You stand at a point and see two roads leading in different directions.

One road, you already traveled. It's a road you became familiar with.

The other road, however, you've yet to experience.

Where shall this road take you? What will be waiting on the path? Will there even be a difference at all?

Some things will never change, but things can be altered.

This is an alternate road with an alternate experience.

It alternates between familiar and unseen.

This...is Alternate V.
Kaede Akamatsu and Shuichi Saihara were at the tail end of their investigation. Only a few short moments ago they had discovered the dead body of Rantaro Amami which meant the class trial to find his killer was set to begin soon.

The two spent most of their investigation determining everyone’s alibis and the next agenda on their list was to fill in some of the blanks.

Korekiyo Shinguuji corroborated the alibis for himself, Kirumi Tojo, Miu Iruma, and Tsumugi Shirogane. However, he noted that Tsumugi left for a brief period to go to the bathroom and this was the inquiry that Kaede was curious about. The act itself was nothing to be overly suspicious of, but that coupled with Tsumugi’s “Ultimate Talent”, a variety of horrific scenarios suddenly became possible.

Kaede and Shuichi went into the library where Tsumugi, Kirumi, Miu, and Ryoma Hoshi were doing their own individual investigations. The two approached the blue-haired girl who seemed to be lost in her own little world.

“I’m just gonna cut to the chase-since you’re the Ultimate Cosplayer…”, Kaede began. “That means you could disguise yourself as anyone-even one of us, right?”

Kaede Akamatsu had the talent of “Ultimate Pianist”, but that didn’t mean she was a slouch when it came to deductions and logic. Her goal for the investigation and ultimately the class trial was to find the mastermind behind the entire killing game. As much as she didn’t want to think about it, the possibility that it could be one of the 14 other students she became acquainted to was lurking within the shadows of her mind.

Tsumugi took note of the pianist’s accusation and merely had a look of curiosity on her face.

“Oh, so that's what you think of me. Well, since we’re in this situation, I’ll be clear…” the blue-haired cosplayer suddenly had the look of confidence on her face. “I only cosplay fictional characters. I don’t cosplay real people…or rather, I can’t.”

It was Kaede’s turn to have a curious look on her face, “You can’t? Isn’t it easy to just wear someone else’s clothes as a disguise and-”

“Cosplay isn’t a disguise!” Tsumugi suddenly yelled.

“Oh! S-Sorry!”

With Kaede taken aback, Tsumugi momentarily calmed herself, but still had an air of determination surrounding her.

“Well…” Tsumugi started. “You’ll probably have a hard time believing me if I just say it, so I’ll show you.”

“Show me...how?” Kaede asked.

“Come on, Kaede.”

“Ah, wait!”
Tsumugi grabbed the other girl’s hand and dragged her outside of library, leaving Shuichi to himself and the other students who were lingering in the area.

Shuichi Saihara stood still from where he was for a brief moment. Although his talent was the “Ultimate Detective,” he had difficulty taking control of certain situations, and the one he just bore witness to was no different.

With Tsumugi dragging Kaede to who-knows-where, the dark-capped detective was left stuck in the library, the scene of Rantaro’s murder.

He and Kaede investigated all the nooks and crannies of the area as well as the body of Rantaro himself. Even so, the detective seemed no closer to the truth than when he and Kaede first discovered the body.

The boy became lost in thought. The library was quiet with the exception of the other students who were left to their own devices. With nothing better to do, Shuichi approached Rantaro’s body once again.

Rantaro Amami was a man of mystery. Unlike the other 15 students, Rantaro had no recollection of his ultimate talent. On top of that, before his death, it seemed like he had a plan of his own to stop the killing game that everyone was forced into when they woke up in the so-called “Ultimate Academy for Gifted Juveniles”. The evidence was plain to see as Rantaro, for reasons unknown, went into the library seemingly to investigate something before he was ultimately murdered by the culprit.

Shuichi stared at the dead body, his eyes examining everything that it could in hopes of finding one evidence, one clue that could lead him towards the truth. He kept eyeing the scene up and down until his eyes looked at the object that was near the body. It was the object that ended the life of Rantaro Amami. The murder weapon: a shot put ball.

As a detective, it was Shuichi’s job to determine the who’s and how’s of the crime, but ever since solving his first murder case, the boy wanted to find the answer to one other aspect of the mystery: the why.

*Why did Rantaro come down to the library?*

*Why did he have his Monopad in hand?*

*And ultimately...why was he killed with a shot put ball?*

Shuichi figured that the “how’s” of the crime would come to light sooner or later, but he feared that the “why’s” would forever be lost if he didn’t figure that out soon.

The young detective thought deeply in his mind as to why the killer felt the need to use an iron ball as a method of murder. Sure, it might’ve been the closest available weapon to use at the time, but there seemed to be other, more practical methods to use as well.

For instance, the kitchen in the dining hall has knives and other sharp utensils that were more proficient for murder. They were more conventional especially when compared to an iron ball. The shot put itself had a risk of over encumbering whoever was using it, at least compared to other murder weapons. There was also a risk of being seen carrying around such an item. One can’t simply hide a shot put ball in their person so casually unless they already had something to contain it in.

“*Contain it...*”, Shuichi thought to himself.
Possibilities started racing within the detective’s mind. Suddenly the why’s of the case didn’t matter as the who and how’s started becoming clearer.

Even then, it was the “when” and “where” that Shuichi suddenly became worried.

*Where did the culprit obtain the shot put ball?*

The only place where one could get a shot put ball within the academy was the warehouse next to the dining hall.

*When could they have taken it?*

Theoretically it could’ve been taken at anytime. However, there was one person that Shuichi knows that had a chance to take the potential murder weapon.

*How did they contain it?*

Slowly but certainly, that person’s image was becoming clearer within his mind.

*How did they kill Rantaro with the murder weapon?*

Suddenly a series of flashbacks appeared in Shuichi’s mind; flashbacks that would help him put the pieces together.

The boy’s breathing became heavy as the inevitable dark truth clawed its way out of his head.

> “What are you doing?”

> “Oh, Shuichi. Done already?”

> “I can’t really get to the vent with all these books in the way though…”

> “Well, we’ll be able to see the entrance to the vent in the classroom…So that should be okay, right?”

> “Just in case, I'll stack more books around the vent so no one can get through.”

*The books…*

Shuichi looked to the vent in the library which connected to the classroom where he and Kaede waited for the mastermind to make their move.

He hastily took the ladder and climbed up to the top of the bookcase to determine the accuracy of this growing theory. He prayed that he would be wrong.

Unfortunately, his prayers would go unanswered.

Shuichi saw that the once messy display of books had been reorganized into a pathway that began from the vent to the other side of the room...where Rantaro met his demise.

The pieces started fitting together in an instant, and all his questions were being answered.

> “Who killed Rantaro?”

All the evidence suggested to one person. Someone who had a chance to take a shot put ball, have a
container to hide it in, and find a way to kill the victim...without having to even be in the same room as them.

Shuichi, from atop the ladder, stared at the books then at Rantaro’s body. His body frozen in disbelief as the once blurry vision of the culprit in his mind suddenly became clear. The image in his mind was one that he would’ve refused to believe had he not noticed any of what he just witnessed: The image of Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist.

With that revelation, Shuichi could only mutter out a single sentence,

“What have you done…?”

“Excuse me, Shuichi?”

The detective was brought back to reality by one of the other students in the library, the “Ultimate Maid” Kirumi Tojo.

“Aah, Kirumi,” Shuichi finally addressed the maid.

“Please forgive me,” Kirumi began. “You seemed to be particularly fixated on something atop of those bookcases. Did you perhaps find any new evidence that would help in this investigation?”

Shuichi was at a loss for words. What should he say in this situation? Should he outright expose Kaede’s crime to the other students here and now? Thoughts, theories, and questions started overwhelming the poor high schooler’s mind. Literally a second ago, he discovered that the one person he trusted most out of everyone was the actual culprit in Rantaro’s murder.

Was he wrong to trust her?

Did she intentionally betray and deceive him?

Was this Kaede’s true character?

“No,” Shuichi thought to himself. “I can’t just jump to conclusions....not now.”

Shuichi calmed himself and looked deep into his mind. He may not be the most confident detective in the world, in fact he would go so far as to say he was undeserving of his title. However, his ultimate talent didn’t come to him randomly. There must’ve been a reason why he became the Ultimate Detective, and now it was time to put that talent to the test.

“I determined the who’s and how’s…” the boy suddenly stopped in his thought process. “Of course!”

Indeed, the young detective had solved two of the most important aspects of the case, but there was another that was yet to be considered; the final piece of the puzzle that would explain everything.

“Why”, the boy muttered. “Why did she do this?”

