’s a really cool talent, Hashikawa—

Hibiki: —Do you know anything about all of this?

Hashikawa: Eh— Huh?

Hibiki: You’re a sailor, and we’re trapped on a ship. It follows that you might know something useful.

Hashikawa: [Skittishly plays with cap’s brim] Oh! Oh. Haha, well, um… I know that it’s definitely a cruise ship, if that helps, but I don’t know anything about why we’re all here. Orrrr who did this, or what’s going to happen to us, or—

Kim: —Hashikawa-san.

Hashikawa: AH! Um, sorry! I just… Ugh…

Yoshida: It’s fine, Hashikawa-san! Take your time.

I watched on for a moment as Hashikawa anxiously hid her eyes behind the brim of her cap and looked down to the floor. Whatever confidence she’d tried to muster up for her introduction clearly hadn’t gotten her very far.

Hashikawa: [Inhales deeply] Uh. I’m really sorry. I’m usually not like this, I swear, I just…

For a moment, Hashikawa glanced up to the dome with a look in her eyes that was nothing short of completely hopeless. Before she could break down into tears, she squeezed her eyes shut tight and resumed staring holes into the floorboards.

Hashikawa: Um. B-But yeah, I don’t know anything about this… [Glances up] It’s a pretty nice ship
though, right…?

Hibiki: Eh, sure.

Hashikawa: I’m… [Smiles] Really glad you think so! I’m used to being part of the coast guard - maritime security and such - so I don’t really get to see ships like this up close that often. It’s beautiful, though!

Kim: Mm. I may not be an architect, but I can appreciate the tastes of whoever designed this… Whoever stuck us here was looking out for us, I guess. I’m not even mad they probably drugged me to get me here.

Hibiki: Speak for yourself… And hey, that means you can’t remember how you got here either, then?

Kim: Nah, course not. Doesn’t seem like anyone I’ve spoken to can.

**Interesting… Good to know that isn’t just me.**

Yoshida: I, uh… Can’t really say this is great either. [Whimpers] I hope someone’s at least taking care of Mikeko-chan…

Hibiki: Who?

Yoshida: …My cat.

Alix?: Don’t worry, cats pretty much exist on a separate plane of being from us. I bet she’ll just summon some sort of eldritch forces to feed her if things get dire!

Alix?: [Pats Kim’s shoulder] Seriously though, I’m sorry. I’m sure she’ll be alright.

Kim: Alix, he’s over there. That’s my shoulder.
Alix?: Oh, I know.

Yoshida: [Chuckles half-heartedly] You’re right. She’ll probably be totally fine.

Hashikawa: Mhm! A-And with any luck we won’t be in here long anyway, haha…

Kim: I dunno. I might stick around if there’s food.

Hibiki: Once again, speak for yourself.

Kim: I did.

Hibiki: [Grits teeth] …So you did.

Alix?: [Rocks back and forth on heels] Hhmmm… I feel like we’re forgetting something!

Hashikawa: We are…?

Alix?: Yeah! Or maybe it’d be more accurate to say someONE?

Hibiki: …Dude, if you’re talking about your introduction, forget it. Your name is Alix. It’s been acknowledged.

Alix?: Aww. You really aren’t gonna let me do the whole thing?

Hibiki: Why w—

Alix?: Reaaaally?
Hibiki: …

Alix?: …Pretty please? S’il vous plaît?

Hibiki: Will you stop haphazardly assaulting me with French?

Alix?: [Sticks up nose] Peut-être.

Hibiki: So that’s a no, then. [Turns to walk away] Guess I’ve seen everything here—

Alix?: Noooo! I’ll stop if it’ll make you happy!!!

Hibiki: [Turns back around] …You promise?

Alix?: Absolutely! Without a doubt! I’ll never speak another lick of it for as long as I live!

Hibiki: … [Narrows eyes] Go on, then.

Alix?: [Fist pumps] Yesss! [Claps hands] From the glimmering city of Paris, I’m Alix Murasaki, Ultimate Exorcist and professional gargoyle enthusiast and imitator!
Yoshida: Um, what was that last bit?

Alix: Oh, I just like to sit on ledges and watch people sometimes. Rethink all the choices I’ve ever made in my life. It’s fun!

Kim: [Raises eyebrow] “Watch”...?

Alix: …Ah. Haha! Slip of the tongue! Ce n’est pas grave.
Hibiki: Fucker.

Alix: [Smiles] Branleur!…

With little warning, Alix’s grin slipped off his face as he, well, faced intensely in my direction. I’d say he was staring if not for the obvious.

After a short moment of what felt like him completely raiding my consciousness through an eyeless gaze, he spoke up abruptly.

Alix: …Hey, Hibiki-san. Don’t freak out, but I think you might be possessed.

Hibiki: What the fuck?

Alix: No, seriously. I’m getting some vibes from you… Something just doesn’t sit right.

Yoshida: Possessed? Like, by a demon or something?

Alix: Oh, non. The demon part is just their personality. Ghosts haven’t got anything to do with that.

Hashikawa: Wait… Wh- Huh? Ghosts don’t exist, right…?

Kim: Don’t get yourself worked up over it. He’s just messing around.

Alix: [Waves sleeves] I’m totally not!

Yoshida: …Alix-san is right about one thing, at least. The spooky feeling coming off of Kioku-san are just from their chilling personality.
Hibiki: [Withering] Thanks for the valiant defence, Yoshida.

Yoshida: [Hand to mouth] Anything for my wonderful acquaintance.

Yoshida: …Oh! I’ve been meaning to ask, Alix-san… What do you actually do as an exorcist?

Alix: Well, how can I explain this… Have you even read Ao no Exorcist?

Yoshida: [Clasps hands in pockets; quirks head] Uh… No?

Alix: Oh cool, me neither! Y’know, since I’m blind.

Yoshida: R… Right…

Hibiki: Why the hell do you need a blindfold then?

Alix: Oh, Hibiki-san… It’s a fucking fashion statement, mon ami.

Hibiki: I know you’re throwing random French in just to piss me off now, Murasaki.

Alix: Oui, exactement! Does it annoy you?

Hibiki: Couldn’t care less.

Alix: Then why’d you ask?

Hibiki: ...Ugh. Just cut it out, would you? I thought we had a deal.

Alix: Whatever floats your boat!
Hashikawa looked out longingly to the front of the cruise ship.

Hashikawa: [Under her breath] Aw man, that’s a good pun…

Hibiki: [Frowning] …

The three people I’d met so far seemed… tolerable, in the barest sense. Alix would be barred from that on account of being a total prick, but at least he was able to keep up. Kim was fine, and Hashikawa’s more of a danger to herself than anyone else, anyway.

But of course, there was one person I’d yet to so much as speak to - the last of the four, standing isolated on the golf green with a hand to his chin, had been pretty much silent the whole time. Yoshida turned to talk to him, and I resigned myself to doing the same.

Yoshida: Uhh… Hi! I don’t know if you heard us earlier, but I’m Daichi Yoshida, and they’re—

Hibiki: Hibiki Kioku… Dunno why you’re bothering though, dude. He is so far gone.

???: …

Yoshida: …Um… Maybe you’re ri—

???: [Muttering, eyes closed] This is quite the predicament, is it not…?

Yoshida: …Huh?

???: Trapped on a ship by an unknown force with a crowd of what seems to be about sixteen others, most of whom appear to be approximately the same age… Given a title of ambiguous interpretation… It really is all very peculiar, would you not agree?
Hashikawa: Um… I would probably say so, I think…?

???: But who would have the means and motivation by which to execute this whole affair? And what exactly is it that we are expected to do here?

Hibiki: Great question.

Kim: Rouvin-kun?

Rouvin?: Hm? Oh, Kim. I was lost in thought.

That’s what he’s like when he’s just thinking out loud? Jeez, this guy’s gonna be bundles of fun in conversation, isn’t he.

Rouvin?: Ah, Kim, you might have an opinion on this. By what means would one be able to collect seventeen people and trap them in what is apparently a glass dome underwater which contains a multi-million dollar cruise ship?

Kim: …Well…

Rouvin?: Is that even the truth of the situation, though? It would presumably take quite the collection of resources in order to achieve such a feat. It is entirely possible that what we perceive as the sea is but a mere illusion of screens - but then, if we believe that it is real, does that, in turn, make it so?

Hashikawa: Umm…

Rouvin?: Either way, why would we need to be under the sea, presuming this was a matter of necessity? It seems somewhat excessive, though if this operation is one meant to be hidden from the public eye, it is entirely possible that it was one of the only options available, yes?

Alix: Hhhoho…
Rouvin?: And how, pray tell, were we even abducted - or, if not abducted, brought here by other means? Is there a possibility that this was voluntary, even if not for each of us? When did this occur, and why and how do we not know? Why us specifically? Is there any reason to prey upon any one specific demographic, and teenagers, no less? The group present here is not one typical of most cruise ship passengers. Are we and the ship connected, or are we two separate concepts, two individual identities, finally brought together by the actions of whoever abandoned us here?

Yoshida: Uh…

Rouvin?: Are we even truly abandoned? Or is it possible that the one conducting this whole event - the mastermind, for lack of a better term - is still very much present on this ship? What if they were to have inside forces within our group? Or what if they, themself, are the inside force?

Hibiki: Oooookay. Who is this guy.

Kim: Ah. This is Rouvin Minerva, Ultimate Philosopher. Don’t ask how I managed to get that much info out of him, don’t think that’s happening again.
Hibiki: That would explain a lot.

Rouvin: …

Rouvin: …Kioku, is it?

Hibiki: Uh- …Yeah.
Rouvin: You are a psychologist, correct? Surely you have some opinion on why someone would choose this location in terms of the effect it has on the mentality of those trapped here?

...Fuck. So he had been listening, then.

I neither knew the answer nor did I care to, but I refused to let myself be shown up so easily. Better just wing it.

Hibiki: The dome is, uh… Meant to be somewhat claustrophobic. Closing people into a space they can’t get out of makes them feel, like… Helpless, or whatever.

Alix: Water pressure takes on a new meaning!

Hashikawa: [Tugs at seifuku tie] Agh, dangit! More water puns?

Rouvin: I appreciate your professional insight, Kioku. The question is, then, what would prompt someone to want to make us feel so vulnerable? When one feels threatened or as though the power is out of their control, they can often become hostile or uncooperative, but likewise, it can also bring people together… Interesting. It seems we’ve encountered something of a dilemma, does it not?

Hibiki: Guess you have a point.

This guy was actually… more insightful than most, for what it’s worth. Now that I was thinking about it, what he’d said was right - no matter how fuck-off huge the dome was, most people probably felt trapped being down here.

It sure would be useful if I could remember anything… I’d seemingly gotten everything I could out of this lot, anyway. About time to move on.

Hibiki: Well, I’m gonna head down to the buffet now. You’re coming, Yoshida?

Yoshida: Of course I am!
Hibiki: Oooof course you are.

Kim: [Hand on hip] Have a good time, you two. I’m around if you wanna shoot the shit.

Hashikawa: Heck yeah, me too! But, uh… What’s that mean, exactly?

Alix: No clue, haha! Don’t ask me any questions!

Rouvin: ...How did the mastermind get an undamaged ship to the bottom of the ocean?

Alix: Mmm. Like that one! My brain hurts.

Hibiki: Yeah, I’m making a break for it. See you, guys.

Alix: Ah! Leaving so soon, are we? Well, that’s alright! [Grins; waves hand above head] Au revoir, connard! Je vais manquer ton suave cul!

Hashikawa: Y-Yeah, whatever he said!

Kim: Seeya, dorks.

Yoshida: Uhh, bye everybody! Nice meeting you all!

With a final nod of acknowledgement, I began to stroll away the opposite way I’d come. Yoshida caught up, padding along behind me quietly as I disembarked down the other set of stairs back to the deck.

Yoshida: Soooo… Where to now, acquaintance?
Hibiki: Cut it out.

Yoshida: You kiiinda brought this upon yourself, you know.

Hibiki: ...Fine, just don’t make me regret keeping you around. I was going to go see what’s in that building over there.

I pointed to the wooden structure at the ship’s front. From behind me, Yoshida murmured softly in understanding.

Yoshida: Ohh, yeah! That’s the, umm… the buffet, bar and dining area, I think. The buffet’s the first thing you see when you walk in, if you want us to start there and work our way around…?

Hibiki: Yeah, sure.

As I made my way across the deck, I looked over the ship’s railing, past the pool lounges and shade sails, and out to the sea beyond. What Rouvin had said crossed my mind.

Why would anyone trap us here? And what were they going to do? It didn’t make sense to just leave us here like this with nothing to do, so something must be up.

…God, I hated not knowing things.

Opening the doors to the buffet, I came face to face with even more condescendingly luxurious furnishing.

Plush buffet seats lined one wall, each accompanied by tables of the same polished wood from, well, everywhere else. On the other wall, separated from the booths by a hallway of shining pearly tiles, was a curving line of self-service platters. Though the foods in them weren’t the incredible quality I’d probably expect of a cruise ship, they didn’t look half bad - pizzas, pastas, rices, salads and different meat dishes were all neatly arranged in the display boxes. Further along the line was a freezer full of what looked to be desserts, and just by that was another booth for making hot drinks coupled with a fridge for cooled ones.
As long as this didn’t run out, I don’t think I’d have trouble being stuck down here… Was what I thought for all of about four blissful seconds until I heard an all-too-familiar voice from around the corner.

Ryuumatsu: You know, I’m not sure I appreciate your tone, mister. This whole affair isn’t exactly a walk in the park. [Sniffs] Not that it should be all too huge a hassle for someone with my prestige…

Hibiki: Oh God.

**Perking up, Yoshida leaned forward a little.**

Yoshida: Hm? New people?

Hibiki: Yeah, maybe. Ryuumatsu too.

Yoshida: Ah…

Yoshida: …This might be too much to ask, but… Can you try to be friendly? Just a bit? You… weren’t exactly stellar with Kim and her friends back there.

Hibiki: …We’ll see.

**Yoshida smiled at me, gently nudging me with his elbow. I scoffed and turned back to listen in as a new voice spoke up.**

???: Ahh, right! Prestige! [Snaps fingers] Your mommy paid for your tuition at some sparkly upmarket university, so the moment you go missing the whole country’ll be prancin’ around like headless chickens tryin’ to find you, right? Hallelujah. We’re saved.

Ryuumatsu: Well- Well yes! Exactly! Is there an issue with that, o-or would you rather be stuck down here for good?!—
Orutoku: [Urgently] Ah, c’mon, guys! We’re all friends here! N-No need to fight!

???: [Chuckles] Don’t worry your pretty little acorn-lookin’ head, trophy boy. This is a completely civilised discussion your friend and I are havin’ here.

Careful not to draw the trio’s attention, I inched further around the corner. The first thing to strike me when the group came into view was the almost threateningly orange coat draped over the edge of a buffet seat, its wearer obscured from view save for a pair of sandal-clad feet kicked up on the table.

Sumire’s earlier words of caution quickly came to mind. I grimaced.

???: [Droll] To answer your question, Your Honour, there’s absolutely no issue at all. Besides, being stuck down here can’t be too bad if it’s with this ‘ere buddy of yours, right?

Orutoku: [Scuffing boot on floor] Aww, shucks… You really think so?

???: Course. Just ‘cuz I’m not Mr. Plutocrat over here doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate some good ol’ fashioned company! So whaddaya say? We pals?

Ryuumsatsu: Absolutely not. Whatever it is you think you’re up to, I can’t imagine that it’s anything good. Even if I may not know your name, I still very much know your type.

???: [Coy] My type, huh? My, my. Didn’t know you cared so much about my love life.

Ryuumsatsu: I-! Y-You know that’s not at all what I meant!

???: Hey, ‘s’all in good fun.

???: [Sits up] …And by the way, do you wanna introduce me to the peanut gallery?
Swathes of seaweed green hair poked up from over the buffet seating as the man peered out at me with heavy-lidded, slit eyes. Then, flustered and flabbergasted, Ryuumatsu shot around to face me. Orutoku waved eagerly from the back.

Ryuumsatsu: [Red-faced] I- What are you doing just… Just standing there gawking like that!?

Hibiki: Aw. Busted.

Yoshida: Sorry, Ryuumsatsu-san. We don’t mean to intrude.

Ryuumsatsu: It’s… [Scrunches nose] Fine. It’s not like this conversation was going anywhere particularly productive, anyway.

???: I dunno, I was enjoyin’ it.

Orutoku: [Thumbs up] Me too! …Kind of!!!

Hibiki: That’d make three of us. So, who’s this joker?

Ryuumsatsu: I can assure you, I’d like to know just as much as anyone else. [Sneers] It’s not my fault that this impudent delinquent over here is as stingy with his personal information as he is with basic human decency.

???: Ey, cut me some slack! This is all just one big misunderstanding.

The man flashed me a carnivorous grin, his rows of stark white teeth even sharper than his piercingly invasive gaze.

???: I’m not lookin’ to get on anyone’s bad side, promise.

???: The whatsits?

Ryuumatsu: Th- Wgh- Th-Those teeth!

???: Ah? Nah. [Taps teeth with nail] Unfortunately for all of us, these ain’t fake. S’what I like to call “cruel and unusual genetics”.

Ryuumatsu: [Staring blankly; frowning] …

Yoshida: Y… You ever bite your tongue?

???: [Slaps knee] Oh boy, do I ever! Hurts like a bitch. You wouldn’t fuckin’ believe it.

Ryuumatsu: Yes, well… I’m sure we’d all be appreciative if you’d learn to bite your tongue a little more often.

???: …Wow. Forget cruel and unusual, I guess we’re just divin’ right into sadism.

Hibiki: Don’t make me walk out before I even get your name.

???: Right, right. My apologies. You would be?


Yoshida: And uh, Daichi Yoshida, Ultimate Luck. It’s nice to meet you.

The stranger offered a handshake, and Yoshida took it. From the way he flinched, the man’s grip was clearly too firm for comfort.
That’s… pretty on point, what with the teeth and all.

Ryuumatsu: [Taken aback] I beg your pardon?

Toramoto: Hm? It’s Hideki Toramoto. Did you not hear?
Ryuumatsu: I heard that perfectly clearly, thank you very much. You know exactly what it is I take issue with here.

Toramoto: Can’t say I do, actually. Mind spelling it out for a poor uneducated oaf such as myself?

Ryuumatsu: I- RRGH! You- You mean to tell me you’re a loan shark?!

Orutoku: Ryuumatsu-kun, sir—

Toramoto: That I do! [Half-lidded grin] Ain’t gonna be an issue, is it?

Ryuumatsu: You’re despicable. I-I can’t believe I’m actually stuck down here with the likes of you. Feh… We’re all lucky my expertise in court has given me enough experience dealing with your sort.

Hibiki: I thought you said you weren’t a criminal attorney.

Ryuumatsu: W-Well—!

Toramoto: Look, Mr. Lawyer sir, I’m not askin’ for trouble. [Leans forward; hand to chin] In fact, I’d really like it if we could all just sing kumbaya and get along just dandy, y’know…?

Orutoku: That sounds good to me!

Ryuumatsu: Well, I…

Beside me, Yoshida twitched and threw a quick glance back to the door. I followed his gaze.

Across the room, unnoticed by the trio of others, a lethargic-looking girl quietly shuffled her way inside. She glanced up at me without a word, surveyed her surroundings with a tired yet
calculating sweep, then resumed writing in what appeared to be a small spiral notebook while filling up a plate from the buffet at the same time.

Whatever. I blinked and turned back around.

Ryuumatsu: [Adjusting bangs] I... *suppose* we can meet some kind of truce here, if that’s what you’re looking for. I do... pride myself on my civility.

Toramoto: What a stellar idea, Ryuumatsu-san! I applaud your innovation.

Ryuumatsu: [Half-smiling] Heh, well... [Eyes snap open] W-Wait, you’re just being sarcastic, aren’t you? You conniving little—

Orutoku: A TRUCE IT IS THEN, HAHA!!! Aren’t you so glad we’re all FRIENDS!!!


Ryuumatsu: *Indeed.*

**Ryuumatsu looked away for a moment as though to leave. Before he could, though, he quickly jolted up.**

Ryuumatsu: Hold on. If you’re a loan shark, what on Earth was all of that- that *nonsense* earlier about my inheritance?

Toramoto: Hm? What about it?

Ryuumatsu: W-Well, you’re supposedly the best of our generation at *illegally scamming unwitting clients out of their hard-earned savings.* I can’t imagine you’re just barely scraping by.

Toramoto: Meh. The economy’s a sham anyway. And besides, I’m not lookin’ to get rich quick or nothin’. Wouldn’t dress like I just hauled myself outta a dumpster if I was rollin’ in dough, would I?
Though he’d had little to say until now, when Yoshida spoke up it was with an undertone of tension in his otherwise calm voice. He corrected his slouch just a little as he stared Toramoto dead-on.

Yoshida: So… what, then. Is toying with people like that just… some kind of joke?

Toramoto: … [Cracks a smirk] Let’s just say it’s my private business. Ain’t no big deal, capiche?

Hibiki: Alright, you fuckin’ cryptid.

Yoshida: [Furrows brow] …Sure.

Ryuumatsu: …

???: …So are you all finally done with your flame war? It’s… [Yawns] kind of noisy, you know...

I and everyone else turned to the far wall of the buffet, where the girl I’d seen before had made herself comfortable in one of the plush restaurant booths. She stared forward blankly, seemingly indifferent to whatever looks the others were giving her.

???: That’s a yes, then… Good to know. I can… [Scribbles in notepad] …work efficiently regardless of background noise, but it’s suboptimal.

Toramoto: Sorry to rain on your… dreary and morose parade, kiddo, but this is a public space. Prooooobably not the quietest spot onboard.

Orutoku: But if us quieting down a little would make you happy, I’m sure we can all manage that! Right, guys?

Hibiki: [Muttering] If it means getting the smartass brigade to shut up…
I flinched as Yoshida delivered a rough jab to my side.

Yoshida: [Hissing] Be nice!

Hibiki: I could ask you to do the same!

Ryuumatsu: [Raising eyebrow] What was that?

Hibiki: Oh, nothing. Just trying to be quiet for her sake. [Points at ???] It’s common courtesy.

Orutoku: Oh, whispering! That’s a great idea! [Whispering loudly] Is this any better, ma’am?

???: [Writing in notepad] …

Orutoku: [Whispering loudly] Great! I don’t think she can—

???: [Writing in notepad] That’s really… not much quieter.

Orutoku: Ah, jeez! I’m really sorry!!!

???: [Writing in notepad] It’s fine.

Shooting the stranger a glance, Ryuumatsu sniffled, sticking his nose up in the air as he glanced around the room.

Ryuumatsu: Hm. Well, I wasn’t intending to stick around here much longer anyway. I’ve seen all I needed to, after all.

Toramoto: Aw. Did you really get tired of my effervescent beauty so quickly? I’m hurt, Your Majesty.
Ryuumatsu: … [Unimpressed] I’ve elected to not speak to you until further notice.

Toramoto: [Nods] Mm, I understand. Not everyone can deal with the five feet six inches of hunky Hollywood superstar that is yours truly. It’s okay if you need to take a step back and catch your breath.

Orutoku: [Eyes light up] AH!!! Do you like American movies, Toramoto-kun?

Toramoto: Oh, you know. I dabble in streamin’ the occasional late night flick. Only with the most legal of methods, of course. [Draws finger over chest] Cross my heart.

Orutoku: Awesome! Got any favourites?

Toramoto: I’unno. Titanic was pretty good.

Yoshida: [Furrows brow] Hits a little close to home now that we’re down here, though…

Orutoku: Aww! Well, once we’re all out of here I can show you my movie collection! I had the whole thing downloaded on my phone, but, uh… [Turns pockets inside out] I’ve only got this card thingy now. Guess I lost it somewhere?

**Right, the cards… I should ask about th—**

???: You didn’t lose it.

Orutoku: Ah?!

**For the first time since she’d walked in, the girl looked up to make eye contact - if only for a moment. She quickly went back to surveying her notes as she spoke.**

???: My laptop and phone are both gone. The few others I’ve collected data from have said the…
[Writes in notepad] …same. Conclusion: they’ve been taken from us.

Yoshida: Ah, I noticed that when I woke up…! [Pats pockets] None of you have them either, then?...

Ryuumatsu: I… If this is a case of theft, I think we all know who’s most likely responsible.

Toramoto: Hey, don’t look at me! [Holds hands up] I ain’t got nothin’!

Ryuumatsu: Is that so? Then I’m sure you wouldn’t mind taking off your coat, would you?

Toramoto: I thought you had elected to not speak to me until further notice?

Ryuumatsu: Rrrgh…

Hibiki: Wanna know what I think?

Yoshida: W—

Hibiki: Yes you do. Anyway, whoever stuck us down here took them. Unless you’re saying that was Toramoto too, Ryuumatsu.

Ryuumatsu: [Skeptically] Would any of you really be all that surprised if it was?

Orutoku: Sorry, sir, but I would be! We’re buds!

Ryuumatsu: You are not “buds”.

Toramoto: Nah, we are.
Ryuumatsu: Why you—

Across the room, the as-of-yet unnamed girl sunk in on herself as she put a hand up to her ear and kept writing. Wordlessly, Yoshida grabbed my hand and nodded to her before gently dragging me across the room.

With Ryuumatsu and Toramoto having yet another one-sided squabble in the background, Yoshida shuffled into the booth seat across from the girl and offered a smile.

Yoshida: Hey! Sorry about them, they uh… Are just a little rowdy…?

???: …It’s fine. I… [Yawns] I’m used to it.

???: …If they’re gonna… keep being loud, though, they may as well introduce themselves already…

Hibiki: Pfft. Good luck getting them to settle down enough to do that. Ryuumatsu would jump into a frenzy if someone breathed near him wrong.

Yoshida: Hey, don’t be r… Actually, I can’t really disagree with that. [Sighs] I’m sure he’ll settle down. This whole thing is probably just really stressful for him, or something.

???: That makes sense… Anyway, I’m in the middle of something.

Yoshida: Oh! Sor—

???: [Flips notepad page] It’s… Akira Yousetsu, by the way.

Hibiki: Great. Hibiki Kioku, Psychologist. Don’t worry about him, he’s just some kid who keeps bothering peo—

I smirked as Yoshida shot me a weak glare and coughed over the end of my sentence.
Yoshida: I-I’m Daichi Yoshida, Ultimate Luck. It’s really nice to meet you!

Yousetsu: [Looks up] Yeah… You two are Ultimates?

Hibiki: Apparently.

Yoshida: Everyone here is, from what we’ve seen. I’m guessing you are too…?

Yousetsu: [Taps chin with pen] Mm… Mechatronics Engineer.
Yousetsu: [Goes back to writing] Uh, if you don’t mind…

Just like that, Yousetsu went back to quietly scribbling in her notepad. Yoshida looked up at me with a slight shrug, and got ready to get up.

…Know what? If he wants me to be nicer, that’s exactly what I’ll do.

Hibiki: [Leans on table] So Yousetsu. What’re you working on there?
Yousetsu: [Glances up] You… wanna hear about it? But it’s not done… It’d be better if you asked later.

Hibiki: Oh, no. In the spirit of friendliness, I insist.

Yoshida: [Buries face in hands] Ugh…

Yousetsu: Um… Okay…

Yousetsu: [Points to diagram, yawns] See this? This is for… a computer. The motors go over here, and this is the layout for the motherboard. That holds the CPU, which basically does all the processing. It’s all pretty complex, so I don’t have time to explain…

…Yeah, I don’t think I wanna hear it anyway.

Hibiki: Wow, cool.

Yoshida: [Nudges with elbow] Yeah, I agree, Kioku-san! It’s really cool! You definitely know a lot about this stuff.

Yousetsu: Well… It’s kind of my job…

Yoshida: R-Right, right.

Hibiki: Yoshida, in the further spirit of friendship, why don’t you tell her about yourself? Aren’t introductions supposed to be mutual? Honestly, how rude of you.

Yoshida gave me a withering smile with a very clear undertone of “fuck you, dude”. I smiled back.

Yoshida: Thanks for the reminder, Kioku-san…
Hibiki: Not a problem. It’s only my duty as the friendliest of friends. Osmosis from Orutoku, let’s call it.

Yousetsu: …

Yoshida: …Right. Well, um-

I looked over to see Yousetsu’s eyes fluttering closed, her head slowly lolling forward as she quickly started to fall towards the table. Yoshida grabbed her near-untouched plate of pizza out from under her right before her forehead made contact with the frigid wood.

Yoshida: Yousetsu-san…?

Yousetsu: …Snnnz…

Yoshida: …

Shooting me a wary glance, the luckster moved Yousetsu into a more comfortable position and snatched some slices of pizza from the plate as he stood up. He shovelled them into his mouth as he began to walk away sheepishly.

Yoshida: [Mouth full] Mmfh. Man, I rea’y ghope she’s oka-

Hibiki: [Snickers] Dude.

Yoshida: [Swallows hurriedly] S-She wasn’t eating it anyway, plus she just fell asleep!… [Waves pizza slice accusatorily] Also, hey! You’re the one who should be getting criticised right now! That’s not how you act friendly!

Hibiki: Oh, I’m so sorry. What would you like me to do?
Yoshida: I dunno, just… Show a little more interest in people other than yourself, I guess.

Hibiki: I’ve barely talked about myself at all.

Yoshida: [Bites into pizza] ...Youuu ha’e ah poinht…

Yoshida: [Gulps] Guh. Try being a little more upbeat, then? Show people you actually enjoy hearing about their lives!

Hibiki: Oh, I’ll show you alright. [Squints] I’ll show you...

Yoshida: … [Lowers pizza from mouth] The only thing you’re showing me right now is that you’re really good at implying you wanna kill me.

Hibiki: Heheheh… Yeaaaah.

Yoshida: ...I’m going to ignore that. Anyway, the door to the bar is just over there, so…

I followed Yoshida’s gesture to catch sight of a door past where the trio from before were still stationed, Toramoto and Ryuumatsu apparently finally coming to some sort of truce… Maybe. Those two were never gonna actually get along, and everyone but Orutoku knew it.

Orutoku caught sight of me and Yoshida coming his way, and perked up.

Orutoku: Hi, guys!!!… [Looks at Yousetsu] Oh gosh. Is she okay?

Yoshida: Mmhm. Just napping, I think… Don’t wake her up.

Orutoku: Roger that! You two headed somewhere?

Hibiki: The bar, yeah.
Yoshida: [Nods] We’re going to see if there’s anyone else around.

Orutoku: [Pats Yoshida’s back] Sounds fun! Welp, have a nice time, guys! I’m here if you need anything.

Yoshida: Thanks, Orutoku-san… We’ll see you around.

With a final wave to Orutoku, I shouldered the door to the bar open and strode inside, Yoshida following behind me. Whatever I’d been expecting to see upon walking in… This wasn’t it.

???: [Wags finger] Come on, there’s no need to throw a temper tantrum. This is my bar, so my rules, okay? Childishness won’t get you anywhere.

???: NO! You just— You don’t GET it!! NO ONE GETS IT!!!

The pair currently arguing over the top of the bar were, to say the least, pretty decidedly opposite in almost every way. The girl - who’d spoken first - was staring over the counter with buggish blue eyes, dressed in a summery ensemble complete with overalls and a neckerchief. Golden curls of hair framed her flushed, round face, making her chiding gap-toothed frown all the more dissonant.

The other, glaring daggers at her from the centre of the room, seemed to be about five feet of pure rage and angst. Aside from a shock of red hot hair, some piercings, two scorching eyes (with heavy eyeliner, of course) and a bunch of what were probably video game badges smattered across the front of his overalls, the guy’s outfit was about as broodingly dreary as it could hope to be. Unsurprisingly, his attitude didn’t seem any different.

???: Of course we do! We’re all stuck down here together, kid. It’s going to be fine.

???: How can you keep saying this is FINE?! Holy shit, chances are half of us are gonna die down here! Fuck, it’ll be a goddamn miracle if it’s only half!
...And DON’T call me KID. I’m, like... [Grimaces] Ugh, I don’t fucking remember, but I’m DEFINITELY at least 19. Lay off.

Yoshida: Um... Everything okay in here, guys?

Hibiki: And what do you mean, this is “your bar”?

**Unfazed, the girl behind the counter turned to Yoshida and I. The other guy did too, just with infinitely more disdain.**

???: Oh, hi there! Everything’s fine, don’t worry. We’ve just got a bit of a troublemaker on our hands here, it would seem.

???: Oh, sooo-rry. You’ll have to forgive me for being concerned about waking up to find myself TRAPPED UNDERWATER with a bunch of soul-sucking idiots who seem to have the collective IQ and awareness of a fucking MOULDY CROISSANT!

Hibiki: Dude, story of my fuckin’ life.

Yoshida: That doesn’t even make sense???

Hibiki: Maybe not to you.

Hibiki: [Crosses arms] Anyway, again - “your bar”?

???: [Holds up finger] That’s right! Seeing as I’m the Ultimate Bartender, and all.

???: [Grumbling] Doesn’t make you everyone’s fucking babysitter...

Hibiki: Riiiiight. But you don’t work here.
Well… S’pose not, but that doesn’t make it any less my responsibility to take care of this place! I’m the only one who knows what to do, after all.

Hibiki: [Narrows eyes] …Is that so.

Yoshida: Kioku-san…

**Yoshida nudged my side softly. I narrowed my eyes even further in spite.**

???: Of course! [Sorting cups behind counter] Unless any of you know of another licensed professional around here? You’d think there’d be actual staff on board the ship, but there doesn’t seem to be a single person in sight who knows a single bit about what’s going on. Horribly irresponsible of them to leave so much alcohol unsupervised like this.

???: [Sneers] WOW. Astute observation! This is just a hunch, but don’tcha think that maybe, just MAYBE, that could have something to do with the fact that the ship also isn’t supposed to be in a fucking SNOWGLOBE?

???: I don’t think I appreciate your tone, mister.

???: Well I sure as hell don’t appreciate ANY of this, but you don’t see ME complaining!

???: Complaining is pretty much the only thing you HAVE been doing. Don’t make me make a rule about indoor voices in the bar. I’d really like for this to be a non-issue, okay?

???: [Muttering under breath, arms hugged to chest] ………

???: See, now that’s better… [Snaps fingers] Golly, where are my manners? I completely forgot to ask for your names! And, come to think of it, your titles. Seems like everyone here’s an Ultimate, doesn’t it?

Yoshida: [Strolls up to counter; offers hand] My name’s Daichi Yoshida, Ultimate Luck. It’s nice to meet you!

The girl reached a hand across the counter to accept Yoshida’s offer of a handshake. I leaned away, hoping not to get caught up in one myself.

???: And same to you! My name’s Mamugi Hanahara. I know I mentioned it before, but… [Chuckles] It’s Ultimate Bartender, for posterity.

-MAMUGI HANAHARA: ULTIMATE BARTENDER-
Leaning on the counter, Hanahara then turned to the other side of the room. The last guy had shoved himself onto a stool in the corner, now angrily burying his head in his arms on a table.

Hanahara: And, er… [Sighs] Any chance of us getting an answer out of you, too?

???: [Mutters inaudibly] Mmfmggh…

Hibiki: I don’t know if you know this, but “face first on a table” isn’t the most conducive pose to being able to fuckin’ talk, so—

???: [Head shoots up] I GET IT. It’s, ugh… Kurai. Kyou Kurai. Fucking famous voice actor, or whatever.
Hibiki: No offence dude, but the last thing I wanna be is an otaku. Never heard of you before.

Not that I would remember if I had, but he didn’t need to know that.

Yoshida: Yeah, I dunno… I do actually recognise your voice, come to think of it, I'm just not sure where from? And I, uh, don’t remember it being so…

Kurai: So WHAT?
Yoshida: [Clamps hands over ears] ...Angry.

Yoshida: …I also usually fall asleep halfway through any movie I try to watch, so… that might have something to do with it.

Kurai: Yeah, well… Well “Actor” does make up half my Ultimate title, so I don’t know why you’re so surprised…

Upon saying that, Kurai stared at the wall for a moment, apparently lost in whatever amount of thought he was actually capable of. Hanahara sighed.

Hanahara: Do you think you could use those acting skills of yours to chill out a smidge?

Kurai: HAH! You wish! [Jabs thumb into chest] I’m not gonna be fucking pushed into submission by ANYONE. I’m not scared of this dumb kidnapping shitstorm, and I’m sure as hell not scared of any of you! Piss and moan all you want. I know what I’m doing.

Hanahara: Whatever you say, bud… [Turns away from Kurai] Jeez, he’s just like Ayaka.

Yoshida: [Tilts head] Hm? Someone we haven’t met yet?

Hanahara: No… Well yes, technically, but not here. She’s just one of my younger siblings.

Yoshida: Aww, cute. How old?

Hanahara: Ah… [Bites thumbnail] That’s a good question, actually.

Hibiki: Pfft. You don’t know?

Hanahara: It’s not that I haven’t been keeping track, I just… [Rests chin in palm] Hm.
Yoshida: What’s up?

Hanahara: Well… Do any of you feel like there might be a… I don’t know. A gap in your memories, I suppose?

**Oh boy, do I ever. I’m… not going to single myself out, though.**

Hibiki: Hmm. A bit might be missing, I guess.

Yoshida: Yeah… I dunno. It’s not like I can pinpoint anything that’s wrong, but… I guess things do feel kind of jumbled, if that makes sense? I guess if there was a complete gap, we wouldn’t even realise it was missing.

Kurai: [Across the room] If you dumbasses are talking about what I think you are, then uh. Yeah. I’m exactly the same as everyone else.

Hanahara: Interesting… Well, thanks for letting me know! Do you reckon it’s just a coincidence or something? Maybe this is some kind of, uh… Y’know, like a test or an experiment, or something.

Kurai: Or a game, yeah. And no, of course it’s not a fucking coincidence. Whichever bastard stuck us here fucking did this to us… [Clenches fists] Fucking… dug around in my HEAD... UGH!!!!

Yoshida: [Covers ears] Dude, please stop yelling.

Hanahara: Let’s not jump to conclusions, okay? We don’t know much about this yet. So long as you all follow my lead and keep a cool head, and we’ll be fine.

**She says that as if she’s some perfect fucking role model… Ugh.**

Yoshida: Mm, of course! As long as we’ve got teamwork and resilience on our side, it’ll work out fine…

Hibiki: Oh don’t you go all hippie “love and peace” on me now too, dude.

Yoshida: What?

Hanahara: Cynicism isn’t going to do you a lot of good. Just listen to your friend, he seems like he’s got a good head on his shoulders.

Hibiki: ...Right.

Beside me, Yoshida sighed.

Yoshida: I try my best…

Hanahara: Well good! And hey, before you two go anywhere, I’m going to need to give you a debriefing. Kurai-san, you listen in too.

Kurai: Make me.

I’m with Kurai on this one. This is so fucking overbearing.

I *hate* overbearing.

Yoshida: Okay… What about?

Hanahara: Just some ground rules for the bar. I’m the one in charge of the alcohol, so don’t touch it, okay?

Hanahara gestured to behind the bar she was stationed at, where a ceiling-high shelf was
stocked near-full with bottles and glasses.

Hanahara: I don’t want anyone going in and stealing any. If this goes bad, which I’m hoping it won’t, the last thing we need is people getting tipsy and making it worse. So just leave this in my hands, alright? It’s off limits.

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: Gotcha. I don’t think we need people like Toramoto-san getting into the alcohol stash, haha…

Hibiki: …I’m gonna go get some fresh air.

Hanahara: [Adjusting ascot] I don’t think you’ll have much luck with that, given the dome situatio—


Yoshida: Kioku-san, what—

**Fucking hell.**

**Without another word, I span around, powered forwards by a searing migraine. I didn’t so much as think as I stormed through a door. Not a second after it slammed shut, I could hear it opening again.**

Yoshida: [Hushed] Dude! I’m sorry, but what is your issue!?

Hibiki: I don’t like people telling me what to do, okay? Is that such a fucking crime? Is it really *my* issue if she up and decides to treat me like I’m- like I can’t take care of myself?

Yoshida: [Hushed] Chill out! She’s just trying to keep everyone safe-
Hibiki: She thinks I can’t handle some glass bottles. She thinks I’m a fucking kid or something!

Yoshida: Kioku-san, seriously? Just take a deep breath and think about this. You weren’t even going to touch that stuff anyway—

Hibiki: So what if I wasn’t?! That doesn’t mean she just gets to- to- UGH.

Hibiki: You know what? Fine! She can think she’s better than everyone else, better than me, but in the end she’s the same as every other asshole on this fucking shipwreck.

Yoshida: ...Wow. Okay, dude. I don’t know what you’re so worked up about, but I’m not going to bother reasoning with you if you’re going to keep being like this.

He says that as if I don’t have a perfectly good reason to be worked up.

...

...Did I even know why I was so worked up, though?

What the hell am I doing letting this shit get to me?

Hibiki: ...Ugh. S... Sorry.

Yoshida: You cool?


Yoshida: …
Hibiki: …

Yoshida: …Kurai-san was right. Hanahara-san isn’t everyone’s babysitter. I’m just yours.

Hibiki: Ha ha. Very fucking funny.

Yoshida punched me lightly on the arm. As reluctant as I was, I couldn’t help but crack a smirk to mirror his. I’d chosen a good person to be stuck with for the day, at least.

…I was still gonna get back at him, though.

Though I’d already been there for a minute or two, it was only then that I looked out at where I’d ended up - the front deck. A bunch of umbrella-shaded tables were laid out, each one set with fancy cutlery and napkins like the ones inside.

It was hard to miss the sight of the two people sitting at one of the tables closest to the edge, backs turned to me. While one of them seemed more subdued in her dress, the other, who was speaking so loudly to her that I doubt either of them had heard a single word of Yoshida and I’s conversation, had hot pink hair that bounced around her head as she gestured dramatically.

Observing the two quietly from the doorway, I hung back with Yoshida for a moment.

Hibiki: …So. You keep telling me to be nice.

Yoshida: Wuh- Well, I mean, yeah! If you’re not a people person, I get it. Like, really, I do. But…

Hibiki: I’m intuitive. I’m observant. And I’m also not going out of my way to upset anyone, am I?

Yoshida: [Scratches cheek] Well… Not for the most part?
Hibiki: Uh huh. Look, I’ll be nicer this time.

Yoshida: …Thank you, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: [Thumbs up] No prob. Watch and learn.

Setting my gaze once again on the two girls across the deck, I took Yoshida by the sleeve and dragged him over. I smiled brightly and clapped my hands together.

Hibiki: Awww, hey guys! It’s totally great to be here, isn’t it? I’m taking the fact that we’ve all been abducted and stuck onto a ship together as a sign that we should all be besties for life - [Scoffs] I mean, who wouldn’t - so I wanna introduce myself, haha! I’m Hibiki Kioku, Ultimate Psychologist, and this cool cat over here is Yoshida, my bestest friend in the whole world!

Yoshida: [Staring in horror] I fucked up.

Both girls turned around, and I was faced with two near-identical sets of verdant eyes. The rosy-haired one, clearly the more vocal of the pair, waved excitedly with a well-practiced smile.

???: OMG, hi! It’s totes a pleasure to meet you guys, you’re both soooo cute! What was that name again…?

Hibiki: Kio—

???: Ah, no no no! Soz! [Cradles chin in hand] I mean, like, your friend there.


A curious smile still plastered across her face, the girl studied Yoshida for a moment, her bright eyes seemingly flitting across every detail they could find. Suddenly, a well-manicured hand reached out to tuck Yoshida’s bangs behind his ear, revealing a mole on his cheek. Yoshida stood rigidly still and straight-faced until the girl finally drew her hand away.
???: Hmm~ There we go! Now you can, like, see properly!

Yoshida: [Wide eyed; wavering smile] T...Th-Thanks?

???: [Poking cheek] No probl...emo! We can’t have you going around and running into anything, now can we? Not with a title like Ultimate Luck...!

???: ...Omigosh, but like, I gotta introduce myself too! My name is Uroko Hondo! My fans call me the Ultimate Composer, buuuut... [Peace sign] You guys can just call me Uroko!
Uroko: I’m soooo totally stoked to meet you both!

Holy shit... She’s absolutely for real right now, isn’t she.

Hibiki: Ugh, you and me both, sister! It’s so totally awesome! Hey, who’s your friend?

I looked over to the girl next to Uroko. Even though she was decked out in a military gakuran and her eyes were sharp and stony, there was something quite mellow about her as she glanced between Uroko, Yoshida and I.

Uroko: Oh! This is my sister, Maeko! [Hugs Maeko’s arm] We’re, like, the bestest friends twins could ever possibly be, right Maemae~?

Maeko: …

Though Maeko nodded softly at her sister, she didn’t say a word. Yoshida hovered on a sound for a moment before finally settling on something to say.

Yoshida: [Tugs at necklace awkwardly] So, uh… What’s your talent? Like, the thing you’re the ultimate at?

Maeko: …

Uroko: Aw, sorry, Maemae’s kinda shy. She says she’s the Super Duper Ultimate Karate Pro!
MAEKO

-Urōko: So like, Maeko and I both work out together aaaaall the time! Just part of what it takes as a blossoming school idol trying her best to spread hope across the world!

Hibiki: Wow, that’s… so totally incredibly amazingly exciting! You two are such a bold duo, haha! Composer and Karate Pro? And what, you’re an idol too?

Urōko: [Giggles] Yep, yep! You’re looking at, like, the lead singer, pianist and composer of the totes fab Miracle Medley! [Pokes cheek] Honestly, I wanted my title to be Ultimate Idol, but it seems like I can’t always be recognised for my talents… Oh well!
Uroko: Any Ultimate title is like, a super huge honour as far as I’m concerned, so if that’s what they wanted to give me, I guess I can’t complain~

...I’m getting the impression that I might be able to get more about what these ‘Ultimate’ things are out of her… But it’s not like I can just outright ask, is it.

Hibiki: Haha, tell me about it. Did you, like… Talk to anyone about your title? You know, maybe someone responsible for assigning the talents, or…

Uroko: [Playing idly with hair] Hmm… Well, no! IDK who actually, like, assigned this one to me and all. [Clasps hands] But it’d be an honour to speak to HPA’s headmaster…!

Yoshida: Ah… HPA? That kind of rings a bell…

Hibiki: [Grimaces] Wait, you’re telling me you don’t remember either?

Yoshida: Wh- “Either”?

Maeko: …

Just then, there was a creak from behind me, followed by the clack of new dress shoes against the lacquered deck. Yoshida turned with a slight flinch to face the source, and I followed.

A tall, overdressed man was making his way onto the deck, his face half-cradled in one gloved hand that didn’t quite manage to mask his slight grimace. His lips quivered ever so slightly as he muttered under his breath. It seemed like he hadn’t even realised there was anyone else around.

Obviously, that didn’t stay that way for long. Having caught the sound of his footsteps, Uroko quickly turned around to wave at the man.
Uroko: Hiiiii, new guy! [Twirls ponytail around finger; hums] Hm, hm… I don’t think I, like, recognise you from anywhere! I’m totes loving that outfit, though. You’re serving purple realness.

Maeko: …

Yoshida: Serving what…?

Though completely lost in thought just moments before, the guy was quick to snap out of it upon hearing Uroko’s voice. His head shot up as the hand that’d been covering it moved stiffly to his side. After a suspended second of apparently needing to collect himself, he turned around.


Uroko: Well come closer, silly! [Flicks ponytail] We can’t have a conversation when you’re all the way over there!!!

???: Right. Of course.

Clearly a little flustered, the man reluctantly shuffled over with his eyes to the floor. Even when he looked up, his gaze seemed to dance across each person’s face without ever quite settling into eye contact.

???: [Folds arms behind back] I sincerely apologise for the delayed introduction... I truly don’t mean to dismiss any of you so nonchalantly.

Uroko: D’awww, it’s okay! [Cups cheeks in hands] You’re so cute all flustered like that!

???: I, er… Thank you…?
Before he could protest, Uroko had already hopped up out of her seat and wrapped her arms around the guy. I hadn’t noticed while she was sitting down, but she was even taller than he was, and he couldn’t be any shorter than six feet, which… was a little concerning, given how much energy she clearly had.

And on that note, Uroko effortlessly lifted the man up into the air.

Uroko: [Squeezing the life out of ???] You know, you’re not very huggable! The shoulder pads really get in the way, and like… You’re about as stiff as a plank! Loosen up, duderoni!

???: [Failing to plant feet on the ground] Gah… M-My condolences?

Uroko: Aw, it’s okay! Good thing my hoodie protects me from getting, like, impaled or something. [Puts ??? down] We wouldn’t want THAT to happen, LOL.

Maeko: [Nods] …

???: [Disoriented] M-Most certainly not, no…

???: [Brushes self off] That aside, would you all mind introducing yourselves…?

Hibiki: Sure. Hibi—

Uroko: —For sure, bud! I’m Uroko, this is Maeko- [Throws hands out] -and these two lil’ cuties are Kioku-chan and Dai-chan!

Yoshida: It’s Yoshida, generally, and I’d really appreciate not being called a “lil’ cutie”, but… Yeah. Um, nice to meet you.
Uroko: Ack! Sorry, I like, totes should’ve known that! [Knocks forehead] Silly me!

The guy and Yoshida both exchanged a look (or as close as they could get without the former looking the latter in the eyes) of shared sympathy for Uroko’s antics. Uroko, of course, remained as oblivious to this as she seemed to be to every single social convention of personal space.

???: It’s a pleasure to meet all of you, too. [Bows] My name is Miren Aitou. I’m under the impression that you all have Ultimate titles, correct...?

Uroko: Yah huh! Super Duper Spectacularly Ultimate Composer! And Maemae’s the Ultimate Karate Pro, too!

Hibiki: Psychologist.

Yoshida: And Luck or whatever you wanna call it, yeah.

Aitou: I see… [Politely clears throat] I’m the, er, Ultimate Mortician. Pleasure to… hopefully not do business with any of you on my end…?

Uroko: ...?

Hibiki: [Forcing a grin] I mean, uh, that’s totally out of this world awesome, Aitou!

Uroko: Yeah! Yay dead bodies!
Um, what the fuck.

Aitou: I… don’t know that I’m that enthusiastic about it, Uroko-san, but needless to say, it’s my life’s work. My… defining talent, I suppose.

Uroko: Well, duh! That’s how being an Ultimate works, Aitou-chan!

Aitou: [Pushing up glasses] I suppose that’s true… I don’t mean to make this about me, though. Apologies.

Yoshida: Don’t worry about it. It’s nice meeting some quieter people around here.

Uroko: YEAH! For reals!

Maeko: … [Blinks]

Aitou: …Yes… Regardless, I’m sorry to have intruded upon your conversation earlier. I really don’t mean to interrupt.

Uroko: You’re such a worrywart! [Makes love heart with hands] No need to keep saying sorry all the time! A true friend will always forgive~

Hibiki: [Dryly] Yeah, and Uroko’s, like, BFFsies with everyone from minute one.

Uroko: That’s right!!!

Aitou nodded hesitantly, before turning around to survey the wall behind where everyone had seated themselves.

Aitou: [Adjusts glasses] Ah… Those doors lead into the buffet and bar, correct?
Hibiki: Sure do… [Looks to Uroko] By which I mean yeah, they sure do, haha!

Aitou: R… Right. Any chance I might find a coffee machine in either of them, then?

Yoshida: Buffet’s your best bet.

Aitou: Fantastic. My most sincere thanks.

Hibiki: [Aggressively overenthusiastic] No need to thank us, we didn’t put it there!

Aitou: Indeed… Well, thank you regardless. I suppose I’ll be heading off to go look into that, if it’s the same to all of you… Not to cut this unduly short, of course.

Yoshida: [Tugs on scarf] Nah, it’s fine. I’m thinking I should get Kioku-san out of here too.

Hibiki: Aww, Yoshi, are you tearing me away from my friends?

Yoshida: [Wide eyed] Y-Yoshi?

Uroko: No Problemo, Aitou-chan~! You have fun with the coffee machine, ‘K?

Aitou: Ah… I will, thank you…?

Uroko: Mhm, mhm!!! Seeya guys! Stay fresh!

Yoshida: [Getting up] Um, sure. You too, I think!

Hibiki: Yeah! You, like, keep jiving your heart out, Uroko! Like, live your dreams and shit! All that good stuff! Positive vibes only, live laugh love, YOLO and PEACE!!!
Yoshida: [Hiding mouth behind hand] Pffftt- Y-Yeah, see you.

Maeko: … [Waves]

As Yoshida dragged me over to the door, I gave a cheery wave to the Hondo sisters with a grin plastered across my face. Yoshida let go as soon as we were through the door.

Yoshida: [Frowning half-heartedly] Kioku-san…

Hibiki: What! Don’t think I didn’t hear you laughing just then.

Yoshida: … [Snorts] Okay, yeah, that last bit was good. I can’t be mad about that.

Hibiki: No need to be anyway. Uroko was enjoying it. Just gotta lighten up sometimes, Yoshi.

Yoshida: [Rolls eyes; smiles] Whatever you say… A-And hey, what’s with the Yoshi thing?

Hibiki: What, do you want me to drop it?

Yoshida: [Tugs hood down] …Nnnno…

Hibiki: Cool. Yoshi it is.

It seemed like everyone had wandered out of the buffet since Yoshida and I had left. In fact, aside from Aitou, preoccupied in the corner with a bunch of instant coffee capsules, the only actual sign of anyone else was Yousetsu’s now-empty plate abandoned on her table.

Shrugging, I wandered through the room to finally face the door which would lead to the main deck.
Hibiki: Guess Ryuumatsu and Toramoto got sick of each other, huh.

Yoshida: Something like that… [Chuckles] Those two can really bicker.

Hibiki: Pshh. Tell me about it.

Hibiki: …And yes, Aitou, I can see you’re watching me.

Across the room, there was a slight clatter as Aitou fumbled with his mug and tried quickly to regain his composure.

Aitou: Er. Yes, sorry to eavesdrop. [Presses button on coffee machine] I’m just… Relieved to see you don’t always carry yourself in the manner you were earlier, I suppose…?

Hibiki: [Scoffs] Dude, you and me both. Uroko’s a piece of work.

Yoshida: C’mon, she’s not that bad. Just… very overeager…?

Aitou: She could… bear to respect the personal space of others somewhat more than she does at present, among other things. [Shoulders sink] A-Ah, but I’m really not one to gossip. I don’t mean to be uncouth.

Hibiki: Do I look like I give a shit.

Aitou: [Glances over hesitantly] …Is there a preferred answer to that?

Hibiki: Meh. Anyway, time to head off, Yoshi?

Yoshida: Oh! Uh… I think we’ve seen everywhere there is to see, so… Back to the main deck, I guess?

Aitou: Ah… I’ll see the two of you later, yes.

Yoshida followed me out the door, and I stood looking idly outwards for a moment as I found myself back on the main deck. Before I could find myself too deep in thought, though, Yoshi nudged me to get my attention.

Yoshida: Hey, Kamiya-san and Rouvin-san are over there. Wanna go check in?

Sure enough, I soon spotted the pair sitting on a pair of pool lounges just parallel to where Yoshida and I had left the buffet. Kamiya seemed to be having… an uncharacteristic amount of success conversing with him, compared to what I’d seen earlier.

Hibiki: …Normally I’d say fuck no, but I could be in a worse mood right now.

Yoshida: [Half-smiles] Which would be to say… a good mood, even?

Hibiki: Don’t push your luck. [Grimaces] Your optimism disgusts and offends me.

Yoshida: Hmm. Makes me wonder why you stick around…

Hibiki: …Just get over there before I change my mind.

Yoshida cracked a smirk and fell comfortably into pace behind me as I strode to the other side of the deck. Kamiya and Rouvin didn’t even seem to notice anyone approaching them, simply continuing the conversation they were clearly somewhat engrossed in.

Kamiya: Hmm… I guess the Ultimate titles have to have something to do with it, now that you bring it up. It can’t just be a coincidence that we all have that in common, can it…?

Rouvin: It seems highly doubtful, does it not? Though I lack the knowledge, context and
consequently the authority to rule out any of our options… [Closes eyes] Hm. I… I suppose that’s a reasonable conclusion for now, is it not…?

Kamiya: I’d think so! [Hands folded on lap] Excuse me if this is rude, Rouvin-san, but I’m surprised at how… varied your perspective on all of this is.

Rouvin: How so?

Kamiya: Well, you’re leaving yourself very open to new information is all!

Rouvin: I would have thought that that would be the best way to operate when it comes to ambiguous matters… [Props chin up in hand] Then again, I suppose I cannot even say that much for sure, can I?

Kamiya: [Hums] Hmm… I wouldn’t be able to say. This really is all very odd though, isn’t it?

Hibiki: You can say that again.

Kamiya: AH!

Kamiya’s gaze swiftly shot up to meet mine, her hand hovering over her chest as though to calm her heartbeat. After leaning so far forward that she just barely managed to catch herself from falling off the lounge, she steadied herself and shot me a flustered smile.


Yoshida, catching Kamiya’s gesture, gladly went to sit down beside her. I stayed standing between the pool lounges, not really bothering to acknowledge her invitation.

Hibiki: Yeah, fine. I’ve met sixteen people now… Should be about everyone.
Kamiya: I do think that’s all of us, yes! I’m glad to hear! [Looks to Yoshida; smiles] And I see you’ve made a friend too!...

Yoshida: Actually, “acquaintance”. Their words, not mine.

Rouvin: Could you define “acquaintance”...?

Yoshida: [Tilts head] Have you… not heard the word before?

Rouvin: I have, but don’t you find it’s often used in a variety of ways? [Taps forehead] Who’s to say what the difference between an acquaintance and a friend is?

...It’s quickly becoming apparent to me that Rouvin’s less of a masterful abduction investigator and more of a high intelligence, no wisdom, all questions type. Does this guy have any confidence in anything?

Hibiki: Dunno, man. I said what I said. [ Shrugs] Y’all’re on your own from there.

Rouvin: …I see…

Hibiki: You sure do, bud. Anyway, what were you—

A crackle of static blasted through the air completely unannounced. Yoshida clamped his hands over his ears through his hoodie until the sound finally fizzled out.

Yoshida: [ Wincing] Augh…

Kamiya: Yoshida-san, are you alright?

Yoshida: [Lowers hands] Y-Yeah, I just—
Yoshida’s hands shot right back up as sound exploded through the dome; Kamiya and Rouvin stopped dead, too, both of them paralysed by the sound.

I… couldn’t say I was much different.

The voice was a lot of things - scratchy, playful, threatening - but beneath all of that, it was frigid. Anything resembling warmth was completely absent from its tone.

???: [Quieter] …Jeez, volume issues already? What an intro! Well, should be fixed now. Sorry, kiddos.

???: Anyway… Attention, attention! Passengers aboard the S.S. Despair, please make your way to the main deck immediately for a super special announcement! Spoiler: That’s where the pools are.

Rouvin: …

Kamiya: I, ah… It should be safe to uncover your ears now, Yoshida-san. Are you feeling okay?

Yoshida: [Sighs] Yeah, I’m okay, just kind of sound sensitive…

Yoshida: …Can’t say I’m really looking forward to whatever’s about to happen, though.

Hibiki: It’ll be fine. Maybe I’ll get some answers about all of this.

Rouvin: That would be greatly appreciated, yes… Well, we can only hope, can’t we?

Yoshida: [Rubbing head] Guess we’ll see in a minute.
Kamiya: I guess we will...

Kamiya swept the group with an apprehensive gaze for a moment. She swiveled to face the pool.

Kamiya: Well… Let’s just head over there and hope for the best, okay?


Pushing down the swarming numbness that had begun to buzz in the back of my head, I turned to the pool. As soon as Yoshida was up, I began to walk forward with him in step.

Yoshida: So… what do you think this is all about?

Hibiki: …

As much as I hated to admit it… I wasn’t really sure. This was starting to seem more than a little abnormal, and even if I didn’t have any memories as a point of reference for what ‘normal’ was, the fear of everyone around me said enough. Something had to be up.

Hibiki: No point speculating now.

Yoshida: …You’re right.

Having finally chosen a spot with a clear vantage of the pools and spa, I stood by as Yoshida surveyed the deck with growing anxiety. It didn’t take long for everyone to congregate around the pool. If there was one thing everyone had in common, I guess it was the want for an explanation for all of this.

Not too far behind me, something clicked. I spun around just in time to catch sight of a black and white blur whipping over Hashikawa’s head, snatching her cap as it rocketed towards the spa.
Yoshida’s hand clamped down on my arm, and I turned around only to see—

???: Helloooo, everyone! Welcome aboard the S.S. Despair!

Hushed gasps rose through the group in a panicked flurry. I was too busy staring to care.

On the spa’s ledge stood what looked to be a robotic bear. One half of it was stark white, almost like a doll - but what set it apart was its other side, drenched in a cold, deep black interrupted only by its razor-sharp sneer and a furious strike of red. A naval coat with gold finishings was the only thing breaking up its striking palette.

As the bear jauntily stuck the cap it’d stolen on its head, Yoshida took a tight hold on my hand. I didn’t bother letting go.

Someone spoke up from the back of the deck.

Yousetsu: …So what are you? A robot with an AI, or an avatar, or…?

???: Hey, slow down there! What kind of question is that? How nosy of you!

???: [Puts paws on belly, cackles] I am your captain, Monokuma! That’s Captain Monokuma to you passengers, of course! Admiral, Your Highness and His Majesty work too, if you’re into that.

I looked over my shoulder to the rest of the group. Maeko had taken a battle stance in front of her sister, Ryuumatsu seemed to be forcing Orutoku to somewhat reluctantly do the same, and Kamiya was hiding behind Rouvin in the corner, sharing an apprehensive glance with Aitou not too far away. The panicked exchanges I’d been able to hear earlier had only gotten louder.

I turned back to see Hanahara striding up to the front of the group, resolve clear in her frown as she clenched her fists at her sides. Trust her to take charge in the middle of all of this.
Hanahara: What is this? Are you saying you’re the one responsible for all of this?

Monokuma: That I am! Isn’t it impressive? Aren’t you just paw-sitively gobsmacked?

Hanahara: [Crosses arms] No! No, it’s not impressive, and this isn’t some fun little game! Tell us who’s controlling you and why we’re here this instant!

Monokuma: [Paw to mouth] Oops, that first part is suuuuper secret information! I’m afraid I can’t spill on that one~

Sumire: Can it. This isn’t—

Monokuma: [Waves paw] Up bup bup! I’m not done, so shut yer trap!

The robot lowered its head ever so slightly as its glass eye flashed crimson with playful malice.

Monokuma: …As for why I gathered you kiddos here… [Grins] Do you really wanna know?

Hanahara: Yes! I would very much like an explanation for all of this, actually, and I’m sure the same is true of everyone else!

Monokuma: Hmm, you sure, Bumblebee? As tough as you think you are, you might not like this!

Hanahara: JUST-- Just tell us!

Ryuumatsu: S-Seconded! This little charade you’ve got going is nothing short of childish!

Monokuma: Weeeellll, alright! But don’t say I didn’t warn you!
Stepping forward as if it were on a stage, the robot flourished its arms in grandeur. The grin on his face was nothing short of ecstatic.

Monokuma: Welcome ladies, gentlemen and whoever else we’ve got here to my new and improved Mutual Killing Game! Now… What’s that, I hear you ask? Well, it’s really quite easy to understand, even for you lot!

Monokuma: To put it simply… I want you guys to kill each other!

As those words echoed in my ears, I felt as though cold water was lapping over my skin, my senses failing to the sea. In the back of my head, I could hear the crowd break as the glass their tension had been encased in shattered, panic spreading across the deck in a flurry of sound. Everything I could see and hear overflowed, information washing around my feet uselessly.

I…

I felt Yoshida clamp down on my hand.

Yoshida: [Staring forwards] Kioku-san… D-Don’t freak out.

…Right. Focus.

Hibiki: …Do you really take me for the type to lose my cool? I’m not like all these idiots.

Hibiki: [Clenches jaw] In fact, I’ll do you one better.

Amidst all the panic from the crowd, I could feel another migraine coming on in place of the numbness from before. I shoved it away.

They- they wouldn’t fucking stop. This wasn’t going to get them anywhere. It wasn’t going to get me anywhere.
I slammed my foot against the deck.

Hibiki: All of you SHUT THE FUCK UP!

Yoshida: [Ear pressed into shoulder] F-Fucking hell, dude! Warn me next time!

Aitou: …

Ryuumatsu: …

Hanahara: …

Hibiki: Great. Now maybe any of you can try doing something useful.

Ignoring all the looks I was getting, I pulled my hand away from Yoshida’s. Once I’d stepped far enough forward that even Hanahara was behind me, I looked up, staring the robot dead in the face.

Hibiki: Monokuma.

Monokuma: Hey now! That’s CAPTAIN Monokuma to y—

Hibiki: Shut up. Tell me what’s happening.

Monokuma: Yeesh, kids these days. You really don’t have any manners at all, do you?

Hibiki: Stop stalling. What the fuck is this.

Monokuma: Well aren’t you eager! Fine then. I guess I can give you a brief summary of what all of
Monokuma: [Tapping forehead] I’m sure you’ve heard this enough times before, so for the sake of not boring myself to death, I’ll be brief! Aaaanyway, here’s the deal!

With that, the robot bowed down, his figure looming over me from the spa’s edge. He grinned, bearing jagged, metallic teeth.

Monokuma: Stabbing, bludgeoning, poisoning, skewering, choking, shooting, crushing, burning, electrocuting, drowning… You can do and use absolutely anything and everything you can get your eager little hands on, and trust me when I say there’s no shortage of options! Bottom line is, if nobody dies, nobody leaves!

Orutoku: Y-You’re kidding me…

Kim: Holy fuck.

Yoshida: Wh… What?! But that’s- There has to be a way around that, right!?

Monokuma: [Proudly] Nuh uh! You heard me, Calico! The only way to escape is by killing one of your shipmates and gettin’ away with it!

Sumire: That’s…

Kurai: ………

Toramoto: [Strained laugh] Ohhh shit.

Uroko: Ugh, you meanie! That just sounds so totally hopeless!

Even from where I was standing, unable to see anyone but Monokuma, the tension weighing on the group was palpable. Most people seemed to not even know what to say… Trust Rouvin
to not be one of them.

Rouvin: …Would you mind defining “getting away with it”?

Monokuma: Sure thing, Socrates!

Monokuma: [Waves paws] Basically, after you off someone, you become what some would like to call the blackened! It’s the duty of the blackened and the spotless - that’s all you innocents - to do some crime scene investigation, and then you gotta figure it out!

Hashikawa: C-Crime scene investigation!?

Sumire: So this— this is just some game to you?

Monokuma: Well, I dunno… “Just” is a little harsh. Gimme some more credit, kyahaha!

Monokuma: Anyway, as I was saying before I was so RUDELY interrupted… If the perfect little spotless passengers can crack the case, the blackened’ll be punished and the game will go on, but if you can’t figure it out, the blackened gets a Get Out of Jail Free card and everyone else gets the punishment!

Yousetsu: And… What’s that punishment?

Monokuma: Well aren’t you inquisitive, Astro Girl? That’s for me to know and you lot to find out! I’m sure the time’ll come soon enough~

Hibiki: Sounds fucking great. I’m glad you take this much glee in killing teenagers.

Monokuma: Heyyy! It’s not like I’m the one doing the killing or anything! Besides, half of you ain’t even teens anymore. I mean, seriously, how many defence attorneys and bartenders under 20 do you think there are? Get over it.

Ryuumatsu: Actually, I’ll have you know that—
Hibiki: —Fine, whatever. What I want to know is… Why are you doing this?

Monokuma: …

**Something on Monokuma’s face shifted, and he stared at me with a look of… disdain, almost, or spite. Though his grin never moved, his voice dipped into a sinister tone.**

Monokuma: …Wouldn’t you like to know, Know-It-All.

Hibiki: …

Monokuma: [Gasps] Oh, I almost forgot! Here are your e-Handbooks, or as some might call ‘em, Monopads! Tadaaa!

**Monokuma heaved a comically heavy box from out of the spa before cracking it open and splaying out a bunch of tablets in his hands. Hopping down from his makeshift podium, the robot quickly delivered the devices across the crowd before rushing back to his post.**

**Turning the e-Handbook on, I watched as the screen lit up with the time and a welcome message, then swapping over to a menu with a map, passenger profiles and the ship’s rules and regulations.**

Monokuma: These are your handy-dandy guides for your lives down here on the S.S. Despair! Make sure to read through those rules really thoroughly, because breaking any of them can land you a super fun punishment!!! ...Oh, it might only be fun for me though. Upupupupu.

Hanahara: [Sighs in frustration] Well, I guess it’s at least a good thing that you have SOME regulations in place…

Orutoku: Y… Yeah! I’m sure those’ll help keep everyone safe!

Kim: Don’t think that’s what they’re meant for, dude.
Orutoku: Oh…

Well, it certainly couldn’t hurt to check.

I clicked on the ‘S.S. Despair Rules and Regulations’ tab. The rules read as follows:

**Rule #1:** There is no end date for the communal life on the S.S. Despair.

**Rule #2:** The hours between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. are designated as “night time” and the buffet and bar will be locked. Additionally, the pools will also be off limits.

**Rule #3:** Violence against Captain Monokuma is strictly prohibited.

**Rule #4:** Your e-Handbook should be kept safe. Please do not break them, as they cannot be replaced.

**Rule #5:** Students are free to investigate any unlocked space in the S.S. Despair, with minimal restrictions.

**Rule #6:** Captain Monokuma will not interfere with, aid or commit murders. Any injuries resulting from Captain Monokuma’s punishments are not included.

**Rule #7:** The Body Discovery Announcement will be played when three or more students, not including the culprit, discover a body.

**Rule #8:** When a murder occurs, everyone must participate in a class trial.

**Rule #9:** If the ‘blackened’ is found during the trial, then only they will be punished.

**Rule #10:** If the ‘blackened’ is not found during the trial, the spotless will all be punished.

**Rule #11:** If the ‘blackened’ succeeds in getting away with their crime, they will be permitted to leave.

**Rule #12:** If the ‘spotless’ continue to win, the game will end at Captain Monokuma’s discretion.

**Rule #13:** Anyone who breaks the school rules will be punished by Captain Monokuma.

**Rule #14:** The Captain may add or update rules at any time.

Christ, as if Hanahara seizing the bar wasn’t bad enough… At least most of these are less restrictions and more explanations of how things are gonna work. Shouldn’t get in my way too much.
Alix: Mmm… Wow, this is so beautifully written, Captain! I loved the part where I looked at the screen with my eyes, knew how to operate it thanks to the super handy visual cues, and then read all of this really important info that’s been conveniently and accessibly provided to me.

Monokuma: Heh, well… I know, I have quite the mastery of literat- [Pauses] …HEY! There’s no need for snark!

Alix: Oh, pardon! How rude of me. I’ll remember to not be blind next time you want me to read something.

Monokuma: Bleck… Look, Buster, I’m sure there’s a text-to-speech function on there somewhere. Force someone to figure it out for ya.

Alix: Aye aye!

Always quick to shove herself into every situation possible, I guess, Hanahara made her way over to help Alix. Off to the side, Toramoto yawned and looked at Monokuma with the same passive aggressive smirk as always.

Toramoto: Well, Cap’n, it’s been real nice havin’ this little chat of ours and shit. Glad to know my mortality is in the… [Glances at Ryuumatsu] exceedingly capable hands of the crew here and everything.

Ryuumatsu: [Squints] Don’t think I didn’t see that.

Toramoto: Wouldn’t think anythin’ of the sort, Ryuumatsu-sama. Anyway, this has been fun and all, but can I ever-so-politely fuck off now? Can’t say I really wanna be out here when the shitstorm starts.

Monokuma: Hm, let me think… No way, Tiger! [Brushes shoulder] After all, we aren’t even at the good part yet!

Kim: Oh boy, what now.
Monokuma: RRGH! If you’d shut up and lemme talk, you might know already!

Monokuma cleared his throat and stood up tall, almost on the tips of his toes (or really, toeless foot stubs). His tone as he continued was particularly prideful.

Monokuma: This is a little unconventional, but it’s about time to spice things up a little! Sooooo… I’m going to be implementing a little thing called the **Team System**!

Kurai: Wuh- You expect us to work in TEAMS?

Monokuma: You heard me! You suckers are gonna get split up, ‘k? This ain’t some barbaric “every sorry little sadsack for themselves” scenario. You’ll all find I’m actually a very nice bear!

Orutoku: [Teeters on heels] Ah! Do we get to choose? Ryuumatsu-kun and I are definitely a team! I’ll keep him safe!

Monokuma: …I’m nice, but not that nice, Eagle One. Team selections are up to me and me only.

Orutoku: [Scuffs boot on floor] Darn.

Ryuumatsu: [Scuffs] As if some haphazardly assigned teams mean anything anyway. Orutoku-san, stay where you are.

Orutoku: Ah! Roger, sir!

Monokuma: Aw, how sweet… Not!!! [Raises paws] If you two would shut up for a minute, you’d see you’re both on the same team anyway!

Ryuumatsu: … Ah. [Sticks nose up] Well, you should have said so earlier, then.

Sumire: Dude, just shut it so we can move on, would you?
Hibiki: Seconded.

Yousetsu: Thirded...

Toramoto: [Smirks] Fou--

Ryuumatsu: I get it.

Monokuma: ... So you’re all finally done bickering? About time! Anyway, here we go…

After pausing for a moment, Monokuma stood proudly, patting his chest as he cleared his throat.

Monokuma: Here’s how this whole shebang works! We’re gonna have two teams of eight, thoughtfully put together by yours truly. This could actually make things a whole lot easier for you folks if you cooperate with each other, so consider it a blessing and don’t complain if you know what’s good for ya!

Toramoto: Don’t mean to burst your bubble, Cap’n, but you’re missin’ someone in that equation.

Monokuma: Shhhut up! I’m getting to it!

Monokuma: [Pointing] Now, let’s start wiiith... **Team Delta**! Katsuo Orutoku, Tsuruko Hashikawa, Yanagi Ryuumatsu, Akira Yousetsu, Kyou Kurai, Saori Sumire, Miren Aitou, aaaand… Uroko Hondo!

Maeko: [Jolts] Wh--

Uroko: Ooooh, yay! New friends are always fun~

Sumire: [Glaring at Ryuumatsu and Kurai] So long as everyone’s willing to play nice, yes…
Kurai: [Hunched; crosses arms] Yeah, yeah...

Hashikawa: [Glancing around; apprehensive] Hhnmm...

Aitou: Ah. Now that I think about it...

Dipping his hand into a breast pocket behind his capelet, Aitou procured a card like the ones Kamiya and I had talked about. Whereas the graphic on mine was in gold and hers had been cyan, Aitou’s was a bright, cool pink.

Aitou: The symbol on this. It’s the lowercase form of the letter “delta,” isn’t it…?

Rouvin: [Glances over] I believe that to be a valid interpretation of that shape, yes...

Monokuma: Sharp eye, Socrates! I’ll get on with it before you lot start pulling your cards out and figuring the rest out yourselves. On Team Rhois Yuri Kim, Hideki Toramoto, Mizuki Kamiya, Rouvin Minerva, Mamugi Hanahara, Alix Murasaki, Maeko Hondo and Daichi Yoshida!

Hanahara: Perfect. [Turns; hands on hips] Everyone, I look forward to working with you. Let’s all get along now, okay?

Kamiya: Ah, of course! I look forward to it too… [Blinks] Assuming these teams are a good thing, of course.

Rouvin: Hmm… Can it really be said with any certainty that anything is necessarily “good”? Is there any difference between good things and bad things?

Maeko: …

Kim: [Scoffs] Oh, this’ll be a blast.
Yoshida: Let’s hope so… But what about, uh--

Hibiki: I think you’re forgetting someone important.

Monokuma: I haven’t forgotten you at all, Know-It-All! You’re just… Special, let’s say.

Hibiki: Course I fuckin’ am. Anyway, spill.

Monokuma: Jeeez, so demanding… [Sighs] But I got protocol to follow! Kiddo, you’re on your own. Team Upsilon’s all yours!

Ryuumatsu: Well that’s hardly fai--

Hibiki: --I see.

Not going to lie, I wasn’t about to be upset over missing out on all the bullshit having to work with some of the people around here would surely cause. A bigger team would just be a disadvantage for me. But even still… What the fuck?

Hibiki: …So, why me. You got a problem with me or something?

Monokuma: Aside from your total inability to call me Captain Monokuma, which I’ll chalk up to decaying brain cells and narcissism, not at all! Actually, if you’ll pay attention to the team rules, maybe you’ll think twice before complaining again!!!

My e-Handbook lit up as a notification tolled, and I went back onto the rules and regulations page. A new set labelled ‘Team Rules’ had been added.

These would be worth a look…

Monokuma: The Team Rules are reaaaally important, so I’ll read them out myself! Wouldn’t wanna tire out your poor, burdened minds.
Monokuma: **Rule #15:** Each team must share the room provided for them. Voluntarily sleeping in another team's dorm is strictly prohibited!

Monokuma: **Rule #16:** Teams are required to work together in Scrum Debates, and must each collectively fight for one opinion.

Orutoku: [Raises hand] Captain, sir! What’s a Scrum Deba--

Monokuma: SHUSH! You’ll find out later! Only if you last that long, that is, which you might not if you INTERRUPT ME AGAIN!

Orutoku: … [Nods silently]

Monokuma: Great! **Rule #17:** Each individual gets their own vote when identifying the blackened. However, if the majority of any one team votes incorrectly for the 'blackened', the whole team will be punished. Tied numbers of correct and incorrect votes will be addressed however your Captain sees fit!

Monokuma: And my personal favourite, **Rule #18**... If one of the two major teams, Delta or Rho, is entirely eliminated, the other team and any remaining participants not part of either team will be permitted to leave!

Then that would mean...

I looked around at everyone once more. Where their attention had previously been addressed at each other, a fair few now looked at me with everything from idle curiosity to envy and suspicion in their eyes.

I’m… safe.

Ryuumatsu: Monok-
Monokuma: [Paws on hips] Captain, if you would!

Ryuumatsu: C-Captain Monokuma, these rules are blatantly unfair!

Monokuma: Oh, and how so?

Ryuumatsu: Considering the setup of the teams, this system is clearly made to put Kioku-san at an advantage-

Monokuma: I have no idea what you’re talking about! I have my reasons, and you shouldn’t pretend to know what’s going on here or stick your ridiculous beak into MY business! [Flashes extended claws] Now, scram! Your captain has some BEARy important preparations to attend to… Upupu.

Monokuma: Oh, and one more thing! If you have something better to say to me than all the pitiful nonsense you all seem to love to spew, say my name and I’ll be there in a flash! After all… I’ve always got an eye on you guys.

Toramoto: …

Sumire: …

Alix: ... Explain to me what an “eye” is. It’s been a while since I’ve seen one.

Rouvin: Well, you see--

Kurai: [Pulls beanie over eyes] Uuuuuggghhhhh. This is a fucking nightmare.

Monokuma: Welp, better get used to it, Temper Tantrum! This is going to be a paw-ticularly long dream~

Monokuma: [Salutes] Anyways, I’ll see you kids later! Smooth sailing, everyone!
Monokuma waddled off to the other side of the spa, and just like that, he’d disappeared into thin air.

I couldn’t say I was all that concerned, honestly; after all, no one had any real reason to see me as a target or a threat. This would go predictably - everyone would agree there’s no way any of them would ever kill, and then some dumbass would do it anyway, and that’d just keep going until all the idiots are out of the picture. All I had to do was wait it out.

Obviously, not everyone else was quite so nonchalant about the whole thing.

Hashikawa: [Hugging gakuran around shoulders] Don’t freak out, don’t freak out...

Kurai: [Hand over eyes] I didn’t fucking sign up for this. I shouldn’t be stu- just- [Slams foot] AUGH!!

Yoshida: [Spacing out] ………

As I moved back over to Yoshida to… I dunno, awkwardly pat his back or something, there was a loud clap from the front of the crowd. The luckster flinched as he looked up to the source - and so, it seemed, did everyone else.