Shuichi was at a loss. When he and Kaede first met, the girl had seemed so kind to him. Never in a million years would he have thought she’d be capable of murder. Either she was a really good actor or perhaps the reasons for her actions were far more complicated than pettiness.

Before Shuichi could theorize any further, the previous person that addressed him interrupted his thought process once again.

“Shuichi?” Kirumi questioned.
The detective stood silent once again. His next words would become very important and he needed to choose them carefully. Would he expose the truth? Or lie just to defend his dear friend?

Or perhaps there was another option he could take. If he wanted to know the full story, see the entire picture, he needed to do one thing:

He needed to test the murder scenario for himself.

“...I need the room,” Shuichi finally spoke as he climbed down the ladder.

“I’m sorry?” Kirumi responded.

“I need the room,” he spoke a little louder.

“As if we’d leave you all alone at the crime scene, Poo-ichi!”

The maid and detective looked towards the source of that outburst and found that it was Miu Iruma, the “Ultimate Inventor”.

The abrasive girl walked towards the two, “You expect us to skedaddle outta here while you go tampering with all the evidence?!”

“I...that’s not…” Shuichi struggled to get his words out.

“If he wanted to destroy any evidence he would’ve tried to do so earlier.”

The three students turned to see Ryoma Hoshi, the “Ultimate Tennis Pro”, approach them.

“A majority of us already investigated this scene as much as we could,” Ryoma continued. “So if he were to try and tamper with any evidence now, it would only contradict what the rest of us had found.”

Miu blushed in embarrassment, “O-Oh, is that so? O-Of course that was obvious to a genius like me, so I’m glad you explained it to the other slowpokes here.”

“That would leave only me,” Kirumi said as she glared at the inventor. “Are you perhaps insulting my intelligence?”

Miu gave a mild whimper, “Hey would you look at the time! I better get back to my lab to develop the photos my moan took!”

Kirumi sighed, “You mean ‘drone.’”

The maid would receive no response as Miu exited the library in a rush.

Ryoma shook his head as he went back to address the other two, “In any case, if it’s integral to solving this mystery, I won’t hinder you.”

The former tennis pro gave a short nod to the detective and left the library as well, leaving only Kirumi and Shuichi remaining.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, Shuichi,” said Kirumi. “However, I was the one who suggested that we not investigate by ourselves.”

“I understand, Kirumi,” Shuichi said.
The maid put a hand to her chin and looked away. On one hand, this was the safest option to ensure a fair class trial. On the other, if Shuichi was indeed onto something, then it would be in her best interests to let the detective do as he pleased.

“Would it really be a hinderance to you if I, at least, remained in the premises?” the young maid asked.

Shuichi thought for a brief moment. The purpose of him wanting the room to himself was a bit of a selfish endeavor. If he were to test Kaede’s supposed “deathtrap” and results showed that it was a success, the boy was unsure of where to proceed from there. If others were to see the method of the murder for themselves, they would be able to put two and two together and their fingers would start pointing at the unfortunate pianist. They would certainly let their emotions get the better of them and they’d start voting for Kaede in the class trial without a second thought.

That being said, could Shuichi trust Kirumi with such delicate information? Out of everyone else in the academy, the Ultimate Maid was one of the more levelheaded types of people. Unfortunately, as a servant, she also acted in the best interests of the others so it might be difficult for her to withhold any information that the detective were to show her.

Regardless, Shuichi decided to take that chance, “That sounds fair. After all, I wouldn’t want you to feel like a liar for willingly letting someone investigate on their own.”

“And what’s wrong with being a liar?”

The two turned to see that, once again, another individual decided to join their conversation. It was the supposed “Ultimate Supreme Leader” Kokichi Oma.

“The correct answer is ‘everything,’” Kokichi continued. “After all, liars are just the worst!”

“Kokichi?” Shuichi questioned. “What are you doing here?”

“Well I was walking around, minding my own business, when I saw Miu rush out of this room all flustered. So I thought, ‘Wow! There must be some shindig going on in here to make that slutty pig flee with her tail between her sweaty legs...Y’know, it’s not as fun making fun of her when she’s not here.’”

The other two students didn’t dignify his remark with a response.

However, Kirumi spoke after that brief pause, “Kokichi, you’ve been on your own for the majority of this investigation, correct?”

“Yeah, I suppose,” the purple haired boy lowered his head. “Actually it made me quite sad. It was like I was the last person get picked for dodgeball or something. Except...I never got picked in the end…UWAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH-”

“In that case,” Kirumi cut off Kokichi’s crying fit. “I think it would be best if you helped out Shuichi for the rest of the investigation.”

“W-What?” Shuichi was taken aback by Kirumi’s proposal.

“Pardon my wording, but with this we are able to kill two birds with one stone,” Kirumi gave Shuichi a content smile. “Now you’ll be able to keep an eye on Kokichi, and Kokichi will be able to keep an eye on you.”

“Oh?” Kokichi tilted his head. “Does that mean I get to play assistant to the Ultimate Detective?”
“If that’s what you’d like to call it,” the maid responded.

Shuichi, however, was having a much more difficult time accepting this deal, “W-Wait! What will you be doing in the meantime, Kirumi?”

“As it just so happens, your little proposal caused two of our classmates to go off on their own,” Kirumi said referring to Ryoma and Miu.

Once again, Shuichi failed to get his words out, “Ah...yes, well.”

“So I shall fulfill your request and let you do as you will, provided that Kokichi remain with you. As for me, I will check up on the others to ensure that they aren’t planning any suspicious activity on their end.”

The young detective, having no retort against the maid, could only nod in response.

“Then I shall make my leave,” Kirumi bowed her head as she exited the library. “If you two will excuse me.”

The sound of the library door closing signified that Shuichi was now free to perform his experiment, along with his newly decreed “assistant”.

“I’m not really sure what’s going on,” Kokichi spoke. “But it sounds like you’re planning something fun, right Shuichi?”

Ever since the detective first met him, Shuichi had resigned himself to the fact that he’ll never truly understand Kokichi. Regardless, he was stuck with the purple haired boy whether he liked it or not.

“Sort of...” said Shuichi. “I think I may have found the method of murder the culprit used to kill Rantaro.”

“Oooh,” Kokichi eyes suddenly had stars on them, implying his great interest in Shuichi’s insight. “That’s our “Ultimate Detective” for ya, I knew you’d be one step ahead of the killer. Honestly I don’t know why they went for Rantaro when killing you would’ve been a greater benefit for them.”

Shuichi remained silent at Kokichi’s inquiry while also trying to determine whether or not what he said was a vague threat. He decided to brush it off. Like he previously surmised, trying to understand the supreme leader would end up becoming a fruitless endeavor.

Instead of responding to his “assistant”, Shuichi handed Kokichi the shot put.

“Go to the classroom just upstairs from this basement. I want you to roll the shot put into the vent that’s in there.”

Kokichi took the iron ball from Shuichi’s hand.

“Do I really have to go all the way up to Classroom A just to roll a ball?” he whined.

“Huh?” Shuichi questioned.

“Well if you wanted me to roll the ball into the vent of Classroom A, then that means the vent would lead to the one that’s here in the library,” Kokichi pointed to the ball’s would-be point of exit. “And that means the ball exited that vent, rolled across from atop the bookcases and-WAM-killed Rantaro.”

Shuichi stared at the supreme leader. Despite his appearance and demeanor, he was deceptively
intelligent. No, perhaps his demeanor gave support to his intelligence.

“Yes, that’s correct, Kokichi.”

“I don’t like thaaaaat,” the boy whined once again.

“...Huh?”

“Can’t we just use the ladder and roll the ball from here?” Kokichi asked. “That way, I could also see it for myself!”

“Wait,” Shuichi shook his head in disbelief. “You’re only upset because you yourself won’t get to see the results of this experiment?”

“I’m sorry, but I thought I was sticking with you because Kirumi didn’t want you to be all alone?” Kokichi said with a sly smile, his attitude suddenly changing from a whining child to a scheming villain.

Shuichi nearly choked on his words. Once again there was a barrier preventing him from discovering the truth.

“That’s...true,” was all he could mutter out.

The two students ended up in a stare off, each determining how they would spin this situation in their favor. Shuichi obviously only wanted the purple haired boy to do as he said, but Kokichi was different. Out of everyone he could’ve worked with, the Ultimate Supreme Leader was probably the worst option.

“Look,” the young detective spoke. “I know I’m technically going against the deal I made with Kirumi.”

“I won’t tell if you won’t,” Kokichi suddenly blurted out.

“W...What?” Shuichi looked at the boy in confusion.

“I’ll go up to that classroom like you asked. I wouldn’t want to stall the deductions of the Ultimate Detective, now would I?”

“What’s in it for you?”

It was Kokichi’s turn to have a look of confusion.