Hanahara: [Claps hands] ALRIGHT, EVERYONE!

Just like that, the whole group turned to face Hanahara. I rolled my eyes.

Hanahara: Alright! The most important thing to do right now is keep ourselves under control, okay? I know this is frightening, but so long as we all manage to go about this maturely, it’ll be fine.

Sumire: [Glances at Toramoto] I’m sure that’ll be easier said than done for some of us here.

Orutoku: Not to worry, ma’am! Teamwork is my middle name!
Orutoku: Hanahara-kun, that sounds like a wonderful idea! If nobody else is up for the task in Team Delta, then I-

Uroko: [Waves arm in air] Ooh, ooh, I'll do it!!! I, like, wanna spread hope to all of you guys through my incredibly wonderful leadership skills so that nobody gets hurt!!

Orutoku: ...Oh! Sure thing!

Hanahara: How generous and courageous of you, Uroko-san!

Ryuumatsu: ...I suppose that's... Acceptable.
Hashikawa: [Salutes] If everyone else is fine with it, I am too…!

**Lowering her notepad for a moment, Yousetsu blinked.**

Yousetsu: ...Ok. Can I leave, then?

Hanahara: Soon, Yousetsu-san. Don’t you think you should stick around to hear the rest?

Yousetsu: [Chewing pen] ...I guess that could be useful… [Points with pen] Keep it brief.

Hanahara: I’ll try to! Now, as for Team Rho… [Adjusts ascot; smiles confidently] I’d say that the choice is already made.

Kamiya: Ah! I’m sure you’ll make a wonderful leader, Hanahara-san.

Yoshida: That’s fine by me…

Kim: Yeah, go ahead. I’m not bothered.

Maeko: …

Hanahara: [Clasps hands at chest] Glad we have that settled! Kioku-san, you govern yourself, I suppose. Just remember what I said about the bar, okay?

**Even if I wasn’t as upset about it as I had been before, the reminder that Hanahara was still trying to impose a bunch of useless rules on me didn’t leave me pleased. Seeing Yoshida glance to me, as if making sure I wasn’t about to call her out, I gritted my teeth.**

Hibiki: Yyyyyep.
Hanahara: Thank you. Now for self-imposed rules… Rule #2 states that certain areas are off-limits at night time. I would suggest that, in order to ensure safety, we don’t leave our rooms at night at all. Sounds good? Sounds good. Great.

Ryuumatsu: I *suppose* that sounds reasonable, yes. Strength in numbers and all.

Kim: I think this might just be a case of “strength of not being out in the dark at night”, actually.

Ryuumatsu: [Frowns] …Well yes, I thought of that. I just figured that that was too obvious to bother mentioning, of course.

Yoshida: …I think that’s a good rule, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara: Fantastic! It’s settled, then.

*The look that I shot Yoshida either went unnoticed or ignored. Hanahara clapped her hands as she once again addressed the group.*

Hanahara: I would also like everyone to meet at the buffet tomorrow at 8:15 AM, so that we can regroup and share any information we might have. Attendance is mandatory, of course.

Yoshida: [Shattered] Th-That early…?

Uroko: Can do, miss! Maemae and I, like, always wake up at 5 AM sharp for our morning training! We can make sure everyone’s up on time~

Maeko: [Thumbs up] …

Orutoku: Wow, five? My daily regime doesn’t usually start until six!

Kim: You’re all such meatheads. Don’t wake everyone else up, ‘k? I dunno about everyone else, but this girl needs her beauty sleep.
Alix: Aww, but you're beautiful just the way you are!

Yousetsu: [Looks up from notepad] Do you say anything that isn’t a joke..?

Alix: Bien sûr! That was entirely sincere.


Hanahara: Right! Well, I think that’s about all I had to cover, so you’re all free to do as you please! Just make sure to be back in your rooms no later than 10:15 PM. The e-Handbooks seem to say the time, so keep those on you, alright?

Hibiki: ...Sure.

Kamiya: Of course, Hanahara-san!

Hanahara: Fantastic! Team Rho, I’ll see you all in… [Checks e-Handbook] An hour and a quarter. Don’t be late!

And with that, Hanahara was done. The group didn’t take long to disperse after that - it seemed a fair few people were keen to talk to each other, but even more just wanted to get away from everyone for a while.

I wasn’t about to let the likes of Hanahara upset me again, but that didn’t mean I had to deal with her if I didn’t want to. Not bothering to look at anyone else, I headed straight back to the buffet, grabbing a scoop of fries haphazardly from one of the containers along the wall as I walked in.

It wasn’t long before Yoshida entered the room, too. After piling slice upon slice pizza onto a plate, he finally caught sight of me. He dropped his plate tiredly on the table I’d sat down at and flopped down onto the booth seating, only sitting up once it proved impossible for him to grab a slice of his meal while lying face down in a cushion.
Slowly, Yoshida took a bite, his eyes really not fixing onto anything in particular. I observed him in silence for a while. It wasn’t until he was on his last slice that Yoshida bothered to speak.

Yoshida: [Bites into pizza] ...Sho.

Hibiki: ...So?

Yoshida: [Gulps] Um. You okay? That was... a lot to take in.

Hibiki: I’m not at risk. I am the least likely target, and so long as someone else decides to act first, I should be out of here with either Delta or Rho in no time.

**Yoshida set his pizza back down on his plate.**

Yoshida: ...That’s how you see it, huh?

Yoshida: …

Yoshida: I’m going to bed, I guess. Night, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: Alright. Tell me what the shared suite is like in the morning. I’m sure it’ll be a riot.

**Picking up his plate, Yoshida narrowed his already tired eyes at me ever so slightly. Eventually, he just nodded.**

Yoshida: ...Sure.

I watched wordlessly as Yoshida set his plate down on the bench and left for the suites. Judging by the clock on the wall, it was probably for the best - it was already 9:50 PM, and
the buffet was due to close up soon enough.

He was obviously upset, but it wasn’t worth comforting him when the reason why was obvious. In a crowd full of people feeling the exact same way, he should be able to deal with it just fine, and if he can’t… Well, that’s on him. After all, I’m not his psychologist.

Having finished what I’d served myself, I chucked my plate onto the buffet bench with a clatter and began the stroll back to my suite. The sky swam above me, the dark water now drowning the main deck in a cool, quiet blue. Everything finally silent, I closed my eyes and drew in a deep breath of the filtered air swirling around me.

This was great. No people, no unnecessary noise… Just me.

With the chatter that began to float by from the buffet, the moment passed. Unaffected as ever, I started my journey up the tall staircase to my suite, unlocking the door with a swipe of my card and flopping down onto the bed inside.

That was it, then - day one of what I guess was my new life. Even if not remembering anything might have been inconvenient… it was nice to close my eyes and, for a moment, have nothing running through the back of my mind, no worries or doubts about whatever I might’ve been leaving behind.

As the gentle waves of unconsciousness swept me into a long night’s sleep, the thought that I could really get used to living like this stayed clear in my head.
Prologue: Ahoy Mutual Killing! All Aboard the S.S. Despair!

STATUS: COMPLETE

PASSENGERS REMAINING: 17

TO BE CONTINUED.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, and thanks for reading UDR!!! It really means the world to me :) This is an updated, rewritten prologue, meaning everything should be high quality and up to date. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to revise some small plot changes caused by this prologue update (re: murder punishment not being specified by Monokuma to be execution), so you may find some small inconsistencies going forward. Rest assured, they will be fixed soon!
Cast Report Cards

Chapter Summary

Report cards for the UDR cast, along with full body references at the bottom!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hibiki Kioku

Talent: Ultimate Psychologist

Team: Upsilon (Leader)

Height: 5’8"

Weight: 58kg

Likes: Distinct fashion, the night sky

Dislikes: Bossiness, cold water

Description: A little over average height. Wears a lot of layers, with a bomber jacket over a lab coat over two different shirts. Their hair is a controlled chaos, with four points and an ahoge sticking out in what almost looks like a star. Their voice is about a midtone, and tends to be pretty deadpan. Relaxed posture and expression.

Katsuo Orutoku

Talent: Ultimate Security Guard

Team: Delta

Height: 5’9”

Weight: 76kg

Likes: Friendship bracelets, Western films

Dislikes: Dishonesty, sleeping in
Description: Dressed up in an almost militant summer outfit that consists of fairly tight shorts and a
dress shirt. Has short, orange hair that’s longer on top and slicked back into a neat point at the back
of his head. Never takes off his neckerchief or sunglasses, possibly not even to sleep. Always
flashing the badge pinned to his chest pocket. Voice is around or slightly below middle range, and is
always confident and bursting with energy.

Tsuruko Hashikawa

Talent: Ultimate Sailor

Team: Delta

Height: 5’5”

Weight: 54kg

Likes: Salty foods, origami

Dislikes: Heights, sharks

Description: A small but strong girl whose cropped seifuku reveals her toned stomach and arms. Her
long navy hair is always tied into a convoluted-looking ponytail with lifesaver themed bands. Her
round, large glasses show her more timid side, contrasting with the way she proudly wears her navy
gakuran and cap. Voice is slightly high, but not too much so, and she tends to talk a little too fast and
either too loudly or too quietly.

Akira Yousetsu

Talent: Ultimate Mechatronics Engineer

Team: Delta

Height: 5’4”

Weight: 78kg

Likes: Ballpoint pens, hamsters

Dislikes: Deadlines, humidity

Description: Short and broad, seeming to have no muscle mass whatsoever. Has dull platinum hair
that she keeps over one shoulder. Underneath her bag and blazer, she wears striped flannel pyjamas,
and doesn’t change out of them at night. Also just wears socks instead of actual shoes. Voice is dull
and quiet, and tends to be somewhat monotonous.

Miren Aitou
Talent: Ultimate Mortician

Team: Delta

Height: 6'0"

Weight: 62kg

Likes: Coffee, musical theatre

Dislikes: Flyswatters, forgetfulness

Description: Tall and somewhat broadly built, but doesn't seem to have much muscle to him. While his attire is fancy and extremely professional, his hairstyle and glasses give off more of an urban, almost hipster vibe. Voice is surprisingly mild in tone for someone of his stature, and he tends to speak coolly and collectedly with slight undertones of ‘intellectual British scholar’ despite the fact that he’s Japanese.

Uroko Hondo

Talent: Ultimate Composer

Team: Delta (Leader)

Height: 6’1”

Weight: 72kg

Likes: Sashimi, game shows

Dislikes: Spoilsports, cynicism

Description: Surprisingly tall and fit for someone of her occupation, not really fitting into the ‘cute, petite school idol’ image. Her hair is dyed red-pink, and a small bunch of hair always sticks up from the bun on one side of her head. Wears a dress from one of her idol concerts underneath a long green hoodie, all covered in abundant musical motifs. Intentionally makes her voice high, cutesy and feminine, but it’s naturally a little deep.

Kyou Kurai

Talent: Ultimate Voice Actor

Team: Delta

Height: 4’10”

Weight: 48kg

Likes: Cup ramen, his fans

Dislikes: Being called short, spicy food
Description: Slight, unfit, and one of the shortest passengers on the S.S. Despair. His blockily cut crimson hair is always messily shoved under a beanie, which, like his overalls, is covered in pins featuring characters he’s voiced in previous shows and projects. He wears mismatched socks and sneakers, and band aids that seem to be more of an aesthetic choice than a practical one are scattered across his legs. May or may not wear eyeliner. His voice is slightly squeaky and a mid to high range, but he can manipulate it very impressively.

**Saori Sumire**

Talent: Ultimate Marine Biologist

Team: Delta

Height: 6’4”

Weight: 82kg

Likes: Textbooks, sunshowers

Dislikes: Outdated tech, manga

Description: Tall, broad, muscular and somewhat overweight. Very freckled. Has violet hair she keeps in a plait over one shoulder. Wears an open dress shirt, a long teal skirt and a backpack over a dark purple diving suit. Always keeps her signature shell wreath on. Doesn’t wear shoes. Her voice is around a middle range and has a smooth warmth to it.

**Yanagi Ryuumatsu**

Talent: Ultimate Lawyer

Team: Delta

Height: 5’7” (5’9” when wearing heels)

Weight: 60kg

Likes: European architecture, soap operas

Dislikes: Being corrected, uncertainty

Description: Fairly tall, pale and thin, with a long face and sharp eyes. His blonde hair is styled into a curling ponytail that reaches to around his waist, and is tied fairly low by a ribbon. He has a cropped magenta blazer which he wears over a dress shirt and brown pants. He also wears high heels with pointed tips that bring him to around 6”. His voice is smooth, controlled and slightly low, but tends to raise, crack and stutter when he gets angry.

**Alix Murasaki**
Talent: Ultimate Exorcist
Team: Rho
Height: 5’4”
Weight: 45kg
Likes: Old statues, incense
Dislikes: The smell of petrol, silence

Description: Somewhat short, with a slightly long face and perked nose. His outfit, which appears to be based upon a priest outfit, covers up most of his thin frame. His sleeves hang down to around his knees, and always cover his hands. He wears dark purple tights and no shoes, but there are ribbons with bells tied to each of his ankles. His long, pale violet hair is tied into two buns and a ponytail that trails on the floor behind him. Voice is slightly pitchy and around average depth, but he occasionally changes it for comedic effect - with debatable success.

**Hideki Toramoto**

Talent: Ultimate Loan Shark
Team: Rho
Height: 5’6”
Weight: 52kg
Likes: Homemade meals, rats
Dislikes: Dumpster diving, alcohol

Description: An odd-looking guy with dark, drooping eyelids and a single sharp tooth always poking out of his mouth. His hair is a dark, cool green, and seems to be dyed a slightly lighter shade where it isn’t shaved. Wears a long orange coat with tiger print inside and a dark brown back, tied above his waist with a length of fraying rope. Under this, he wears a dress shirt, shorts and sandals. His voice is slightly grating, with a sharp Osakan accent. It's slightly deep, a little nasally and can get somewhat raspy at times.

**Yuri Kim**

Talent: Ultimate Demolitionist
Team: Rho
Height: 4’8”
Weight: 44kg
Likes: Pomeranians, diamonds
Dislikes: Fire, fragility

Description: A short, tan and petite girl with a feminine frame. Wears dark purple lipstick on her thin lips. Over her summery pink dress she tends to don a cropped leather jacket with a diamond patch ironed onto one sleeve. Below all of this she wears high, somewhat torn up socks and high top trainers. Also wears a lot of wristbands and jewelry, much of which coordinates with the dyed pink underside of her naturally brown hair. Her voice is calm and soothing, and has something of a cool roughness to it. It's not super expressive, usually keeping a chilled out tone.

**Daichi Yoshida**

Talent: Ultimate Luck

Team: Rho

Height: 5’5”

Weight: 67kg

Likes: Pizza, sunny afternoons

Dislikes: Waking up early, playing cards

Description: A catlike boy whose long fringe always falls over one eye. His hair is either dyed at the ends or bleached at the roots - no one's really sure. Wears a green, tattered hoodie with the hood up, and has a necklace and scarf over this. His pants are a paler green, and he wears comfortable brown sneakers that look a little oversized. Voice is slightly higher than average when he gets nervous or flustered, but generally sounds around average for a typical teenage boy, if a little strained.

**Mamugi Hanahara**

Talent: Ultimate Bartender

Team: Rho (Leader)

Height: 5’2”

Weight: 59kg

Likes: Fairytales, bees

Dislikes: Video games, economics

Description: A round-figured girl with buggishly wide eyes and a short stature. Her golden hair is carefully curled and always kept back in a bun of sorts, aside from her fringe and two stray strands that poke up like antennae. Wears a neckerchief, dress shirt, vest and suspenders, all in cheerful colours, and has puffy sleeves and pants. Her shoes are ballet flats. Voice has an odd buzz to it, and is quite loud and slightly high, but it goes lower when she’s being authoritative, which is, well… always.
Maeko Hondo
Talent: Ultimate Karate Pro
Team: Rho
Height: 6'1"
Weight: 72kg
Likes: J-Pop, succulents
Dislikes: Cold tiles, public speaking
Description: Tall and muscular like her sister, with sharp eyes lined with plum-coloured eyeshadow. Her dusty blonde hair is paler at the bottom than its roots, and is tied into two bunches at the front, with the back part cut short. Her fringe is long and sideswept. Wears a sleeveless green gakuran with gold finishing and matching pants, and has a karate black belt with three gold stripes tied around her waist. She also has tall military boots, and her arms are always wrapped with dark lengths of bandages. Doesn’t seem to speak, really, but it isn’t hard to imagine what her voice might sound like.

Rouvin Minerva
Talent: Ultimate Philosopher
Team: Rho
Height: 6'8"
Weight: 95kg
Likes: Sand timers, forests
Dislikes: Libraries, making decisions
Description: Extremely tall and somewhat overweight, but also seems to have a fair amount of muscle. His hair is bleached platinum blonde, and he wears it swept back under a golden headband that matches his earrings and necklace. His poncho, which he wears over a white turtleneck sweater, is held together by another golden pin just above his heart. Has baggy brown trousers that are tucked into boot-like, open toed shoes. His voice is deep and very warm and smooth, and he tends to talk slightly slowly in normal conversation yet surprisingly fast while muttering to himself.

Mizuki Kamiya
Talent: Ultimate Fashion Designer
Team: Rho
Height: 5’11”
Weight: 54kg
Likes: Photography, volunteer work

Dislikes: Strobe lights, heavy clothing

Description: A tall, willowy girl with drooping green eyes and a kind smile. Her hair is fairly long, and is tied up in a ponytail to one side of her head. She wears a pale blue shoulderless dress that sweeps around her feet and has fairly long, wide sleeves. She wears blue flats and silver jewellery, including a bangle, a ring and round studs in her earlobes. Most notable is her clover necklace, though, which sits at her collarbones. Her voice is soft but not whispy, and is slightly high.
Next chapter will go up later today since I don't want to wait until Saturday morning due to the AO3 servers going down! See you all then!

Also sorry that a few of the talents on the full body ref sheet are a little wrong in how they're worded, they're a bit outdated :/ all the refs are still accurate though!
Welcome to the start of chapter one, and thank you all so much for the positive feedback!!

This chapter's obviously one of the first ones I wrote so sorry if things about it aren't perfect, I think I've improved since I wrote this so hopefully if any of it is boring that'll be a one-off instance! I think it's still pretty solid though, hopefully :D Hope you enjoy!
Waking up from actual voluntary sleep somewhere as ridiculous as an underwater cruise ship for the first time was... not one of my most coherent moments. I drifted in and out of sleep for a while, until all I could hear was the sound of blood rushing in my ears - just enough to urge me through to consciousness.
Squinting through heavy eyes, I glared at the ceiling, its surface bathed in an eerie blue light seeping through the curtains.

Ugh... Never mind, fuck this. My sleep is more important.

I went to pull the blankets back over my head. As I did, though...

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bongggg!

...The screen in the corner of my room flashed brightly through the room. Guess I’m not getting back to sleep, then.

Monokuma: I hope you’re all having a beary good morning down here on the S.S. Desbear, folks!

Monokuma: The buffets have been restocked to provide for only the highest of tastes, and of course room service shall be provided at 8:00 tonight.

Monokuma: ...Aw, who am I kidding? Get off your lazy asses and kill someone or you ain’t gettin’ SQUAT!

Monokuma: ...

Monokuma: Upu.

The monitor flickered to black, and I flipped it off from under the covers. Maybe I could at least lie here with my eyes closed for an hour and avoid everyone...

???: [Knocking on door]...

For fuck’s sake.
There was a pause, and for a moment I thought the knocking might be over... Until, of course, it started up again with twice the urgency.

Hibiki: Ughhh..... Have some fucking manners.

I stormed over to the entrance, shoved the keycard from my pocket onto the scanner and slammed the door open.

Yoshida: PLEASE, KI- Oh.

Hibiki: Let me get dressed.

Yoshida: ...Aren’t you wearing your day clothes already?

...Oh.

I looked down at myself. Sure enough, I hadn’t even taken off my shoes last night.

Hibiki: …Ugh. Yeah, guess so. Still gotta fix up my hair, though.

Yoshida: You have two minutes.

Hibiki: You’re on.

With that, I walked back into the room and entered the ensuite for the first time. It was certainly pretty flashy, not unlike literally anything else on the ship. Two wash basins, an unnecessarily long mirror, a ceramic bath, a cabinet full of cosmetics, another for medicines and a huge, glass doored shower - pretty much everything I could ask for in a bathroom I’ll probably never use.
Staring at myself in the mirror with tired eyes, I ran a brush through my hair lazily and attempted to flatten down my cowlick with… absolutely no success. Whatever, the only person who would comment would probably be the fucking attorney anyway, and God knows his opinion doesn’t count for shit anywhere on the globe.

Throwing the brush onto the counter and slamming the bathroom door behind me, I met up with Yoshida again in front of my suite.

Hibiki: So, what the hell’s going on today?

Yoshida: Uhh… Hanahara-san said breakfast in the buffet at 8:15?

Hibiki: Fine. Better than sitting here gouging out my eyes from boredom.

Yoshida: O...kay?

Vaguely aware of other people exiting the Delta and Rho rooms, I decided to leave before one of them tried to have a conversation with me. I headed down to the buffet with Yoshida at my back.

The restaurant seemed as normal as ever - or, at least, as normal as yesterday. A fair few people had already sat down in the booths, some of them with food. Hanahara stood next to the coffee machine with arms crossed and an authoritative look on her face.

I fought the urge to scowl and plunked down into one of the booths. Yoshida threw a couple of slices of pizza onto a plate before taking a seat across from me.

Yoshida: [Concerned stare] …

Hibiki: I’m not going to blow up at her. Also, do you eat anything that isn’t pizza?
Yoshida: I could, but that would be denying myself my own happiness.

Hibiki: Fair.

Slowly but steadily, passengers filtered through the buffet and found seats. The more responsible people like Hanahara, Sumire, Orutoku, Hashikawa and Ryu umatsu had probably been there for a while. Surprisingly enough, Toramoto seemed to have already settled in too, and was sitting with Alix and Rouvin in a booth in the corner, even if he was opting out of acknowledging either of them to instead smirk suspiciously at anyone who dared cross his field of vision. Others who’d shown up more recently like Aitou, Kim, Kamiya and the Hondo sisters, who were apparently one unit, were wandering around with plates and piling food onto them at their own paces. Kurai, the last one to show up, took one look at the group before growling obnoxiously loudly and leaning up against one of the booths moodily.

A few more moments passed without much more than casual chatter, but once everyone had taken a seat, the sharp clink of metal against glass called out through the room. The atmosphere sunk as all eyes turned to Hanahara.

Hanahara: Alright, folks! Thank you all for showing up. There are a few topics of discussion I feel we need to go over as a group.

Hanahara: First of all is the living conditions here. Facilities we have access to, what we might not have access to, what arrangements need to be made, et cetera.

We seriously needed to come here to talk about that? Jeez.

Hanahara: So. The areas we have access to are as follows.

Hanahara pulled a notepad out from one of her back pockets, tapping a pen against it with her other hand.

Hanahara: [Points pen at notepad] The top floor has the Team Delta, Rho and Upsilon dorms, along with seventeen other rooms, all of which are locked.
Hanahara: Oh, on that topic, did anyone have any troubles they’d like to bring up regarding sleeping arrangements?

**Yousetsu raised her hand, still staring down at her own notepad as she did so.**

Hanahara: Yousetsu-san?

Yousetsu: It’s... cold. Are there more... [yawn] more blankets?

Hanahara: There could be a linens closet somewhere on the top floor! I’d suggest having someone look for one.

**Yousetsu didn’t say a word, simply nodding. Boring as always, I guess. Not that that wasn’t true of the whole discussion - I had a duvet and a shit ton of blankets anyway.**

Hanahara: Anything else…?

Everyone stared blankly at Hanahara, the floor or, in Alix’s case, nowhere at all. Lively atmosphere.

Hanahara: ...Okay, great! Hmm… Back to the list of facilities, then. Next up is the buffet we’re in now. The food supply here seems to be constant, if the state of the platters this morning says anything about it. There’s also the dining area, and… Ah. The bar.

Hanahara: None of you are allowed to touch anything in there. It’s in the interest of everyone’s health and safety.

I heard Kurai grumble under his breath from the booth next to mine, and nodded at nobody in particular. Yoshida sighed, but stayed silent.

Hanahara: The deck’s got entertainment and leisure activities, so that’s certainly a start in terms of creating an environment everyone can live in. Be prepared to make a lot out of what’s there, everyone!
Ryuumatsu: Hold on a moment.

The air froze over as Ryuumatsu stood up from his seat and stared down Hanahara from across the room.

Ryuumatsu: You… expect us to live here?

Hanahara: Well, of course. Can’t exactly just waltz out, can we now?

Ryuumatsu: And for how long, do you suppose, might you let us stay stuck in this sub-zero wreck?

Hanahara: Until someone finds us, of course. Nobody’s killing anyone.

Ryuumatsu: W-Wh-

Orutoku: [Rubbing neck] Ryuumatsu-kun is right… As much as I really do trust everyone, things don’t tend to go smoothly in situations like this! I’ve seen it in the movies!

Ryuumatsu: R-Right! There’s no guarantee I won’t die if we w-wait that long!

Sumire: Thanks for your concern regarding the other sixteen human lives on this ship!

Ryuumatsu: O-Oh, would you just-

Uroko: [Peace sign] Maemae and I are with Hanahara-chan! We’ll totally get rescued! Boats can find us super easy!

Toramoto: Who says anyone’s lookin’?
Uroko: Wellll, I’m like, totally famous! And Kurai-chan’s gotta be too, right?

**Kurai scoffed, leaning even harder into the side of the booth.**

Kurai: Of course I fucking am. I’m way more important than any of you low-life lardbags.

Uroko: [Totally unfazed] See? I’m sure someone’ll come looking for us in no time!

Kamiya: Would they really look in the sea, though…?

Toramoto: And who would even do the looking?

Alix: Ooo, maybe the police are on our trail? A detective infiltrating a cruise ship to rescue a bunch of kids sounds like an awesome twist!

Rouvin: …

Aitou: Hm, it’s certainly possible… Then again, we don’t even know for certain where this dome is located.

Kim: Right. I think Rouvin-kun said this yesterday, but it’s entirely possible that the dome’s walls are only made to look like the sea’s on the other side, or some wack tech shit like that. Dunno.

Alix: Huuuuuh? Doesn’t look like anything to me!

Ryuumatsu: This is serious, you kn-

Uroko: Hey, we could totally tell if we got a bit closer, right? Like, you’d def be able to see if it was a big screen!

Yousetsu: Not… necessarily.
Sumire: What’s that supposed to mean?

**Eyes still fixed on her notepad, Yousetsu raised her voice just enough to address the room.**

Yousetsu: Well, technology’s really advanced at this point… Cryogenic sleep, simulated and realistic robotic lifeforms, cloning, supercomputers with processing power far beyond anything humans alone could dream of possessing… It’s all within science’s reach. There’s no saying whether you’d be able to discern a screen from a real ocean with the naked human eye.

Aitou: That’s... certainly something.

Yousetsu: [Chewing pen] Actually, given similar advances... it’s just as possible that we’re genuinely over a kilometre underwater, and that the air pressure, temperature and circulation of oxygen are all being regulated by an advanced setup. Technology can get you anywhere you want… Just gotta be able to make it or pay someone to do it for you.

Hibiki: So the person behind this either had access to a ship and highly advanced technology or a shitload of cash, then?

Yousetsu: If you want to put it that way… Yes.

Rouvin: Even if the dome is in open water where it could potentially be discovered, there is also a crucial matter that has yet to be discussed.

Hashikawa: Um, what’s that…?

Rouvin: Well, we’ve already thoroughly discussed the matter of where, and even the how. The why appears… Somewhat difficult to capture, given the circumstances.

Rouvin: However, I feel the question of *when* may also be important to consider.

Kamiya: What do you mean by that?
Rouvin: Did Yousetsu not just tell us that cryogenic sleep is currently entirely possible? We could be a fair many years from when any of us last fell asleep off this ship. Who is to say society has not moved on without us?

A simmering quiet buzzed in the air as everyone took this information in however they could. The possibility had been weighing on my mind since Yousetsu brought it up, but having someone else present it to the group made it seem much more real.

Was my memory loss related to this? How long had I been out?

When and where was I?

…Hanahara spoke up through the others’ whispered conversations once more.

Hanahara: Right… Well, though I can’t answer any of those questions, I can certainly continue with arrangements.

Hanahara: Summary of protocol is simply as follows: keep to Captain Monokuma’s rules, don’t leave your room at night time, and don’t touch anything in the bar. ‘No killing people’ should go without saying.

Toramoto: You seriously expect that to work?

Toramoto smirked and tapped his nails against the table he sat at. Hanahara’s buggish blue eyes met his silently piercing gaze with no fear at all.

Hanahara: Please, just be reasonable here. I only want the best for the group, and it’s my job as Team Rho’s leader to take responsibility.

Toramoto: I don’t remember there bein’ any election for that. Actually, if memory serves, you just put yourself in charge.
Hanahara: I stepped up because I had to.

Toramoto: ...Did you, now.

**Next to me, Kurai slammed a hand against the side of my booth chair and bared his teeth.**

Kurai: Course not! Control Freak over there just thinks she’s fuckin’ better than eeeeveryone else.

Hanahara: [Tuts] Oh come on now. Just because I’m best suited for a position of authority doesn’t mean--

Kurai: Having some kid sibling doesn’t mean you know what the fuck you’re doing here, you know that? This isn’t fucking ANYTHING like what you think you know. Get the hell off your high horse already before it bucks you into oblivion.

Hanahara: Kurai-san. Please shut up.

Kurai: Gh- Why the hell should I? Just because I stop talking doesn’t make me any less righ--

Hanahara: I said shut up. Nobody wants to hear it, and I promise you, if you hurt me or anyone else, it’ll be you meeting Monokuma’s punishment at the end of the day.

**Kurai glared at Hanahara for a few moments before standing up, grabbing a plate and slamming it at her feet. The ceramic exploded against the floor like shrapnel.**

For a moment, he stared at it, as though still processing what he’d just done. He accepted it, though, and his face quickly warped into a scowl.

Kurai: ...You’ll regret ever thinking lowly of me.

As the fiery boy stormed out of the buffet, I watched Hanahara intently. Her wide eyes were fierce and powerful, but something about them seemed tired.
Good. Kurai may have had an overblown ego and absolutely no tact, but Hanahara got what she deserved.

Hanahara: ...I’m sorry about that, everyone.

Kamiya: Are you sure you’re alright? Your legs are all scratched up, Hanahara-san...!

Hanahara: I’m fine. Thank you for your concern, Kamiya-san. Ah, for future reference, does anyone here know first-aid?

Though mostly everyone still looked shaken, nobody commented on Kurai’s outburst. Hashikawa quickly raised her hand.

Hanahara: Perfect. In case anyone tries anything… risky, I’ll be counting on you to help out.

Hashikawa gulped.

Hashikawa: A-Ah... Okay! I’ll try my best not to let anyone down!

Hanahara: Thank you. Now if you’ll all excuse me, I need to go rinse off my legs before-

For the second time today, the monitor screen flickered to life, Monokuma’s visage appearing on-screen and interrupting Hanahara’s departure.

Monokuma: Hellooo, and I hope you’re all having a beary good morning! Squabbles and death threats are, as always, highly encouraged!

Monokuma: Say, why don’t you kiddos come down to the spa for a bit of relaxation? I got something I wanna show you!
Monokuma: ...That’s an order, by the way. Hop to it! Unless you want a few spears through your chest. Upupupu.

Monokuma: Welp, see ya soon!

And just like that, the monitor flickered off.

So much for a relaxing morning.

Kamiya: I guess we should head off, then… There’s a bathroom in the buffet if you’d like to wash the blood off your legs first, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara: No, I should go. It shouldn’t take long.

Kamiya: Ah… Right. Please take care of yourself…

With that, Kamiya took her leave. Slowly but surely, everyone else filtered out behind her until the only people remaining were Hanahara, Yoshida and I.

Hanahara: ...Ouch.

Yoshida: ...

Yoshida: Stay safe, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara just smiled at Yoshida as she left the room.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: Yeesh.
Yoshida: Yeah… She’s got it rough.

Hibiki: She brought this upon herself. I don’t see any reason to feel sorry for her.

Yoshida: ...Sure.

Yoshida gave me a weird look that was somewhere between confusion, pity and borderline repulsion, but didn’t elaborate. The luckster picked up his now-empty plate and left it in the stack of dirty dishes as he made for the door.

Yoshida: Guess she’ll have to work out a schedule for dishwashing, too…

Yoshida: Well, let’s get going. An execution for rule-breaking isn’t really something I’m all that keen on.

Hibiki: Meh. If you’re sure.

I followed Yoshida through the door in silence. There was really no point in talking - anything we’d ask each other about this was about to be answered anyway. Not worth wasting my breath.

The two of us approached the spa again. In front of it, between the pools, was an upright board of some kind on a stand, all covered in a sheet.

I turned around and watched as the other fifteen passengers came closer. Orutoku whispered something to Uroko, who then began gathering all the Team Delta members into a group while still clinging to Maeko’s arm with one hand. Hanahara was corralling Team Rho with much more success despite her injuries, ordering people around instead of using Uroko’s method of passive encouragement. Blood still dripped down her legs, though Aitou seemed to have given her the handkerchief from his pocket to clear it up.

Hanahara turned to look at Yoshida, waving a hand and motioning for him to join the team.
Yoshida: Um…

Hibiki: Just go. I don’t care.

Yoshida: ...Alright. Thanks.

I stood between the two groups as Uroko and Hanahara stepped forward to stand at the front of each one. As soon as we’d done that…

Monokuma: Hello hello helllooooo!

...Monokuma sprung out of the spa and down to the covered object, grin as wide and gruesome as before.

Monokuma: Wow, great to see you guys in your teams! And that tensions are already rising, too. Pretty edgy scratches, Bumblebee!

Hanahara’s gaze didn’t even falter. Blood was starting to soak into her socks.

Hanahara: This was a… one-off incident. Nobody’s going to kill anyone.

Monokuma: Really, now. And I guess Temper Tantrum over there apologised to you? Did you all make up and have a sweet little tea party?

Uroko: Oh my gosh, that’s a great idea!

Kurai: …

Hanahara: ...No, but that’s fine. Everything is under control.
Monokuma: Upupupu!!!! Aww. That’s cute.

Hanahara: …

Monokuma: Welp, no point in stalling! As much as you might want love and peace, Bumblebee, your Captain doesn’t agree. Can’t kill ya for treason, though, so I gotta do this instead!

Monokuma grabbed onto the sheet with one paw. He almost tore it off, but stopped partway through the motion, his other hand coming to his chin in contemplation.

Monokuma: Hmm… Well, actually, this probably deserves a preface.

Monokuma: [Pointing arms at groups] Alright, folks! Pop quiz!

Monokuma: Question one! You all have a talent, something you’ve been saying you’re the Ultimate at. Tell me, who decided you were the Ultimate at anything?

I expected everyone to put their hand up but me. Everybody else seemed to remember things about their pasts, and this was clearly a big part of it.

Looking to the sides, though, the only person who did was… Uroko.

Monokuma: ...Huh, I didn’t expect any of you idiots to answer. Yes, Hopester?

Uroko: Welllll… It’s all part of Hope’s Peak Academy, isn’t it?

Monokuma almost looked shocked by her answer, but grinned and clapped for her nonetheless.

Monokuma: Right you are, kiddo! Wow, smart kids, huh? Maybe this generation isn’t a lost cause.
Monokuma: Alright then, Hopester. Question two. Paragraph response. Tell the class what Hope’s Peak is like.

Uroko: Hmm… Well, it’s, like, a super prestigious school! All the facilities ‘n stuff are totally glitzy and perfect, and it’s surrounded by a field of beautiful daisies, and the dean of students is a total badass! She survived being injected with a lethal poison, and it was super awesome. The headmaster’s a cool guy, too! Pretty cute, only like 5’5”, actually went on trial for helping out a gang of these super nasty guys once… I’m pretty sure that those two are a thing. Aaaaanyway, basically they have these people called scouts, and they find all these amazingly talented kids and they stick ‘em in classes to nurture their talents and create hope! Is that all right, Captain Monokuma?

Everyone was staring at Uroko blankly, myself and Monokuma included.

Monokuma: ...Sure is. Wow, and for a second I thought all of you kids might be total amnesiacs!

Monokuma turned his gaze directly towards me as he said that, and for just a second, a spark of cold rushed up my spine. I stood still.

Monokuma: Welp, like Uroko said, Hope’s Peak Academy is a prestigious, best-of-the-best school run by one Makoto Naegi! Not that any of you know who that is, but hey, some meaningless information here and there never hurt anyone, right?

Monokuma: Now… Anyone wanna guess what I gathered you here for?

Yoshida raised a hand. Monokuma nodded at him.

Yoshida: You can’t physically interfere with the killing game, right?

Monokuma: Not directly!

Yoshida: And you can give us announcements over the P.A. system…

Monokuma: Yes siree!
Yoshida: So this is another big reveal like yesterday, and you’re going to tell us something?

Monokuma: Bingo, Calico! Though ‘tell’ isn’t quite the word I’d use. Actually, I’m giving you something.

Yousetsu: And what’s that…?

Monokuma: Well, Astro Girl, just something I’d like to call… a motive.

You could practically hear the tensions rising. Nobody wanted to ask the question, but everyone knew the answer.

Cowards.

Hibiki: Motive to kill.

Monokuma: Aren’t you on the ball, Know-It-All? Living up to your name!

Monokuma: Like they said, I’m giving you a motive to kill. Now, there’s something you all have in common. You all have something to hide. A secret.

Monokuma: Actually, you’ve all got a few. Not that surprising for a bunch this shady! But I’m saving the extra juicy ones for later, so I’ll just spill the easy one now.

With that, Monokuma finally whipped the sheet off of the object we’d all gathered in front of. It was a chalkboard, a single sentence scrawled on its surface.

‘Congratulations to Hope’s Peak’s newest graduating class!’

...Then that means...
Toramoto: What kinda joke’s this?

Kamiya: Oh my…

Alix: Do I really gotta ask someone to say it out loud?

**Monokuma laughed hideously.**

Monokuma: Sorry, Buster! Here, I’ll spell it out for ya.

Monokuma: You seventeen degenerate wastes of space are the latest graduating class of Hope’s Peak! Jeez, you’d think you woulda been tipped on by Hopester’s talk about talents and all.

The deck was quiet as everyone mulled over what they’d just been told or let the meaning behind it sink in. Not wanting to waste time, I decided to get it over with and state the obvious.

Hibiki: So everyone’s forgotten the last three or so years.

Monokuma: You got it! Here’s the rundown. Where your memories stop is probably sorta foggy, but wherever they do, you all shoulda gotten the acceptance letters from Hope’s Peak sometime in the week following! After that’s three wonderful years of learning, bonding, fights, friendships, romance… You name it, it probably happened.

Monokuma: Anyway, point is that you guys are in a bit of a funny situation right now! You’re all acting how you did at the end of those three years and your personalities are totally the same, but the memories that molded those personalities in the first place are, well… Gone. Weird, isn’t it?

Monokuma: So… If you want any of those life-changing memories or anything back by any chance, I’ll throw them in for free for anyone who offs someone else! Just a reminder, some of you guys weren’t that nice to each other back then. I wouldn’t trust anyone too much… You might befriend a backstabber. Literally! Upupu.
Monokuma: That’s it. If you need anything, say my name to a mirror three times and I’ll appear behind you in a flash. And who knows, if nobody kills I might get bored and start killing you off myself just to keep you on your toes?

Monokuma: Welp, see ya!

And just like that, Monokuma disappeared, the floor opening up to swallow both him and the chalkboard.

...Right. Well, not going to let that ruin my day. Why would I care about any of these hacks regardless of how many years I spent with them? Boring people are boring people are boring people.

Hanahara: ...Well.

Like her.

Hanahara: I think that for now, it’d be best if everyone just… Thought on this for a while. You’re all above murder, and I know it. Nobody’s going to die, and I won’t let that bear change anything about that.

Toramoto: That’s pretty optimistic.

Aitou: Well… Isn’t optimism all we have?

Silence again. God, do these guys even know how to keep up a conversation without going into shock?

Uroko: You’re totes right, Aitou-chan! But you shouldn’t act like it’s a last resort. After all, optimism brings hope, and hope is what decides who’s strong enough to live.

Uroko: Like Hanahara-chan! You’re so strong and you have so so much hope! It’s so great… I’m glad we have someone like you to set such an amazing example.
Hanahara: ...Thanks, Uroko-san.

Uroko grinned and gave Hanahara a cutesy thumbs up. Hanahara barely smiled back.

Hanahara: Alright, well... I suppose everyone is free to do as they wish for the rest of the day, so long as you stay within the rules we're set.

Hanahara: If at no other time, I'll see you all tomorrow morning at 8:15.

As soon as she'd said what she wanted to, Hanahara swept her gaze over us one last time and left. Slowly, everyone else began to disperse, and Yoshida heavily walked over to my side.

Yoshida: So... That was interesting.

Hibiki: ...

Yoshida: Um, listen... How about you try to make a new friend today?

Hibiki: Why, you plan on dying anytime soon?

Yoshida: N-No! Of course not!

Hibiki: ...I was joking, Yoshi.

Yoshida: Right. Uh, heh... Sorry. Little bit on edge.

Hibiki: Mm.

Yoshida: Uhh, right. I just thought that it'd be good for you to get to know more people is all...
Regardless of how good the rules are for you, it’s still good to have people on your side too. Especially someone from the other team.

Hibiki: Sure.

Yoshida: Right… Um, here’s a good way to start. Who here do you like talking to?

Hibiki: You, apparently.

Yoshida: [Blushes] Aw. Um, thanks… I think.

Yoshida: Okay then… How about people you don’t hate talking to?

Hibiki: …Rouvin, Hashikawa, Aitou, Toramoto, Kim, Sumire if she won’t pull me into the pool.

Yoshida: Rouvin-san, huh…? He’s on Team Rho like me, but I guess we gotta start small. Or, as the case may be, with the biggest guy here… heheh.

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: [Clears throat weakly] Uh, okay. Rouvin-san is…

Yoshida looked around a bit before his gaze fell on the philosopher, and I followed his line of sight. The man was muttering to himself at a wild pace, his hands gesturing frantically along with whatever he was saying.

Yoshida: …Occupied. Maybe later.

Hibiki: Agreed.

Yoshida: Okay, then what about Hashikawa-san? [Points] She’s just sitting over there. She looks like
she could use a friend.

Hibiki: She had three friends just yesterday.

Yoshida: ...C’mon, Kioku-san. Please?

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: I won’t talk to you again until you do it.

Hibiki: I don’t need you.

Yoshida: ...Y’know, that’d almost be funny coming from anyone else, but something tells me you’re serious and honestly I don’t wanna confirm that for myself. But really, just go do something with yourself! It’ll be fine. We all had to have gotten along somehow when we all knew each other before… right?

Hibiki: Whatever you say.

Sighing, I made my way over to where Hashikawa was sitting. She had her legs in the pool, dangling them there absently as she stared at the water.

As much as I didn’t like how annoying and predictable most people here were, something about Hashikawa was at least slightly interesting, not to mention she wasn’t argumentative or pushy like Hanahara. Rather, she was… Well, not placid, but she was a pushover, so good enough for me. Better to come out of a conversation bored out of my mind than wanting to shove pins into the roof of my mouth.

Hibiki: Hey.

Hashikawa jumped at the sound of my voice, but turned to me and smiled. Her expression was waver ing a little, but she was welcoming nonetheless.
Well… Let’s see how this goes.

Hashikawa: Oh, um, ahoy, Kioku-san! Nice to see you…

Hibiki: Thanks...

I thought about what Yoshida said about making friends, and my eyes flicked off to the side.

Hibiki: ...You too.

Hashikawa: [Moves over] Oh, do you want to sit down?

Hibiki: Yeah, sure.

I sat down on the floor next to Hashikawa, her legs still hanging over the pool’s edge while mine stayed on the floor. I started fiddling with one of my shoes as she began to speak.

Hashikawa: ...So, um… Nice weather we’re having…?

I said nothing. Hashikawa squeaked.

Hashikawa: Ahaha, oh… Right, yeah, oppressive glass dome that’s kinda sorta putting at least a few hundred metres of water between us and any sort of weather at all, sorry. Do y-

Hibiki: The motive was interesting.

Hashikawa: O-Oh, yeah! It was, uh…

Hashikawa: ...Never mind.
Hibiki: What?

Hashikawa: Um, well, I’m sure whatever you have to say about it is more interesting.

_She isn’t wrong. Still, even if she’s sort of boring, just listening to people talk and not having to waste time keeping the conversation going myself is better than nothing._

Hibiki: Meh. It was a big thing, sure, but if I can’t remember it, there’s no reason I should worry about it. It’ll all come with time.

Hashikawa: You really think so?

Hibiki: Well yeah, sure. With the stunt Kurai pulled this morning, I don’t suspect it’ll be long before someone dies, and after that everyone’ll just keep going until one team leaves and I go with them. Sheep follow the rest of the herd.

Hashikawa: ...Yeah. Yeah, you’re right. A-Actually, I thought it was… nice, in a way. The motive, I mean.

Hibiki: ...Go on.

Hashikawa: Oh, well, just… The thought that everyone here was in the same class for three years, you know? Not everyone… Not everything is going perfectly right now, but it’s nice that we all got along. It makes me think that maybe that could happen again, and we could all be friends. I just think that that would be really nice.

Hashikawa: ...Sorry for rambling. I know I’m probably not the best company.

Hibiki: Actually, that’s an interesting take on it.

Hashikawa: You really think so?
Hashikawa: [Hand brushes at scar on her side] ...Thank you, Kioku-san. I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but… I think you’re actually pretty cool. You seem so collected, and you didn’t even freak out when Captain Monokuma was talking to you yesterday… How do you do it?

My gaze drifted up to the sailor as I finished dealing with my socks and started rolling up my pant legs. I shrugged.

Hibiki: I just remember that in the end, I am above all of this.

Hashikawa: Huh?

Hibiki: If something happens and I can’t control it, there’s no reason I should waste my breath. Taking things in stride is the smart thing to do. There’s no reason I should fear the inevitable, and there’s no reason I should fix other people’s mistakes. Not my fucking problem until I’m in danger.

Hashikawa: Wow… You’ve really got everything together. That kind of strength… I think that really says a lot about the kind of person you are.

Hashikawa: ...But that’s just me, so feel free to ignore that.

Hibiki: Right.

Having long finished dealing with my pant legs, I pushed my shoes to the side and pulled myself to the water’s edge.

I put one foot in the pool water, and immediately recoiled.

Hibiki: -Gh!

I used my dry foot to push myself away from the pool, my wide gaze lost to the now unsettled water. I could feel my heart speeding up in my chest.

The feeling of cold waves rushed over my head again. I brought one shaking leg up to my chest.

*It was so cold.*

Hashikawa: Kioku-san? Are you… Oh God, are you having a panic atta--

Hashikawa’s voice made me aware of where I was once again, and I tried my best to pull myself together. The waves subsided.

Hibiki: Um. It was just cold.

Hashikawa: O-Oh… Um… Sorry. I should have warned you.

Hashikawa cast me a concerned look, but my eyes stayed on the water.

Hibiki: I’m fine.

*What the hell was that?*

Hashikawa: O-Of course! Sorry, sorry.

Hashikawa: This… This might be rude of me, but… If it makes you feel any better, I know how that feels.

Hibiki: …I don’t need your platitudes. Like I said, I’m fine.
Hashikawa: [Recoils] O-Oh, of course. Sorry if it seemed like I was doubting you.

Hibiki: Whatever. Just…

Hibiki: Don’t go around telling anyone else about that.

Hashikawa: N-Not a problem. I know that whatever happened to make you react like that must be… It must’ve been bad. Sorry.

Hibiki: I don’t know what you’re talking about. Bye, Hashikawa.

I rolled down my pants and picked up my shoes, avoiding Hashikawa’s eyes as best I could. I stood up and started to leave.

Hashikawa: Wait!

...Hashikawa was looking at me with something like desperation in her expression. As much as I just wanted to leave, something compelled me to listen anyway.

Hashikawa: Um… I just wanted to say that if… If you ever wanted to talk to anyone or if you want a friend… I’m around. I… I don’t think I’ll last that long, but… Yeah. Sorry… Sorry.

Hibiki: ...Like I already said. I don’t need your platitudes.

Not looking back to see the expression on Hashikawa’s face, I left.

I was feeling pretty tired after that… Getting something from the buffet could help, at least.

After dragging myself around the platters for a bit, I dumped a spoonful of pasta onto my plate, grabbed a cup and another jug of cola from the fridge and slammed both down at a
Left alone with my thoughts as I ate, I ended up being forced to think about what’d just happened.

Hashikawa had said she’d understood, but she’d just been sitting in the water herself. What was that even supposed to mean? That she’d fallen overboard a bunch of times?

...Actually, that wouldn’t be surprising at all.

But still, that reaction… That wasn’t even me.

...

...The water was just cold. That’s what I told Hashikawa. That’s what it was. Nothing else.

I’m always in control.

I stared out the window, and watched as light rippled on the sandy bed of the dome. The water above shone with dark, freezing light.

...My pasta had gone cold, too.

I gulped down a glass of soda and left the room, the jug and plate abandoned at my table. They could be someone else’s problem.

???: But that’s… No… What about… Hm.

I turned to see Rouvin standing just outside the bar, muttering to himself. Something to brighten up my day, at least.
I walked over to him and nodded.

Hibiki: Yo.

Rouvin: But what about- Oh. Hello, Kioku.

**I couldn’t say I really cared what Rouvin was doing, but given the alternatives right now…**
**Well. May as well try to hold up a conversation. At least this guy was always a step ahead of the pack, too.**

Hibiki: What’re you doing out here?

Rouvin: Ah, well, I had just finished a drink - non-alcoholic, of course. Hanahara is still in there if you’d like t-

Hibiki: Nooooo thanks.

Rouvin: …Is there a problem?

**God dammit. Guess I’m doing this again.**

Hibiki: You wanna hear the fucking problem? ...Hanahara tries to control me. She thinks she knows better than I do, but she doesn’t. She doesn’t know the first thing about me at all, and it’s frustrating watching her feed everyone false hope.

Rouvin: Hm.

**Rouvin stood still in thought for a few moments, one hand lifted to his chin like always.**

Rouvin: ...Well, I suppose this depends, in part, on the model of ethics which you apply to the
Rouvin: There are many of these, and most individuals do not have a name for the model under which they pass judgement of others, but primarily these models discuss the balance of intents and consequences.

Rouvin: One such model is utilitarianism, a consequentialist approach dating back to as early as the times of Epicurus of Samos, an-

Rouvin: …

Rouvin: My apologies. I should probably condense all of this, shouldn’t I.

Rouvin: To put it simply, there are three primary schools of ethical judgement, and each has a few different sub-models. One of the most famous gauges for these is the trolley problem.

Rouvin: …Bear with me here. So, say you are standing at a split in a railroad track. A train is coming your way, and will go onto one of the two tracks by which you stand.

Rouvin: On one track is one person, and tied to the other are five. You do not know anything about these people, only that as is, the train will continue onto the track which will kill the five and spare the one.

Rouvin: …However. You are standing next to a lever which will switch the tracks, saving the five but killing the one. Who dies is up to you. The question is, do you pull the lever?

...What the fuck.

Hibiki: You sure you wanna be sharing murder methods right now?

Rouvin: Perhaps not, however… I believe you would not pull the lever.

Hibiki: …
Rouvin: That is to say, your model of ethics… Is it not closest to the egoistic approach?

Hibiki: Are you calling me a narcissist?

Rouvin: I am not calling you anything. When all is said, this is merely subjective. All of this is.

Rouvin: I am suggesting, though, that you would act for your own benefit in any situation. Most people do. After all, do we follow duties and rules to help others, or appease ourselves?

Hibiki: ...Huh.

Rouvin: Mm. So then, by outright stating you are acting in self-interest, are you not simply being more sincere than the majority?

Hibiki: Sure. Guess so.

Rouvin: ...Mhm. And then, the other thing to consider…

Rouvin: Everyone here is standing in front of their own lever. Who will be the first to pull it?

Rouvin looked down at me, and for a moment his eyes shone with something more than the absent-minded intelligence he’d shown every other time we’d met. He was obviously passionate about his occupation, but there was something about the way he’d said that that made me think he had a lot more than dedication going for him.

I felt an unsettling air creep over my back.

Hibiki: Well… Would you pull the lever?

Rouvin: …
Rouvin: I don’t know.

I nodded, my hands shoved just a little too deep into my pockets.

Hibiki: ...Thanks for the talk, Rouvin.

Rouvin: Anytime.

I left in a bit of a daze, my mind wandering between Rouvin’s words as I left. I heard the bar door open and close behind me.

Well, today sure was something.

I pulled my e-Handbook out of one pocket. 6:18PM.

Never too early for sleep, I guess. The more of it, the less hours I have to spend with these hacks.

I made my way up the stairs, unlocked my door and flopped onto my unmade bed once more, consciousness drifting away from me as fast as driftwood in a storm.

---

Once again, I woke up to knocking at my door.

Hibiki: WHO IS IT?

???: ...
Hibiki: You have got to be fucking joking. FINE, ASSBAG. Ruining my wonderful sleep. This is a federal offense in some countries, you know!

???: ……

Hibiki: *I hope I die first.*

I opened the door. Outside was Maeko, the usual calm but stern expression on her face.

Hibiki: What do you want.

Maeko: …

The karate pro shifted awkwardly before starting to walk towards the staircase. She motioned for me to follow with one hand.

Hibiki: ...This had better be fucking good.

As our footsteps echoed through the staircase, I pulled out my e-Handbook groggily. 8:50PM.

Hibiki: This is going to be a full seventy minutes I could be spending unconscious, you know? You did this to me. Hope you’re happy.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: ...Fucker.

Knowing that Maeko wasn’t going to respond to me no matter how many insults I dished out and questions I asked, I gave up on both and decided to just follow her in silence. Eventually, we found ourselves at the bar. Maeko opened the door to reveal a small group gathered
around the main bench.

I spotted Hanahara and scowled.


Maeko: …

Maeko: ……

Hibiki: Eat my fucking heart out.

Maeko looked at me for a moment and tilted her head slightly, clearly confused. Too busy being stoic to ask me what I was saying, though, she simply marched over to stand by Uroko’s side, whispering something in her ear. The composer waved at me and squealed as I strolled over to the bench and took a seat next to Kamiya.

Uroko: Hiiiii!!! Sorry Maemae had to wake you up, Kioku-chan! We’re just having this super important meeting, and Hanahara-chan and I agreed that all the team reps should be here, especially since you were so nice yesterday!

Hibiki: ...Yeah, sounds totally sick!

Here we go again. Gotta love messing with this loser.

Hibiki: So, there are a lot of people here… Why? Got some awesome plan?

Looking around at the seats in the bar, about six people other than myself were present. Uroko and Maeko, attached at the hip once more, were both on the other side of the room, the latter standing next to the sofa her sister was sitting on with a rigid posture. Hanahara had stationed herself behind the main bench with all the alcohol, and was scrubbing cups vacantly as she listened to the conversation. Aitou, Orutoku and Kamiya, who were lined up on bar stools, had also apparently been invited.
So this is just the preps, then.

...At least, to apply a bit of Uroko’s ‘optimism’, it could be worse. They could’ve invited Ryuumatsu.

Instead of Uroko answering my question, Hanahara jumped in to take the lead.

Hanahara: We do, actually. We were hoping you could all help us with it.

Uroko: Yeah, that’s right!

I’m starting to think Hanahara just loves the sound of her own voice. That didn’t even contribute anything.

Uroko: Sooooo… Basically, Hanahara-chan and I talked, and we agreed that we want distrust between the teams to be as low as possible! So, as a big group bonding event, I suggested that we hold a concert!

Aitou: A concert…?

Uroko: Yeah! I asked Kurai-chan if he maybe wanted to do a duet with me since he’s a voice actor and all, but he just, um… Did a rude gesture and spat on my shoes. But hey, they’re shinier now, so it’s fine!

Uroko: Anyway, the idea is that I’ll hopefully be able to get a piano from somewhere on the ship and perform for everyone! I may not be a pianist by trade, but composers gotta be multitalented like that, y’know?

...Wow, sounds like a great idea. Sure would be a surprise if someone took advantage of this to kill someone else during the concert.
...These idiots are all fucking doomed.

Orutoku: That sounds like a great idea, Uroko-san! I’ve just got a couple of questions, though…

Uroko: Ooo! What are they, Orutoku-chan?

Orutoku: First of all… Why us?

Hanahara: Oh, that’s simple. Uroko-san, Kioku-san and I all had to be involved because of our statuses as team leaders. Also, Uroko-san is the performer, and she said Kioku-san was very friendly and would be a good addition to the team.

**Orutoku raised an eyebrow at me as Hanahara said that last part, but he didn’t mention it aloud. I just shrugged and grinned at him.**

Hanahara: Maeko-san was an obvious choice due to her strength. We’ll need to spend a lot of time on preparations, some of which are bound to involve heavy objects. There’s also the obvious sister relationship, so there was no reason not to have her involved. No better way to unite the teams.

Hanahara: Orutoku-san and Aitou-san, you were both chosen for your strength and responsibility, too. You both seem collected and respectful enough, and Orutoku-san, we might need a security guard. And Kamiya-san… We were hoping you could help with decorations.

**Mizuki’s eyes lit up at the mere concept of being involved in decorations, while Orutoku grinned widely at Hanahara and Aitou hid his mouth under a single gloved hand.**

Orutoku: I’m glad you decided to recruit me! I swear on my life, I won’t let you down.

Kamiya: [Clasps hands] Me too! This is such a wonderful idea… It would be so nice to have the teams united like that.

Aitou: This is quite the honour… I may not be the most suitable candidate for the task, but thank you for involving me regardless. I’m sure this is bound to be interesting.
Hibiki: ...Sweet!

They ain’t gettin’ shit outta me.

Orutoku: Ah, onto my other question… Where do you actually want to host this?

????: I can help with that one!

Out of nowhere, the floorboards rattled behind the bar bench. Monokuma sprung up onto the table without warning.

Monokuma: I was saving this for later, but this sounds interesting, so I’ll give ya early access! [Points over shoulder] There’s a concert hall through one of the doors in that big ol’ stairwell over there. Should do pretty nicely, huh?

Kamiya: Ah! That sounds perfect!

Aitou: You were saving it for later?

Monokuma: Nice catch, Watson! Yeah, if any of you airheads up and offed someone else, I was gonna reward the trial winners with a few snazzy new rooms. Sticking to the same boring deck all the time would be such a waste. This is a cruise ship, for Pete’s sake!

Hanahara: ...Nobody’s going to kill anyone.

Monokuma: Aw, how cute. You keep telling yourself that, Bumblebee.

Monokuma: Anyway, this sounds pretty off the chain, if you ask me, and I was gonna unlock an area early anyway… Guess it’ll be this one! There’s a grand piano in there, but something tells me it might be in the middle of all the seating. Whoops!
Orutoku: What the…

Uroko: This sounds tooooootally great, Captain Monokuma! Thanks a bunch!

Monokuma: Shucks, kid. You flatter me.

Monokuma: Anyway, I gotta blast, so see ya later kids! Scram in the next twenty minutes or I might lock you in.

Just like that, the robot jumped back behind the counter and plunged into the floor, disappearing without a trace.

Everyone just stared for a moment until Uroko clapped her hands and grinned.

Uroko: Sweet! That’s that, then!

Uroko: We were hoping to have this, um… Night after next? Yeah! So the fourth night. Tonight’s night two. That sound good?

Everyone nodded, and Uroko flashed a peace sign. Hanahara picked the conversation back up.

Hanahara: Alright, well… If the grand piano’s seriously in the middle of the seating area, this is going to be a lot of work. I say we meet tomorrow night at 6 to begin preparations - the concert hall will probably lock at night time, so we need to have vacated it by 9:40PM just to be safe. We can finish setting up the day of the concert. Kamiya-san, it might be worth asking Captain Monokuma if he has any decorations you can use. Everyone else, all you need to do is show up and put in your best effort.

Hanahara: With that… I think it’s probably time for bed. I’d suggest everyone gets out of here before it locks up for the night.

Hanahara walked over to the door, and held it open as she waved goodbye to everyone before
starting to make her way across the deck. Steadily, everybody else streamed out of the bar as well, only Kamiya and I remaining behind.

Kamiya: Um.. Kioku-san?

Hibiki: What.

Kamiya: I… I just wanted to say that… I think it’s really cool that you’re so calm when you’re all alone in your own team, and… It’s nice of you to help with this. It seems more everyone else’s sort of thing than it is yours, so…

Hibiki: This is the mortician’s sort of thing?

Kamiya: Oh, um, Aitou-san? Well, maybe not him. Still, though, I think he likes music... He hums a lot in the buffet.

Hibiki: Who knew.

Kamiya: ...Yeah. Um, anyway, I’ll… I’ll see you tomorrow. Thanks, Kioku-san.

Kamiya gently lifted her tall frame from the stool, gracefully padding over to the door and leaving with one last glance in my direction.

I gave it a minute so that I wouldn’t run into her before leaving as well. The nighttime announcement played just as I unlocked the door to my suite, and this time I actually thought to take off my shoes before falling unconscious once more, the soft hum of the ship’s lights lulling me into a sound sleep.
Hey everyone, and thanks for reading UDR! Thank you especially to everyone who has drawn fanart! It's my birthday today so I didn't have enough time to get everything together, but I might do a fanart feature at the end of next chapter - it's a short one anyway, so that might make up for it...?

I didn't put this in the report cards between the prologue and chapter one, but Captain Monokuma's design is kind of needed to understand one of the things in this chapter, so I figured I'd stick it at the top of the chapter and add it to the reference sheets ASAP.

Warning for this chapter: someone has a panic attack (yes, that sort of happened last chapter too, sorry for not warning about that one). Nothing too bad, just figured that was something I should tag... Hope everyone's alright with that, and that you enjoy reading :D
CAPTAIN MONOKI
To no surprise on my behalf, I woke up to the monitor in my room flicking on once again, Monokuma’s cheery voice slicing through my sleepy consciousness and grating at my ears.

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: Wowie, another bee-a-UTIFUL day on the S.S. Desbear! Get up, get a breath of sterilised and mechanically filtered air, and take in the sights, kids. Life is short.

Monokuma: ...Extremely short.

Monokuma: Anyway, seeya later! Upupu.

The screen flicked off. I wasn’t going to be able to get back to sleep… At least I got extra last night.

Last night… Oh, great. Guess I have to go spend more time with fucking Hanahara of all people tonight. Better enjoy the day while I can, or something.

Not bothering to put up a fight with Yoshida, who’d just started knocking on my door again, I patted my hair down as I strolled over to the exit and opened the door.

Hibiki: Yo.

Yoshida: Wh-- O-Oh, that was fast. You sleep well?

Hibiki: I don’t know. I was unconscious.

Yoshida: ...Oh. Haha. You got me there. Um…
Yoshida: Breakfast meeting starts in fifteen minutes, I guess, if you want to…

Hibiki: If I want to? Dictator Hanahara decides what I want, I fucking guess, so yeah. I’m going.

Yoshida: ...Heh, yeah. Okay. She… She is kind of controlling.

Hibiki: You don’t have to tell me.

Yoshida: R… Right.

Something was up with Yoshida this morning. I couldn’t say I particularly cared, but a conversation with him was marginally better than walking to the buffet in silence.

Hibiki: You’re acting off.

Yoshida: [Eyes widen] Huh?

Hibiki: You keep stuttering and hesitating. Something’s wrong.

Yoshida: [Scratching his neck] Oh, that. I’m just a little jumpy today, I think. ...Couldn’t get to sleep last night.

Hibiki: Huh.

Yoshida: Yeah, I… I don’t know. I’m just… kind of afraid, I guess. Sucks to admit it, though. Heh.

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: It’s just… I don’t know how much I can trust everyone here, you know?
Hibiki: ...We can talk about this later.

Yoshida gulped weakly, his smile shaking ever so slightly. Finally having reached the buffet, he held the door open and entered after me.

Yoshida: Oh, um. Right. Sorry about that.

Yoshida: ...Did you make any friends yesterday?

Hibiki: I don’t have friends.

Yoshida: [Trying to joke around] Aw, w-what about me?

Hibiki: …That was a really bad delivery.

Yoshida: Um… Yeah. I guess I really am out of it this morning.

Yoshida stared at nothing as he grabbed a plate and put a slice of pizza on it. I piled a ton of food onto my own plate and shoved it onto the table we’d been at yesterday, not really caring when spaghetti ended up all over the placemat.

Hibiki: You usually eat more than that.

Yoshida: [Stunned, looks at plate] ...Oh. Just don’t have much of an appetite today.

Hibiki: ...Whatever.

Well, whatever the hell this was, it wasn’t my fault or my problem. Ignoring Yoshida fidgeting with his necklace, I started shovelling food into my mouth as the last few people filtered through the buffet. Soon enough, everyone had taken a seat, and Hanahara was walking up to the front again with her notebook in hand.
Yoshida: ...Does Hanahara-san actually eat breakfast?

Hibiki: Hope not. Maybe she’ll starve to death.

Yoshida: ...Heh, yeah. Um... maybe.

Yoshida stared at his plate again, and I rolled my eyes. Eventually, Hanahara finished flipping through her notebook, nodded, and began her proceedings.

Hanahara: [Claps loudly] Alright, everyone! There’s nothing major we need to discuss today, but I’d still like to talk to you all about how yesterday went and go over protocol.

Hanahara: The main thing I was going to organise was a roster for washing up dishes, but... it looks like that might actually be automatic. Also, the kitchen is locked. So-

Yousetsu: Actually, there was something I… I want to discuss. It’s really important, so...

Hanahara looked stunned and a little frustrated, but curiosity seemed to get the best of her. She crossed her arms.

Hanahara: Go ahead, Yousetsu-san.

Yousetsu nodded, looking down at her own notepad with a gaze more alert than I’d seen from her before. Last time, she hadn’t been engaged at all… Guess this was really important to her, or something.

Yousetsu: Well… I’ve been thinking about how any of this is actually… possible. Like how this was all set up. And also that there has to be someone coordinating this… Like a mastermind, I guess. I thought if we tried to find out who that was, we might be able to… Do something about it. And leave.

Hanahara: ...I see.
Hanahara seemed at something of a loss now that she didn’t have the answers. The bartender tapped her foot and frowned at the floor.

Hanahara: Well, does anyone else have any input?

Um, you’re all stupid for not thinking about this sooner? I almost can’t believe it took three days for this to come up, but somehow, I’m not really that surprised. God, these guys are dense.

By some miracle of existence, someone actually spoke up who wasn’t Hanahara.

Toramoto: Actually, I got somethin’ to say about all this, too.

Hanahara: Uh… Go for it.

Toramoto: If you say so.

Toramoto grinned, shoving his hands into his pockets underneath the table. His piercing gaze swept across the room.

Toramoto: Someone here’s pretty clearly suspicious, and it doesn’t take much to figure it out. This project, if ya even wanna call it that, took two things.

Toramoto: The first is manpower. [Slams table with fist] You’d need access to a lotta people to get this thing down here, along with some pretty specialised tech meant specifically for workin’ in the ocean - at least, if we’re underwater at all, which I, personally, think we are.

Toramoto: Second thing’s money, but it’s not a necessity if you’ve already got the resources you need. Y’know, like, a boat, a submarine, whatever else. The dome ‘n everyday outside it is up for debate, but we know for a fact we’re on a cruise ship, right? There’s no debatin’ that.

Toramoto: Now, a few more things.
Toramoto: For one, that motive. If we were just one class outta a bunch at Hope’s Peak, why choose us? Who would choose just us? They’d have to be someone closely connected to the whole class, and someone who could’ve, across the years, formed a grudge against the rest of us. Namely… Someone in the class, yeah?

Toramoto: And another thing. Whoever’s runnin’ this show would want to have pretty close surveillance on us, don’t ya think? They could be hidin’ out on the ship or controllin’ everything remotely, but there’s also another option…

Toramoto: Tell me, Aitou-san, what’s the last way to keep an eye on everyone if you aren’t hidden from sight?

Aitou: Um… I suppose you would have to be personally present, correct?

Toramoto: Right. And why wouldn’t you be, if you could blend in? You’d wanna be here, and you’d wanna put yourself at an advantage. Even make yourself so obvious that nobody’d ever bother to suspect you, ‘cause the easiest answer usually isn’t the right one. Thing is, though, it always could be, and I wouldn’t put it past someone to take advantage of that.

Toramoto: Now, this is just my opinion, but doesn’t Hashikawa-san’s uniform look pretty much exactly the same as what Monokuma wears?

A loud clatter rung through the buffet. Hashikawa had dropped her knife and fork, and was staring at Toramoto with sheer terror contorting her face.

Everyone went silent as they turned to her in anticipation and distrust.

Hashikawa: I… You… W-What…?

Toramoto: Nothing against you, kid. Just statin’ what I’m seein’. The uniform, the ship, the manpower… What do you do as a sailor, again? Pretty sure you ain’t just ridin’ around on cute little boats. You’d have a whole crew, right?

Hashikawa: I-I--
Toramoto: ...Not respondin’ isn’t a defence. If you can’t refute this, I have no reason not to believe it. After all, ‘s all just speculation. You can’t stop me from thinkin’ what I do unless you give me a good reason.

Toramoto got up and strolled over to Hashikawa’s table, his strides long and lax. He stood over her hunched and shaking form from a couple feet away.

Toramoto: Look, sunshine. I’m just tellin’ it as it is. All I want is to keep as many people safe as possible, so-

???: Behind you.

Toramoto turned around slowly, his gaze drifting up as Sumire’s face came into his line of sight. He scoffed.

Sumire raised one hand, scowled, and slammed her open palm right across his face. Toramoto was sent to the floor sprawling.

Sumire: Listen up, Tiger Shark. You might think this is funny, and I don’t know who you think you’re helping by doing this, but don’t ever, EVER pick on someone like that when you don’t have anything but circumstantial BULL to back you up. You hearing me?

Toramoto: [Keeled over, smirking grimly] ...Sure am.

Sumire: Fantastic. Don’t ever speak to or about Hashikawa-san again unless it’s to apologise. You make me sick.

Sumire turned to Hashikawa, who’d long since started shaking and sobbing into her jacket. Gently, she picked up the sailor’s glasses from where she’d left them on the table and took one of her hands with her own.

Sumire: Hey… Do you want to go somewhere else?
Hashikawa looked up weakly, nodding as best she could. Her eyes couldn’t seem to decide where to focus.

Sumire: Okay. Here, I’ll help.

Hashikawa slowly got up, and Sumire put a hand on her back, too tall to properly support her around the waist. Sumire set her gaze straight for the door and tried to get Hashikawa to do the same, but it was obvious she’d heard everyone’s murmurs from the way she shuddered and pulled down her hat.

Everyone pretty obviously felt bad for Hashikawa, but… Toramoto’s words hadn’t gone unacknowledged. Whether they were true or not, they had some merit that was hard to ignore for even the more sympathetic members of the group.

Desperate to regain some semblance of control over the room, Hanahara spoke up again.

Hanahara: …Well. I’m… I’m sorry about that, everyone. You’re all free to do what you want for the rest of the day.

Uroko: Aw, don’t just give up hope like that, Hanahara-chan!

Uroko leapt out of her seat to stand next to Hanahara, hands balled up at her chin exuberantly.

Uroko: I know that was a pretty rough way to start the day, but we can’t let it ruin everything for everybody! Everyone else can still be in a good mood! Right, sis?

Maeko: … [Gives a thumbs up]

Uroko: See? So how about we all head down to the pool or something! We can all have a nice swim and get to know each other better and have a totally great time! Hanahara-chan, you could even make mocktails!
Hanahara: ...You know, I do think that would help…

Uroko: Awesome! Alright then, who’s with me?

Kyou: Not m-

Maeko: ………

Kyou: [Unnerved] ...Actually, yeah, whatever.

A couple of other people who had been ready to decline got similar stares from Maeko. Everybody nodded in agreement with Uroko’s plan.

Uroko: Aw, gosh you guys, thanks for the enthusiasm! This is gonna be great!

Hanahara: Toramoto-san, how about you go get some towels.

Toramoto: [Already leaving] ...Sure thing.

Hanahara: As for everyone else, ah… Does anyone know if there was swimwear anywhere?

Kamiya: Oh, um… I think I saw some in the suite wardrobes? There’s a lot of stuff in there.

Hanahara: Thank you, Kamiya-san. Anyone who’s interested in swimming, I’d recommend going up there to get your swimwear.

Kim: Sweet. Alix-kun, are you coming with me to get changed?

Alix: You have any other ideas for how I’d get anywhere?
Alix: ...Wait, actually, I don’t know how to swim. Mamugi-san, can I just get the biggest mocktail you can make?

Hanahara: Well, I can only make them as big as the glasses are…

Alix: That’s okay! I’ll just picture it as being really really huge.

Hanahara: Oh, heh… Yeah, sure thing. I’ll… See if there’s a cart or something anywhere that I can bring out to the pool.

Alix: [Flopping sleeves around cheerfully] Woohoo! I’ll help! I’m told I’m really great when it comes to looking for things.

Hanahara: [Chuckles] ...Thanks, Alix-san.

Uroko: That’s the spirit! Maemae and I are gonna head up to the suites now! See you guys at the pool!

Maeko: … [Waves].

Hanahara: We’ll be going too. See you all at the pool!

Alix: Byeee!

It didn’t take long after that for most people to leave. I rolled my eyes as I dropped my plate down onto the stack that’d started to pile up. Yoshida did the same a little more gently, and we both headed out to the pool deck.

Hibiki: You planning on swimming?

Yoshida: ...I can’t even explain to you with words how much I don’t want to do that.
Hibiki: Cool. Same. Let’s not.

Just then, Toramoto walked up to me with the same grim air hanging over him as before, now with a bunch of towels shoved under his arms. He raised an eyebrow at me as he looked at my empty arms before shoving all of the towels onto me, forcing me to hold them.

Toramoto: There ya go.

Hibiki: ...I didn’t fucking ask for these.


Toramoto grinned and waved over his shoulder as he walked away, eventually lying down on one of the pool seats in a far corner of the deck. Yoshida held out his arms, and I dropped one of the piles of towels into them unceremoniously, leaving the other to fall to my feet.


Hibiki: They aren’t my problem.

Yoshida: ...Guess those ones can be for my bed.

Yoshida picked up the heap of towels from the floor and started walking over to a patch of light just next to the shaded lounges, where he dumped them on the floor again and started to make a nest.

Hibiki: ...What are you doing.

Yoshida: I’m just making a bed! I need… I need a nap. God, I really need a nap.
Hibiki: ...It’s 9:14.

Yoshida: I know this, and I do not care. It’s pool time. I’m not getting in the pool. So… So I’m just going to enjoy this however I can, I guess.

Yoshida: I’m just… I’m just going to take a nap.

Hibiki: Dude, what the fuck. You keep saying that.

Yoshida pulled his hood a little further over his head as he curled up in the blankets, his eyes staring solemnly away at the pool despite his insistence on sleep. He sighed.

Yoshida: ...Yeah. Guess I just… I don’t know. It’s been a bad morning for everyone, I think. A bad two days and a morning, actually. Everything’s just… Exhausting.

Hibiki: Hm.

Yoshida: ...Kioku-san, can I ask you something?

Hibiki: Sure.

Yoshida: ...How much do you trust everyone here?

I looked out to the pool, where most of the other passengers had finally gathered. Hanahara had set up a mocktail cart with Alix and Kim to keep her company. Aitou, Uroko, Maeko, and Kamiya were all in the pool, Uroko riding on Maeko’s shoulders through the shallow end and Kamiya sending playful flicks of water Aitou’s way while his back was turned. Rouvin absently watched from the lifeguard chair. Ryuumatsu and Orutoku had claimed the spa, and both held glasses of colourful liquid Hanahara had probably made. Away in the opposite corner to Toramoto was Kurai, who had apparently decided to use a towel as a blanket and pretend to get some sleep so that he could complain about everyone being too loud. Yousetsu was curled up on another lounge with her notepad, scribbling things down as always.
Hibiki: ...I don’t trust them at all.

Yoshida: …Yeah. I want to, but… I don’t think I can, either. Not after this morning. Not after yesterday. I… I’ve seen too many close calls already to believe in anyone anymore.

Yoshida: ...Um, except for you, of course.

Hibiki: You don’t have to lie to me, you know.

Yoshida: Wh-- I’m not! ...If I… If I’m totally honest, I don’t think anyone sees you as the most morally upstanding person here, and I know you don’t try to be, but… Really. I really don’t think you’d ever go that far. You don’t even have a reason to.

Yoshida looked over at me and lifted his head ever so slightly off the towel bed he’d made. His fringe fell over his face, and he swatted at it tiredly, trying to get it to stay put over just one of his eyes instead of both of them.

Yoshida: It’s, um… Really good to have a friend. Or, um. Acquaintance. Heheh.

Hibiki: That joke’s been dead for two days.

Yoshida: Yeah… Well, no point in leaving it dead if it was a good joke.

Hibiki: Heh. We’ll see.

Yoshida: Cool… Um. Kioku-san… One more question.

Hibiki: Yeah?

Yoshida: Can I… Can I call you by your first name?
I’d known Yoshida could be forward, but not in such a sincere way. I shrugged.

Hibiki: Doesn’t matter to me, Yoshi.

Yoshida: ...Thanks, Hibiki-san. [Yawns] I… I’m gonna have that nap now. I really wasn’t exaggerating when I said I was exhausted.

Hibiki: Alright.

Hibiki: ...Sleep well.

Yoshida beamed at that, his face lighting up as his eyes drifted closed.

Yoshida: Will do.

...For a moment, I’d forgotten that someone was probably going to murder someone else in the next few days.

...Oh well. Mood ruined, I guess.

I waited for Yoshida to fall asleep by looking around at the pool. Nothing really interesting was happening - pretty much the same as before, except that Uroko had coerced Rouvin into getting into the pool and was now riding on his shoulders instead.

The philosopher’s words from before crossed my mind. Who would be the first to pull the lever?

...Whatever. It really didn’t matter to me - anyone weak enough to be the killer or the victim probably deserved it, especially if they were about to force me to pull everyone’s weight to save my own skin.
I sighed and stood, deciding to make my way over to the buffet. No matter how batshit ridiculous everyone was trying to make things, there was always time for cola.

As I walked inside, I grabbed the usual jug of soda - restocked as it had been the day before - and a glass, making my way over to my table before stopping short. I turned around last-minute and sat outside in the outdoor dining area instead.

My eyes drifted off to the dome, cold and tall and towering. I rested my head in my hands. If Yoshida had been right about anything... The last couple of days had been sort of tiring. Nothing was going to happen to me directly, and nobody here was scary in the fucking slightest, but... I still didn’t want a murder to happen. I couldn’t trust anyone but myself to actually figure anything out, given how dense everyone seemed to be, so any investigation I had to do would be one I’d be figuring out alone.

...Well, hopefully that day would be later rather than sooner. Or the killer could just make everything really easy. Either works, honestly.

I was just about to pour myself another glass of cola when I heard voices from inside, both of them coming closer. I slouched over some more in the hopes that they’d ignore me.

Alix: Hnnnn… Wow, that was sooo good. Thank you again, Mamugi-san!

Mamugi: Oh... It was really no trouble. More importantly, you should make sure you’ve eaten.

Alix: Yes m’am!

Of all the fucking people... Ugh. Should’ve bolted for it while I had the chance.

...Unless I still do...

Hibiki: Gh…
Alix: Oh, hey! It’s Hibiki-san! Bonjouuurr!

Hanahara: Bonjour?

Alix: [Snickers] It annoys them.

Hibiki: ...I have to go take a shit or something. It’s important. Bye.

Hanahara raised an eyebrow and waved confusedly as I speed walked inside. I didn’t look back.

Hanahara: Kioku-san, you left your soda on the-- Oh, never mind.

Alix: Thanks for the cola! I won’t see ya later, but someone will!

Hanahara: But won’t you… Ohh. Heheh.

As soon as I’d turned the corner and was out of Alix and Hanahara’s sight, I slowed down completely and leaned against the wall, rolling my eyes. Guess I’m not going back out there, then.

Something I’d barely paid attention to before in the buffet caught my eye, and I decided to instead waste time inspecting that. It was a gacha machine, its colours split black and white down the middle, a flashy sign that read ‘MONOMONO MACHINE’ stretched across its top. It was a little under half full, so one could only guess it hadn’t been restocked for a while. That, or Uroko or someone similarly charismatic and happy-go-lucky had managed to use it that much in two days, at least.

A stack of gold tokens with Monokuma’s face on them also lay off to one side, just waiting to be used. I picked up a token and slotted it in before twisting the handle on the machine’s front. It rattled a little and dispensed a large capsule. Shrugging, I popped it open.

A ...huge nut fell out onto the floor.
Hibiki: Uhhh… What the fuck?

...Looking at it was giving me weird vibes. I kicked it off to the side with a grimace. That thing was fucking cursed.

Really, though, I had nothing better to do than keep messing with this thing...

I stuck another token in, turned the knob, and kept going until the machine was almost empty and I had more useless shit than I could hold.

That… Sure was an hour, I guess. Whatever - not like I’ve got anything better to do with my time.

Gathering all the prizes up in my pockets and leaving the capsules all over the floor, I walked over to a table and unceremoniously dumped them everywhere.

Yousetsu: ...Um… What are these…?

Hibiki: Wh--

Looking up, I saw that Yousetsu’d been sitting in silence at the table I’d thrown everything onto, and probably for a while. A plastic dinosaur was now sticking out of her pasta by its tail.

Hibiki: Oh. Hey.

Yousetsu: …

Hibiki: ...
Yousetsu: I... Asked a question...

Hibiki: ...Oh. These came from that machine over there.

Yousetsu looked down at her pasta, then to the dinosaur, and then back at me.

Yousetsu: ...Why was there a dinosaur?

Hibiki: I don’t know, there was a lot of weird shit in there. Like, uh…

I looked down at the pile of crap on the table, and picked up a small slip of paper that just said ‘Ticket: One free purging of capitalist 18th century demons!’.

Hibiki: Like this shit that I don’t even remember getting. What the fuck is this?

Yousetsu: Oh… That’s not from the gacha machine. Murasaki-kun put it on my table earlier…

Hibiki: Go figure, huh… Okay, well, there’s still a ton of disgustingly useless abominations in here that Murasaki didn’t play a hand in creating. I think.

Hibiki: Like, uhh… This huge plastic square, or whatever.

As I held up the prize in question, Yousetsu gasped excitedly.

Yousetsu: [Eyes sparkling] H-Hold on! That’s… That’s a hard drive!

Hibiki: A what? How did this even fit into the-... Actually, I don’t care. Just take it.

Yousetsu: Really?
Hibiki: Yeah. Take all of it, if you want. I really could not care less.

Yousetsu: Oh my gosh… Um, thank you! Let’s see here… [Digging through pile] That’s a flash drive… And these walkie talkies should have transmitting technology, speakers and microphones… Oh, there’s a USB, too! Even if it’s shaped like… Is that supposed to be a banana?

Hibiki: Beats me.

Yousetsu: Well, it’s useable anyway! Thank you so much, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: Uh, no problem.

I didn’t even think she could be this excited about anything. It was sorta creeping me out.

Yousetsu wasted no time staring at her gains, and immediately started taking notes on what she’d found. I walked over to the fridge to get some more cola before coming back over and sitting across from her to fiddle with some of the other stuff I’d won.

Yousetsu: Um… You’re still here?

Hibiki: Yeah. Nothing better to do. Yoshi’s asleep and Hanahara’s on the front deck, so this is my best bet.

Yousetsu: Who’s… Yoshi?

Hibiki: Yoshida. You know. Cat kid, probably thirteen years old, super shady, insufferable prick.

Yousetsu: He’s only thirteen? I thought I was the youngest here…

Hibiki: How would you even know how old everyone else is?
Yousetsu: Well, we’re all out of secondary school now, right…? So everyone should be about seventeen or eighteen… But following that logic, I’m only fifteen.

Hibiki: Huh?

Yousetsu: Yeah… I skipped a few grades. Homeschooled... My parents are robotics professors.

Hibiki: Oh. Cool.

Yousetsu: Mm… Yeah. Lots of… Lots of computers. Everywhere.

Hibiki: ...Ok.

Yousetsu: ...

Yousetsu: ...Um, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: What.

Yousetsu: I... wanted to thank you for talking to me, and for all the gifts… It was really nice talking to someone. Usually, I, um… Don’t have time.

Yousetsu looked down to her notepad and sighed. Her words became slightly more rushed.

Yousetsu: Actually, I… I probably shouldn’t be wasting time now, either. I have to finish this. Thank you, though.


I picked up whatever I’d been fiddling with and left to go back to my room for a while. Looking down, it seemed like the object was a pin - one of a silver and gold daisy, to be
precise. It occurred to me as I approached the suites that the flower that’d been on my desk was a daisy, too.

My mind flickered back to what Uroko had said about Hope’s Peak - that it was surrounded by a field of daisies. Something told me that this was… probably intentional.

Finally back in my room, I scooped the dying flower up from the table just inside the door before falling onto my bed. Holding it up into the air above me, I looked at the wilting flower skeptically.

A petal fell off and landed right on one of my eyes.

Hibiki: ...Fuck you too, I guess.

As shitty as this flower had decided to be, there was one interesting point it brought up. Whoever had brought us here had to have been at Hope’s Peak right before kidnapping us if this flower really was from there. That meant in turn that Toramoto’s theory about one of us masterminding this… actually held a fair amount of merit. We absolutely weren’t chosen at random, and whoever had set this up was almost definitely involved with Hope’s Peak in some way.

I guess that was the secret to that motive, then. Pushing the vulnerable to doubt each other. Didn’t affect me.

I hung out in my room for a while longer to mess with the TV, which, as it turned out, actually had a movie bank. Most of the movies were either animated or Japanese dubs of bad Western movies, all of which were bound to be shit, so I left them alone for now. It’d probably come in handy after everyone started dying and I ran out of entertainment, though.

Eventually, I decided to head back down to the main deck to see what was going on. Everyone had long since ended the pool party, but a few people seemed to be sticking around, most notably Yoshida. I walked over to him in silence and sat down on the end of his pool lounge.

Hibiki: Hey, Yoshi. I’m bored.
Yoshida looked up at me, seemingly surprised by my presence. He tried not to let it show.

Yoshida: ...I thought you said that you were the babysitter?

Hibiki: I am. I’m everyone’s babysitter. Without me, you’d all be screwed.

Yoshida: Heh-- ...Oh. You actually think that.

Hibiki: Of course I do. It’s the truth. Nobody else here will be able to pull their head in to solve a case when someone inevitably kicks it, so that’s gonna be my job.

Yoshida: ...Sure. Hey, uh… Why don’t you try making another friend?

Hibiki: I don’t h--

Yoshida: You know what I mean. Expand your horizons some more, and stuff. Just… Try being nice to someone.

Hibiki: I was nice to Rouvin.

Yoshida: That’s one person.

Hibiki: I was nice to Yousetsu.

Yoshida: Are we talking today or two days ago, because two days ago was less than stellar.

Hibiki: Today.

Yoshida: Okay, two. Seriously, aside from them and debatably me, have you actually made a
concerted effort to get along with anyone?

Hibiki: ...Tried with Hashikawa.

Yoshida: And I don’t doubt for a second that that went horribly.

Hibiki: Hey, fuck you. It was fine.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: ...What happened wasn’t my fault.

Yoshida: [Skeptical] Uh huh…

Hibiki: You suck.

Yoshida: Aw, thanks. Seriously, though, just… Go talk to someone else who you can tolerate. Kim would be a good start.

Hibiki: ...Fine.

I almost went to get up, but looked to Yoshida and decided against it. May as well figure this out while I’m here.

Hibiki: ...You feeling better now?

Yoshida: What?

Hibiki: Do you feel better.
Yoshida: No, I heard you, I was just… Surprised. But um… Yeah. Yeah, I think I’m alright. I was just sorta scared, y’know?

Hibiki: …No, I don’t know. Nothing is scary except the prospect of eventually being forced to talk to people who weren’t on my tolerable list.

Yoshida: Heheh. Good luck with that one.

Hibiki: Don’t wish me good luck for something that won’t ever happen. Actually, don’t wish me luck at all. You’re probably cursed.

Yoshida: [Quietly laughing] Yeah, I wouldn’t be surprised, honestly.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: I’m going to go over to the back deck or something. You could actually come for once if you wanted. You don’t exist in a fucking bubble contained from everything else I do.

Yoshida: Um… That’s okay. Thank you, though. I’m just... gonna stay here for a while.

Hibiki: Alright. See you.

Yoshida: [Smiles and waves] See you later, Hibiki-san.

Like clockwork, I made my way over to the back deck, where the minigolf course and shuffleboarding shit all were. When I finally arrived, I ended up finding Kim and Orutoku playing minigolf, Ryuumatsu standing close by.

Yoshida really did curse me, didn’t he?

Ryuumatsu: No, Orutoku-kun. You’re supposed to hold the putt like this.
Orutoku: Actually, are you sure it’s not like--

Ryuumatsu: Y-Yes, I’m sure.

Orutoku: ...Aw, alright. This is still fine for me, though!

Kim: If it’s working, then you may as well leave it that way. [Smirks playfully] Though of course… If you were to put yourself at a disadvantage, I wouldn’t be the first to complain.

Orutoku: That isn’t happening! We’re gonna face off, fair and square!

Kim: Just what I wanted to hear.

Ryuumatsu: ...This is ridiculous.

Hibiki: Hey, Kim. Hey, Orutoku. …’Sup, Ryuumatsu.

Ryuumatsu: ‘S-Sup?!--

Kim: Oh, hey Kioku-kun. Do you want to join my team?

Hibiki: Team for what.

Kim: Minigolf. I was going to play against Orutoku-kun, but we could always go two-on-two.

Ryuumatsu: No, you can’t. I refuse to participate.

Hibiki: All good. Bet you would lose anyway. I’ve never played minigolf before, but I could sure as hell beat you at it.
Ryuumatsu: ...I change my mind. I’ll play.

Kim: Great! Two on two, then.

Orutoku: Perfect! Thank you so much, Ryuumatsu-kun!

Ryuumatsu: You’re welcome. Don’t make the mistake of ever expecting this to happen again.

Orutoku: Yes sir!

The three of them and I played minigolf for a while. It turned out that although Ryuumatsu did know proper putt technique, he was even more skilled at constantly getting ridiculous shots that, despite being impossible for anyone else, somehow always let him complete each hole in a few putts.

Unluckily for him, observation and estimation were my strong points, Orutoku was inherently physically skilled, and Kim seemed to have a thorough understanding of physics from her work as a demolitionist or… something. By the end of the second last hole, nobody was behind by more than a few points, with Kim and Ryuumatsu tied for first. Orutoku was losing, but he just seemed happy to play.

Kim: Alright. It’s just you and me, Ryuumatsu-kun. Are you ready to putt?

Ryuumatsu: You can putt first, Kim-san. My gift to you.

Kim: Aw. Thanks.

Kim rolled her eyes with a smirk, totally aware of the backtone in Ryuumatsu’s words but far too cool and collected to be fazed. Her half-lidded eyes focused on the ball, she swung her put back slowly, before striking with calculated precision. The ball rolled a fair way before stopping mere centimetres from the hole tauntingly.

Kim: Darn. Guess you got me. Time to deliver the finishing blow, huh?

Ryuumsatsu: I’m afraid so. I would say I pitied you, but in the end there can only be one person to best any sport, and I’ve rightfully earned that title.

Kim: Right you are. I guess I have no choice but to lay down and accept my defeat.

Ryuumsatsu: Thank you for accepting your loss so graciously. Now, simply turn the putt like so, and...

Ryuumsatsu furrowed his brow and bit down on his lip as he drew back his putt, letting it hit the ball in one firm movement. The ball shot off across the green, rolling perfectly over each hill and swerve, never leaving the floor.

Finally, it neared the hole, seemingly still on a perfect trajectory. Next to me, Kim smiled.

Ryuumsatsu’s ball slowed, and would’ve had just enough speed left to make it into the hole in one shot… If it hadn’t hit Kim’s in instead.

Orutoku: ...Hole in one.

Ryuumsatsu: Of course it was, I-

Orutoku: No, I mean, Kim-san got a hole in one.

Ryuumsatsu: …What?

Kim put a sympathetic smile on her face as she slung her putt over one shoulder and put her hand out for Ryuumsatsu to shake it.
Kim: Good game, Ryuumatsu-san.

Ryuumatsu: Y-You didn’t- That w-wasn’t- You just- You’re n-not supposed to hold the putt like that!!!

Kim: Oh. Sorry. [Holds putt at side] This better?

Ryuumatsu: Hmph. I s-suppose. Anyway, I have better things to do than spend time here.

Ryuumatsu pointedly ignored Kim’s still-outheld hand, turning his nose up as he dropped his putt perfectly into the racks.

Ryuumatsu: Orutoku, I’m leaving.

Orutoku: Oh, um… Coming!

Orutoku: [Speaking quietly, smiling sheepishly] Sorry, guys… Ryuumatsu-kun’s just a little prideful. It’s nothing personal.

Orutoku threw his own putt into the rack before waving goodbye and running down the stairs after Ryuumatsu. Kim sighed as she took both my putt and hers, putting them away as well.

Hibiki: Dude’s got some major fucking problems.

Kim: He’s… certainly a character, isn’t he?

Kim: Well, hopefully he’ll cool down soon. I really didn’t expect him to get that upset.

Hibiki: You set up the ball like that intentionally, though, didn’t you?
Kim: Hmm… [Chuckles] Maybe I did.

Hibiki: Smart. Why?

Kim: Good question. Putting Ryuumatsu-kun in his place? Just to show off my own capabilities? To make things a little more interesting? All of them are true, I guess. I don’t really worry about it much. Better to live in the moment.

Kim: Trying to plan ahead has never helped me anyway.

Hibiki: The hell’s that supposed to mean?

Kim: Oh… Nothing, really. The way I see it, things tend to just... run their course. Everyone else can do what they will, and anyone who feigns power over that tends to be sort of… Pedantic? Anxious? Overly concerned? Mm. All of those.

Hibiki: Like Hanahara.

Kim: Sure. The girl’s a little bit of a control freak, if I have to admit it.

Hibiki: Holy shit, you think so too? I thought everyone else here was fucking dense or something. Thank God.

Kim: Heh… Well, it’s just the way she chooses to act, I guess. But really… Everything ends at one point or another, and lives are no different. This is just me, of course, but… I don’t really see the point in prolonging the inevitable, you know?

Hibiki: …

Kim: I guess I’ve always been a little bit of a nihilist, though. And a cynic. But yeah. If you were to ask me, that’s my take on all of this.
Hibiki: So you don’t care if anyone dies?

Kim: Of course I’ll care. Death is sad. I just won’t regret my inability to save anyone.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Interesting. Thanks for the perspective.

Kim: Anytime.

Kim went to put away the golf balls while I stood around for a moment. Then, a firm weight fell on my shoulder.

Hibiki: Huh?

I turned around to come face-to-neck with Maeko, who was staring down at me in silence, tall and foreboding. The girl pointed a thumb over her shoulder and looked between me and the stairs.

Hibiki: ...Fine. I get it.

Hibiki: Kim, I’m leaving.

Kim: [Waves] Have a nice night, Kioku-kun. Bye!

Only slightly less begrudging than last time, I trudged down the stairs after Maeko. Once we’d reached the main deck, she turned back around to go up the stairwell that peaked at the suites. I followed, and soon found myself in front of a large set of doors two thirds of the way up. They were incredibly classy, just like everything else on the ship - the wood of the doors was polished to perfection, with red and gold finishes lining the whole thing garishly.
Maeko: …

Hibiki: Hey, you open the door. You’re the one with muscles.

Maeko: … [Shrugs]

The karate pro pushed the doors open with ease to reveal a lavish concert hall on the other side. A red carpet the same shade as the one on the landing ran all the way across the room and onto the stage, where a golden lectern and microphone stand stood. Partway into the sea of mahogany and velvet seats, Uroko, Aitou, Orutoku and Hanahara were crowded around a huge grand piano.

Orutoku: [Strained] I can’t… Lift… Oh my gosh. This is ridiculous.

Uroko: Hmm… Maybe we need more manpower? ...Hey, perfect timing! Maeko and Kioku-chan!!! Helloooo!

Maeko: … [Nods]

Hibiki: Yo.

Uroko: Hope you guys are going great tonight! Maemae, I know you have been! You’re such a big help!

Maeko: ... [Thumbs up]

Uroko: Kioku-chan, are you secretly super good at lifting heavy stuff by any chance?

Hibiki: Absolutely not.

Uroko: Aww, bummer. Alright then… Sis, you wanna give this thing another shot?
Maeko: … [Shrugs]

Uroko: Great!

Maeko wandered over to one side of the grand piano, Uroko, Orutoku and Miren each taking other parts of it as Hanahara ducked through and came to stand near me in the lane. I took a couple of steps away from her. She didn’t notice.

Uroko: Okay guys, on the count of three!

Uroko: One…

Uroko: Two……

Aitou: Oh God.

Uroko: Three!

The four of them all pulled up at once. They managed to get the grand piano off the ground for a few moments, during which time they got it a bit closer to their destination, but it didn’t take long for them to drop it again. Orutoku heaved out a heavy sigh; Aitou looked about ready to fall onto the floor. Uroko and Maeko were absolutely unfazed.

Uroko: Alright guys, that was absolutely fantastic! Now we just gotta do that, like, two hundred more times!

Hanahara: Looks more like three hundred to me, at that rate.

Aitou: Ah, um… I really don’t think I can manage that. It’s… Exceptionally heavy.
Orutoku: I can see the light at the end of the tunnel…

Hanahara: I think that’s the LEDs.

Orutoku: Yeah… Same thing.

Uroko: Aww, c’mon! We can’t give up!

Hibiki: I think Orutoku might be about to die.

Orutoku: N-No, I’ll be okay! I just… Can’t feel my arms.

Hanahara: How about I try asking Sumire-san and Hashikawa-san if they can help? They both seem strong enough.

Aitou: Wouldn’t Minerva-san be best suited for the task at hand, though?

Hanahara: Yes, but a group activity would be good for Hashikawa-san right now after what happened earlier, and I don’t really want to be the one to separate Sumire-san from her. Of course, if any of you would like to volunteer for that role…

Everyone stayed silent. Uroko shook her head.

Hanahara: I thought so. I’ll try to see if I can get both of them to help out. While I do that, why don’t you all work on the tech setup and preparations for the stage?

Uroko: Ooh! I have to use stage equipment allllll the time. The tech booth should be a cinch!

Orutoku: I’m more than happy to help with those arrangements, too! Security guards such as myself require basic training in security systems. I don’t see why this should be too different!
Uroko: That sounds so cool, Orutoku-chan!!! I can’t wait to work with you!

Hanahara: Alright. Maeko-san, Aitou-san, Kioku-san, why don’t you three start arranging decorations and cleaning? Kamiya-san should be here any second now.

Aitou: I’m perfectly fine with that.

Hibiki: Yeah, sure.

Maeko: …

Uroko: Thanks so much, you guys! [Makes heart with hands] Couldn’t do it without you! Kioku-chan, I’m putting you in charge. I believe in you, so do your best!

Uroko skipped off across the room to the tech booth, Orutoku following her and Hanahara heading for the door. I pressed a hand to my temple.

Hibiki: Why the fuck am I in charge?

Maeko: … [Shrugs]

Aitou: I… Admittedly, I am unsure.

Hibiki: Thanks, guys.

Hibiki: Alright, well… Any ideas with this shit?

Aitou: Ah… Hm…

Maeko: …
Hibiki: …

I wish I had a knife so I could drive it into my fucking spine.

???: Um, sorry I’m late!

The doors swung shut quietly behind me, and I looked back to see Kamiya standing at the entrance with her arms full of supplies.

Aitou: Oh, Kamiya-san. Good evening.

Kamiya: Hello, Aitou-san. Hello, everyone else! Ah… I asked Monokuma, and he found some decorations for us!

Kamiya held out one hand to reveal a few packets of gold streamers, confetti and banners. Maeko walked over to take it, moving all the decorations onto one of the empty seats.

Aitou: You’re holding something else, correct?

Kamiya: Ah, right! These are cleaning supplies! Monokuma unlocked a janitor’s closet for me, too… It looks like we’ll be needing to sweep and mop the stage.

Kamiya cast a cautionary glance over to the grand piano, and tilted her head a little.

Kamiya: Seems like the piano will need dusting, too…

Aitou: That shouldn’t be too much trouble. Here, I can start. I’m… Likely subpar at most of these tasks, but dusting shouldn’t be too much of a hassle, correct?
Hibiki: Don’t see how you could fuck it up that badly.

Kamiya: Right… Um, sure. I’ll start putting up decorations, then… Kioku-san, Maeko-san, how about you two begin working on the stage floor?

Maeko: … [Takes mop]

Hibiki: Guess I’m sweeping.

Maeko left for a moment to fill the mop bucket, and I started sweeping the stage floor. The dust kept falling onto the carpet, but I didn’t really care. This was probably all going to be redundant, anyway - the audience consisted of sixteen teenagers. The chances of most of them caring at all were slim.

Soon enough, even a little faster than I’d expected, Maeko had returned with the mop bucket and started on the area I’d already covered.

Maeko: [Mopping furiously] …

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: You ever gonna talk to me?

Maeko barely looked up, instead continuing to focus on the floor. She quickly reached the last part I’d finished sweeping, and took the broom off me, then resorting to sweeping with one hand and mopping the freshly swept floor with the other. It was kind of ridiculous to watch, honestly.

Hibiki: ...I know you can talk, you know. You said something on the first day.

Maeko: …
Hibiki: When the teams were being picked. You were surprised that Uroko was on a different team to you, so you gasped, or whatever, and you were all like, “Wait, no! Not the brain of our terrible twosome! She may be slow and a total airhead, but I’m supposed to be the brawn and can’t fucking speak, so she’s all I’ve got!”

Maeko: …

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Geez, fine.

Maeko: …

Maeko: …S-Sis isn’t- She’s n-not an air… an airhead.

Hibiki: Oh. So you can talk.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: Well, fucking whatever, I guess. You got a stutter or something?

Maeko: …Y… Yeah. Yes.


Maeko: Uh… Sis… a-and me…

Hibiki: That was rhetorical.

Maeko: …
Maeko: S-Sorry.

Hibiki: I don’t really care.

Maeko: …

Maeko went back to working in silence for a while after that. I stood by and fixed up any spots the karate pro missed while she swept and mopped at the same time. She gave herself that responsibility, so I didn’t bother helping her - she was more than competent, anyway.

Maeko was only seconds away from finishing the stage when the performance hall doors burst open again, Hanahara leading the way for a still-annoyed Sumire and a slightly cowering Hashikawa, the latter of whom was barely visible behind the other two.

Hanahara: I brought help! Come on, guys, let’s get this piano moved!


It was only a minute before everyone was gathered around the piano again, Kamiya and I standing to the side while Hanahara tried to guide the large group and the piano out of the stage seating. At the very least, they seemed to be a lot more successful in lifting it now that extras had arrived - Hashikawa had barely spoken a word that wasn’t a stuttered apology since showing up, and what little Sumire had said mostly consisted of clipped, serious comments, but they were both putting in their all. I stared blankly for a while from a seat on the opposite side of the aisle, but eventually, I’d had enough.

Hibiki: Hey, Kamiya.

Kamiya: Oh! What is it, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: I’m gonna head to my room. See everyone at the meeting tomorrow, or something.
Kamiya: Oh, that’s fine! I’ll tell everyone you said goodnight.

...I didn’t, but whatever. Guess it doesn’t matter to me.


Kamiya: Sleep well, Kioku-san. Goodnight!

Lethargy starting to drag at my limbs again, I left the hall quietly without so much as a wave goodbye, trudging up the stairway, through the hall and then across my room. Flopping onto my back, I stared up at the ceiling for a while from my bed. The sheets were still perfect… Seemed like never making the bed didn’t actually matter if I always passed out on top of the covers anyway.

I kicked off my shoes easily enough, and had just enough presence of mind left to take off my jacket and lab coat before I drifted off to sleep once more.
CHAPTER ONE PART THREE: The Lullabies of Driftwood in an Ocean Storm

Chapter Notes

Here we go again :D Not too much to say this time except a warning for some graphic stuff that has images to go along with it? You'll be able to tell when it's coming. Nothing beyond usual Danganronpa standards of blood and stuff.

It was only the fourth day, but by now, waking up to Monokuma’s announcement and the sound of knocking at my door felt completely normal.

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: Good morning again, kiddos! Rise and shine! If what I’ve been hearing around is true, some of you have got a preeeeety jampacked day!

Monokuma: If I were you, I’d go out and make the most of it… Peace can’t last for much longer, y’know. Upupupu.

Monokuma: Well, there’s an 8AM glass of wine calling my name, so guess I’ll see you all later, ya rascals! Have a good time aboard the S.S. Desbear!

...Of course, I was an amnesiac, so I didn’t really have a point of reference for what was normal to begin with.

I went into the ensuite briefly to fix up my hair, and had just slipped my lab coat and jacket back on when the knocking at my door started again. I opened the door to see Yoshida scuffing his shoe against the floor absently.

Hibiki: Yo, Yoshi.

Yoshida: Oh! ...G-Good morning, Hibiki-san. Hope you slept well.
Hibiki: I thought we went over this yesterday. I don’t know how well I slept-

Yoshida: That’s why I didn’t ask.

Hibiki: …Clever.

I started walking down the hall, Yoshida picking up the pace quickly enough.

Hibiki: You stopped being weird today?

Yoshida: Heh, uhh… Sorta. Expect me to still be kinda weird.

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: Dude, I could be killed at any moment and it’s sort of freaking me out. Cut me some slack.

Hibiki: That’s kinda stupid, but sure, whatever.

Yoshida: Thanks.

Yoshida: …Oh yeah, also… Hanahara will probably say this, but not everyone’s coming to breakfast. ‘Sleeping in after a hard night’s work’ or something.

Hibiki: Oh yeah, with the piano.

Yoshida: What piano?

Hibiki: They had to carry a piano.
Yoshida: Wha-- Where?

Hibiki: Performance hall. From the middle of the seating onto the stage.

Yoshida: Why was the piano in the middle of the seating???

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Beats me.

Yoshida: …I give up.

Yoshida: …Wait, we have a performance hall?

Hibiki: Yeah. A really fucking dusty one.

Yoshida: What the hell…

We entered the buffet in a comfortable silence, each of us getting a plate of food before sitting at the usual table. We were some of the first there, this time - the only people who had arrived were Rouvin, Kamiya, Toramoto, Sumire and Hashikawa.

Yoshida silently chewed on his pizza while I went and got another jug of soda, and by the time we’d both gotten most of the way through our food, Hanahara was about to start talking.

Hanahara: [Claps] Alright, folks! We’ve got some really important things to get through today!

Hanahara: First off, you might notice that Maeko-san, Uroko-san, Orutoku-san and Aitou-san aren’t present this morning. They had to do a lot of work last night, so I’ve allowed them to sleep in. Sorry that this meeting might be a bit of a mess because of that.
Sumire: Like the other morning meetings weren’t a mess? Comparatively, this is actually the best one so far.

Hanahara: ...I’m trying my best here, Sumire-san.

Hanahara: *Anyway*, the project we were working on is something we were all hoping to put into action tonight! We’ve all planned to hold a concert that Uroko-san will be performing at.

Kim: It sounds great, but… Why are you telling us this so late? Wouldn’t earlier notice have been good?

Hanahara: Well, I didn’t really expect anyone to have any better plans.

Kim: …Yeah, fair enough.

Hanahara: So. Attendance will be mandatory, first and foremost!

Ryuumatsu: And why’s that?

Hanahara: ...Because if you aren’t there and everyone else is, you’re probably doing something you shouldn’t be.

Alix: Like taking stuff from the bar!

Toramoto: ...She meant planning a murder.

Alix: [Pouts] Yeah… I know…

Hanahara: …Those are both valid answers. We really need to stop getting off track, though, so please pay attention.
Hanahara: I’d like everyone to be there by 6PM for a 6:20 start. We’ll try to have refreshments in the hall, so long as Monokuma will cooperate with us.

Hanahara: Oh, right. The venue is the performance hall in the same stairwell that leads to the suites. The doors will be open and Maeko-san and Orutoku-san will be standing out front, so locating it shouldn’t be a problem.

Sumire: How’d you even get access to that? All those doors were locked, weren’t they?

Hanahara: Monokuma offered… On the basis that we’d have to move the piano.

Kamiya: Oh, right… How is that coming along, by the way?

Sumire: We’ve almost got it to where it needs to be. Tsuruko-san and I should be able to finish that off in about an hour this morning, if the others don’t wake up in time.

First name basis, huh? Interesting.

Hanahara: Perfect. I think that’s most of what we had to cover. Everyone is free to do what they want until then, but make sure to be there by 6!

Everyone agreed in something between an exclamation and a mumble, and got back to either eating or preparing to leave. Yoshida picked up our plates and put them on the stack.

Hibiki: Guess I gotta go help these fucks out with the rest of the setup.

Yoshida: Oh… That’s okay! Have a good time, Hibiki-san.

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: Or at least try to, I guess. Not everyone there will be so bad, right?
Hibiki: Yeah, sure. See you.

Yoshida: Bye!

Hanahara, Sumire, Kamiya and Hashikawa were waiting for me by the door, Hashikawa firmly at Sumire’s side. Hanahara started to lead the way to the concert hall once I had joined the group, and Kamiya drifted a few steps behind me as the two Team Delta members trailed at the back. Soon enough, we were all back inside the hall. Hanahara turned around to face everyone and give a briefing.

Hanahara: Alright… So, the obvious thing on the agenda is getting the piano moved.

Hanahara gestured over to the piano, which was now at the top of the three small stairs that led up to the stage, and just needed to be moved to the centre. It was really no wonder some of the people who had been moving it had needed to sleep in.

Hanahara: So, obviously, that task falls onto Hashikawa-san and Sumire-san. It’s pretty heavy, so if you can’t lift it alone, that’s fine, bu-

Hashikawa: I-I can do it. I can help.

Hanahara: ...Just don’t push yourself, alright? I really appreciate the help, but I don’t want anyone getting hurt.

Hashikawa nodded, tugging at one end of the gakuran draped over her shoulders. Sumire put a hand on her arm.

Hanahara: Alright… Kamiya-san, are the decorations done?

Kamiya: I still have to hang up the banner, but otherwise, they should be fine! Ah, um, Aitou-san also finished dusting the piano last night, I think, so… That part is done too.
Hanahara: Perfect. I don’t think Orutoku and Uroko quite managed to finish setting up the lighting last night. We could try Yousetsu-san, but she doesn’t seem the type to want to be bothered… Kioku-san, do you have any experience with this kind of thing?

Hibiki: Absolutely none.

Sumire: I’m pretty tech savvy. If it comes down to it, Tsuruko-san and I can work it out after we finish dealing with the piano.

Hanahara: Perfect. I expect the others should wake up in an hour or less, and they’ll probably come straight here, so it shouldn’t be a huge problem if you can’t. For now, the idea is this: Kamiya-san and Kioku-san, hang up the banner. There should be a ladder in the janitor’s closet, which Kamiya-san should be able to find without any trouble seeing as she’s the one who went there last night. Hashikawa-san and Sumire-san, just move the piano to stage centre. I’m going to go mix some drinks to put out as refreshments, so I’ll be in the bar if anyone needs me.

Kamiya: Sounds good! See you soon, Hanahara-san!

Kamiya: Kioku-san, I’m going to go get the ladder. I’ll be back in just a moment!

Hibiki: Knock yourself out.

I lazed around in one of the stage seats for a little while while Kamiya left for the janitor’s closet. I looked over at Sumire and Hashikawa. They were surprisingly successful when it came to lifting the piano, especially on Sumire’s end. Hashikawa seemed to be struggling a little, but said nothing. She was pretty desperate to be helpful, I guess.

It was only about five or so minutes before Kamiya returned, a fairly long ladder under her arm.

Kamiya: [Slightly worn out] Huuuu… Hi, Kioku-san! Um… Just a second…

Kamiya: [Drops ladder on floor] Oh my gosh, that was heavier than I expected it to be.
Hibiki: No fucking kidding, huh.

Hibiki: Alright, may as well get this over with. Where’s the banner.

Kamiya: Oh, I can go get it!

Hibiki: Cool.

I dragged the ladder over to one side of the stage, and Kamiya brought over the banner. We worked in silence as we tied both ends up at opposite sides of the stage, and within about half an hour, we’d finally managed to get it up.

Kamiya huffed out a sigh as she lowered the ladder back down, and it crashed onto the floor with little fanfare.

Kamiya: Well… I’ll have to put that away later, I guess… But at least the banner looks nice!

Kamiya spread her hands out to gesture to the banner. It was bright and shimmering, white text spelling out ‘S.S. DESPAIR CREATIVE PRODUCTIONS’ across its golden surface. A little inaccurate, given that Uroko was by no means actually a staff member of the ship, but… It worked.

Meanwhile, onstage, Hashikawa and Sumire had just about finished moving the piano. Kamiya noticed, too, and rushed behind the stage’s platform to retrieve what looked to be the piano stool. The two Delta girls dropped the piano in its final place, Sumire wiping her forehead and grinning, Hashikawa slightly out of breath. Kamiya placed the stool down in front of it and gave the pair a small applause.

Sumire: Glad that’s done! Thank you so much, Tsuruko-san! You did great.

Hashikawa: O-Oh, I, uh… Really? Um… Thank you! You too!!

Kamiya: Really! It’s perfect.
No need to give them all the credit. They didn’t exactly make the damn thing.

Hibiki: We supposed to do the tech booth now or something?

Sumire: Right. Let’s get on that, then.

We all walked over to the tech booth. Off to one side of the seating and behind all of the rows, it was a small room with a few screens showing views of the concert hall and a control panel that seemed to be for the lights. The front wall of the booth was glass - heavily tinted from the outside, but surprisingly clear from within. Sumire sat down and got to work immediately - she didn’t seem to know quite what she was doing, but was working it out easily enough.

Hashikawa, on the other hand, was struggling immensely. She still seemed determined to help, but one look at all the knobs and screens had sent her into something of a confused daze.

Hibiki: Having trouble, huh.

Hashikawa: Oh, no, I… Well, I mean- Um. Yeah…

Hibiki: What, never seen a computer before or something?

Hashikawa: ...Actually, not really, no.

Well, wasn’t really expecting that.

Hashikawa: I mean, I’ve sat behind the controls of a ship more than a few times, and I get all of that, but, uh… I-I’ve always sorta, um. Lived on a boat. Bad phone service at sea. I’ve never owned a, a mobile phone, or anything.

Hibiki: No shit, huh.
Hashikawa: I-I’m sure I can still help somehow, though! I have to be useful somehow!

Hashikawa: ...Right? Or… Or would I just be getting in the way…

Hashikawa: Uh… You know what? I’ll just… I’ll go see if Hanahara-san wants any help or anything.

Hibiki: Alright. Seeya.

I stuffed around in the tech booth for a while as Kamiya and Sumire figured out the controls. After a couple of lighting tests that seemed to work just fine, the two of them got up, Sumire clapping Kamiya on the shoulder.

Sumire looked around the back of the tech booth and frowned.

Sumire: Where’s Hashikawa-san?

Hibiki: Said she couldn’t help. Left to go help out Hanahara instead.

Sumire: ...Damn it.

Kamiya: Is there a problem?

Sumire: Not a big one, just… Don’t want her feeling like she can’t contribute, y’know?

Kamiya: Ah, yeah… Is she doing okay after yesterday…?

Sumire: ...She’s fine. She’s strong.

Yeah, right. That girl would have a breakdown at not being able to find one sock.
Kamiya: I guess we should go wait for her and Hanahara-san to show up?

Sumire: Yeah, sounds good.

I went back into the main hall, Kamiya politely chatting with Sumire for a few minutes until the doors swung open to reveal Hanahara and Hashikawa. Both of them were pushing small carts, one full of neatly stacked glasses and a bucket of ice, the other containing a few drink dispensers that were full of bright, undoubtedly non-alcoholic drinks.

Kamiya: Wow! How’d you get those up the stairs?


Hashikawa: Yeah! Um… Hope this helped, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara: It was a great help, actually. Thank you.

Hashikawa beamed, ducking her head as she pushed her cart over to one of the tables. Hanahara smiled at us for a moment before looking around in confusion.

Hanahara: The others aren’t here yet? It’s been well over an hour, maybe even two.

Sumire: Nah. Nobody’s shown up.

Hanahara: Hm… Maybe they just didn’t think to come here. I didn’t get a proper chance to tell them when and where to regroup last night.

Kamiya: Or they could still be sleeping… Maybe it would be worth checking?

Hanahara: Good idea. Most things seem to be finished, by the looks of things, so it shouldn’t matter
if we waste a bit of time now.

Hashikawa: [Jogging back over] What’s going on?

Hanahara: We were all talking about going to look around for Aitou-san, Uroko-san, Maeko-san and Orutoku-san.

Hashikawa: O-Oh! I can definitely help! I’ll, um… I can check the dorms?

Hanahara: Sounds good. I’ll go back to the bar and see if they’re on the main deck or in the buffet. Obviously, I’ll check the front dining area, too.

Sumire: Great. I’ll check around the back deck. The area with the minigolf and all of that.

Kamiya: Um… I can stay here in case any of them show up, if you’d like?

Hanahara: Sounds perfect. Kioku-san, ah… You’re free to look around the main deck or something, if you’d like, but it sounds like everything’s covered…

Hibiki: I’ll do whatever.

Hanahara: Okay, great. Meet back here in thirty minutes if you don’t find anybody.

Hanahara, Sumire and Hashikawa all left, Kamiya meandering by the door. I stuck around for a while, but eventually got bored.

Hibiki: Kamiya. I’m going to go look around.

Kamiya: Alright! See you back here soon.

Hibiki: Sure.
Shoving my hands into my pockets, I left the performance hall and decided to go up to the suites. It was about twenty minutes into the time Hanahara had set by the time I got there.

Walking down the hall, I ran into Hashikawa and Yoshida, who were standing between the Delta and Rho dorms.

Hashikawa: That’s weird… Um, was Maeko-san there at any point while you were in there?

Yoshida: No, she wasn’t… I only saw her when I woke up.

Hibiki: What’s this about?

Yoshida: Oh, hi Hibiki-san. Uh… Hashikawa-san was just asking me about where Maeko-san was.

Hashikawa: I asked Yoshida and checked the Delta dorm myself, but Aitou-san was the only one there… He’s, um, still sleeping, by the way. I didn’t want to wake him up.

Hibiki: That’s good, I guess. Orutoku and the Hondos are somewhere else, then.

Hashikawa: Yeah… I think I’m going to head back down to the performance hall. I-I should tell everyone I found Aitou-san, at least…

Yoshida: I can come with you, if you want? I’m happy to help look around for the others.

Hashikawa: That would be g-great! Um… Just this way, then…

Hashikawa: What about you, Kioku-san?

If I went back down now, I could end up doing this shit all day… May as well sneak in a break before Hanahara gets on my case, I guess.
Hibiki: …

Hibiki: I’ll stick around up here for a bit.

Hashikawa: O-Okay, sounds good. I’ll see you soon, then.

Hibiki: Sweet. See you, Yoshi.

Yoshida: See you!

Yoshida and Hashikawa wandered back down the hall. After they’d both disappeared down the stairwell, I walked over to my room and pulled out my keycard to open the door.

I went to flop down onto my bed again, but a few steps away, I tripped. I turned around to see what it was.

...Something dropped in my stomach.

There, on the floor, was a severed arm, cut just above the elbow. Fresh blood still spilled from its raw interior.

I had to resist the urge to throw up. The sound of waves crashed in my ears, heavy and daunting. My mind started to go foggy.

I got up, and started to follow the blood that’d been sprayed across the floor. A little further across the room was something else - part of a leg, severed a little below the knee. The blood led into the ensuite, alongside a spray of bottles and tubes and canisters of cosmetics.

I gulped, and followed as best I could.
The ensuite was a warzone. Scratches had been cut into the tiles of the walls, shattering ceramic and spraying it across the floor. The towel rail had been absolutely demolished, its shape bent in at the centre next to a large impact in the wall. Cosmetics from the cabinets lay strewn across the floor amidst more blood than I’d ever seen.

None of that mattered compared to what lay in the middle of the room, though.
On the floor, leaned up against an open cabinet door, was the body of Uroko Hondo, Ultimate Composer. A gash had been slit across the side of her neck. One of her legs had been hacked off at the knee.

What was more concerning, though, was that both of her arms were totally intact.

I looked frantically around the room, my mind in a daze, my vision blurring. Distantly, I heard an announcement over the speakers.

Monokuma: A body has been discovered! All of you, head to the suites. I’m sure you’ll find what you’re looking for…

Monokuma started cackling, his laugh sinister and cold. I walked over to the shower and pulled back the curtain.

I wanted to screw my eyes shut. I wanted to scream. I didn’t know how to process what had happened… But it had.
Maeko Hondo lay in the shower, blood spilling from the stump that had been left of her right arm.

I leaned against the wall, my eyes unable to focus on anything. Blood consumed my vision.
Faintly, I heard someone scream from inside my room. Footsteps approached.

Hashikawa: ...H-Hrk--

Hashikawa: Gh…… S… SOMEONE G-GET OVER HERE!!!!

Yoshida: O-Oh my god… U-Uroko?

Waves crashed over my head once more. My legs went numb, and I slid down to the floor.

I was finally learning the meaning of pure, merciless fear.

Chapter 1: The Lullabies of Driftwood in an Ocean Storm

DEADLY LIFE: START!
My ears were ringing. Everything felt like I had been thrown into an ocean storm, thrashing waves pulling at my limbs and numbing my skull.

I stared down Uroko Hondo’s dead body, her eyes glassy and wide, and time seemed to stop.

I didn’t care about her. I didn’t before. I didn’t now. But… The scene in front of me still left a sinking weight in my stomach. I was being anchored to my fate.

My stare went blank.

Hibiki: Wh… Heh… What the f-fuck…?

Everything felt so cold. Laughing at a time like this was unimaginable, but faced with something this abnormal, this unbelievable, this fucking impossible, it was all I could think to do.

Everyone was going to suspect me. Why would anyone want everyone to suspect me?

Why would anyone ever…

???: Kioku-san?

Ever…

???: K-Kioku-san, can you hear me?
I looked over. Hanahara had grabbed my shoulder, and was kneeling down beside me, her gaze hard. Hashikawa stood behind her, trembling.

Hibiki: What do you want?!

Hanahara: I was making sure you were conscious. We have to investigate.

Toramoto: That’s really the first thing on yer mind right now? Wow. Cold.

Toramoto was standing in the doorway along with a few others who’d already arrived, Aitou and Orutoku among them. Aitou pushed through the crowd, first aid kit in hand. Many of the expressions of those behind him were those of horror, shock and grief, but his was entirely flat.


Hashikawa: What?! But i-isn’t she dead?

Aitou: If she isn’t and we stand idly by, she will be momentarily. Help me out.

Aitou set the kit down onto the floor harshly, slinging it over to Hashikawa as she knelt down on the bloody tiled floor. She stared at what remained of Maeko’s severed arm for a moment before gasping quietly, her hand wavering around Aitou’s shoulder.

Hashikawa: ...She already has a tourniquet around her arm.
Hashikawa leaned back. Sure enough, despite all the blood on the wall, Maeko’s arm actually wasn’t bleeding at all. A black band of what looked like velcro, padded foam and elastic was wrapped tightly just above the wound.

Aitou: That’s… Hm.

Aitou leaned over cautiously. He slowly slipped off one of his gloves, and held two fingers to the side of Maeko’s remaining wrist.

Aitou: …Her pulse is there. A little slow, but she’s unconscious, so that’s to be expected. Hopefully, she will awaken soon.

???: She had better!

Monokuma pushed through the crowd of distraught passengers at the door, waddling over to stand between Uroko and Hashikawa. His grin widened.

Monokuma: Glad to see you’re all finally here! Even if most of ya can’t fit into the ensuite at once. Sorry about that!

Hanahara: …

Aitou: What are you here for? Are you delivering more instructions?

Monokuma: That I am, Watson! But first, what I was saying about the Karate Kid.

Monokuma: Anyone remember the rules? No? Allow me to give you all a bit of a refresher.

Monokuma: **Rule #8:** When a murder occurs, everyone must participate in a class trial. That means all seventeen of you, no exceptions! …Well, sixteen now, huh? Upupu.
Monokuma: So basically, Hondo’s got two options: wake up and attend, or don’t and die sometime between now and the trial.

The robot held out one of its paws, and suddenly, a set of glistening, razor sharp claws shot out of it. He brandished them at us cheerily.

Monokuma: ...If it comes down to it, I’ll do her in myself.

Hashikawa: …

Yoshida: …

Hanahara: ...

Aitou: [Monotonously] …Hashikawa-san, please start trying to wake her up.

Hashikawa: A-Alright.

Hashikawa turned back around hesitantly and began to shake Maeko’s shoulder, grimacing as she caught sight of the karate pro’s missing arm once again. Aitou stood up, using his height to loom over Monokuma.

Aitou: What are the instructions you came to deliver?

Monokuma: [Unfazed] Glad you asked. I mentioned this before, but what with the current predicament you poor little kiddos seem to have found yourself in, I guess you’ll be needing a full rundown of how we do crime scene investigations ‘round these parts!

Alix: Ooo, CSI! Is this gonna be anything like th--

Ryuumatsu: Quiet.
Monokuma: [Ignoring Alix] It’s so simple that you seriously shouldn’t even need me to tell you. Buuuut... you’re all a little slow and I don’t trust you to understand anything without me spelling it out for you. So, here’s the gist of it!

Monokuma jumped, floating down onto the bathroom counter gracefully. The robot cleared its throat.

Monokuma: Soon, all of you are gonna have to go to trial to figure out whodunnit! This investigation phase that I’m granting you all out of the generosity of my heart is to make sure the innocents stand a chance.

Yoshida: Um... How soon is ‘soon’?

Monokuma: Whenever I get bored of watching you all flounce around uselessly, buckeroo. Probably in about half an hour. You guys aren’t as interesting as I’m sure you’d like to think you are.

Yoshida: ... [Gulps]

Monokuma: Anyway, like I was saying before I was rudely interrupted, you all have this short time together to take a look around and collect some evidence and alibis! I’ve even temporarily unlocked all the team suites so you don’t have to mess around with keycards! Alsooo... Not gonna tell you all how to live your lives or anything, but I’d recommend working in teams. After all, you never know who you can and can’t trust.........

Monokuma: Heh, well, I don’t really care if you’d all prefer to dig yourselves into a ditch. Just as much fun for me. Work hard, though, or else the trial will be over pretty fast!

Monokuma: Oh, and one more thing...

Monokuma clicked two of his... paw-fingers, and a beeping noise rung across the room. Everyone started reaching into their pockets as I did the same, all of us pulling out our e-Handbooks. A new tab had appeared on the main screen - ‘Monokuma File 01’.

Monokuma: Tadaaa! That’s the Monokuma File. Normally I’d give you a new tablet just for it, but
that seems a little excessive, don’t you think? May as well be resourceful!

Monokuma: Anyway, that’ll have some pretty important and absolutely, certifiably accurate info about the corpse that you can take a look at whenever you want, so if I were you, I’d make the most of it! Of course, it hasn’t got anything about the killer in it. I’m a fair bear!

Sumire: How is any of this fair?! You’re absolutely disgusting! One of our friends is dead!

Monokuma: Huh? Would the Mad Scientist prefer it if I just left you all to squirm? I can always revoke your Monokuma File rights, you know.

Kamiya: P-Please don’t...

Monokuma: Well, that’s about it! I’ll see you all in the trial, and Karate Kid better hope she’s included! Upupu…

Monokuma: Have fun!!!

With that, the bear marched back out of the room, disappearing between everyone’s legs. I decided to take advantage of the inevitable stunned silence that followed every mildly confronting interaction any of these numbskulls encountered by taking a look at the Monokuma File.

Opening up the file, the first thing to show up was a black and white picture of Uroko, underneath which was her name, height, weight, and other details from her Student Report Card. Nothing that seemed to be all that important.

Tabbing over to the next page, though, revealed a lot more useful information. Aside from a picture of the body and the wounded Maeko at the top of the page, there was also a paragraph listing some of the more useful case details.

The victim was Uroko Hondo, Ultimate Composer, who was discovered inside the Team Upsilon ensuite.

The time of death is unknown. The cause of death is blood loss from the right carotid artery, which
has been cleanly sliced through. Death was likely near-instant. The victim’s left leg has also been severed below the knee.

Maeko Hondo, the Ultimate Karate Pro, was also found unconscious inside the ensuite. Her right arm has been severed above the elbow. All of the wounds appear to be clean cuts from the one weapon.

Unknown time of death, huh… Given the tight surveillance, that doesn’t seem very likely. More than likely, that information was being withheld from me on purpose.

I looked around the room, around at all of the other passengers’ faces, and my vision turned to red. One of these people... One of them had framed me. One of them, for whatever sick reason, wanted me dead.

Whoever that person was… I would make sure that they wouldn’t be coming out of that trial room alive.

Hanahara: ...Alright.

I turned around. Hanahara, standing in the doorway, had been watching idly for a while. It seemed like she finally had the capacity to go back to being controlling and making demands.

Hanahara: Uh, I… Ahem.

Hanahara: I… believe it would be best if we did not split into teams for the investigation. Our best shot at finding the culprit is if we all work together and share our findings. Neither team can realistically find everything on their own.

Ryuumatsu: You’re just saying that because our team has the only people professionally trained in anything medical.

Toramoto: Well, Team Delta’s also got you on their team, Ryuumatsu-sama, so I guess that about evens out the playin’ field.

Ryuumatsu: Why I never--

Ryuumatsu: W-What did you call me?!

Sumire: An eel. Now shut up. Hanahara-san was talking, and she was right. No team is going to be working alone. Your petty game of one-upping everyone does \textit{not} take precedent over the fact that \textit{one of our friends is literally dead right in front of us}.

Ryuumatsu: [Scowls, looks to Toramoto] ...  

Toramoto: [Raises an eyebrow] ...

Ryuumatsu: ...F-Fine. Whatever. We can all work together.

Sumire: Fantastic. Glad to have your permission. Anyway, Hanahara-san, you were saying something?

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: …Right. We need to conduct this investigation as efficiently as possible, so… So I’m giving you all roles.

Hanahara: Aitou-san, you conduct an autopsy on the body as best you can. Hashikawa-san and Sumire-san can guard the crime scene to ensure nothing is being tampered with. I’m going to be supervising as well. Orutoku-san, Kamiya-san, you’re also welcome here. Everyone else, stay out of the way. Investigate the suite or the rest of the ship for other clues. Collect alibis and testimonies. I don’t care.

Hanahara: As for you, Kioku-san…

\textit{As Hanahara looked over to me, everyone else did the same. The distrust in their gazes was almost tangible.}
Hanahara: …Stay with someone the whole time. I don’t care who. I can’t take the risk of leaving you unsupervised, given the… circumstances.

Hibiki: …You seriously think that I--

Hanahara: Please. I don’t have time to argue with you.

Yoshida: I-I’ll do it. I’ll stay with them.

Hanahara: …Thank you, Yoshida-san.

The bartender looked back to where Uroko lay for a single, silent moment, and her shoulders sagged under the weight of what was sure to lie ahead. She sighed.

Hanahara: We can’t afford to waste any more time. Everyone, get to work.

Turning around and grimacing, Hanahara started to walk over to Aitou and Maeko, and wordlessly, everyone began to scatter. Yoshida took my hand in his and shuddered.

Yoshida: … I…

Yoshida: I can’t believe… Uroko-san is…

Hibiki: No need to use honorifics for a dead person. The corpse can’t hear you.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: We should investigate.
Yoshida: Really?

Hibiki: What?

Yoshida: Well, you know… Thought you were more the type to leave the groundwork for others.

Hibiki: You think I trust any of these incompetent shitstains to find the disgusting excuse for a human being that tried to frame me for murder?

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: ...You better not have thought for a fucking second that I did any of this.

Yoshida: What? N-No! Of course not. I know you wouldn’t do th--

Hibiki: Don’t act like you know me.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: I wouldn’t do this, though, no.

Yoshida: Oh thank God.

Yoshida: [Tugs at necklace] ...Okay, so… Where do you want to start?

Hibiki: In the bedroom area of the suite. Best to wait for Aitou to complete his autopsy report before bothering to talk to him.

Yoshida: Smart thinking.
Hibiki: I know. Try to keep up.

I left the ensuite with Yoshida traipsing after me, and we found ourselves in my suite’s main room. Cosmetics were still scattered all over the blood stained floor, the two severed limbs lying amidst them. I walked over to where Uroko’s leg still lay.

Hibiki: So… Guess this could be important?

Yoshida: Um… Yeah?

Hibiki: I was joking. Of course it’s important.

Yoshida: ...Oh. Okay.

Hibiki: First and foremost, why cut off her leg.

Yoshida: Um… It was probably the closest part of her body to whoever did this, I guess… She might’ve tried to kick them.

Hibiki: That rests on the assumption that the weapon used was handheld. Which, given the state of the scene, is almost definitely the case. Most likely, it was a sword.

Yoshida: Um, why a sword?

Hibiki: Clean cuts through two limbs and a third that looked like it’d gone partway into Uroko’s neck, not to mention the cuts in the walls. Also…

I glanced over to the part of the floor that the bed had obscured from the doorway. Sure enough, a katana was lying there, its golden blade coated in blood.

Hibiki: ...That.
Yoshida: The katana?

Hibiki: Yes, the fucking katana. What, have you seen it before?

Yoshida: Um, actually… Yeah, I have. There was one on display on one of the desks in the Team Rho room…

Yousetsu: Same for us.

Yoshida: W-W-Wh?!

Yousetsu had appeared behind us out of pretty much nowhere, and was writing furiously in her notepad. She barely even looked up to me as she spoke.

Yousetsu: The same katana was in the Team Delta suite, too. The killer could have retrieved it from either room.

Hibiki: Guess I’ll have to look at the suites later, then.

OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Uroko’s Severed Leg

OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Blood Coated Katana

Hibiki: Now… How about that.

I pointed over to the arm, and Yoshida gulped as he followed my line of sight.

Yousetsu: The bandages match the ones from Hondo’s other arm… The unconscious Hondo, not the… dead one. There’s no doubt it’s hers.
Hibiki: Obviously. Looks like the slice was about halfway from the elbow to the shoulder. Might’ve been trying to punch whoever sliced it off.

Yoshida: That’d be pretty terrifying… S-She could probably shatter a few bones with a single hit.

Hibiki: You’re talking about her as if she’s dead.

Yoshida: [Wincs] Well, her arm sure is.

Hibiki: …Mm. Better take note of this.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Maeko’s Severed Arm**

Hibiki: There’s also the matter of all this shit.

Looking around, it wasn’t hard to see that the floor was still covered in cosmetics. It probably would’ve been more of a challenge to not notice. While the majority of the bottles, tubes and containers were in the ensuite around the body, an almost ridiculous portion of them had somehow ended up in the main room, cluttering the floor to the point where stepping on something was near inevitable.

I picked one of the bottles up and inspected it.

Hibiki: Why the fuck would I have nail polish remover. I don’t even wear nail polish.

Yoshida: Luxury of a cruise ship, I guess… Did you really have that many bottles in there?

Hibiki: No clue. I never even opened the cupboards. A lot of these bottles seem to be the same thing, though. Lots of duplicates.
Yoshida: Backup stock from your bathroom, maybe?

Hibiki: ...Yeah. Probably.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Scattered Cosmetics In Suite**

That was a start, but looking closely, something else seemed to be scattered around on the floor besides toothpaste and teenagers’ limbs. To be precise, there were a few oddly shaped pieces of wood, all of them roughly triangular in shape.

Yoshida: Uh… What are those?

Hibiki: Look.

The banister-like plank at the foot of the bedframe, only inches away, had had a couple of its corners cut off. The pieces that were missing from it looked like they should be about the same shape.

Hibiki: They were probably cut off by the katana in the middle of the fight, or something. Not surprising that a few things would get ruined in a murder.

Yoshida: Wow, you’re observant! Must’ve been pretty intense...

Yoshida: Um, I found another one of those wooden corner things around where the katana was.

Hibiki: ...Three in total, then. They’re all different shapes.

Hibiki: And of course, those aren’t the only obvious signs of a huge fight in this room…

Yoshida: Huh?
Hibiki: …The walls, Yoshi. The walls and the curtains.

Yoshida: [Looks around, nods] ...Oh. Yeah. Those.

I hadn’t paid particular attention to either when I’d first come into the room, but the walls and curtains had both been devastated by the katana. The drape closer to the middle of the room had basically been shredded, blue light now harshly beaming in through its tattered surface. Likewise, the wall the curtain hung on and the one that had the ensuite and closet doors on it both had deep scratches in their surface.

Yoshida: The fight was mostly in here, then…?

Hibiki: What do you fucking think.

Yoshida: ...Point taken.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Signs of a Fight**

Hibiki: Lastly, all the blood on the floor. Looks like it sprayed. It’s even on the bed sheets.

Yoshida: Gross…

Yousetsu: Oh, that.

Yousetsu’d stayed with the severed limbs while Yoshida and I wandered off to look at the cosmetics. Now, she was investigating the floor, still quickly writing in her notepad.

Yousetsu: I’m not the most knowledgeable on this topic, because I’m not a biologist or medical expert… But basically, when an artery is severed, the high blood pressure makes blood spurt everywhere. Real fast. Sumire told me.

Yoshida: I thought Sumire did fish and stuff?
Hibiki: Fish still have fucking arteries. C’mon, Yoshi.

Yoshida: Heh… Ahem. Right.

Hibiki: Anyway, that means the killer should have been sprayed with blood when they attacked Uroko. Maybe Maeko, too.

Yoshida: Oh, right… The Monokuma File said that one of her arteries was cut, right? The, uh… carotid?

Hibiki: Right. Not sure what the range of that thing is, but I’m sure that if they left themselves exposed, the killer would’ve been drenched in that shit. Explains the walls, too.

Yoshida: Eugh… Yeah.

Of course, there’s always a chance the killer avoided the blood spray, but if they didn’t, they would have to have had a pretty wide time frame to cover their tracks. Better take note of that and the Monokuma File.

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Blood Spray*

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Monokuma File*

We’d covered everything in the main room, but there were still plenty of other things to investigate and not much time to do so. Deciding to leave a little longer for Aitou to inspect the bodies, I went over to the walk-in closet that I’d been neglecting to use.

Hibiki: I’m going to search in here.

Yoshida: Guess I’m coming in, then?
Hibiki: Guess you are. Come on.

The wardrobe was obviously pretty big, but not excessively so - Yoshida and I took up about a third of the floorspace between the two of us. Rungs and shelves lined all the walls. Mostly, they were empty, but there were a couple more copies of the outfit I was wearing now along with another two or three hangers that had a dress shirt, a vest and a trenchcoat. A purple newsboy cap with a clover insignia sat on one of the shelves with some pants and shoes.

Yoshida: You ever gonna wear that other thing?

Hibiki: No. I hate changing outfits. Just choose a look and stick to it.

Yoshida: ...How long have you been wearing the same thing?

Hibiki: No clue.

Yoshida: What do you mean?

Hibiki: I mean I don’t remember.

Yoshida: Oh… Heheh. Must be a really long time, then.

Hibiki: Sure. Anyway, there’s probably something more relevant in here than clothes I’ve never worn, so if I could actually focus and not miss some important shit that ends up getting us killed, that would be stellar.

Yoshida: Right, right. I think I see something over there.

Hibiki: Already ahead of you.

I took a few more steps into the wardrobe. It wasn’t well lit, but it didn’t need to be for the crumpled up sheet on the floor to be apparent. I pulled it up off the ground to find that it
was... sticky.

Yoshida: What is it?

Hibiki: A plastic tarp or something. It’s covered in shit.

Yoshida: Gross. Like, literally?

Hibiki: No, not fucking literally. I think it might be…

I drew a hand away from the plastic sheet and held it out closer to the closet exit, where the light was stronger. Sure enough, the liquid now on my hand looked like... Blood.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Bloody Plastic Tarp**

Yoshida: ...Oh. That’s arguably just as unhygienic. And... kind of disgusting... Uuu...

Hibiki: If you throw up, I’ll never forgive you.

Yoshida: Noted.

???: What on earth is that?!

Yoshida: Um, Ryuumatsu-san?

**Ryuumatsu rounded the corner to stand in the closet doorway. He looked down at the tarp with a mix of disgust, dismay and sickening curiosity.**

Ryuumatsu: What are you two... individuals doing inspecting new evidence like this? You really shouldn’t be touching that! It is imperative to preserve the crime scene if we are to-
Hibiki: [Lifts up hands] I’ll come for you next.

Ryuumatsu: Is th-that… B-Blood? What on Earth did you--

Hibiki: Chill. I just picked that up. It was right there. Now use your amazing nerd powers to psychoanalyse the shit out of that plastic ’til it spills the whole story or something.

Ryuumatsu: They’re not nerd powers. All of my knowledge is derived from my prestigious study of the I-law, I’ll have you know. Also, you’re the one who should be doing the psychoanalysing, not that anyone would appreciate it if you attempted to invade their privacy in that way.

Hibiki: …

Ryuumatsu: Feh. But since you clearly won’t be able to survive this trial without my assistance… I suppose I’ll lend you a hand. Feline boy, hold out the tarp.

Yoshida: I, uh… have a name. I told you it three days ago.

Ryuumatsu: Hm? Sorry, I don’t waste my time on talentless leeches. Now hold out the tarp.

Yoshida: [Looks over shoulder, hisses] You owe me one.

Hibiki: [Deadpan] What? Can’t hear you over all the amazing investigating Ryuumatsu is doing. Soooorry.

While Yoshida was preoccupied with Ryuumatsu, I went to the very back of the closet and bent down. Pushing back the couple of coats against the back wall revealed something… Strange.

A small crawl space door had been installed into the wall, a single green light shining dimly above it.
I pushed lightly on the door, and it opened silently to reveal a corridor that was easily two metres tall, the door itself at the top of this space. I couldn’t tell where it led without entering, but it was obviously suspicious. Whoever had unlocked this, they hadn’t just done it from the outside.

I looked back to Yoshida and Ryuumatsu, who were still talking only a few steps away. If I wanted to go inside, it would mean letting everyone know this was here.

...I couldn’t trust anyone else with that information. Anyone else would just screw everything up. The only person with the tact and intelligence to deal with this, the only person who could know about this without more baseless suspicions arising, the only person who definitely wasn’t masterminding this killing game… was me.

I looked around quickly and found something else in the middle of the floor. Not even bothering to look at it, I picked it up, closed the door and turned around before either of the others could see me.

Ryuumatsu: And so I can conclude with near certainty that that is where I should continue my investigation… Kioku-san, why in God’s n-name do you have a k-katana?!

Hibiki: Oh.

Sure enough, the object I’d picked up was another katana. Aside from the obvious lack of blood other than what’d ended up on it from my hands, it was exactly the same as the one near the curtains.

Ryuumatsu: I told you, you have to preserve the crime scene! This is an utter m-mess! How do you intend to rectify such a flagrant and reckless disturbance of such crucial evidence?! None of you unversed commoners should’ve been allowed to touch ANYTH--

Hibiki: Yo, shut the fuck up and let me talk.

Ryuumatsu: H-How dare y-
Yoshida: What is it, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: This is the second katana. Apparently, there was one in the Delta dorm and one in the Rho dorm. That means the chucklefuck who framed me for this shit went into not just one, but both of the big team dorms.

Ryuumatsu: …Ahem. You... raise an interesting point. I… I s-suppose that would be the case, yes.

Hibiki: Thanks for the validation. Anyway, everyone would have to be even dumber than they already are if they were to form a dual-team alliance. I could just somehow be underestimating everyone’s stupidity, in which case I’ll find out when you all manage to pin down fucking Uroko as the killer during the trial or some shit. If you’re all present of mind, though, chances are that the murderer used Uroko or Maeko’s keycard to steal the katana they couldn’t already access from their own team’s room.

Ryuumatsu: [Sticks nose up haughtily] Are you insinuating that you didn’t do this? Y-You can’t simply twist your words around to subtly manipulate me like that, you know.

Hibiki: I’m insinuating it because it’s true. I had nothing to do with this shit.

Ryuumatsu: Well how do you figure anyone else got into the room that only you have a keycard to?!

Hibiki: …

I looked back over to the crawl space door and scowled. Not like he could throw any meaningful accusations at me yet. I should keep that as my trump card.

Hibiki: Dunno. Stole my card or something, maybe.

Ryuumatsu: [Sneers] Now wouldn’t that be convenient.

Hibiki: Not really, given that it’s why you think I did any of this in the first place.
Ryuumatsu: I meant convenient as an excuse, you--

Hibiki: Yeah. I know.

Ryuumatsu: …You are an infuriatingly adept waste of potential.

Hibiki: Aw, thanks.

Yoshida: Can I put the tarp down now? My arms are getting sore.

Hibiki: Go ahead. I’m done here.

Ryuumatsu, Yoshida and I filed out of the closet. Yoshida dumped the tarp down just outside the door, and I threw the katana beside it.

Hibiki: That’s it for the wardrobe, then.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Katana in Wardrobe**

Ryuumatsu: Right, well, I have other matters to attend to. There’s something else I need to investigate.

Hibiki: Something about the tarp?

Ryuumatsu: …Indeed. I’m going to try to confirm its origins. I’d get Orutoku-san to do it so that I could put my superior skills to use where they’re truly needed, but he’s… Occupied.

Hibiki: Sure is. Good luck with that. Tell me where it came from when you figure it out.
Ryuumatsu: …I suppose I could divulge my spoils.


Ryuumatsu: R-Right.

**Ryuumatsu left in a hurry, jogging masterfully in his heels. I took Yoshida’s arm and started to drag him over to the door.**

Hibiki: Do you know what time it is, Yoshi?

Yoshida: [Scratches neck] No clue.

Hibiki: It’s time for me to do the rest of the fucking work and drag all these losers’ asses to victory.

Yoshida: You’re really putting your all into this, huh?

Hibiki: Do I look like I want to die?

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: Don’t answer.

**I approached the door to find Rouvin standing there, holding it open. As always, he seemed to be talking to himself, his expression contemplatively blank.**

Rouvin: But if it operates under a deontological system, then… Oh. Kioku. Yoshida.

Hibiki: Yo.
Yoshida: Hello! Uh… Any thoughts on, well, all of this?

Rouvin: Hm… Determining the culprit at this juncture is not feasible, if that’s what you are asking.

Yoshida: Oh…

Rouvin: However, I am confident in my standpoint that it is not Kioku, as most others seem to be choosing to believe.

Hibiki: Oh thank God.

Yoshida: That’s great! Not doubting Hibiki-san’s innocence at all, but… Can I ask why?

Rouvin: …

Rouvin: I suppose it’s not evidence, but these sorts of actions would be entirely uncharacteristic of them. That is to say, they do not give the impression of someone so absent minded as to commit this kind of unethical, punishable act in their own residence. Doing so would be… condemning.

Hibiki: Thank you for actually thinking for five seconds. More than most people here can say for themselves.

Rouvin: It is my pleasure, Kioku. [Muttering] Now, on the topic of deontology in the trial system…

Yoshida: …I think he’s changed stations.

Hibiki: We have to keep going anyway. Come on.

I left my suite with Yoshida in tow, and we found ourselves in the hallway. Kim and Kamiya were standing by the Team Rho door and talking quietly. Kamiya’s gaze was distant and melancholic.
Yoshida: [Pulls at hood] …Are you… Are you okay, Kamiya-san?

Kamiya: Huh…? Oh… Hello, Yoshida-san, Kioku-san. I’m, um… I’m alright. Hanahara said I could stay in there, but… It was a little too much, I guess. I’m really okay, though.

Kim: Better than some people, I’m sure. No need to worry. We’re the least of your concerns.

Kamiya: I just can’t believe… Uroko-san…

Yoshida: Yeah. I can’t believe it either, really… The last person I expected to, uh… To leave us was her.

Kamiya: [Looks down blankly] It…

Kamiya: It should’ve been me.

Kim: Don’t say that. Uroko-san was admirable, but there’s nothing you could’ve done to prevent this. We don’t even know when the murder happened.

Kamiya: …Right. I’m sorry.

Kamiya: Um… Have you found any evidence, Kioku-san?

Kim: [Crosses arms] You’d trust evidence from them?

Kamiya: Yes, of course! I… I want to trust everyone, but if I have to choose between all of my friends… I want to believe in you, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: …’K.

Hibiki: The obvious pieces of evidence right now are probably the katanas. Both the Delta and Rho
ones were in the suite, though only one had been used. Not sure who to suspect right now, though, except that I’ve taken the honour of crossing myself off my own list.

Kamiya: Right… I guess we’ll just have to wait for the trial, then.

Kim: Yeah. Good luck with your search, guys. I’m pretty sure the dorm doors are unlocked for investigation.

Yoshida: Great. Should we start with the Team Rho room then, Hibiki-san?

Hibiki: I don’t care.

Yoshida: I’ll take that as an enthusiastic yes. Let’s go.


Kamiya: Good luck!

I stationed myself in front of the door to the Team Rho suite, and Yoshida tentatively batted at the knob before turning it and allowing me inside. It was actually my first time in either of the other team suites, and this one was evidently a lot less luxurious than mine - instead of one king bed, four sets of bunk beds were set up against the room’s walls, leaving a smaller walking space. The eight of them probably couldn’t all stand up in here at once.

Yoshida stepped aside, stretching out his arms as he smiled weakly.

Yoshida: Ahah, uhh… Welcome, I guess? Kinda sad that the first time you’re coming to visit is for a murder investigation.

???: How’s that goin’ for ya?
Yoshida and I looked up. Toramoto was lying stomach-down on one of the top bunks, his chin propped up on his hands. He smirked at us as he shifted to sit with his feet resting on the ladder’s upper rungs.

Yoshida: It’s going fine. How about you? Are you okay after, ah… Seeing that?

Toramoto: You think a little blood ‘n gore’s enough to break me? I’m really not that beaten up about it. Hondo ‘n I weren’t exactly friends, y’know.

Toramoto: As for progress with the investigation, there’s nothin’ here. In fact, there’s even less than there should be.

Hibiki: The katana, right?

Toramoto: Exactly. Used to be sittin’ on the table over there, but I’m guessin’ it ended up in, hmm… Oh, right. Your room. Funny that, huh?

Hibiki: If you’re trying to take a jab at me, you should probably know the katana from the Delta room is missing, too.

Toramoto: Huh. Well, fancy that.

Hibiki: Yeah. So hey, if you want to keep insulting me with your stupidity, maybe you should actually find some evidence.

Toramoto: You want all sixteen of us to stand in the one room at the same time?

Hibiki: …Actually, that sounds nightmarish.

Toramoto: I rest my case. Anyway, they have an American movie on the TV set over there called Paul Blart Mall Cop 2 and it looks absolutely horrendous, so if ya don’t mind I’d like to watch ten minutes of it before I gotta leave for the shitstorm.
Yoshida: Didn’t Alix-san recommend that last night? He said it was really good.

Toramoto: Course he did. Guy can’t see all the tragically uninspired shot direction in this thing.

Hibiki: The hell do you know about shot direction?

Toramoto: When you live alone in an apartment that’s got nothin’ but a shitty TV and a boa constrictor, you learn a lot of things, Kioku-kun. Now leave me to watch this masterpiece of modern media.

Hibiki: Whatever you want, dude. Have fun.

Yoshida: Should we really just let him do nothing?

Hibiki: I honestly don’t care. We don’t need him to find everything for this case. Now follow me. There’s something I want to check out in the ensuite.

Yoshida: Uh, okay… Right behind you.

I strolled into the ensuite and wasted no time in throwing open the cupboard doors. Where cosmetics had presumably been in my ensuite was nothing but empty space - the shelves were nearly bare.

Hibiki: Hm.

Yoshida: Uh… What’s up with all this?

Hibiki: Well, given how frivolous someone seems to have been in stocking my ensuite’s shelves, you’d think there’d be, well, something to speak of in here.

Yoshida: And yet… The shelves are bare. Huh.
Hibiki: How perceptive of you.

Nothing else seemed to be out of place. I stood back up from where I’d been crouched at the shelves and started walking.

Hibiki: Well, I think that’s probably everything of importance in here.

Hibiki: …Right. I should probably ask you about this, too.

Yoshida: What’s that?

Hibiki: You were in this suite right before I found the body. Was anyone else here?

Yoshida: No, nobody else came here. I got here pretty much right after breakfast… By that point, Maeko-san had already left. Nobody came in or out after I got here, so… yeah. I was in here the whole time after that… Oh wait. Oh no.

Hibiki: What?

Yoshida: Ghh… I fell asleep for a while. S-So… So someone could’ve taken the katana then. Shit.

Hibiki: Interesting. Thanks, Yoshi.

Yoshida: Y-You’re not even fazed?!

Hibiki: Not like it’s my problem.

OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Yoshida’s Testimony
Hibiki: Alright. Let’s check out the Delta suite and then go back to my room.

Yoshida: Uhh… Sure! Sounds good.

Yoshida: [Murmuring to himself] Shiiiiittt……

We left the Rho suite, Hideki scoffing at us as we walked past the television screen. Not half a minute later, the two of us were standing in the Team Delta room, which looked just as undisturbed as the other one.

???: Ghh--!!!

Yoshida: H-Hello?

Yoshida: …Oh. It’s Kurai-san.

Kurai: Sure is. Got a fucking problem with that?

Kurai had just come out of the ensuite, his face dripping with water and the front of his overalls similarly soaked.

Yoshida: Uh… Why are you all wet?

Kurai: What’s it look like, shit-for-brains? I was washing my fucking face.


Kurai: Maybe I just care about my personal hygiene. It’s none of your fucking business.

Yoshida: It’s okay if you’re upset about Uroko-san, you know--
Kurai: [Shoves hand in pocket] Like I’d ever care about her. She was practically begging for someone to kill her with optimism that shitty and transparent.

Hibiki: Alright, dude, I really don’t care. Have you done any investigating at all?

Kurai: Of course I fucking have. I’m not an idiot with a death wish.

*What a shocker. Could be more competent than he lets on, but the chances of me being wrong about him or anyone else are pretty goddamn slim. Loser probably just got lucky and wanted to show off.*

Hibiki: Alright then. What have you got?

Kurai: Why should I tell you?

Hibiki: Because if you don’t then I’ll steal wine from the bar and tell Hanahara it was you.

Kurai: …You are a fucking awful human being and I don’t take orders, so no. I don’t care. Go do it yourself.

Hibiki: Hypocrite. I didn’t exactly need your help.

Hibiki: Okay, well, the katana’s pretty obviously gone, if anyone couldn’t have already guessed.

Yoshida: Should I go check the ensuite cupboards?

Hibiki: Please do.

*Yoshida entered the ensuite as fast as he was ever willing to go - that is, at a slow jog - and disappeared from my sight.*
Yoshida: …

Yoshida: [Loudly] It’s empty!

Hibiki: That one too, huh. Odd.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Empty Ensuite Shelves**

Yoshida: [Walking back into room] Guess that’s it for in here, then?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Wait.

While nothing in the room was decimated like in my room, there was still something… off. Unsurprisingly, most of the beds were unmade and messy, but Uroko’s seemed to have something sitting amongst the sheets, too. To be precise, it was a piece of notebook paper.

Yoshida: Oh wow, nice catch! I’m surprised you saw that at all, no way would I have ever caught it. Pretty lucky, huh?

Hibiki: Luck is your thing. I need to be observant.

Yoshida: Heh, true. Well, you’re really good at it!

Hibiki: I know. Now, let’s see what this says.

I turned the piece of paper over as I picked it up. A message was neatly hand-printed on it:
Dear Uroko Hondo,

Please meet me in the Team Upsilon suite at 8:30 AM tomorrow. I need to discuss something with you.

Don’t tell anybody about this.

Hibiki: What the fuck?

Yoshida: Um… Wow.

Hibiki: What kind of fucking numbskull would pretend to be me?!

Yoshida: I mean, they didn’t--

Hibiki: They told her to meet them IN MY ROOM!!!

Kurai: Could you pipe the fuck down?

Hibiki: SHUT UP! I can’t believe the fucking audacity of the thick-headed idiot who tried to pull this shit! For them to think that I would not only be dumb enough to ever invite a murder victim to my room, but also that I wouldn’t be able to prove that this is fake as shit?! That’s just fucking sad!

Yoshida: I-I mean… At least you can prove you didn’t write it, right? It’s not a big deal!

Hibiki: Of course I can prove I didn’t fucking write it. Unlike the rest of the population of this gaudy shipwreck, I actually THINK!

Yoshida: Hibiki-san…

Hibiki: WHAT?!

Yoshida: Um, well, you aren’t scaring me, but you’re certainly, uh… Going a little overboard.
Hibiki: Daichi Yoshida, if you are making fucking boat puns, I swear to God--

Yoshida: N-No, no! Just… Calm down, please?

Hibiki: …Fine. Fine. Whatever. It doesn’t matter, anyway. It’s cool. It’s…

Hibiki: …It’s…

Hibiki: Ugh. I’m going.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: Well? Are you coming or what, Yoshida?

Yoshida: C-Coming!!! I’m coming!

Hibiki: Great. Pleasure seeing you, Kurai.

Kurai: …

Yoshida: L-Let’s just leave.

Hibiki: You don’t have to tell me.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Note to Uroko**

Well, that was fucking great. Only one place left to worry about, I guess… my ensuite itself.
I entered the Upsilon suite in silence, pushing past Rouvin and making my way over to the bathroom in seconds.

Yoshida: [Panting] H-Hey, you didn’t have to go so fast the whole way, y-you know.

Hibiki: It was twenty metres at most. Get over it.

Yoshida: [Muttering] Tell that to my binder…

Yoshida: [Coughs] Um, anyway, you first.

Hibiki: I was going to go in first anyway, but thanks for giving me permission.

Even from outside the room, the stench of blood was overwhelming. Of course, it was only worse once I actually entered the ensuite. The stuff was still everywhere, and the drying footprints that’d ended up all over the tiles weren’t helping to contain it.

The room was basically at maximum capacity - Orutoku, Alix, Hashikawa, Sumire, Aitou and Hanahara were all there, not to mention the body sprawled out across the floor. It was getting to the point where Hashikawa had perched herself on top of the bench with one foot in the sink, Aitou was basically confined to a square metre of bloody tiles, and Hanahara had shoved herself into a corner. Alix basically transversed the laws of space, so his presence didn’t seem to be much of a problem, somehow.

It only took a second for Hanahara to notice me. Unable to move from her place, she resorted to projecting her voice across the room.

Hanahara: Kioku-san… There are enough people in here as it is. We have the investigation covered.

Hibiki: Is Alix helping?

Hanahara: …He’s… He’s doing something.
Hibiki: Right, well, I’m actually going to investigate, so if you’re that short on floor space, kick him out. Whatever he’s up to, there’s zero chance it’s productive.

Hanahara: …

Hibiki: Or do you just not want me in here because you suspect me?