Shuichi continued speaking, “Cooperating with me so easily while also willingly leaving me alone in this crime scene...what do you want in return?”

Kokichi thought about this for a brief moment, “Hmm, I’ll get back to you on that.”

The boy finally turned away from Shuichi and started exiting the library.

“W-Wai-” Shuichi tried to shout.

“Can’t! Who knows how long we have left until the class trial!”

And with a slam of the door, Shuichi was left all alone in the library.
The young detective waited with bated breath for Kokichi to roll the shot put from the vent. He waited for what seemed like hours, but Shuichi knew only a few minutes have passed. Eventually a “few” minutes became “many” minutes and the boy was starting to get anxious. At any moment, Monokuma could come out and stop the investigation and start the class trial. If that were to happen, then the truth would potentially be lost.

“What in the world is Kokichi doing?” Shuichi asked himself.

Actually, there were a lot of things he could be doing, the detective feared. He could be telling Kirumi that Shuichi broke her trust, he could be telling the others that Shuichi was all by himself in the library doing something suspicious. Or, in a Kokichi-like fashion, he could’ve just abandoned this plan altogether.

“Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to have Kokichi walking around with the murder weapon…”

Suddenly the library door creaked open and Shuichi stood at attention to see who was coming in. To the detective’s surprise, it was neither Kokichi, Kaede, nor any of the other students he previously spoke to.

Rather, the one who appeared before him was K1-B0 or “Keebo”, the “Ultimate Robot”.

“Keebo?” Shuichi wondered. “What are you doing here?”

“My apologies,” the robotic student answered. “It wasn’t my intent to return to the crime scene, but Kokichi asked me to come assist you...with whatever it is you’re doing in here.”

“Kokichi asked you to come down here?” asked Shuichi.

“Indeed. He also told me to, um…” Keebo paused, unsure of how to complete his sentence. “...Well he asked me to give this back to you…”

Keebo held out his hand to reveal that he was holding the bloody shot put that Shuichi gave to Kokichi earlier.

“Why do you have that?” Shuichi asked the robot.

“Kokichi gave it to me. He said for me to tell you that he didn’t need it anymore.”

“H-He what?!”

Keebo nearly flinched back at the detective’s uncharacteristic outburst.

“Y-Yes, I found it odd myself and quite frankly, a little redundant.”

“Huh?”

“Well, he came into the classroom holding about 4 or 5 shot puts,” Keebo explained. “I was almost certain he would end up collapsing from the weight…”

“The classroom?” Shuichi parroted.

The detective suddenly remembered that Keebo was originally investigating in Classroom A.

Which meant that Kokichi really did follow his instructions.

Which meant that he was in there right now.
“Why did Kokichi have the murder weapon with him?” Keebo asked the detective. “What exactly are you two planning?”

Before Shuichi had a chance to respond to him, the echoing sound of moving metal reverberated throughout the library.

Suddenly, a shot put came out of the library’s air vent and rolled through the row of bookcases.

The two students in the library watched as the metal ball made its way across the room and towards the location of Rantaro’s body.

Shuichi braced himself for the cold, dark truth that would come to light. Soon all his suspicions would be answered in an instant.

Except...that wouldn’t be the case.

The shot put ball fell from the bookcase, but it landed not towards Rantaro’s body; nowhere near the initial illustrated point of impact, in fact. The ball landed on the floor a few feet away from the victim’s position.

Keebo merely put a finger to his metal chin in curiosity. His associate in the room with him, however, had a different reaction entirely.

A mix of confusion, surprise, and relief overwhelmed the detective. He wasn’t sure if what he just witnessed was real and yet he indeed saw it with his own two eyes.

“It didn’t hit Rantaro. It didn’t fall where it was supposed to.”

But most importantly, the one point that became increasingly clear; the point that Shuichi was focused on more than anything:

“Kaede, didn’t kill him.”
Shuichi and Keebo watched as the metal ball rolled across the floor in the library. The room was silent as it came to a halt near Shuichi’s feet.

All the detective could do was pick up the round object and stare at it.

“So it couldn’t have been that…”

Shuichi turned to see that Keebo was the one who spoke.

The robot continued, “I’m impressed, though. I didn’t suspect that could be a potential way for the killer to murder Rantaro.”

“Indeed,” said Shuichi. “I noticed something suspicious as I was investigating the top of the bookcases and I wanted to test out that theory.”

Keebo chuckled, “Your detective skills are truly unmatched, Shuichi.”

The detective returned the chuckle as he looked at the metal ball in his hand once again. As he gazed at the object, his feeling of relief slowly changed to that of curiosity. He took note of his robotic friend’s words.

If he truly was a detective with unmatched skill, then his job wasn’t over yet.

“You said that Kokichi had multiple shot puts with him when he entered the classroom, right Keebo?”

“That is correct. I didn’t get a good enough look to determine specifics, but I would say it was around 4 or 5.”

After a brief moment of thinking to himself, Shuichi dropped the metal ball, climbed up the ladder and tried to reach the vent as close as he could.

“Kokichi!” the young detective shouted into the vent. “Can you hear me?”

The sound of Kokichi’s voice suddenly escaped from the metal opening.

“Loud and clear, boss!” the boy in the classroom yelled.

“I need you to roll another shot put into the vent!”

“Another one?” Keebo parroted.

Shuichi turned to the robot, “We can’t be sure until we test this out multiple times. I won’t be satisfied until I know that the shot put ball missing wasn’t just some fluke!”

“Alrighty!” the two heard Kokichi say. “Here comes another one!”

Just as before, a loud reverberating sound reached the library as another shot put ball rolled down the vent.

Shuichi, now on the ladder, watched the ball intently to see the exact movements of the metal object.
The ball rolled through the pathway of books that Kaede had organized and once again it fell from the bookcase...to the exact same location the previous ball fell.

“Not yet,” Shuichi thought to himself as he turned to the vent.

“Again!” he shouted.

Suddenly the echoing sound of a rolling shot put ball amplified. Shuichi nearly covered his ears with his hands in response to the loud noise as he noticed that Kokichi seemed to roll three balls into the vent this time.

He watched all three shot put balls roll through the path and all three fell to the same destination as the previous two.

The young detective slowly climbed down the ladder as he was finally able to reach a conclusion. After testing it out with five shot put balls, Shuichi concluded that Kaede’s murder plan never had the chance of working.

As he reached the ground level of the library, Shuichi stopped short and stayed on the ladder.

“Shuichi?” Keebo questioned as he saw the detective lower his head.

Unbeknownst to the robot, despite his melancholic posture, Shuichi was actually smiling.

“Thank goodness,” Shuichi whispered to himself. “Thank goodness…”

“Hmm,” Keebo took note of the detective’s relieved state and decided not to pry any further than that.

Instead, he looked up at the bookcases, “It’s perplexing though.”

Shuichi finally brought himself back to reality as he turned to face his classmate.

“What’s perplexing?” he inquired.

“Well, you just proved that the shot put ball rolling atop the bookcases was not a possible method of murder,” Keebo explained. “However, for a total of five shot puts to have followed such a specific pathway? It’s too convenient to be just a coincidence.”

“Ah,” Shuichi acknowledged. “You have a point.”

“If I may be so bold,” said Keebo. “I suggest we cannot rule this possible method of murder out entirely. If my calculations are correct, I theorize that the culprit attempted this method only to realize it didn’t work and then came down to the library themselves to murder Rantaro.”

“K-Keebo,” Shuichi tried to stop Keebo’s dangerous line of thinking.

“But wait,” Keebo suddenly said. “If that were the case...then the only possible suspects who could’ve used the vent from Classroom A are-”

“Kee-boy, are you bothering Shuichi with your useless robotic self?”

The two turned to see Kokichi make his reappearance in the library.

“I do not appreciate that robophobic remark!” Keebo said pointing at the purple-haired boy in accusation. “Besides, you were the one who said Shuichi needed my help in the first place!”
“He did?” Shuichi questioned.

Kokichi scoffed. “That was just to get you out of that darn classroom. I didn’t need you to distract me while I was helping Shuichi.”

“So why have him come here?” the detective asked the boy.

“Well I mean I couldn’t leave you here all alone, now could I?” said Kokichi. “I just wanted to stay honest for Kirumi’s sake after all.”

“You and honesty go as well together as motor oil and cake,” Keebo said pointedly.

The other two students stared at Keebo, both unsure how to acknowledge his remark.

For the first time it seemed Kokichi was at a loss for words, “I...you...what...?”

Shuichi decided to change the subject, “Anyway, thank you for your help, Kokichi. You as well, Keebo.”

The robot gave Shuichi a kind smile. Kokichi however was decidedly dismissive at his classmate’s genuine thanks.

“Eh, don’t get used to it,” Kokichi said. “I am the Ultimate Supreme Leader, after all, so it’s not everyday I end up working for someone else.”