Hanahara: Look, Kioku-san, it’s nothing against you. I just--

Hibiki: I didn’t do it.

Hanahara: I… Huh?

Hibiki: I said I didn’t fucking kill anyone. Actually, more than half the people I’ve talked to today have been smart enough to figure that out on their own, and we aren’t even in the trial yet.

Hanahara: …I don’t appreciate your tone.

Hibiki: Whatever. Point is, you should know I’m not dumb enough to frame myself. I’m going to investigate.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: I’m just doing my job, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: And I’m going to do mine. Now, if you’re willing to actually make a meaningful contribution, I need to know who stayed behind this morning to sleep in.

Hibiki: Cool.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Hanahara’s Testimony**

Hibiki: While I’m asking… Hashikawa.

Hashikawa, who’d been tugging at her tie nervously, squeaked as she looked up at me, skittishly saluting on instinct. She seemed more than a little out of it.

Hashikawa: Gh-- Y-Y-Yes sir! What is it, sir!

Hibiki: When you came up here looking for Uroko and Maeko, you went into both of the other team dorms.

Hashikawa: Uh, yes I did, sir!

Hibiki: Not sir.

Hashikawa: Y-Yes, uh… Ma’am?

Hibiki: No.

Hashikawa: ...Cap’n?

Hibiki: Better. Tell me who was in the suites when you got here earlier.

Hashikawa: Oh! Uh, w-well, Aitou-san was still asleep in the Team Delta room… Nobody else was there.

Hibiki: Not a surprise he’d sleep that long. Guy never stops drinking coffee.
Hashikawa: Eheh, yeah… The, uh, only person in the Team Rho dorm was Yoshida-san. He opened the door for me.

Hibiki: And everybody else who’d slept in had left.

Hashikawa: R-Right!

Hibiki: Interesting. I’ll keep that in mind.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Hashikawa’s Testimony**

I probably didn’t need any more accounts of today’s events for now… Probably time to deal with the body. Thankfully, I didn’t have to go anywhere to take a look.

Hibiki: Aitou.

Aitou: …

Hibiki: Aitou.

Aitou: …

Hibiki: Ai--

Alix: Aitou-san, Kioku-san wants something.

Aitou: Wh-- Oh! Oh. My apologies. I was, ah… Somewhat lost in thought.

Hibiki: Sure. I’m here to investigate. You’re the one who did the autopsy.
Aitou: That I am. Were you hoping I could enlighten you as to my findings from my endeavours?

Hibiki: Exactly that.

Aitou: Alright. Well, I’ve inspected the wounds of both Maeko-san and… The corpse, so informing you should, with any luck, be a simple matter.

Aitou: I’ll start with the corpse. Most notable, evidently, is the absence of the right leg - or, at least, what of it was below the knee. I trust you’ve seen it in the main room?

Hibiki: Kinda hard to miss it, yeah.

Aitou: Right. The corpse is otherwise mostly unscathed, but the right side of her neck seems to be the site of the final strike. The katana sliced directly through her carotid artery.

Hibiki: Brutal.

Aitou: Indeed. I’m no forensic scientist, mind you, but I have no doubt she would have been dead within the minute.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Uroko’s Neck Wound**

Hibiki: Hm. Anything else on the body?

Aitou: Not particularly. Her hands and much of her clothing are drenched in blood, but I suppose that’s to be expected. Her right leg, too. Ah, and her clothes are slightly torn, mostly in very clean, minor slices that would have naturally resulted from being involved in a swordfight. Unfortunately, my experience with cadavers is limited to external work, most of which is cosmetic, so I cannot conduct a full investigation which would encompass internal wounds, but… It seems unlikely that it would have any, given the lethality of the strike to the neck.

Hibiki: Interesting. Is that it for this one?
Aitou: That it is. She… It doesn’t seem to have any other wounds. There is the matter of the surrounding scene, however.

Hibiki: The cosmetics and shit?

Aitou: Correct. They seem to have been scattered around in the scuffle.

Hibiki: …

Looking at them closely… Something was off. The floor was absolutely covered in blood, but at least half of the bottles were almost entirely clean.

That… could be important. I'll keep it to myself.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Cosmetics in Ensuite**

Yoshida: Hey, how about that thing? The, uh, towel rail.

I had to crane my neck to see it, but there certainly was a towel rail there. An entirely dysfunctional one, too - it’d been bent into a shallow ‘V’ shape, and the tiles behind it looked like they’d been impacted. Fiddling around with it, it seemed like the rail was pretty easy to just slip out of the holsters on the walls, even with the way it’d been bent.

As I was messing around with it, Orutoku looked over in my direction, and his face lit up with surprise.

Orutoku: Oh, hey! The one in the Delta suite is like that, too!

Hibiki: As in, it’s loose?
Orutoku: Right! Guess they did a pretty crappy job on the bathroom appliances, huh?

Hibiki: Hm.

Aitou: Ah. I believe that to be the site at which Maeko-san hit her head. That would have been the cause of her losing consciousness, unless the blood loss overwhelmed her first.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Towel Rail**

Yoshida: S-She hit the wall that hard?!

Aitou: It does seem to be the case, yes. Thankfully, her skull doesn’t seem to be noticeably damaged. She should wake up soon, I hear.

Hibiki: Who told you that?

Aitou: Orutoku-san informed me. It seems he has experience with concussions.

Orutoku: That I do!

Yoshida: Oh, hello, Orutoku-san! Um… What’s this about a concussion?

Orutoku: [Puts hands on hips] Well, as a security guard, I have to deal with a fair bit of violence! Crowds can be pretty rowdy.

**Orutoku grinned at us. He went to gesture over to Maeko’s body, but a glimpse of the gory scene was all it took to turn his face green. He shuddered slightly through a smile as he continued.**

Orutoku: H-heh, uh, so! I’ve seen a few people get concussed! Even dished out a few knocks to the head myself! Never seen someone get a limb cut off, though… Wow, that is gross.
Orutoku: Anyway, uh… You really aren’t supposed to leave a person unconscious after a concussion, but with how much blood Maeko-san’s lost, I’m not sure waking her up is a good idea, either. Kamiya-san got something sugary for her to eat, though, so she’ll… Probably be okay?

Yoshida: You… Don’t sound that sure.

Orutoku: Well, I’ve never seen anyone in such critical condition before! It’s a miracle she’s still breathing, to be honest. If it weren’t for that tourniquet… I don’t think she’d be here right now.

Hibiki: Oh, yeah. Did anyone figure out what the deal with the tourniquet was? Who put it on her?

Orutoku: No clue, sorry.

Aitou: Mm. It could have been the culprit, I suppose. I doubt they were attempting to commit two homicides - if anything, Maeko-san likely accompanied her sister, and attacking both could have acted as a ploy to throw off the scent regarding the culprit’s team alignment.

Hibiki: Hm.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Maeko’s Tourniquet**

Hibiki: Odd that there was even a first aid kit here to begin with.

Aitou: Agreed. Kamiya-san mentioned it to me last night… I retrieved it from the janitor’s closet. The same one she sourced the ladder from to hang up the banner, that is.

Yoshida: Really? Y-You got here pretty fast after the Body Discovery Announcement played, though. Did you sleep in your suit or something?

Aitou: …Yes. Yes, I did.
Orutoku: [Chuckles awkwardly] Hey, you do you, I guess.

Whatever. Aitou’s always seemed like a kind of quirky guy, even if he’s subtle about it. Can’t say I’m particularly surprised.

On a related note, though… Thinking back, there was something off about what’d happened earlier. It was probably another thing best kept to myself.

If the rules required that three people other than the killer see a body for the Body Discovery Announcement to go off, then… Why did it play when I walked in alone? I didn’t exactly have to start counting on my fingers to figure this out. At the very most, Maeko and I would have seen the body. That wouldn’t account for the third person, though, who obviously couldn’t be the killer or Uroko herself.

Then… Did someone else find the scene before I did?

...

Guess I was going to have to find out.

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Body Discovery Announcement*

Hibiki: Alright… There shouldn’t be that much more to this. Aitou, what’s the deal with Maeko.

Aitou: [Pushes up glasses] Actually, since I was preoccupied, Sumire-san has been primarily supervising her for the last while.

Sumire: That I have.

Sumire was standing halfway inside the shower, her back rested against the shower wall. From the way her bright, blue eyes seemed to pierce me as soon as she looked over, she really wasn’t happy. Probably a more normal reaction than most of the people here had had,
actually. She looked like she’d cried recently.

Sumire: Maeko-san will probably be fine. Even if I’m a marine biologist, I still know enough to say that her cardiovascular system is in working order. My main concern is the mental issues that can come from head trauma.

Hibiki: Such as?

Sumire: Lots of things, really. Sleep loss, drowsiness, amnesia, a lack of coordination, changes in personality and general temperament, light and sound sensitivity… The list goes on. Basically, there are a lot, and we have no way of knowing what until she wakes up.

Hibiki: Hm… Oh, hey. There’s something on the shower floor.

Sumire: Are you talking about the blood? Because if you are, it’s really not that funny.

Hibiki: Seriously, look. There’s a card next to her arm.

Orutoku: Huh? Which one?

Hibiki: Which one do you think? There’s only one answer.

Orutoku: …Ohh. Right, right.

Actually, looking more closely… There might not just be one answer. While the front of Maeko’s pants was mostly clean, there was a suspicious smearing of blood near her left pocket.

Hibiki: Sumire. Check her pocket as well.

Sumire: Sure.
Sumire bent over and reached gently into the pocket on Maeko’s pants. Her eyes widened, and in seconds she’d drawn back with another card in hand.

Sumire: …

Sumire: This is definitely worth looking at.

Sumire collected up the cards and passed them through to Hashikawa, who washed them off and handed them over. There were two of them.

The first one was, simply enough, a Team Delta keycard. Unsurprisingly, it had Uroko’s name on it.

The second one, though, was different to any I’d seen before. Where the owner’s name should have been printed in clean, uniform font, something had instead been scribbled in bold marker: “UNIVERSAL KEY.”

Hibiki: …What the hell?

Yoshida: What is it?

Hibiki: Look.

Yoshida: …

Yoshida: [Wide eyed] Where did that come from?!

Hibiki: I… Someone must have used that to get into this room.

Orutoku: Huh?
Hibiki: Well, why the fuck would I need what seems to effectively be a skeleton key to get into my own suite?

Orutoku: …Oh. Hmmmm…

Aitou: This is certainly an odd revelation. I suppose that if the culprit required this in order to enter the Upsilon suite, they could not logically be a member of Team Upsilon.

Hibiki: Right.

Yoshida: So you’re in the clear then? That’s great!


Aitou: Perhaps you should ask around and see if anybody recognises the card? I highly doubt it simply appeared out of thin air or whatnot.

Hibiki: Yeah, sure. Thank fuck I found these.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Set of Key Cards**

Hibiki: …Is that it, then?

Aitou: It appears so, yes.

Yoshida: But… Maeko-san still hasn’t woken up.

Sumire: I wouldn’t speak so soon.
I bent over to get a view into the shower. Sure enough, Maeko had started to shift, a scratchy and uncomfortable noise beginning to rise in her throat. Orutoku, Yoshida and Hanahara all rushed over, and I took a step back as the rest began to crowd around the girl. Beside me, Aitou and Alix stood still.

I’d… actually managed to forget Alix was even there. He’d been silent almost the whole time, bent in prayer with both hands on the magatama around his neck. Weird guy.

Hibiki: Hey, Alix.

Alix: …

Aitou: [Quietly] He’s in the midst of a particularly important ceremony. I believe he’s honouring Uroko-san’s… passing.

Alix: …

Hibiki: Wow. All it took to shut him up was a bit of homicide.

Aitou: I certainly hope you’re not insinuating the implementation of any unethical methods of silencing Murasaki-san.

Hibiki: It was a joke, dude.

Aitou: …Ah, of course. My apologies. I’m not the social butterfly I’d like to be, to be frank.

Hibiki: Hard to drift on the conversational breeze with a ten foot pole up your ass, huh?

Surprisingly enough, Aitou… actually laughed at that one. He’d covered his face with one gloved hand, but the corners of his lips as he smiled were hard to miss. Of course, a couple of seconds later he’d reverted back to being awkwardly stiff and formal, but the flush in his cheeks wasn’t as fast to disappear.
Alix: …

Alix: You have a nice laugh, Aitou-san.

Aitou: I-I... I what?

Alix: When all you’ve got is sound, you gain a new appreciation for it. You have a nice laugh.

Aitou: [Flustered] Ah, um... Th-Thank you?

Hibiki: Not very used to receiving compliments, are you.

Aitou: I...

Aitou: [Covers face] I’m not very used to any of this.

Aitou: …Also, Murasaki-san... What happened to your ceremony?

Alix: Oh, it’s over. I was just listening to you guys talk.

Hibiki: What was the ceremony even for?

Alix: [Grins] It’s so you don’t get haunted. You’d better be grateful, Kioku-san!

Hibiki: Ghosts don’t exist, so I don’t care.

Alix: Oh?
Alix: Well… I guess it’s fine if you think that, but… If you ask me, it’s totally possible that ghosts exist, and it’s totally possible for them to stay with us after death and even come back after it, too.

Aitou: …How so?

Alix: I mean… There might not be any proof, but I think it’s better that way. If Uroko-san and everyone’s dead loved ones can reunite after death… That’s a lot more comforting, you know? I think that souls can choose where they want to go, and as an exorcist, I need to help them find their way home.

Alix: …Maybe that just sounds silly. I dunno.

Aitou: …

Aitou: [Quietly] …No, it doesn’t. I think that sounds… Nice. I think that sounds really nice.

Alix: Really?

Aitou: Really. I hope you were able to help Uroko-san find her way to, ah… Home.

Alix: …

Alix: Thank you, Aitou-san. I hope so, too.

I’d never seen Alix this serious or Aitou this vulnerable before. It was honestly… pretty unnerving. Almost as if I was invading their privacy.

Stepping away, I decided to leave the two of them to ponder mortality or whatever the fuck it was they were so enthralled with, finally walking over to the shower door. Yoshida and Mamugi were short enough that I could easily see Maeko over their heads - it looked like she was managing to stand with Sumire’s help, though her gaze still seemed distant and empty. Lucidity was probably still a few minutes away.
Right on time, there was a short crackle, and the TV turned on in the main room.

Monokuma: Aaaalright! Investigation’s over, kids. Now, get your butts down to the trial room door at the bottom of the stairwell so we can get this show on the road!

Sumire: Damn. Guess I’ll just have to lift you up, then. Sorry, Maeko-san.

Maeko: …Mmngh…

Hanahara: [Leaving the ensuite, shouting] Alright, everyone! Time to go!

Hashikawa: D-Do you need help, Saori-sa--

Sumire: Don’t worry about it, Tsuruko-san. I’m fine. Girl’s not as heavy as she looks.

Hashikawa: I-If you’re sure…

Maeko: … Uu… Mae… G…gh…

Sumire: At least she’s almost awake. Keep trying to talk to her as we go.

Hashikawa: Um… Okay. I’ll try.

Sumire: Thank you. Alright, let’s get going.

Everyone filed out of the ensuite to let Sumire through, and soon enough, all sixteen passengers were on their way to the stairwell. As Hashikawa tried to talk to Maeko, I took one last look around… And saw something.

The table with the ship in a bottle next to the stairs… One of the corners had been sliced clean
…What the hell did that even mean?

Yoshida: …Hibiki-san, what are you looking at?

Hibiki: …Nothing.

...I shouldn’t forget this.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Corner of Stairwell Table**

Nothing left but Maeko’s account now… If we were lucky enough, she might not have forgotten a thing.
Hashikawa anxiously met Maeko's empty gaze and tried her best to get something out of her. With all the blood she'd lost it wasn't likely she'd be fully functioning for a while, but she thankfully seemed... reluctantly responsive, at least.

Hashikawa: Um... Are you awake? Mae... Oh, I guess I don't need to call you that anymore, that was silly of me, ahh... Um, H-Hondo-san?
Maeko: Nghh… Hu… Huh?

Sumire: I think she’s awake. Try asking her something she should know.

Hashikawa: Okay, um… Do you know what, what y-year-- oh, wait, I don’t even know what year it is. Dumb, dumb, dumb!

Sumire: It’s alright, Tsuruko-san. Start with her name.

Hashikawa: O-Okay. Um… Excuse me?

Maeko: …H?

Hashikawa: Yes. Hi. Hello. Um, could you tell me your name, please?


Hashikawa: P-Perfect! Next, ah… Which one do you want me to call you by?

Maeko: …Don’t care.

Hashikawa: Alright, um, Maeko-san it is. What else can you tell me?

Maeko: …

Maeko: …Nothing.

Tsuruko: W-Wha--
Hibiki: How about your Ultimate Talent?

Maeko: Uh… Ultimate…?

Hibiki: Yeah. Yours is Karate Master.

Maeko: [Fully awake] No it’s not.

She could just be delusional, but… Something about her tone sounded oddly confident.

Hibiki: How can you be so sure?


Sumire: Hm… Kioku-san, do you want me to--

Hibiki: No. I’m the psychologist here. Quiet.

Hibiki: Hondo. If you aren’t the Ultimate Karate Master, you have to be the Ultimate… Something.


Hibiki: No, I mean, something real that isn’t karate. Come on.

Maeko: …

Maeko: Don’t know. I’m just… Ultimate.

Hibiki: Oh for Christ’s sake--
Yoshida: Do you mean that you remember having an Ultimate talent, but you’re not sure what it is?


Maeko: So, um… I guess I’m Maeko Hondo… Ultimate… ???.

Hibiki: Oh, great.

Maeko: Yeah. And, um…

Maeko: When are you all going to introduce yourselves? And why am I… Looking at the ceiling?

Yoshida: Oh my God…

Hibiki: [Muttering] This has got to be a fucking joke.

Sumire: Maeko-san. Do you remember anyone named Uroko? Uroko Hondo?

Maeko: Um… No. Why do they have the, uh… The same name as me?

Sumire: …

Sumire: Well, this is going to be interesting, isn’t it.

Hashikawa: W-We’re doomed…

Yoshida: …Hibiki-san?
Hibiki: What.

Yoshida: I don’t think… I don’t think we’re getting any first-hand testimony.

Hibiki: No shit.

Finally, I found myself standing in front of the lowest door in the stairwell, its surface padded with red cushioning and lined with a vibrant gold.

Something creaked, and I heard Maeko gasp as the doors slowly swung open of their own accord.

Yoshida: Guess it’s time, huh…?

Yoshida: I’d say good luck, but I don’t think you’re going to need it. You’ll absolutely crush it in there.

Hibiki: You know I will.

Yoshida: Don’t doubt it for a second. Um… Just because of my own nerves, though…

Yoshida pulled at my hand for a second, and as soon as I’d started to bend over…

He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me in for a hug.

…He was shaking.

Yoshida: …Just because I know you’ll do just fine doesn’t mean I’m not scared, you k-know. I… I might be sort of useless, but… I really believe in you, Hibiki, and if I get a chance to help you during the trial, I’ll take it.
Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Thanks, Yoshi.


Hibiki: Don’t get sappy.

Yoshida: Heheh… It’s a little late for that. Sorry.

Hibiki: It’s fine. We going in?

Yoshida: …You bet.

...This was it. The first trial with the other passengers… With my class. The first Class Trial.

Someone had framed me for murder. Just that thought was enough to set my stomach boiling once more. Someone had tried to win their life back and lose me mine.

As I walked around the circle of podiums and found the stand with my name, I looked around the group. Everyone looked scared, confused, distraught, anxious, anguished… But for one of them, it was a lie.

Whoever they were, I would personally ensure they wouldn’t live to see anything outside this room again.

CLASS TRIAL: NOW IN SESSION

Chapter End Notes
TRUTH BULLETS:
-Uroko's Severed Leg
A severed leg that stops just above the knee. Was discovered near the door in the Upsilon suite. Belonged to Uroko Hondo.

-Blood Coated Katana
A blood coated katana that was thrown aside at the scene. Came from either the Delta or Rho suite, but it's impossible to tell which based on appearances alone.

-Maeko's Severed Arm
Maeko Hondo's severed arm, cut halfway between the elbow and shoulder. Was discovered in the middle of the crime scene.

-Scattered Cosmetics in Suite
Bottles of cosmetics and other bottles you'd find in a bathroom were scattered through the suite.

-Signs of a Fight
The walls and curtains of the room have been slashed up by the katana. Not only that, but the bed frame seems to have been cut up, too.

-Blood Spray
Blood has been sprayed across parts of the room. It seems like the trajectory was quite wide.

-Monokuma File #01
'The victim was Uroko Hondo, Ultimate Composer, who was discovered inside the Team Upsilon ensuite.

The time of death is unknown. The cause of death is blood loss from the right carotid artery, which has been cleanly sliced through. Death was likely near-instant. The victim’s left leg has also been severed below the knee.

Maeko Hondo, the Ultimate Karate Pro, was also found unconscious inside the ensuite. Her right arm has been severed above the elbow. All of the wounds appear to be clean cuts from the one weapon.'

-Bloody Plastic Tarp
A plastic tarp covered in blood that was found in the wardrobe. Not sure where it came from.

-Katana in Wardrobe
A clean katana that was sitting in the wardrobe. Was from whichever suite the bloody one wasn't taken from.

-Yoshida's Testimony
Yoshida said that he came back to the Rho suite just after breakfast and stayed there, and that Maeko was already gone by then. He wasn't awake the whole time, but nobody came in or out while he was. He's not sure when the katana was taken.

-Empty Ensuite Shelves
The bathroom shelves in the Delta and Rho dorms are all totally bare.
-Note to Uroko
A note found on Uroko's bed. It reads:

'Dear Uroko Hondo,

Please meet me in the Team Upsilon suite at 8:30 AM tomorrow. I need to discuss something with you.

Don't tell anybody about this.'

-Hanahara's Testimony
Aitou, Orutoku, Uroko and Maeko all stayed back at the dorms to sleep in on the morning of the murder.

-Hashikawa's Testimony
When Hashikawa went to the dorms to look for the people who'd slept in, Aitou was still asleep in the Delta suite and Yoshida let her into the Rho suite, which he was in alone. Nobody else was around.

-Uroko's Neck Wound
A thin, deep slice into one side of Uroko Hondo's neck. It would have cut clean through the carotid artery.

-Cosmetics in Ensuite
Bottles that were spilt all over the floor. Most of them aren't very bloody, despite the large amounts covering the floor.

-Towel Rail
Somewhat indented, and very easy to slide out. Orutoku says the same is true of the one in the Delta ensuite, and presumably the Rho ensuite too.

-Maeko's Tourniquet
A tourniquet was tied around Maeko's arm sometime before the body discovery announcement played to stop her from bleeding out. No idea who set it up, but it seems to have saved her life.

-Body Discovery Announcement
Announcement for Uroko's body. Played when Hibiki walked into the ensuite. Two other people, not including the killer, must've seen the body before Hibiki did, and one of them could have been Maeko. The other is a mystery.

-Set of Key Cards
Two key cards were found next to Maeko's body. The first was Uroko's key card, while the other was the 'Universal Key'. This can supposedly unlock any door, like a skeleton key.

-Corner of Stairwell Table
A corner of the table next to the stairwell has been cut cleanly off. Not a very big piece.
Here's the start of the trial! Mechanics should be fairly self-explanatory. If you have the skin I've programmed into this work turned on, there'll be a 'Solution' button at the end of every non-stop debate and other minigames that you can scroll over (laptop, computer) or click on (touchscreen device) for the answer. If it's turned off, it'll just show the answer there. Sorry if they look a little weird, the coding might've messed up and because it's almost 2 in the morning I don't really care enough to check. It should still work absolutely fine!

Truth bullet list is both below and at the end of the last chapter in the notes! You can keep a second tab open to the notes from there for easy access to the list, if you want to.

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Her right arm has been severed above the elbow. All of the wounds appear to be clean cuts from the one weapon.'

-Bloody Plastic Tarp
A plastic tarp covered in blood that was found in the wardrobe. Not sure where it came from.

-Katana in Wardrobe
A clean katana that was sitting in the wardrobe. Was from whichever suite the bloody one wasn't taken from.

-Yoshida's Testimony
Yoshida said that he came back to the Rho suite just after breakfast and stayed there, and that Maeko was already gone by then. He wasn't awake the whole time, but nobody came in or out while he was. He's not sure when the katana was taken.

-Empty Ensuite Shelves
The bathroom shelves in the Delta and Rho dorms are all totally bare.

-Note to Uroko
A note found on Uroko's bed. It reads:

'Dear Uroko Hondo,

Please meet me in the Team Upsilon suite at 8:30 AM tomorrow. I need to discuss something with you.

Don't tell anybody about this.'

-Hanahara's Testimony
Aitou, Orutoku, Uroko and Maeko all stayed back at the dorms to sleep in on the morning of the murder.

-Hashikawa's Testimony
When Hashikawa went to the dorms to look for the people who'd slept in, Aitou was still asleep in the Delta suite and Yoshida let her into the Rho suite, which he was in alone. Nobody else was around.

-Uroko's Neck Wound
A thin, deep slice into one side of Uroko Hondo's neck. It would have cut clean through the carotid artery.

-Cosmetics in Ensuite
Bottles that were spilt all over the floor. Most of them aren't very bloody, despite the large amounts covering the floor.

-Towel Rail
Somewhat indented, and very easy to slide out. Orutoku says the same is true of the one in the Delta ensuite, and presumably the Rho ensuite too.

-Maeko's Tourniquet
A tourniquet was tied around Maeko's arm sometime before the body discovery announcement played to stop her from bleeding out. No idea who set it up, but it seems to have saved her life.
-Body Discovery Announcement
Announcement for Uroko’s body. Played when Hibiki walked into the ensuite. Two other people, not including the killer, must've seen the body before Hibiki did, and one of them could have been Maeko. The other is a mystery.

-Set of Key Cards
Two key cards were found next to Maeko's body. The first was Uroko's key card, while the other was the 'Universal Key'. This can supposedly unlock any door, like a skeleton key.

-Corner of Stairwell Table
A corner of the table next to the stairwell has been cut cleanly off. Not a very big piece.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The trial room was, to say the least… Extravagant. As I took my place at the stand at the very back, I came face to face with a bright scene - a circular hall, sixteen podiums set in a ring at its centre. Behind the one at the back was a towering red throne. Draping stage curtains covered the walls, the red fabric illuminated by dim pink lights that shone down throughout the room. A cooler blue light peeked out from beneath.

As soon as the last few passengers had stepped through the doors, they swung closed. Bright white spotlights overhead turned on and, on cue, Monokuma sprung up from behind the throne to land on it.

Monokuma: Glad you’re all finally here, folks! Welcome to the paaar-taaayyyy!

Ryuumatsu: How dare you insult the sanctity of the courtroom like that! This is no so-called ‘par-tay’, this is a procedure of the la--

Monokuma: Yep, yep! Noooobody caaares. Take a joke, Devil Advocate.

Ryuumatsu: D-Devil?!

Kamiya: [Folds arms reservedly] Ah, um… That aside, I can’t believe that one of us would hurt Uroko-san...

Alix: [Bows head] She was so nice… I’ll make sure she passes to the afterlife safely, for sure.
Orutoku: Wait, wait. Are we sure it was one of us who did that to her?!

Aitou: I… don’t believe any other entities are even present, let alone capable of acts of homicide.

Orutoku: Well, it could have been Captain Monokuma, right? Uroko-san was so nice to everyone! No way would someone here do that to her! We’re all friends!

Monokuma: I dunno about that last thing you said, but as for the first part… Of course it wasn’t me!

Orutoku: [Raising arms defensively] Wh-- Definitely?

Monokuma: One hundred percent, kid. As much as seeing some of you kick the bucket sooner than later would bring that fleeting sensation of joy back into my life, hurting any of you myself is against the rules! Ah, the woes of a lawful neutral.

Yoshida: Lawful…

Rouvin: Neutral?

Yousetsu: Hey… I don’t wanna waste time. Let’s… start.

Aitou: [Folds arms] Ah… Indeed. If we aim to derive anything from this procedure, we should ensure our courses of action are each worthwhile.

Ryuumatsu: …Just as I was going to say! I see you’re a man of culture as well, Aitou-san.

Aitou: [Slightly uncomfortable] Ah… Simply trying to hasten unpleasant proceedings, is all.

Sumire: Right, well, let’s actually get onto them instead of spewing meaningless conversation.
Monokuma: Aaalright! But first… We’re missing someone!

Orutoku: Huh? I think everyone’s here…

Monokuma: You’ve already forgotten your friend? Geez! Didn’t think you of all people would want to leave someone out, Eagle One.

Orutoku: …You mean…

Yoshida: W-What?

Monokuma’s grin stretched impossibly wider, and he jumped almost novelly off of his throne to waddle around to its side. He picked something up from the floor, making his way over to where Aitou and Kurai stood at their podiums before setting it down with a bang.
Monokuma: Tadaaa!

Aitou: What on Earth…

Kurai: EUGH!
In between the two podiums now stood a tall stand. In the frame at its top was... A portrait of Uroko. Its neck and face had been slashed through with what Monokuma probably wanted us to think was something a little more macabre than well-mixed paint.

Aitou: [Unnerved] This... What is the meaning of this?

Kurai: And why the fuck has it gotta be next to me?!

Monokuma: What, just because Hopester’s dead, she can’t be part of this wonderful community event? Necrophobia is a crime, Temper Tantrum.

Hibiki: Hey. If you were going to put that thing in the circle from the start, you should’ve set up seventeen podiums.

Monokuma: Well sorry I don’t meet your impossible standards for robotic ursines, Know-It-All!! I... I guess I’ll just never be good enough... Sniff...

Hibiki: Saying ‘sniff’ out loud adds exactly nothing to your awful acting, asshat.

Monokuma: Watch your language!

Hibiki: Eat shit.

Monokuma: [Stomping over to throne] Alright, alright! You’re moody! We get it!

Monokuma jumped back up onto his seat with a huff. He clapped his paws, and all the screens on the podiums, previously lit up with the names of those designated to them, shut off.

Monokuma: I know how you kids are these days... Always getting distracted by your mobile devices! Well, not today!

Alix: Those are mobile?
Toramoto: And you of all people would be able to tell if they weren’t?

Kamiya: [Quietly] There’s, ah… no need to be so blunt...

Hanahara: No, Captain Monokuma. We… We won’t be distracted. We’re here for… for Uroko-san.

**Saying ‘we won’t be distracted’ while everyone’s already getting sidetracked… This one’s real fucking bright.**

Orutoku: Right! We all have to pay attention and avenge our friend!

Orutoku: …Unless that’ll just cause more fights, which… Um… I don’t know what would be best then, so not fighting is the only option!

Monokuma: Upupu, I don’t think it’ll be that eas--

Toramoto: C’mon. You seriously expectin’ anyone to just get along in a trial? That’s naïveté at its finest.

Monokuma: Well, you’ll all have to get along at least a bi--

Orutoku: If you’re trying to provoke me, it’s not going to work.

Toramoto: Really now. It isn’t, is it?

Orutoku: Absolutely not! The less arguments the better, and we’re all friends here, so we should all get along!

Toramoto: And yet one of us is dead.
Orutoku: Ack! You’re right! Does that mean that one of us isn’t a friend then? Oh jeez… This is tougher than I thought!

Monokuma: HEY! Do you want to hear my life-saving advice or not, knuckleheads?

Maeko: …Um, who are you?

Monokuma: [Turning red with anger] AHEM!!!

Maeko: ...

Maeko: I-I’ll save it for later.

Monokuma: Thank you, Karate Kid! Or should I call you Hopester now? That hair of yours is pretty impressive.

Maeko: [Fiddles with bandages] Uh… I dunno…

Monokuma: Hm… I’ll figure it out tomorrow!

Monokuma: [Throws out arms] Now then, let’s begin with a basic explanation of the class trial!

The robot picked up a gavel from one armrest of the throne and began to weigh it with his free paw as he spoke, his words so automatic they sounded near-scripted.

Monokuma: During the trial you’ll present your arguments for who the culprit is, and vote for ”whodunnit”.

Monokuma: Vote correctly, and only the blackened will be punished. But if you pick the wrong person, I’ll punish everyone besides the blackened, and that person will graduate from this academy!
Monokuma broke out of his haze for a second and all his grandeur dissipated.

Monokuma: Oh, of course, the teams come into this too! If the majority of one team votes right and the majority of the other votes wrong, then only the incorrect team will be punished! Means you gotta convince everyone on your team and hope for the best, because every vote counts more than ever, buuut… If one of the major teams is fully eliminated, you know what that means!

Monokuma: And I know you got it already, but Know-It-All, your vote counts for one hundred percent of your team, so you had better get it right!

Hibiki: …Yeah, I know.

Monokuma: Great!

Monokuma: Also, refusing to vote will result in your death, sooo you better vote for someone!

Monokuma: [Pumps arm in air] Now, let’s get this crazy, awesome, crazy-awesome trial underway!

The podium monitors flashed, and a bright pink studio-style ‘APPLAUSE’ cue appeared. Monokuma leaned forward in anticipation.

Orutoku: …

Kamiya: …

Hibiki: …

Monokuma: ...You guys suck.

Hibiki: Can it.
Alix: Haha, uhh… I have no idea what’s going on right now!

Maeko: [Pointing to Alix] Why are you wearing a blindfold?

Alix: [Clasps magatama] Oh! Is that Maeko-san? That’s great!! Guess reincarnation is possible and ghosts are totally real! Exorcist: one; psychologist: zeroooo.

Hibiki: No it’s not. And she didn’t die. She’s just got amnesia.

Alix: Aww, you’re such a party pooper! I knew that.

Alix: But hey, hey… I wanna know what’s happening with Maeko-san now!

Kim: It would actually help to know, wouldn’t it? Being caught up on the situation couldn’t hurt.

Sumire: Right. The shortest version I can give of all of this is that Maeko-san seems to remember nothing but her name.

Maeko: Yeah, what, um… She said.

Rouvin: Certainly an intriguing turn of events…

Yoshida: And an unlucky one, too… That must be really upsetting, huh.

Maeko: ...What should I be upset about?

Yoshida: Oh, yeah… Guess it’s hard to be that sad about forgetting things that you don’t remember, huh? Darn…

**Fucking tell me about it. I should probably talk to Maeko about all of this later.**
Hibiki: Alright, I get it. You’re all not going to get anywhere talking about what someone else doesn’t know.

Yoshida: Right, right. Um, Hanahara-san, would you like to lead the conversation then?

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: Oh! Oh. Yes, definitely. I’ll do that.

Hanahara: We’re going to start by establishing an initial suspe--

Hibiki: No. I’m going to start by making sure nobody’s dense enough to still think I’m the one who did it, and you are all going to listen patiently.

Hanahara: Well, Kioku-san, it’s not actually--

Hibiki: First of all, I’m not enough of an idiot to kill someone in my own room. That’s basically suicide, and although the concept is kind of tempting every time I have to go to those breakfast meetings, I don’t actually intend on dying down here, if anyone hadn’t noticed.

Hanahara: Well-

Hibiki: Secondly, I have no reason to kill anyone, because I’m a member of Team Upsilon and can get out of the killing game so long as one team eliminates the other. Nobody has any good reason to target me, and I don’t have any motive to attack anyone else, especially two of the strongest people here.

Hanahara: True, but-

Hibiki: And I have an alibi for the entire morning. You should know that better than anyone, Hanahara.
Hanahara: *I do!*

Hibiki: Fantastic.

Hanahara: Right, but I didn’t actually think it was you anyway.

Hibiki: Great. Anyone want to fucking contribute, then?

Hanahara: [Crosses arms angrily] *YES! I do!*

Hibiki: Be my guest.

Hanahara: [Sighs] …*Alright.*

**NON-STOP DEBATE: START!**

**Truth Bullets: Signs of a Fight - Set of Key Cards - Katana in Wardrobe**

Hanahara: Alright. I want to start off by talking about the murder weapon.

Yousetsu: The katana. It was lying on the floor in the Upsilon suite.

Hanahara: Right, that it was. There’s **no way the murder weapon could have been anything else.**

Alix: For sure?

Aitou: Indeed. The cuts were far too clean for any other blade.

Aitou: I suppose the question you’re asking, then, is… Which room did the killer obtain the weapon
from?

Sumire: Right. There was a katana in each suite, wasn’t there.

Kurai: What are you all fucking thinking? It was **definitely the Rho dorm**! The victim was from MY fucking team!

Kurai: If the killer was from Team Delta, **why the fuck would they off their own team leader**?!

Maeko: Just one question… What teams are we talking about?

Kamiya: Oh dear… That’s some pretty bad amnesia, isn’t it?

Orutoku: Sure is! Yeesh.

**Something doesn’t sound right. Now’s my chance.**

Refute "definitely the Rho dorm" with the Set of Key Cards truth bullet.
Hibiki: **What are you, fucking braindead?**

Orutoku: Um… Me? Not last I checked…


Kurai: *Me? H--* Hey, wait, *what’d you just fucking say to me?!!*

Hibiki: I said you’re an idiot. There’s no reason the katana used for the murder *has* to have come
Kurai: What the fuck are you implying?

Hibiki: I’m not implying anything. I’m outright stating it. Regardless of which team the killer came from, they could’ve gotten the katana used for the murder from either room.

Hashikawa: Oh! Um! Are you talking about th--

Hibiki: I’m talking about the Universal Key.

Kamiya: Universal Key?

Hashikawa: [Hunches shoulders, sinks down] Uu… Never mind...

Orutoku: Right! We found that with Uroko-san’s key card, didn’t we? They were both near Maeko-san.

Hibiki: No. We found Uroko’s key card near Maeko, but the Universal Key, which seems to unlock all rooms, was hidden inside Maeko’s pocket. Probably by the killer.

Kamiya: Um… So does that mean the culprit didn’t want anyone to know that they had it?

Hibiki: That’s pretty obvious. They wanted everyone to think that they just had the Team Delta keycard from Uroko’s body and their own keycard, which, given they got both katanas, would logically have to be a Rho keycard.

Ryuumatsu: Precisel--

Hibiki: I didn’t ask you.
Hibiki: *Anyway*, shut up and listen. Access to the Universal Key is obviously something not all of us should have. That’s obviously suspicious.

**And as suspicious as it was... I didn’t want to get into mastermind accusations with this group of numbskulls. Best to leave that as long as possible and drop it.**

Hibiki: What’s really interesting is that the killer left Uroko’s card in plain sight. They definitely wanted everyone to know they’d gotten that from her.

Yousetsu: Which means... They were probably trying to frame someone who wouldn’t have a Team Delta key card of their own, then.

Hibiki: Yeah. Maeko, do you still have your key card?

Maeko: Uh... What’s that look like?

Hibiki: Fucking hell. It’s a *card*. Just look in your pockets.

**Maeko did as she was instructed, shoving her remaining hand into her pockets one after the other. It came back empty.**

Maeko: There isn’t anything in them. Except, uh... Blood. Actually it’s, uh. Everywhere.

Aitou: Well, that’s no surprise... You weren’t even supplied with a change of clothes, were you?

Maeko: No...

Kamiya: Oh! I can try to fix those up later, if you’d like!

Hibiki: That’s great. I was actually in the middle of making an important point.
Kamiya: Heh… Sorry, Kioku-san!

Hibiki: Whatever. Since Maeko’s card is missing, the killer disposed of it somewhere else. Could have dropped it down the shower drain. Point is, since they were so insistent on making the killer out to already have a Team Rho card, they’re a member of Team Delta.

Rouvin: Hmm… Certainly an insightful take on the events which took place.

Toramoto: Hm, hm… Pretty interestin’.

Hibiki: What is it, Toramoto. I know you’ve got something to say.

Toramoto: [Shoves hands in pockets] Guess I’m pretty predictable, huh? Then again, you do seem to be quite the observer, Kioku-sama.

Hibiki: Cut the bullshit and spill it.

Toramoto: If ya say so.

Toramoto: I’ve been readin’ through the list of evidence on the screen installed in this podium. Apparently, it’s interactive. Who knew?

Yousetsu: …Hurry up.

Toramoto: Sorry, sorry. Anyway, might just be me, but… Hashikawa-san, I’d like to hear what was in this testimony of yours.

Sumire: If you start picking on her again, I’ll make sure you regret it, Galeocerdo cuvier.

Toramoto: Hey, take it down a notch. I’m not askin’ much here.
Toramoto: Unless you think Hashikawa-sama can’t even hold it together enough to answer a simple question?

Hashikawa: I-I can!!

Toramoto: Great. Then, I’d like to ask… What’s in this all-important testimony of yours?

Hashikawa: Um… I went up to the rooms to look for Maeko-san and Uroko-san, and I checked the Team Delta and Rho rooms while I was there… Aitou was--

Toramoto: How long before the body discovery was this?

Sumire: Don’t just interrupt Tsuruko-san like that.

Toramoto: Hush it, lady. How long before was it?

Hashikawa: …About twenty minutes…

Toramoto: That’s all I needed to hear. Hashikawa’s our suspect.

Hashikawa: W-What?!!

Sumire: Excuse me?

Toramoto: Hey, ’s just my opinion. No need to get all defensive about it.

Toramoto: After all… If you can’t disprove it with actual evidence, isn’t that saying something?

Sumire: Oh, bring it on!
NON-STOP DEBATE: START!

Truth Bullets: Blood Spray - Yoshida’s Testimony - Hashikawa’s Testimony

Toramoto: Hashikawa-san had about twenty minutes in the dorm area where she was totally unattended.

Toramoto: Not only that, she’s the one who checked in the Delta room, right?

Sumire: Hey, what are you--

Hashikawa: Th-That’s right…

Yoshida: I did talk to her at one point…

Toramoto: And lemme guess, you were asleep right before that?

Yoshida: U-Urk… Yeah…

Toramoto: So that was a free opportunity. Tell me, Hashikawa-san, did you volunteer to go up to the rooms or somethin’?

Hashikawa: …

Hashikawa: Yes. I was the first one to suggest it.

Alix: Heh, hey, isn’t this a little--

Toramoto: That settles it. Hashikawa had a chance to attack Uroko-san and Maeko-san.
Hibiki: Try to remember the basics.

Refute "had a chance to attack Uroko-san and Maeko-san’ with the Blood Spray truth bullet.

Toramoto: What’s the problem?

Hibiki: Hashikawa was alone for a while, and her claiming the rooms for herself during the search might be suspicious, but you’re jumping the gun.

Toramoto: I don’t think I am, no. Hashikawa-san had a perfect opportunity to kill ‘em.

Hibiki: But she didn’t have enough time to clear up her tracks.

Toramoto: I wouldn’t be so sure.

Geez, he’s stubborn. The guy’s smart, but clearly, he’s still a few brain cells short.

Hibiki: Fine. If you want to fucking fight about your half-baked theory, I’m not going to back down.

Toramoto: I don’t do fights, thanks. This is just a friendly little debate.

Ryuumatsu: Is this really--

Alix: Ooh, quiet please! I gotta listen!

NON-STOP DEBATE: START!
Truth Bullets: Bloody Plastic Tarp - Yoshida’s Testimony - Set of Key Cards

Toramoto: You said Hashikawa-san didn’t have enough time to commit the murder because she wouldn’t be able to clean herself up, right?

Sumire: Of course she wouldn’t have time. The wound that killed Uroko was a clean slice through the carotid artery. That would send blood everywhere.

Yoshida: S-So it can’t have been her, then? That’s great!

Ryuumatsu: Toramoto-san, hold on just a m--

Toramoto: It’s simple. Hashikawa arrived at the dorms and woke up Uroko-san and her sister.

Toramoto: That was when she attacked.

Kamiya: But… Didn’t we already say that the blood spray would’ve gotten all over her?

Toramoto: It woulda, but Hashikawa used somethin’ to block the blood spray. Specifically, this suspicious lookin’ evidence file here called the ‘Bloody Plastic Tarp’.

Ryuumatsu: Toramoto-san, about that--

Toramoto: All she had to do was hold that up, and the blood spray woulda been totally blocked! Then, it was just a matter of gettin’ rid of it wherever the hell she wanted!

Hibiki: Use your fucking head!
Refute "woke up Uroko-san and her sister" with the Yoshida’s Testimony truth bullet.

There are a few things he said in there that sound totally wrong. That one, though? That’s just blatant fucking ignorance.

Hibiki: Tell me, Toramoto. Have you actually read the descriptions of the evidence files?

Toramoto: Some. Why’d ya ask?

Hibiki: Because clearly, you didn’t pay attention to Yoshida’s testimony. Despite the fact that you were in the fucking room when he gave it.

Ryuumatsu: There’s also--

Hibiki: Shut up. Yoshida said that he went to the Rho room right after breakfast, and Maeko was already gone. The only person in the room was him.

Toramoto: Hm… Guess I can’t argue with that. Went in there about forty minutes before the body announcement and the guy was fast asleep.

Yoshida: I’m still really sorry that I was asleep during such an important time in the case… Aaagh.

Hibiki: Doesn’t matter. Walls are soundproof either way.

Hibiki: As for what I wanted to say about your argument, Toramoto. Hashikawa might have the strength and agility and shit or whatever it was you were going for to be able to attack Uroko and Maeko, but picking on her for the sake of picking on her, as much as I couldn’t care less, always leaves holes in the shit you’re trying to say.

Hibiki: Maeko had been awake for ages, so Hashikawa didn’t wake her up. She could’ve been in the
Delta room with her sister… But that’s not the only point I’m here to make.

Hibiki: Hashikawa was in and out of the concert hall, but she was only unattended for that twenty minutes and, presumably, the time it took her to get from there to the bar a couple of times. She was helping Hanahara.

Hanahara: That’s right! Hashikawa-san helped me bring a couple of carts up the stairs. It took quite a while, so even if we don’t have an exact timeframe, I highly doubt she was able to do anything related to a murder.

Hashikawa: Th-Thanks, guys… Um, if it helps, I-I did see Rouvin-san, Kim-san and Alix-san on the deck on my way to the bar. They were on the lounge chairs.

Alix: Yep yep! I thought those footsteps sounded like yours!

Hashikawa: Y-You can recognise people’s footsteps that well? That’s amazing!!!

Alix: Sure can!! It all started on one dark and rainy night when I was possessed by the ghost of a pianist… Spooooky, right?

Kamiya: [Clasps locket] Ah, um… That doesn’t sound too good. Is that bad for your health?

Alix: [Flashes a thumbs up] Aside from all the ectoplasm? Nah, not really! C’est bien!

Hibiki: Anyway. Hashikawa’s pretty much in the clear. Rouvin, Kim, is what she said right?

Kim: Yeah. The three of us were on the deck together.

Rouvin: I suppose that would depend on your definition of “right”… Language is very subjective, with each word having a slightly different meaning to each individual based on their experiences and past, and--

Hibiki: …
Kim: …

Toramoto: …

Rouvin: Well… Yes, I suppose that statement would be… Right.

Hibiki: Perfect.

Ryuumatsu: Great! I’m very glad to hear. Now, can I--

Sumire: One more thing that should clear this up for good.

Ryuumatsu: Rrgh… You know, I’m actually trying to--

Sumire: When Tsuruko-san, Hanahara-san and I decided to look around the ship for the people who had slept in, I checked the back of the boat. The tarp that’s usually hanging there for sun cover was gone.

Ryuumatsu: Y-Yes, it was! I went and checked during the investigation, and--

Kim: Interesting. Kioku-kun, Orutoku-kun and I were there last night, and the tarp was definitely still there. Guess they had to have gotten it after that.

Ryuumatsu: Hey! I-I was there too!

Kim: Oh, you were?

Ryuumatsu: Yes!!! I won the game of minigolf!!
Kim: Hmm… Right. Now I remember.

Ryuumatsu: Yes, and this all would’ve been easier if--

Orutoku: Um, didn’t Kim-san win minigolf?

Ryuumatsu: …

Kim: Actually, I’m pretty sure I did, now that you mention it.

Hibiki: She definitely won.

Ryuumatsu: …

Ryuumatsu: N-N-Never mind.

Ryuumatsu: Regardless, the point stands that the killer must have retrieved the tarp after that point last night.

Kim: …I already said that, Ryuumatsu-kun. Are you feeling okay?

Ryuumatsu: …J-Just… Be quiet.

Hibiki: …Cool, guys. Point is, nobody at the morning set-up meeting could’ve done it. I’m going to go ahead and include Hanahara in that, because I really don’t think that between mixing all the fucking drinks she hauled up the stairs she could’ve incapacitated-slash-killed two people twice her size.

Sumire: So that puts you in the clear, Tsuruko-san!

Hashikawa: Great! Um, that goes for you, Hanahara-san, Kamiya-san and Kioku-san again too, r-
Kamiya: Mhm! You're so smart, Kioku-san. Thank you so much!

Hibiki: Yeah, sure.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: Oh. Thank you.

Hibiki: …Uh huh.

Hibiki: Anyway, now that some of the time frame’s cleared up, may as well go a little further.

Yoshida: More evidence?

Hibiki: Yeah. The piece of evidence I’m thinking of should actually give a pretty good idea for what time this might have all happened.

Aitou: Oh? What might that be?

Hibiki: This.

**PRESENT EVIDENCE!**

Present Truth Bullet 'Note to Uroko'.
Yoshida: Oh yeah, I remember that!

Kim: Well I sure don’t. What’s that supposed to be?

Hibiki: Let me explain and you might find out.

Kim: [Shrugs] The floor’s yours.

There’s no way I can be sure just how relevant this piece of evidence is to what really happened, but if I don’t point it out, the chances of anyone catching on are pretty low. One of the benefits to being surrounded by idiots, I guess.

Hibiki: This piece of paper is a note that Yoshida and I found on the victim’s bed. It’s addressed to her.

Yousetsu: Is it signed as being from anyone?

Hibiki: Yes, but it’s fake information anyway.

Rouvin: Hm... How are you able to deem it untrue with the objectivity you seem to believe you hold? Truths can never truly be found - we can only choose to believe in ultimately subjective ideas that could change at any moment, and-

Hibiki: It’s because it’s signed from me.

Rouvin: …Ah. That doesn’t make sense, no…

Kamiya: Right! Kioku-san already has an alibi, don’t they?

Hibiki: Yep. Are you all going to keep re-establishing the very few things I’ve already figured out, or would you like me to read the note?

I looked down at the paper, and the acid in my stomach started to boil again as I remembered the intent with which it had been written.

...Time to get this over with.

Hibiki: Alright. Dear Uroko Hondo, please meet me in the Team Upsilon suite at 8:30 AM tomorrow. I need to discuss something with you. Don’t tell anybody about this.

Alix: That’s it? That wasn’t very long at all!

Aitou: Hm… You’re right. Though, what it does say should certainly provide a clear enough basis for us to move forward with proceedings.

Ryumatsu: [Slams palm on stand] RIGHT! Eight thirty is only half an hour after the morning announcement, and the breakfast meeting was from--

Hibiki: The breakfast meeting was from about five past to twenty past, so the culprit would’ve had ten minutes to prepare. Since the crime was obviously premeditated, that should’ve been enough.

Ryumatsu: …I had d-deduced the same thing.

Hibiki: Good for you. Point is - if this is anything to go by, at least - shit probably went down pretty early on.

Sumire: Hmm… That was the information expleted in the Monokuma File, wasn’t it. Finding a smaller timeframe has got to be pretty important.

Toramoto: More than likely.
Sumire: [Glares] …Nobody asked you.

Toramoto: Wasn’t waitin’ for someone to anyway. Actually, I’ve got a question for somebody else.

Sumire: Do you now.

Toramoto: Just said so, didn’t I?

Sumire: …


Toramoto: With pleasure.

Toramoto’s bemused gaze searched the room again, but this time, there was no menacing glint in his eye. He crossed his arms and tilted his chin up as he addressed his target.

Toramoto: Maeko-san.

Maeko: Whuh?

Toramoto: Tell me, how dry’s the blood on your clothes?

Maeko: [Glances down] Umm… I dunno.

Toramoto: …

Maeko: …
Hibiki: ...Christ. Find out, then.

Maeko: Isn’t that, uh… Unhygienic?

Hibiki: *Oh my God.* You know what? I’ll show you fucking unhygienic.

*Not willing to waste more time listening to circular banter, I left my stand, stormed over to Maeko’s, and, keeping full eye contact with her the entire time, slammed the back of my palm into the bloody fabric covering her stomach. Hanahara gave me a wary look from the next stand over, but said nothing.*

Hibiki: …It’s pretty dry. Seven out of ten dryness, if you’re one for meaningless numerical gradings.

Toramoto: Hm. The time on the note’s probably about right, then.

Kim: How do you know how long blood takes to dry?

Toramoto: You try working with the yakuza’s finances. Shit gets nasty.

Kim: …Hardcore. I like it.

Orutoku: Wait, the YAKUZA? That’s the most illegal thing I’ve heard all day!!!

Ryuumatsu: Someone is *dead*, Orutoku-san. Homicide is a very serious crime, as you should know, and between that and the charges for assault and property damage, that should really be--

Hibiki: Cool, don’t care. You’re all welcome for the blood test.

Sumire: You do realise how hazardous that could be to your health now that you’re stuck with it on your hand for the rest of this trial, right?
Hibiki: Oh, absolutely. I’m hoping it incapacitates me so badly that I have to be served breakfast in bed for the next month.

**Sumire having decided not to dignify that with a verbal response, I started to stroll away, wiping my hand on Maeko’s back.**

Maeko: Oh, um… Yuck.

Hibiki: *Yuck?* Do you even remember the last time you showered?

Maeko: …Uh… No.

Hashikawa: Um, can she remember anything at all, though…?

Hibiki: That was the joke.

Hashikawa: [Saluting, shouting nervously] I-I’m very sorry!!!

Hibiki: Whatever.

Alix: I can smell where you’re standing right now, so I bet you can’t remember the last time you showered either, Kioku-san!

Hibiki: You shut up too.

Alix: [Saluting, shouting cheerily] Aye aye, Cap’n Killjoy!

Hibiki: Anyway, Toramoto’s point about the blood should be fine. The murder was probably between 8:30 and 9 this morning.

Toramot: Correctamundo.
Hibiki: No human being fucking says that, dude.

Toramoto: Noted.

Hibiki: Awesome. So, then… Who has an alibi for that time? As in, an actual solid alibi that involves being with other people during that time.

I looked around the room. The people from the set-up group raised their hands, as did Alix and Yousetsu, but… That was about it.

Hibiki: …Fucking hell. Okay, Yousetsu, what were you doing.

Yousetsu: I was talking to Murasaki about my inventions.

Alix: Yep! The diagrams were really pretty!

Hibiki: …Ok.

Hanahara: So… So this means it could have been just about anyone, then. Nobody saw anyone going to the back deck to get the tarp?

Aitou: …

Kim: …

Alix: ………

Hanahara: Ohhhh dear.
Hibiki: Chill out. This doesn’t make the evidence useless.

Yoshida: It doesn’t?

Hibiki: No. There are still ways for me to use this.

Hanahara: Ah… Such as?

Hibiki: Such as this: When did Uroko even receive the note?

Alix: Hmmm… My spirit senses say it was this morning!

Orutoku: That definitely seems like a good option to me! Nice work, Alix-kun!

Kim: Hm. I wouldn’t jump the gun like that, boys.

Yoshida: Um, anyone have any ideas, then?

Rouvin: …Define ‘ideas’.

Kamiya: [Sighs amusedly] Oh geez…

To my right, Kamiya turned and tapped me on the shoulder. She smiled warmly at me.

Kamiya: Hey, Kioku-san… We’re all counting on you! Figure this out as well as you can, okay?

Hibiki: …Will do.

LOGIC DIVE: DEEP SEA EDITION
I: When did Uroko tell Maeko about the note?

Morning of the murder - Night before the murder

*Uroko told Maeko the night before the murder.*

II: Was the note given to Uroko directly, or left on her bed?

Given to Uroko directly - Left on her bed

*The note was given to Uroko directly.*

III: When could someone have given the note to Uroko unnoticed?

Before last night’s concert set-up - During last night’s concert set-up - After last night’s concert set-up

*During last night's concert set-up.*

*CLEAR!*
...A lot of this is conjecture, but… As long as I sell it to everyone like it’s the truth, it should be fine.

After all, I’m pretty much always right anyway.

Hibiki: …Okay. I’ve got it for sure.

Kamiya: That was really fast, Kioku-san! You’re really impressive…

Hibiki: It was just me standing and thinking, not fucking snowboarding down hologram lane. Shit doesn’t take that long.

Kamiya: [Chuckles] Fair enough. Could you tell us what you found out?

Hibiki: Don’t have to ask.

Hibiki: Alright, listen the fuck up, because I’m not repeating myself.

All attention in the room turned quite quickly in my direction. Good to see everyone’s figured out who’s on top here.

Hibiki: First things first, I’m going to establish the obvious. Uroko told Maeko about the note the night before. They didn’t just organise this in the morning.

Maeko: We didn’t?

Hibiki: No. Trying to arrange all of that in less than thirty minutes while everyone thinks you’re asleep, there are two other people still around and the person you’re intending to meet could be lurking around in the corridor? Seems like the worst possible option to me. Trying to wake up Maeko to tell her about whatever plan the two of them had would have been a huge risk.
Yoshida: Um… Plan?

Hibiki: Right. The note said for Uroko to meet me alone in my suite, but she brought Maeko with her, so clearly she didn’t take it at face value. However ditzy she was, she had some wits about her, at least.

Hibiki: Here’s what happened. Uroko, after receiving the note, was suspicious of a potential murder attempt. Instead of telling the whole group and outing the culprit, she instead, for whatever reason, decided to band together with her sister. Between the two of them, they would’ve had the strength to defeat most assailants for sure. The intimidation factor alone might have even been enough.

Yoshida: So you mean… Someone tried to meet with her to kill her, and she was going to fight back? But… But they still overpowered both her and Maeko-san?

Hibiki: Yes.

Aitou: Hm… Intriguing indeed. I have one query in that regard, though… What would influence someone as trusting as Uroko-san to believe someone was attempting to, erm… Dispose of her, so to speak?

Hibiki: That leads into my second point, actually. It was because someone handed her that note in person, and it wasn’t me.

Ryuumatsu: H--

Hibiki: And before anyone tries to fight me on this one, think about what I have been saying this whole trial for just two seconds, realise how dumb you are and shut up.

Ryuumatsu: …

Hibiki: Cool. Back to my point. Regardless of whether or not Uroko read the note right after receiving it, she must have known that it didn’t come from me. She was aware enough to understand that I wouldn’t murder anyone, and yet she still came fully prepared for just that. So, then… The note was given to her in person.
Yousetsu: Because… If anyone had left it on her bed, someone could have seen it, right? And she wouldn’t know who it was from… And she wouldn’t have found it until night time, after she’d probably already gone into the Delta suite for the night…

Hibiki: Right. So the culprit had to have spoken to Uroko in person while nobody else was around to witness it. I certainly would have said something if I’d seen that happening, and unless anyone here secretly has an IQ dipping below the 60s, I expect any of you would as well.

Hibiki: I can’t say for sure whether Maeko was around or not when all of this happened, but if it were me trying to set up a murder, I probably wouldn’t want to talk to Uroko about that note at any length with another witness. That said, there’s only one point in time I can say for sure that Uroko was with only one other person yesterday.

Kurai: Oh wow, another suspect? Fucking fantastic. Stop stalling and just spit it the hell out.

Hibiki: Maybe I would have already if you’d shut the fuck up.

Kurai: [Pulls down beanie] …Tch. If it’ll get me what I want faster, then fine.

Aitou: …I… I believe I know who you’re referring to, Kioku-san, and… I can’t say I disagree.

Hibiki: Perfect.

...No doubt about it now. Let’s see where this goes.

**PICK A SUSPECT!**

01: HIBIKI KIOKU - ULTIMATE PSYCHOLOGIST

02: KATSUO ORUTOKU - ULTIMATE SECURITY GUARD
03: TSURUKO HASHIKAWA - ULTIMATE SAILOR
04: AKIRA YOSETSU - ULTIMATE MECHATRONICS ENGINEER
05: MIREN AITO - ULTIMATE MORTICIAN
06: UROKO HONDO - ULTIMATE COMPOSER
07: KYOU KURAI - ULTIMATE VOICE ACTOR
08: SAORI SUMIRE - ULTIMATE MARINE BIOLOGIST
09: YANAGI RYUUMATSU - ULTIMATE DEFENCE ATTORNEY
10: ALIX MURASAKI - ULTIMATE EXORCIST
11: HIDEKI TORAMOTO - ULTIMATE LOAN SHARK
12: YURI KIM - ULTIMATE DEMOLITIONIST
13: DAICI YOSHIDA - ULTIMATE LUCK
14: MAMUGI HANAHARA - ULTIMATE BARTENDER
15: MAEKO HONDO - ULTIMATE ???
16: ROUVIN MINERVA - ULTIMATE PHILOSOPHER
17: MIZUKI KAMIYA - ULTIMATE FASHION DESIGNER

02: KATSUO ORUTOKU - ULTIMATE SECURITY GUARD.
Hibiki: *This is my answer.*

Yoshida: No way… I-It can’t be.

Orutoku: Wait! Wh--

Monokuma: Well, well, well!! How exciting!

Hibiki: What do you want.

Monokuma: Oh, nothing much! Just saw how spicy all this drama was getting, you know? It’s heating up so fast… I can feel the cold sweat evaporating off my paws!!

Alix: Eww…

Monokuma: Yep, that’s exactly how I’ve been feeling for the last hour! The kid knows what’s up.

Monokuma: Anyway, what with how things are going… I thought it was about time for a nice little intermission! Collect your thoughts, craft your theories, comment your theses… It’s for those kinds of things.

Yoshida: But we just--

Monokuma: SHUT IT, CALICO! Geez! The mouths on these teens. I tell ya.

Monokuma: Well, stay tuned while I go get myself a piña colada and we’ll be back before you know it!

Monokuma hopped off his throne and waddled around the back, disappearing into its shadow. Left unsupervised, everyone turned to stare at Orutoku. He was leaning over his
stand, his breathing heavy and eyes wide, but with an anxious smile still stretched across his face.

Orutoku: [Hugging his arms] …

Orutoku: …I know this looks bad, but… But it’ll be okay! It’ll… Everything’s okay.
Orutoku: …

Orutoku: Everything’s… Everyone is…

Hibiki: …

Maeko: …

Ryuumatsu: …

Orutoku: *Shit.*

Chapter End Notes

That just happened! :D Thanks for reading! I'm awful at replying to comments but I read every one I get and I appreciate them a lot! Feel free to tell me your thoughts, feedback, theories, whatever you want.
CHAPTER ONE PART SIX: The Lullabies of Driftwood in an Ocean Storm

Chapter Notes

Same system with the trial mechanics. Sorry if some of these are too difficult! I don't really have an accurate gauge for difficulty.

Once again, truth bullets are here:

TRUTH BULLETS:
-Uroko's Severed Leg
A severed leg that stops just above the knee. Was discovered near the door in the Upsilon suite. Belonged to Uroko Hondo.

-Blood Coated Katana
A blood coated katana that was thrown aside at the scene. Came from either the Delta or Rho suite, but it's impossible to tell which based on appearances alone.

-Maeko's Severed Arm
Maeko Hondo's severed arm, cut halfway between the elbow and shoulder. Was discovered in the middle of the crime scene.

-Scattered Cosmetics in Suite
Bottles of cosmetics and other bottles you'd find in a bathroom were scattered through the suite.

-Signs of a Fight
The walls and curtains of the room have been slashed up by the katana. Not only that, but the bed frame seems to have been cut up, too.

-Blood Spray
Blood has been sprayed across parts of the room. It seems like the trajectory was quite wide.

-Monokuma File #01
The victim was Uroko Hondo, Ultimate Composer, who was discovered inside the Team Upsilon ensuite.

The time of death is unknown. The cause of death is blood loss from the right carotid artery, which has been cleanly sliced through. Death was likely near-instant. The victim’s left leg has also been severed below the knee.

Maeko Hondo, the Ultimate Karate Pro, was also found unconscious inside the ensuite. Her right arm has been severed above the elbow. All of the wounds appear to be clean cuts from the one weapon.'

-Bloody Plastic Tarp
A plastic tarp covered in blood that was found in the wardrobe. Not sure where it came from.

-Katana in Wardrobe
A clean katana that was sitting in the wardrobe. Was from whichever suite the bloody one wasn't taken from.
-Yoshida's Testimony
Yoshida said that he came back to the Rho suite just after breakfast and stayed there, and that Maeko was already gone by then. He wasn't awake the whole time, but nobody came in or out while he was. He's not sure when the katana was taken.

-Empty Ensuite Shelves
The bathroom shelves in the Delta and Rho dorms are all totally bare.

-Note to Uroko
A note found on Uroko's bed. It reads:

'Dear Uroko Hondo,

Please meet me in the Team Upsilon suite at 8:30 AM tomorrow. I need to discuss something with you.

Don’t tell anybody about this.'

-Hanahara's Testimony
Aitou, Orutoku, Uroko and Maeko all stayed back at the dorms to sleep in on the morning of the murder.

-Hashikawa's Testimony
When Hashikawa went to the dorms to look for the people who'd slept in, Aitou was still asleep in the Delta suite and Yoshida let her into the Rho suite, which he was in alone. Nobody else was around.

-Uroko's Neck Wound
A thin, deep slice into one side of Uroko Hondo's neck. It would have cut clean through the carotid artery.

-Cosmetics in Ensuite
Bottles that were spilt all over the floor. Most of them aren't very bloody, despite the large amounts covering the floor.

-Towel Rail
Somewhat indented, and very easy to slide out. Orutoku says the same is true of the one in the Delta ensuite, and presumably the Rho ensuite too.

-Maeko's Tourniquet
A tourniquet was tied around Maeko's arm sometime before the body discovery announcement played to stop her from bleeding out. No idea who set it up, but it seems to have saved her life.

-Body Discovery Announcement
Announcement for Uroko's body. Played when Hibiki walked into the ensuite. Two other people, not including the killer, must've seen the body before Hibiki did, and one of them could have been Maeko. The other is a mystery.

-Set of Key Cards
Two key cards were found next to Maeko's body. The first was Uroko's key card, while the other was the 'Universal Key'. This can supposedly unlock any door, like a skeleton key.

-Corner of Stairwell Table
As quiet as the room was, nothing could hide the static of distrust that electrified the air around Orutoku. He’d been far removed from his usual friendly demeanour, an almost painfully worried grin now wavering on his face as his knuckles whitened through their tight hold on his arms. His pilot shades barely masked the anxiety in his eyes.

…I probably won’t be stuck in this trial room much longer.

???: Aaaalrighty!

A voice rang out from behind me, and I whipped around. Monokuma appeared at the top of his throne and threw himself down onto the plush pillows below. The wine glass he was holding spilt its contents everywhere, slipped out of his hand and crashed unceremoniously onto the floor.

Monokuma: ...Oh.

Hibiki: What the fuck did you think was going to happen?

Monokuma: I dunno! I’m a bear! Cut me some slack.

Hibiki: No.

Monokuma: Yeesh. Whatever! I mean… It’s n-not like I wanted your validation or a-anything anyway…

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: I hope you die a painful, miserable death mourned by precisely nobody.
Monokuma: Fine, fine! Let’s just get back to it.

Yousetsu: Please.

Monokuma: Okey doke! All bets are off. Do your worst, kids.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Orutoku.

Orutoku: …

Hibiki: If you want to keep freaking out, fine. I’m not going to wait for you.

Hibiki: Here’s why Orutoku being the culprit makes sense. Kamiya.

Kamiya: [Folds hands eagerly] Ah! Any way I can help, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: Tell me who did what last night at the concert preparations.

Kamiya: Well… Everyone was trying to move the piano for a while. After that, we did some cleaning and dealt with some decorations… Um, ‘we’ being you, Maeko-san, Aitou-san and myself.

Kamiya: Hanahara-san went to go get Hashikawa-san and Sumire-san, and… Oh. Oh dear…

Hibiki: Say it.

Kamiya: [Frowns concernedly] Ahh… Uroko-san and Orutoku-san were alone setting up the tech booth…
Hibiki: Exactly. He had more than enough time to give Uroko a note and not be seen by anyone. The tech booth’s windows are one-way, too, which only makes it an even more favourable place to set that kind of thing up unnoticed.

Hibiki: So… Anything to say, Orutoku?

Orutoku: …

Orutoku: It… wasn’t me.

Hibiki: Sure. I have evidence on you, so do you maybe want to use actual facts to disagree with me instead of just floundering pathetically?

Orutoku: … I...

Orutoku: I don’t know if I have any. I just… Uroko-san was my friend. She was so nice to everyone, and… And she… I...

Orutoku: I would never hurt one of my friends.

Hibiki: …

Orutoku: Y-You believe me, right? I wouldn’t. I… I don’t want to hurt anybody.

Hibiki: Evidence.

Orutoku: …

Orutoku: …N ngh…

Alix: Um… Would he have had time to go get the tarp? He wouldn’t, right?
Orutoku: R-Right! Thank you, Alix-ku--

Yousetsu: He wasn’t around for the breakfast meeting... He had free reign of everywhere except the buffet and the area close to it during that time.

Orutoku: But I was asleep!

Yousetsu: Can you prove it...?

Orutoku: Uuhhh... Agh...

Orutoku: It... It really wasn’t me...

Yoshida: …I believe him.

Hashikawa: M-Me too! I don’t want to believe that someone as nice as Orutoku-san would do this!

Ryuumatsu: Seconded. I highly doubt it was him.

Toramoto: And you’d rather blindly trust someone you barely know than think critically?

Ryuumatsu: Well--

Toramoto: Suit yourself. I reckon it was him.

Kurai: Why are you stating what’s already fucking obvious! No shit he killed her!

Monokuma: Wow! You all seem pretty split over this! In fact... Well, I’m not sure if you’re quite half and half, but it doesn’t really matter, does it? After all, gotta stick to the teams!
Orutoku: H-Huh?

Monokuma: Do I really need to say it again? Rule #16: Teams are required to work together in Scrum Debates. Doesn’t matter whether you all agree or not! Each team fights for an opinion, or, well… Upu. Let’s just say the punishment might be a little harsh.

Kim: You brought up those Scrum Debate things before… What are they, exactly?

Monokuma: Glad you asked!

Monokuma reached an arm behind his back and pulled out a huge golden key, cheerily thrusting it into the air. After a moment, a panel popped up in front of him, and he stuck the key into it.

Monokuma: Ahem! Scrum Debates are suuuuper special debates where you guys will be split into two teams! The teams should be pretty obvious, of course. Know-It-All, you can choose whichever side you want.

Hibiki: …

Monokuma: You’re welcome. Anyway! The whole point is that you argue your opinions against each other until you can alllll come to a consensus. Much better than endless two-line quips.

Monokuma: So, hm… Looks like Team Rho will be arguing that Orutoku is the culprit, and Team Delta will be arguing that he isn’t the culprit.

Hanahara: …Why don’t we get to choose?

Monokuma: Because you’re supposed to be protecting your own team!!!! Geez, Bumblebee. Don’t you get it at all?

Hanahara: Of course. I have to protect them no matter what.
Monokuma: Then *do it!!!!*

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: Alright.

Monokuma: Perfect!

**Monokuma reached over and turned the key, and something began to whir in between all the podiums.**

Monokuma: If you start to feel motion sick, start standing on your hands! I hear it helps.

Ryuumatsu: Why would we feel motion si-- AUGH!

**Right as Ryuumatsu spoke, all of the trial stands shuddered, rising into the air one by one while beneath them, glass walls and then water started to rise. Before long, everybody had been stationed in two lines, a rippling koi pond beneath the podiums.**

Seemingly able to move my stand, I shifted it over to Team Rho’s side and stared down my opposition.

Monokuma: You think Eagle One did it, huh?

Hibiki: Yes.

Monokuma: Welll… A seven to nine ratio’s a little inconvenient! What a shame.

Maeko: Actually, uh… I have no idea w-what’s going on…
Monokuma: Hmm… Oh, I know! Hopester, you can sit this one out. Everyone else has to contribute, though! If I catch one single person with their head in the clouds, there’ll be trouble!

Monokuma: Anything else I need to say? Don’t drink and debate, remember to scrum responsibly… Aagh, who cares. Let’s get this just get this thing rolling! It’s Scrum Debate time!

**SCRUM DEBATE: START!**

**Orutoku is the culprit:** Hibiki, Alix, Toramoto, Kim, Yoshida, Hanahara, Rouvin, Kamiya

**Orutoku is not the culprit:** Orutoku, Hashikawa, Yousetsu, Aitou, Kurai, Sumire, Ryuumatsu

Hashikawa: Like Orutoku-san said, h-he would never hurt anyone, especially one of his friends! It can’t have been him!

Rouvin: I’m afraid we can’t simply put blind trust in unsubstantiated claims at a time like this. An individual’s moral standing is not so easy to understand.

Kurai: Doesn’t fucking matter! Even if Orutoku’s a total dumbass, there’s no way anyone with enough brain cells to perform basic fucking thought processes would kill off their own team leader!

Alix: Yeah, but… Didn’t Maeko-san get hurt, too? Maybe this was all a conspiracy and she was the real target!

Aitou: She did, but I feel as though the culprit would have been likely to leave Maeko-san unattended to bleed out were they part of Team Delta. It would aid the potential of their team’s eventual escape, after all.

Yoshida: He still could’ve done that… Maybe he just felt guilty and had a change of heart after the fact?

Ryuumatsu: Unlikely. More importantly, it’s entirely possible that Orutoku-san wouldn’t have had time to retrieve the tarp and remain unseen. What if he had woken up too late to allow that!?
Kamiya: There’s a chance that he pretended to be asleep until everyone left, though… He could have gotten up as soon as possible and made the most of the breakfast meeting time.

Yousetsu: What if he didn’t even know the tarp was there…? There’s no certainty he’s even seen it before…

Kim: Yes there is. He was standing underneath it yesterday afternoon. It would have been very hard to miss that kind of thing.

Sumire: What about the paper used for the note? It would make much more sense for someone who actually owns a notepads to have written the note, and I haven’t seen Orutoku-san with one even once!

Hanahara: Actually, there are enough notepads for everyone in the bedside tables’ drawers. He just would have had to look there, even by chance, and it would have been enough. After all, I did the exact same thing!

Orutoku: Hold on… What about the katanas? S-Surely if I’d tried to get the one from the Rho suite with Maeko-san’s card after… after everything had happened, Yoshida-san would have seen me there, right?

Toramoto: Yoshida-san said himself that he was asleep for a while. Not only that, but the culprit had the Universal Card. They didn’t have to wait until after they’d done in Maeko to get into the Rho suite, no matter which team they were from.

Orutoku: …

Orutoku: W-Wait… If I had wanted to attack someone as strong as Uroko-san, I would’ve used a weapon I’d been trained to use - a baton. Just like… Just like the towel rail in the ensuite at the crime scene!!!

Hibiki: Yeah right. I highly doubt you would’ve thought to do that.

Orutoku: Well I was able to think of it just now, wasn’t I?! If I’d been dead set on framing you,
Kioku-san, what better way would there be than to use a weapon from your room!?

BREAK!!

As it had so many times before, the roar of rushing water suddenly flooded my senses. I looked down to see the koi pond disappearing, the fish retreating to what could only be an aquarium behind the curtains and lowering glass walls around me. The trial stands reached the floor once more, and I looked down at my shoes. My eye twitched.

...I...

...I...

...I...

...I lost...

...I looked over to Orutoku. He was wide-eyed, sweaty and trembling, but the smile on his face had a curve to it that looked... confidently relieved. Even now, not a hint of malice shone through in his composure.

...How the fuck could I have been wrong?

Orutoku: [Hands gripping podium] Haah... Hheh... Ohhh thank god.

Ryuumatsu: ...I have to say, those were some... Unexpected reasoning skills, Orutoku-san. You may absolve yourself yet.
Yoshida: So this means that Orutoku didn’t do it after all, right?

Orutoku: It does? ...It does! You’re ri--

Hibiki: No.

Orutoku: Whuh?

Hibiki: NO. If you want to stop being under suspicion, you have to fucking EXPLAIN.

Yoshida: H-Hibiki-san?

Hibiki: Stay out of it, Yoshi. Now Orutoku, explain.

Orutoku: Um… Alright.

Fiddling with his sunglasses nervously, Orutoku took an unnecessarily deep breath and steadied himself.

Orutoku: My point was basically just… what I said. If I was going into a fight with someone as strong as Uroko-san, there’s no way I would have used a katana. There was basically a baton right there at the crime scene! I’m trained to use those!

Yousetsu: He’s right. Not just that, but… I don’t think Uroko-san would have gone if Orutoku-san was the one to invite her. She was more muscular than him and all, but… Someone as trained as Orutoku-san wouldn’t be the easiest to confront…

Hibiki: So what?

Yousetsu: So… So Uroko-san brought Maeko-san with her for a reason, right… She was probably intending to make it out of there alive with her sister… and nobody else. In a worst case scenario, at least. I don’t think she would put Maeko-san and herself at that much of a risk…
Aitou: Hm… That theory certainly appears to be a possibility… I do remember Orutoku-san stating that he was aware of the looseness of the towel rail during the investigation, too. You said the one in the Delta suite was the same way, yes?

Orutoku: Yeah! They all kinda just… Slide out.

Orutoku: …Why do they do that, actually?

Monokuma: Subtle encouragement.

Orutoku: …Encouragement to do what?

Monokuma: To use a towel rail as a weapon.

Orutoku: …Uh... Should’ve seen that one coming.

Kamiya: I, ah, hate to be the one to bring this up, but…

Kamiya: If it really wasn’t Orutoku-san… Someone still has to have done it.

Hibiki: There’s no solid proof it wasn’t Orutoku.

Kim: That’s the case for a lot of things. With the evidence we have, there isn’t much pointing to any one specific person at all.

Aitou: …Hold on. I may have one idea in mind that could assist us.

Sumire: And that would be?
Aitou: Well, it isn’t much, but… I suppose that if Uroko-san did not receive the note during the concert preparations, then that event must have taken place beforehand. Since we had established that it was unlikely to have been abandoned on her bed, I was considering what opportunities would have been available, and…

Aitou: Well. Did Maeko-san not leave Uroko-san’s side last night to go fetch each of the concert set up volunteers?

Hanahara: …You’re right. She did.

Aitou: May I ask what Uroko-san preoccupied herself with during that time?

Hanahara: …Actually, I’m pretty sure she just hung around by herself. It wouldn’t have taken Maeko-san long to bring one of the volunteers to where she was, but the window of time there… It definitely would have been enough for a short conversation.

Aitou: Mm. I suppose one would have to get quite lucky to do all of that and remain unseen, but… I am inclined to believe now that this is likely what occurred.

Toramoto: A’ight, so where do you wanna go from there?

Aitou: Hm. Some of us may have alibis for that time. It would be beneficial to refer to those in narrowing down the culprit, yes?

Toramoto: True. Well, I got nothin’.

Kim: Hm… Kioku-san, Orutoku-san and I were all playing minigolf yesterday afternoon, and I don’t think we finished up long before concert prep probably would’ve started, so we’re probably in the clear.

Ryuumatsu: Did we not already go over the fact that I was there, too?!

Kim: …Yeah. Him as well.
Sumire: I was in the buffet with Yousetsu for a while in the afternoon. We were discussing… What was it?

Yousetsu: The mechanics behind electroencephalography.

Sumire: Right! Of course. How could I forget?

Kamiya: Umm… Great, I think! So, if we count out all the people who Maeko-san went and got, that leaves… Hashikawa-san, Rouvin-san, Kurai-san, Yoshida-san, Alix-san and Toramoto-san, right?

Alix: Aw, geez! Guess I can’t just pull the ‘I’m blind’ pity card when it comes to a murder investigation, huh?

Aitou: Well, I imagine your capacity to commit homicide would be severely hindered by your complete lack of vision, so we can, ah… Probably cross you off the list?

Toramoto: Yeah, that sounds fair. If two of the strongest people here coulda seriously gotten done in by a tiny purple gremlin with four outta five senses, they probably deserved it anyway.

Orutoku: That’s a little harsh…

Toramoto: Well, I ain’t wrong, am I?

Alix: Yep, yep! Thank yo--

Kurai: [Slams podium] NOBODY GIVES A SHIT! There are still five fucking people on that list, and I’m not about to let anyone fucking draw swirly straws to see who you’ll all bet MY fucking life on!!!

Alix: …That sounds like fun, though…
Kurai: [Points at Alix] YOU’D FUCKING DIE TOO, DUMBBASS!

Kim: ...Christ, dude.

Sumire: Alright, alright! Everybody just chill out!

Sumire: Here’s what I think we should do. If we can’t pin down a culprit, it’s because we’re looking at things the wrong way. What we need to do is refer to the evidence we have and try to discuss something that hasn’t come up yet!

Hashikawa: Y-Yeah! That should give us a new perspective!

Hashikawa: …That was what you were going for, right?

Sumire: Mhm.

Hashikawa: Great! I agree with Saori-san, then!

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Alright.

Sumire: Is there something you’d like to present, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: Yes. It was a pretty important part of the scene where the bodies were, but none of you have brought it up yet… This.

**PRESENT EVIDENCE!**
Yoshida: Those?

Alix: Oh, yeah! I tripped on one of them! They’re like rollerblades, but the wheels are on the floor and you have to slide along them… Good times. I remember it like it was yesterday.

Maeko: Um, yesterday… So... not at all?

Alix: HAH! Good one!

Hibiki: …Sure. Point is, the fact that they were even there… Is starting to stick out a lot more to me the more that I think about it.

Yoshida: How so?

Hibiki: Well, the fight pretty obviously took place in the ensuite for the most part. The blood spray and scratches on the walls should make that obvious. Even if Maeko was concussed near the end in the ensuite, the struggle at that point shouldn’t have led to the cosmetics spilling everywhere. Especially since Uroko’s body was up against the cabinets.

Yousetsu: What do you make of that, then…?

Hibiki: You sound like you’ve already made up your mind yourself. Why don’t you tell me?

Yousetsu: …Alright. Let’s go.

REBUTTAL SHOWDOWN: START!
Yousetsu: If you ask me… The cosmetics in the ensuite were probably set up as a trap.

Yousetsu: It would’ve been an easy way for the culprit to go on the defensive. All they had to do was empty the cabinets and spill the bottles onto the floor, and there’s immediately a hard-to-avoid trap right there… It seems like the most obvious option.

Yousetsu: By having a trick like that up their sleeve… The culprit could get an advantage on their targets if they ended up being backed into a corner in the ensuite.

Yousetsu: There’s definitely no way they were just emptied onto the floor during the scuffle… I think they were probably set up before the fight even started.

Use ‘Cosmetics in Ensuite’ Truth Blade.

Advance!

Hibiki: Some of that definitely makes sense, but there’s no way they could have all been set up before the fight started.

Hibiki: After all, most of them only had blood on them where they were touching the floor. They’d been dropped there after Uroko had already been killed!

Yousetsu: That’s true, but… We don’t know how long the time between Uroko-san’s death and Maeko-san’s concussion was.

Yousetsu: What if the killer spilt all the cosmetics right after Uroko-san’s death and Maeko-san fell for the trap? The cosmetics were all right there, so it would have been easy to set them up between
Hibiki: Cut the bullshit!

CUT!

Hibiki: Yousetsu, I do agree with you on one thing… Those cosmetics were definitely a trap. Just not in the sense you were thinking before.

Yousetsu: What do you mean?

Hibiki: Well, there’s definitely no way the killer could’ve just had all the cosmetics there at their convenient disposal. Actually, the shelves in all three ensuites were emptied out. The culprit had no way of throwing the bottles all over the floor post-murder.

Sumire: [Crosses arms] We didn’t find any containers or anything at the scene at all, did we? Regardless of what time they did it, how would the culprit have moved all the bottles between rooms?

Hibiki: Some of the bottles had blood on them, and some were clean save for blood from the floor… I think I know.

PRESENT EVIDENCE!
Hibiki: Here.

Ryuumatsu: That would make sense. All the culprit would have had to do was hold the clean part on the outside to prevent blood dripping outside of the crime scene, and they could have--

Hibiki: They could’ve used this as a bag to move all the cosmetics between rooms.

Yoshida: Right! That definitely would have been big enough to hold all the bottles from all three rooms. The ones that got bloody would’ve been at the bottom of the pile in the tarp, and all the clean ones weren’t making contact with it!

Hibiki: Yeah. But obviously, the killer was still using the tarp during the actual murder, and definitely wouldn’t have had time to collect all the bottles and throw them everywhere between Uroko dying and Maeko getting concussed.

Toramoto: Interestin’. So, then, what were ya saying about this bein’ a trap?

Alix: Yeah! If everything had already happened, there’d be no point in throwing that stuff all over the floor, right? Not really a trap when there’s nobody left to trip on it!

Hibiki: It wasn’t that kind of trap. The trap I’m talking about is the one you’re falling into right now.

Alix: Huh?

Hibiki: Think about it. There’s no way the bottles could have been scattered before the murder, because they would have blood on them. There’s no way they could have been scattered during the murder, because there wasn’t enough time. Not only that, but the bottles are spread through the suite, too, and the culprit went out of their way to collect as many bottles as possible.

Kim: So, what you’re saying is...
Hibiki: The trap was getting you to overlook something by hiding it between all the bottles.

Alix: Really? I didn’t see anything there at all! Ehehe…

Rouvin: I’m afraid I didn’t either.

Yousetsu: Mm… Your theory makes sense, but… Without the evidence to back it up, that’s all it’ll be - a theory. So… Show us what you’ve got.

Hibiki: …Alright.

Choosing evidence this time should be easy… Now it’s just a matter of proving everyone wrong. Or, as the case may be… Proving someone right.

NON-STOP DEBATE: START!


Yousetsu: I was looking around in the suite for most of the investigation period… In that time, the only things that really stood out to me were the cosmetics, scratches on the walls, blood spray… And the blood-covered katana.

Hashikawa: Could the killer have been trying to hide the blood spray, then?

Kim: It’s possible, but I think it’s more likely that there was something about the bottles from one suite that was suspicious. Mixing them up with all the rest of the bottles could have been an attempt to cover that up.

Yoshida: Could there have been bloody fingerprints on some of the bottles or something?
Kim: Not if the tarp was used to spread them out. The culprit probably took measures to make sure that kind of thing wouldn’t happen.

Aitou: Then, is it possible there was other damage to the crime scene that we’ve thus far overlooked? Perhaps they were trying to cover that up.

Maeko: If it was just normal damage, what’s… I mean, why bother?

Orutoku: She has a point! There were already plenty of signs that there was a murder in the room… Why hide just one!?

Sumire: Hm… What if the specific kind of damage made something else more obvious? Something that the culprit wanted to hide?

Toramoto: Hm… Guess that does sound about right, huh?

Sumire: Nobody asked you.

Hibiki: **Holy shit, a sign of intelligent life.**

Support “made something else more obvious” with the Signs of a Fight truth bullet.

Hibiki: So far, the only damage to the room that’s been discussed is the scratched up walls.

Yoshida: Wasn’t that all there really was, though?

Hibiki: No. Remember the bed frame, Yoshi?
Yoshida: …Oh. Ohhh…

Rouvin: What’s this about a bed frame?

Hibiki: When Yoshida and I were looking around the suite, we noticed that the bed frame had been damaged. Some corners of the part that sticks up at the bed’s foot were cut off.

Aitou: Hm… Do you know how many, exactly?

Hibiki: Two. Though, actually…

I thought back to the investigation for a moment, and my brow furrowed.

…Something’s not adding up.

Hibiki: Only two of the corners of the part we looked at were missing… But we found three wood pieces in total.

Aitou: That’s… Certainly odd. Perhaps the culprit was trying to hide the pieces of wood in such a way that that discrepancy would not make itself obvious?

Hibiki: …Hm.

Thinking back on it, I’d definitely seen another piece of furniture with a severed corner. Whatever that meant… I was getting close.

Time for the deus ex machina.

Hibiki: Actually… I know where the third corner came from.
Yoshida: You do?

Rouvin: Where might that be?

Hibiki: The table next to the top of the stairwell. The one with the ship in a bottle on it.

Kamiya: There? That’s quite far away from the crime scene…

Kurai: No fucking kidding! The killer wouldn’t have even had to go down there with the katana! Why the fuck would they have done that?

Hanahara: …What shape were these cuts of wood, exactly?

Hibiki: Shape you’d always get from cutting a corner off of a thick wood surface. Very slanted triangle, I guess. Looks like the cut was pretty vertical.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: That… That sounds like a doorstop.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: What?

Aitou: …She’s correct. A doorstop is that general shape, yes? It needs to be able to slide firmly enough under the door to prevent it from closing, after all.

Hibiki: …
Aitou: Come to think of it… Maeko-san, your key card is still missing, correct?

Maeko: Uh… Yeah.

Aitou: Then… Hm.

Hibiki: What.

Aitou: …

Hibiki: Aitou, tell me. What are you fucking saying.

Aitou: …I’m sure you can put the pieces together for yourself, Kioku-san. All the doors were unlocked during the investigation. Maeko-san’s key card is missing, and another card appears out of the blue. A block of wood perfect for use as a doorstop was intentionally cut off of a table far from anywhere the katana should have been present.

Hibiki: …I never got proof that the Universal Key wasn’t a fake.

Aitou: …

Aitou: Right.

Hashikawa: S-So… What does that mean, then?

Aitou: Well… A doorstop can only be used when a door is open.

Sumire: And if the Universal Key is nothing but Maeko-san’s card in disguise… then only Kioku-san could’ve opened the door, right?

Hibiki: Are you saying I--
Sumire: No. We already know you wouldn’t have had time to go back and even do so much as open your door.

Kim: So then, Kioku-san, when did you open your door this morning?

Hibiki: …

My heart was burning up in my chest. Cold washed over my body in waves, and my stare fixed on one person’s feet as I looked forward blankly.

No. No.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …

Yoshida: Hibiki-san… Say something.

Hibiki: YOU, SHUT THE FUCK UP.

Yoshida: W-Wh--

Hibiki: FUCKING SHUT IT.

Yoshida: …

Yoshida: …
Hibiki: ...I only opened my door once before the body discovery this morning.

Aitou: That should make things considerably simpler, then.

Aitou: …Tell me, was there anyone outside your door when you opened it?

Hibiki: …

Aitou: …

Aitou: Kioku-san, I’m sorry, but this is extremely important. Was there anyone outside your room who would have had an opportunity to slip the doorstop under the door before it closed?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: ……

Yoshida: Hibiki-san, I’m sor--

Hibiki: Don’t fucking speak to me.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: Yes. There’s only one fucking scumbag who had that chance, Aitou.

Aitou: …

Aitou: I see. Then… Please. You do the honours.
SELECT SOMEONE!

01: HIBIKI KIOKU - ULTIMATE PSYCHOLOGIST

02: KATSUO ORUTOKU - ULTIMATE SECURITY GUARD

03: TSURUKO HASHIKAWA - ULTIMATE SAILOR

04: AKIRA YOSETSU - ULTIMATE MECHATRONICS ENGINEER

05: MIREN AITOU - ULTIMATE MORTICIAN

06: UROKO HONDO - ULTIMATE COMPOSER

07: KYOU KURAI - ULTIMATE VOICE ACTOR

08: SAORI SUMIRE - ULTIMATE MARINE BIOLOGIST

09: YANAGI RYUUMATSU - ULTIMATE DEFENCE ATTORNEY

10: ALIX MURASAKI - ULTIMATE EXORCIST

11: HIDEKI TORAMOTO - ULTIMATE LOAN SHARK

12: YURI KIM - ULTIMATE DEMOLITIONIST

13: DAICHI YOSHIDA - ULTIMATE LUCK

14: MAMUGI HANAHARA - ULTIMATE BARTENDER

15: MAEKO HONDO - ULTIMATE ???

16: ROUVIN MINERVA - ULTIMATE PHILOSOPHER

17: MIZUKI KAMIYA - ULTIMATE FASHION DESIGNER
I lowered my head. My fists were shaking at my sides. My mind seemed to shut off, waterlogged with something so intense it made my head burn.

Hibiki: …

I turned to face Yoshida. He was looking towards me, but his eyes seemed to drift just a bit to the side.

…

What a fucking coward.

13: DAICHI YOSHIDA - ULTIMATE LUCK.
This was the end.
There's one illustration I wanted to finish for this chapter that I didn't have time to do, so I'll probably add that sometime in the next few weeks.

You won't be needing the evidence list for this one. Enjoy!

My vision swam. Something dark settled in my mind, thick and suffocating, until all I felt was the cold numbness of the ocean closing in around me.

... 

... 

... 

So much for friends. So much for even acquaintances.

The most people like *him* deserved to be called was *scum*.

Sentimentality was always just a triviality, wasn’t it?

... 

I looked up. Across the room, Aitou was looking between Yoshida and I with concern. I hadn’t said anything yet, but... He already knew.
Might as well state the facts, then.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …Yoshida killed her.

Yoshida: ...I’m sorr--

Hibiki: NO YOU FUCKING AREN’T.

Yoshida: [Pulls hood down] …

Yoshida: You... Y-You’re wrong.

Hibiki: *Excuse me?*

Yoshida: I said you’re *wrong*.

Yoshida: I… I know I can’t make you believe me, but… But it’s true, and I can’t give that up. Even… Even if I did it. Even if I know what’s coming for me… I at least don’t want you to think that I wanted this.

Hibiki: Of COURSE you fucking wanted this! YOU’RE THE ONE WHO DID IT!

Yoshida: …Why won’t you listen to me?

Hibiki: BECAUSE IT’S BULLSHIT! ALL OF THIS IS ABSOLUTE FUCKING BULLSHIT!

Yoshida: IT’S NOT! Please, Hibiki-san, just listen!
Hibiki: *NO! YOU FUCKING DID THIS TO YOURSELF! WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU TRIED TO FRAME ME FOR MURDER, HUH?*

Yoshida: …Fine. If you want to fight… I guess I’ll fight. Just… Please. Try not to take it too personally.

Yoshida: …This… wasn’t supposed to have anything to do with you.

**PANIC TALK ACTION: START!**

Yoshida: I have no reason left to lie. I know what I h-have coming for me, so… I guess this is it.

Yoshida: I never wanted to hurt you, Kioku-san.

Yoshida: I just… I don’t know how it came to this.

Yoshida: But… But I need you to believe me!

Yoshida: Please! Even if there’s no changing what I did!

Yoshida: I need you to know I never wanted to hurt anybody!

Yoshida: I never wanted anyone to die!

Yoshida: I didn’t want any of this!!!

Yoshida: If there was anything I could have done to make this less painful for anybody, I would have!!!

- ANNOU - COVERY - NCEMENT - DIS -
Hibiki: …I bet you wanted me to believe that you were the one who saved Maeko from bleeding out, huh.

Hibiki: You wanted me to think that you actually felt some fucking remorse after you framed me for a fucking murder and decided to save her life.

Yoshida: …

Hibiki: ...Well. That’s BULLSHIT.

Hibiki: When I walked into my room… The body discovery announcement went off right away. Nobody else had to get there.

Hibiki: Three people other than the killer have to see a body for the announcement to go off.

Hibiki: The first one was Maeko. The third one was me.

Hibiki: So, then… The second one was whoever tied that tourniquet, wasn’t it.

Yoshida: …
Yoshida: …I--

Hibiki: Don’t fucking answer that. I’m not listening to another second of your bullshit.

Hibiki: I’m going to state exactly what you did, you're going to agree and tell me why the fuck you thought this was a good idea, and then you’re going to die. Got it?

Yoshida: …


**CLOSING ARGUMENT**

Hibiki: The lead-up to the murder started while Maeko was getting everyone together for the concert set-up last night. Uroko wasn't alone for long, but it was long enough. The murderer, who had already prepared what they needed, talked to Uroko and gave her something while remaining totally unnoticed by anyone else. That thing was a note they’d forged earlier, signed as being from me. It requested that Uroko meet 'me' in my room the next morning... alone. The murderer escaped quickly.

Hibiki: Later in the night, after concert set-up was over, Uroko told Maeko about the note in private. She had suspected that something was off, and either wanted to prevent a murder or commit one herself. Even I'm not a psychic, so all I can say is that it was one of those two things, not which one it was of the two.

Hibiki: Sometime between everyone leaving for the concert set-up and the morning announcement, the killer had preparations to do. They took the tarp down from the back of the boat and used the katana from their dorm to cut a corner off of the table near the stairwell. The tarp was stashed away somewhere in their own room at that point, since they couldn't put it in my suite yet.

Hibiki: Then, when the morning announcement went off, they took advantage of the *one person they were supposed to give a shit about* and started the process of framing them for murder. The killer slipped a doorstop under the door to my suite behind my back, giving them access to the room for the murder.
Hibiki: Meanwhile, Uroko and Maeko pretended to sleep in like Aitou and Orutoku, who were actually just sleeping instead of getting themselves killed. After everyone had left, the two got ready. They didn't arm themselves, by the looks of things. Rather, they decided to rely on their combined physical strength should someone try to pull something.

Hibiki: Once the breakfast meeting had finished, the murderer headed back to the dorms alone. They brought their suite's katana and the tarp into my room, making sure to keep the door on the doorstop, and waited. Finally, eight thirty struck. I'm not fucking omniscient, so I don't know exactly how the fight went down, but here's what seems most likely.

Hibiki: Uroko went in first, probably under the guise of being alone. This would've given her a chance to interpret the situation, assuming she was even capable of that. Once she saw the katana, which the murderer probably had in hand as soon as she walked in, she would have known for sure what was about to happen. She immediately ran forward and tried to strike by kicking the killer in the chest. Though they struggled enough to damage the walls, they managed to retaliate, using the katana to slash off her leg - probably through or around the side of the tarp, which they were holding up in front of them to block any blood spray from staining their clothes. Then, the killer lodged the katana in her neck, sending blood across the room.

Hibiki: Around this point, Maeko would have realised something was wrong and rushed in. I doubt the killer could have taken them both on at once, so they probably came in one after another. Maeko tried to throw a punch, and the killer retaliated in the same way they had with her sister and sliced off her arm. The fight moved to the bathroom. Backed into a corner, the murderer struck Maeko back, throwing her head into the wall and concussing her. By this point, Uroko would have already died in the suite.

Hibiki: After that, all the killer had to do was set up the crime scene. First, they moved Maeko into the shower so she would be out of the way, taking her keycard while they did so. They then removed the cosmetics from the cabinets in the ensuite, spilling them all over the floor. Once they had gotten them out, they could have put Uroko's body up against the cabinets. That made the fight look like it'd taken place in the bathroom, so the cosmetics wouldn't seem out of place.

Hibiki: After that, they used Maeko's card to get the katana from the other suite and put it in the closet so it would be unclear which room the original katana had come from. Then, they gathered up all the cosmetics from the other two rooms and spilt them around to cover up some of the murderer's tracks in the suite itself and allow the doorstop to blend in later. The corners on the bed frame were probably cut off specifically to hide the doorstop instead of as collateral damage, too.

Hibiki: The last thing to deal with after that was the red herring in this case - the Universal Key. Using a pen, probably from the same place as the notebooks, the killer was able to deface Maeko's card to make it look like it'd been able to unlock every door. After all... The ink that was already on the card could've been taken off with nail polish remover, just like the shit that was all over the floor.
It would have almost been too easy.

Hibiki: All the killer had to do then was throw the doorstop inside as the door was closing so it would be hidden with the bottles and other wood pieces. At that point, the crime scene was sealed off. They went back to their suite and waited, the murder totally unnoticed by anyone.

Hibiki Only one person could be stupidly lucky enough to not only come out of all of that alive, but remain uncaught for the whole set-up of the crime scene afterwards. Only one person would have the audacity to stoop to framing me. And obviously, that fucking scumbag is the Ultimate Luck... Daichi Yoshida.

There was a whimper a few stands away. Then, nothing.

I looked down at Maeko’s blood on my hands and clenched my fists tightly at my sides. The bright colour only served as an unrelenting reminder of what that fucking murderer had done. He’d wanted everyone to think that I was the one at fault.

That, by far, was the most unforgivable thing of all.

Monokuma: Snooore… Oh! Are we finally done?

Behind me, Monokuma’s sickeningly sweet tone sliced through the silence like a honed blade. My fists tightened.

Monokuma: Geez, guys! Bored me half to death! You’re lucky my right side is immortal, or you might’ve gotten stuck in here by yourselves!

Monokuma: Anyway… You done?

Aitou: It… Would seem so, yes.

Hashikawa: But… None of this even makes sense, r-right? How did Yoshida overpower both of them? H-how… How is he alive? You can’t just pick up a katana and…
Yoshida: …

Hashikawa: But… It really was you, wasn’t it. You just… Got lucky, then.

Yousetsu: Seems like it. ...I think everything should be clear enough by now.

Yoshida: …Yeah.

Yoshida: Hibi…… Kioku-san. Everything… Everything you said was right. All of it.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Whatever.

Hashikawa: Y-Yoshida-san…

Orutoku: [Starting to cry] This never should have happened… T-This is awful.

Monokuma: Well get a bag of popcorn and some bandaids, because it’s not getting better anytime soon!

Sumire: [Glowering] This is the part where you force us to vote, isn’t it.

Monokuma: Good memory, Mad Scientist! Though, I’m not loving that choice of words. I’m not forcing anyone to vote! It’s toooootally optional.

Orutoku: R-Really?
Monokuma: Yup! Just that if you don’t, I get to kill ya. Still optional though!

Sumire: And how is *that* fair!?

Monokuma: Aww, you think it’s supposed to be fair? That’s cute. Really, your naivete is adorable.

Monokuma: But hey, let’s stop wasting time! First one to vote gets a prize.

Kamiya: Like what?...

Monokuma: You’ll find out if ya win! Now, let’s get votin’!

Monokuma: And oh, by the way… Fill this out for me, Calico. You’re not eligible for *that* prize, but this could get ya one!

Monokuma frisbeed a card and pen over to Yoshida, who caught them ungracefully. I barely bothered to look.

The screen in front of me flickered to life. I didn’t even waste my time reading all the names before jabbing the screen.

Whatever the prize was for voting first, it couldn’t be as good as that shithead knowing I was the one to win it.

…I closed my eyes for a moment and waited. A minute passed, and Monokuma spoke up again.

Monokuma: That’s tiiiime up! And the prize winner is… Wow! I’ve never seen anyone vote that fast before! Congrats, Know-It-All.
Toramoto: Ya tellin’ me you weren’t just tryin’ to fuck with us and there actually is a prize?

Monokuma: Of course! I have a policy of no lying unless necessary. This bear sticks to his word! And, just for the record... Here are the results!

Monokuma flourished his arms, and the screens on the walls both turned on to display a list of names.

Fifteen votes for Yoshida, one for Aitou.

I shot a glance at Yoshida a few stands away. He was staring at the screen, his expression hidden by his hair.

Whatever. He can be petty and throw his vote as much as he wants. Majority rules.

Monokuma: Sooo… You kids ready for the execution, or do you want a nice ten minutes of exposition first?

Hibiki: Let’s just get right to it.

Kamiya: No! Please… I need to know.

Kamiya: Yoshida-san… Daichi-san, if I may. Why… Why did you kill Uroko-san?

Yoshida: …

Yoshida: I…

Kamiya: …Please, Daichi-san. I want to believe that you had a reason for this… Anything at all.
Yoshida: …

Yoshida: …

Yoshida: …I don’t remember.

Kamiya: …

Kamiya’s eyes flickered across the room and landed somewhere I couldn’t pin down. Something like disappointment worked its way into the frown that creased her brows. Something almost like… anger.

Kamiya: …I see.

Aitou: You… You’re truly incapable of recalling?

Alix: But that can’t be all there is to this, can it? There’s gotta be something else! You’ve gotta remember something!

Yoshida: That’s…

Yoshida: That’s it. That’s all I can say.

Yoshida: …I’m sorry.

Kamiya: …

Kamiya: [Staring across room, monotonous and blunt] …I’m sorry, too.

A heavy, oppressive air settled over the room like grime in still water. I didn’t even flinch.
Of course he’d fucking lie through his teeth for no reason other than to rub salt in the wound minutes before he’d be dead and it wouldn’t matter to him at all. Of course.

A fittingly shitty confession for such a shitty person.

Monokuma: Hm… What a shame. Oh well! Guess there’s nothing I can do about that, huh!?

Yoshida: …

Monokuma: Well then! Are we done now? Are we ready!?

There were murmurs of sadness and fear around the room. Hashikawa, Orutoku, Sumire, Kamiya, Hanahara, Alix… They all looked like they wanted to stop the punishment from starting, but had nothing left to say. Their faith had run dry.

There were no objections left to make.

Monokuma: …

Monokuma: Wow, you all gave in easily. Guess the fact that the killer fessed up really took the edge off. Or maybe it did the opposite? Bears are notoriously bad at reading the mood, so I wouldn’t know.

Monokuma: Oh, well! If nobody has anything to say, I guess I’ll just get along with it!

Orutoku: You… You don’t have to do this!

Monokuma: Huh?

Orutoku: All of this is horrible! Uroko-san died, and now you’re just going to--
Monokuma: What, I’m just going to kill another one of your friends? I thought you were brighter than that, Eagle One! Not sure why, but I did!

Monokuma: You really think Calico is your friend? Get real! Isn’t he the guy who committed murder behind your backs?

Orutoku: Yes, but--

Monokuma: But nothing! Goes to show you can’t trust anyone, doesn’t it? Bummer.

Monokuma: Maaaaybe it’s just my natural instincts talking, but trusting anyone in a situation like this just seems a little… Dumb.

Monokuma: Come on. It’s only been about an hour since everyone was accusing you of murder! Did anyone hold back then?

Orutoku: My team did…

Monokuma: Yeah, because losing another teammate would make it harder for them all to escape. Hell, some of them would’ve been on the other side of that debate if I’d given them a choice!

Monokuma: But anyway… Maybe that’s just me getting hung up on semantics. You do you.

Monokuma: Now, anyone else got something smart to say?

Kamiya: …

Hashikawa: …

Aitou: …
Monokuma: Faaan-tastic. Alright, Calico, you finished with that card?


Monokuma: Bring it up here, buckeroo!

Yoshida: ...Okay.

Yoshida started taking slow steps towards Monokuma, the piece of card held firmly in front of him. As he passed me, I took a glance at it. It looked like a bingo card. Ten numbers had been circled in shaky red ink.

Yoshida hesitated, and I looked away with disinterest as he passed Monokuma the slip with quivering hands.

Monokuma: Hmmm…… Yep, looks good! Glad we could have this immortalised in ink. After this is over, I might even frame it and stick it up in the buffet!

Yoshida: Um… Why did I have to fill that out?

Monokuma: Oh, I think you know.

Yoshida: …

Monokuma: Alright! Know-It-All, get up here! Your prize is ready!

Hibiki: I don’t want the fucking bingo ticket.
Monokuma: No, no, even better than that! You’re getting a front row seat to the main event!

Hibiki: …

Monokuma: Ohh, this is iiiiiit! My kidneys are just tingling with excitement! Can you feel it, guys? Can you feel it!?

Monokuma: Weeeell… Here we gooo!

Monokuma clapped his hands, and a huge slot machine appeared behind him. The lever moved down automatically and set the wheels into motion, faces of the passengers flying past the three windows so fast they became a blur. The wheels slowed, and a perfect row of pictures of Yoshida’s face showed up, sending the machine into a flurry of light and sound that rained coins down everywhere.

Monokuma: Upupupu! Oh boy, that’s my second favourite part!

Yoshida: [Suddenly frantic] …Wh-- Wait, not now! I didn’t even get to--

Monokuma: Alrighty! Let’s give it everything we’ve got!

Yoshida: WAIT! I’M SORRY! I-I CAN EXPLAIN! I CAN--

Monokuma: SORRY, CAN’T HEAR YOU!!!! Last minute changes of mind are a HUGE pet peeve for me, so no can do!

Yoshida: BUT--

Monokuma: NOPE! NOW, LET’S GIVE IT EVERYTHING WE’VE GOT! IIIIIT’S PUNISHMENT TIIIIIME!!!!!!
Monokuma wasted no time in picking up the gavel that lay beside him. In one malicious swing, the robot brought it up above his head before smashing it into a button that had appeared before him, immediately switching the lights in the room from pink to gold.

A chain lunged down from the wall and shot straight for Yoshida. Cold red metal snapped itself shut around his neck, the golden cat bell on it ringing gleefully from the force.

Yoshida turned to me, frantic terror in his eyes, and reached out a hand.

Yoshida: Hibiki, please! You need to--

Hibiki: Shut up.

Yoshida: WAIT! Please! Look at th-- GHK!

The chain gave a sharp yank, and then started to pull up quickly. Yoshida’s hand remained outstretched, his last chance at escape.

My hands stayed clenched at my sides.
The walls opened up, and the luckster was jerked away, his hands frantically clawing at his neck. His body was hauled up into the air by the chain and plunged into a huge, orb shaped cage surrounded by red felt floors and a bingo board, all of it styled to look like a casino.

The cage sat still for a few moments, and Yoshida looked around in fear.

This was it.
A light flickered, and suddenly the whole setting came to life, bright golden lights turning on all around Yoshida to light up the casino-like decor. The ceiling opened up for a stream of bingo balls that fell one by one into the ball roller Yoshida stood in, each one as tall as his shoulders and with a number printed on it in a bright, bloody hue.

A huge statue of a lucky cat fell from above and landed next to the bingo roller. Its waving paw moved to the crank, and it began to turn. The chain latched itself to the stand the bingo roller sat on, and Yoshida started running in a desperate attempt to stop himself from being crushed, speeding to a painful sprint as the cage spun faster and faster. Before long, the bingo
card Yoshida had filled out appeared on a screen, and as the roller continued to speed up, bingo balls were released from the roller one by one until the board was almost full.

Finally, Yoshida’s legs gave in, and the chain attached to the roller’s stand flung him back in perfect time with the ball slot opening. The luckster landed in the final slot of the bingo card, exhausted, heaving, and with tears of exertion staining his cheeks bright red.

The numbers Yoshida had chosen matched up perfectly with the bingo balls that’d fallen into the board’s slots. A childish cheer rang out from somewhere, and a huge golden sign that spelt out ‘WINNER’ in lights dropped down in front of him.
Yoshida’s eyes grew wide, desperate and pleading and exhausted beyond belief, clinging by a thread to any sense of hope or respite or *anything at all* that could be found.

There was none.

Behind him, another lucky cat dropped from the ceiling, landing mere inches from Yoshida’s head. In the hand that was supposed to be waving, it held a mallet larger than the luckster
himself.

All Yoshida had time to do was look up, and the pure, unbridled terror in his gaze was visible for less than a second before the mallet swung down. The only sound that could be heard was a sickening crack.

…From beneath the mallet, blood seeped out onto the board in every direction. My stomach lurched. Behind me, someone screamed.

This… What was this?

......

No… I knew exactly what it was.

It was a just punishment, and nothing more.

Monokuma: WAHHOOO!!! Oh man, doesn’t that just get your heart racing? I know it did for Calico! Wow, what a doozy!

Hashikawa: Hh… AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!!

Kurai: W-WHAT THE FUCK?!

Yousetsu: [Sobbing] O-Oh my God…

Ryuumatsu: [Retching] I’m… g-going to be sick…

Monokuma: And those reactions! Man, you guys really pulled through for me on this one. Can’t wait for the next time one of you suckers off someone without thinking it through!
Kurai: You’re telling me we have to fucking watch that AGAIN?!?!

Kamiya: Daichi… He was in so much pain… I-- I can’t do this…

Hanahara: …

Orutoku: [Choking on tears] Y-Yoshida… He’s… He’s dead?!

Monokuma: Waddaya fucking think? No wonder your hair looks like an acorn! It’s a metaphor for the size of your brain!

Ryuumatsu: I-I can’t do this… I can’t stay down here…

Kim: Holy shit.


Aitou: H… Ghh…

Monokuma: Dear lord, we get it. A kid died and it was traumatic. Can’t we move on?!

Sumire: You want us to just MOVE ON?

Monokuma: Yeah, that’s the idea! Get over it and scram! I got stuff to do!

Sumire: NO. WAY. This is absolutely DISGUSTING. Someone - the SECOND PERSON TODAY, might I add, is DEAD! You can’t just expect anyone to--

Hanahara: H-He’s… He’s right.
Sumire: …Hanahara-san?

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: We should go. All of us.

Maeko: A-Agreed.

Hibiki: …

I started walking towards the door, my face downturned. Someone put a hand on my shoulder.

Kamiya: Kioku-san, are you--


Kamiya: …


Hibiki: …

I didn’t look back for a single moment. I just wanted to leave.

As I approached the doors, they clicked, beginning to open automatically. I didn’t even blink. I simply stared straight ahead the whole way up the stairs, past the table with the missing corner, and into my suite.
Just like always, the sound of rushing water seemed to drown out my senses, and I shivered as I half-consciously washed Maeko’s blood off of my hands in the ensuite’s sink. I had just enough presence of mind to notice that the room looked totally untouched. It was like today had never happened.

Good. Things would be better that way.

Not sure what to think or if I even could, I fell onto my bed, totally exhausted. The blue light cast from the midnight sea outside swept across the walls and cooled my mind, and I drifted off into the first of many nightmares to come.

Chapter 1: The Lullabies of Driftwood in an Ocean Storm

STATUS: COMPLETE
Chapter End Notes

If that left you with some pretty important questions that you feel need a canon explanation, don't worry. Everything'll get answered at some point.

Now that Chapter One is done, UDR will be taking a short hiatus so that I can get a good backlog of chapters and illustrations ahead of time! Hopefully, it'll be back in around three weeks. At any rate, it'll resume the normal update schedule ASAP! Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter! I'll be around on the DR Amino @gokuharas if anyone wants to see what I'm doing during the hiatus.

Also, there's a UDR discord! It's linked in the description of this fangan now. Feel free to join for some quality UDR discussion (right now someone's writing a non-despair spinoff oneshot and it's glorious)
CHAPTER TWO PART ONE: To Write A Will In Ice

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long hiatus, guys! A lot has been going on. I'm going to try to take up a once a fortnight update schedule until I can find the time to write more chapters (right now I'm working on Chapter 2 Part 4). Once I have enough written it'll go back to once a week. Thank you all for being so patient!

Some of you may not have seen it since it was a late addition to the chapter, but the execution gif in the previous chapter was made by my wonderful and talented friend Damien! His art blog is iishiimondo.tumblr.com if you'd like to check out more of his work or commission him. He also writes Danganronpa: Rewound Despair, which is a great fangan hosted here on Ao3! Definitely worth a read.

With all that said, here's the start of Chapter Two: To Write A Will In Ice. I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
My lungs were on fire.
I couldn’t breathe. Grey, violent masses of water swirled above my head, crashing and screaming and tearing everything to the ground.

I wanted to scream. One arm shot up as far as I could make it go, desperately clawing at the water’s surface for some sort of lifeline.

Nothing was there. This was it.

The cold grip of the water below bit at my ankles, and as the dark colours around me became vibrant with blood, I opened my eyes one last time, and I saw them.

I saw their tear-stained faces, and I tried to smile.

It was too late.

I coughed up the last of my breath. The world quickly began to disappear around me, my vision spinning and blurring and burning at my eyes until--

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!!!

Hibiki: AAAAGH!!

I… I was drenched in sweat.

I put a hand to my forehead and ran it feverishly through my hair. My chest was heaving.

Monokuma: Gooooood morning everybear-dy! Nothing like a few pawfect puns to bear-ighten up a clawful day, right? I know you love ‘em. No need to fur-latter me.
Monokuma: Anyway, the time’s now 8am! So…

Monokuma: …Yeah, that’s it. Bye, suckers.

...

Hibiki: …Th… That’s one way to start the day.

As I clutched at my arms, dazed and out of breath, a knock sounded at my door, followed by another.

???: [Muffled] Kioku-san?

The voice was distinctly Hanahara’s, but for some reason, it lacked any of her usual authoritative demeanour. One more knock sounded at the door, and then… Nothing.

...Trying to brush off the sickening feeling in my stomach, I looked around my room. Soft, blue light brushed at the walls and decorated the floor. Everything was pristine.

I looked to the ensuite, and memories from yesterday finally started to settle back in.

...

Thank God he was dead. After what he’d done, he deserved every second of pain that execution brought him. If only that shitstain could’ve had the decency to--


I walked into the ensuite. Just like last night, there was no trace anything had ever happened there. Actually, it was even cleaner than it had been before.
Remembering that Alix had gone so far as to actually fucking point out my hygiene during the trial, I decided to take a shower. I pulled the handle set into the far wall, recoiling when cold water hit my hand.

...Part of the nightmare I’d had resurfaced in my mind as I watched the glass fog up. It was blurry, but... I was sure I’d recognised some of the people in that dream. Which didn’t make sense, because I didn’t remember anybody I’d known before I’d woken up on this ship. Now, though, I couldn’t imagine their faces no matter how hard I tried. Everything was foggy.

...Huh. It was probably nothing. A metaphor for the suffocating experience of being surrounded by idiots, or something like that.

I got into the shower and decidedly agreed with myself that I wouldn’t bother thinking about it. The water was basically scalding, but anything was better than the freezing cold it’d been before. I could deal with it.

Hazily, I washed myself off and got dressed. Nobody had knocked on my door all morning, but the chances were they were still having a breakfast meeting. Not that it was worth going to, because they were all pointless, bland and inevitably disastrous, but having a sense of some sort of routine was... at least slightly appealing as a way of ignoring the bullshit I’d put up with yesterday.

Slipping on my shoes, I swiped my key card and left. The hall and stairwell were already completely empty - clearly, everyone had been at the breakfast meeting for a while. That or they were all dead. Which actually wouldn’t be too awful, because at least then I’d be able to leave this shithole, but the chances of that were low, so... So whatever.

My fists clenched at the fabric of my jacket as I shoved them into my pockets and pushed the buffet door open with a shoulder. Sure enough, everyone was already seated. It didn’t look like they’d started talking yet.
I took a few more steps into the room, and one by one, everyone’s gazes turned to me. All sixteen… All fourteen of them stared silently as I heaped way too much food onto a plate and sat down at my table until finally, someone had the decency to talk.

Hanahara: Um… Thank you for coming, Kioku-san. We were just--

Toramoto: Acorn hair made all of us wait for you to show up.

Hanahara: …Um… Right.

Hibiki: …

I looked over to Orutoku. He avoided eye contact with me at first, probably because of what had happened in the trial, but looked over and nodded nonetheless.

…He’d proven me wrong. He’d shown me up in that scrum debate. He’d made me look stupid.

...

That wasn’t something I was willing to forgive.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Did he now.

Orutoku: Yeah! It… It didn’t feel right to leave you out after, um… Last night. We’ve all gotta stick together, y’know?

Hibiki: …Sure.
Orutoku: Great! I’m… Glad you agree…?

Hibiki: …

I made a point of looking back to my plate dismissively, and Orutoku nodded again, nervously clearing his throat.

Orutoku: [Tugging scarf] Uh. So! Thank you everyone for coming! I know that everyone’s still recovering, but it’s really good to see that you could all show up after… um. Yeah. I, uh…… yeah.

Ryuumatsu: … [Sighs] What Orutoku-san is trying to say is that now that Uroko-san is gone, Team Delta needs a new leader.


Toramoto: [Smirks] And you wouldn’t say the same?

Kim: [Chuckles] You got me there, Tiger.

Ryuumatsu: [Deeply uncomfortable] …Anyway.

Ryuumatsu: Given yesterday’s events, it’s entirely safe to say, I should think, that Orutoku-san is trustworthy.

Rouvin: Hmm… Why do you say that?

Ryuumatsu: He was able to stand his ground and guide everyone towards the right answer even when a more bitter and spiteful person might just let everyone dig their own graves. If nothing else we’ve seen that he values his own continued existence enough to not do something ignorant and suicidal. He’s sound of mind, to say the least.
Rouvin: …Understandable.

Orutoku: Um, right! So… If nobody has any objections, I’m happy to take up the position!

Sumire: I don’t see anyone else fitting the bill as well as you do, Orutoku-san. I’m more than fine with that.

Hashikawa: Yeah! I agree.

Yousetsu: …I don’t really mind.

Kurai: [Barely even listening] Meh.

Aitou: …I think that sounds like a wonderful idea, Orutoku-san. You have my support.

Orutoku: Great! Thank you, guys. So, uh...

Orutoku looked over to Ryuumatsu for a moment, and the attorney gave him a look of stern affirmation. Orutoku smiled, though his confidence still seemed to be wavering.

Orutoku: Um, things’ll just stay the same as they were before, I guess? We don’t really need stricter rules. Is that right?

Ryuumatsu: Mm.

Orutoku: Cooool. And, uh, the concert… Yeah. That’s… Yeah.

Orutoku: Hanahara-san, you got anything you wanna say?

Hanahara: …Oh. Um, no.
Orutoku: Alright! I guess that’s… it… thennn…??

Orutoku grinned awkwardly, which soon turned to a wince as a heavily uncomfortable silence sunk over the room. I pointedly kept eating as everyone searched for something to say.

After what had to have been a full minute of silence, someone finally spoke up.

Maeko: Um… Actually…

Orutoku: Oh! Maeko-san! Did you wanna say something?

Maeko: …Yes please.

Maeko got up from where she’d been seated across from Kurai and went over to stand next to Orutoku. Honestly, the fact that she’d consciously decided to sit next to the scene phase toddler of all people was a testament to how bad her amnesia was.

The former karate pro took a look around the room before bowing politely, seemingly only realising what she was doing halfway through the motion and then jerking back upright. Instinct and muscle memory must’ve been getting the best of her.

Maeko: [Slightly confused] …Uh. I figured I would introduce myself. My name is Maeko Hondo.

Maeko: [Creases brow] Though, um… All of you seem to know that already…?

Hibiki: …

Maeko: At… At any rate, I don’t seem to, uh… Remember much of anything.

Hibiki: Retrograde amnesia.
Maeko: Huh?

Hibiki: Retrograde amnesia. Inability to recall memories prior to the moment of infliction. Usually caused by brain damage or severe emotional trauma. Doesn’t necessarily affect motor skills, basic knowledge or habitual abilities. Should be fine, if potentially permanent.

**I should know. It was the same thing I seemed to be suffering from.**

...Wait, how the fuck did I even remember all of that?

Maeko: [ Shrugs ] …Yeah. Sounds right.

Kamiya: Wow, Kioku-san! It’s a good thing we have a psychologist here, isn’t it?

Orutoku: Y-Yeah!

Hibiki: …Right.

Hibiki: …

Orutoku: …

Maeko: …

...Aaaand the uncomfortable silence was back in full force. Everybody save for Kamiya seemed all too eager to avoid interacting with me if they could. Looking around now, every single person seemed afraid of, dismissive of, or… sorry for me.

Hibiki: …I’m not upset about Yoshida.
Sumire: What?

Hibiki: I’m not. I know you’re all thinking I’m weak and I’m going to be all pathetic and useless now because someone was an ass to me. I can tell.

Sumire: …

Hibiki: Well, you’re all wrong. I’m not as pitiful as some people are, and I’m not about to become some easy target. So you can all stop staring at me like that or avoiding eye contact or whatever the fuck it is you’ve each resorted to. Don’t think I didn’t notice.

Hanahara: [Almost silently] …Sorry.

The way Hanahara had said what she did forced memories from last night to the front of my mind. I grit my teeth as I tried to push them back down.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Whatever. I’m done.

I got up and set my plate down on the buffet’s bench with a little too much force, turning to look the bartender in the eye as I did so. She winced.

Hibiki: And Hanahara. If you’re so hellbent on being a leader, act like it. You were on everyone’s asses on day one, and yet today you’ve barely talked at all. It’s pathetic. If one murder is enough to get you like this, you won’t make it another ten days. Do your team a favour and shape up or step down.

Sumire: Hey, you--

Hanahara: Just… Leave it.
Sumire: …

Hanahara: Please.

Sumire: …If you say so.


Giving the remaining fourteen people one last glare, I walked over to open the door and leave the--

???: AHOYYYYYY!

The door slammed open, crushing my hand between the knob and the wall as Monokuma burst into the room.

Hibiki: FUCKING SHIT!

Monokuma: [Cackling] Oh my, is that a hip new greeting? Well thank you for the warm welcome! Almost makes up for you leaving before I even got here for the big announcement! I mean, seriously! I had to do that last set of morning pushups in thirty seconds flat to make it!

Alix: A bear in more ways than one…

Monokuma: You know it, Buster. Anyway, as much as I’d love to show you how jacked I am some other time, I’m here on very important business, and staring at your ugly mugs isn’t something I wanna keep doing if I can avoid it!

Yousetsu: …Cut to the chase.
Monokuma: Wow, Astro Girl’s getting a little snippy! I wouldn’t want to take my chances with the captain if I were you.

Ryuumatsu: Oh, come on. It’s not like you can do anything to us if we don’t break the rules. Honestly, you act as though y--

Yousetsu: You’re wasting our time. Just hurry it up...

Monokuma: [Sniffles] Geez… You guys are no fun.

Ryuumatsu: [Smiling passive aggressively] Y-You know, you could let me finish a sentenc--

Sumire: Maybe we’d be a little more fun if we weren’t being subjected to this. Also, nobody wants to hear you restate the basic rules that we learned four days ago, Anguilla japonica.

Toramoto: Oof. Scorched ‘em.

Sumire: You shut up too, Galeocerdo cuvier.

Monokuma: I’m gonna stop you before you flame everyone in this room with vague scientific terminology. Now, anyone wanna take a crack at guessing what I’m here to tell youuu?

Toramoto: ...

Ryuumatsu: …

Sumire: …No, we don’t.

Monokuma: Bummer. But alright! Guess I can stop stalling.

Monokuma: Soooo, as it happens, I’m here with a beary special gift for you all!
Hashikawa: Another motive…?

Monokuma: Naaah. That’s for later! Right now, I just wanna show you something! I promise it has nothing to do with dead people. Captain’s honour!

Orutoku: [Looks over unsurely] …Ryuumatsu-san?


Orutoku: Alright, Captain Monokuma! We’ll take you up on this offer!

Kim: I don’t think it was ever really optional, anyway.

Monokuma: Loose Cannon’s right. If you’d resisted accepting my wonderfully generous gift, I would’ve whipped out the gatling guns!

Monokuma: Buuut anyway, I guess those are for another time. Now, get in line! Single file! Make sure to hold hands so you don’t get lost!

**Monokuma turned back to the door, standing at attention and saluting before opening it and marching forward.**

Monokuma: Come on, sailors! Hup, two three four! Keep up the pace!

Hashikawa: [Salutes, straight-faced] A-AYE AYE, CAP’N!

Orutoku: ON IT, SIR!

Kurai: This fucking SUCKS.
Alix: It wouldn’t if you joined in!

Kurai: [Mimicking Alix’s voice perfectly] It wouldn’t if you joined in! Yeah, right. I don’t see you marching behind Captain Chucklefuck either.

Alix: That’s only because I can’t see him at all! I may have incredible taste in fashion, the dexterity of a god and the ability to chant an incantation that makes you able to hear spirits for three weeks, but marching while blind? Please. I can only be a man of so many talents, Kurai-chan.

Kurai: …I have so many things I could say to the absolute nonsense you just spewed, but everything about it is so fucking ridiculously stupid that I’m not going to bother. Fuck off.

Alix: Will do, Monsieur! Just don’t hurt yourself on all that edge. Ouch.

Kurai: The fuck did you say?

Alix: [Taps chin] Definitely not anything about how saying ‘fuck’ in every sentence isn’t an intimidation tactic!

Kurai: OH, DO YOU WANNA GO? BECAUSE LEMME TELL YOU, I--

Kim: Chill the fuck out, dude.

Kurai: ...

Alix: … [Smiles and waves]

Kurai: [Mumbling angrily under his breath] ...Eat shit and die.

As Kurai devoted the next ten seconds to shooting daggers at Alix with his eyes, the group finally made it to the staircase under the suites. I followed Monokuma and the others up the stairs for a moment before they stopped in front of another huge door, its appearance exactly
like the entrances to the concert hall and trial room.

Monokuma: Aaaalrighty, sailors! We’re here!

Kim: A door. Impressive.

Aitou: Ah… What is this, exactly?

Monokuma: A reward for making it through your first trial, of course!

Kim: If this reward is going to be anything like the reward you gave Kioku-san for voting first or whatever, we aren’t interested.

Monokuma: Aw. You seriously think I’d do something like that? I’m not here to torture you, you know!

Rouvin: On that note, why are you here, exactly? If you’d be willing to share your motives for hosting such a gruesome and unethical - though not necessarily immoral, might I add - game of murder and betrayal, it would most likely be quite intriguing--

Monokuma: Not happening, my wonderful disciple of Socrates. But please, keep the fan theories coming! It’s fun to hear what you think is going on and laugh at how wrong you are.

Monokuma: [Swoons] Oh, but how I digress! Guess I should let you kids out onto your new playground so someone can hurry up and kick the bucket, huh?

Monokuma waddled over to the door before loudly knocking on it and holding his ear to the wood. After a moment, the door clicked and swung open completely. Monokuma put his hands on his hips and sighed, apparently satisfied with his work.

Monokuma: Well, there it is! Start exploring! No need to tell me how grateful you are. I already know.

Maeko: …Can I ask why we’re on a cruise ship?

Monokuma: No you CAN’T, Forget-me-not! Geez, you kids and your endless questions!

Maeko: Um… Forget-me-not?

Monokuma: That’s YOU! Now scram! Shoo! Begone! I’ll talk to ya later!

Maeko: … [Shrugs]

Maeko took the first step into the hallway Monokuma had unlocked, and everyone else soon followed. The robot gave an exasperated sigh as he walked into the corner and disappeared into the floor.

I mindlessly followed the rest of the crowd out of the stairwell and into the hallway. It was more than spacious enough for fifteen people, with a luxurious crimson carpet sprawled across the usual sleek wooden floor. A few tall doors were set into the pristine walls of the room.

After standing around for a few minutes, I finally decided to enter one of the new rooms. Lazily pushing my shoulder against the door was enough to open it, revealing a grand library full of maze-like shelves that towered above me. To the right of the room was an area full of chairs, benches and desks, and a door around the same place seemed to lead into another part of the ship.

I heard voices coming from the bookshelves. Those were the voices of the last two people I wanted to see right now, but I needed something to do to keep my mind off of… To keep myself from being bored. I walked over to find Orutoku and Ryuumatsu wandering down one of the aisles, the latter skimming the titles of books he passed as he went.

Orutoku: A library… and it’s totally empty! This is pretty cool at least, huh?
Ryuumatsu: I don’t know if ‘cool’ is the word I would use to describe it, but I suppose.

Orutoku: Good, good… Oh, yeah! I can do this!

Orutoku: [Cups hands around mouth] ECHOOOOOO!

Ryuumatsu: [Smirks] Is that really any way for a team leader to act?

Orutoku: Darn it! You’re right. I can’t flunk this position! Gotta set a good example for the others!

Hibiki: I don’t see any ‘others’.

Orutoku: [Turns around] Kioku-kun! Hello!

Ryuumatsu: [Frowns] Oh. It’s you.

Hibiki: Wow. Outstanding intuition. You cracked the case once again. It sure is me.

Ryuumatsu: …I-I don’t appreciate your tone.

Hibiki: I don’t appreciate a lot of things. One of them is being trapped on this boat with you of all people. Another one is literally anything that has happened in the last twenty-four hours, up to not only this moment but probably the next ten minutes as well. Thanks for being fun to rile up, though. Makes your impact on my life only extremely negative instead of excruciatingly so.

Ryuumatsu: W-What’s that s-supposed to mea--

Orutoku: Aw, you don’t really think that, right?
Hibiki: …I might, I might not.

Orutoku: Well, I’m gonna choose to believe that you don’t and say we’re all pals here and shouldn’t fight over dumb stuff!

Hibiki: …Riiight.

I glared at Orutoku as he turned around and kept walking down the aisle, a skip in his step. He really didn’t deserve me not having a go at him, but… It just wasn’t worth it right now.

Ryuumatsu saw me glaring and made a face at me. I stuck my tongue out at him and he recoiled in offense, turning around and slinking off after Orutoku with his nose high in the air. To his dismay, I followed.

Orutoku: Hmmmm… Hey, this place is pretty well-kept, isn’t it?

Ryuumatsu: O-Of course it is. It’s a library, after all.

Orutoku: Right, right, but like… If the ship sunk and nobody else is on it and everything, isn’t it pretty weird that all the books are on the shelves? How’d they manage that?

Ryuumatsu: That’s… They must’ve sunken the ship in a very deliberate way, I suppose, or what’s been said about the surrounding ocean being an illusion is true and this ship isn’t underwater at all, or--

Hibiki: Glued all the books to the shelves.

Orutoku: Woah… Do you think they could do that?

Hibiki: Dunno. I can think of some people who might be stupid enough to try.

Ryuumatsu: How e-convenient that nobody asked your opinion on the matter, then, because I’m sure
y—you’re enough of an upstanding citizen to not slander those people and land yourself in civil court, hm?

Hibiki: …

I walked up to Ryuumatsu and put a hand on his shoulder, speaking in a tone low enough that Orutoku couldn’t hear.

Hibiki: You. I was talking about both of you. Mostly the orange guy. But also, you.

Ryuumatsu: …I d-despise you.

Hibiki: Hm. That’s nice. I feel indifferent towards you.


Orutoku: Hey, you guys! Look!

Ryuumatsu took the first chance he saw to slip out from under my hand, marching over to Orutoku a little too quickly. I followed once again. At the end of the aisle, the security guard was standing on some sort of ladder, one of his feet a couple of rungs up as he tested its stability.

Orutoku: They’ve got this ladder here! It should help reaching the higher books or something if you wanna read some.

Ryuumatsu: Orutoku-san, that’s a stepladder, not any everyday ladder. There’s an important difference.

Hibiki: No there isn’t--

Orutoku: Really!? My bad! Would’ve thought I’d’ve heard about it…
Orutoku: ...Is it the same kind of difference as father versus stepfather?

Ryuumatsu: N-N-- ...Wait, n... I... I suppose it might be? But... No, how would you even c-compare... What???

Orutoku: [Grins and shrugs] I dunno! I’m just asking!

Ryuumatsu: Well, I... Hrmm.

I raised an eyebrow at Orutoku and he grinned at me, clearly pleased with himself. Seemed like he might’ve been trying to give Ryuumatsu something to think about instead of just being plain dumb.

...I wasn’t sure whether Orutoku not being a complete imbecile was reassuring or even more reason to be angry at him for yesterday, so I decided to just ignore it completely and move on, leaving him and Ryuumatsu to themselves. I walked back to where I’d come from and looked around for a moment before someone else caught my eye. Standing between the doorway and the bookshelves was Rouvin, a hand on his chin and a contemplative, concerned look in his eye.

Hibiki: Yo.


Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Somehow, you seem even more spaced out than usual. Not a fan of libraries or something, huh.

Rouvin: Ah... Not generally, despite my love for philosophical literature and the access to such resources that libraries provide. I prefer to keep my mind free of biases where possible, but... The librarian at the library I frequent...
Rouvin: She doesn’t appreciate my… compulsive vocalisation of my thoughts.

Hibiki: Rough.

Rouvin: It is certainly a shame, yes. But who am I to tell her she is in the wrong? It is just as likely that I am more prominently at fault, or, perhaps, that nobody is to blame so much as the mere coincidence that my traits as an individual and her duty as a librarian would clash in such a way as to--

Hibiki: I’m going to stop you there, because I feel like I probably don’t need to hear it. There’s no librarian here anyway. Go nuts.

Rouvin: [Eyes widen] …That sounds… Promising. I will have to look into the non-fiction section once I have seen the rest of the newly-accessible rooms.

Rouvin: Oh, and speaking of topics of interest… The current situation Maeko seems to be finding herself in is quite intriguing, no?

Hibiki: Hm?

Rouvin: Well, you stated yourself this morning that she is suffering from retrograde amnesia. It seems like being left in that predicament after an event that would have otherwise left such a strong impact on her emotionally and socially would lead to a variety of unknowns. In this state, it has become hard to predict just how much of her personality remains influenced by memories, and what of it is simply her nature.

Hibiki: …Huh.

Rouvin: Actually… Part of why I found it quite so curious is that I fear I may be suffering from something similar.

...Well, that was interesting.
Hibiki: …Monokuma did say he’d erased a few years of everyone’s memories. How long are you talking?

Rouvin: Well, certainly at least the two years he had mentioned… But something leaves me inclined to say that perhaps I have forgotten more.

Hibiki: And what’s that?

Rouvin: Well… I can’t recall practising philosophy in any significant way prior to coming here. It’s odd, because I’m certain that the memories I now lack have a very strong influence on my identity both internally and externally as is, but as to what those memories might be… I can provide nothing but mere conjecture. It makes me wonder if anyone else may be suffering something similar.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: That’s… something.

Rouvin: Indeed. It’s possible this is something I alone am experiencing, or perhaps others are concealing information out of paranoia? This is a killing game, after all, and so it would make sense for most to be wary of what they allow others insight into.

Rouvin: Say, Kioku… You wouldn’t happen to be experiencing anything similar yourself, would you?

Hibiki: Yeah. Something like that.

Rouvin: …Interesting. Thank you for telling me.

Hibiki: It’s whatever.

Hibiki: By the way… You said people might be hiding shit because they don’t trust each other, right? Why’d you tell me?
Rouvin: Are you implying that you’re not worthy of my trust?

Hibiki: Nah, more like outright stating that trusting people right now is kinda stupid.

Rouvin: …I suppose it didn’t get you very far, did it.

Hibiki: …You think I was stupid enough to trust a killer?

Rouvin: Being outwitted by someone with nefarious motivations does not necessarily make someone else unintelligent.


Rouvin: …

Rouvin: Of course.

Rouvin: To answer your question, though… I trusted you because of our conversation on our second day here. Regarding the trolley problem. You would not go out of your way to use this information against me if it were of any inconvenience to you, as far as I can tell.

Hibiki: …Maybe.

Rouvin: Well, it was a risk I was willing to take, at any rate. If people are suspicious of me because you shared personal information that I supplied to you, who the blame falls on is an ambiguous matter.

Rouvin: But I suppose I should leave you to keep exploring. Think of me what you will, in the meantime. Goodbye.

Weird dude. Way more tolerable than Ryuumatsu, though, and at this point I’ll take what I can get.

I was definitely done with this part of the library, but I still hadn’t been over to the seats or the other door. I started walking over right away, only to find… Even more people I didn’t feel like talking to. Great.

Alix: [Jumping onto a bean bag] Woaaaaahhh!! Oh man, these are super comfy! C’est magnifique!

Hanahara: …

Alix: Sure was nice of Captain Monokuma to give us these bean bags, hey Hanahara-chaaaan?

Hanahara: Huh? Oh… Yeah! Yeah.

Alix: Yesssss. Validation.

Alix sunk into the bean bag for a moment, then perked up.

Alix: Oh! Kioku-chan! Bonne journée!

Hibiki: What’s with the ‘chan’ thing all of a sudden?

Alix: Just me appreciating my friends!

Hibiki: …I’m not your friend.

Alix: Well you didn’t have to be fucking rude about it, but yeah, I thought you might say that. I’d make friendship bracelets and prove you wrong by giving you one as a sign of our friendship, but I’m already in cahoots with the wonderful companion that is blindness, and boy is she possessive!
Alix: [Snickers] But hey, just imagine I gave you one or something. Lying to yourself aaaaalways works.

Hibiki: …Alright…

The hell?

Alix: Oh, hey, hey! Maybe Hanahara-chan and you could make some friendship bracelets or something, though! That’d be friend-tastic! Thoughts? Contributions?

Hanahara: Ahah… Maybe.

Hibiki: …No.

Alix crossed his arms and blew a raspberry at me as Hanahara watched on with a blank look on her face. Actually, saying she was even watching was probably too generous. She was kind of just… spacing out.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Alright. See you later, I guess.

Alix: Yay! That’s the spirit!

Hibiki: I didn’t say I was going to enjoy seeing you later, dipstick.

Alix: No worries. I won’t get to enjoy seeing you later either, after all!

Hibiki: That’s not what I meant, you know that’s not what I meant, and you’re fucking with me, except you’re failing because I’m not an idiot.
Hibiki: And anyway, this is all under the assumption that you don’t get murdered by then, which is pretty up in the air right now for both of you. I’d suggest watching your backs, but I’d kind of rather that you didn’t.

Hanahara: [Winces] …

Alix: Boo, that wasn’t even a funny insult. Two out of ten, stop telling people to go die.


Alix: … [Blows another raspberry]

Flipping Alix off dismissively, I went over to the door that was tucked away in this corner - the only one in the room, it seemed, aside from a few janitor’s closets here and there. I pushed open the door and stepped inside.

Kurai: God damn computers… Why even bother with these if there’s no wi-fi?

Yousetsu: …

Inside were Kurai and Yousetsu, the former turned away to the back of the room and talking loudly to himself while the latter stared on, her expression blank. The room itself, at any rate, seemed to be a pretty high end computer lab. Laptops and monitors were set up on desks all across the room, and the lights were even dimmed to suit the setting. Impressive enough, I guess.

Kurai: Wh-- They have Microsoft Paint on here?? That program got put out of commission YEARS ago! It’s not even GOOD!!! Funny, but not good!

Yousetsu: …

Kurai: [Clicking around rapidly] This is ridiculou… WAIT.
Kurai stopped for a moment, his frame shock still as he rapidly went to click on an icon on the screen. A program opened up, and he started… giggling?

Kurai: [Lifting a hand to his face] Oh hoh hooo… Ohh my god! They’ve got the most high-end voice recording shit this side of the globe! This is… THIS IS AWES--

In the midst of what was so out of character that it couldn’t have been anything other than an emotional meltdown, Kurai span around with his fists pumped up in the air and immediately came face to face with Yousetsu and I both staring at him. His gleeful smile practically evaporated, and he ended up staring at me, eyes wide in shock.

Kurai: [Glowering] …Y… What are you two looking at? Fucking look like you just saw me rip someone’s still-beating heart out with my bare fucking hands!

Yousetsu: …That sounds… Kind of unnecessarily graphic… And probably impossible…

Hibiki: Also weirdly specific. Is there something you need to repent for? The goblin priest is right outside.

Kurai: Shut up. I’m just glad they’ve got some decent software here for me to do my FUCKING JOB WITH.

Kurai: [Frowning] …It’d be pretty fucking nice if they had mics, too, though… Christ. This place is a letdown. Just like everyone in it, I guess.

Yousetsu: …

Kurai: …Stop fucking staring at me.

Yousetsu: …’K.

...Clearly, no sort of intelligent discussion was going to be taking place here any time soon. I decided to leave without mentioning the dozens of microphones in the concert hall.
I slunk past Alix successfully enough and ended up back outside the library a minute later. I still had another two doors to deal with, by the looks of things - one small, the other large enough for a truck to pass through.

I chose to save the bigger one for later and ended up finding myself in a laundry room. Washing machines, dryers and sinks lined the walls. Hashikawa and Sumire had sat down on top of a couple of them and were chatting quietly - not that Sumire knew how to be particularly quiet - and Aitou was perched on his toes in front of another machine and messing with the buttons.

Sumire: People just don’t seem to appreciate the nuanced differences between the cardiovascular structures of freshwater and marine fish and how their countercurrent circulatory systems are such a brilliant adaptation for coping with the low oxygen content of their environments!

Hashikawa: [Frowning, confused] R-Right, right…

Sumire: Honestly, the way the gills allow the extended exposure of deoxygenated blood to fully oxygenated water and thus maximise the absorption of said oxygen into the bloodstream via diffusion is-- …Do you want me to slow down?

Hashikawa: [Tugs on cap] U-um… Maybe just a little, if that’s… o-okay?

Sumire: [Grins, pats Hashikawa’s shoulder] Sure thing, Tsuruko-san! Okay, so…

Whatever the fuck they were talking about sounded overly complicated and pointless, so I decided to tune out. I walked over to Aitou and watched him press buttons aimlessly for a moment.

Hibiki: …Yo.


Now that I had gotten a better look at him, Aitou looked a little less composed than usual.
He’d clearly tried to cover them up with concealer, but there were dark rings under his eyes.

Hibiki: Have trouble sleeping?

Aitou: [Stifles a yawn] …I suppose my attempts at keeping that fact unknown weren’t sufficient. Yes, I… Did struggle somewhat. It’s nothing to concern yourself about. I’ll just… Get some coffee later.

Hibiki: Seems like you’re the only one who uses that coffee machine at this point.

Aitou: Ah, probably. Hopefully everyone else is sleeping soundly, at least.

Aitou: How about yourself? Having your own private quarters must aid at least somewhat.

I thought back to how I’d woken up screaming this morning. I tried to hide the grimace that forced itself onto my face at the thought of it.

Hibiki: …I’ve been sleeping fine. Like a baby that overdosed on sedatives.

Aitou: Interesting metaphor. At any rate, I’m glad to hear.

Hibiki: Mm. Tried sleeping in something other than your full day wear? Those shoulder pads look like they’re made out of straight steel.

Aitou: Hm? …Oh. I suppose I should look into that. Thank you for reminding me, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: Yeah. I’ll leave you to… keep pressing random buttons on the dryer, or whatever it is you’re doing.

Aitou: …
Aitou: I wish I could tell you that I had any concept of what I was attempting to achieve with that.

Hibiki: Go find Alix. I’m sure he’ll make up some stupid excuse. Say it’s haunted or something.

Aitou: …That’s a significantly more appealing idea than anything I had in mind. I’ll… I’ll go do that.

Hibiki: Have fun with that. Bye, Aitou.

Aitou: Ah, um… Farewell.

There really wasn’t much to see in the laundry room that I couldn’t get out of the cursory glance I’d given it earlier, so I left without giving it much more thought. Only one room left to go, then.

I headed over to the last door and pushed it open to find the biggest room yet. What looked like it might’ve once been a dance hall or ballroom was now the site of row upon row of industrial warehouse shelving. Pretty much everything I could think of could be found somewhere on the shelves. A wide gap between the shelves had been left down the middle of the room for easy transportation, and the back of the hall seemed to have a bunch of smaller cabinets.

Partway down the hall, Kamiya seemed to be setting something up. She looked up for a moment and met my eyes, then smiled and beckoned me over.

I walked over to Kamiya to find that she was setting up a desk and sewing machine with some trouble. It seemed like she’d even found fabric already. Guess this place really did have everything.

Kamiya: [Looking up while assembling the desk] Good morning Kioku-san! It’s great to see you!

Hibiki: Sure. You know anything about all of this?

Kamiya: Ah, um… I wandered around a bit earlier. It seems like this is a storeroom for spare supplies
and things like that… There are some things here that seem really out of place, though.

Hibiki: Like what.

Kamiya: Well, lots of things, really… There are plenty of bolts of fabric that I managed to find, for example! But, uh…

Kamiya: The concerning thing is those cabinets down at the end. There’s… Poison in them.


Kamiya: Yeah… I considered trying to hide all of them, but Captain Monokuma said that I wouldn’t like what would happen if I tried, so… I guess we have to leave them there.

Hibiki: Most people probably don’t have the basic awareness to actually find all of that shit anyway. It’ll be fine.

Kamiya: Heheh… Um, that’s quite the way of phrasing it, but you’re right. I guess I’m just worried because that’s the same thing that happened with the katanas…

Kamiya: [Bites lip] Oh, but um! We… don’t have to talk about that.

Hibiki: …I don’t care about any of that.

Kamiya: …

Kamiya: I was mad about it, too. Actually, there was something I…

Kamiya paused for a moment, as if considering something, and her hands came to a rest at the table top’s corner. She sighed and looked back up to me.
Kamiya: It’s fine. I’ll talk to you about it later. Maeko deserves to hear it, too.

Hibiki: Maeko?

Kamiya: Mhm! She’s actually in here right now, I think. I saw her earlier. She carried the table over here for me!

Hibiki: With one arm… Huh.

Kamiya: [Giggles] Well, just because she’s forgotten that she was a karate pro doesn’t mean she isn’t strong anymore, thankfully.

Hibiki: …No shit.

Kamiya: Ahah, don’t worry. I know you’re more than smart enough to know that without anyone telling you.

Hibiki: That’s also obvious.

Kamiya: [Smiles sincerely] Of course it is. You were really impressive in the trial yesterday… I’m glad you’re here.

Kamiya: Uh… Even if it’s really not that great that it means you’re stuck in a killing game.

Hibiki: Tell me about it.

Hibiki: Anyway, you seen anyone else or know where Maeko is or anything?

Kamiya: Oh, I saw Kim-san and Toramoto-san leaving together earlier! I don’t think they spent much time looking around, but they didn’t seem to mind so much, so I didn’t bother them about it… Maeko-san should be in one of the other aisles.
Hibiki: Great. Thanks, Kamiya.

Kamiya: Any time, Kioku-san! See you!

Hibiki: Bye.

I waved to Kamiya and left. She was… Surprisingly alright, actually. Definitely one of the easier people to talk to.

I wandered off again. Eventually, I found Maeko, who seemed to be prodding at a stack of katanas. Great.

Hibiki: Hi Maeko.

Maeko: Oh. Hi, um…


Maeko: Right, sorry. Everyone’s been introducing themselves to me this morning… or reintroducing. It’s…

Maeko: …

Hibiki: …

Maeko: …

Hibiki: Excruciatingly awkward?

Maeko: That sounds about right, yeah.
I watched as Maeko’s eyes drifted over the shelves absently. She seemed oddly… Not present? It wasn’t particularly surprising after everything that had happened to her yesterday, but seeing her almost forget she was in the middle of a conversation with someone was sort of weird.

...Actually, there was something else that’d been bugging me, too.

Hibiki: Hey… You had a stutter before.

Maeko: [Tugs hair] …D-Did I? I, um… I guess I. Forgot. Or something. That’s probably not how t-that works.

Hibiki: That’s definitely not how that works.


...And as soon as I had mentioned it, she started stuttering again? That’s more than a little suspicious.

...Maeko and Uroko were identical twins, weren’t they?

...I looked up at the person in front of me and squinted. I couldn’t seem to picture what either of their faces had looked like before, let alone any major differences between them, but… I didn’t trust this at all.

Which Hondo twin was standing in front of me now?
You’re both in the same place! Finally!!!

My train of thought was interrupted by Monokuma literally bursting out of a panel in the floor and throwing himself between me and the person who I was going to choose to assume was Maeko. He flourished his arms and took a bow before looking up at the two of us with an almost mocking brand of cheer.

Monokuma: Ahoy, my wonderful passengers! Know-It-All and Forget-Me-Not, my two favourite kiddos with incredible matching hyphenated nicknames. What a pair.

Hibiki: Tell me what you want or leave.

Monokuma: Fine, fine! It’s not really about you anyway. It just… concerns you.

Monokuma: Wellllll, what I came here to say is that there’s been a change in… Team arrangements.

Maeko: Um… Are those the ones with the weird s-symbols? I’m in…

Hibiki: Rho.

Maeko: Yeah, right. R-Rho.

Monokuma: Bzzzt! Nice try, wrong answer! You were on Team Rho. Past tense.

Hibiki: …If this is going where I think it’s about to go, you can shove it up your ass.

Monokuma: Okay, first of all, that’s no way to speak to your captain! Second of all, I’m physically incapable of doing that because I have arms like a T-Rex. I can’t even touch my belly button!

Maeko: Um…
Monokuma: But back to the point! Here you go, Forget-Me-Not!

Just then, Monokuma whipped something out from behind his back and threw it to Maeko, who caught it deftly in her one hand. She held it out to look at it, and as I did as well I could see what was printed on it - a picture of Maeko with her name, now also featuring the Upsilon symbol. A key card.

Monokuma: From now on, you’ll be teaming up with Know-It-All on Team Upsilon! Pretty spicy twist, right?

Hibiki: …I’m not fucking sharing my bed.

Monokuma: That’s fine! The two of us can set another one up! No better way to use the store room’s supplies. Oh, but we’ll be busy for a bit, so you can’t go into your suite again until we’re all set! Unless you want to spend time with widdle ol’ me, that is.

Hibiki: …Die.

Monokuma: I thought you’d say that! We’ll go get the bed frame now, then. Forget-Me-Not, you are now a proud resident of the Upsilon suite!

Maeko: [Tapping cheek] …W-Which one is that? I don’t think I’ve b-been in there before...

Monokuma: Oh, trust me. You have.

Maeko: …

Monokuma: Upu.

Hibiki: Alright, this fucking blows. I’m leaving.
Monokuma: Aaaalrighty! Catch you later, kid!

Maeko: Um… S-See you, I think.

...Well, this was bullshit. Why even switch Maeko to my team? Is this just some sort of fucking Amnesiacs United club? Is Monokuma intentionally forcing the two people who remember literally nothing about their lives to be in a room together constantly so he can get off to how many awkward silences there’ll be? What does he want me to do, make small talk about the fucking WEATHER?

...Jesus fucking Christ. I had a headache coming on.

Nursing one of my temples in my hand, I pulled my e-Handbook out of my pocket and gave it a cursory glance. It was nearing lunch time already. May as well go eat something,

I went down the stairs and back over to the buffet. It was totally empty. Everyone else must have still been exploring the new areas, or something.

Out on the very front part of the deck outside the buffet, I could see Toramoto and Kim. They seemed to just be… Sitting around, talking, and occasionally laughing. Fucking riveting.

I made the obvious choice and decided to avoid them, instead opting to eat alone and in complete peace and quiet. The completely unsettling sound of five fucking thousand tonnes of water shifting above my head was better company anyway. I got together a plate of food, specifically not glancing at anything vaguely pizza related, and grabbed a pitcher of soda and a cup before bringing it all out onto the main deck and setting it down on a table next to a lounge chair.

I sat there for a while, eating vacantly and staring up at the sea above me and trying my best to not think about how last time I’d been in one of these chairs it’d been with Yoshida curled up right next to it asking me how much I trusted everyone like it was some kind of sick fucking joke.

...Whatever.
That was becoming something of a mantra, now.

I sighed and flung an arm over my eyes, clawing at the lounge frustratedly with my other hand. Why was I so fucking hung up over this? What he’d done to me was inexcusable, but every time I thought about his last moments it was like I could feel the pain of being crushed coursing through my bones. It was...

It was awful. It was really, truly awful.

Tired and confused, I lay there with my eyes closed for what felt like forever. I wasn’t sure if I’d fallen asleep, but by the time I finally opened my eyes, the dome I was trapped in had grown dark with dusk’s hues. It felt like I’d been asleep for ages. It felt like I hadn’t slept at all. Mostly, it felt like I’d just thrown myself down a flight of stairs.

Groaning, I got up and looked around to find that the deck was totally vacant. The jug of soda was room temperature now, but I downed a glass of it anyway.

...I wasn’t sure what a hangover felt like, but this probably wasn’t far from it.

After a moment spent just coming to my senses, it occurred to me that I could probably actually go back to my room now. Not bothering to move all the soda that’d gone warm or food that’d gone cool, I ditched my plate where it’d been sitting on the table and meandered over to and up the stairs until I found myself in front of the Upsilon suite once again. I pulled out my keycard, swiped it, and went inside.

Maeko was sitting on the double bed she’d set up with Monokuma, surveying the room calmly but curiously from her place. She looked over to me and gave a small wave.

Maeko: Hi, Kioku-san.
Hibiki: Don’t oversell it on the stutter.

Maeko: What?

Hibiki: Nothing.

We sat in silence for a few moments. It would’ve been awkward, but with how wordless Maeko usually was, it actually felt relatively painless. Not completely, but relatively.

I flopped onto my bed and stared at the ceiling for a minute as the buzzing in my head slowly died out, leaving me with nothing but pure static.

I’d been resting for ages, but there really wasn’t anything to do. Guess I should just try to go to sl--

There was a knock at the door.

???: Kioku-san? Maeko-san?

It sounded like… Kamiya? She had said that she’d wanted to talk to both of us, now that I thought back on it.

I went over, lazily swiped my keycard and opened the door. Like I’d expected, Kamiya looked down at me from the other side, a kind, warm glow in her smile.

Kamiya: Good evening! Um… Do you mind if I come in?

Hibiki: Go for it. Nothing’s happening right now.

Maeko: … [Gives a thumbs up]
Kamiya: Ahah, yeah. It can get a little repetitive being stuck here like this, huh?

Kamiya: [Fiddles with necklace] I, um… I wanted to talk to both of you.

Kamiya looked up from her hands at her collarbones, and her eyes met mine. They were a soft green, gentle and trusting, but they betrayed some sort of profound melancholy now that I'd never seen before. There were so many emotions there - exhaustion, resignation, a piercing hot acuity… the bittersweetness of compromise.

…It made me realise that for every moment I had forgotten, she had a memory that she carried with her now. I shoved my hands into my pockets.


I walked around to the side of my bed adjacent to where Maeko was sitting on her own. Kamiya followed me over and sat down at my side. She was silent for a moment, but then clasped at her necklace again and sighed.

Kamiya: I… I wanted to apologise for yesterday, first. Everything you saw… I was really hoping nobody would have to watch their friends die in front of them.

Kamiya’s voice took on a dark tone. She clenched a fist in her lap.

Kamiya: That innocent people would have to go through all of this… It’s really, truly unforgivable.

Kamiya: But… I wanted you both to at least know that you aren’t alone in all of this.

Hibiki: …

Kamiya: I didn’t have many friends when I was younger. People tried to get close to me, but it was only ever to get something out of me. And I let it happen. I let myself get walked all over, because I
thought that was all anyone would want me for.

Kamiya: But a couple of years ago, I... I met the most wonderful person. Sh... She saw more in me than I had ever even been able to see in myself. She wasn't the most social or the most delicate, but she knew what to say and when to say it, every single time. She was... more than just the best friend I'd ever had. She was the best person I'd ever met.

Hibiki: ...

I could see the end of this story coming from miles away. It was like watching a train hurtling towards you, knowing it's too late for anyone to slam on the brakes.

Maeko looked more alive than she had... ever, really. A childlike fascination glittered in her eyes.

Maeko: Th-That's great! That you were able to find someone who really listened to you... Isn't that good?

Kamiya: ...

Kamiya: She died a year ago.

Maeko: ...

I watched as the light slipped from Maeko's eyes and shattered. I looked over to Kamiya, expecting to see tears streaming down her cheeks, but instead found her thumbing her locket blankly. Her eyes looked greener than ever.

Kamiya: I'm sorry to bring down the mood. I just...

Kamiya: I wanted you both to know that I... I've been in a similar place before. It's fine if you want to be alone, but nobody should ever have to feel lonely.
Kamiya: …I think both of you can overcome this. You’re both strong. Even if you struggle now… If someone like me could lift myself back up, I have no doubt both of you can too. It’s just…

Kamiya: I don’t know where I’d be now if former friends hadn’t extended their hands to me when I needed them to. I figured I’d do the same.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …Thank you, Kamiya.

Kamiya: …It’s really not a problem, Kioku-san.

A few moments were just spent in silence as Maeko and I let what we’d just been told sink into our heads. It was… A lot to digest, just having someone’s entire life story handed to you at once. It made not knowing a thing about myself kind of terrifying.

Maeko wiped her eyes on her arm and stood up slowly. She wasn’t even trying to hide the tears that had started to roll down her cheeks.

Maeko: I, um… I…

Maeko: [Bows] E-Excuse me for a minute.

Kamiya smiled softly at Maeko, and she walked over to the ensuite a little too briskly before closing the door behind her. Kamiya sighed and looked down at her lap.

It was then that I noticed she’d been holding something since she walked in. A bit of red ribbon poked out from between her fingers.

Kamiya: …Hibiki-san… Is it okay if I call you that? Just for now?