“However, your decision to bring in multiple shot put balls proved beneficial to our findings,” Keebo pointed out. “Thanks to that, we were able to conclude that-”

“Kee-boy!” Kokichi suddenly shouted.

“W-What?” Keebo responded.

“You can’t just blurt out your findings so casually at the first person you see!” the supreme leader tried to explain.

“What are you talking about? You’re a part of this as much as the two of us!” Keebo said referring to both himself and Shuichi.

“Yeah well, I decided I don’t want to know the results of Shuichi’s little experiment,” said Kokichi.

“Why not?” asked Shuichi.

The mischievous boy gave the detective a sly smile, “Cause that would be too boring.”

“Boring?” Keebo repeated.

“Hey, Shuichi!” Kokichi said ignoring the robotic student. “Remember when you asked what’s in it for me a little while ago?”

“Yes…” Shuichi responded, a little wary of Kokichi’s intentions.

“Well I came up with something good! In exchange for me helping you, and keeping things ‘on the down low’ I want you…”

The detective prepared himself for whatever scheme Kokichi had planned for him.
“...to give me an entertaining trial!” the purple-haired boy finally finished.

“W-What?” Shuichi looked at the boy with a confused look.

“An entertaining trial?” Keebo once again parroted Kokichi’s words.

“Of course!” Kokichi confirmed. “Shuichi acted awfully intense in this investigation, so I imagine he’s got this whole case figured out! If this really is the trial to catch the mastermind, then this will be the only trial where I’ll get to see the Ultimate Detective face off against them! A classic good vs. evil showdown! Who will win? Shuichi’s truth? Or the mastermind’s lies?!”

“This isn’t some type of drama on television!” Keebo cut in. “Everyone has to participate in the class trial, so telling you our findings would prove beneficial to-”

“Too bad, I already helped out Shuichi with what he wanted, now he has to do what I want,” Kokichi interrupted.

“Is this really just for the sake of your own entertainment?” Shuichi finally asked.

“Hmm?” Kokichi questioned.

“I know you’re not stupid, Kokichi,” said Shuichi. “You probably have as much of this case figured out as I have.”

The supreme leader and the detective were once again in a staredown. It was as if the two were using their eyes to analyze the other.

If Keebo didn’t already understand the concept of being a “third wheel”, he was getting well acquainted with the feeling as of that moment.

Kokichi sighed, “Looking at me as if I’m your enemy...this is the thanks I get for buying you some extra time?”

“Buying me extra time?” Shuichi wondered.

“Let me tell you a little something about strategy, Shuichi,” said Kokichi. “Just because you drew some favorable cards, doesn’t mean you immediately reveal your hand.”

The detective raised an eyebrow at Kokichi’s statement.

“I’m afraid that metaphor is lost on me,” said Keebo.

“It wasn’t as bad as the one you said about motor oil and cake!” Kokichi yelled at the robot, the purple-haired boy now having a baffled expression. “Seriously! What would you be doing with a cake anyway?! Not eating it, of course, because YOU’RE A ROBOT!”

“Just because I’m a robot doesn’t mean I can’t eat as well!” Keebo argued.

“Ugh, whatever,” Kokichi decided to dismiss the argument entirely. “Anyway, Keebo, help me pick up these shot put balls. We gotta put these back in the warehouse.”

“Huh? Why do I have to help?”

“You saw me walk into that classroom carrying those heavy balls. I bet you were laughing your shiny metal ass off at my suffering.”
Keebo, acting flustered for a brief moment, suddenly looked away and gave a minor smirk.

Kokichi narrowed his eyes, “Or...at least you would’ve, if robots could laugh. Which they can’t.”

Now it was Keebo’s turn to have a staredown with the supreme leader. However, the robot realized that challenging Kokichi would prove to be a fruitless endeavor.

The robot sighed, “Whatever. Let’s get this over with.”

Keebo proceeded to pick up the scattered shot put balls in the library while also finally handing Shuichi the original bloodied shot put that killed Rantaro.

Kokichi and Keebo, each with several shot put balls in hand, left the library, leaving Shuichi alone again.

The detective decided to take this brief moment of peace to drink in everything he had deduced.

“Kaede didn’t do it,” Shuichi said to himself. “I imagine she’ll be more than relieved when I tell her-”

His thought process stopped cold as he realized the implications of his own words. While it was true that Kaede wasn’t the one who killed Rantaro, it doesn’t change the fact that she had attempted to do so.

Indeed, Kaede wasn’t a murderer, but that doesn’t mean she was completely innocent either.

“But why?” Shuichi asked himself. “Why would she try to kill Rantaro? No...maybe it’s not as simple as that.”

Now that he thought about it, there was no definite way for Kaede to have known that Rantaro of all people would be in the library at that time. In fact, why set this elaborate plan in the first place? She didn’t even take advantage of the First Blood Perk.

That means she must’ve had a reason; a reason as to why her actions have led up to this point.

Why she used Shuichi’s plan to set up her murder method.

Why she felt the need to kill in the first place.

“It was all to kill the mastermind,” Shuichi deduced.

Now that Shuichi knew her plan had failed, it became all too clear why Kaede didn’t take the First Blood Perk and why she was so determined to catch the mastermind at the class trial.

This was her last chance to atone for what she had done, or in this case, what she thought she had done.

“Catch the mastermind,” Shuichi thought to himself.

It was at that moment the detective reflected back on what Kokichi said.

____________________________________________________________________________________

“Just because you drew some favorable cards, doesn’t mean you immediately reveal your hand.”

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Shuichi looked down at the bloodied shot put in his hand. He suddenly realized that if this was
indeed the murder weapon that killed Rantaro, then what happened to the other shot put ball?

Specifically, what happened to Kaede’s shot put ball?

The detective gripped his hand tighter on the metal ball. Everything became clear to him all in an instant. There was another culprit out there-Rantaro’s true killer-and they were framing Kaede for their murder.

He wasn’t going to let that happen. It didn’t matter whether they were the mastermind or just a petty killer. In order to save everyone...in order to save Kaede, he needed to catch them.

And he was going to use this class trial to do so.

“Forgive me, Kaede,” Shuichi thought to himself. “I need to keep this a secret from you for the time being. Don’t you worry, though. I’ll fulfill your wish, and catch whoever really killed Rantaro!”
Kaede, from her brief outing with Tsumugi, returned to the library where Shuichi was waiting.

“Ah, Kaede,” the detective greeted. “I was starting to wonder where you had gone.”

“Well Tsumugi took me to the girls bathroom, but we only spent like a few minutes in there,” the pianist explained. “We would’ve come back sooner but...Kokichi…”

“Hmm?” Shuichi took note of that namedrop. “What about Kokichi?”

“We were on our way back to the library, but then we saw Kokichi walking around with the murder weapon,” said Kaede.

“Y-You did?” Shuichi questioned, trying not to look suspicious himself in the process.

“Yeah, and when we asked him what he was up to, he told me and Tsumugi…”

Tsumugi and Kaede walked out of the girls bathroom, the blue-haired cosplayer having just made her case as to why she was unable to impersonate another student using her ultimate talent.

“I’m so sorry you had to see that, Kaede,” said Tsumugi. “But it was the only way to prove that I can’t disguise myself as someone else so easily.”

“I...I understand,” said Kaede, tears about to stream for her eyes. No amount of therapy or piano playing could help her cope with what she witnessed in there.

Her tears and Tsumugi’s satisfied state would stop short, however, as the two girls witnessed a certain purple-haired boy walk pass them with a peculiar object in his hand.

“Wait a sec, Kokichi!” Kaede yelled.

The supreme leader stopped in his tracks and turned to the two.

“Why hello there, ladies!” Kokichi addressed the two. “Had a little ‘girl time’ in the bathroom, I see!”

“Um, Kokichi,” Tsumugi said in her usual polite manner. “What are you doing with the murder weapon?”

The boy looked to the bloody metal ball in his hand, “Oh this? I just thought I’d take this, walk around the academy and, I dunno...kill someone with it!”

“Kokichi!” Kaede said sternly.

“Okay, okaaaaaay,” the boy responded dejectedly. “That was a lie.”

“Even if you were doing this as a prank,” said Kaede. “You shouldn’t be running around with the murder weapon so casually.”

“She’s right, Kokichi,” Tsumugi added. “You wouldn’t want the others to think that you’re the blackened, right?”
The young supreme leader gave a devilish smile, “Actually, the reason I’m carrying this around is because I have a pretty good idea who the blackened is.”

“Huh…?” Kaede was taken aback by his statement.

“Y-You do, Kokichi?” Tsumugi was similarly surprised. “This has to be another one of your lies, am I right?

“Nuh uh!” Kokichi argued. “I went back to the crime scene and saw it myself!”

The pianist was afraid to ask, “Saw what…?”

“There’s something off about the murder weapon,” Kokichi concluded.

“What’s wrong with it?” Tsumugi asked as she tilted her head.

“Geez it’s just questions, questions, QUESTIONS, with you two!” Kokichi said, exasperated. “If you’re that curious, you both can come with me to the warehouse because I’m pretty sure the killer left a serious piece of evidence behind when they first got this shot put ball.”

Sweat started dripping upon Kaede’s brow. Slowly but certainly the truth was revealing itself, but she didn’t think it would be so soon. More and more she regretted her plan of action to try and take down the mastermind. It was because of that she ended up killing an innocent person. She betrayed her close friend as well as the others. On top of that, if she was unable to catch the mastermind in the upcoming class trial, then her own fate was sealed.

She needed to buy herself a little more time; she couldn’t let Kokichi discover the truth just yet.

“Fine, I’ll go with you,” the pianist said.

“I’ll go too!” Tsumugi said with determination. “Although I think this is still a part of Kokichi’s prank.”

“Splendid!” the purple-haired boy said excitedly. “Well ladies, let’s not keep that warehouse a-waitin’!”

Kokichi, now with Kaede and Tsumugi in tow, proceeded to make his way towards the warehouse.

The warehouse was just as huge as the three recalled. With sports equipment placed in the center, the rest of the room was filled with shelves upon shelves of various items.

“Do you really think the culprit left behind some kind of clue in here?” Tsumugi asked as Kokichi stepped into the warehouse first.

“There’s no doubt about it,” the supreme leader said with a sinister tone. “In fact, I can practically sense the culprit’s nervousness even from here.”

Kaede gulped, wondering how much Kokichi already knew.

The boy chuckled, an even more sinister smile creeping on his face, “Yes. It’s only a matter of time...a matter of time before I single-handedly bring about the killer’s downfa-”

Kokichi proceeded to trip and fall onto the sports equipment.

A loud crashing sound echoed throughout the warehouse as the two girls flinched back in reflex.
As they looked back at the scene, they saw Kokichi laying face down on the ground and all the neatly displayed equipment had turned into a mishmash of scattered objects surrounding the unfortunate boy.

“Kokichi!” Kaede called out. “Are you oka-”

“RISE AND SHINE, URSINE!”

With that loud and synchronized declaration, Kaede became filled with dread. Not “dread” for her physical safety, but “dread” for her mental sanity as five multicolored robotic bears entered the room. They were the “children” of the headmaster Monokuma: the “Monokubs”.

The leader of the Monokubs, Monotaro, was the first to speak, “W-W-W-What’s all this?!”

“J-Just what the hell are you dumb broads doing?!” Monokid followed.

Monosuke held up his fake paper money, “Do youse have any idea how long it took for us to organize this here warehouse? We spent a lot of time, and time is money……we also spent a lot of money!”

Monophanie held up her paws in defense, “Now now, brothers, it was probably an accident.”

Monodam, despite his usual silent state, looked as if he was about to speak, “THIS-IS--”

“Hold on a second!” Kaede interrupted, pointing at the pink bear. “Shouldn’t you be busy developing the photos from our cameras?”

“Oh dear!” Monophanie exclaimed.

“Right back at ya, bitch!” Monokid yelled. “You’re supposed to be using this time to investigate, but instead you and your girlfriend here decided to make a mess of the entire academy! GAH! All this stress has thrown me off my drunken stupor!

“Wh-Why am I included as well?” Tsumugi said flustered.

Monosuke growled, “If it were up to us, we’d have our own little class trial just so we could sue the two of youse.”

“For obstruction of justice?” Monotaro asked.

“No!” Monosuke shouted. “For DESTRUCTION of justice!”

“Oh, but father would not like that,” Monophanie warned. “He would prefer all class trials to be murder related.”

“Yeah that’s Pops for youse,” Monosuke agreed.

“So since we can’t do that,” Monokid started. “We’ll just have you dumb bitches clean up this mess for the rest of the investigation!”

“W-What?!” Kaede said astonished. “That’s not fair! We need to use this time to investigate! You can’t just come in here and—”

“Fair’s fair!” said Monosuke. “Ain’t ya ever heard the sayin’ ‘You made the mess, now clean it’?”

“But it wasn’t us!” Kaede gestured to the center of the room. “Kokichi was the one who—”
As the pianist looked to the direction her finger was pointing, she found that it was gesturing to no one in particular, because Kokichi was gone from his previous position. In fact, there seemed to be no sign of the boy’s presence anywhere in the room.

Kaede and Tsumugi looked left and right, trying to search for the sneaky student.

“Hmm?” Monotaro looked around as well. “I don’t see anyone else around…”

“Yeah!” Monokid shouted in his usual enthusiasm. “All I see are some blue and blonde troublemakers!”

“So sorry about this,” Monophanie said apologetically. “You should try to be a little more careful next time you’re exploring the academy.”

“And just so we’re clear,” Monosuke said with a stern tone. “This is all to ensure a safe and pleasant experience for everyone in the academy. This is definitely not because Pops would immediately blame the five of us and have us killed!”


The two students looked at one another with worried yet defeated expressions. It seems they wouldn’t be getting out of this situation no matter how hard they tried.

The Monokubs, satisfied with the compliance of the two “culprits”, decided their work was done and exited the warehouse.

“So LONG! BEAR WELL!”

“Ah, so that’s how it was,” said Shuichi, having just heard the full explanation of Kaede’s whereabouts.

“Honestly,” Kaede sighed. “The next time I see Kokichi, he’s not gonna hear the end of it from me.”

“So, what happened to Tsumugi?” asked Shuichi.

“Oh, she said she had to use the restroom.”

The detective made a small chuckle.

“What is it?” the pianist questioned.

“Oh it’s nothing, really. It’s just that that’s the third time I associated Tsumugi with the girls bathroom.”

Kaede responded with a playful smile, “Oh? You weren’t thinking about something perverted just now, were you, Shuichi?”

The detective became flustered, “Wh-Wha...ah...no! Of course not!”

“Good!” Kaede said happily. “Cause I wouldn’t want that innocent mind of yours to get tainted.”

“I-It won’t get tainted!” Shuichi stuttered.

*ding dong bing bong*
The sound of a school bell resonated throughout the academy.

“Huh?” Kaede took notice. “This chime…!”

Suddenly appearing on all of the monitors were the Monokubs sitting on a couch, each with a drink in their paws.

“It’s time you bastards!” Monotaro announced. “Time for the long-awaited class trial!”

“No, it’s not!” Monophanie interjected. “We’re just announcing that the photos are ready! Don’t interrupt meeee! Anyway, I’ll be waiting at the warehouse.”

“So long! Bear-well!” the Monokubs simultaneously declared as all the monitors turned off.

“Did you hear that Shuichi?” Kaede said excitedly. “The pictures have finally been developed! Let’s go! Come on, get a move on!”

“Ah! Wait, Kaede!” Shuichi barely managed to catch up to the girl as she ran as fast as she could to the school warehouse.

Sadly, for the blonde pianist, her enthusiasm would go unrewarded as the photos did not reveal any hint of the mastermind in them.

Shortly after the photos were received, Monokuma announced the end of the investigation and for everyone to meet in the courtyard.

As the other students made their exit out of the warehouse, Shuichi and Kaede remained.

“Kaede, really, are you okay?” asked the detective.

“Sorry,” Kaede apologized. “I didn’t mean to worry you. I’m just so shocked...I really thought that everything would be resolved once we looked at the photos...”

“She’s trying to give it her all,” Shuichi thought to himself as he gazed at the melancholy pianist. “It would be so easy for me to tell her what I know right now...but I can’t.”

In his mind, Shuichi cursed his ultimate talent. A talent that no one should bear, especially in the situation he’s currently in. One mistake—one fatal miscalculation—could result in the failure of catching the mastermind. While the detective wanted to keep Kaede in the loop, he couldn’t risk the chance. Right now, everything was going all according to the mastermind’s plan to frame Kaede. If they were to notice anything, any sort of element, that went against their ease of mind, they were to surely take the precautionary measures to avoid becoming caught. Shuichi needed to catch them at the most opportune moment.

Kaede looked at the detective with a nervous smile, “I’m okay now, Shuichi. Let’s go! It’s the red door in the courtyard, right?”

The two proceeded to walk to the courtyard.

As Kaede was about to open the red door that led to the two’s destination, she stopped short noticing Shuichi looking back at something.

“Shuichi? Is something wrong?”
The dark-capped detective stayed silent as Kaede wondered what he was looking at.

Shuichi finally spoke aloud, “Sorry, Kaede, but do you mind going on ahead? There’s something...I need to do.”

“Oh, ah...of course,” Kaede concurred. “Just don’t keep us waiting too long, okay?”