Hibiki: …Go ahead.
Kamiya: Thank you. Um… Hibiki-san, there was something I wanted to say just to you, too. I’m sorry if it seems too forward, but I… I’m willing to take that risk if it might help you, even if you hate me for it. I want to help.

Kamiya: Um… A lot of this could be wrong, too--

Hibiki: Just. Say it.

Kamiya: …Heheh. You know when to be forward too, don’t you? I think that’s really admirable.

Kamiya: What I wanted to say is… There’s a reason I believe in you so much.

Hibiki: Huh?

Kamiya: I’m sure you’ve noticed. I… I think you have a lot of potential. I’ve seen the way you read people the second they start talking. I’ve seen how forward you can be, how you don’t hold back or let people stay weak. Some people would call it rude, and um… It can be, sometimes. But… But I think it’s also a matter of perspective.

Kamiya: You… When you watched the execution yesterday. Or… thinking back on it now, even, now that you’re less upset. How does it make you feel?

Hibiki: …

Just like this afternoon, I brought my mind back to Yoshida’s final moments. I couldn’t even hold back my wince.

Kamiya: …I thought so. You’re really good at reading people, aren’t you? You can look at a person and name everything they’re feeling.

Kamiya: Did you ever feel it too? When you looked at them?
Hibiki: …I don’t know.

Kamiya: …I see. Um, this might sound even more forward of me, but… I think it’s what she would have said.

Kamiya: Hibiki-san… You’re obviously really smart. But that intelligence all comes from a keen eye and an ability to connect with people, and letting it get to your head won’t do you any favours.

Hibiki: …What are you saying?

Kamiya: I’m saying… Don’t let your self confidence blind you to the fact that sometimes, even the smartest people can’t see everything on a first glance. You could mean so much to so many people. Outside of this killing game, you probably already do. I’m sure of it.

Kamiya: But… I think getting used to being able to read some people like an open book could have blindsided you to the fact that there’s often a lot more to each chapter than meets the eye. There’s an overarching meaning that you can’t draw from skimming the pages.

Kamiya: I think you’re an incredibly observant person, Hibiki-san. Just take a step back from your own confidence and come to things with a more critical eye. It’s okay to be in the wrong. Nobody thinks you’re anything less than a genius.

Hibiki: …

Normally, at this point, I’d blow up. I’d get mad about the fact that someone thought they might be smart enough to understand me, to actually criticise me to my face.

…I didn’t. I just sat and watched as Kamiya unfolded her hands, as she began to lace the red ribbon of Yoshida’s pendant between her fingers.

…I just… watched.
Kamiya: Ahah, um… You don’t have to listen to all of that, though, if you don’t want to. I just thought I would…

Hibiki: Offer some insight.

Kamiya: Right! Hopefully it’ll be of some use. It’s not like my opinion is fact or anything, it’s just… what I saw in you, over these last few days. I think… If there’s room to let people grow, you should allow it. Nobody gets anywhere on a fixed track. You just keep going around in circles.

Hibiki: …Sometimes, you need to pull the lever.

Kamiya: You could put it like that, yes! Thank you for listening, Kioku-san. It means a lot to me.

Kamiya pushed herself up off the mattress delicately. She regarded the necklace in her hand, then lightly dropped it on the bed as she made her way to the door.

Kamiya: Oh, um… I can’t open this without your card.

Hibiki: …Right.

I moved to Kamiya’s side and swiped my keycard on the register next to the door. It beeped, and the girl held the door ajar for a moment in thought.

Hibiki: …Hey, Kamiya?

Kamiya: Hm?

Hibiki: What was the name of your friend?

…I’d basically blurted that out without thinking. Kamiya looked at the floor for a moment, and when her eyes met mine, they were intense with sadness and conviction.
Kamiya: Aika Tanemaki.

Hibiki: …Thank you. Goodnight.


Kamiya drifted through the door almost ethereally, and I stood back for a moment and just stared.

I… I suddenly felt really insignificant, somehow.

Trying to shake off that feeling, I looked around the room and… Remembered.

There was a trap door in the closet. I’d left it after the investigation and hadn’t looked back since.

...I turned on the closet light and walked inside. Just like the ensuite and the main room, everything was completely clean now. No sign of any blood dripping anywhere. Maeko’s clothes now hung from the same rail as mine.

I got down on my knees and ran a hand along the wall until I hit a ridge. Crouching down lower, I could see the trap door, same as it had been before. Or… Not quite. The light that had shone a bright green before was now off completely.

…Shit.

I tried opening the door, and my suspicions were confirmed. Someone had locked it. I’d… I had missed my chance.

Fuck.
W-Why are you on the floor?

Hibiki: Wh--

I jolted up and spun around to see… Maeko. Of course. Her hair looked damp. Must’ve taken a shower.

Hibiki: What’re you in here for?

Maeko: …Don’t you w-wear pyjamas to bed?

Hibiki: …

Maeko: You know, l-like um… Sleepwea--

Hibiki: Don’t patronise me. I know what pyjamas are.

Maeko: …Oh.

Maeko: So… Y-You do wear pyjamas to bed, then?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Ugh. I’ll make a start on that now.

Maeko: Um… Eheh. S-Sounds good. I’ll get changed in the bathroom.

Hibiki: It’s an ensuite.
Maeko: …Same thing, right?

Hibiki: …Just go.

Maeko: O-Okay.

I watched as Maeko retrieved a folded pile of clothes from one of the shelves and quietly left the closet, closing the door behind her gently. Looking around on the shelves, I ended up finding my own pyjamas and getting changed in something of a frustrated haze, not really sure what to feel or think.

…I’ll sleep it off.

I dumped my daywear on a shelf and went back into the main room, sitting down on my bed. The monitor in the corner of the ceiling flickered to life.

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: The time is now 10pm! Time to get the beauty sleep you all desperately need! Or not. Do what you want. At the end of the day, I can just choose to not look at your sleep-deprived mugs if I gotta!

Monokuma: Nighty night!

...It occurred to me that this was the first time I’d ever listened to that in full. Huh.

I kind of wanted to punch that fucking bear, actually.

…
…Wait, that was an awful idea. What the fuck.

Hibiki: Uuuuggghh…

Maeko: Kioku-san?

Once again, I’d barely even noticed Maeko was in the room. Christ.

I looked vaguely in her direction and sighed, punching the mattress.

Hibiki: Why can’t everyone but me just be absolutely unapologetically shit? Kamiya fucking showed me up.

Maeko: …E-Emotions, huh…

Hibiki: Like you’d know.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: I’m going to bed.


Hibiki: …

I shifted my foot up onto the bed, and winced a little as it hit cool metal.

…Yoshida’s pendant. Right. Kamiya had left that there. The hell made her think I would want it? This was just fucking dumb.
I sighed and stuck it in the drawer on my bedside table. At least now I wouldn’t have to look at it.

Whatever.

I hadn’t slept with covers before, and I sure as hell wasn’t going to start now. My way of doing things was fine. I lay down on top of the sheets and pressed my face into my pillow, and soon enough, I drifted into another night of dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Next update should be in two weeks. Thank you all for reading, I hope you enjoyed, and please feel free to leave a comment - I love receiving them, even if they’re super short, and will try my best to respond to each one!
For the first time since I’d ended up on this ship, I woke up calmly and entirely of my own accord. I was… almost too well-rested, honestly. Even if my sleep hadn’t been that great, I’d probably spent more time unconscious than not in the last day.

I looked over to the monitor, expecting to see it flash on in a few seconds, but… It didn’t. Maeko was still sound asleep on the bed next to mine, too. The light filtering through the curtains had taken on a greener, almost golden hue.

…Huh.

Already wide awake, I got up and changed back into the clothes I’d dumped on the closet floor last night. As I slipped my jacket on, I pulled my e-Handbook out of the pocket I’d left it in and pressed the power button.

The screen showed that it was… only 5:57am. And there was no chance of me getting back to sleep, either. Great.

I decided I was at least going to do something if I couldn’t sleep, so I left Maeko alone in the suite and headed out to the main deck. It seemed like the weirdly coloured light coming into the suite had been because of the sunrise - standing out here now with the top of the dome fully exposed, I could see even from this far underwater how the ocean above me rippled with light. Kind of pretty, I guess, but nothing worth staring at.

At any rate, the pool was always way too cold for comfort, the sauna wasn’t running and the buffet was locked, so there was no point in being here. I went back up the staircase and loitered in the hall for a bit before finally, I ended up wandering around the nonfiction section in the library. By the looks of things, some books had already been taken from the biology, philosophy, law and computer science sections. The areas for modern history and journalism had been cleared out completely, too, but the dust on the shelves made it clear that that wasn’t something anyone here could have done in the day since the library was unlocked. Whoever was running this game, they definitely didn’t want me finding out anything about the outside world.
Eventually, I started to walk over to the fiction section before something caught my eye. Right at the divide between the fiction and nonfiction sides of the library was a door with a sleek plate that had ‘ARCHIVES’ spelt out across its surface. Thinking there might be newspaper articles or something left in there that’d have more information on what was going on in the outside world, I started towards the door, grasping the handle and pushing forward until--

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: Ahoy-ou gozaimorning, my wonderful passengers! It is now 8am! The forecast’s looking fantastic, so get out of bed and go have fun!

Monokuma: Well, that’s for those of you who haven’t been awake for the last two to twenty hours… Geez, you kids and your wacky sleep patterns. Get a grip, you bastards!

Monokuma: I’ll be seeing you all soon! Peace out!

...Missing the breakfast meeting and getting yelled at for it or some shit was not how I wanted to start my morning. Guess I’ll have to investigate this later.

I went to take the handle before remembering what had happened last time I’d closed a suspicious door, and the realisation that I could lose yet another potential advantage came to mind.

...Better leave it ajar, then. I shoved a book in between the door and its frame a little too cautiously, eyeing the room before leaving. It wasn’t until I had gotten to the main deck that anyone else actually showed up.

???: Good morning, Kioku-san!

Hibiki: …?

I turned around to see who had spoken. In front of me was someone who I could only tell was
Maeko because of the missing arm, and… The other girl, I didn’t have a clue.

Hibiki: …Who the fuck are you?

???: [Gasps] Oh, eheh! Sorry, I guess you can’t recognise me because of the new outfit. I’m Kamiya!

Sure enough, I’d barely recognised Kamiya at all. She’d completely changed how she looked overnight. She’d tied her hair up in a loose braid to one side of her head, with her capelet and knee length dress fluttering against her body like petals.

Maeko was also wearing something totally different. Her sleeveless gakuran had been replaced by a thin high necked sweater, the popped collar of her pink and gold jacket now framing her face. The letter upsilon had been embroidered onto one of the lapels. Her karate belt had been tied around one of the belt loops on her pants and was now sticking out below her missing arm.


Kamiya: Oh! Um… Thanks…

Kamiya: [Spacing out] …

Hibiki: …You didn’t sleep much, did you.

Kamiya: [Yawns, smiles sheepishly] Eheh… You got me. I went back to sewing after we talked last night and got a little sidetracked. But it was definitely worth it! It’s kind of sad to make Maeko-san wear that old outfit all the time when she doesn’t even, um… Remember doing karate.

Maeko: [Shrugs, fiddles with lapels] This is more… more comfy a-anything.

Kamiya: I’m glad to hear that! Um… I have to ask though, Kioku-san…
Kamiya: Could you really not recognise me from my face or anything? I mean, I still look the same and all, even if I’m wearing something different…

...Was there a problem with that? Swear to God, the last thing I needed right now was Kamiya being overbearing and getting all up in my business. Better just brush it off.

Hibiki: …Of course I could. I was just making a joke.

Kamiya: Oh, um, right! Sorry.

Kamiya: [Fiddles with braid] I... guess we should probably head over to the buffet? We wouldn’t want to miss the meeting…

Hibiki: Yeah. Okay.

Maeko, Kamiya and I all walked over to the buffet and put together some breakfast. I sat down at my usual booth, and though Kamiya apologetically left to go sit with her teammates, Maeko followed me and slid into the spot that had used to be for… Yoshida.

Yeah. Whatever. I hadn’t exactly invited her, but there were worse people here to get stuck with.

Hanahara: ALRIGHT!

...Case in point.

Hanahara must have taken my advice yesterday, because now she was louder than ever and fucking steaming from the ears. Fantastic.

The bartender stormed up to the front of the room and clapped her hands. Across the room, Aitou dropped a plate and hissed in air through his teeth.
Hanahara: [Hands on hips, stern] Good morning, everyone! We have a lot to get through this morning!

Orutoku: Right!

Orutoku: …That is right, right?

Ryuumsatsu: Right.

Orutoku: [Flashes a thumbs up] RIGHT!

Hanahara: …Right. Anyway, like I was saying!

Hanahara: We have a lot to get through this morning, because SOME PEOPLE have been BREAKING THE RULES.

Orutoku: Ri-- …Wait, what?

Hanahara: Didn’t you hear the morning announcement? Captain Monokuma said at least a couple of people were already awake and out of bed! One of them for TWENTY HOURS!

Kamiya: …Um…

Hanahara: We can’t just let people wander around like that! Not at night! We have to stick to the schedule, and we ALL AGREED that we’d stay in our suites at nighttime!

Kamiya: [Sliding out of her seat] Hanahar--

Hanahara: You all have to get it! This is a KILLING GAME! Someone has already… We’ve already lost two people! And a limb! What if somebody was building a trap or--
Kamiya: [Stands up, clasps necklace] *Hanahara-san!*

Hanahara: [Glaring furiously] *WHAT?*

Kamiya: …

*Kamiya took a step back, looking down at Hanahara with something between pity and caution in her gaze. Hanahara stared back at her for a moment before she seemed to come to her senses, her hunched shoulders sinking to her sides as her eyes widened, something about them almost fearful. She put a now unclenched fist to her forehead quietly as she looked down.*

Hanahara: I… I’m sorry, Kamiya-san. What was it you wanted to say?

Kamiya: …I was the one who was up all night. I was just sewing some new outfits for Maeko-san and myself, and I lost track of the time. I’m sorry for distressing you so much.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: Oh.

*Hanahara gave Kamiya a silent look of apology before pacing back to the middle of the room, and Kamiya sat down again with an understanding smile.*

Hanahara: [Dejected and stormy] Alright, well… I… I guess that isn’t a problem, then.

Orutoku: Um… Monokuma said someone had been up for two hours as well, didn’t he?

Ryuumatsu: He did.

Hanahara: …He did! And anyone could have been up between those times, too!
Hanahara: [Crosses arms] ALRIGHT! WHO WAS IT?

Aitou: Ah, um… I was in the hall briefly at approximately two in the morning, though I don’t believe I am one of the individuals Monokuma mentioned. I was simply walking off some unwanted energy for half an hour or so.

Sumire: In your suit again?

Aitou: …Perhaps.

Yousetsu: You should stop sleeping in that thing… It doesn’t seem comfortable. Wear pyjamas all the time. Just as efficient.

Aitou: I …may consider that, however I feel it is important that I commit myself to professionalism and--

Hanahara: [Grinning passive-aggressively] GREAT! Great. Thank you, Aitou-san. Who ELSE was up?

...Fuck. Guess I was going to have to dig my own grave.

Hibiki: …I woke up early and went to the library.

Hanahara: …


Hanahara: Just… don’t break the rules. It’s not that hard. Anyone who needs to for whatever reason should report to me or Orutoku-san, but I’m not letting this go unmonitored again. I’ll set up a night guard shift if this keeps happening.
Ryuumatsu: That sounds… excessive, but I suppose it can’t be helped if this is what some people have stooped to.

Orutoku: If it’ll help everyone get along, I’m all for it!

Alix: [Raises hand] I second that!!

Hanahara: Great. I’ll discuss this with you if someone breaks the rules again. I want the teams to be able to work together, but… At the very least, I need Team Rho to keep it together, and I’ll take action with or without everyone else if I need to.

**Hanahara looked around the room, and for a moment I could see the same exhaustion behind her eyes that had been there yesterday.**

Hanahara: Good. Anyone have any objections?

Toramoto: I--

Hanahara: I was asking the people who have opinions that actually matter, Toramoto.

Kim: [Smirks] That’s fair.

Toramoto: Heh. If Kim-san says that’s reasonable, then I guess it must be. She would know by now.

Hanahara: …You know what? For the sake of my own sanity I’m not going to ask what that’s supposed to mean. If nobody else has anything to say, then the meeting’s over. Don’t do anything you’ll regret. I’ll be at the bar. Have a good day, everyone.

**Hanahara barely even acknowledged anyone again before turning around and leaving for the bar. A tense silence settled over the room for a moment while people thought over Hanahara’s words.**
Yousetsu: Uh… Can I leave n--

Kurai: Well, THAT was just fucking dumb. Now every serial killer on the block is gonna be after her ass.

Sumire: There aren’t any serial killers here, dude. Take it down a notch.

Kurai: And let my fucking guard down so one of you can off me? Tch. Not fucking likely.

Kurai got up and pushed his plate off of the table, leaving it to break pathetically on the floor. He shoved one hand into his pocket with a sneer and pushed open the door.

Kurai: I’m out. See you all at tomorrow’s daily shitfest.

Alix: [Cheerfully reprimanding] Hey! That was bone china, you ignorant bitch!

Kurai: NOT LIKE YOU’D FUCKING KNOW, YOU BURNT OUT LIGHTBULB!

Kurai flipped Alix off as he left, and Alix smiled sweetly back as if he knew exactly what was happening without even needing to see. Across the room, someone sighed. Aitou grimaced.

Aitou: … Was that bone china?

Alix: [Tents hands] Hmm… Maybe, Aitou-chan! Here’s a more exciting question: how many bouncy balls can I pull out of my sleeves?

Aitou: I would assume, ah… None?

Alix: Heheheh… Just you wait.

At some point between Alix shakily trying to stand up on his seat with four rubber balls in
each hand and Orutoku cleaning up the third shattered plate of the morning, I decided that
going and checking out the archives was a much more urgent and engaging pastime than
watching… whatever chaotic garbage I was bearing witness to now. I gave Maeko a nod
goodbye as I stuck my breakfast plate on the stack and headed for the stairs.

A pang of apprehension weighed on my conscience as I tried my best to coolly push through
the library doors. It… It wouldn’t be locked. It couldn’t be.

I turned a corner, and...

The book was still stuck between the door and the frame, just like I’d left it. Thank fuck.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I kicked the book across the floor and went inside. I had to shuffle
around a bit to find the light switch, but once I did, I was finally met with the contents of the
room. Ceiling-high shelves had been pushed up against the five walls of the hexagonal room
not reserved for the door, but curiously… Four of them were totally bare. Only the one across
from where I stood bore anything at all - rows upon rows of thick files, each one labelled with
a number. Cautious, I walked over and moved to pull the first file from the shelf.

Hibiki: Let’s see here…

???: Hmph. What’s all of this, Kioku-san?

Hibiki: ………

My shoulders shot up to my ears as my breath hitched in my chest.

...Holy shit, I was going to be killed for finding this right here and now, wasn’t I? This wasn’t
how I wanted t--

...
Wait. I’d recognise that cold, bitchy voice anywhere.

Hibiki: …What the fuck do you want, Ryuumatsu.

Ryuumatsu: Oh, nothing much, really. I simply saw you leaving the restaurant and thought I might join you.

**Ryuumatsu walked over to my side, and turned bodily towards the shelf as he scanned his eyes across the files.**

Ryuumatsu: [Frowns condescendingly] Not to mention that you were one of the… offending *individuals* who broke the nighttime rule last night, and you barely even explained what you’d been doing all night. I had no reason not to be concerned enough to follow you. You’re… suspicious.

Hibiki: That’s nice. Now shut up and leave. I’m trying to do something.

Ryuumatsu: Why, I had ought to-- HEY!

**I shoved past Ryuumatsu and pulled out the file I’d been reaching for before. A neat ‘#001’ was printed on its spine, but aside from that, it was bare. Pushing myself between Ryuumatsu and the shelf so he couldn’t reach the other files, I quickly flipped through the pages while he kept talking.**

Ryuumatsu: That could be *important evidence*, you know! It would be infinitely more rational to leave this to the trained professional who has *experience* with these things! I k-know you think you know what you’re doing, but just--

Ryuumatsu: …Wait. Stop flipping through that so fast.

Hibiki: [Slams file closed] You mean like this?

Ryuumatsu: C-Christ, just. Just s-stop being difficult and open the file. Or let me do it, God forbid.

Ryuumatsu: F-Fine! Just open it already!

Peering over at Ryuumatsu mockingly, I stuck my tongue out and flipped backwards through the file at a slower pace. It was only once I started to actually catch sight of what was on the pages that I realised how serious this could be. Clearly, Ryuumatsu had had the same thought.

Ryuumatsu: W-What… What is a-all of this?!

Hibiki: …

I stopped on a page and stared at it for a moment, Ryuumatsu stuttering and murmuring as he did the same.

At the top of the page was… a picture of a murder scene, body and all. An illustration, to be more specific. The rest of the page was filled with text that described every single detail of the set up, playout and aftermath of the case.

…

Ryuumatsu: I-Is this supposed to be a… A guide to murder?

Hibiki: Dunno. Someone would have to be pretty fucking dumb to use this now that two people have seen it.

Ryuumatsu: Th-That’s…

Ryuumatsu: Let me look at the other ones. I need t--

Hibiki: No. Back the fuck off. I found them myself, and I’m going through them myself.
Ryuumatsu: Honestly, what is with your persistence in not letting me do my job? I’m trying to he--

Hibiki: You’re stuck up, excruciatingly opinionated, pathetically incompetent socially, gratingly wordy, WAY too pedantic about things being exactly how you want them to be, and a bitch. There’s your answer. Now shut up.

Ryuumatsu: [Pouting frustratedly] …Fine. No point in arguing with an idiot. I’ll just stand over here then.

I rolled my eyes as Ryuumatsu stuck his nose up in the air and marched over to the corner, where he turned around and started looking dejectedly between me, the files, and the floor. I shoved the first file back onto the shelf and pulled out another one about ten files down, flipping it open to a random page. This time, there was still an image of a murder scene, but… it was a real life photo.

Ryuumatsu: [Peering over nose, wide-eyed] …Oh my God. Is that one real?

Hibiki: None of your business. Zip it.

Ryuumatsu: Hmph.

Ryuumatsu: …

Hibiki: …

Ryuumatsu: …I wonder why there’s a switch from illustrations to photographs. When exactly in these files does the switch occur? Is that a permanent change? Was that a change of necessity, or preference? How could this even be necessary at all? Are these real murders? Why have I not heard of them? Why forty-eight of these?!

Hibiki: Forty-eight…
Ryuumatsu: Yes! That’s h-how many f--

Hibiki: How many files there are. #001 to #048. I got it. You’re starting to sound like Rouvin.

I swatted Ryuumatsu’s hand away from the shelf as I pulled out a different file further along the shelf. God, this guy was impossible to keep quiet.

Though… I could probably make him talk about literally anything else so he would at least stop bothering me about this.

Hibiki: …If you like the sound of your own voice so much that you can’t shut the fuck up, talk about something else instead.

Ryuumatsu: [Raises eyebrow] …Such as what…?


Ryuumatsu winced at the mention of home life and then again when his choice of outfit came up. He massaged the side of his forehead for a moment before running a hand along his bangs and sighing.

Ryuumatsu: …I suppose I c-could talk about that first one, if you insist.

Ryuumatsu: Outside of this… mildly undesirable prison I seem to be stuck in with the likes of you, I’m a respected and relatively well renowned professional who is actually taken seriously because I know how to do my job. I’ve been taking a law degree alongside my high school education on a specialised course for the last few years, and am the youngest recognised attorney in the country.

Hibiki: It baffles me that you managed to do all of that when you can’t go one sentence without tripping over yourself.

Ryuumatsu: …
Ryuumatsu: Th-Things are different at… at home.

Ryuumatsu paused for a moment as though troubled by something before promptly clearing his throat, averting eye contact and sticking his nose back up in the air.

Ryuumatsu: *Anyway*, the p-point is that I’m a lot more adept than you seem to ever be willing to give me credit for. I actually spend quite a bit of time working with some of the most famous attorneys in the country, I’ll have you know.

Hibiki: And who are those.

Ryuumatsu: My, um…

Ryuumatsu: *[Furrows brow]* M-My mother and father. They are very successful people who have very high expectations of me, so of course I meet every single one.

Hibiki: *[Flipping through file dismissively]* Wow. That’s cute.

Ryuumatsu: C-Comments like *that* are why I didn’t tell you all of this in the first place. I d-don’t… It’s simply…

Ryuumatsu: …It’s not s-something I want to speak of with you.

Hibiki: *[Absently grabbing another file]* …

Ryuumatsu: Wh… A-Are you even *listening*!?

Hibiki: …You actually want me to be?

Ryuumatsu: I-- Y-You-- YES!!! You’re the one who asked me to say any of this in the first place! It’s only polite to pay attention to someone when you ask them to divulge personal information to you, and I should have you know that most people would consider any opportunity to so much as
glance in my general direction and breathe the same oxygen I do a privilege!

Hibiki: They must have low standards then.

Ryuumatsu: [Tensely] They don’t……

Ryuumatsu: T-They don’t have low standards. I just… Meet their high ones. No matter what it takes.

Hibiki: …Is that meant to imply that you’re secretly living a double life wherein your secret persona goes out in the dead of night and assassinates rivals to your fame so that you can win more cash?

Ryuumatsu: Wh-- NO! Can you PLEASE just take this SERIOUSLY!??

Hibiki: Nah. Fucking with you is more fun.

Ryuumatsu: Rrrgh…

Scowling, Ryuumatsu looked over to the bookshelf as if he were about to pull a file off just to annoy me, but then seemed to… reconsider. The hand he’d lifted dropped as his twisted frown dulled into a thoughtful and concerned gaze.

Ryuumatsu: …

Ryuumatsu: Gh… Kioku-san.

Hibiki: What. You gonna ask me to apologise now that you’re more cool headed and can be all high and mighty about yourself?

Ryuumatsu: O-Of course not. I’m neither dumb nor desperate enough to bother trying that with you.
Ryuumatsu: [Frowning, twirling hair with finger] I, um. I wanted to ask you about, uh… Y-You know. How you realised y-you were…

Hibiki: …A boss ass bitch? Smarter than you in every way? God?

Ryuumatsu: …I can’t even tell w-whether or not you were joking about that last one, given how highly you seem to think of yourself.

Ryuumatsu looked me over for a moment, cringing. He cautiously eyed me before sighing heavily.

Ryuumatsu: Y… You know what? Never mind. It wasn’t even important. I’ll just g--

Hibiki: Are you kidding me?

God dammit.

Normally I would’ve just dismissed this and left Ryuumatsu to storm off so I could gloat to myself about getting him all flustered, but… Something about this was just pathetic. And as much as I hated to admit it, I could feel that same heavy feeling that I could only regretfully call guilt rising in my stomach.

…I cannot believe that I’m doing this.

Hibiki: If you have a serious question, just fucking ask it. Don’t waste my time being vague and irritating.

Ryuumatsu: …Ok.

Ryuumatsu: Kioku-san, uh. H-How’d you realise you weren’t, um… Ugh. Let me reword this.

Ryuumatsu: You… You aren’t male or female, right? That’s how all of this works?
Hibiki: Yeah. Also, this had better not be for some fucking joke, dude.

Ryuumatsu: I-It’s not! I have more self awareness and r-respect than that! I was just curious.

Ryuumatsu: …

Ryuumatsu: [Frowning at floor] …How did you realise that? I mean, uh… how did you deal with the fact that y-you weren’t the same gender you thought you were before?

Hibiki: …

...

**Having any long term memories sure would be fucking useful right about now. Dear lord. Though… I guess I kind of knew the answer anyway.**

I turned my back to the bookshelf and leaned against it with a shrug. Best to play this casually, or something like that.

Hibiki: I dunno. Just fit right, so I went with it.

Ryuumatsu: …That’s it? There’s no easy trick to it?

Hibiki: No shit. Like, I don’t even fucking think about it unless people make stupid and obnoxious ‘Oh, what’s between your legs’ comments, and then I tell them that they should probably escort themselves to a fuckin’ prison for even thinking about that. People will do what they do best and be embarrassingly self-important assholes who think they can dictate my goddamn life, and I’ll be over here not caring in the slightest because I’m the one with an IQ more than half my age.

Ryuumatsu: …That’s… Hm.
Ryuumatsu gave me a tentatively non-spiteful eyebrow raise and nod, apparently still not willing to actually smile at me, and I turned back to the shelf to keep looking through the files.

Guess that was convincing enough. Thank fuck.

Just as I went to pull another file from the shelf, a loud crackle filled the room from outside.

Monokuma: Helloooooo! Your captain has a special announcement to make, lovely passengers!

Monokuma: You - yes, you - have all been invited to come receive a once-in-a-lifetime boon from me personally! Attendance isn’t mandatory, but I sure as hell wouldn’t want to miss out on this if I were one of you suckers!

Monokuma: Anyone who isn’t a loser, I’ll see you at the computer lab in five minutes!

The archives fell back into silence as the speakers outside clicked off. Ryuumatsu went back to fiddling with his hair again, looking over at the door with concern.

Ryuumatsu: Could this be another m--

Hibiki: It’s another motive.

Ryuumatsu: [Unamusedly] ...I thought so too.

Ryuumatsu: Well, I s-suppose it’s part of my duty to attend. Hard to say whether Orutoku-san would survive without me, to be honest.

Hibiki: You’re giving yourself way too much credit. Not that Orutoku isn’t an idiot. Just that you are too.

Ryuumatsu: Wh-- You-- HEY!
Hibiki: Heh heh heh… Okay, I gotta get to this fucking meeting. Leave.

Ryuumatsu: Nnrgh… F-Fine. I wouldn’t w-want to condemn myself to walking with someone like you anyway.

Hibiki: You say that as though you’re even worth my time.

Ryuumatsu: Y-You say that as though your time is worth a-anything at all!

Hibiki: So you’re worth less than nothing?

Ryuumatsu: …You are an u-unlovable human being.

Hibiki: That’s rich, coming from you.

Ryuumatsu: [Struggling to stay composed] ……..

Ryuumatsu: [Sighs] …You know what? I-I’ll be going now. I have things to d-do that don’t i-involve… This. Farewell. Actually, fare less than well. Fare horrendously.

Hibiki: Merry go fuck yourself to you too!

Ryuumatsu sneered and turned his chin up once again as he swiveled around, opened the door and made his way out. I rolled my eyes, taking one last glance at the shelf of files before leaving, closing the door, and starting to head over to the other side of the library.

By the time I opened the computer lab door, at least four minutes had to have passed since the announcement. A few people were already present - Hanahara had unsurprisingly chosen to turn up, as had Orutoku and, of course, Ryuumatsu. All three of them were having a quiet conversation about what I could only imagine was the most mundane shit on the planet while the others all stood in their own group to the side, Hashikawa hiding as much of herself
behind Sumire as she could while the two spoke to a very on edge Aitou and an overly cheerful Alix.

It didn’t take much thinking to realise that interacting with either of these groups would probably be the emotional equivalent of sawing my toes off with a rusty knife, so I ended up leaning against a wall and staring at the room in silence. The light of one of the screens in the closest row glared back at me. Guess someone had already turned it on for some reason. The laptop that I could swear had been sitting next to it the day before was gone now, too… Someone must have taken it to use somewhere else. Probably for the best - staring at a bright screen in a dark room like this for hours on end seemed needlessly migraine-inducing, to say the least.

It wasn’t until a few minutes later that the door opened again and Maeko walked in with Rouvin right behind her, Kamiya following a few seconds later. The fashion designer looked around the room before spotting me and waving.

…I don’t like I had anyone better to talk to. I walked over to the trio and gave them a small nod. Rouvin perked up in response.

Rouvin: Oh. Good morning, Kioku. Maeko and I were just discussing the logistics of individual identity and its factors.

Hibiki: Sounds existential.

Rouvin: It’s really quite intriguing. Remind me to tell you about it sometime.

Hibiki: I might.

Kamiya: Ah, count me in too! That sounds fascinating.

Rouvin: [Taps chin] You take an interest in philosophy, Kamiya? Or is this intrigue exclusive to that topic in particular?

Kamiya: Eh, more the second one. Mostly I just like spending time with all of you, though. It’s
nice having some people I can call friends in the middle of all of this.

Rouvin: Oh, of course… Maintaining human interaction during stressful times is, I imagine, integral to the upkeep of emotional and mental wellbeing. Though I suppose Kioku would be much more educated on that topic than myself.

Rouvin: Moving onto our current situation, though… It has been far longer than five minutes since Captain Monokuma’s announcement, has it not?

Kamiya: [Yawns] Mm… It does seem like it…

Hibiki: Yeah. You guys should have been late.

Rouvin: Well… Yes, I suppose I was not all that concerned about being precise in the time of my arrival. As much as I appreciate the more informative parts of the captain’s conversations with us, I do believe that said informative parts are somewhat few and far between whenever he first arrives.

Maeko: …He rambles lots.

Hibiki: Fuck dude, he sure does. Bitch had better show up soon.

???: I’M HEEEEERE!!!!

There was a loud creak from the other side of the room, and I looked over to see Monokuma flying out of the floor, a panel of it spinning quickly from where he’d flung himself. The robot landed on the desk and saluted.

Monokuma: AHoy, wonderful passengers! It’s great to see you all again!

Alix: Wish I could say the same!

Orutoku: [Points] CAPTAIN MONOKUMA! You finally show your dastardly face!!!
Ryumatsu: It took you long enough. A quarter of an hour, to be precise.

Monokuma: Sorry, sorry! Technical difficulties. But anyway, wouldn’t it be more exciting to hear about the big surprise I organised for you guys?

Hanahara: Definitely not if this is going to be anything like the last one.

Monokuma: Aww, you really don’t even appreciate all the effort I go to for your sake? This sucks…

Hanahara: For our sake?! This is just another motive! You’re just trying to kill more of us!

Monokuma: Whatever I’m trying to do is my business. More importantly, you kids wouldn’t have come if you didn’t want to see some hot new twists, and yet here all but four of you are! Got an excuse?

Hanahara: I came because I don’t want ANYONE to get involved! Nobody is going to see this motive. I’m not going to have more people dying!

Monokuma: Upupu… You think you can just make everyone leave? That’s cute.

Hanahara: CUTE?! I’m trying to prevent a murder here! I’m sure everybody else understands! Nobody wants this!

**Hanahara turned around to face the group, looking between each person in front of her with something manic burning in her eyes.**

Hanahara: Don’t fall for his-- his bullshit! We should just ignore the motives completely! Last time we got one, two of our friends ended up DEAD! We can’t let this keep happening!!

Hanahara: You all agree, right? Orutoku-san?
Orutoku: Of course I don’t want any of my friends to die!

Hanahara: THANK YOU! So--

Orutoku: But, um…

Hanahara: [Glaring] …But what?

Orutoku: I’d, uh… Have to check with Ryuumatsu-san…

**Orutoku nervously looked over to Ryuumatsu, who looked down at his nails nonchalantly and crossed his arms.**

Ryuumatsu: …I say we stay for the motive.

Hanahara: What?!

Ryuumatsu: At the very least, I’m not moving an inch. Turning down free information about all of this would be foolish.

Aitou: My apologies, but, ah… If there’s any chance this could provide information about the world outside like Ryuumatsu’s implying, I’d… I would like to remain here as well.

Aitou: [Looks down solemnly] It’s selfish, but… I cannot simply resign myself to living out the rest of my life here.

Hanahara: Are you guys serious right now? You know what happened last time! You seriously don’t care if this could… If I… Rrrgh…

Maeko: H-Hey--
Hanahara: MAEKO! You get what I’m saying, right? Uroko-san would have agreed with me! This is reckless! We should just ignore Monokuma and go!

Maeko: …

Maeko: Um… I-I’m sorry. I don’t know what I…

Maeko looked around the room warily, her frown sad and confused as she took in the expressions of everyone around her. She grabbed at her missing arm as she hesitantly continued.

Maeko: …I don’t even know who Uroko is. Or… Or was. I-I’m sorry for letting you down.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: I see.

Hanahara’s voice dropped to something low and grim, and Maeko recoiled. The bartender surveyed the room with a cold glare.

Hanahara: …Fine. I’ll see you all again when you decide to take this seriously. I’m not going to stick around just to let some robot play these fucking mind games with me.

Alix: Hanahara-chan--

Hanahara: Bye.

Hanahara stormed off towards the door and flung it open, only for her cheeks to turn even redder as she came face to face with Kurai.

Hanahara: OH, GREAT! WHAT ARE YOU HERE FOR? GOING TO THROW ANOTHER FUCKING PLATE AT ME?!
Kurai: W--

Hanahara: WELL NOT TODAY! SEE. YOU. LATER.

Fuming from the ears, Hanahara shoved Kurai into the computer lab and slammed the door behind her. Alix murmured under his breath while Kurai tried to regain his balance, everyone else staring on in shock.

Alix: …Hanahara-san…

Kurai: [Mimicking Hanahara] “Going to throw another plate at me?” Christ, this is the second fucking time today. Is she alright?

Sumire: You actually care?

Kurai: It would be nice if my life didn’t revolve around waiting to be goddamn screeched at on a daily basis, so yeah, I do care. This fucking sucks.

Ryuumatsu: You’re not the only one affected by all of this, you kn--

Monokuma: Can you guys just CAN IT? You all came here to hear my beautiful voice, and here we are ten minutes later and I’ve barely gotten a word in! You’re all drama machines!

Ryuumatsu: Get on with it, then. It’s already past lunchtime.

Monokuma: Your priorities astound and disgust me, Devil Advocate. But anyway, that’s enough of that! Time for the main event!

Ignoring Ryuumatsu’s incredulous stuttering, Monokuma leapt up onto one of the computer lab’s desks and flourished his paws.
Monokuma: Ladies, gentlemen and Know-It-All! It is with great honour that I present to you today something beyond the capacities of your young, innocent minds…

Alix: Taxes?!

Orutoku: Illegal contraband?!

Hashikawa: A-A brainwashing video that shows us exactly how and when each and every one of us will die and then makes us fulfil the horrible things we’re shown on the screen?

Monokuma: …Geez, you really are a nervous wreck, Nervous Wreck. Even *I’m* not messed up enough to think of that!

Monokuma: But no. Actually, this is much, *much* more terrifying.

Monokuma chuckled as hid his mouth behind his paw. The air became tense with anticipation, eyes darting between faces, hands shuffling through pockets, feet tapping quietly racing pulses on the floor.

The robot leaned forward. His red eye gleamed, sinister and sharp.

Monokuma: …Internet access.

Kurai: Wh… Wait, what the fuck?

Monokuma: You heard me! Every single computer on this ship has wi-fi! The real deal! Safe search is off by default, by the way.

Kurai: …Christ.

Sumire: I imagine this isn’t just going to be a free for all. You’ve restricted some content, haven’t you.
Monokuma: You’re sharp, Mad Scientist! I did my best to set up a few firewalls and other wacky computer magic. You can’t send any messages or emails, and some things might be… censored. It’s all for a good cause, though! Adds an element of suspense to all the dry journalism I’m sure you guys will be picking through.

???: This… sounds kind of dumb.

Monokuma: Wh-- HEY! Astro Girl! You’re late!

I looked over to see that Yousetsu had just entered the room, a tired but stern and skeptical frown plastered across her face. She let the door swing shut behind her.

Yousetsu: I mean… Those kinds of precautions aren’t foolproof, so… Something could slip through really easily. You do know that, right?

Monokuma: O-Of course I know that!!! I’m a computer whiz!

Maeko: B-Because you’re literally a computer?

Monokuma: I’M A BEAR!!! Cripes, you kids are cold!

Monokuma: Here’s a great idea for you! If you doubt me so much, why not give it a spin? I know you want those express delivery endgame spoilers!

As soon as Monokuma finished talking, there was a dull gasp from across the room. Kurai looked at Monokuma as his face turned dark.

Kurai: Endgame spo… HEY, WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

Monokuma: Upupupu! Why not find out, Temper Tantrum? Don’t keep me waiting!
Kurai: I’m not touching SHIT if YOU’VE tampered with it. Fuck you.

Monokuma: Fi--

Kurai: Fuuuck youuuu.

Monokuma: F--

Kurai: FUCK YOU!!!

Monokuma: $HHHHHHHHHT UP!$ Fine! If you won’t do it, I can just choose literally anybody else in the room!

Monokuma: [Taps chin] Hmmm… Know-It-All! You haven’t said a word this whole time!

Hibiki: I’ve been trying to block out the bullshit you’ve been spewing at every given moment since you showed up. It’s a meditative thing.

Monokuma: Yeesh… Do you really not want to give it a go?

Hibiki: Never said that.

Monokuma: Fantabulastic!! Then step right up!

...Guess this was happening, then. Taking my hands out of my pockets, I stepped over to a computer and hastily wiped the dust off of the keyboard with a sleeve. Some people followed me over and crowded around the desk.

I looked up at the screen, the search bar already blinking back at me, and tried to figure out what the best thing to search would be.
Monokuma: What’s the holdup, Know-It-All? Search something!

...Uh. Literally any memory of the outside world would be a great place to start, but apparently that wasn’t going to be an option.

Sighing, I typed out ‘recent news’ into the search bar and slammed the enter key. The connection was frustratingly slow, but it eventually managed to load some results. I clicked on the first news site that showed up on the screen and waited for it to load again.

The page finally started to load, and then... Stopped. Looking in the corner of the screen, I could see that the connection had gone out completely.
Hibiki: Hooooly fucking shit.

Kamiya: Huh?

Hashikawa: [Grimacing] Is that... supposed to happen?
Alix: Is *what* supposed to happen?

Aitou: …The internet connection just cut out.

Monokuma: What’s that?

Sumire: The internet connection. Cut out. What part of that sentence don’t you get?

Monokuma: Eeeeeeh???

Sumire: Your motive is *broken*, Monokuma.

Monokuma: [Sweating] ……

Monokuma: …Upupu! That was supposed to happen! You just got bamboozled!

Monokuma: ………

Monokuma: …*I’ll be right back.*

Monokuma waddled over to the corner with a nervous smile on his face before disappearing into the floor. Rolling my eyes, I looked back to the computer’s screen. Only a few headlines had managed to show up before the wi-fi had cut out completely, but what had loaded was enough to stop me dead in my tracks.

‘[REDACTED] Daichi Yoshida and [REDACTED] Others Missing After’-

…The page stopped there.

Apparently the others had noticed, too. Aitou was reading the title to Alix under his breath,
Hashikawa muttering while the rest stared on quietly.

Maeko: Yoshida-san… That w-was the name of the, uh… That’s the guy from the trial?

Hibiki: …

Sumire: …Yeah. That’s him.

Kurai: Why’s it just say HE’S missing?! All of us are too! He isn’t fucking special!

Rouvin: I suppose there might have been something particularly notable about him or his circumstances. Though of course, that’s simply a theory.

Kurai: He was the Ultimate LUCK! What’s notable about that?!

Sumire: Chill, dude. This is a touchy subject for some people.

Kurai: Yeah, right. I don’t think cold, bitter and detached over there gave two shits about the guy, and I know for a fucking fact nobody else did. The guy was a fuckin’ recluse.

Hibiki: …

Kamiya: …Hey, Kurai-san?

Kurai: What.

Kamiya: Um, if you don’t mind… Could you shut up?

Kurai: ……Fine.

Orutoku: Hey, I have a question that doesn’t involve people being mad at each other and fighting! Do you guys think Monokuma meant for the connection to drop out like that?

Maeko: W-Why would he want that?

Alix: Ooooh, maybe! There could be deception afoot! Or maybe the internet is cursed!

Orutoku: Is a ghost going to start using the keyboard? That would be cool!

Yousetsu: I think it’s probably more likely that it just… broke. Connection can’t be that good underwater… Or in a big electronic dome meant to simulate an underwater environment. Whatever this is.

Kamiya: [Yawns] You’re probably right, Yousetsu-san…

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Kamiya frown as she looked back to the screen again. She put a hand on my shoulder delicately as she continued.

Kamiya: I hate to bring it up again, but… That headline at least gives us some information, doesn’t it?

Ryuumatsu: First of all, by virtue of its existence we can conclude th--

Sumire: [Forcefully speaking over Ryuumatsu] How so, Kamiya-san?

Kamiya: Well, ah… The fact that it even exists means that society is stable enough for the news to keep going! And this seems recent, too, so… I guess we all probably woke up pretty soon after getting here.

Yousetsu: Right… This does at least mean we weren’t in some kind of automated cryopreservation
system for fifty years.

Hashikawa: Cryo… what?

Sumire: It’s technology that basically allows the subject to hibernate without aging for an extended period of time by lowering the temperature of their body.

Hashikawa: [Pulls down hat awkwardly] Aah, so it’s like that… I understand everything now!

Yousetsu: Are you su--

Hashikawa: Y-YEP! No doubt about it, haha! Moving on!

Sumire: [Pats Hashikawa’s back] All good, Tsuruko-san. At any rate, this is, uh…

Orutoku: Reassuring?

Sumire: …Sure.

Aitou: [Sighs] *Extremely.*

Kamiya: Are you alright, Aitou-san? You sounded kind of upset just then, if you don’t mind me saying so… Do you have a girlfriend you’re missing?

Aitou: [Flushes red, coughs] I, um. No. I was never interested.

Kamiya: In relationships?

Aitou: ...In w-women.
Kamiya: Oh my gosh, I’m sorry for assuming! I had no idea.

Aitou: [Wheezes] I-It’s fine.

Monokuma: I’M BACK!!!

Aitou: AUGH!

Monokuma jumped up out of the floorboards again, patting Aitou on the leg as in some mediocre attempt to help him with the coughing fit he’d just spiralled into. The robot shuffled through the crowd and jumped up onto the desk.

Monokuma: Aaaaalrighty! So! It looks like you’re not getting wi-fi. Sorry, kids. You’ll have to get out of here alive if you want to illegally download anime.

Kurai: That cuts my fucking salary, you know. Why can’t people just buy the goddamn box sets?

Monokuma: I dunno, I’m just a bear! Probably capitalism or something. But you seem to spend all your money on edgy street fashion anyway, so it’s kind of for the best, don’tcha think?

Kurai: Fuck off.

Monokuma: Awww, I thought you’d say that. We know each other so well…

Kurai: …You’re gross.

Monokuma: Fine, fine! Anyway, the connection is busted, and I can’t exactly pull another motive out of thin air.

Yousetsu: Why not?
Monokuma: These things have to be ORGANISED, Astro Girl. Like any fine art, there’s a process to motive making, and it’s not something you can just rush if you want perfection.

Ryuumatsu: So this means there’s no motive, then?

Monokuma: Sure does! Bummer, I know. Though it at least seems like you got a bit out of this!

Monokuma: [Points at screen] An article about Calico? I’d say that’s a smashing motive right there! Absolutely on the ball!

Hibiki: …Uh huh.

Monokuma: You don’t like my puns? I thought I was on a roll.

Alix: Hey. These aren’t funny. You’re just being mean.

Monokuma: No need to get catty! I’ll be on my way.

Monokuma: [Salutes] See ya later, kiddos!

Monokuma plunged off of the desk and into the floor once again. I slammed my face down onto the keyboard and covered my head with my arms.

…God. This was just… exhausting. Why did I feel so fucking drained every time Yoshida came up? I had no reason to care about him. I shouldn’t care about him. So what the fuck was the problem? Why did I keep…

Keep……

Hibiki: AAARGH!!!!!
Kamiya: Kioku-san?

Hibiki: This is so fucking dumb!

Kurai: What’s your problem?

Hibiki: NONE OF YOUR FUCKING BUSINESS, ASSHAT!!!

Kurai: …

Yousetsu: Wow.

Kamiya: Kioku-san, are you alright? Can I help? Do you want anything?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: This is the fucking pits.

Ryuumatsu: How professional of you. You do have a teammate now, you know. Have you considered that you should possibly try to set a good example for her sake?

Maeko: I-It’s okay--

Hibiki: III dooooon’t caaaaaaare.

I stood up hazily, and everyone took a step back. Kamiya brought a hand around my shoulder as I turned around and started to make my way to the door. I let her leave it that way.

Hibiki: Fucking… Bye.
Kamiya: Um, bye everyone!

Alix: Feel better soon! Au revoir!

Hibiki: Don’t tell me what to do.

Maeko: …

I stormed outside, Kamiya fluttering around behind me, and flung myself into a beanbag in the reading area. This was so fucking dumb. I thought this would be over after how shit I felt yesterday, but all the frustration and whatever the fuck else this was were refusing to let up. I felt sick to my stomach, my head was pounding, my chest felt like it was going to boil up and fucking melt…

This wasn’t fucking *fair*.

I rolled over onto my back and hung my head onto my knees. A weight settled next to me. A hand found its place on my back.

Kamiya: …You remember what I told you last night, right? You can talk to me if you need to.

Hibiki: I don’t need to. I only need myself.

Hibiki: …

Kamiya: …You sound more like you’re just saying that for the sake of saying it than because it means anything to you.

Hibiki: [Muttering] …Everything’s wrong…
Kamiya: You’re allowed to be upset, you know.

Hibiki: Why the fuck would I be upset?

Kamiya: Well… Yoshida-san was your friend, wasn’t he? You two seemed close.

Hibiki: Fucking maybe, but like…


Kamiya: …Don’t push yourself, Kioku-san.

Hibiki: You think I don’t know what I’m doing?

Kamiya: …

Kamiya: I’m sure you’ll figure it out.

Hibiki: The way I do things now is perfectly fucking fine, actually, and it’s none of your business. There’s nothing to figure out.

Kamiya: [Brow furrowed; looking away] …Mm.

Kamiya: Um, never mind that, then. I’m just tired, I think.

Hibiki: No shit. That’s what happens when you neglect sleeping completely like that. Kind of just follows as, like, the fucking logical conclusion.

Kamiya: Ahah, yeah. You’re right.
I looked around the room blankly for a moment, and then saw a pair of boots coming to a rest near my head. Looking up, I could see that Maeko had just walked over. She played with the edge of her jacket absently for a moment.

Kamiya: [Tilts head] Oh, hi Maeko-san!

Maeko: Hi… Want to go g-get lunch?

Hibiki: Yeah. Sure.

Kamiya: [Smiles sleepily] That sounds great! You guys lead the way.

Hibiki: I’ll do what I want.

Kamiya: Eheh. Of course.

Maeko: [Thumbs up] …

I dragged myself up off of the beanbag and stepped away as Kamiya did the same. A few of the others seemed to have drifted over to the bookshelves… Guess the meeting was long over, then. I found my bearings and headed over to the stairwell, taking two stairs at a time down to the main deck as Maeko and Kamiya followed behind me.

Kamiya: [Yawns] So, what are you thinking of having f--

There was a small crash behind me and then a loud one. I braced myself on instinct.

Kamiya: AAAAAAAGH!!!

Hibiki: WH--
I spun around to see Kamiya starting to tumble down the stairs, Maeko catching her with her one arm at the last minute. I pushed a hand up against her back so she wouldn’t fall.

Kamiya: SORRY! Sorry! Oh my gosh!

Hibiki: Are you… What the fuck was that? I thought you were goddamn dying or something!

Kamiya: Are you alright, you two? Did you get hurt?

Hibiki: Wh-- No. I’m fine.

Maeko: …Same.

Kamiya: That’s a relief! I’m sorry, I’m so tired I must have just tri--

???: Pfft-- AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!

Hysterical laughter suddenly erupted from up the staircase. Kamiya found her footing and turned to face the source as they came down the stairs, a regretful grimace weighing down her features.

Kurai: [Pointing, crying with laughter] AHAHAHAHA! OH MY GOD!

Maeko: …

Kamiya: …Oh dear.

Kurai: That was fucking PRICELESS!!! Talk about fucking karma! Who’s telling me to shut up now!? You were all like-

Kurai: [Mimicking Kamiya’s voice, swooning] AAAAAAAAUGH!!! Oh, Maeko-sama, save
meeee! AHAHA!!

Hibiki: *Christ.*

Kamiya: You should probably stop screaming, someone will think you’re--

Kurai: That I’m *killing you?* That’d be dumb. I know how this fucking game works!

Kamiya: What’s that mean…?

Kurai: …You saw Yoshida.

Hibiki: Don’t fucking bring that up.


Hibiki: Ha ha ha. You crack me up. *Leave.*

Kurai: Maybe I will!

Hibiki: Great! Then fucking go!

Kurai: You’d like that, huh?

Hibiki: You have no idea.

Kurai: Oh, don’t I?

Hibiki: Clearly, because you’re still fucking here and I swear to God if I can still see your face in ten
seconds I’m going to snap your neck.

Kurai: …

Kurai: You wouldn’t.

Hibiki: Don’t test my patience.

Kurai: Oh, what are you gonna do, fucking walk up to me while someone is standing right there and-


Kurai: Y-You wouldn’t.

Kamiya: Kioku-san, uh--

Hibiki: Seven. Six. Five.

Kurai: …

Hibiki: *Four. Three. Two.*

Kurai: ALRIGHT! I’M LEAVING!!!

Hibiki: Sounds about right.

I returned the middle finger Kurai waved at me as he walked back up the stairs and rolled my eyes. Kamiya sighed as she looked towards the main deck’s doorway.
Kamiya: It’s a shame Kurai-san is so…

Hibiki: Intolerable? Horribly immature? Hypocritical?

Kamiya: [Smiles] …Callous and defensive were the words I thought of, but those things too.

Hibiki: Yeah, well. The dude’s just a petty bitch.

Kamiya: Eheh… Does seem that way.

Maeko: …Yeah.

Maeko, Kamiya and I arrived at the buffet not long after that, and I ate mostly in silence as Maeko looked over the room quietly and Kamiya occasionally made small talk. It was nice having something to listen to other than my own thoughts and the sound of shifting water for once, admittedly. Something about it was just… Relaxing.

Soon enough, Kamiya said her goodbyes and headed off. I ended up watching movies in the Upsilon suite with Maeko for a few hours, making snarky commentary the whole time while she watched on placidly. It was around 9pm by the time I decided to head back down to the main deck.

I stepped out of the stairwell and looked around, only to be faced with… Oh, God.

Hibiki: Alix, what are y--

Alix: SHHHHHH!!! They’ll hear you!

Hibiki: [Whispering] You’re being louder than I am, dipshit. Who the fuck are you talking about?

Alix: [Pointing at the floor] Up there.
Hibiki: …Those are the fucking floorboards. Who the hell left you alone? This is such a bad idea.

Alix: Fuhuhu. I know what I’m doing.

Alix: [Beckoning with his sleeves] Seriously, though, they’re on the back deck. Can’t you hear them?

Hibiki: ………

I frowned, then creased my eyes shut in concentration. If I focused, I could hear… something. It just sounded like voices.

Hibiki: …Wow. People? Conversing? That’s new. Almost reminds me of what we are literally doing right fucking now.

Alix: You love talking to me and you know it. But for real, you gotta help me out here. Kim-chan’s up there.

Hibiki: …So what.

Alix: Duh! She’s my friend! And as her friend, it’s my duty to--

Hibiki: Spy on her while she’s talking to people who aren’t you?

Alix: No need to put it like that! I’ve barely seen her for two days, dude. I just wanna know what she’s up to. Also, friends are supposed to be nosy about their friends’ love lives.

Hibiki: L… Love lives?

Alix: Nyehhehehe… You telling me you haven’t caught on? Come onnnnn.
The sound of laughter echoed from the back deck. Even if I couldn’t hear what was being said, I could definitely tell who it was saying it now.

Hibiki: …She’s with fucking Toramoto? And you want to snoop on them? Do you have a death wish?

Alix: Wellll… You wanna hear what I think?

Hibiki: No--

Alix: Toramoto-chan seems like he’s aaaaall bark and absolutely no bite.

Hibiki: He literally has razor sharp teeth. The guy looks like a carnivore.

Alix: Shit, does he? That’s priceless. Maybe I should ask him if I can feel his face sometime.

Hibiki: Your funeral. Also, you didn’t answer my question earlier. Why the hell are you alone? You’re going to get yourself killed.

Alix: Ah, have ye no faith? Pitiful.

Hibiki: …

Alix: …I didn’t wanna ask Aitou-chan to come with me because he’s tired today and more respectful of people’s privacy than I am, I didn’t wanna ask Hanahara-chan because she’s been in a bad mood all day and would probably tell me off, I couldn’t ask Kim-chan to come with me because she’s the one I’m spying on, and I didn’t have anyone else I could easily find and get to partake in such a critical mission.

Hibiki: …Right.
Alix: Right! So…

Alix: [Grins] Wanna sneak up the stairs and see how close we can get before we get ghostbusted?

Hibiki: You’re an idiot.

Alix: And what does that make you if you think that's how to answer a question? It's a yes or no answer.

Hibiki: …I can’t believe I’m doing this.

Alix: Yessssssss.

I looked up the stairs skeptically and sighed in defeat. Alix snatching one of my hands in his own, I slowly started to creep my way up the stairs. I couldn’t see much other than a bunch of crates and golf gear just by poking my head over the last step, but one of Kim’s sneakers peeked out from behind it, at least. It seemed like they were sitting down together or something.

Alix: [Whispering] What can you see?

Hibiki: [Hissing] Jack shit. What can you hear?

Alix: [Whispering] I can hear you talking way too loud! Keep it down!

Hibiki: [Lets go of Alix] …


Hibiki: …
Alix: [Whispering] And I can’t hear you either? Wow. You got me.

Hibiki: …

Alix: [Bites lip] …P-Please don’t leave me alone.


Alix: H-Heheh. Funny prank, dude. Cracked me up. Can we keep going now?

Hibiki: …

I shifted onto my knees and dragged Alix over to the crates, putting my back up against the last one in the pile and bringing my knees to my chest. I still couldn’t see Kim or Toramoto, but I could hear them loud and clear. The two were bantering with each other in a way that made every sentence sound like an innuendo.

Kim: [Chuckles] Wow, Tiger. So tell me, what happened then?

Toramoto: After the police call or after the molotov cocktail shattered on the back wall?

Kim: Whichever one is more exciting.

Toramoto: [Teasingly] Isn’t every word I say to you excitin’, princess?

Kim: Pfft. You got me. I’m on the edge of my seat.

Toramoto: Wouldn’t have it any other way.

Kim: Of course.

Toramoto: Should I get more?

Kim: Nah, I can do it.

Kim: …Besides, there’s something I’ve been meaning to check on for a few minutes.

Toramoto: Heh heh. We’ve both been hearin’ it, then? Guess they ain’t so slick.


Kim: …Actually, you know what would make this more fun?

Toramoto: I dunno, but I like the look you’re givin’ m-- MMPH!

There was a moment of silence, followed by a way too suggestive chuckle. I put my hands over my ears and started bashing my forehead into my knees. Alix was practically vibrating beside me.

Alix: [Whispering] Kioku, what’s going on?

Hibiki: …

Alix: *Kioku-chaaaaaaan.*

Hibiki: …

Alix: …
Alix: …OH MY GOD, ARE THEY MAKING OU--

Hibiki: SHHHHHHH!

Alix: ...

Hibiki: ...

Kim: I wonder who *that* could’ve been.

Toramoto: Snnrk-- Maybe it was a couple of ghosts?

Hibiki: [Groaning] *Please let me drop dead.*

I heard two sets of footsteps approaching me, and tried my best to melt into the floor or shrivel up and die or something. Unfortunately, none of those things happened. I took in a deep breath through my nose, sighed, and stood up as the footsteps grew louder and then finally… stopped.
Alix: [Waving and grinning] Hi guys! Didn’t see you there!

Kim: [Chuckles] Good to see you’re doing well, Alix-kun. You make a friend?

Hibiki: Seconded.

Toramoto: Shame. Thought this might be a double date or somethin’.

Hibiki: I’d rather die.

Alix: No dying! Also!! So you guys ARE dating then!

Hibiki: Wh-- You didn’t even KNOW?

Kim: We’re just doing what we want. It’s chill.

Toramoto: May as well make the most of the cruise ship ‘n all. Pretty fancy stuff, yeah?

Alix: All I know is that the beds are comfortable and the cuisine isn’t shit, but if that’s any indicator for everything else here then I totally agree!

Hibiki: I guess.

Kim nodded, apparently satisfied with Alix and I’s answers, and then plucked up a pitcher of melting ice from on top of one of the crates. She winked at Toramoto as she waved it in the air coolly.

Kim: Well, I’m gonna go get more soda. See you guys soon. Especially you, Tiger.

Toramoto: [Grins; leans back] See ya, princess.

Kim started to trot down the stairs. I looked over at Toramoto to see that he was smirking at me like he was trying to hold back a laugh.

Hibiki: …What’s the shit eating grin for?
Toramoto: Nothin’. You just look fuckin’ horrified, s’all.

Hibiki: Yeah, and for a good fucking reason.

Alix: Kioku-chan’s just mad they weren’t invited.

Toramoto: Aw. That’s cute.

Hibiki: Don’t worry. I’d sooner shoot myself in both feet than try to get in on two days straight of quality bonding time with anyone here.

Toramoto: So long as it’s not me you’re shootin’, I can respect that.

Hibiki: Yeah, well. That could change. We’ll see.


Alix: Don’t worry about Kioku-chan! They’re just a biiig meanie.

Hibiki: A meanie? Are you four?

Alix: Fuhuhu, sorry! Does ‘pisse-froid’ work for you? Or maybe ‘enculeur de mouches’? How about ‘caca boudin’?

Hibiki: The fuck does all of that mean.

Alix: It means you’re a piss-cold fly-fucking shit sausage, Kioku-chan.

Toramoto: [Holding back a laugh] Holy shit. Nice one, kid.
Hibiki: Wow. You know words. Someone call the fucking emergency hotline, because this kid’s on fire.

Alix: [Bowing; grinning] Merci bien! I try my best.

Hibiki: ...Ugh.

God, this was just fucking irritating. Every second of Alix’s voice was another millenium of regret for me. May as well change the topic to something of actual consequence.

Hibiki: …Toramoto. How’d you and Kim even end up as, like…

Toramoto: [Smirks] As a what?

Hibiki: …An item?

Toramoto: Already told ya all there is to it, didn’t I? I was bored, she was bored too. We got talkin’ about shit. S’mostly just banter.

Alix: Well, I’m glad you guys are happy together! So fast, too… jeez.

Hibiki: …Really fast.

Toramoto: Yeah, well. Don’t see why that matters. Kim’s cool. That should be enough, yeah?

Hibiki: I literally could not fucking care less what soap opera you guys are living in now so long as you keep me out of it.

Alix: Uh… Guys?
Toramoto: Trust me, I don’t think either of us were exactly intendin’ on gettin’ all buddy buddy with you.

Hibiki: Thank god for that. It’s nothing personal, but being subjected to you two making out against a wall for so much as three seconds already felt like some new sick form of torture.

Alix: …Buddies?

Toramoto: [Smirking darkly] Funny that you wouldn’t’ve seen or heard a thing if you hadn’t been the one to come snoopin’ around business that isn’t yours then, huh?

Hibiki: I think the fact that you’ve disillusioned yourself into believing I participated in this out of anything other than a will to save myself from an hour of whining is the real funny thing here.

Alix: Pals?

Toramoto: Well ain’t you just a fuckin’ saint, then?

Hibiki: Speak for yourself, loan sha--

Alix: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAUGH!!

Hibiki: WHAT⁈

Alix: …Nothing! Hee hee hee.

Toramoto: …Christ, kid. That sure was somethin’.

Alix: That was the idea! Anyway, I’m really sleepy, so now Kioku-san has to take me to bed!

Hibiki: You can’t be that tir--
Alix: [Yawns loudly] GEE, I SURE AM EXHAUSTED!

Hibiki: …Ugh, fine. I’ve been up for fifteen hours anyway. May as well go to sleep.

Toramoto: Glad to hear your life story, Kioku-sama. Really. Truly a pleasure.

Hibiki: Oh, why don’t you shove it up your a--

Alix: GOODNIGHT TORAMOTO-CHAN!!! SLEEP WELL!!!

Toramoto: Heh. G’night, dude.

Hibiki: Can you stop fucking yelli--

Before I could even get another sentence in, Alix had started dragging me in the general direction of the stairs, albeit still a few steps away from them since he couldn’t tell where they actually were. Rolling my eyes, I took the lead and walked him down the stairs, waving to a confused-looking Kim as she passed me on her way up.

After a few more minutes of dragging Alix around, we were finally both in the hall for the suites. Hanahara had stationed herself outside the Rho suite, a stern look on her face. She seemed to soften up a bit when she saw Alix.


Alix: Hanahara-chan!!! Hi!!!

Hibiki: …Yo.

Hanahara: [Pulls out e-Handbook] Hm… 9:38. Glad to see you’re both back before nighttime.
Hibiki: …Is *that* what this is about?

Hanahara: Of course. I can’t have any stragglers. They’re putting the safety of themselves and everyone around them at risk.

Hibiki: So your solution is to…

Hanahara: Stand out here, make sure everyone is accounted for, and not sleep until I’m sure everyone is inside.

Alix: Sounds like you might be up for a while!

Hanahara: Huh?

Alix: Kim-chan and Toramoto-chan are hanging out together on the back deck. They’re in loooooove.

Hanahara: [Grimaces] O-Oh. Well, so long as they’re not breaking the rules, I guess they can… do what they want.

Alix: Ehehe, don’t worry. I’m not sure what Kim-chan sees in him either. She can handle herself, though!

Hanahara: I have no doubt. I just hope this doesn’t end badly.

Hibiki: Well, that’s a lost cause already, then. I’m going to bed.


Hibiki: [Swiping keycard on door] Yeah.
I gave Alix and Hanahara a careless wave goodbye and closed the Upsilon suite’s door behind me. Maeko was lying on her bed and staring up at the ceiling, hand on her stomach. She didn’t so much as look at me as I walked in. I went into the closet and changed into pyjamas like I’d done the night before.

I wandered back into the main part of the suite and flopped onto my bed, above the covers like always. I started to drift to sleep.

Maeko: …Kioku-san, c-can I ask you something?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Go for it. Wouldn’t be the first today, anyway.

Maeko: O-Ok. Um… I’ve just been thinking about… w-wondering about my sister. U… Uroko.

Hibiki: That sure was her name.

Maeko: Right. Um…

Maeko: What… What w-was she like?

Hibiki: Oh, I dunno. Musical. Enthusiastic. Excruciatingly optimistic and vocal about that fact at all times.

Maeko: Did… Did people like her?

Hibiki: …

Maeko: …More than they liked m-me?
Hibiki: …She was more fun to fuck with. You’re much less… grating.

Maeko: So that’s… Uh…

Hibiki: …Goodnight, Maeko.


I rolled over so that my back was facing Maeko’s bed and stared at the wall for a moment. The sound of water moving from beyond the dome started to seep into my mind, and I tried my best to block it out as I fell asleep again.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed! I'm going to stick to the fortnightly update schedule for now, since I'm enjoying being able to make more art for each chapter and I still need to work on the investigation and trial a lot. Thank you so much for reading, I'll see you all in two weeks :D
After the past two nights, just waking up to Monokuma’s voice at the usual time without any screaming felt like a miracle. I let my arm flop over my eyes and rubbed at them as the scratchy sound of the monitor turning on echoed through the room.

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: Gooooood morning, ya bastards! It is now eight in the morning! Rise and shine!

Monokuma: You’ve all been here for a full week now! Gonna be honest, it feels like I’ve known you kids for years. Time flies when you’re hosting a murder game, huh?

Monokuma: Well… Get up. That’s all. Bye!


Still trying to wake up from a long night’s sleep, I got up, showered, and changed into my day clothes. When I left the bathroom, Maeko was standing in front of the door. She was still wearing her pyjamas - a singlet and fluffy pink sweatpants.

Hibiki: …The hell do you want.
Maeko: Um… G-Good morning to you too, Kioku-san. I w-was just hoping I could, uh… Use the bathroom.

Hibiki: If you want to miss the breakfast meeting, go for it.

Maeko: …

Maeko: I’ll just d-do that later.

Hibiki: Whatever, dude.

Maeko gave me an odd look before slinking off into the closet and closing the door. I shrugged.

May as well go ahead without her. I swiped my keycard across the scanner and left, heading down the stairs at a leisurely pace. By the time I got to the buffet only Yousetsu and Rouvin had arrived, so I decided to just get my breakfast together and sit down.

Soon enough, more people came into the buffet. Maeko shuffled into the seat across from mine only for the door to slam open moments later.

Orutoku: H-Hanahara-san, I know you just want to keep everyone safe, but…

Ryuumatsu: This isn’t sustainable, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara: Rrrgh…

Oh, great.

I looked over to the door. Orutoku was wringing his hands anxiously as Ryuumatsu stared on with disapproval at Hanahara. The bartender had dark rings under her eyes that were only
made worse by her frown.

Hanahara: It was important.

Orutoku: Your health is important too though! There’s gotta be a better way of keeping everyone safe than sacrificing your sleep to keep watch like that! You at least don’t have to do it all night!

Ryuumatsu: Or perhaps you just shouldn’t worry about it at a--

Hanahara: I’m not just going to give up. I can’t.

Ryuumatsu: W-Well, technically you c--

Hanahara: Did you not hear me?

Ryuumatsu: ………

Ryuumatsu: W-Well. I suppose if you d-don’t appreciate my c-concern for your well being, I’ll… l-leave it.

Orutoku: Hanahara-san…

Hanahara: …Let’s just start the meeting.

Well, this was bound to get irritating. Christ.

Pushing past Orutoku, Hanahara stepped up to the front of the room and surveyed the crowd with a frown. As soon as she had finished, an even angrier frown crossed her features.

Hanahara: …Where are Toramoto and Kim?
Alix: [Pouts] Aw man, they really didn’t show up? I thought they might’ve just been reaaaally quiet. Like, really quiet.

Kamiya: [Taps cheek; frowns] I think they’ve probably just gone to do their own thing, or… Something. I’m sure they’re fine.

Alix: Oh, definitely! They’re probably just making out on the minigolf course or something.

Hanahara: …

Alix: …Um, Hanahara-chan?

Hanahara: …...

Hanahara: …They were supposed. To show. Up.

Alix: H-Hey, it's ok--

Hanahara: I spend my entire fucking night making sure everyone’s safe and this is the thanks I get?!

Orutoku: Hanahara-sa--

Hanahara: [Laughing incredulously] MY OWN TEAMMATES, AND THEY CAN’T EVEN BE BOTHERED TO DO THIS? WOW! I’D ALMOST THINK THAT THEY WANTED TO DIE!

Orutoku: H-Hanahara--

Hanahara: That’s IT! As soon as this meeting is over I’m going over there and TEACHING THEM A LESSO--
Ryuumatsu: HANAHARA-SAN.

Hanahara: …

Alix: …

Orutoku: …

Orutoku: Haha! Um. So! Nice… Nice weather we’re having.


Ryuumatsu: [Raising an eyebrow] Laundry?


Orutoku: H-Heheh, ummmm, yep! That sure is. The word. Which I said.

Orutoku: [Sweating] I’mmmm… going to do some nice community laundry! And everyone can get along!

Ryuumatsu: It… doesn’t sound like a bad activity, I suppose.

Orutoku: COOL! Cool. Sooo, uh… Bring anything you want washed to the laundry room at, like… One? One. PM, preferably, because I won’t be there in the middle of the night, haha!

Ryuumatsu: …

Orutoku: ...But um. That was obvious.
Ryuumatsu: Quite. It’s a good idea, though. Well done.

Orutoku: [Beaming] AH! Thank you, sir!!!!

Ryuumatsu: Hm. No need to thank me.

Orutoku: Right! Well, um…

Orutoku: I guess that’s… it… then…???

Hanahara: …

Ryuumatsu: …

Orutoku: …Hanah--

Hanahara: Yeah. That’s it.

Orutoku: …G-Great! Uhh, see you guys at one, then!

Sumire: Sounds great, dude! Thanks.

Hashikawa: Yeah! We’ll be there.

Alix: Aitou-chan and I are gonna go too!!

Aitou: W-We are?

Alix: If you’re gonna sleep in your suit all the time, you should wash it!
Aitou: I… can’t contest that.

Alix: Great! You’ll come too, right Hanahara-chan?

Hanahara: …

Alix: Please?

Hanahara: Nn…

Alix: Pleeeaaaase?

Hanahara: …Alix-san, I’m really not in the m--

Alix: I am a desperate blind orphan with exactly three best friends, and one of them is too busy sucking face to talk to me. I am suffering, Mamugi-chan. Pity me.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: …Alright.

Alix: Yay! Thank you!!!

Orutoku: That’s the spirit! I’ll head over there now to make sure I know how a washing machine works! See you guys later!

Orutoku waved at everyone before literally jumping out of the restaurant’s doors. Ryuumatsu grimaced.
Ryuumatsu: …Oh my God, he can’t even use a washing machine. Does he know to sort dark clothing from whites?

Sumire: Maybe you should catch up and find out, Anguilla japonica.

Ryuumatsu: D-Don’t call me that. I’ll have you know t-that I am the y-youngest attorney to ever take the bar, and I--

Sumire: What’s that? I think I can hear the first washing machine breaking into a smoking heap.

Ryuumatsu: …

Ryuumatsu: [Throwing door open, jogging] O-ORUTOKU-SAN, H-HOLD ON!

Sumire: Heheh. Score.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara looked at the door Ryuumatsu had just left from and sighed with exasperation. Wordlessly, she trudged through the door connecting the buffet to the bar and slammed it behind her.

Kurai: …Cool. I’m glad we were all able to sit here in silence and watch this completely irrelevant bullshit unfold. Should’ve fucking taken Toramoto and Kim’s lead and booked it while I had the chance.

Yousetsu: [Asleep with her head on the table] ………

Kurai: …Or I could’ve done that. God, no wonder she’s considered a fucking child prodigy if she managed to sleep through that shit.

Yousetsu: [Head still on table] …Stop complaining… You’re ruining my nap.
Kurai: …Fffffffine. I’m out. Got better things to do than to sit around here.

Alix: What could you possibly have to do?

Kurai: Watch shitty movies and feel bad for myself. It’s recreational.

Alix: …Define ‘watch’.

Kurai: I’m not some fucking robotic database, you ass. Ask the random question generator. He seems wordy.

Rouvin: …

Kurai: …

Rouvin: …Why are birds?

Kurai: Oh my fucking God, he’s not even listening. I’m out!

Sumire: You already said that.

Kurai: WELL I’M SAYING IT AGAIN BECAUSE IT’S TRUE!

Rouvin: …

Rouvin: …I’ve been wondering.

Kurai: [Crosses arms] Oh, HAVE you now.
Rouvin: …Is this the kind of behaviour one might go so far as to kill the perpetrator over?

Kurai: …What?

Rouvin: Of course, I’m not one to say. I did find the concept interesting, though. Is this brand of abrasiveness an inconvenience or a threat? What ends might others go to in a game of mutual killing to eliminate either?

Kurai: …Wait. You… You think someone’s going to…

Rouvin: Dispose of you? Not necessarily. I believe it may be a possibility, but I am far from the type to object to the sheer unpredictability of humanity and the intricacies of its members.

Kurai: …

Kurai: That’s bullshit.

Rouvin: If that is what you choose to believe, I suppose I am not one to attempt to sway you. I would recommend minding that you do not commit any fallacies of thought, however. Such ignorance could possibly lead to undesirable events. Of course, it could also have no consequences at all. There are many foreseeable futures, I suppose.

Kurai: The only future I’m foreseeing is the one where I leave this conversation right the fuck now and--

**Kurai stopped short as a loud slam interrupted the conversation. Hanahara stormed back into the room with nothing short of pure fury on her face.**

Hanahara: WHO FUCKING TOOK IT?

Kurai: Oh holy shit.
Maeko: T- Took what?

Hanahara: THE ENTIRE BOTTLE OF CHARDONNAY THAT’S MISSING FROM THE BAR!

Kamiya: Oh dear…

Kurai: Wasn’t me. Not my fuckin’ problem.

Hanahara: And why should I believe YOU?!

Kurai: W--

Hanahara: You wanna hear something, Kurai? You’re nothing but a fucking asshole! Hell, you’re worse than that! Toramoto’s a shitty guy too, but apparently he’s off making out with a respectable human being right now, so at least he probably has SOME redeeming qualities! What have YOU got to show for yourself?!

Kurai: …

Hanahara: Fucking. NOTHING.

Hanahara: [Standing over Kurai] You wanna know why? You haven’t made a SINGLE FUCKING EFFORT TO GET ALONG WITH ANYONE. ALL YOU DO IS BITCH AND MOAN AND PARADE YOUR FOUL VOCABULARY AROUND LIKE A FUCKING TROPHY!

Kurai: ……

Hanahara: Well you know what? I’m fucking SICK OF IT. GET. OUT.

Kurai: ………
As hard as he was trying to hide it, Kurai looked absolutely horrified. He squeezed his eyes tightly shut for a moment and took a deep breath in before quietly stepping back. A shaky exhale left his lips as he stared back hatefully.

Finally, his wits seemed to come back to him all at once, and he turned on his heel and ran outside, one arm reaching up to wipe at his face right as he went through the door.

Hanahara glared on for a few moments as she huffed angrily, then crossing her arms and sighing.

Hanahara: …

Hashikawa: …Woah.

Maeko: H-Hanahara-san, are you--

Hanahara: [Snappily] I’m fine.

Maeko: ………

Hanahara: …Sorry for the tone.

Maeko: I… I-It’s okay.

Aitou: If it helps, ah… The one to take the alcohol was likely Toramoto-san or Kim-san, I believe.

Hanahara: …Of fucking course. I’ll go have a word with them right now.

Kamiya: Hanahara-san, you don’t have t--
Not even listening to Kamiya, Hanahara stormed her way out of the room yet again. The silence the room was left in afterwards was predictably tense.

Maeko: Is… I-Is she gonna be o-okay?

Kamiya: I… I hope so. I’m just as concerned about Kurai-san, honestly…

Sumire: Why? The guy’s absolutely awful.

Kamiya: Maybe, but… Nobody would be faring well in his position, I think. He didn’t really do enough to deserve that…

Rouvin: Though I believe that to be subjective, I certainly see the merits to that perspective… He did not commit many distasteful acts this morning, did he?

Sumire: If you don’t count general negativity, then not really, no.

Kamiya: Mm… I’ll try to talk to him later. I’m sure he can be reasonable.

Maeko: G-Good luck, Kamiya-san. I think if anyone can talk to him, it’s you.

Kamiya: [Smiles warmly] Thank you for believing in me, Maeko-san! I appreciate it a lot. I’ll try my best.

Maeko: [Blushes; gives a thumbs up] U-Uh, um. Y-Yeah.

Quiet chatter resumed for a while after that as people started to finish their meals and filter out of the buffet. Soon enough, I decided to leave too.

After a bit of wandering around, I ended up settling on going back to the library archives to
read more of the files I had found in no particular order. It all seemed like it was just... more of the same. Dead body after dead body. Looking at any one for too long made me feel sick to my stomach, though, so I just tried my best to focus on the text - pages upon pages of autopsy reports and case files, as expected. All of them were in locations so odd for murder that each would have seemed staged for entertainment if not for the sheer realism of the images with them. Maybe these were meant to document some niche snuff film series or some shit... They even had cast lists near the front of the files, so that seemed unsettlingly likely. Not that any explanation for this wasn’t at least a little unsettling.

At any rate, though, they weren’t telling me anything relevant to whatever shit I’d been thrown into myself, so after a while I decided to abandon the archives again and head out into the main part of the library. A group seemed to be over at the quiet reading area, so for lack of anything better to do, I walked over.

Hibiki: Yo.

Alix: [Cupping a hand over his eyes] SORRY, CAN YOU SAY THAT AGAIN? I CAN’T HEAR YOU. I’M BLIND.

Hibiki: …

In that moment, I immediately wished I could just walk the other direction and pretend that that interaction had never happened. Before I could, though, the other people there spoke up.