Shuichi made a small nod in agreement as he walked away from Kaede to his unknown destination, leaving the girl to join the others on her own.

Kaede entered the Shrine of Judgment as the other students talked amongst themselves.

“So this is the Shrine of Judgment...” Kaito Momota, the ‘Ultimate Astronaut’, was the first to speak as he stared intently at the surrounding area.

“Careful, everyone!” Gonta Gokuhara, the ‘Ultimate Entomologist’, was the next to speak. “If bad things happen, get behind Gonta!”

Angie Yonaga, the ‘Ultimate Artist’, cheerfully approached the large student, “Then gimme a piggy-back ride! C’mon carry me.”

Miu didn’t share the artist’s enthusiasm, “Omigod, you are so fucking annoying! So are we doin’ the class trial here or what!?”

“No,” Ryoma responded. “Monokuma made it sound like we’d be guided somewhere from here.”

Kirumi looked around, “But Monokuma is nowhere to be seen. What’s going on...?”

Suddenly, the Shrine of Judgment started to rumble.

“Wah!” Kaede said in reaction. “Wh-What!?”

The students stared in awe as the Monokuma statue in the shrine started to move and lower itself from the fountain it was originally placed upon. In its place, from behind the fountain’s waterfall, what seemed to be an elevator appeared before the students.

“Is this...an elevator?” Kaede asked, still reeling on what she just witnessed.

“Does he want us to board it?” Keebo followed up on Kaede’s inquiry.

“I don’t wanna...” said Himiko Yumeno, the ‘Ultimate Magician’. “I don’t do scary rides.”

Tsumugi agreed with the small girl, “I...don’t want to get on it either.”

“Stay behind, then,” countered Maki Harukawa, the ‘Ultimate Child Caregiver’. “Though I’m sure that’ll just be worse for you in the end.”

“Yeah, that’s true...I know...” the blue-haired girl reluctantly agreed.

“However, if everyone wishes to run away, I will cooperate as well,” Kirumi offered.

“That’s probably not a good idea,” Ryoma warned. “There’s nowhere to run. As long as that End Wall exists, escape’s not an option.”

Despite the bleak outlook from the rest of the students, Kaede stood her ground, “It’ll be fine...Let’s
all work together. Remember our promise? We’re gonna escape this place and remain good friends afterward…So let’s do it! I’m sure we’ll be alright! Because…we make such an incredible team.”

“Heh, I wouldn’t be able to call myself a man if I was still scared after hearing a girl say that,” Kaito said in response, clearly affected by Kaede’s little speech. “Bring it! I’ll show them how I, Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars, live!”

“Don’t you mean ‘die’?” Kokichi decided to add in.

“Don’t say something all ominous like that!” Kaito shouted at the supreme leader.

“Nggaah!” Tenko Chabashira, the ‘Ultimate Aikido Master’ yelled. “We’ve come so far already! We just gotta do it...SO LET’S DO IT!!!”

As the students began to walk towards the elevator, Kaede stopped them, “W-Wait! Shuichi hasn’t shown up yet!”

“Shuichi?” questioned Maki. “Wasn’t he with you?”

“Well yeah,” answered Kaede. “But he said he had something to take care of before he joined us.”

Miu started to laugh, “I guess Poo-ichi knew his life was forfeit, so he decided to have one last ‘time to himself’, if you know what I mean!”

“Unfortunately, we do know what you mean,” Kirumi retorted.

The inventor suddenly became frustrated, “Actually that might’ve been a good idea...Dammit, why didn’t I think of that too?”

“Th-That’s what you’re concerned about?” Tsumugi inquired.

“Hmm,” Korekiyo Shinguji, the ‘Ultimate Anthropologist’, spoke softly. “Maybe the burden of the situation was too much to bear and he decided to abandon us…”

“Shuichi would never do that!” Kaede declared.

“But wait!” Gonta interrupted. “If we no have Ultimate Detective to help us, how are we supposed to solve crime?”

“I thought the class trials were supposed to be mandatory participation…” said Himiko. “If Shuichi can ditch them, then maybe I should just stay behind as well.”

“No, Himiko!” shouted Tenko. “We’ll need your magic in the class trial! Don’t be like that degenerate male and abandon us in our time of need.”

“I told you guys, Shuichi isn’t like that!” Kaede exclaimed once again.

“Kaede’s right!” said Kaito. “I’m sure Shuichi’s just preparing himself for the battle that’s about to begin!”

“It’s a class trial,” corrected Maki. “Not some duel to the death.”

“Isn’t it, though!” Kaito countered. “To an Ultimate Detective, a trial’s like a duel, and regardless, his life is on the line as much as the rest of us, so it is ‘to the death’!”

“Don’t be an idiot…” Maki could only mutter.
The sound of a door opening silenced the concerned conversations of the Ultimates as they saw the
absent student walk into the shrine.

“If it isn’t Mr. Tardy Pants,” Kokichi decided to address the detective first. “You should’ve heard the
mean things everyone said about you while you weren’t here! Why, Kaede even called you a--huh?”

Kokichi’s lie was cut short as he noticed something different about Shuichi. In fact, the other students
let out similar noises of curiosity as they noticed the detective’s change in appearance.

Kaede finally said aloud what was on everyone’s mind, “Shuichi…your hat…!”

As the pianist claimed, Shuichi was no longer wearing his signature hat, revealing his short hair and
a curious slim forelock of it sticking out from the top of his head, similar to Kaede’s.

The detective paid no heed to the other students as he slowly walked passed them, looking only
straight ahead at his destination.

No greeting, no apology for being late; Shuichi said nothing as he made his way towards the
elevator.

Outside of his lack of headwear, the students noticed a change in demeanor from Shuichi as well.
What they were currently seeing was not the reluctant, stuttering boy that they first met. In fact, this
may as well be a completely different person. This person stood straight, walked with confidence,
and had a fire in his eyes that could only be described as “glowing”.

“See, what’d I tell ya?” Kaito said cheerfully. “You all could take a lesson from Shuichi in
confidence!”

“Hmph,” Ryoma grunted. “That look in his eyes kinda reminds me of how I used to be back in the
day…”

“Oh my,” Angie spoke next. “Shuichi’s looking pretty cool right now! And more handsome without
his hat!”

“I—I’ll admit, even for a degenerate male, he looks pretty cool,” Tenko reluctantly said.

“For the Ultimate Detective to look like this before a class trial,” Kokichi said mischievously. “If I
were the blackened right now, I’d be sweating bullets~!”

“Sh-Shuichi?” Kaede muttered, taken aback by the detective’s current state.

The “no-longer-capped” detective finally made his way to the elevator, but not before finally
addressing one of the students.

He stopped in his tracks, still facing forward and talked to the student who was at the side of him—the
student, outside of Kokichi, who also had the tools to figure out the dark truths of this case as much
as he did.

Shuichi addressed Keebo, “Whatever happens in there, follow my lead.”

The robot looked at the detective confused, but found his resolve and responded, “Affirmative.”

With the robotic student’s assurance, Shuichi was the first to step in the elevator.

“Are you guys coming?” he asked the other students.
Miu moaned in pleasure, “Give me a few more seconds of you acting like that, then I’ll be close!”

The inventor’s comments notwithstanding, the rest of the students complied with the detective and proceeded to enter the elevator themselves.

Kaede was the last to enter the elevator as its doors finally shut and moved down towards its next location: the class trial.

She stood next to Shuichi as the young pianist looked at the boy with curiosity. Various students made random remarks regarding their current situation, but the pianist paid them no mind. Right now, there was something she needed to get off her chest.

“Um, Shuichi…” Kaede started whispering to the detective. “About that talk from before…”

“Hmm?” Shuichi responded.

The pianist continued, “I think everyone is afraid of learning the truth. But the people who are willing to find the truth are the ones who can decide their fate. If you never know the lies from the truth, then you can’t choose a path. You won’t even know you’re on a path. So…fight for the truth… Even if it is frightening. I know you can do this. If you’re scared, borrow the strength of others, who will be there to help you. Think of everyone you’re helping, and let that be your strength. I used to be like you—”

“Kaede,” the detective interrupted.

“Yes?”

“Do you…trust me?”

The pianist looked at the boy before answering, “Of course I do.”

Shuichi closed his eyes and smiled, “Then I don’t have anything to worry about.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kaede.

“Kaede…can I ask something of you?” the detective requested.

“What is it, Shuichi?”

“You said the truth can be frightening,” he went on. “And I’ll do my best to find it...no matter how painful it may be...but...I also ask that you face with me.”

“Face it with you?” Kaede repeated.

“I’m asking you to find your strength, as well,” Shuichi clarified. “Cause I know you have that strength within you...to bring everyone together...to lead us out of these dire times. Promise me, Kaede, no matter what happens, you won’t run away from the truth and face it head on...with me...with all of us.”

“Shuichi,” Kaede muttered, surprised at the detective’s inspiring words. “I...I do promise…I won’t turn my back on the truth.”

Shuichi sighed in relief, “I’m glad...Thank you, Kaede.”

The elevator finally came to a halt. The doors slowly opened to reveal what awaited the students on the other side: a large room with sixteen podiums surrounding each other. It was an authentic replica
of a courtroom, complete with a high standing judge’s chair, where Monokuma and the Monokubs placed themselves.

The black and white headmaster instructed the students to stand behind their respective podiums.

As Shuichi walked towards his podium, an image of his body flashed in his mind.

“Rantaro…” the detective thought to himself. “He died without knowing who killed him.”

An image of her flashed in his mind.

“And Kaede…you planned something drastic, but you weren’t the one who did it. For Rantaro’s sake…for your sake…”

Suddenly images of all the students in the academy flashed in Shuichi’s mind.

“…I need to find the true killer, here and now. Mastermind or not, they’re framing you for his murder. Whoever it is needs to be brought to justice…if they were to succeed, it would result in your unfair death. I need to solve this case…so we can move forward. So we can…end this killing game. I will fight…I will fight for my life in this trial of truth and lies!”
“That’s the truth behind your lies...**Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist!**” Shuichi yelled from his podium.

For the students of the Ultimate Academy, it had been a long and arduous trial. Theories were thrown around with no shortage of accusations as well, until finally, it all came to a head with the reveal of a dark truth. One of the pictures from the cameras revealed Rantaro noticing a particular camera which had its flash on. There was one person who could’ve set up that flash, and the moment Shuichi revealed their identity, the horrible truth became clear: Kaede Akamatsu set up a trap to kill the mastermind and Rantaro Amami was its unfortunate victim.

“And that concludes the events of Kaede’s trap,” Shuichi finished his closing argument.

“N-No...Kaede...did it?” Gonta struggled to say.

“Damn it!” Kaito yelled in frustration.

“It is a truth I do not wish to accept, but since Shuichi has brought everything to light…” said Kirumi. “We can at least try to trust the **Kaede we’ve come to know** up to this point.”

“The Kaede we’ve come to know…?” Tenko parroted.

“Even if she did commit a crime, what Kaede has said to us is not a lie,” Kirumi explained. “She wanted to protect us, and I firmly believe that to be the truth.”

“If that was a lie too, it’d be the last straw for me,” Ryoma wistfully said. “I’d have nothing left to believe in.”

“You guys are so nice…” Kaede said, tears streaming from her eyes. “Even though I betrayed you all…”

The detective thought to himself, “**Kaede...after everything you’ve been accused of...everyone still seems to believe in you. I’m glad...I’m actually really glad...**”

Shuichi found his resolve.

“**Okay...This should be enough!**”

“Is everyone satisfied?” Shuichi asked the other students. “Kaede did what she did...to save all of us...are we all in agreement to that?”

Ryoma tipped his beanie down, covering his eyes, “You’ll hear no arguments from me.”

“It’s painful to think about,” Tsumugi spoke next. “But I can understand where she was coming from…”

“**Atua says Kaede bears no sins upon her shoulders,**” said Angie. “She will gladly be accepted into heaven!”

Gonta tried his best to hold back his tears, “**Kaede tried to save Gonta...but Gonta want to save Kaede as well...**”

“...” Keebo said nothing as he only stared intently at Shuichi.
“Grrah, this is BULLSHIT!” Kaito suddenly yelled.

“Kaito?!” Kaede exclaimed, surprised by the astronaut’s outburst.

“Kaede,” the astronaut went on. “You stayed behind to try and help us...Like hell I’m gonna stand here and do nothing!”

“And what, pray tell, are you planning to do?” asked Korekiyo.

“I’m gonna stand my fucking ground, that’s what!” Kaito loudly declared. “C’mon guys, Kaede’s gonna get executed at this rate! We’re all here so let’s fight Monokuma together!”

“Together?!” Tsumugi repeated.

“Nyeh...me too?” Himiko hesitantly said as she started to sweat.

“Don’t group me into your little suicide circle!” Miu yelled.

“Puhuhuhuhu!”

A familiar laughter echoed throughout the trial room as the other students looked its source: the headmaster Monokuma.

The black and white teddy bear spoke, “You’d really risk all your lives just to save one?”

“You’re damn right we would!” Kaito yelled at the bear.

“Like I said, don’t run train on me!” Miu shouted at the astronaut again.

“Gonta will fight if he must!” the large entomologist closed his fists with confidence. “After all, Kaede tried to save Gonta, but Gonta want to save Kaede as well!”

“Um, Gonta, you already said that,” Tsumugi pointed out.

“I’ll use my Neo-Aikido on machines if I have to!” Tenko took a fighting stance.

“Everyone stop!” Kaede shouted.

Suddenly the tense atmosphere of the room slowly drained as everyone looked to the pianist. Her face was ridden with guilt and stained with tears. It became clear to the other students what the girl’s true feelings were.

She’s had enough. Kaede only wanted this trial to end.

“Please...let’s just end this...” the blonde pianist said sadly.

Most of the other students had equally sad expressions on their face as they slowly resigned themselves to follow Kaede’s wishes. All it would take was for the silence to continue and Monokuma would begin the voting process.

Kaito found himself between a rock and a hard place, “Dammit, I shouldn’t be voting for you, Kaede.”

“You shouldn’t be voting at all,” Shuichi declared.

The other students looked to the detective, surprised at his words. Not due to the words themselves,
but the tone he said those words in. It was a tone of clarity, assurance, but more surprisingly, as if it was a command.

“What do you mean, Shuichi?” asked Maki in her usual serious tone.

“We shouldn’t vote yet,” the detective explained. “Or to be more precise, we can’t.”

“We can’t?” Gonta repeated.

“Ummmmmm,” an elongated hum broke out of Kokichi’s mouth. “I’m pretty sure we can if we wanted to. I mean, it’s actually really easy. It’s as easy as going ‘HEY MONOKUMA, I THINK WE’RE READY TO START THE VO-’”

“SHUT UP!” Kaito yelled at the supreme leader before turning to the detective. “Shuichi, what do you mean we can’t vote yet?”

Shuichi closed his eyes, “Because this trial is far from over.”

“Whhhhhhhhhhhaaaaaat?”

To everyone’s minor surprise, the source of the outburst came from Monokuma.

“The trial is far from over?” Monokuma repeated the detectives words. “If that’s the case, then it would make this the longest class trial to date!”

“Who held the previous record for that?” asked Monotaro.

“Ugh, ya shoulda seen the guy,” Monosuke answered as he adjusted his glasses. “A real slowpoke, that one.”

“He was like...a snail in molasses,” Monophanie reminisced.

Monotaro nodded in agreement, “Oh yeah...I guess now he’s one with...wait why am I getting a sense of deja-vu!?”

“Didn’t I tell you weirdos to shut it!?” Kaito started to become more and more frustrated. “Shuichi! What do you mean-”

“Ugh, how long are we gonna play this game?” Kokichi whined.

“What was that!?” Kaito turned to the supreme leader.

“I mean, how long are we gonna play this game of ‘Shuichi, what do you mean ‘insert last thing Shuichi said here’?” said Kokichi as he gave a sly smile to the detective. “It’s pretty obvious our Ultimate Detective has something he wants to say...If that’s so, then he should just come right out and say it.”

This was it, the moment of truth. It had been a tough trial to deal with up to this point, but Shuichi knew that it was going to get much more difficult from here on.

Nevertheless, the detective braced himself, for the the next words to come out of his mouth would change the direction of this trial completely.

“Kaede is not the culprit,” said Shuichi.

A long silence filled the room, as if the other students needed time to fully process the five words that
the detective just uttered.

“H...Huhhhhh!?” Tsumugi was the first one to react.

The other students followed.

“Oh, so I guess it wasn’t Kaede,” Angie said in a happy oblivious manner. “Okay, time to continue the trial, everyone!”

“D-Don’t just accept it so easily!” Tsumugi told the artist.

“W-What Shuichi mean Kaede not the culprit!?” asked Gonta.

“Um, Gontaaaaa, I thought I just said we weren’t playing that game anymorerrrr,” said Kokichi, clearly not fazed by the detectives words.

“Oh, Gonta sorry,” the gentleman apologized.

“Forget about all that!” Kaito said suddenly. “We have more pressing matters right now!”

“Kekekeke, clearly we do,” Korekiyo laughed softly. “What exactly are you playing at, Shuichi?”

“Yeah!” Miu agreed. “You just spent the last few fucking minutes proving how she was the one who did it!”

“All I did was prove a possible method of murder,” Shuichi explained. “But that doesn’t mean Kaede killed-”

“Shuichi!” Kaede yelled at the detective.