Kamiya: [Holding a game piece in one hand] Oh, hello Kioku-san! Sorry, I’m a little preoccupied. You’re welcome to stay around, though! Your company’s appreciated.

Aitou: [Frowning in concentration] Mm.

Hibiki: …What’s going on here?

Kamiya: Oh, this? Aitou-san found the board game cabinet! We figured we’d play a game of chess.

Alix: They won’t let me eat the pieces.
Aitou: [Chuckling; covering mouth with hand] Probably for the best. Kamiya-san, your move.

Kamiya: Oh! Thank you.

I looked over with a passable amount of interest as Kamiya picked up a rook and used its base to knock one of the black pawns on its side with a giggle. Aitou creased his brow and set the piece off to the side of the board. He then frowned at Kamiya, who responded with an amicable yet competitive smile.

Aitou: Curses.

Kamiya: Ehehe… Whoops.

Alix: [Stage whispering] Don’t fall for her cutesy tricks, Aitou-chan! The ‘whoops’ was a ruse! She’s ruthless!

Aitou: She does indeed seem to be. I’d never expected you to be this good at chess, Kamiya-san.

Kamiya: Aw, should I feel insulted?

Aitou: W-Well I… No, I mean--

Kamiya: Don’t worry! I was just joking around. It’s all intuition, really.

Kamiya glanced over to me and winked playfully as she continued.

Kamiya: Some people can just read others pretty well.

Aitou: That’s… it? Certainly a convenient gift.
Alix: That or it’s the product of paranormal influence! Need me to exorcise you later?

Kamiya: I think I’m fine, Alix-san. Thank you for the offer though.

Alix: Nooooo problem! Kioku-chan still needs an exorcism for their room and roommate, so I can just do that.

Hibiki: You aren’t putting a single fucking foot into my room until you put shoes on. I am *not* going to be stuck rubbing disinfectant into the floorboards to get out the smell of… The hell is that?

Alix: Lavender incense. Infused with my tears and whatever else my face leaks when I cry. It makes the spiritual cleansing properties stronger.

Hibiki: ...Somehow I want to be around you less now than ever before. You’ve outdone yourself, Murasaki.

Alix: [Grinning] Pas de problème, Kioku-chan!

Aitou: Pas de…?

Alix: [Whispering to Aitou] It means ‘you’re welcome’.

Aitou: [Smirking slightly] I see.

Alix: That makes one of us! Speaking of which! Kioku-chan, have you seen the absolute best part of the library yet?

Hibiki: Yes. It’s called ‘whichever part Alix can’t find me in’.

Alix: Fuhuhu… There’s no escape from someone as persistent as me, Kioku-chan. You could kill me and I still wouldn’t stay dead!
Hibiki: That’s the worst news I’ve heard all week.

Alix: Aww, thanks. But seriously! There’s an audiobook section here. It’s really cool!!!

Aitou: [Still staring at the chess board] Ah, yes… We did happen upon that earlier, didn’t we?

Alix: Yeah, and it’s super duper awesome! Now I can finally get educated. Should I start with a shitty purple prose vampire romance trilogy or try for something saucier?

Kamiya: [Chuckling] Are you sure those are educational?

Alix: Oh, for sure. At the very least, I’m sure I’ll learn a ton of fun new words!

Hibiki: Oh dear lord. Please just stick to some cheap horror novel instead.

Alix: [Blankly] No way.

**Alix’s voice had suddenly taken on a much more collected tone. I recoiled in shock.**

Hibiki: Wh…

Alix: Death that’s played for shock value like that? That’s just mean. That sort of stuff’s why people are so afraid of ghosts, too…

Hibiki: …So…?

Alix: Welllll… Wouldn’t it be nicer if instead of being so afraid of ghosts, we helped them? It’s kind of sad to think that as soon as someone dies, so many people either thinks they’re gone forever or get super afraid of them.

Hibiki: I already told you before. Ghosts aren’t real.
Alix: I know you think that! I’m not some weirdo priest with a convert-or-kill agenda or anything. It’s more about, like… How death doesn’t need to be something that people are afraid of. It’s not necessarily the end, and it’s better to not ruin your life worrying too much about what comes after it! Right, Aitou-chan?

Aitou: [Startled] W-- Sorry, what? I wasn’t, um… I was focusing on the game of chess.

Alix: I was just telling Kioku-chan about how un-spooky death is!

Aitou: …Un-spooky… R-Right.

Aitou: …

Kamiya: Aitou-san, are you okay? You look mortified.


Kamiya: Glad to hear. In that case…

Kamiya: [Puts chess piece down] Check!

Aitou: [Pushing up glasses] Again?

Kamiya: Again.

Alix: [Leaning in] Oooo… Hibiki, narrate the game for me.

Hibiki: No.
I ended up watching the rest of Kamiya and Aitou’s game of chess silently, Alix flapping his sleeves in my face from time to time to try and get my attention. Almost all of the pieces had been set off to the side of the table already - now, the two of them were just chasing each other’s kings around the board as Aitou quietly explained what was happening. Eventually, the two stopped.

Kamiya: I think this is…

Aitou: A stalemate, it would seem.

Alix: OOOH! That sounds… Actually, that doesn’t sound very exciting. What’s that mean?

Hibiki: Means the game’s over.


Hibiki: And you’re not funny, but you still make more jokes than comments of any actual substance.

Alix: [Sticks out tongue] What can I say? It’s part of my charm!

Hibiki: Sure it is. I’m out. Gonna go eat lunch or something.

Kamiya: Is it that time already? I completely lost track…

Hibiki: You seem to do that a lot.

Kamiya: Eheh… I guess I do, don’t I? Accidentally staying up all night isn’t really one of my proudest moments… I hope Hanahara-san isn’t still mad at me for that.
Alix: I think she’ll come around! She’s been kind of scary lately, though.

Kamiya: Yeah… Maybe she just needs someone to hear her out, though! You could try to do that, right Kioku-san?

Hibiki: …

Kamiya: [Clasps locket] Please? For me?


Kamiya: Thank you! Sorry to hold you up. You can go have lunch if you still want to.


Alix: Or don’t! I know you don’t feel any positive emotions ever, so don’t feel like you need to challenge yourself, yeah? Baby steps!

Hibiki: Yeah, fuck you too.

Hibiki: …See you, Kamiya.

Kamiya: [Smiles] Ah! See you later, Kioku-san!

Giving Kamiya a small wave, I left the library and headed over to the buffet again, not really intending on actually having a meal so much as chugging some soda or something. Whatever would pass the time, I guess.

I walked into the buffet and made my way over to the fridge, setting down a jug of soda and a cup at my usual table. Nobody else was around, but if they had been, I sure as hell wouldn’t have talked to them. I sat down and started to pour a glass.
Silently daring whoever was on the other side of the door to open it and ruin my alone time, I took a slow sip of cola and narrowed my eyes.

...

......

It didn’t open. Thank *fuck*.

Sighing a breath of relief, I put my glass down and--

Hanahara: [Throwing the door open] UGH!!!!

Hibiki: ……

Hanahara crossed her arms as she looked around the room in frustration, and I quietly prayed that I would suddenly be invisible or something. Unfortunately, whatever sick powers were overlooking this bullshit refused to take pity on me.

The bartender’s eyes landed on me, and her face set into a cold and commanding stare.

Hibiki: …
Hanahara: …

Hibiki: ……………

Hanahara: …Kioku-san. Come with me.

Hibiki: [Hissing] Fuck.

If Hanahara had heard what I’d said, she’d chosen to ignore it. Pinching the bridge of my nose, I followed her through the bar door and watched as she pushed chairs up against each of the doors.

When Kamiya had asked me to talk things through with Hanahara, I hadn’t been expecting it to be fucking immediately. The idea of just unblocking the door and leaving was pretty tempting, but… God, if this was going to be even mildly more interesting than staring at a wall for an hour, I’d take it at this point. I wandered over to one of the bar stools and took a seat.

Hibiki: If you’re trying to set up a locked room murder, you should probably remember that I’m half a foot taller than you and that if only one person gets to leave this room then it’s gonna be me.

Hanahara: [Coldly] I’m not going to kill anyone.

Hibiki: Oh, of course you’re not. You could try, though. That’s what I’m concerned about.

Hanahara: …

Hanahara: We need to talk.

Hibiki: Is this about me waking up two hours early yesterday? You’re kind of fucking late to the party--
Hanahara: That’s not what this is about. I just…

Hanahara took a deep breath as she stepped behind the bar, picked up a glass and started to clean it absently.

Hanahara: …I just want to talk.

Hibiki: We aren’t friends.

Hanahara: I… I know. But you’re… Ugh.

Hanahara: You’re a psychologist, so… So you probably hear about this kind of stuff all the time anyway. So just. Put up with it or something. I don’t know.

Hanahara: I… God, I don’t know. Everything’s been an absolute mess.

Hibiki: …

Hanahara: [Cleaning a glass] Like Kurai. He’s a danger to everyone, he has no regard for people’s feelings or safety, he threw--

Hibiki: A plate at you. As you’ve said many times now.

Hanahara: Right! There’s just some… I don’t know. Severe lack of any regard for other people. It’s disgusting.

Hibiki: He asked if you were okay after you left the motive reveal yesterday.

Hanahara: He what?

Hanahara: [Picks up another glass] Well… That’s nice, I guess, but it’s no excuse for his behaviour.
It’s not like I don’t already have enough to deal with, and he knows it. Keeping everyone safe is my responsibility, and if he’s making himself into an obstacle to that, then he hasn’t got anything good coming for him. I mean, come on. What’s he done to make things easier for anyone?! It’s ridiculous.

Hanahara: And then there’s Kim and Toramoto… I’d really thought she was above this kind of thing at least, but it turns out she’s the one who stole the chardonnay! She didn’t even seem to care when I confronted her about it! And Toramoto! He went ahead and attacked Hashikawa-san and she hadn’t even done anything! I want to find the mastermind as much as anyone else, but Hashikawa-san? Really? She couldn’t hurt a fly.

Hibiki: Her abs beg to differ.

Hanahara: [Not listening] It’s just so frustrating that these people are on my team and I can’t even get them to listen to me! I’m supposed to be their leader, for God’s sake! And I can’t talk to them about anything serious either, because if I told them how much I’ve been freaking out for the last few days then everyone would get worried and it’d be my fault just like everything else!

Hibiki: Everyone already knows that you’re freaking out--

Hanahara: [Cleaning glass faster] I mean, Uroko dying was my fault too! I-- If I’d just been there! If I’d just made everyone stick to the rules and wake up on time, nobody would be dead! Everyone would be fine and we’d all be able to move on and find a way out of here and nobody would be fucking traumatised because I was too irresponsible to do anything about any of the shit that happened! I was literally in the same room as Yoshida-san all night! I should’ve just spoken to him!

Hibiki: …

Hanahara: [Scrubbing even faster] But NO! I just had to blow it! Just like I did with the motive meeting and just like I did with everything else! And the worst part is that I shouldn’t even feel bad for Yoshida because he was a murderer and everything, but-- But now I kind of get why he did it!

Hanahara: This- living like this is TERRIFYING! Uroko-san tried to keep everyone together and she died and now I’m going to be next because I can’t even manage to hold a ten minute meeting anymore! Hell, the day after the trial I was fucking USELESS! I couldn’t bring myself to say a thing, because I was just so-- so goddamn afraid! It took someone who isn’t even on the same team as me telling me to snap out of it for me to get my head back together, and now I’m not even doing much better because I keep losing my temper and I can’t think straight and I couldn’t even protect the fucking BAR! THE ONE THING I’M SUPPOSEDLY GOOD AT OTHER THAN HELPING PEOPLE AND I BLEW IT! I BLEW IT AT EVERYTHING!
Hibiki: ……

Hanahara: WHAT’S EVEN THE POINT IF I JUST KEEP SCREWING UP BECAUSE I’M SO SELFISHLY SCARED OF SOMEONE KILLING ME THAT I-- I…

Hibiki: …You’ve been cleaning that glass for five minutes straight.

Hanahara: ………

Hanahara looked down at the glass in her hands, and her lip started to tremble. Tears welled up in her bright blue eyes.

Hanahara: I… I really am fucking everything up. I can’t even clean cups properly.

Hibiki: …

Hanahara: I can’t clean cups properly, I couldn’t keep my head together enough to look out for my friends, I couldn’t keep my resolve to help anyone… I couldn’t help the people I needed to. Two people. It shouldn’t have been that hard.

Hanahara: And I’ve been trying so hard to just make sure nobody breaks the rules, because the first time I let someone do so much as sleep in they ended up dead, but… But I think everyone just thinks I’m some kind of tyrant. I wouldn’t be surprised if you did. I know you don’t like me.

Hanahara: And honestly, I… I shouldn’t have even subjected you to this. It feels like I’m just using you because you’re a psychologist and the only original team leader left and I know that you won’t be worried about me because you have no reason to care. And it only feels like it because… Th-That’s exactly what this is.

Hibiki: ……

Hanahara: I just… I’m terrified, Kioku-san. I’m not strong like Sumire or Orutoku or Maeko. I’m not
as smart as Ryuumatsu or Yousetsu or Rouvin. I haven’t even got Toramoto or Kurai’s shitty intimidation factors. I’m vulnerable, and the way I’ve been acting has just been making me more of a target, but I just…

Hanahara: [Sniffles] Being a leader and helping people is all I have. It’s all I know how to do. And I’ve been doing such an awful job of it that I…

Hanahara’s hand drifted up to cover her mouth as she stared at the table in horror. Her arms shook.

Hanahara: For a moment, I… I thought about killing someone to get out. And it terrified me that I would th-think that, but… But I could understand why someone would. It’s not malice. It’s… It’s desperation.

Hanahara: I have so much left to go back to. My family really needs me around. Looking after Kenta and Haru and Ayaka is…

Hanahara: [Choking back sobs] …O-Oh my God. What if they’re not okay? What’s happened in all the time I’ve forgotten?

Hanahara: [Burying face in hands] I… I can’t do this… I thought I could keep leading like I’m supposed to but I just keep ruining everything and the guilt of it all is just so much that I… I…

Hanahara’s bangs fell across her face as she leaned into the counter and started to cry. I wanted to just stand by passively and not worry about it, but… Something struck a chord in me. Watching her cry like that made my gut wrench, even if my brain told me it should be about as emotionally moving as drying paint.

Stupid fucking empathy bullshit, catching me off guard with all these sudden feelings that I can’t name and don’t want.

…

…I walked around the counter to stand at Hanahara’s side. Hesitant and kind of ashamed, I
reached up to pull off one of the clips holding up my fringe.

Hibiki: …

I knelt down, brushed Hanahara’s hair out of her face, and pinned part of it up. As I stood up and backed away, her fingers reached up to glide along the clip that was now in her hair.
Hibiki: …Stop crying.

Hanahara: [Wiping eyes with neckerchief] …

Hibiki: I… I know you’re sad and scared, or whatever, but giving up? Really? I didn’t think you were better than that, but you sure as hell shouldn’t be like this over it. Seriously.

Hanahara: …

Hibiki: If you think I don’t really care about all of this, it’s because I don’t. But I meant what I said before. This isn’t how a leader needs to act. Nobody expects you to be perfect, because the only perfect person is me and that’s just how it fucking is, but still.

Hanahara: … You know what? You’re… You’re right.

Hanahara: Yeah, you’re absolutely right. I… I think I just. I need to stop being so afraid. Easier said than done, but… But living like this isn’t doing me any favours. I need to try to go at my own pace.

Hibiki: You’re surprisingly optimistic for someone who looked about ready to throw up thirty seconds ago.

Hanahara: Well… I’m still not exactly sure what I’m going to do, to be honest, and I doubt I can just cut out any sort of fear altogether. Honestly, that doesn’t sound like a good idea anyway. But… But I’ll figure it out. Someone will know what to do. I just need to keep telling myself that, I think.

Hanahara: …Also, knowing that I have someone looking out for me really helps. Sorry for forcing you into this. If you hate me, I don’t blame you. I just want you to know that this… Really helped, actually. I think a lot of it was just that I had so much pent up frustration that I kept on losing it. Ehheh.

Hanahara brushed at her hair again and smiled weakly.
Hanahara: I’m sorry for dumping all of this on you… Thanks for being so generous. I really appreciate it.

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: No sweat.

Feeling kind of embarrassed about how impulsively I’d acted, I shoved my hands into my pockets and looked away, silently cursing at myself. I was just letting myself be turned into a communal therapist, wasn’t I? Fucking hell.

Hanahara’s talk of her family and her life outside hadn’t done anything to help my ego, either. It’d just been another reminder of how… insignificant the world wanted me to think I was, as much as I hated using that word in any relation to myself. Some sick part of me found a sort of comfort in knowing that I’d gone out of my way and helped Hanahara for no benefit to myself whatsoever, and that now, she probably trusted me. Whatever part that was, I kind of wanted to kill it. I also kind of wanted to take my fucking hair clip back, but I guess that wasn’t happening any time soon.

Struggling against my conflicting feelings, I tried to go for the easiest way to forget about them - an escape.

Hibiki: Uh… I think the laundry thing is happening soon.

Hanahara: [Pulls out eHandbook] …Oh, you’re right. I’m really sorry to have held you up, Kioku-san. Thanks for everything.

Hibiki: Yeah.

Thanks for nothing, more like. Hanahara had caught me off guard way too many times for my own liking. I was supposed to know shit. I did know shit. So then… God, why was reading these people turning out to be so hard? I wasn’t supposed to be wrong about things. This fucking sucked.
…Whatever. I stood aside as Hanahara pulled out the chairs from under the door handles and opened the one leading to the main deck. I gave her a half-nod in acknowledgement as I left, tired and frustrated yet somehow not as much as I felt like I should be.

Whatever feeling of fulfilment or satisfaction or doubt or anything other than self-assuredness I was experiencing needed to leave me alone to wallow in the tragedy of my superiority over every other miserable, two-dimensional lifeform on this godforsaken boat. It was only fair.

For now, it was easiest to just ignore all of that. I headed back up the stairs to the suites, got my unwashed clothes together, heaped them all into a pile, and then tried my best to wrap my arms around the whole thing and stay that way as I went back down to the laundry room. Quite a few people were there already - Orutoku, Ryuumatsu, Maeko, Sumire and Hashikawa were all standing around the washing machines; Rouvin and Kamiya’s clothes were already here even though they were absent, and Alix, Aitou and Hanahara came through the doors not long after I had. I stepped to the side as Aitou dumped a large pile of folded clothes onto the floor with a huff. I ended up walking over to Maeko just to occupy myself.

Hibiki: …Hey. You should’ve brought down my clothes if you were coming anyway.

Maeko: O-Oh. Hi, Kioku-san. Um, I… I would have, but I don't really have much of a way to carry t-too many things… You know. Because of t-the, um. Arm. Also, I f-figured that- I figured you would t-tell me “not to touch your stuff” or s-something.

Hibiki: Okay, first of all, I would use the word ‘shit’ instead of ‘stuff’ because I’m not four. Second of all, yes. I would have said that.

Maeko: B-But now you’re telling me that I… should have touched your s-stuff?

Hibiki: Yes.

Maeko: …

Maeko: Okay. Well, I’m… G-Glad you were able to get it down here?
Hibiki: Are you really? Where’s my round of applause?

Maeko: …Uh…

Maeko faltered, and I looked at her accusingly for a moment until my eyes landed on her mostly-missing arm. I held my forehead in my hand and sighed.

Hibiki: …It was a joke, Maeko.

Maeko: …Oh. Whoops.

Maeko went back to fidgeting wordlessly, so I let her be. It didn’t take long for Orutoku to loudly interrupt everyone’s quiet chatter.

Orutoku: [Yelling into a megaphone] HELLOOOOOOOO!

Ryuumatsu: AUGH! Would you keep it down!

Orutoku: [Through megaphone] SORRY SIR, WHAT WAS THAT?

Ryuumatsu: [Pushing down megaphone] Don’t yell into that thing! You’ll damage my ears. And everyone else’s.

Orutoku: Oh, heheh. Sorry! I was just really excited!

Ryuumatsu: You’re doing laundry, Orutoku. There’s no game to this. It’s a chore.

Orutoku: Yeah, but it’s great that so many people showed up!
Orutoku: [Through megaphone] AHoy, EVERYONE!

Alix: [Facing the wall; waving] Bonjour!

Hanahara: Hello, Orutoku-san. Where’d you get the megaphone from?

Orutoku: [Through megaphone] STORAGE ROOM! THEY’VE GOT EVERYTHING YOU COULD EVER WANT IN THERE! IT’S TOP OF THE LINE!

Hanahara: That’s great to hear! I’ll have to check it out later. I haven’t spent much time in there yet.

Orutoku: [Through megaphone] SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN!

Orutoku: [FlingS megaphone at wall] Okay, that’s enough of that! Thank you all for coming! Just dump your laundry wherever you want and I’ll sort the rest out!

Sumire: You sure you don’t want any help with all of this? It looks like there’s a lot.

Orutoku: Thanks for the offer, but I’m alright! Your laundry is in good hands!

Ryuumatsu: For once, I can actually say with certainty that he’s right. He does seem to know what he’s doing.

Orutoku: [Patting Ryuumatsu’s back] Aw, shucks. Thanks, sir!


As Orutoku started talking over his plan for setting up all the laundry with Ryuumatsu, everyone else put their clothes down in piles and started to leave. Still feeling conflicted and annoyed, I sat down in front of one of the machines that was already on and watched it spin aimlessly.
I just… let everything else get drowned out.

...

Someone sat down beside me.

Orutoku: Hey, Kioku-kun! What’re you doing?

Hibiki: Appreciating the artistic simplicity of this grey spinning circle. It’s one of the few pleasures I have left in life.

Orutoku: Oh! That sounds like fun!

Hibiki: It’s not.

Orutoku: Then why do it?

Hibiki: Because sometimes you just need to fucking suffer.

Orutoku: Sorry if this is rude, but that sounds… kind of pessimistic. Also depressing. Are you okay?

Hibiki: If I wasn’t, I sure as hell wouldn’t tell you.

Orutoku: Well… I’d like it if you did! That’s the only way I can know how to help! The last thing we need is people getting mad at each other and fighting, and communication is a good way to make sure that that doesn’t happen, so being open is always the best way to go.

Hibiki: Alright.
Hibiki: …

Orutoku: …

Hibiki: …

Orutoku: …Sooo… Will you tell me what’s wrong, then?

Hibiki: …Nothing’s wrong. But, uh…

Hibiki: Can you just… talk about something? Anything at all?

Orutoku: Hmm… Yeah, alright! I can do that for sure! Uh…

**Orutoku ran a hand through his hair as he mumbled some things under his breath. Suddenly, he clicked his fingers and grinned.**

Orutoku: I got it! Kioku-kun, how much do you know about James Bond?

Hibiki: Jack shit.

Orutoku: [Grinning] That’s exactly what I wanted to hear.

**Orutoku started to enthusiastically ramble about spy movies for a while, then switching to talking about some kind of jungle adventure movies followed by wild west films and then some kind of action adventure crime drama. The whole thing was erratic and hard to keep track of, especially when he got up and started acting out entire scenes using the megaphone, but it was nice to at least have some kind of background noise. It didn’t seem like Orutoku really minded that I was barely listening - not that I cared, but it was a lot better than him getting upset at me for it and wasting my time.**

Orutoku: [Pushes up sunglasses] And so that’s why I think Goldeneye is one of the coolest movies in
history! Like, absolute cinematic gold! Heheh.

Hibiki: It all sounds kind of… jumbled. Exactly how high was the screenplay writer for this thing when they finished this script?

Orutoku: Hopefully not at all! That sounds very illegal. Maybe not in America, though… I dunno.

Hibiki: Weed’s legal in America?

Orutoku: Maybe! Lots of weird things are legal in America.

Hibiki: Fair enough.

Just then, one of the washing machines started beeping. Orutoku jogged over to grab a basket before opening the door and dumping all of the washed clothes into it. As he started to put it all into a dryer, I stood up and went to sit on top of one of the machines idly.

Hibiki: Seemed like you needed to get all of that trivia out of your system.

Orutoku: Eheh, sort of. I don’t think Ryuumsatsu-kun would wanna hear about western movies and stuff, so I haven’t really talked to him about it or anything.

Hibiki: No kidding. The guy’s a narcissistic bitch. Doesn’t even have the unfazeable dismissive air that would make his stickler bullshit vaguely respectable.

Orutoku: He’s not that bad!

Hibiki: ……

Orutoku: …Okay, he’s sort of that bad. But he means well, I think!
Hibiki: Why the hell would you think that.

Orutoku: Well, uh… I’m probably not supposed to know this, but Ryuumatsu-kun brings up his parents a lot. Usually just under his breath.

Orutoku: [Rubs neck] By the sounds of things they have super high expectations of him, so… I think it’s kind of understandable that he’d be such a perfectionist. It’d be nice if he’d actually talk to me instead of just muttering under his breath, though…

Hibiki: Wouldn’t keep your hopes up. He doesn’t think much of you smarts-wise, if you hadn’t noticed.

Orutoku: That’s okay! I just gotta prove myself to him then! Show him we’re on equal ground!

Hibiki: I guess. You’re pretty persistent, huh?

Orutoku: If it means everyone will get along, I’m up for anything. I can be a guard for the security of places AND emotions!

Hibiki: That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard, but you know what? Fine. Good for you.

Hibiki: Also, hey… How’d you become the Ultimate Security Guard?

Orutoku: I’m flattered that you’d ask!

Hibiki: Yeah, well. Might let me figure out some things about what caused all this murder game shit.

Orutoku: Alright! Well, I’m not sure exactly how I got into contact with, uh… Hope’s Peak?

Hibiki: That’s the one.
Orutoku: Right! I’m not sure how they got to know me or why, but I do know that it was probably because of the time I helped to ward off this heist with my sister! She’s an Interpol agent, which basically translates to ‘coolest person on the planet’.

Orutoku: So the two of us were out together because she was investigating this fraud case, right? And we get to the company and we’re there for a little while and she leaves to go talk to the higher ups, and then these dudes come in through the front door looking ready for a fight and they go up to the receptionist and start making threats and stuff!

Hibiki: Shit.

Orutoku: YEAH! So what’d I do? I pretended I was holding a gun and was like, “hey punks, put your hands in the air,” and they totally bought it! It ended up on the news and everything! After that, I ended up going into training to become a security guard really fast! Got job offers from all over the place!

Hibiki: Sounds like some kind of real life spy movie.

Orutoku: Heck yeah it is! It’s so great! I mean, guarding can get a little bit tiring sometimes, and I’d really prefer to not have to beat people up, but uh… At least they deserve it!

Hibiki: Good for you, dude.

Just then, the laundry room door opened. Hashikawa paced into the room, the coat she usually had draped over her shoulders nowhere to be seen. Yousetsu slowly followed behind her.

Orutoku: Hey guys! What’s going on?

Hashikawa: Oh! Um. Just came to check up on my gakuran! I wanted to make sure that it’s not getting ruined in the, uh… Washing thing. Clothes machine. Um…

Yousetsu: Washing machine.
Hashikawa: R-Right! That’s the one. It’s just that it’s kind of old and everything and it’s really important to me, so…

Orutoku: No problem! I can check right now.

As Orutoku and Hashikawa went over to one of the washing machines, I got up and started to meander over to the door. Yousetsu, only half looking up from the notebook she was scribbling in, nodded at me. I just raised an eyebrow back.

Before long, Hashikawa had finished talking to Orutoku and was heading over to the door. I turned to her as she passed me.

Hibiki: Where are you guys going?

Hashikawa: Uh… Library. W-Why’d you ask…?

Hibiki: Got nothing to do. I’ll tag along.

Hashikawa: Oh… Um, okay! That’s fine.

Yousetsu: Mm.

Orutoku: Oh, you’re leaving, Kioku-kun? Have a good rest of your day, then! See ya!

Hibiki: Later, Orutoku.

Hashikawa held the door open as she jittered around on the spot, and Yousetsu and I stepped out into the corridor. Not bothering to wait for either of them, I strode ahead. Hashikawa jogged up to me.

Hashikawa: Um, sorry if being in the library with me gets boring or something. I’m not the b-best at social stuff, I guess, s--
Hibiki: Where’s Sumire?

Hashikawa: Oh, um, Saori-san’s still at our table.

Hibiki: Huh.

Hashikawa: …Huh?

Hibiki: Just surprised you two aren’t attached at the hip. I thought you would die if you stepped outside of arm’s reach of her or something.

Hashikawa: What? I, um… I mean, uh… Is that o-okay? That’s okay, right?

Hibiki: I don’t really care, so yeah, whatever. Your dependency issues aren’t my problem.

Hashikawa: R-Right… Sorry.

Hashikawa held open the door to the library the same as she’d done before. Spotting Sumire across the room nose deep in a huge textbook, I strolled over and took a seat.

Hibiki: Yo.

Sumire: [Looking up from book] Oh! Hey, Kioku-san. You come to sit with us?

Hibiki: Yeah. Guess so.

Sumire: Sweet. There’s not a lot of talking going on, so you might want to grab a book. Stay as long as you want.
Hibiki: Sweet.

Hashikawa and Yousetsu caught up, both of them sitting down as well. Sumire smiled at Hashikawa warmly.

Sumire: Hey, Tsuruko-san. Is your gakuran okay?

Hashikawa: Y-Yeah! Yeah, it’s fine. I’ll go check on it again soon.

Yousetsu: [Opening a laptop] I’ll go with.

Sumire: Sounds like a plan.

Hibiki: Sure. What’s with the laptop?

Yousetsu: Oh… This is from the computer lab. A few of the devices in there were portable ones, so I figured I’d take one… Better than sitting in the dark all the time.

Hibiki: ...Fair enough.

Yousetsu went back to typing after that, so I got up and went to go get a book. Eventually, I settled on some murder mystery novel that was transparent about the entire plot twist from the first page. I ended up reading it for an hour or so anyway, Hashikawa folding origami cranes, Yousetsu typing away on her laptop and Sumire always either reading, talking about what she’d read or going to go find more books. All of it seemed to be about coral, so I decided to just try my best to tune it out.

After a while, Hashikawa sat up and sighed. Yousetsu looked up from her laptop, expression as monotonously blank as always.

Yousetsu: Something wrong?
Hashikawa: Oh, um… I-it’s no big deal. I just ran out of paper.

Youseitsu: How big do the pieces need to be?

Hashikawa: Not that big! It’s okay though, I can just go get some from the s—

Youseitsu: Here.

_Youseitsu pulled out her notebook and cleanly tore off a few pages and handed them to Hashikawa._

Hashikawa: A-Are you sure you don’t need these? I mean, you write in that notebook a lot, and, uh…

Youseitsu: …

Hashikawa: …T-Thank you.

Youseitsu: No problem. The cranes look nice.

Hashikawa: Aah! Um! Thank you again! Eheh…

Hashikawa: [Poking at cranes] Do you want one? I’m not doing anything with them, so…

_Youseitsu looked over at the cranes silently before plucking one up as if she was inspecting it. She put it down on her laptop’s dashboard and softly smiled._

Youseitsu: …That’s really nice of you. Thanks.

Hashikawa: [Happily relieved] Ah! It’s no problem at all!
Hashikawa: Oh... Mind if I ask what time it is?

Yousetsu: [Looking at laptop] ’Bout 2:45.

Hashikawa: A-Alright, thanks! I think I need to go check on the laundry again, then...

Yousetsu: I’ll come.

Hibiki: Me too. This book sucks.

Sumire: Oh, are you guys going to go check on the laundry?

Hashikawa: Yeah. Did you want to come?

Sumire: I would, but I was just about to go find some more books. You guys’ll be fine if I stay here again, right?

Hashikawa: U-Uh, yeah! We’ll be okay! Take your time with the books and stuff.

Sumire: Will do. See you soon, Tsuruko-san!

Hashikawa: Yeah! See you soon.

Everyone got up, Sumire heading off to the shelves while Hashikawa, Yousetsu and I started towards the door. Just as I entered the hallway, the sound of laughter reached my ears.

Kim: [Standing outside laundry room; chuckling] You think he’ll come out of there any time soon?

Toramoto: Pfft. Not likely. You think we can get in?
Kim: At our own risks, maybe. He’d probably just kick you in the shins.

Toramoto: And you?

Kim: I’d punch him in the throat. Perfect height.

Toramoto: Oh God. I’d pay to see that. Just keep me out of it.

Kim: If I do ever get to throttle him, I’ll make sure you’re at least an upper-cut’s distance away, Tiger.

Toramoto: Heh. Sounds great.

Hibiki: Who are you two plotting to kill?

Kim: Oh, hey. We’re just talking about Kurai. Not gonna kill the dude.

Toramoto: As much of a pain in the ass as the guy is, it ain’t exactly worth goin’ to trial for offin’ him.

Hibiki: Fair. He hasn’t blocked the laundry room door or anything, has he?

Toramoto: Nah. You should be able to get in.

Kim: For sure. Good luck.

Toramoto: Make sure Hashikawa-san doesn’t faint the minute she walks in there. Could get scary.

Hashikawa: [Hunching shoulders] U-Uh… O-Okay.
Rolling my eyes at Toramoto, I went over to the laundry room door and opened it quietly. It seemed like Orutoku had left, but there was definitely still someone inside. They had their back turned and were hunched in front of one of the washing machines, shoving clothes into it furiously. The weird part, though, was their appearance - they were wearing some kind of bright yellow outfit that had both pants and a hoodie fused into the one article of clothing, which unsurprisingly looked absolutely ridiculous. It had a hood with ears and some sort of... Jagged lightning bolt tail? I had no clue what to make of it. It was just fucking uncanny.

Apparently Yousetsu could get something from it, at least. As I stepped into the room quietly, she followed behind me, then muttered something with an air of sheer bewilderment as she caught sight of the figure.
Yousetsu: Uh... Is that a Pikachu kigurumi?

Kurai?: [Frozen still] ........

The person ducked their head down and pulled at their hood frantically. Yousetsu, apparently unfazed, started to walk over to them.
If Yousetsu hadn’t been here, I’d probably have thought it was her, but… Between the height and what Kim and Toramoto had said earlier, it was pretty clear what was going on.

Yousetsu: …Kurai-san.

Kurai: …

Yousetsu: …I know it’s you. All the clothes you’re putting into the washing machine are grey v-necks.

Kurai: ……

Yousetsu: …Why are you wearing that?

Kurai: F-Fuck off--

Yousetsu: Also, you could have brought all your laundry to the meeting earlier. You wouldn’t have had to even do it yourself.

Kurai: I-- I SPILT SOUP ON MY SHIRT, OKAY? I-I MEAN. SOMEONE ELSE SPILT IT. IT WAS ALIX.

Yousetsu: …

Hibiki: Holy shit, this is priceless.

Kurai: [Turns around] Wh-- YOU’RE HERE TOO?

Hibiki: I might be, bitch. What’s it to you?

Kurai: YOU… Ugh. Fuck. FUCK!
Kurai pulled off his hood angrily, revealing his bright red shock of hair. He slammed the door on the washing machine and turned it on.

Kurai: I was just trying to mind my own fucking business and then you guys come in and ruin EVERYTHING! Can I just get some peace and quiet? For ONCE?

Yousetsu: …You’re the one yelling.

Kurai: MAYBE I LIKE YELLING!!!

Yousetsu: [Shrugs] …Ok.

Hashikawa: U-Uh… Can I ask what you’re weari--

Kurai: NO.

Hashikawa: EEP!


Kurai: DON’T TELL ME HOW TO LIVE MY LIFE!

Kurai: You know what? Fuck this. I’m leaving. Have fun ruining lives or whatever, you ASS.

Hibiki: Oh, no need to tell me. I will.

Growling at me and shoving his hands into his pockets, Kurai bent his head down and stormed off, slamming the laundry room door behind him. Hashikawa, Yousetsu and I stood in silence for a moment, the two of them apparently trying to process what they’d just seen.
Hashikawa: …Um. W-We should probably just go. You know, before he comes back. I’m sure my gakuran is f-fine.

Yousetsu: …Sure.

After ducking her head out the door to make sure the coast was clear, Hashikawa held the door open again. Kurai was nowhere in sight by the time I stepped back into the hallway. Thank God for that.

Trying my best to ignore Kim and Toramoto unabashedly making out against a wall on the other side of the hallway, I went back into the library and sat down with Yousetsu and Hashikawa again. Sumire still hadn’t gotten back, by the looks of things.

I opened up my book to the page I’d left it open to and started to read again. The prose was almost impressively dry. It was a wonder anyone could write something so bland and still get it published. Not like it mattered, though - anything else would’ve been equally b--

???: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAUUUGHHHHHHH!!!!

Hibiki: …

A piercing scream rang out through the library.

My stomach dropped.

Hashikawa: W… What…

Yousetsu: Oh my God. That sounded like…

Hibiki: …
Without thinking, I leapt up out of my seat and started to sprint. The bookcases were almost impossible to navigate, but-- but there had to be some way. I clenched my teeth.

Hashikawa: W-WHERE DID THAT C-COME FROM?

Yousetsu: F-Further to the right. Just. Go right.

Hashikawa: …

???: [Distant] Oh no.

???: [Distant] UH, ANYONE AROUND? WE’RE IN THE AUDIOBOOK SECTION!


Hashikawa: T-The audiobook section! Um, I think that’s…

In front of me, Hashikawa turned a corner, then stopped dead in her tracks. Her eyes went wide.

…

I followed.

Alix: A-Aitou-san? Aitou, answer me. Who is it.

Aitou: …

Hashikawa: …
...Something cold settled inside me. Clutching at the side of my head, my skull pounding, I turned the corner.

...

Hibiki: Oh God.

...On the ground, slashes and bruises littering her body, a knife lodged in her side…
...Was Kamiya. Mizuki Kamiya. Ultimate Fashion Designer.

Bile rising in my throat, I doubled over, falling to my knees. Hashikawa’s yells rose over the sound of fast approaching footsteps.

Hashikawa: GET OVER HERE! ANYONE AT ALL! F-Fuck! W-Why hasn’t the Body Discovery Announcement g-gone off yet?!
Sumire: TSURUKO, ARE YOU O-- O… Oh my God.

Kurai: What’s-- ……

Toramoto: …Kamiya?


There was a pause, and then--

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

Monokuma: A body has been discovered! Get yourselves down to the library if you want in on the drama!

...

...She really was dead, then. That was it.

.........

Fuck.
CHAPTER TWO PART FOUR: To Write A Will In Ice

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the extra week's delay! School's REALLY been getting on top of me recently. Can't promise the next chapter will be out when it was meant to be, but here we are with this, at least! Thank you all for sticking with me so far!

Mentions of poisoning, lacerations, bruising, and other general DR stuff for this chapter. Just the stuff from the body discovery art from last time, basically.

That said, hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything was a blur. Acid bubbled at the back of my throat, scorching and sour, and I fought to bite it back. Amidst it all, the crashing sound of earth shattering waves rang through my head.

Kamiya...

...

...This just had to fucking happen again, didn't it...?

......

Squeezing my eyes shut tight, I took in a deep breath. Explosive footsteps and shouts echoed through the library, all of it foggy through the hot blur of... of something that was pounding in my skull. I covered my ears, clenched my jaw, and tried my best to block it all out.

I just... I just had to breathe.

...
In. My hands shuddered over my ears.

Out. A pang of heat shot through my throat.

In. I bit down on my lip.

Out. My brow loosened.

In...

......

......Out.

......

In...........

...

...After what felt like an eternity, the buzz subsided. I lowered my hands from my ears and stumbled to my feet.

*God,* this was even worse than the last time.

I opened my eyes and tried my best to look nonchalant. A few metres away, Aitou was crouched down at Kamiya’s side with an ungloved hand to her skin. Occasionally, he murmured under his breath to Alix, hovering by his shoulder with a regretful frown.
Shaking off my disorientation as well as I could, I turned around. At the other end of the bookshelf, Hashikawa had taken Sumire’s hand and hidden herself behind her. The last few people were just now coming around the side of the shelf, each of them shouting something different as the body came into view.

???: GUYS, WHERE ARE-- .......

???: [Trembling] Oh no… K-Kamiya-san?

???: [Panicked] W-What’s going on!?

???: G...Ghh...

???: H...Huh?

Hibiki: ........

All around me, everyone else’s outcries of horror bled together into a whirlpool of trepidation until finally, a single voice sliced through.

???: Upu…

???: Upupupu. AHAHAHAHA!

Hibiki: …G-Get the fuck out here.

???: AHA--------

???: …Jeez, fine. You’re no fun at all, Know-It-All.
There was a loud click as the floorboards spun behind me, and Monokuma sprung out from beneath them. He waddled over to stand next to the body, in everyone’s line of sight.

Monokuma: [Dejected] Here I am trying to make this a player-friendly killing game, and yet you guys fly into a blind panic every time you see a little bit of blood! This kind of stuff happens on TV all the time, you know…

Sumire: [Glowering] It’s a little bit different when it’s just animated. This is all-- Kamiya-san was a real person! And now she’s--

Monokuma: --Oh, that’s real funny. Animated? You should be the Ultimate Comedian.

Kurai: [Hands balled into fists] Wh--

Monokuma: WELL, ANYWAY! I’m glad to see you’re all here! What a diligent lot of kids you guys are!

Kurai: ...Tch. Right.

Kim: Yeah. How surprising that people would collectively react when they hear someone fucking screaming at the top of their lungs in a killing game. Phenomenal teamwork.

Monokuma: Hey! If you’re gonna give me snark, you can take it up with the PR department, Loose Cannon. Celebrities like me have better things to do than listen to all this slander.

Ryuumatsu: [Raising finger] I-I don’t believe slander is the appropriate legal terminology you’re looking for he--

Monokuma: [Unsheathing claws] Would you CAN IT!

Ryuumatsu: [Wide eyed; recoiling] !!!
Monokuma: THANK you. You bastards can’t sit still for two minutes, can you?

Monokuma: [Retracting claws] Well, that’s enough of that. It’s about time I gave you kids the MONOKUMA FILE!

Monokuma clapped his paws, and a beep sounded from my eHandbook. I reached into my jacket pocket with slightly trembling hands, clutching the device tightly as I navigated to the new page - the ‘Monokuma File 02’.

The victim was Mizuki Kamiya, Ultimate Fashion Designer. The body was discovered in the library.

The time of death was 3:02pm. The victim has bruises, lacerations, one stab wound, and slight internal bleeding. Traces of poison have been found in the victim’s system.

OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Monokuma File 02

...Holy fucking shit.

Toramoto: Christ. That’s brutal.

Kim: No kidding…

Aitou: [Standing up, frowning] There’s, ah. No cause of death listed here.

Orutoku: Huh? Aren’t there, like… Three? Four?

Aitou: Those simply describe the injuries inflicted on the victim. Which one of those was fatal hasn’t been clarified.

Monokuma: [Rubbing neck sheepishly] Oopsies! I must have left that out. Golly, I’m so scatterbrained…
Hashikawa: S-So you’re going to add it?

Monokuma: Ahaha! …No.

Hashikawa: [Biting lip] …O-Oh…

Sumire: [Warmly, patting Hashikawa’s shoulder] We’ll be fine, Tsuruko-san.

Sumire: [Frigid, glaring] …Thanks for nothing, Monokuma.

Monokuma: [Teasingly on-edge] Oh no, M-Mad Scientist’s m-m-mad at me again! Guess I had better scam!

Alix: Wh-- Already?

Monokuma: Course! You kids should know what you’re doing! The tutorial was days ago.

Yousetsu: Yeah. We know what to do… Just gotta find the culprit, and everyone else gets to live.

Monokuma: Right you are, Astro Girl! After all, I’m a bear of my word.

Monokuma: [Saluting] Well, I got stuff to do. I’ll see you kids when I see you! Buh byeee!

Just like that, Monokuma hopped off and disappeared back into the floor without a trace, leaving everyone else reeling. A suffocatingly discomforting silence fell upon the room as it dawned on everyone what came next.

Hanahara: W-We…
Hanahara: [Breathing in deeply] We can get through this. All of us.

Kim: Well, not all. Someone isn’t coming out of that trial room.

Hanahara: …I know. We can’t let that get in our way, though. There’s no time to be worried about that. Or about, uh… Kamiya-san.

Rouvin: Abandoning your personal sentiments and hesitance in favour of the matter at hand does seem practical in a scenario such as this with so much on the line…

Aitou: …I suppose if that’s what we need to do, then… I’ll get started on my examination of the corpse. With any luck, I should be able to narrow down the potential causes of death.

Orutoku: Great! I’ll guard the crime scene! Hanahara-san, can you stick around?

Hanahara: Oh. Sure.

Muted chatter started to rise through the room as everyone decided what they were going to do.

…Guess I had better put this shit behind me and get to work.

Shoving my hands into my pockets, I glanced around the room. Nothing besides the body really stood out immediately, but there was sure to be something. Best thing to do would be to just start looking.

I decided to head over to the nearby table first. My hands were still shaking, but hopefully getting away from the body for a little while would force them to stop being a humiliating mess. Sighing, I shook my head and continued on.

???: H-Hey, Hibiki-san…
Hibiki: What is it, Yosh--

Hibiki: ……

...Fucking hell.

Steeling my nerves, I turned around. Behind me was Maeko, standing as though she’d been caught in a car’s headlights. She looked meeker than I’d ever seen her.

Maeko: [Shoulders hunched; head bowed] …

Hibiki: …Fuck. Sorry.

Maeko: F-For… what?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Absolutely nothing at all, actually. I didn’t say a thing.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: …Know what? Let’s just get to work.

Maeko: …Ok.

Not sparing another glance back at Maeko, I stalked over to the table I’d been eyeing before. My hands clenched tighter in my pockets as my eyes scanned its surface.

Hibiki: …Huh. Well this looks like a whole load of nothing.
Hibiki: You’d think a killer who used about ten fucking murder methods would need somewhere to put all of their shit. Guess they cleaned up well.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: Nice to see someone here is at least kind of competent, at least. I was starting to have my doubts.

Maeko: ……..

Hibiki: …Are you attempting telepathy, or are you just being all cryptic again now? That worked better as a duo act with your sister, you know.

Maeko: …………..

...Wow. Whatever, I guess. If she didn’t want to contribute, that was her problem, not mine.

Not like I ever needed a fucking sidekick or anything anyway.

I took a step back and glanced around the library. Now that I was a bit more focused, I could actually see that despite how beaten up the body had looked before… there didn’t actually seem to be much in the way of any damage to the surroundings. Nothing really indicated too much of a scuffle.

Hibiki: You’d think that if someone got that badly wounded, there’d be some kind of mess to show for it. Barely anything’s been moved at all.

Maeko: [Staring at table] …

Hibiki: …Okay then. Your expertise as a fucking karate master who fights people for a living might
be kind of helpful here, but I guess I’ll just shove it up my ass if you really care that little. We can just get executed in the trial. That’d be way easier than actually investigating.

???: That’s pretty optimistic of you, Kioku-kun.

**Oh thank God. Someone who was actually willing to interact with me.**

**I turned around to find Kim standing by me. Her hand was poised on her hip, the slightest smirk tugging at her lips.**

Kim: I mean, assuming that getting executed is easier than investigating? What if they execute us through relentless labour? Make us shovel coal ‘til we drop, or something.

Hibiki: That’s… kind of overly fucking gruesome in practice, probably, but yeah. Guess it could happen.

Toramoto: I’ll be sure to ask Monokuma exactly how much of a sadist he is next time we see ‘im. Also, why coal?

Kim: [Shrugs] Gotta be incinerators somewhere on this thing. Maybe we can set the whole thing up in flames. Show it to the man.

Hibiki: That’s one way of asserting yourself, I guess.

Toramoto: Heh. Sure as hell is.

Toramoto: [Tugs at lapel; grins] Anyway, if you’re lookin’ for some expertise on fight scenes ‘n shit, you’ve come to the right guy.

Hibiki: What, you get into brawls with that staggering five foot six frame of yours?

Toramoto: I prefer to stay out of it myself, but… Let’s just say brushin’ paths with the yakuza ain’t
always pretty.

Hibiki: Wow. I have no idea why that might be.

Toramoto: …You want my insight or not, Kioku-sama?

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: Please.

Toramoto: Keheh. Thought so.

Chuckling, Toramoto turned around to face the body and gestured at the area around it with a broad, languid sweep of his hand.

Toramoto: A’ight. Y’see these bookshelves? I honestly don’t know how at least one of ‘em didn’t get knocked over. With the wounds Kamiya-san’s got, I’d guess that she was probably pinned to the ground pretty quick, because otherwise that kinda thing woulda left a real shitstorm in its wake. Fuckin’ knife wounds everywhere.

Kim: No kidding, huh…

Toramoto: Sorry, Princess. This too brutal for ya?

Kim: [Puts arm around Toramoto’s waist; smirks] Oh, don’t worry about me, Tiger. I’m pretty familiar with playing rough.

Toramoto: [Raises eyebrows; grins] You’ve definitely left no room for doubt there, I gotta admit.

Maeko: …
Hibiki: I’m going to puke.

Toramoto started laughing as I said that, and I felt my face start to burn as I threw my head back and sighed. Dying and being condemned to an eternal existence in the pits of hell would be a walk in the park compared to this shit.

Guess I’d at least gotten some useful information, though… Clearly, the killer was pretty strong if they managed to pin Kamiya to the floor or something like that. This was definitely worth remembering.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Body’s Surroundings**

Rolling my eyes, I gave Toramoto a sharp look.

Hibiki: …Alright. Fucking thanks, I guess.

Toramoto: You guess?

Hibiki: If you think there’s any chance of me showing you any more gratitude than I have to, you’re delusional.

Kim: Aw, fair enough. You found anything yourself?

Hibiki: I’ve barely been here three minutes.

Kim: You were here before we showed up! But hey, understandable. See you around, Kioku-kun. Good luck!

Hibiki: …I don’t need luck.

Kim raised an eyebrow at me as she gave me an odd smile, and she and Toramoto walked
away, his hand draped across her shoulders. Already losing faith in this entire investigation, I turned to Maeko.

Hibiki: You got anything to say about that?

Maeko: Uh…

Hibiki: …Oooof course not. Fine, let’s just…

I looked around the room, and soon enough my eyes landed on a set of speakers not that far from the table, a pile of books stacked on top of them.

Hibiki: …That could be a thing, I guess. You think that’s a thing?

Maeko: [Shrugs] …

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …Just come with me.

I grabbed Maeko’s hand in one of my own and dragged her over to the speaker. Stretching my other arm above my head, I managed to pull down one of the stacks of books.

Hibiki: Time to take a look at these…

Hibiki: …

Hibiki: …’Thirty Easy Recipes for the Everyday Otaku’?

Maeko: …
Scowling, I cast the fine piece of modern literature in front of me onto the floor without a second thought. Guess *that* wasn’t going to be of any use, then.

As I went to throw the rest of the books onto the floor along with it, I saw Yousetsu’s hazy eyes catch my own from across the room, and she shuffled over at a painstakingly slow pace. Finally, once she was at my side, she gave the floor and speaker a long, tired look.

Yousetsu: [Fiddling with pen] …Are you sure you should be tearing apart the crime scene like that…?

Hibiki: Who’s gonna stop me? *You*?

Yousetsu: …Fair enough, I guess.

Hibiki: Damn right.

Hibiki: …

Maeko: …

Yousetsu: [Chewing pen] …

Hibiki: ...Oh my God, alright. Why did you come over here? Did you have something to actually *say*?

Yousetsu: [Frowning] …I said it already.

Hibiki: …
Hibiki: [Grumbling] Right. Okay, well, anything else?

Yousetsu: Uh… Let me think for a moment.

Yousetsu: …

Hibiki: …

Yousetsu: …No.

Hibiki: Awesome. Thanks for wasting my time, then. Bye.

Waving Yousetsu off, I turned back to the speaker to give it a closer look. It was… a pretty fucking standard speaker. Literally nothing about it was at all abnormal - no scratches, no blemishes, no bloodstains, just a couple of blinking lights and a whole lot of aluminium. At the rate this investigation was going, we’d be better off just voting based on gut instinct five minutes in and calling it a day--

Hibiki: …Wait, shut up.

Yousetsu: I wasn’t s--

Hibiki: Why is the speaker turned on?

Yousetsu: …Oh. It is?

Hibiki: It sure as shit seems to be, given there’s a big fucking green light on it. You got a better diagnosis for that?

Yousetsu: It could mean that it’s eco-friendly?
Hibiki: …

Yousetsu: …

Yousetsu: Heh… Um, yeah. I guess it’s turned on.

Hibiki: Yeah. Probably just Aitou or Alix or some shit, I guess. He was talking about the audiobook section a while ago.

Yousetsu: Can Alix… turn on a speaker?

Hibiki: He can hit a golf ball off a tee with perfect accuracy.

Yousetsu: He can what?

Hibiki: …Nevermind. Point is, the guy’s fucking incorporeal, so nothing he does makes sense anyway. No use trying to apply reality to any of it.

Yousetsu: …Oh. Okay.

Yousetsu: [Pushing pen behind hair] To be fair, uh… I don’t think anyone else could’ve actually made any use of the speaker, at least not that recently. There’s nothing plugged into it.

Hibiki: Right… And a wireless wi-fi connection wouldn’t work since…

Yousetsu: Since the motive meeting didn’t go that well. I don’t think anyone would have had much of a chance with that. The connection was gone pretty much immediately, if I remember…

Hibiki: Yeah. Which also means that chances are the motive had nothing to do with this… Meaning someone acted entirely of their own accord.
Hibiki: …Jesus. Guess that also means someone in our midst is a natural born killer, huh.

Yousetsu: What?

Hibiki: They didn’t need a motive, and they absolutely fucking brutalised the body. Eugh.

Yousetsu: I… hadn’t thought about it like that. That’s…

Yousetsu looked to the floor, and for a moment a look of fear unlike anything her unfazed demeanour had let slip before made her brow crease and eyes focus. She tugged at the strap of her bag tightly as she looked back to me and nodded, shaken.

Yousetsu: …

Yousetsu: …I’ll… do the best I can in the investigation.

Hibiki: Go for it. Doesn’t change a thing for me.


Hibiki: Really wish people would stop saying that, but thanks, I fucking guess. Whatever.

Yousetsu: What?

Hibiki: Whatever! Bye!
Yousetsu: [One eyebrow raised; clutching bag strap] Yeah… Bye.

Well, that was… something, at least. Sure as hell better than spending the investigation watching whatever shitty American movie Toramoto had been so hooked on last time.

Glancing over out of the corner of my eye, I could see that Maeko was still nearby, just spacing out blankly at the floor. It was kind of frustrating, but… I guess she was pretty upset.

Hibiki: …Hey.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: I’m going to go look at the, uh… the body now. Stay here if you want.

Maeko: … [Nods]

Hibiki: Cool.

I gave Maeko a small, hesitant pat on the arm, and gradually made my way over to the body. I didn’t want to look at it, and yet… The moment my gaze landed on the gruesome scene, it became impossible to pull away. Unsettled, I screwed my eyes shut tight, clenched my fists, and finally closed the distance between myself and the corpse.

Aitou: [Muttering softly] …A-And you’re sure…?

Alix: Mhm. Everything will be okay. Kamiya-san doesn’t seem like the type to hold vengefulness in her heart for long, does she? I’m sure her spirit can move on.

Aitou: [Nodding; smiling slightly] …Okay. Th… Thanks.
Alix: Pas de problème, mon chéri.

Alix: … [Perking up] Oh, hey Kioku-san! How are you doing?

Hibiki: What makes you think I’d wanna tell you?

Alix: [Smiles] Oh, literally nothing you’ve ever done has indicated any amount of willing emotional openness whatsoever, don’t worry. Just figured I’d ask.

Alix: …You’re here to see Kamiya-san, right? Aitou-san’s already finished up his fancy autopsy thing, so we should be able to fill you in.

Almost automatically, Alix softly nudged Aitou in the arm to get his attention. The mortician looked up, caught somewhat off guard, and then followed Alix’s gesture to look at me - at least until he inevitably broke off eye contact. Aitou adjusted his cravat with a gloved hand and straightened his posture.

Aitou: [Clears throat] R-Right.

Aitou pointed out the cuts that ran along Kamiya’s arms with stiff hands. When he started to speak, it sounded almost mechanically rehearsed.

Aitou: Perhaps one of the most apparent points of interest on the cadaver is the set of lacerations along the arms and face. They seem to be coupled with some fair bruising, though it’s all somewhat light, and appears to be predominantly on the legs… Better judgement would tell me this was likely all the result of a confrontation of some sort.

Hibiki: Wouldn’t be surprised if a lot of the bruises were just her falling down the stairs and shit.

Aitou: That happened often?

Hibiki: More than you’d think. The cuts are obviously from this, though.
Aitou: I see… It’s certainly also worth noting, then, that the cuts are all quite shallow. I’d hypothesise that the culprit was attempting to strike at her from a distance by taking broad stabs or swings. Either that, or these were inflicted post-mortem.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Cuts on Body**

Alix: [Bowing head; serious] Whoever did this must have been in a really unstable state of mind… This killing game is horrible.

Hibiki: [Raising voice] And the person who did this shit isn’t? Pretty sure only the most despicable low-life fuck on the planet would pull something like this. Swear to God, soon as I find out who did this I’m gonna gouge their fuckin’ eyes ou--


Hibiki: …Whatev’.

Aitou: Thanks. Uh, as I was saying.

Aitou: [Coughing awkwardly] Um. Relevant to the gashes on the corpse’s arms is the lack of blood loss. Obviously the incisions are all quite shallow, but enough capillaries would have been severed that one would anticipate at least some loss of blood, or so Sumire-san tells me. And yet… there’s barely any.

Hibiki: Alright. So what?

Aitou: So… Something happened to the victim’s blood flow before death, I suppose. Coagulation, a severely lowered pulse… Or, potentially, measures were taken to clear up the blood before the body was discovered. Given how recent the death was, though, that seems incredibly unlikely.

Hibiki: Huh.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Lack of Blood Loss**
Narrowing my eyes and biting my lip, I looked over the body. Aitou was probably getting around to talking about the knife that was very clearly sticking out of Kamiya’s side, but there was still something else worth talking about which caught my eye.

Hibiki: …There’s something dripping out of her mouth.

Aitou: [Adjusts glasses] …Ah, that. The Monokuma File said there were traces of poison in the victim’s system, did it not? I’d imagine that’s likely what this is. It was likely ingested very recently.

Hibiki: If it worked quickly, it could’ve caused the blood clotting or slow pulse or whatever. Probably would’ve made taking her down really easy…

Aitou: Precisely. A vast array of different events seem to have taken place in quick succession here - the lacerations, the poisoning…

Hibiki: [Pointing at knife] And that.

Aitou: And that, yes.

Alix: [Nudging Aitou] “That”…?

Aitou: The knife embedded in her torso. The victim was stabbed with it, and it was probably used to strike at the arms, too.

Alix: Oh. Thank you.

Alix: …Wait, what kind of knife? Hanahara-san might know something if it’s from the buffet.

Alix raised a delicate hand and pointed across the room silently. I followed the direction of his outstretched finger to find Hanahara standing with Sumire and Hashikawa, the three of them gently consoling Maeko as she slumped against the wall with her head buried in her one remaining hand. Nearby, Orutoku noticed Alix’s gesture from where he’d been watching over
the crime scene and tapped Hanahara on the shoulder. They exchanged a few words with the others, and the two of them both promptly walked over to see us.

Alix: [Calm smile] Hi, Hanahara-san. Hi, Orutoku-san. How are things?

Orutoku: [Grinning; eyes closed] About as good as they can be, thanks! How about y...

Orutoku: [Opens eyes and looks down; clamps hand over mouth] …Urp.

Hibiki: …You’re really that disturbed by one dead body?

Orutoku: [Smiling nervously] Y-You aren’t?

Hibiki: Oh, I might be. The difference is that you’re literally a fucking security guard who watches spy movies in his free time. Would’ve thought you’d be a little numbed to this by now.

Orutoku: T-Those were just movies… It’s still upsetting to see when it’s one of your friends. Don’t think it really, uh… sunk in last time. Wow.

Orutoku: [Looking away; grinning anxiously] A-Anyway! You guys wanted something?

Aitou: I… I suppose we did, yes. The knife that’s been stabbed into the corpse’s torso is from the buffet, is that correct?

Orutoku: U-Uh… Do I have to look…?

Hanahara: It’s alright, Orutoku-san. I’ll handle it.

With a sigh, Hanahara knelt down across from Aitou and looked at the knife, her wide eyes narrowing under the weight of her frown. After a moment, she stood up and gave him a small, sharp nod.
Hanahara: That’s definitely from the buffet, yeah. I haven’t got a clue about when it was taken or who actually took it, though… Just about anyone with pockets could’ve tucked it into one safely enough.

Hibiki: So… Just about anyone except Kamiya then. Great.

Hanahara: Right… Sorry I wasn’t able to help much. I guess someone took it at breakfast, if that means anything. Can’t say for sure.

Aitou: That’s quite alright, Hanahara-san. Thank you for your assistance.

Hanahara: [Smiles softly] I’m just glad I could help.

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Steak Knife*

Orutoku: Actually, um, didn’t we also find some stuff on the floor?

Hanahara: Stuff on the-- OH! We did! Come take a look at this.

Alix: Come do what?

Hanahara: Take a l-- ...Ohhh. Sorry, Alix-san.

Alix: Heheh. No need to apologise.

Alix took Aitou’s hand in his as the pair stood up, and they walked around Kamiya to follow Orutoku and Hanahara’s gestures. Seeping into the carpet just behind Kamiya was a clear liquid with a sharp acidic scent, all of it right next to a small glass bottle that it’d clearly been tipped out of.
Hibiki: The fuck’s this?

Orutoku: I wanted to say it was nail polish, but, uh…

Hanahara: Doubt there’d be nail polish here.


Aitou: Ah… I saw this earlier, yes. I imagine it was likely the vessel for whatever poison the victim ingested.

Hibiki: Lemme see that.

Ignoring Orutoku’s anxious objections, I leaned down and picked up the bottle. It didn’t immediately start searing my fingerprints off, so it was probably safe enough.

Turning the bottle over exposed a small, bright yellow label. I squinted at it as I held it up to my face.

Aitou: Hm… Fluorescent toxicity warning label, simple glass with a tall prismic emerald cut… What does the label read?

Hibiki: [Fiddling with bottle] Says “Fast Acting - Lethal within two minutes”… Well, that’s pretty fuckin’ blunt.

Orutoku: C-Cripes.

Hanahara: Does it say anything else?

Hibiki: I’m getting there.
Hibiki: Alright, fine print… “Ingest orally in any quantity for fastest effects. Will cause internal bleeding, fast loss of consciousness, and potential organ failure. Contact with skin may cause severe acid burns and bleeding.”

Hibiki: …Someone else wanna hold this thing?

Hanahara: I… think I’ll pass, thank you.

Alix: I can hold it with my sleeves covering my hands?

Orutoku: [Running hand through hair nervously] I-Isn’t that kinda unsafe? What if you drop it?

Alix: [Lifting hand to face; gasping] Oh, shit. Um…

Hibiki: If you’re gonna, make sure to do it in Kim and Toramoto’s directio--

Aitou: --W-Would it perhaps be easier to simply place it down where it was and attend to it later? I should be capable of handling it safely with my gloves and a generous amount of caution.

Hibiki: All yours, dude.

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Spilt Poison Bottle*

Without hesitation, I leaned over and put the bottle back on the floor. I was about to stand up again when something caught my eye.

Hibiki: …Oh boy.

Hanahara: Is something wrong?

Hibiki: …
Grimacing, I bent over to Kamiya, picked up her hand in mine, and splayed her fingers open to reveal another glass bottle sitting in her upturned palm. A little more cautious of any spilt poison this time, I looked it over before picking it up.

Orutoku: [Shielding eyes with hands] Uh, what’s that? Another bottle?

Hibiki: Yeah. Looks about two thirds full. Wasn’t just left open on the floor or anything, I think.

Aitou: A tapered cut… Could I inquire about its label? Is it the same as the previous bottle?

Hibiki: [Turning bottle over] …Hasn’t got one. The bottles’ designs are definitely the same, though.

Aitou: Intriguing… I suppose the label may have fallen off at some point. Perhaps the culprit took it in order to keep note of the poison’s effects. They could potentially still have it on their person, should that be the case.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Labelless Poison Bottle**

Alix: Ooo. That’d at least cross one of us off the suspect list!

Orutoku: It would?

Alix: [Waves hand in front of face] Don’t think I can do much with a label other than making sticky origami!

Hibiki: Yeah, and for all I know you’re just wearing a blindfold to ‘make a fucking fashion statement’, end quote, you can see completely fine with those eyes of yours that none of us have ever actually seen, and you and your boyfriend over there are in cahoots.

Aitou: [Flushed red] W-Wait, his w--
Hanahara: No need to start bickering! That’s what the trial’s for. Alix has a point, but it’s pretty circumstantial. Let’s just leave it at that for now… Please.

Orutoku: S-Sounds good to me!

Alix: Moi aussi, dude. Also, I can show you my eyes if I gotta. I haven’t seen ‘em though, so they might be super gross! I could have, like, gooey tar black scleras that turn people into wax, or maybe straight up pits in my face that contain these ominously flickering candles but there’s nothing inside my skull for the candles to illuminate and my soul is actually entirely contained within a single flame that’s visible through both of the gaping chasms where my eyeballs are supposed to go, or--

Hibiki: --Y’know, it would be really great if your imagination was just a little less vivid.

Alix: No way! The shit that comes out of my mouth is its own artform. You’re just a hater.

Hibiki: Yeah? Well you’re just a--

Hanahara: SAVE IT FOR THE TRIAL, PLEASE!


Hanahara: It’s… Fine. We just don’t know how long we’ve got to investigate. Wouldn’t wanna waste valuable time squabbling, now would we?

Alix: No, ma’am!

Orutoku: [Standing at attention] U-Uh!-- NO MA’AM!

Hanahara: [Chuckling; tapping Orutoku’s arm] You don’t have to salute, Orutoku-san. As much as I appreciate it, I’m not your boss.

Orutoku: Oh…! Right. Heh.
With an awkward laugh, Orutoku lowered his arm down and started to thumb at his breast pocket’s emblem. Eyes drifting to the bookshelves, Aitou sighed and spoke up.

Aitou: At… any rate, I believe that covers everything there is to note about the corpse. If you happen to have any other inquiries, please feel free to take them up with me.

Hibiki: …Actually, yeah, I do have something to ask you about. You too, Orutoku.

Orutoku: M-Me? This, um.. This isn’t gonna be like last time, right? With the accusations and all?

Alix: [Melodramatically] Gasp! I suppose Hanahara-chan and I know when we aren’t wanted!

Hanahara: [Pushing up hairpin; playful tone] That’s alright, we can go do something else for a bit. Don’t bully Orutoku-san, though. I’ll punch you in the knees if you do.

Orutoku: [Panicked whispering] No violence, please! And, well… Y-You sure you really wanna take on Kioku-kun, Hanahara-san!? That seems like, um…

**Orutoku’s anxious gaze flitted over to me, and he jumped as our gazes met, his sentence trailing to a wavering halt. Hanahara looked at me and lit up with a small, lopsided grin.**

Hanahara: Yeah, I think I can take ‘em. They’re not the type to actually hurt anyone.

Hibiki: Bold of you to assume I haven’t already murdered someone in cold blood.

Orutoku: I don’t wanna be the killjoy here, but, uh… If we could stay a comfortable step away from the killing people jokes right now, I’d r-really appreciate it.

Hibiki: Fine, fine. I got shit to ask anyway.
I turned to Aitou. Though the mortician’s gaze was still meanderingly directed at the wall, I could tell he was still tuned in by the slight hitch in his expression when my eyes met his.

Hibiki: Aitou. You were with Kamiya when I last saw her. Tell me what happened after that.

Aitou: Oh. Er… She didn’t stay much longer, I suppose. Perhaps until around midday or so. I can’t fathom it was much longer than that.

Hibiki: Alright. And in the lead-up to the body discovery…

Aitou: I… Didn’t see her again. Alix-san and I simply spent the rest of the afternoon together. I perused the library, for the most part. We were also in the audiobook section for a period… Evidently, that was some time before this occurred.

Orutoku: I’d hope so… Strolling through the library and stepping on that would be horrifying.

Hibiki: [Crossing arms] And the speaker?

Aitou: Pardon?

Hibiki: [Jabs thumb over shoulder] There was a speaker turned on over there with nothing plugged into it. You just leave it on, or what?

Aitou: Ah! I… Suppose I must have, yes. My apologies.

Hibiki: [ Shrugs] Cool.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Aitou’s Testimony**

Aitou: If you don’t mind me asking, is any of this, well… Relevant? The Monokuma File stated that Kamiya’s death occurred right around the time of her body discovery, and that scream…
Hibiki: Oh, yeah. That was definitely her. She still could’ve gotten involved in some nasty shit before that, though, so alibis are definitely worth having…

Hibiki: [Narrows eyes] …Unless you’re doubting me, for some reason.

Aitou: [Leaning back] N-Not at all. I’m in no position to doubt your competence.

Hibiki: Sounds about right. Now… Orutoku.

Orutoku: [Gulps] Um, m-me?

Hibiki: No, the other Orutoku stuck on this hellhole of a ship. You know, just like the other Aitou.

Orutoku: The, uh… Um. What?

Hibiki: [Pinches bridge of nose] …You. I was talking about you.

Orutoku: Oh, haha! Well why didn’t you say so?

Hibiki: [Glaring] …

Orutoku: …Will telling you that I very much enjoy spending time with my friends and family and being alive in general stop you from doing whatever thing that look you’re giving me makes it seem like you’re v-very much about to do?

Hibiki: Nah. Telling me about the laundry meeting might, though.

Orutoku: O… Oh. Oh! I can-- I can do that!

Hibiki: Really wish you’d go ahead and do it, then. Y’know, instead of just telling me that you have the capacity, but not actually doing anything to prove it whatsoever.
Orutoku: Right, right! Sorry. Um…

Orutoku: [Pushing up sunglasses] So… You were there when I left the buffet in the morning to head over to the laundry room! I got there pretty fast, so I just started checking up on the washing machines and stuff. Ryuumatsu-kun showed up not much after that, for some reason. He seemed pretty worn out.

Hibiki: Wish I could’ve been there to see the look on his face.

Orutoku: [Tugs neckerchief] Yeah, aha… He barrelled in and said something about separating dark clothes from the rest of the load.

Hibiki: Sounds like Ryuumatsu, alright.

Orutoku: Guess so, huh? It was all good, though! I know my way around my fair share of stuff like that. Where would I be if I didn’t even know how to handwash my neckerchief?

That’s… honestly more competence than I’d expected from Orutoku. Nice to hear I hadn’t left all my shit in the hands of a total dumbass, I guess.


Orutoku: S-Sorry! Um… yeesh. I guess Ryuumatsu-kun and I spent most of the day together in the laundry room. Or… I was in there from the end of breakfast until a little after you left with Yousetsu-san and Hashikawa-san. Ryuumatsu-kun kind of came and went all morning.

Hibiki: So you were alone for a fair part of the morning, then.

Orutoku: Yep! That’s okay, though! Ryuumatsu-kun is super busy, a--

Hibiki: So you don’t actually have anyone to back up those parts of your alibi.
Orutoku: W-Well, no… That was hours ago, though! I was with him for a while in the lead up to the laundry room meeting, and then I was with you for ages after that!

Hibiki: Yeah, yeah.

Hibiki: …Kamiya’s clothes were already in the laundry room when I showed up. Did she drop them off?

Orutoku: Ah! She did! She was one of the first people there. She left pretty quickly after dropping everything off.

Orutoku: [Scuffing boot on floor] And, uhh… After you left with Yousetsu-san and Hashikawa-san, I hung around for a bit longer and then headed down to the buffet for a while. After that, I just went back to the Delta room!

Hibiki: And was anybody there for any of that?

Orutoku: Um… Yeah! Kurai-kun was in the suite for a little while. He left a while before all of this happened, though. Ran out of the room really fast!

Aitou: He what?

Orutoku: [Runs hand through hair] Yeah. I think he was wearing yellow and carrying a pile of dirty clothes or something? That’s what it looked like. Oh, but he yelled at me not to look at him, so don’t tell him I saw that… I-It was an accident.

Hibiki: Right.

I watched Orutoku’s gaze linger on me for a moment, and his shoulders relaxed as he realised the conversation was coming to an end. I shoved my hands into my pockets and turned to the bookshelves.
Hibiki: Well, from what I’ve gotten so far, you were pretty much the last person to see Kamiya before all this shit happened. Wonder what she was doing after that.

Orutoku: Maybe she was being, like… Interrogated in a dark room? Or she could have been shot with a tranquiliser dart and left out cold!

Hibiki: If either of those turn out to be from that fucking James Bond thing you were talking about, I’ll eviscerate you.

Orutoku: …On second thought, maybe she was just in the library doing her own thing.

Hibiki: Sounds about right.

Aitou: Does it…? Alix and I were in the library for a fair two or three hours before the body discovery. I would have thought we would have encountered her…

Hibiki: Meh. This place is pretty big. She could’ve been in the Archives room or some shit.

Aitou: [Raises an eyebrow] … Archives?

Hibiki: It’s nothing. Point is, this is just about the biggest unlocked room on this ship. With only seventeen… fifteen of us around, it’s not really unbelievable that you wouldn’t’ve run into her.

Aitou: I suppose you have a point.

Hibiki: Of course I do. Now, are we done here or what?

Orutoku: Um… Yep! I think I covered everything…

Hibiki: Sweet.
Aitou: Actually, I’m interested in hearing what you were doing in the lead up to the murder, Kioku-san. Best to cover all bases.

Hibiki: …Is this an accusation?

Aitou: N-No, of course not. I simply thought it pertinent to ask.

Hibiki: Well, if you insist on wasting my time, I was with Sumire, Hashikawa and Yousetsu for about an hour or so up ‘til we heard that scream. Sumire wasn’t there when that happened, though.

Aitou: Where was she, then?

Hibiki: I dunno. Looking at big nerdy science books somewhere.

Aitou: …You don’t read similarly voluminous titles for your work as a psychologist?

Hibiki: I don’t need to read. I know everything already.

Aitou: I… see.

Aitou: Well… That’s all I wanted to hear, I suppose. This provides an alibi for the three of you, at the least. Sumire-san’s circumstances are… yet to be seen, as much as I would prefer to be able to trust her.

Orutoku: [Adjusts sunglasses] I’m sure she wouldn’t hurt anyone like this! Sumire-san is super nice. You guys saw how she stood up for Hashikawa-san that one time! That’s the mark of someone who’s got their heart set on justice!

Hibiki: Yeah, well. We’ll see.
I looked over to the end of the bookshelves. Maeko, who was still standing in the same place as before, had been joined by Hashikawa and Sumire themselves. By the looks of things, the three had been talking for a while.

On an off chance, Maeko looked up, and we locked eyes. Her gaze quickly flittered back to her shoes again.

Hibiki: …I’d better head back over to Maeko. I’ve got some shit to ask Sumire and Hashikawa about anyway.

I nodded my head in the trio’s direction, and Orutoku and Aitou looked over to them. Orutoku smiled at me and nodded, Aitou’s gloved hand drifting up to push his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Orutoku: Sounds good! We should probably go find Hanahara-san and Alix-kun again anyway. You wanna come, Aitou-kun?

Aitou: Yes, please. I’m positive they haven’t gone far… I’ll rinse the bottle of poison that spilt on the floor, too. It may be useful to have that in the trial.

Hibiki: Yeah, sounds good. See you guys later.

Orutoku: [Adjusts neckerchief; grins] See you, Kioku-kun!

As Aitou and Orutoku walked off together, both of them taking excessively wide steps around Kamiya’s body, I turned and started to stroll over to the end of the aisle. As I did, Sumire looked over and waved at me, a solemn smile adorning her face that didn’t quite reach her bright and teary eyes.

Sumire: Hey, Kioku-san. How are things?

Hibiki: About as good as they can be when you’re standing within a ten metre radius of a beaten corpse.
Maeko: [Flinches] …

Sumire: [Puts hand on Maeko’s shoulder] R… Right. Well, hopefully things’ll be better soon. Just gotta keep pushing forward, yeah?

Hashikawa: Y-Yeah! We can all make it through this!

Hibiki: Well, yeah. Not like any of us are just going to phase into the floor, or anything. We’re all here until the, uh… execution.

Hashikawa: [Pulls down hat; clings to Sumire] …

Maeko: [Clasps arm] …

Sumire: …Right. Anyway, did you want something?

Hibiki: Didn’t exactly come over here to talk about the weather, did I.

Sumire: [Coolly] Would’ve been nicer than shoving the elephant in the room in all of our faces.

Sumire: [Fiddling with braid] …Ugh. Sorry. Just… I don’t think what happened to Kamiya-san is something to make light of. Can we get this over with?

Hibiki: Whatever you want, dude.

Sumire: Thank you.

I glanced over to see Hashikawa’s grip on her cap tighten, the sailor hiding almost half her short frame behind Sumire. At this point, the two of them may have been fused at the hip - it felt like I’d barely seen them apart since I talked to Hashikawa on my second day here.

Hibiki: The first thing is alibis. Obviously, the two of you were together all day.

Hashikawa: O-Obviously?

Hibiki: Am I wrong?

Hashikawa: Um… No…

Sumire: [Nods] Yeah. Tsuruko-san and I were together pretty much all day. Yousetsu-san met up with us at about half past one, too. Aside from the two of them heading over to the laundry room two or three times and me going to get the occasional book, we were together the whole time. You were there for most of that.

Hibiki: Sure was.

Hashikawa: Mhm! And, um, we went to the storeroom for origami paper a while before that… W- We were in the library after that, though! Except for the visits to the laundry room, t-that is. Oh, and, um! We were never away from Saori-san for long, so she definitely couldn’t have had anything to do with this!

Sumire: [Smiling softly] Thanks, Tsuruko-san. I imagine Kioku-san will want to find that out for themself, though.

Hibiki: No kidding.

Hibiki: [Puts hand on hip] Good to see you’re not underestimating me, though. You aren’t exactly my top suspect anyway.

Sumire: [Crosses arms; nods confidently] I’m glad to hear that, at least. Mind if I ask why?

Sumire: Well, I can’t complain about that! Thanks for trusting me.

Hibiki: I didn’t say *that*.

Maeko: …

Hibiki: Oh yeah, and another thing. Where were you when you heard Kamiya scream?

Sumire: When Kamiya-san screamed… I was a fair few aisles away, for sure. Everything was a bit of a blur after that happened, so I don’t know the exact distance, unfortunately. I definitely wasn’t in the audiobook section, though… I prefer to read things myself.

Hibiki: You didn’t run into Aitou and Alix, then.

Sumire: Not until I got here, no. The two of them were both standing over Kamiya-san by the time I managed to find my way over. Them talking was part of the reason I was able to get here so quickly, actually.

Hibiki: Sweet.

*OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Sumire’s Testimony*

Sumire: Since we’re bringing up the body discovery, I may as well ask… You noticed that the Body Discovery Announcement took a while to play too, right?

Hibiki: Yeah. The rules around that were, like…

Sumire: [Pulls out e-Handbook] … Rule Seven. Apparently, it’s supposed to play after exactly three people other than the killer have seen the body.

Hashikawa: W-Wait, but… Didn’t it play after half of us were already there?
Hibiki: Sure did. You two, Alix, Aitou, Yousetsu, Kim, Toramoto, Kurai and I were all there when it went off.

Sumire: That doesn’t make much sense. Maybe there was just a delay for some reason.

Hibiki: Yeah, maybe.

At any rate, this is definitely worth taking note of…

OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Body Discovery Announcement

Sumire: Hm... Anything else?

Hibiki: Nah. I think I’ve seen everything I gotta in the library now. Might head over to the laundry room.

Hashikawa: [Tugs at seifuku] O-Oh! Um…

Hibiki: [Sighing] ...Yes, I can get your gakuran when I go.

Hashikawa: [Smiling anxiously] Y-You don’t have to!!! But, um. Th-Thank you.

Hibiki: Whatever. Maeko, you coming?

Maeko: …

Maeko looked over to me and, after a moment, gave her head a small shake ‘no’.

Hibiki: …Suit yourself. See you at the trial.
Maeko: …

Maeko: …Okay.

Waving blankly, I left the aisle, weaving my way through the bookshelves and out of the library. Nobody was standing in the corridor, but I could hear the occasional clipped shout coming from the laundry room.

Well, no point in wasting time. I stepped towards the laundry door and turned the handle.

Kurai: Jesus fucking Christ. Would you just get off my ass already?

Ryuumatsu: Stop b-being so abrasive and maybe I'll consider it.

Kurai: Oh, I’m sorry, your majesty! Would you rather I just copied your sheer eloquence?

Kurai: [Haughtily, hand on chest] My greatest condolences for disgracing your ears with my earlier rabble, my refined acquaintance. Truly, an uncouth ruffian such as myself should be--

Ryuumatsu: --I don’t sound like that--

Kurai: --Punished for my misdeeds! Ah, what shall I do. Sigh.

Ryuumatsu: Th-- You-- This is ridiculous! Rouvin-san, tell him this is ridiculous.

Rouvin: …

Ryuumatsu: R-Rouvin.
Rouvin: …

Ryuumatsu: …

Rouvin: …Me?

Hibiki: [Smirking] Oh, holy shit.

Ryuumatsu and Kurai glared with bewilderment as I strolled into the room and leaned against the wall next to Rouvin. Both of them looked completely disgruntled, the latter of the two now wearing a soaked version of his usual outfit that was dripping water all over the floor.

Kurai: …What do you want.

Hibiki: Well, first I want to tell you that that imitation would’ve been spot on if an overdramatic Aitou was what you were going for. Which, by the way, would be fucking hilarious. Remind me to ask later if there’s any way I can bribe him to act like that for a week.

Ryuumatsu: Is this really--

Hibiki: Secondly… you’re both fucking idiots.

Kurai: Is that supposed to be a conversation starter, shitstick?

Hibiki: Nah. I just thought you looked like you needed reminding. You’re welcome for that.

Kurai: Wow, cool! Make sure to send me a link to your donations page when the wi-fi stops being broken so I can fund your fucking escapades in comedy. A few decades of training couldn’t hurt you, I’ll tell you that!

Kurai dropped his facetious grin to snarl at me for a moment, and then stormed over to one of
the washing machines and kneeled down in a huff. A washing basket was already sitting in front of its open door, half full.

Kurai: Stupid fucking washing machine, stupid fucking psychologist, stupid fucking--

Hibiki: I can hear you.

Kurai: [Turning around frustratedly] IS THIS THE FACE OF SOMEONE WHO CARES IF EVERYONE ON THIS GODAWFUL SHIP FUCKING HATES HIM? NO? DIDN’T THINK SO!

Hibiki: …’K. Don’t think for a second you’re going anywhere without showing me the complete contents of that thing, by the way.

Kurai: [Jabbing middle finger over shoulder] …

As Kurai turned around and continued shovelling clothes into his washing basket, I looked over to Ryuumatsu. As much as I hated to admit it, the expression on his face... kind of shocked me. An almost grim, resigned frustration much different to his usual frantic offence had worked its way into his brow, turning down the corners of his lips. Sighing, I turned to him and looked him blankly in the eyes.

Hibiki: …What’s your problem?

Ryuumatsu: …Nothing of any concern to you.

Hibiki: Fine. Be that way. I don’t care.

Rouvin: Then why did you ask?

Hibiki: Because I’m a fucking nice person.
Rouvin: Oh… I don’t say this with intent to refute that by any means, but could you perhaps explain your line of logic to me? My limited personal understanding of the word ‘nice’ seems to be somewhat unsuitable for this context, and regrettably this has led to a lack of understanding on my behalf--

Hibiki: Dude. It was a joke.

Rouvin: I see… In that case, um… Hah hah?

Hibiki: Damn right. Hear that, Kurai? He appreciates my efforts. I don’t know what your idea of comedy is, but clearly you need to consult Rouvin on what a REAL joke is made of.

Kurai: [Shouting frustratedly] He didn’t even fucking GET IT, shithead!

Hibiki: And apparently neither do you, but here we are. Now, is anyone here actually getting any fucking investigating done, or have the three of you just been going in circles for the last however long with whatever pointless argument you were having when I walked in?

Ryuumatsu: O-Of course we’ve gotten things done. Or, well, I have, at least. I don’t know what these two have been doing.

Kurai: Nothing fucking useful, that’s for sure. Rouvin asks a whole lotta questions and doesn’t have a whole lotta answers.

Rouvin: Ah, apologies… Is that a problem?

Kurai: I dunno, can you end a sentence with something that isn’t a question mark?

Rouvin: …Possibly?

Kurai: Oh my fucking God.

Hibiki: Kurai, shut up. Ryuumatsu, tell me what you were doing.
Ryuumatsu: Why would I want to do th—… Actually, you know what? Fine. If you must know, I took it upon myself to investigate parts of the ship other than the library in the hopes of finding something else of consequence. Apparently it was worth doing last time, because the tarp that I investigated did actually play an important part in the trial, believe it or not.

Hibiki: Amazing how you managed to say so much and yet so little. Get to the point.

Ryuumatsu: [Glaring] …I investigated the storeroom, for the most part. Once I was done there, I found myself here. I have to say, though, I’m certainly wishing I hadn’t.

Hibiki: You and me both. Didn’t find anything important, did you.

Ryuumatsu: …I believe that shall be seen in the t-trial. In the meantime, why not inquire into Kurai-san’s incredible expedition in laundering?

Hibiki: I was about to do that, genius.

Hibiki: …Well, Kurai?

Kurai: Well what?

Hibiki: Basket. Hand it over.

Kurai: Wh-- It’s just my fucking CLOTHES.

Hibiki: Like how the fluorescent piss yellow rat onesie you were wearing was just normal pyjamas? Yeah, don’t fuckin’ think so.

Kurai: You fucking watch your mouth about Pikachu.

Hibiki: …
Kurai: …

Hibiki: If you give me that basket right the fuck now, I didn’t hear a thing.

Kurai: [Slams washing machine door] Deal.

Kurai kicked the basket over to me, pulling his beanie - the only thing he was wearing that wasn’t soaked - down over his hair and grumbling as he did so. I pulled a shirt out from the pile, letting a bunch of loose pins and badges fall all over the floor.

Kurai: HEY! Those are fucking important! Don’t just drop them all over the floor!

Hibiki: How important can some shitty plastic pins be, dude.

Kurai: …

Hibiki: Well, whatever. Not like a half metre drop’s gonna break any of them. Now, let’s see here…

Giving the first shirt a look over, I couldn’t see anything particularly out of the ordinary on it. The same went for the other three in the pile, too. Guess whatever may have been on them had come off pretty well in the washing machine.

Chucking the shirts onto the floor, I narrowed my eyes at Kurai for a moment.

Hibiki: …Those didn’t have anything on them.

Kurai: [Pinning badges back onto overalls] Course they didn’t, dipshit. That’s literally why washing machines are a thing. Can I go now?

Hibiki: Fuck no. We aren’t done here.
Kurai: Why the hell not?!

Hibiki: Because seeing you suffer brings me great satisfaction. Now shut the fuck up.

Kurai: Rrghh…

All that was left in the washing basket seemed to be a few more socks and buttons. Boredly, I picked the whole thing up by one handle and dumped its contents onto the floor. Along with what I’d already been able to see, a few other bits and pieces fell onto the floor.

Kurai: [Scowling] Stop breaking my shit!


I brushed off the intense glare Kurai was sending me and sat down amidst all the shit that was now on the floor. Candy wrappers, elastic bands, tiny plastic figurines… Where the fuck did he even get half this stuff?

Hibiki: [Picking up keychain] The fuck’s this shitty squirrel supposed to be?

Kurai: Th-- That’s Emolga, you bitch!

Hibiki: Right. And what’s that thing do?

Kurai: Depends on the moveset.


Kurai: Fuck off--
Hibiki: [Holding up figurine] What about this one?

Kurai: Pachirisu…

Hibiki: Oh, so this one’s the squirrel.

Kurai: IT’S NOT JUST A SQUIRREL!

Hibiki: Whatever. Hey, how about...

I picked up a small... *something* from the floor. It looked like it was just a vaguely cylindrical grey bit of plastic attached to a clip. Definitely not anything I’d seen recently.

Hibiki: What the fuck.

Kurai: That’s, uh.

Ryuumatsu: [Squinting] It appears to be a microphone. I suppose it makes sense for a voice actor to have one.

Hibiki: Fucking tiny for a microphone.

Ryuumatsu: Yes, well--

Hibiki: Reminds me of someone’s brain!

Ryuumatsu: *That w-wasn’t even good.* Are you quite finished?

Hibiki: Hmmm...
Ryuumatsu: …

Hibiki: …Yeah. I’m finished.

Ryuumatsu: Fantastic. As I was saying, it’s a microphone. Those kinds are often used on television shows and, as it happens, in the occasional court case.

Hibiki: That was so fascinating it almost put me to sleep. Thanks, bitch.

Ryuumatsu: …Right.

Hibiki: What else have we got here… Hairpins, bottle caps, pencil toppers, uh… Oh, this is spicy.

Kurai: What.

Hibiki: [Picking up paper] Got a note, huh? Who’s it from? Could it be… a secret admirer?

Kurai: I don’t-- Oh, fuck.

Kurai leaned over, trying to grab the note out of my hands, and I held it over my head. He hit my arm in a weak attempt to get me to drop it, glowering at me as he leaned back again.

Kurai: That’s fucking important. Not to mention personal. Give it back.

Hibiki: You scared I’ll read it?

Rouvin: If it’s just been through the wash, will it be legible? I believe ink bleeds when submerged in water, and in a washing machine the paper itself likely wouldn’t fare much better.
Kurai: SHIT. You’re right. I can’t believe I fucking left it in there…

Kurai: [Fiddling with armband] …I still want it back, though.

Hibiki: Fine. All yours.

...Something about this seems… kind of off. I’d better take note of that.

**OBTAINED TRUTH BULLET: Laundry Basket**

Hibiki: [Holding up elastics] Why even keep all this shit in your pockets? Surely there’s a better place for at least half of this.

Kurai: It’s… Ugh. Just don’t touch my fucking stuff.

Hibiki: … [Drops elastics on floor]

Kurai: AND DON’T BREAK IT, EITHER!

Hibiki: Elastic bands aren’t just going to fucking break, asshole!

Rouvin: They have a point at which they will eventually snap though, correct?

Ryuumatsu: Could you all *please* tone it down--

Monokuma: Bing bong bang bong!

_A jolt ran through my back as the loudspeakers crackled to life and the monitor in the corner flickered on. Monokuma’s face grinned down at me, sharp white teeth clamping down as the robot began to laugh._
Monokuma: Upupupu! Time’s up, kiddos! Hope it was long enough! If not, though… This should be fun. For one of you, that is!

Monokuma: Anyway, please make your way down to the trial room at once! Captain’s orders!

Rouvin: Hmm… Shall we go?

Ryuumatsu: I, for one, am not interested in being punished for f-failing to attend, and I doubt you are either. The other two are… Free to pass judgement for themselves.

Hibiki: I’m sure you’ll be glad to hear that not only am I going, but that I’m once again going to be running the whole fucking show. You’re welcome in advance for saving your sorry asses once again, by the way.

Ryuumatsu: Need I remind you that you spent the first half of the trial accusing an innoce--

Kurai: Christ. Fucking get over yourself.

Hibiki: [Smiling matter-of-factly] Make me.

Kurai: [Standing up] I’d rather choke on glass than spend my precious personal time with you of all people.

Kurai: [Pulling down beanie; walking towards door] …Also, I’m leaving. Don’t fucking follow me.

Hibiki: We’re all going the same way, shit-for-brains.

Kurai didn’t even acknowledge me, simply marching out of the room and slamming the door behind him. Exasperated, Ryuumatsu tried to share a look with Rouvin. Rouvin just looked back with his usual blankly questioning demeanour.
Rolling my eyes, I went over to the washing machines, remembering Hashikawa had asked me to get her gakuran. I quickly found the right one and tucked the jacket under my arm. Standing by the door again, I looked back at the pair beside me and sighed.

Hibiki: …Okay, well, there’s no way in hell I’m taking that many flights of stairs with the two of you. No offense, Rouvin. You’re tolerable.

Rouvin: Ah… Thank you, I think? None taken. Might I ask though, w--

Hibiki: Nope! Please don’t ask. I’m sure Ryuumatsu would love to hear all about your existentialist ponderings, though. Guess I’m just too dumb for them!

Ryuumatsu: Why y-you--

Hibiki: Welp, see ya!

Grinning at Ryuumatsu cheerily, I strolled out the door and slammed it shut behind me. Having to deal with him in the trial would be fun, but I could at least forget about that for the next few minutes.

…Of course, trying to do that just made the weight of everything else that’d happened today come crashing back down on me.

I… wasn’t sure exactly how well I’d known Kamiya. Even when she was spilling her heart out to me, something about her had still felt distant, almost unattainable.

I guess it was completely unattainable now, though.

…Still, if anyone here hadn’t deserved this shit, it was her. I wasn’t about to let whoever did this forget that.

As I made my way down the last few stairs, there was a loud clang, and the trial room’s
looming doors began to creak open just as I turned the corner.

I reached out a hand to my side... only to realise there was no one there to take it.

...

...No use crying over... anything, really. Time to get this over and done with.

Clenching my fists, I stepped through the doors and into the darkness beyond.

CLASS TRIAL: NOW IN SESSION

Chapter End Notes

I'll put the truth bullet list with descriptions here soon, as well as at the start of the next chapter! Thank you all for reading, I'd love to hear your theories!
TRUTH BULLETS:

-Monokuma File 02
The victim was Mizuki Kamiya, Ultimate Fashion Designer. The body was discovered in the library. The time of death was 3:02pm. The victim has bruises, lacerations, one stab wound, and slight internal bleeding. Traces of poison have been found in the victim’s system.

-Body's Surroundings
Despite the violent nature of the wounds inflicted on Kamiya's body, the area around it is almost completely undisturbed.

-Speaker
A large speaker not too far from the body was on during the investigation, and presumably for a while before that, too. There was nothing plugged into it, though. Aitou mentioned that he probably left it on.

-Broken Motive
Captain Monokuma's latest motive, which was meant to provide all passengers with slightly restricted wi-fi usage, broke before anyone could use it for more than a minute or two.

-Cuts on Body
A large number of thin lacerations cover Kamiya's arms. They seem to be quite shallow. It's safe to assume that they were caused by the knife in her abdomen.

-Lack of Blood Loss
Despite being cut all along her arms and stabbed in her side, Kamiya's body barely has any blood on it.

-Steak Knife
A fairly average-sized knife meant for cutting steak. It seems to be from the buffet. Right now, though, it's stabbed into Kamiya's side. Little blood leaks from the wound.

-Spilt Poison Bottle
A small prism-shaped bottle that was leaking onto the floor next to Kamiya's body. The label on it reads, "Fast Acting - Lethal within two minutes. Ingest orally in any quantity for fastest effects. Will cause internal bleeding, fast loss of consciousness, and potential organ failure. Contact with skin may cause severe acid burns and bleeding."

-Labelless Poison Bottle
A predominantly full glass bottle of the same design as the one spilt on the floor. It seems to have come from the same place, but this one has no label. It was found in Kamiya's hand.

-Aitou's Testimony
After the game of chess in the morning, Kamiya stayed with Aitou and Alix until about midday, and then left by herself. Aitou didn't see her after that, and spent most of the
afternoon in the library with Alix, including a while that was spent in the audiobook section. Aitou mentioned that he probably turned the speaker on during this period and forgot to turn it off.

-Orutoku's Testimony
Orutoku and Ryuumatsu were in the laundry room for a fair portion of the day, with Ryuumatsu coming and going somewhat regularly from a while after breakfast until eventually leaving for good shortly after one in the afternoon. Kamiya came to drop off her clothes not long before the meeting was supposed to start, and didn't stay for long. When Orutoku went to the Delta suite at about 2:00pm, Kurai was there, though he eventually left with all of his laundry.

-Sumire's Testimony
Sumire and Hashikawa were together for most of the day, with Yousetsu joining them at about half past one. The three went to the storeroom for Hashikawa's origami paper before spending the rest of the time in the library, Hashikawa and Yousetsu occasionally making trips to the laundry room to check on Hashikawa's gakuran, and Sumire leaving from time to time to get another book to read. I myself was there for the last hour or so of this. By the time Sumire heard Kamiya's scream and ran over, Aitou and Alix were already present.

-Body Discovery Announcement
The body discovery announcement seems to have been slightly delayed. The people present when it went off were Hibiki, Hashikawa, Yousetsu, Sumire, Aitou, Alix, Toramoto, Kim, and Kurai.

-Laundry Basket
A basket full of the clothes that Kurai put into the wash just before the body was discovered, along with all the things from his pockets. A note that Kurai was very secretive about was in the basket, along with some elastic bands, hair pins, a microphone, and some keychains and figurines.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As I stepped into the trial room and the lights flared on overhead, I found myself once again engulfed in the inescapable red of the curtained walls. A soft blue glow shone against the gold fixings of Monokuma’s throne. I drew my gaze over to my trial stand.
A portrait of Kamiya, her pleasant smile obscured by bloody paint, now stood tall beside it.

…I tried my best to tear my gaze away. Without thinking, I let my feet carry me across the room and stepped up onto the pedestal. Kamiya’s blank, painted gaze was staring far off into the walls, but it loomed over me all the same.
I held my head up high as others started to filter into the room, many of them casting the new portraits wayward glances. I averted my eyes before I could end up staring at the other one. He… That wasn’t going to make this worse than it already was. It didn’t matter.

Hibiki: [Murmuring] Fucking hell…

???: [Panicked whisper] Ah, s-sorry! Did I--

Someone spoke up from behind me, and I had to force myself not to jolt up at the sudden noise. I turned around to see Hashikawa, eyes flitting around my face nervously. I sighed.

Hibiki: [Shoves hands into pockets] No, you didn’t. What.

Hashikawa: Um, sorry for catching you off guard. Everyone’s a little on edge right now, I think…

Hibiki: [Stiffening shoulders] I’m not on edge.

Hashikawa: [Salutes] R-Right, um, captain! My mistake. Sorry for… assuming.

Hibiki: Hm.

Hashikawa: …

Hibiki: …


Hashikawa: Ah, sorry! Can I-- um, if it’s not too much trouble I mean, can I--
Hibiki: Can you *what*?

Hashikawa: [Points] …Have my gakuran back…?

...Right. I’d forgotten that I was even carrying that thing.

I took Hashikawa’s coat out from under my arm, and chucked it at her carelessly. She caught it against her chest and smiled with anxious relief as she threw it back around her shoulders.

Hashikawa: [Pulling coat’s sleeves] Thank you, Kioku-san! Sorry to bother you while… You know.

Hibiki: [Blatantly unimpressed] …Uh huh.


I rolled my eyes as Hashikawa slunk warily back to her stand. Straightening my own jacket on my frame, I stared out at the rest of the circle until--

???: Ahoooyyyy! I’m so glad you all came! Taking all of this time out of your day to see widdle ol’ me… Really, I’m flattered. Gahaha!

Orutoku: Well, captain’s orders! It would be kinda hard to just not show up.

Yousetsu: Especially with everything we have on the line…

Monokuma: Aww. Don’t make me blush, Eagle One.

Orutoku: My apologies, sir!

Toramoto: [Grinning] You two star-crossed lovers or somethin’?
Kim: Cute.

Orutoku: What? Uh--

Monokuma: Pshh. Nah! I’m about thirty lightyears out of his league. The kid needs a hair stylist, stat.

Orutoku: [Holds hand against forehead] Is there something wrong with my hair?

Alix: No! Your hair is perfect.

Orutoku: Awh! Thanks, Alix-kun. That means a lot.

Ryuumatsu: [Pinching bridge of nose] …This is a lost cause.

Hibiki: You’d know a lot about those, wouldn’t you.

Ryuumatsu: [Voice pitching up] I--

Sumire: Both of you, shut it.


Sumire: You aren’t funny, tigershark.

Toramoto: Aw shucks, and now I’ve been scorched, too. Y’all better not wear yourselves out, because right after this shitshow is over we’ll be investigatin’ Sumire’s cold-blooded verbal slaughter of yours truly.

Kim: [Chuckles] I’ll make sure to write you a totally sick eulogy, Tiger.
Toramoto: Thanks, babe.

Shooting the pair a glance, Hanahara cleared her throat.

Hanahara: I’m glad you two are comfortable enough for PDA, but, uh, someone just DIED. Can we actually talk about that, maybe?

Aitou: [Adjusts glasses] …Seconded.


The robot corrected its posture, straightening its cap on its head before mechanically proceeding.

Monokuma: Ahem! Once again, during the trial you’ll present your arguments for who the culprit is, and vote for "whodunnit". Vote correctly, and only the blackened will be punished. But if you pick the wrong person, I’ll punish everyone besides the blackened, and that person will be free to leave!

Monokuma: What else… Team majority vote, yada yada… Oh, who cares! You guys were all here, what, three days ago? You should remember this. Ain’t like it’s been a whole year or nothin’.

Maeko: …Um…

I turned around as Maeko spoke up. She had yet to take one of the stands, instead just awkwardly loitering halfway between the podiums and the door.

Maeko: So, where do- I mean, am I supposed to stand at, um… One of those?

…There’s literally one free stand left. Figure it out.
Monokuma: Yup, yup! Although, now that you mention it… Forget-Me-Not, you should be next to Know-It-All now! Teams gotta stick together.

Maeko: Forget-Me-Not… [Tilts head] That’s, um, me?

Hibiki: Fucking hell. This doesn’t matter.

Monokuma: What can I say? I’m a perfectionist, lemme be pedantic. Now, how do I…

Monokuma went dormant for a few seconds, and Maeko scuffed her boot on the floor, clearly uncomfortable with being the centre of attention. After a moment, the robot spoke up again in a huff.

Monokuma: Hrrrmgh! This is too complicated! I can’t get the stands to mov… Oh, whatever. Forget-Me-Not, do me a favour and just move over, wouldja? And Socrates, you move next to Bumblebee, and…

Hibiki: Once again. It really does not fucking matter.

Hanahara: Weren’t you just complaining about something being “too complicated”, Captain Monokuma?

Rouvin: Oh, I don’t believe this should be any trouble… I think?

Maeko: …

In one stilted motion, Maeko picked up Kamiya’s portrait and stuck it onto Rouvin’s stand as if the sturdy metal stand weighed nothing at all. The two shuffled around, Maeko shooting me a confused, lost look as she stepped up beside me. Apparently satisfied, Monokuma sighed.

Monokuma: There we go! Now how hard was that?
Kim: Way more than it needed to be.

Alix: What was the point? I don’t see any difference!

Kurai: [Hunches shoulders] Ha ha. Very fucking funny.

Orutoku: Wait, what are we laughing at?

Yousetsu: [Coughs] …

Hibiki: Oh my God.

Hanahara: ONCE AGAIN, GUYS? SOMEONE IS DEAD.

Monokuma: [Waves paw] Yeah, yeah. I won’t distract you kids anymore! You do enough of that to each other, anyway. Now go nuts!

Hashikawa: So… we’re starting?

Monokuma: YES! Do I gotta spell it out?! Class Trial, S-T-A-R-T!

Sumire: No need to have such an attitude.

Sumire: [Crosses arms] Anyway, does anyone have somewhere they’d like to begin?

Alix: Hrmnm…

Kim: [Smirks; sighs] Honestly, I’d rather not do this at all.
Sumire: I’m sure that’s true of most of us. Not exactly helpful, though.

Orutoku: It’s okay! I’m sure everything will go just fine!!!

**Kim shrugged, a nonchalant smile on her face. Aitou drummed his fingers on the edge of his stand.**

Aitou: I believe that at least attempting to speculate on the cause of death is imperative if we are to establish a basis for this case. There were many different injuries on the body, but the Monokuma File neglected to indicate which one was the fatal blow. In particular, whether it was the stabbing or... the poisoning.

Rouvin: Hmm… May I ask what the purpose of discerning that would be? I am not discrediting your investigation, of course, but does it change anything about the case?

Hanahara: I’m not exactly sure how it’ll change things, but… Solidifying a theory seems like a good place to start.

Aitou: Right. There’s very little we can currently say for certain, as things stand. Such a discussion might give us foundations to build upon.

Aitou: [Brushes shoulder] Also… I simply don’t like to leave such matters unresolved.

Ryuumatsu: That seems reasonable, Aitou-san. Shall we actually talk about it instead of talking about talking about it, then?

Aitou: Er, yes. My apologies.

Ryuumatsu: None needed. So, the—

Sumire: —First off, the stabbing and other knife wounds are definitely a factor. Not the one that ultimately proved lethal, necessarily, but a factor nonetheless.
Orutoku: [Shudders] Yeah, for sure… Yikes.

Hanahara: Right. The other major option is the poison that was mentioned in the Monokuma File. Some of us found the bottles around the body.

Yousetsu: Bottles…?

Hanahara: Uh… Yes, bottles. I’m gonna assume you’re not asking me to explain what those are?

Yousetsu: Of course not. I’m just wondering why there would be two.

Toramoto smiled, smugly bearing his rows of fangs.

Toramoto: Maybe the killer was plannin’ on makin’ it two for two and just offin’ themself then and there? More reliable way of gettin’ out of this shithole than dealing with this trial bull, that’s for sure.

Kurai: [Sneering] What kind of fuckwit funnyman are you? No shit they wouldn’t do that.

Toramoto: [Waves hands dismissively; chuckles] Woah! C’mon, no reason to take it so personally...

Toramoto: [Narrows eyes; smirks] I mean, ‘less there is for you, or somethin’. I’d love t’ hear about it if you’ve got some juicy goss, Kurai-kun.

Alix: Yeah, man! Spill the tea!


Sumire: [Under her breath] That’s nothing new, is it...

Ryuumatsu: Manners, everyone. As barbaric as it is, this is still a court of law, and discussion should be conducted in a productive manner… [smirks condescendingly] …As much as is possible for you
lot, at least.

Sumire: [Thoroughly unimpressed] …

Toramoto: [Not even listening] …

Hibiki: …So anyway, we gonna fuckin’ talk about this case or are you simpering fourth graders happy with this quaint little middle school roast-off you’ve got going?

Orutoku: [Frowning] Yeah! Please stop being so mean to each other, guys… [Sniffles loudly] I don’t know if my heart can take it…!

Kim: Oh, please. You look like a man who does cardio. You’ll be fine.

Hibiki: If you guys don’t shut the fuck up and focus I’ll make Orutoku cry.

Orutoku: Uh huh! [Sniffles] And it’ll be super awful, so please be nice and stay on task! I’m an ugly crier, I promise you don’t wanna see it.

Toramoto: I say we listen to the man. Wouldn’t wanna see my good pal all torn up about nothin’ in these troublin’ times.

Orutoku: [Flashes a thumbs up; immediately chipper] Thanks, buddy! So, anyone got any intel on this case?

Toramoto: [Slouches] If anyone was there when it happened, I’d think they’d said somethin’ by now… but yeah, I do have intel, actually. Their Highness Kioku over there already knows what I’m talkin’ about.

...Right. That would be…

Hibiki: The wounds, yeah. That and the body’s surroundings.
Ryuumatsu: The Monokuma File did list lacerations, knife wounds and traces of poison, yes—

Kim: But the area around the body was pretty much spick and span. Aside from the bottles, there wasn’t much in the way of signs of a scuffle.

Kurai: Wh- Did ANYONE hear her scream?! Of course there was a fuckin’ scuffle!

Yousetsu: The files also list her time of death as… very recent to the body discovery. Don’t know exactly when that was, but if it’s… [glances at Monopad] 4:27pm now, and she died at two past three? That’d have to have been close.

Aitou: I would say so, yes. You didn’t happen to look at your watch at the time by any chance, Toramoto-san?

Toramoto: Nah. I was too busy starin’ at a corpse. I’m sure y’all understand.

Alix: [Smiles proudly] I don’t!

Hashikawa: If it helps, uh! Yousetsu-san said the time was a quarter to three when we went to check on the laundry… If I’m remembering right.

Yousetsu: True… [Taps pen on lip] That lines up.

Hibiki: Sure does. Kurai, how long would you say our nice little conversation was?

**Just that comment seemed to flick a switch in Kurai’s head. In a split second, he went from dour to outright seething.**


Sumire: Mind me asking what all this is about?
Kim: [Snorts] Please. I’ve been waiting to hear about this little shitstorm.

Kurai: WHY DO YOU EVEN KNOW ABOUT THIS???

Orutoku: Wait, know about whaaaat?

Hanahara: Let’s calm down, people. Hashikawa-san, what was this about?

Hashikawa: Uh… Yousetsu-san, Kioku-san and me all went to the laundry room. [Tugs jacket] My gakuran was in the wash, so we went to check on it…

Toramoto: [Scoffs] What, to protect it from the notorious jacket vandal of the S.S. Despair?

Hashikawa: I, uh—

Sumire: [Sneers at Toramoto] Don’t worry about him. What happened?

Hashikawa: [Nods] Right! Um, so Kurai-san was in the laundry room when we went in there… He said- well, I think he said Alix-san spilled soup on his last clean shirt, or…

Kurai: It doesn’t fucking matter.

Hibiki: Nor does the furry yellow bodysuit you were wearing, but I sure am going to make a point of mentioning it!

Kurai: HEY!!!

Toramoto: [Snorts] The what?
Yousetsu: Pikachu kigurumi. There isn’t much more to be said on the matter.

Rouvin: [Deep in thought] …Fascinating…

Sumire: Absolutely scintillating, yes. Why on earth did this happen?

Alix: And what’s this about soup?

Kurai: [Grumbling] …I reserve my right to silence.

Orutoku: Okie doke! You guys headed off and then heard Kamiya-san pretty soon after, right? That timing sounds about right!

Ryuumatsu: Don’t let yourself be convinced too easily, Orutoku-san. You weren’t even there.

Orutoku: Not to worry! I’m an investigative professional. Cinema taught me well.

Ryuumatsu: That’s not—

Orutoku: That being said! …Why are we talking about this, again?

Yousetsu: Knowing the time of the body discovery helps discern the cause of death.

Aitou: Seconded. So, knowing what we do now… I suppose the question is why the killer opted to employ so many methods in, er, executing their task. Much of that likely hinges on the sequence of events…

Kurai: [Scoffs] Yeah, bet. Sure would be fucking useful if we had any idea what that sequence was.

Alix: Who’s to say I can’t divine it here and now? [Reaches into sleeve] I’ve gotta have a dowsing rod or something in here somewhere—
Hashikawa: A what…?

Ryuumatsu: [Gently pushing Alix’s arm down] Murasaki-san, this is no time for—

**Just then, there was a loud crack as Hanahara shot up in her place.**

Hanahara: [Snaps fingers] That’s IT!

Toramoto: [Raises eyebrows] Holy shit, Bumblebee snapped. Y’all went too far this time.

Hanahara: Not like that! Though I’d appreciate if you all stayed on task… [Frowns] But anyway, the point is that I think I might be onto something.

Alix: Woohoo! Hanahara-chan did it!

Ryuumatsu: Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, now—

Sumire: C’mon then, spill. [Smiles reassuringly] I’m keen to hear your insight.

Alix: Yeah! [Pumps fist] Goooo Hanahara-chan!!!

Hanahara: … [Smiles a little] Thanks, guys. Alright then.

**NON-STOP DEBATE: START!**

**Truth Bullets: Monokuma File 02, Steak Knife, Body’s Surroundings.**

Hanahara: So… According to the Monokuma File, Kamiya-san was… Eugh. Bruised, poisoned, and struck at with a knife - **the one embedded in her torso, more than likely.**
Kim: Wow. Seems a little excessive.

Kurai: No fucking kidding, rocks-for-brains.

Kim: [Smirks] Keep throwing a fit if you want. I’m sure this is making you look great right now.

Kurai: Shut UP!

Kim: Anyway, the area around the body looked pretty undisturbed, right? I’d say it was the poison that did her in.

Toramoto: Somethin’ had to give her those cuts ‘n’ bruises, but she sure as hell didn’t get slammed against the bookcase or nothin’. There woulda been more of an upset.

Hanahara: The poison was pretty strong, you’re right - the label said it’d kill in a couple of minutes.

Hanahara: [Folds arms] That’s not my point, though… What I’m wondering is how much planning went into this.

Ryuumatsu: It—

Kim: With those injuries? I’d say there’s a good chance it was on impulse. Like, act of passion kind of stuff.

Aitou: [Strokes chin] I wouldn’t discount the act of passion perspective, no…

Alix: ...But you don’t sound entirely sure, Aitou-san.

Yeah, and for good reason. There’s a glaring problem here…
Refute it was on impulse with the Steak Knife truth bullet.

Hibiki: Shut up and listen.

Hanahara: Kioku-san, manners…

Hibiki: I don’t give a shit about manners and right now, I don’t think you do either.


No need to tell me. I know exactly what’s going on here.

Hibiki: Kim. You said the murder was on impulse.

Kim: Seems like it could be, sure—

Hibiki: No.


Kurai: Do you think maybe you SHOULD be?!

Hibiki: Can it, jackass.

Hibiki: [Leans back] The point is that there’s no way this was a spur of the moment decision. Yeah, the murder was messy as fuck. But the knife Kamiya was attacked with is from the buffet, idiot. You think that just teleported there?
Kim: [Shrugs] Eh, got me there.

Aitou: The poison, too… That’s sourced from the storage room, if I remember correctly. Well, presumably - I don’t know of any other potential locations to acquire such a thing, but, er… Feel free to correct any misinformation.

Toramoto: Nah, I think that’s all yer bases covered. Don’t see where else someone coulda just chucked a rack of bottles and shit. Janitor’s closet, maybe, but those’d have to be some pretty funky cleaning supplies.

Yousesu: Don’t see how it could’ve been from anywhere else. The killer organised this in advance.

Orutoku: No two ways about it, huh!

Sumire: Right. For now, we should all agree on something so we can move on. We don’t have anything too substantial to work off of here.

Yousesu: I agree with Sumire-san. Best to keep this efficient…

Ryuumatsu: Alright, then. Essentially, we could surmise that the poison—

Hanahara: —The poison was probably used first, right? That… That’d explain why there wasn’t much of a fight. [Eyes widen] Kamiya-san must have fought back enough for the killer to need to use the steak knife!

Ryuumatsu: [Simpering] …Right.

Hashikawa clapped her hands.

Hashikawa: That, ah, makes sense! My captain always said it’s good to have backup plans for your backup plans…

Hashikawa: [Grimaces] Th-Though… maybe not so great in this case.
Kim: Dunno, I’m sure the killer was pretty pleased with themself for it.

Sumire: And that’s evidently not who we’re concerned with.

Kim: [Nods] Also true.

Aitou: Right… Shall we move onto the next order of business, then?

Hanahara: I think that sounds like a great idea. Any suggestions?

Hanahara looked expectantly across the room for a moment, her eyes clear and brow steady. I couldn’t say it wasn’t a relief that she’d calmed down from this morning. God only knows what kind of shitstorm this could have turned into otherwise…

It didn’t take long for someone to pitch in.

Yousetsu: We can’t pin down a murder method… Suspects may be a good place to start.

Rouvin: We will need to surmise the method of murder eventually, will we not?

Yousetsu: Yeah. More info would help us do that, though.

Ryuumatsu: Well, actually—

Hibiki: And the only way to get that is to fuckin’ move on already, so hurry up.

Yousetsu: Yeah, sure.

Tapping my fingers along the edge of my podium, I closed my eyes in thought for a moment.
A fair few people had been in the library when Kamiya was... Found. Aside from Yousetsu, Hashikawa, Sumire and myself, the main subjects of interest were probably...


Alix: Aw, a pet name just for me? Je suis flatté.

Alix: …Wait, does this mean you suspect us?

Aitou: [Grimaces] …

Hibiki: Well you’re sure as hell both at the top of the “sketchy as fuck” list. What were you doing in the library, again?

Aitou: We weren’t… [Inhales] Alix-san and I were simply spending some time browsing the library.

Alix: I can’t exactly navigate it that well myself, y’know? There were audiobooks, so Aitou-san played some of those for me. We were together the whole time.

Hanahara: I think it’s safe for all of us to cross Alix-san off the list, at least.

Sumire: [Nods] Agreed. Alix-san wouldn’t do anything like this.

Kim: You could say that about pretty much anyone. Doesn’t mean it’s true.

Sumire: [Narrows eyes] There are more than a few people here no one would be willing to say that about... Your boyfriend, for one.

Toramoto: Charmed.
Grimacing, Hanahara raised her hands as if warding off wild animals.

Hanahara: I can’t argue with that, though it’d probably be for the best if we put personal grudges to the side for now. Please try to play nice.

Toramoto: [Smirks] No need to worry about me, Hanahara-san. Clearly Sumire-sama knows what’s best for all of us. I’m not offended.

The look Sumire shot Toramoto in response to that comment was either frigid or absolutely scalding - maybe both, but evidently nowhere in between. She kept her mouth shut, despite how Toramoto’s grin grew even wider in return.

Sumire: ...Noted, Hanahara-san.

Hanahara: Thank you. Anyway, I meant moreso that Alix-san probably couldn’t pull something like this off. That’s fair to say, isn’t it?

Alix: Wouldn’t is still more than right… But yeah, I think everyone probably knows by now that I’m pretty shit at investigating. [Hums] This isn’t… really any different.

Orutoku: Please don’t be so harsh on yourself, Alix-kun—


Rouvin: And that confusion doesn’t cause you to be upset in turn?

Hibiki: This isn’t a fucking therapy session. The murder happened too quickly and too cleanly for Alix to have pulled it off. He would’ve left something behind or, like, done some other dumb shit. Not to mention the difference in height and presumably strength. Case closed.

Alix: What a gracious defence!
Hibiki: Yeah, shut up. Anyway, Mr. Doom and Gloom over there still isn’t in the clear.

**The room’s attention turned to Aitou. He looked up, his brow furrowed.**

Aitou: ...Ah. That would be me, then.

Kurai: [Scoffs] …

Yousetsu: Alix-san, since we’re assuming you’re innocent… Mind recounting what you did in the library?

Alix: I think I’ve already said most of it… [Presses fingers to temples] Hmmn… Well first, Aitou-san and I browsed the shelves for a while! We were in the fiction section for a bit, buuuut… mostly, we were around where the audiobooks are, I’m pretty sure.

Sumire: That’s also where Kamiya-san was found… Hm.

Alix: Yeah. But Aitou-san couldn’t have done anything while we were browsing!

Rouvin: What is it that makes you sound so certain about that…?

Alix: [Shrugs] He was holding my hand the entire time, so it’s not like he could’ve just walked off.

Hanahara: ...Aitou-san?

Aitou: [Flustered] That’s… true, yes.

Sumire: No need to be so embarrassed about it. That narrows things down.

Alix: Mhm! And besides, if anything had happened, I’d’ve heard it!
He says that… But I’m not convinced that it’s true.

Hibiki: You said that you browsed “first”. You were listening to some audiobooks after that, weren’t you.

Aitou: [Adjusts glasses] Indeed we were. I’m… Unfortunately not the most proficient with technology, I’ll admit, but I did eventually manage to set up one of the speakers provided in the audiobook section’s lounge area.

Alix: Yeah! We—

Hibiki: So you two were in contact for the entirety of that?

Alix: Nah, we weren’t. The tragic nature of single-seater lounge chairs tore us apart.

Yousetsu: And you weren’t talking to each other the whole time either, I’d guess…

Aitou: Er, no… It would have been disruptive, unfortunately.

Hibiki: Right. So what I’m hearing here is that for a pretty fuckin’ extended period, Alix had no way of knowing whether you were there.

If Alix could have blinked in disbelief at that, he would have - but nonetheless, he stayed calm, even while Aitou struggled to keep his expression as neutral as I was sure he’d like for it to be.

Aitou: I…

Alix: I mean, I guess that’s true, sure.

Alix took his ponytail between his hands, absently threading his fingers through its length.
Alix: It’s not a big deal, though. [Turns] Please don’t stress, Aitou-san.

Aitou: I-I’m not— I mean…

Alix: [Smiles] Okay. It’s fine if you are, but try not to worry. I can’t prove it yet, but I know you didn’t do it.

Aitou: [Steadies self] …Thank you for trusting me. It’s, er… Stressful, being put on the spot like that, is all.

Kim: Yeah, yeah. Get a room.

Hanahara: [Gasps] Kim-san!

Ryuumatsu: There should be no reason for you to stress if you’re innocent, you know. The evidence will show what it shows, and all will be revealed in due course.

Orutoku: Right! I’m sure everything will be fine, Aitou-kun!

Ryuumatsu: [Closes eyes; smirks] Exactly. So—

Kurai: Yeah, yeah, easy for you to fuckin’ say. Could you try and be any more pretentious?

Ryuumatsu’s brow twitched. He stayed silent.

Orutoku: I mean… Ryuumatsu-kun has a point, though, doesn’t he?

Toramoto: [Smirks darkly] I admire your optimism, bud, but the legal system ain’t all sunshines and rainbows. Shit’s fucked, and this ain’t no different.
Hanahara: Look, I agree, but let’s save this for later, okay? Having this conversation right now won’t get us anywhere.

Toramoto: Of course. In that case, if we’re looking for new leads…

Toramoto leaned in, almost conspiratorially, as his gaze slithered its way along the faces of those in front of him. I knew where it was about to settle before he even opened his mouth.

Toramoto: …Hashikawa, forgive me if I’m wrong, but weren’t you and your pals in the library too?

The life seemed to melt right out of Hashikawa’s face as Toramoto said her name. She didn’t cower or try to hide from what was coming, but the way her knuckles whitened as they gripped the hem of her gakuran said more than enough.

Sumire: Would you just lay off for once in your life? Tsuruko didn’t do anything.

Toramoto: Didn’t she? If you were with her the whole time, I guess it isn’t an issue, is it.

Sumire: [Grits teeth] Ugh…

Toramoto: Though, on second thought… Cap’n?

I could hear a rustling behind me as Monokuma shifted around on his throne, presumably to face Toramoto. The robot cleared its throat, speaking with an eager tone.

Monokuma: Ahoy, Tiger! Ya called?

Sumire: Go back to sleeping or whatever. No one wants to hear from you.

Monokuma: You say that, Mad Scientist, but clearly someone’s keen to talk! Wassup?
Toramoto: Ah, nothin’ to worry about. I was just wonderin’ if you could remind our friends on Team Delta of the rules this whole shebang operates on. The last two team rules, if you’d be so kind.

Monokuma: My oh my! It would be my absolute pleasure! Give me one moment…

**Monokuma went still for just a few seconds before becoming as animated as ever once again. Puffing his chest out, the bear adjusted his cap - Hashikawa’s cap, really - on his head.**

Monokuma: Alrighty, let’s see here… Ah! Rule #17: Each individual gets their own vote when identifying the blackened. However, if the majority of any one team votes incorrectly for the 'blackened', the whole team will be punished… which, as you lot know now, ain’t a pretty sight to see! And of course, I get the final call on how any split votes are managed.

Monokuma: [Paw on chest] And Rule #18: If one of the two major teams, Delta or Rho, is entirely eliminated, the other team and any remaining participants not part of either team will be permitted to leave. That’s the dealio!

Toramoto: Wonderful, Captain. Might I add, your passionate delivery was simply divine. [Kisses fingers] Masterful.

Monokuma: There’s no need to suck up, Tiger… [Grins] But hey, I won’t complain.

Kurai: This is gross.

Toramoto: [Tugs lapels] Nothin’ wrong with doin’ a little networking. Point is… Kamiya was a member of Team Rho, which makes her a prime target for you Delta folks.

Ryuumatsu: Well obviously we all knew th—

Toramoto: We all knew that, yeah, and it don’t mean shit. Someone on Rho coulda still done it. Otherwise, we woulda crossed Alix-san off the list from the get go.

Orutoku: Ahh… So it isn’t an issue then, right. What’s this got to do with Hashikawa-san?
Toramoto: I’m gettin’ to that, trophy boy. Don’t you worry your pretty little head about it.

Toramoto: Point is… Who’s to say there isn’t some collusion going on here?

Sumire: Me, right now. There isn’t, and it’d be in everyone’s best interest for you to lay off on the deep dive hypotheticals.

Toramoto: [Shrugs] If there isn’t, there isn’t. I’m just sayin’, if someone were to rig things so that only one team would vote wrong, the other group’d all get off scot free. It’s somethin’ to keep in mind.

Kurai: Fucking fantastic. Stop giving the idiots here bright ideas.

Alix: Hmm, which idiots? Tu veux dire, toi-même?

Kurai: Just ‘cuz I don’t speak French doesn’t mean I can’t tell when I’m being dissed, asshole.

Alix: [Grins] Which is exactly why it’s funny!

Toramoto: Ey, no need to get so antsy, Kurai-san. If anything, this just means nobody’ll get blindsided, don’t’cha think?

Kurai: Urgh… [Scuffs shoe against floor] I guess.

Toramoto: That’s the spirit. Anyhow, I think I’m within my rights to not trust you Delta folk. It’d be pretty easy for ya to save each other’s skins consequence-free, and I ain’t about to walk blindly into that.

Sumire: You do realise the exact same idea works both ways, don’t you?

Toramoto: Never said it didn’t, Your Highness. Back to the point I was makin’ before our little
detour… I have no reason to trust any sort of alibi that ain’t backed up by both teams. Simple as that.

Toramoto’s thumbs lodged themselves behind his belt, and he shifted laxly in place. His eyes, ever sharp, landed right back on Hashikawa once again.

Toramoto: So, that in mind. Care to share this alibi of yours with the class, Hashikawa-san?

Hashikawa: Uh…

Despite everything that Toramoto said being true… It’s obvious that Hashikawa is in the clear, and he should know, too. Now all I need to do is prove it.

NON-STOP DEBATE: START!

Truth Bullets: Sumire’s Testimony - Laundry Basket - Body Discovery Announcement

Hashikawa: Well… Saori-chan and I were together the whole day, so… we’re each other’s alibis.

Yousetsu: I was with them for a few hours. Hashikawa-san never left my sight.

Toramoto: Ah, so yet another member of Team Delta comes to save the day. Sorry kiddo, I ain’t convinced.

Ryuumatsu: Just because there exists reasonable room for doubt does not mean evidence becomes null and void, Toramoto-san. Really, you should k—

Sumire: There isn’t any room for doubt at all, because I’m being completely honest, and so is Hashikawa-san.

Toramoto: But we have no way of knowing that, do we?
Rouvin: As is true of each and every concept we deem reliable enough to consider a “fact” under the pretense that we perceive our surroundings truthfully and without deception, no?

Kurai: [Squeezes eyes shut] This is giving me a fucking migraine.

Toramoto: Course there’s a way of knowin’. This ain’t total anarchy… You’d just need backup from a trustworthy source. Someone who ain’t out t’ save your skin.

Sumire: And who made you the authority on that?

Orutoku: Please don’t fight, guys… I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation to all of this! We just gotta work together to figure it out!

Hibiki: Or let me do the work for you.

Refute No way of knowing that with Sumire’s Testimony.

Hibiki: No matter what you say to devalue Hashikawa’s alibi, the fact is that it’s true, and you should know it is.

Toramoto: Hm. Interestin’. Dare I ask how?

Hibiki: Because you know I was there for over an entire hour of it, jackass.

Hanahara: …Seriously?

Across the room, Ryuumatsu buried his face in one hand out of what was very visibly sheer exasperation. For once, everyone else seemed to agree with him.
Yousetsu: If the corroboration Sumire-san and I offered wasn’t enough ‘cause of our teams, that should probably do it… I can confirm Kioku-san showed up no later than about 2.

Hibiki: And I have no reason to lie for their sakes. In fact, you and Kim were sitting outside the laundry room, too. You would have seen Hashikawa going in and out of there with the others.

Toramoto: …Can’t say I didn’t see ‘em every now and again, you’re right. I politely disagree with that first part, though. [Scoffs] You have plenty reason to cover for Delta.

Hibiki: Because Upsilon gets out no matter which team wins? Yeah, sure. You’re failing to consider the fact that there’s no way in hell I’d put my life in the hands of- [Gestures across room] -literally any single one of you people.

Kim: Aw. Even me?

Hibiki: Full offence, Kim, especially you.

Kim: [Nods] Ok, I trust that. Hashikawa’s in the clear.

Kurai: Wh- And how the hell does THAT work???

Hibiki: If you’d been using more than a fraction of one fuckin’ braincell, maybe you’d know. [Blows fringe out of face] Yousetsu and I are off the hook by extension, if you’re all finally coming to your senses. She and I were with Hashikawa the whole time.

Sumire: [Smirks] Exactly. Lay off, Galeocerdo cuvier.

Toramoto: Y’know, I’ve been called a lotta insults in my life, but that has to be the nerdiest, most long winded one yet. ‘Grats.

Sumire: Thanks. Glad to hear I’m not the only one with the common sense to hate your guts.

Jesus Christ, could these two chill for one fucking second?
Kim: This little catfight you two have got going is cute, and I’d love to see more of it later, but Orutoku looks like he’s about to have a breakdown. Just so you know.

Orutoku: [Visibly sweating] I, uh- It’s fine! Just… I would really like it if no one got hurt, so—

Sumire: No one’s hurting anyone, don’t worry. I’m sorry for upsetting you, Orutoku-san.

Toramoto: …

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Sumire turn to Orutoku, presumably to cast him a reassuring glance. That wasn’t what I focused on, though - instead, I watched as Toramoto’s usual shit-eating smirk wavered, and he tried to control the twitch of his brow. The motion was momentary - miniscule, even - but to me, it was clear he was nervous.

As soon as Sumire’s attention was back off of Orutoku, though, and he knew people were looking at him again, the expression was gone. The loan shark cleared his throat, casting Orutoku a half-genuine look of apology.

Toramoto: [Looking off to the side] …Yeah, what she said.

Sumire: So you admit I’m right?

Toramoto: [Smirks] About this, maybe. Still, you ain’t suspicion-free just yet. Your pals might be fine, but I didn’t hear a whole lot of your name in the alibi Kioku-san just gave us.

Sumire: Funny, I’m not hearing a whole lot of yours. How do we know you aren’t just pinning me to throw everyone off?

Toramoto: ‘Cuz I was outside the library with Kim, your friends passed me on- [Pretends to count fingers] numerous occasions, and I doubt you’d’ve missed me waltzin’ into the library with a knife in hand.
Sumire: Ugh, fine.

Hibiki: [Leans onto podium] Anyway. Sumire left for a while, you’re right. She told me she was going to look for another few books to read.

Sumire: Which I was.

Aitou: [Adjusts glasses] May I ask when this occurred?

Yousetsu: That was right before our last trip to the laundry room… So maybe fifteen minutes before Kamiya-san’s body was discovered.

Kim: Ooh. Well that’s not good.

Hashikawa: Saori-chan didn’t do it, though! So… So it’ll all turn out fine!

Ryuumatsu: [Clears throat] Then there shouldn’t be any issue with us having this discussion. I think a cross-examination is in order.

Alix: Ooooo, cross-examination… Fancy. Like in that video game with the attorneys?

Kurai: It’s literally just court procedure, you dipshit.

Ryuumatsu looked between Kurai and Alix with a frown.

Ryuumatsu: …Thank you for clearing that up, Kurai-san. As I was saying, I think that I should be the one to conduct a cross-examination of Sumire-san’s testimony. I am by far the most experienced here in this kind of work - by quite a margin, if you’d all be so kind as to remember, so—

Hibiki: Oh my God, just shove it up your ass. No one needs your fucking resume.

Hibiki: Fantastic. How about you all stop doing nothing and get some discussion underway.

With the window she would have had to work in, Sumire’s unlikely to be the killer… but as much as I hate to admit it, there are a couple of uncertainties here that I’m going to need to clear up. Might as well get to it.

NON-STOP DEBATE: START!

Truth Bullets: Body’s Surroundings - Sumire’s Testimony - Spilt Poison Bottle

Aitou: So… Where to start?

Hanahara: Maybe with the body discovery? I’ve heard a lot about it, but I wasn’t there until later than most. Who was there first?

Alix: That would’ve been Aitou-san and I! Sumire-san was one of the next people there. She showed up right after Hanahara-san.

Kim: So she was nearby, then.

Sumire: Closer than most of the others, yeah. I didn’t hear anything other than the scream, though, so not just around the corner or anything. It still took me a while to get there when I heard her scream…

Toramoto: Y’know, what I find interestin’ is how quickly the killer cleaned themself up and got away. Sumire-san’s wetsuit would be just the ticket for that, don’t’cha think?

Toramoto: [Gestures to Sumire] I mean, get a bit of water on that thing and any blood would wash right off. Capiche.
Sumire: And where do you suppose I would have gotten water from? I couldn’t exactly walk into the laundry room covered in blood.

Toramoto: No... But you do have that handy dandy backpack you’re wearin’ right now.

Aitou: And I suppose you’re going to suggest that that could have been used as a vessel for the knife and poison, too?

Toramoto: Exactamundo. Slippin’ a knife into the bag at breakfast woulda been simple, what with all the commotion this mornin’. Then she just coulda picked up the poison bottles from the storage room, chucked in a water bottle, and bam. Simple as that.

Yousetsu: I’m not sure if you’re forgetting or if you’re just ignoring the obvious again... But there was barely any blood on Kamiya-san’s body to begin with.

Rouvin: Occam’s razor, then. I suppose that does not need to be part of the discussion, does it?

Toramoto: Right on. Doesn’t mean the rest ain’t true.

Hibiki: ...

...I’m still sure Sumire’s not the main suspect here... But my only evidence is my own observation of what happened, and none of these idiots are smart enough to just trust me. How am I supposed to—

Hashikawa: That’s- That’s way overboard!

Alix: Ooh, well would you hear that! Nice pun, Hashikawa-san!

Hashikawa: ...Oh, yeah. [Chuckles quietly] Whoops.

Hashikawa, though jittery from her own nerves, was quick to plant her feet firmly once she
noticed the eyes on her. There was anxiety in her eyes - but not without resolve to balance it out, too. It might’ve been the most confident I’d seen her, at least after the first day of… all this.

Gulping down her nerves, Hashikawa straightened her back. Her voice was… surprisingly measured.

Hashikawa: Um, what I was going to say is that Sumire-san didn’t have a chance to get the poison, because… Because she was never in the warehouse.

Sumire: [Quietly] Tsuruko…?

...Not everyone knew it, but… I did. That was a lie - and sure enough, from the way she glanced at me, I could tell Hashikawa knew that I knew. After all, Sumire had told me herself that she and Hashikawa had been in the storage room to get the paper for the origami Hashikawa had been making in the library.

...That said… I wasn’t about to say anything. No one else knew, and no one else needed to, as long as I had everything under control. I’d be the one solving this case, anyway.

Hashikawa: [Staring at Sumire] Sumire-san and I only went in there on the first day it was unlocked, just to check it out. Lots of people were there. [Closes eyes] She couldn’t have gotten the poison.

Toramoto: …I’d say she coulda gone without you, but there’s no point pretendin’ you two aren’t attached at the hip, is there.

Hashikawa: Um… N-No.

Hanahara: Can anyone back this up? I know they couldn’t have gone at night, because I was on watch duty one night, and Kamiya-san spent the other one in the warehouse herself. She would have seen anyone come in.

Kurai: No one can fucking back all of this up unless they’ve been stalking her the whole time. There’s no way in hell anyone can clear all of this.
Kim: That’s just how things work, I guess. Not like any of us have a 24/7 buddy system.

Hanahara: Oh, that would have been a good idea, actually… [Frowns] But anyway. It seems like we can’t be certain right now, so the best thing for all of us to do might be to move on.

Hibiki: Glad someone has some common sense. The loose ends’ll come up as the options get narrowed down. No point wasting time dwelling on the one topic for hours on end.

Toramoto: Tch… I guess we can come back to this later, sure. Might I ask what to, oh great and mighty Kioku-sama?

Hibiki: No, but you’re more than welcome to drop the sarcasm and shut the fuck up, if that appeals to you.

Toramoto: [Grins] Duly noted.

Hibiki: Stellar. What I’m getting at is that there’s one thing that’s been pretty glaringly wrong since the very beginning of this case.

Aitou: Ah… I believe I know what you’re referring to.

PRESENT EVIDENCE!

*The Body Discovery Announcement.*

Hibiki: Honestly, I shouldn’t even have to fucking say this. It’s quite sincerely the most obvious shit.

Kim: …Yeah, that’s fair.

Aitou: It was certainly odd that the Body Discovery Announcement was so delayed. Somewhat opposite to the issue we had with it during the previous ca—
Hibiki: Don’t bring that up.

The words had come out of my mouth before I’d even thought them. That didn’t mean I was about to rethink them, though - even just the body discovery of the last case was an uncomfortable topic. There were too many questions left to answer, and there was nothing I hated more than uncertainty.

Aitou recoiled momentarily, but only to stoop into a shallow bow. Even with his glasses obscuring part of his expression, it was no secret he was flustered.

Aitou: Of course. I should have known better. My apologies, Kio—

Hibiki: Don’t give me your fucking pity, either. Just. Move on.

Sumire: C’mon, Kioku-san. There’s no need to snap. He didn’t mean anything by it.

Aitou: N-No, they’re right. It was insensitive. My apologies.


Aitou: The body discovery, yes…

Straightening his posture, Aitou reached up a delicate hand to readjust his glasses chain.

Aitou: I, er… Was somewhat distressed at the time, so I unfortunately don’t recall exactly who was present at the time it went off. Would anyone else happen to?

Alix: Of course! Unless someone showed up without saying anything, I’m pretty sure it was…

Alix: [Counts on fingers] You and I first, then Kioku-san, Hashikawa-san, Sumire-san, Kurai-san,
and finally Toramoto-san and Kim-san, I think!

Yousetsu: I was with Hashikawa-san and Kioku-san.

Alix: Ooooo. Sneaky.

Rouvin: So that’s approximately nine people, then...?

Hibiki: ...Exactly nine, yes. Good fuckin’ job.

Rouvin: Ah. Thank you, I think.

Hanahara: [Cups chin in hand] Right, so… I guess the question here is, why’d it take so long to go off?

Ryuumatsu: As a matter of fact—

Kurai: HMM, I fucking wonder. [Sarcastic grin] Maybe it was a conspiracy mass-killing. [Shakes hands in air] Spooooky. And appropriately fuckoff-stupid for the kind of bullshit you people dish out.

Hibiki: I agree.

Kim: Yeah, I also agree.


Toramoto: [Snorts] ...Bud, you’re a riot.

Orutoku: Oh! Thanks! You too, Toramoto-kun!
Alix: Oh, if we’re talking about the BDA… Captain? I have a question.

Oh God, here we go again.

Monokuma: Yeeees, Buster? How may I help?

Alix: [Taps finger against blindfold] This shit. With the eyes. The ones that don’t work? I believe you’re familiar.

Monokuma: As surprising as this may be… Yes, I know you’re blind.

Alix: [Nods] I see, I see… [Stops] Well, figuratively speaking. Anyway, my question is… Do I count towards body discoveries? I’m not really sure.

Yousetsu: That’s… A really good question, actually.

Alix: Pas de quoi! So, what’s the deal?

Monokuma: Hrmmm...

Monokuma shifted around for a moment as he hummed, apparently deep in thought.

Monokuma: Here’s the deal. If you’re in a place where you WOULD be able to see someone if ya COULD, it counts. Keepin’ it simple.

Aitou: So, he counted towards today’s discovery, then?

Monokuma: Yup, yup! If he isn’t the killer, of course. Them’s the rules.

Sumire: And that has no bearing on when the announcement would have played, does it.
Monokuma: No siree!

Ryuumatsu: Right. So evidently, the obvious conclusion here is—

Kim: That it was a conspiracy.

Ryuumatsu: No.

Alix: That I’m innocent?

Ryuumatsu: No- well, yes, but we already established that.

Orutoku: That the Body Discovery Announcement was remotely delayed by an intervening source who was intent on hiding the truth behind this case?!

Ryuumatsu: [Nursing forehead] …Orutoku-san, you should know better than to say these things to me. Please consider cutting back on the spy movies.

Toramoto: C’mon, Ryuumatsu-san. Let him have this. [Turns to Orutoku] Whaddaya say we have a Bond marathon after this shitfest is over and done with? I’ll make popcorn.

Kurai: If you think that’s happening in the Delta suite, you are so fucking sorely mistaken.

Hanahara: I’m honestly not sure we even have a microwave, actually. Or popcorn… But anyway! Please stay on task.

Orutoku: Right! On task! … [Glances at Toramoto] I’d love that, though.

Toramoto: [Grins] Duly noted. Anywho, a thousand yen says Cap’n just fucked it up and made it play late.
Monokuma: W-What’s this?! I thought you were sucking up to me…!

Monokuma: …And HEY, I would never! I’m beary good at my job, I’ll have you know!

Yousetsu: Then what was the deal with that motive…?

Monokuma… didn’t have a lot to say to that. He’d tried to hide it, but it was pretty common knowledge that that motive went down completely differently to how it was supposed to…

Monokuma: W-Well!!! Listen, that was something completely different!

Aitou: In all fairness, I can’t imagine that maintaining a steady signal down here would be a simple feat.

Sumire: [Shrugs; unimpressed] You’d be surprised to see what some submarines can pull off these days, then. Monokuma clearly doesn’t know his stuff when it comes to tech.

Monokuma: That’s Captain Monokuma to you…!

Monokuma: …But anyway, I can confirm that the Body Discovery Announcement went off without a hitch! Right on time! No ifs or buts!

Hibiki: Right. So… There’s really only one option, then.

This has been obvious for a while now… But it’s time to get it out in the open.

HANGMAN’S GAMBIT!

Why did the Body Discovery Announcement take so long to play?
There was NO BODY.

Hibiki: That’s it.

Alix: Sorry for the inconvenience, but most of us here aren’t clairvoyants. Care to share, mon ami?

Hibiki: The Body Discovery Announcement goes off when at least three innocents have discovered a dead body.

Ryuumatsu: …That’s your groundbreaking revelation here? Honestly, I—

Sumire: There’s clearly more to it than that. Shush.

Hibiki: …As I was saying. The number of discoverers isn’t the only criteria here - it’s one of two.

Aitou: I see what you’re referring to… In order for there to be a body discovery, there first needs to be a body to discover, yes?

Hibiki: Shut it and let me finish. …[Shoves hands in pockets] Yeah, that’s exactly it.

Hashikawa: W-Wait, I’m not following…

Orutoku: [Snaps fingers] I get it, I think!

Alix: So she materialised out of thin air? Now THAT I’d like to see.
Orutoku: Um… That wasn’t what I was thinking, but that’s valid too!

Hibiki: [Sighs] The POINT is that until the BDA played, Kamiya wasn’t… dead.

...Which… Might have meant there was a chance for someone to save her, huh.

...Shit.

Hibiki: She just… It just took a couple of minutes. Is all.

???: ...Do… Do you think she was in pain?

...That was a voice I hadn’t heard in a while.

Even out of the corner of my eye, it wasn’t hard to catch Maeko’s desolate expression. Her hands clamped down on the lapels of her jacket as if for dear life.

…Kamiya had made that for her, hadn’t she?

Hibiki: …

Maeko: …Sorry. Now isn’t the time.

Sumire: Maeko-chan, you don’t have anything to apologise for. You’re allowed to be upset.

Yousetsu: For what it’s worth, that poison was probably a discrete neurotoxin. It’s unlikely she felt a single thing.

Yousetsu: [Expression softening] Um… I’m sorry, though.
Maeko: I’m- It’s okay. Thank you.

The way Maeko’s lips trembled, I had the feeling she had more to say… But not a word of it came out. Most of the other passengers looked on at her in sympathy or pity - none of them sure how to approach her, a few likely unwilling to try. I couldn’t blame them, either. To say this was a mess would be an understatement.

Maeko: S-So, back to, uh…

Yousetsu: The BDA, yeah. Based on the Monokuma File, I think it’s safe to say that Kioku-san’s theory is right. It was right on 3 when we heard her scream, if I remember right.

Kim: And the Monokuma File says 3:02 PM… Yeah, that checks out. Nice eye.

Yousetsu: [Nods] Thanks.

Rouvin: [Eyes closed] Hmm… Excuse me for interjecting, should that be considered rude, but with the new information we now have at hand… I feel there are some questions to be asked, don’t you?

Alix: Dunno, but I am so ready to listen to you talk and wind up understanding everything LESS than I already do. Bring it on.

Rouvin: [Not noticing Alix] Unfortunately, I lack the expertise in this field to make propositions of any true merit, so this is mere conjecture and theoretics… But, upon reflection, does some of the evidence supplied here not appear incongruent?

Aitou: …No, I’ve been thinking the same thing. [Taps glasses] The cuts and scars, the bruises, the impalement, the poison, the comparatively tame scene of the body discovery, the scream, the late death…

Kim: You gonna keep this list going?
Aitou: Uh- No, apologies. I just… Well, I’m sure I’m not the first to believe that we’re off track here. Potentially by quite a drastic extent.

Ryuumatsu: In fact, I—

Toramoto: What, so is everythin’ we’ve done so far gettin’ thrown out the window?

Aitou: No, no. Most of what we’ve done so far is the reason our earlier assumptions now seem so… Shallow.

Aitou: Of course, that isn’t to say that the theory which was previously proposed has no substance… but…

Aitou’s eyes mulled across the empty space between himself and the far wall, as if searching for whatever kind of answers it might contain.

Aitou: …I’m not sure. I suppose I’m simply proposing that we re-evaluate things from here.

Sumire: I know what you mean, yeah. The fact that I didn’t hear anything but that scream feels kind of off… [Points] That was the same for you two, yeah?

Alix: Sure was. I don’t mean to brag, but if there’d been anything to hear, I’d’ve heard it! I don’t miss a thing.

Yousetsu: Except for when you’re listening to audiobooks?

Alix: ...Tu as raison.

Ryuumatsu: You know, if you would all just—

Sumire: [Narrows eyes] No one wants your condescension. Anyway, there’s definitely something worth looking into more deeply now that we have our footing.
Aitou: Excellent. Shall we, then?

**NON-STOP DEBATE: START!**

*Truth Bullets: Cuts on Body - Lack of Blood Loss - Monokuma File 02*

Hanahara: So, what we agreed on earlier was this.

Hanahara: [Gestures] First, the killer somehow managed to poison Kamiya-san. I guess she was given a drink or something… Not that it matters much, though.

Aitou: Correct. We assumed from there that, after being poisoned Kamiya-san briefly fought back. This was when, as a last resort, the killer opted to use the knife they had prepared as a second option to fall back on.

Hanahara: The cuts were pretty shallow, too. Probably because the knife was only made for eating, and not, uh… Assault.

Hanahara: She probably would have screamed when she was attacked. That leaves the killer a pretty small window to have gotten out before they’d end up cornered.

Aitou: That’s what appears so odd to me - it feels as though the events must have occurred earlier.

Ryuumatsu: On that topic—

Rouvin: Might I ask how you would explain the fact that Kamiya was heard screaming, in that case?

Sumire: It’s possible that that was the culprit. It’s not like that had to have been her voice.

Maeko: It... Sounded like her, though...
Toramoto: [Raises eyebrow] And who of our key suspects has a feminine enough voice to pull that one off, ‘ey Sumire-san?

Sumire: Can it.

Sumire: [Crosses arms] Aitou-san’s theory does make some sense, though… I mean, she didn’t lose a lot of blood. I’m no toxicologist, but many poisons cause blood pressure and BPM to drop drastically.

Alix: …Yeah, I’m really confused.

Hibiki: Then let me clear things up.

Refute the events must have occurred earlier with Monokuma File 02.

Hibiki: I agree that this whole thing is sketchy as fuck, but there’s shit you’re forgetting here. The Monokuma File is probably the most reliable piece of evidence there is. Monokuma may be an incompetent bastard, but he’s said before that that thing doesn’t lie.

Monokuma: It’s true! …Though I’d prefer it if you’d keep your rude comments to yourself, Know-It-All.

Hibiki: No. The point is, Kamiya’s time of death was still 3:02 PM. That wasn’t fake.

Ryuumatsu: No, of course not. However—

Hibiki: Don’t talk over me. [Sneers] If you’d all fuckin’ think for two seconds about the evidence, you’d know what we’re dealing with here. The poison was fast-acting. It said so on the label.

Ryuumatsu: It’s really not—
Hibiki: Therefore, Kamiya had to have been poisoned just then. I don’t see why the killer would go to the risk of attacking her, leaving, and coming back again later to poison her. That wouldn’t make sense, even by you guys’ standards.

Ryuumatsu: Would you just—

Sumire: You have a good point. If anyone had been coming in and out that much, there’s no way they would have gone unnoticed.

Kim: Not to mention that if a body had been laying around for ages, there’s a good chance someone would’ve seen it.

Ryuumatsu: But—


Ryuumatsu: Well—

Hibiki: Right. So it’s settled, then.

Ryuumatsu: WOULD YOU LISTEN FOR ONE MOMENT?

...Good lord, here we go.

I turned, already dreading the conversation to come, to face Ryuumatsu. A lock of hair hung loose across his face, swept between the edges of a grimace more exhausted than it was angry, the neat curls of his bangs dishevelled and limp. His stare was intense - but the eyes behind it were dull. They were resigned.

...That wasn’t like him at all.
Ryuumatsu: If you- If- … [Covers eyes] Rrrgh!

Aitou: Ryuumatsu-san—

Ryuumatsu: I have been trying to speak for the entirety of this trial and not ONE of you has been willing to g-give me so much as a MINUTE! I’m not just trying to soothe my own EGO, you know!

Sumire: …

Toramoto: …

Orutoku: Ryuumatsu-kun, sir—

Ryuumatsu: Don’t call me- …Look. Did a single one of you enter the storage room at any point during the investigation?

Hanahara: I… can’t say I did, no.

Ryuumatsu: Anyone else?

There was a pause, as Ryuumatsu swept across the room face by face. He knew that no one would have anything to say. Sure enough, no one did.

Ryuumatsu: …Right. So, d-do you think- do you think that maybe the insight of the one person who did investigate the source of the key murder weapon may have some value?

Maeko: …Yes, definitely.

Ryuumatsu: [Stares at Maeko] …Thank you.

Ryuumatsu: In the storage room, there is a- a cabinet containing a variety of poisons. Why none of
you who may have noticed this beforehand bothered to do anything about this, I’m not sure.
[Brushes hair out of face] The bottles, you’ll note, are all the same design. The labels are where things differ.

Ryuumatsu: Most parts of the cabinet were fully stocked - there were just- just two sections that were missing a single bottle each. One was the fast acting poison, as you found on Kamiya-san’s corpse. The other…

Ryuumatsu opened his jacket, pulling something from the pocket inside. I could have sworn there was something else tucked into it, too - but as soon as I so much as caught a glance of it, it was concealed once more.

Ryuumatsu: … [Holds up label] “Low potency. Ingest orally. Will cause nervous system damage or failure, total loss of sensation, loss of consciousness, and potential organ failure, when ingested in the appropriate quantity. See back for dosage appropriate to weight.” …

...Oh, shit.

Yousetsu: So… You’re saying that was what was used on Kamiya-san.

Aitou: [Pushes up glasses] We can’t know for sure, but it’s certainly a possibility.

Ryuumatsu: …That it is.

Sumire: This throws pretty much everything we’ve done so far up in the air, you know. It’d have to be pretty compelling evidence.

Aitou: It is, though, isn’t it? It was just moments ago we had agreed that the current assumptions we were working under appeared questionable. This sort of development would explain that…

Alix: But then what about the scream?

Ryuumatsu: Presumably the killer.
Maeko: [Looking down] I-I still think it sounded like her…

Sumire: And hey, wasn’t the labelless bottle nearly full? This is a low potency poison. It wouldn’t have killed in a small dosage.

Yousetsu: Not to mention the timing of the whole thing… And the fact that regardless of the poison, she was still assaulted and stabbed. If that knife hit one of her vitals…

Orutoku: It would’ve bled a lot more then, right?

Sumire: People don’t bleed as heavily as they do in movies, Orutoku-san. Especially not with low blood pressure.

...I need to concentrate. I really, really hate that Ryuumatsu’s evidence was so important, but… For my own sake, I don’t know if I can afford to ignore it.

Time to turn this thing around.

LOGIC DIVE: DEEP SEA EDITION

I: What was the cause of death?
Poisoning - Internal bleeding - Stab wound

The cause of death was poisoning.

II: Which bottle of poison was used to poison Kamiya?
Empty bottle with the “fast acting” label - Labelless bottle in Kamiya’s hand - Both

Kamiya was poisoned with the empty bottle, which had the fast acting label.
III: What was the nature of the poison Kamiya actually ingested?
Fast acting - Slow acting

The bottle Kamiya was given actually contained a slow acting poison.

CLEAR!

Hibiki: Right...

Maeko: ...Kioku-san?

...Breathe in, breathe out.

Clenching my jaw, I stared up at the room as people looked to one another in confusion and frustration, each of them clearly nearing their limits. The argument they were having was getting nowhere fast - there were too many contradicting elements, and too few certainties.

Kamiya was… poisoned and stabbed. Knowing what I knew now… It was still a mess, but the poison had to have been what had done it. The knife was only stabbed into her side - chances are it couldn’t have hit anything vital enough to kill her, at least not quickly. So… Why use both methods, then? Did one fail and cause the killer to resort to the other? The labels being swapped could make that make sense - maybe the killer tried to poison Kamiya quickly, but failed.

…Or was this just leading me into a dead end? Was this just to throw me off?…

Hibiki: …Ryuumatsu…

I sincerely couldn’t think of anything I wanted to do less than ask him of all people for information, but… this is what it comes to, huh.

Ryuumatsu: …
Hibiki: [Brushes bangs out of face] Dude, don’t just be fucking petty and ignore me. What do you know about that poison. Was there anything that wasn’t on the label you just read out?

Ryuumatsu: [Brushes shoulder] Yes, as a matter of fact. There was more information on the back. I didn’t bring the bottle, so maybe you’ll simply have to decide to trust me.

Hibiki: …Uh huh.

Ryuumatsu: [Squints] …Essentially, what I gleaned was that at the right dosage, the toxin attacks the nervous system and thereby gradually slows bodily functions until, essentially, life becomes unsustainable. Once the heart can no longer supply oxygen to the body like it needs to, there isn’t a lot anyone can do.

Ryuumatsu: I couldn’t say what dosage Kamiya was given… But I’d guess she’d lost full consciousness and sensation after twenty minutes, based roughly on the label.

Sumire: If it was low potency, she probably would’ve needed a fair amount of the bottle for it to be able to kill her in the first place. There isn’t that much variation in potential dosage beyond that, what with how much the bottle actually had in it to begin with.

Hibiki: [Shoves hands in pockets] And Sumire. You said something earlier about blood pressure.

Sumire: Well, by the sounds of things, this would have weakened her heart over time. Can’t say how quickly that happened, but low blood pressure would explain the low blood loss. Even with how shallow those cuts from the knife were, they’d still be cutting through capillaries. Those tend to bleed.

Hibiki: Right.


Aitou: With all of this in mind, I have no doubt that the poison was what caused Kamiya’s death. Admittedly, given the location of the stab wound, it strikes me as unlikely that it would have pierced any vital organs so heavily as to be fatal within the time window at hand.
Hanahara: So what you’re saying is… The knife wasn’t even involved until Kamiya-san had been in that state for quite some time, then.

Sumire: Seems likely to me.

Aitou: [Cups chin in hand] Mm. I’m afraid I’d have to agree.

Yousetsu: So why bother, then…?

Toramoto: As a decoy. Throw us off track. [Smirks] And boy did it work.

Orutoku: That’s so smart!... But kind of mean, too…

Kurai: What fucking part of leaving someone to slowly die in a library of all places while you stab them in the hip seems anything but MEAN to you?

Kim: Y’know, he has a point.

Toramoto: Can’t blame the guy for havin’ a heart of gold. Anyways, this is startin’ to make a lot more sense. Even explains the scene around the body bein’ so bland, if Kamiya-san was practically comatose by the time anythin’ else happened to her.

Hanahara: Even so, there’s still a long way to go before we’re done here. We aren’t starting right from square one again, but that doesn’t mean we can relax.

Hanahara looked at each of her peers, her gaze confident and firm. If anyone had faith this was going to be fine, it seemed like it was probably her - really, it was a pretty drastic change from how little trust she’d had the past few days. She probably just felt like she could afford to trust because she was in control…

…Which was kind of dumb, honestly. After all, I’m going to be the one to solve this case.
Though she could at least rest easy knowing that, I guess.

I brought my focus back to the group in front of me as the group’s discussion continued, many of them finally making out some sense in this case. Ryuumatsu motioned as if ready to embark on yet another self-aggrandizing spiel, and I rolled my eyes - only to find he was mercifully interrupted.

Monokuma: Well, folks, don’t get too uptight! I think it’s about time we tuned out for an intermission!

Monokuma: [Chuckles; hand to mouth] After all, this drama is bound to taste even better with some popcorn on the side!

Orutoku: So we DO have popcorn, then! Hear that, Toramoto-kun?

Toramot: [Grins] Loud and clear, bud.

Monokuma: [Waves paw] Just ‘cuz I’ve got some doesn’t mean it’s for you lot too! Keep yer grubby paws off, Eagle One!

Orutoku: Ah! [Stands at attention] Yes, sir! … [Sighs] Even if I was really looking forward to it…

Ryuumatsu: I’m not sure confectionery should be the highest of our priorities right now, Orutoku-san. Stay on track.

Orutoku: Right! Right. Can do!

Monokuma: Wonderful! In that case… I’ll be seeing you kiddos reaaaaal soon. Upupupu!

Monokuma laughed, hopping up before disappearing through a hatch in the throne he’d perched himself on before. Most of the room was quick to fall silent in his absence, Toramoto and Orutoku’s quiet banter the only thing filling the gap.
...Something about what had just happened was hard to accept, and yet it all seemed to make so much sense. I didn’t want to admit it to myself, but... The way Maeko longingly glanced to Kamiya’s portrait from time to time wasn’t something I didn’t feel myself wanting to do, too. I guess I just... missed her.

That was a first... Or at least, I wanted to say it was. Deep down, some part of me wasn’t quite sure.

I hated that more than almost anything.

...I forced my mind away from that and looked back to the room. Surveying the crowd now... There was one person who stuck out as a little too suspicious for their own good, with everything unfolding how it was. They’d seemed that way from the beginning, but now... It was starting to make sense.

...I couldn’t be sure, though - not yet, not completely. But I would be soon enough.

After all... I was going to win, just like I always did.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, it's been a while! My last year of high school was pretty hectic, so unfortunately UDR had to get put on the back burner. I'm a semester into my uni degree now and thankfully have a LOT more free time, so with any luck, some kind of schedule may be back in place soon enough! I don't have any plans of cancelling this thing, don't worry.

Thank you to everyone who's kept up with this work, who's read it since the hiatus, and ESPECIALLY to everyone who helped me through the last year (which I'll admit, has been pretty stressful). I'm not the best at replying to comments, but I do sincerely read and appreciate each and every one I get. It's amazing that so many people enjoy my work, and I'm so happy to be able to share this with you all.

If you're looking for something to do while Part 6 gets written, I actually rewrote and updated the entire prologue a month or two ago! It's a huge improvement, so if you need a refresher, now's the perfect opportunity to get one. A lot of people also seem to have missed out on Cruise Mode - it's got Uroko's FTEs! You can find it on my profile.
A few revisions are going to be made to Chapter 1 over the next little while, but otherwise, I'm hoping to be on track to update this again in another few weeks. Thank you all for reading, and I'll see you in the next chapter for the trial's climax!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!