“Huh…?!” Shuichi reacted in surprise to her outburst.

The pianist suddenly gave him a warm smile, “You’ve done well up to this point. I didn’t expect any less...but you still have a long way to go. You need to be more assertive. If you did that more often, you’d be a pretty cool guy.”

It was clear to Shuichi what Kaede was doing. She had resigned herself to her fate. No matter what evidence the detective presented to try and convince her otherwise, it doesn’t change the fact that the girl truly believed she murdered Rantaro.

Regardless, Shuichi wasn’t going to give up.

The detective looked at Kaede straight in the eyes, “You are not the culprit, Kaede.”

Shuichi watched as the the pianist’s warm smile turned into a frown. Not a frown of anger, but a frown of confusion and desperation.

“Don’t do this…” Kaede muttered to Shuichi.

“Kaede…” said Shuichi. “You have to believe me. The trap you laid out--”

“Was how I murdered Rantaro!” Kaede finished. “Please, Shuichi, don’t do this! You promised me you would accept the truth no matter how frightening it was!”

Shuichi was beginning to stutter, “I...I know, but what I’m saying is the tru--”
“Shuichi, that’s enough!”

The detective looked to the source of the voice and was surprised that it came from Tsumugi.

Tsumugi smiled wistfully as she continued, “I know how you feel, Shuichi...I really do. Up to this point, I had grown close with Kaede. The two of us shared some pretty good memories. I don’t want her to die...in fact, had you not tried to convince us she wasn’t the culprit a moment ago, I probably would’ve spoken out as well...and try to come up with an excuse why she couldn’t have done it.”

“Tsumugi...” Kaede said, touched by the cosplayer’s words.

“But that’s not what she wants!” exclaimed Tsumugi, now with tears streaming from her eyes. “She did what she did for all of us, and the least we can do is not have her suffer anymore! Let’s end this trial...for her sake...okay, Shuichi?”

“W-Wait…” Shuichi said as he noticed things starting to become out of his control. “We can’t…”

“Stop stalling and let us vote already!” Miu shouted. “Y’think we’re gonna just keep continuing the trial all because you have a crush on Princess Piano!?”

“The two have been somewhat close ever since we woke up in this academy,” Korekiyo pointed out. “That would explain why he would suddenly go back on his previous deductions and try to claim Kaede’s innocence.”

“Claim...her innocence?” Tenko repeated, getting a completely different context on Kiyo’s statement. “Is that what you’ve been after this whole time, you degenerate!?”

“N-No!” Shuichi denied. “Everyone if you just listen for one--”

“I will not allow you to speak any further!” Tenko took a fighting stance. “Not if your words will cause Kaede anymore suffering.”

“Kid…” Ryoma spoke next. “It’s bad form to stop a lady from what she wants to do. I don’t like this as much as you do, but we have to accept this truth.”

“Nyeh…” Himiko whined. “This is starting to become a pain...for me and for Kaede. We should probably vote now.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Himiko!” Tenko excitedly said to the mage.

Keebo looked around at the students nervously, he turned towards the detective and noticed that Shuichi was starting to become flustered, as if he wanted to yell out but can’t.

“Um, everyone if I may have your attention?” Keebo spoke out. “I think we should hear out Shuichi first before we--”

“Nobody cares, Keeboy!” Kokichi yelled.

“Ahh!” Keebo exclaimed in shock. “N-No! This isn’t right! Shuichi isn’t lying because I was--”

“Yeah, yeah we get it, you’re a useless robot,” Kokichi interrupted again. “Hey, why don’t you make yourself useful and remodel yourself as a toaster?”

“I can’t focus on that right now!” Keebo asked the supreme leader before shaking his head.
The trial room descended into chaos, as various students made accusatory remarks at Shuichi while Keebo and Kokichi fought amongst one another. Kaede looked around the room with only sadness filling her heart, seeing her friends fighting one another. Until finally…

...she broke down.

Sounds of quiet sobbing echoed in the trial room. The voices from the other students slowly stopped as they saw Kaede with her head buried in her hands as she cried into them.

“Kaede…” Shuichi muttered.

Tsumugi looked at the pianist and then closed her eyes as she spoke, “Everyone...I think it’s time…”

“...I suppose it is,” Kirumi followed.

“Puhuhuhu,” Monokuma gave a slow and menacing laugh as he took his cue.

“No,” Shuichi thought to himself. “This wasn’t how it was supposed to go…”

The only reason Shuichi waited this long to prove Kaede’s innocence was to convince everyone of her purpose in creating the trap. He theorized that even if he proved Kaede wasn’t the one who ultimately killed Rantaro, it wouldn’t change the fact that she set up a method to kill someone. He didn’t want to taint Kaede’s image as an attempted murderer, he wanted to show her goodwill to the others.

And to his shock, his plan worked frighteningly too well.

“Looks like the debate’s finished, so that means it’s Voting Time!” Monotaro excitedly declared.

"It wasn’t supposed to happen like this…”

“Alright, you bastards! Press the button in front of you to cast your vote!” Monophanie instructed.

"Why won’t anyone believe me?"

“And make sure y’all vote, cuz refusin’ to vote is grounds for termination,” Monosuke warned.

"Why won’t...she believe me?"

“At last!” Monokuma shouted. “The heart-racing excitement as the blackened and the spotless finally face off…”

“It can’t end like this…”

“It’s...VOTING TIME!!!” Monokuma and the Monokubs all yelled together.

"It can’t end like this…!”
“EVERYONE SHUT UP FOR ONE SECOND!”

Before the voting was able to start, Kaito called out to the rest of the class.


“HELL NO WE’RE NOT!” Kaito continued to shout.

Monotaro threw his paws in the air in surprise, “WHAT?! B-B-B-B-But we spent weeks memorizing our lines!”

“Ugh, all that time just thrown down the drain,” Monosuke lamented.

“Like a goddamn virgin, we prematures all over the place!!!” Monokid yelled. “Dammit Monodam, I blame you for this!”

Monodam said nothing.

“So Kaito…” Kokichi said in a suspiciously friendly manner. “Wassup, buddy?”

“And what was the meaning of that outburst just now?” asked Korekiyo.

“If I recall, he said that we’re not voting,” said Kirumi. “Am I correct, Kaito?”

“Damn straight we’re not voting yet!” Kaito said as he gave everyone a thumbs up.

“Oh come on, not you too!” exclaimed Miu in frustration. “Argh, let’s just ignore him. He’s just a big dumb idiot anyway.”

“Don’t call me an idiot!” Kaito shouted.

“Heeeeeeeeee!” the inventor flinched back in terror.

“Anyway,” the astronaut continued. “I say we’re not voting until we hear out Shuichi!”

“Oh,” Kokichi said plainly. “So this was just a waste of time.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” the astronaut challenged.

“C’mon, I thought we established Shuichi’s only trying to stop us because he doesn’t want Kaede to die,” the supreme leader explained. “And now that I think about it, Kaito, you don’t want her to die as well, right?”

“Of course I don’t!” Kaito proudly declared. “I don’t think anyone does!”

“No one’s accusing anyone of wanting her to die,” said Tsumugi. “It’s just we have no choice but to vote for Kaede…”

“Yeah,” Kokichi agreed. “Unless, y’know, we all just choose to die here and now.”

“If that’s what everyone decides, then I shall do so as well,” said Kirumi.
Miu groaned in frustration, “I knew you’d try to get me wrapped up in your suicide circle!”

“It’s not a suicide circle!” Kaito yelled. “And I’m not trying to get anyone killed.”

“Aren’t you, though?” wondered Korekiyo. “Between you and Shuichi trying to stop the rest of us from voting, you’re effectively holding us hostage until we see things your way.”

“First of all,” Kaito began. “What the hell is wrong with just hearing out what Shuichi has to say?!”

“That is a fair point.” Ryoma noted. “Even if it does turn out to be a complete waste of time, then that’s all it’s going to be...a waste of time and nothing more.”

“Ooh, I see, I see!” agreed Angie. “Then there’s nothing wrong with us hearing out Shuichi!”

Tsumugi looked up in curiosity, “I wonder about that...”

“What do you mean?” Korekiyo asked the cosplayer.

“I’ve been meaning to ask...” Tsumugi looked towards the robotic headmaster. “Monokuma, is there a time limit to these class trials?”

“A time limit?” asked Gonta.

“You ask that now, of all times?!” exclaimed Kaito.

“S-Sorry!” Tsumugi apologized. “The thought never came up to me until now...and we’ve been debating for quite awhile now...”

“You have a point there,” said Tenko.

“Well, Monokuma?” asked Maki.

The black and white bear put a paw to his chin, “Hmm, to be honest, I never considered the thought. I was always so sure that you guys would find a way to conclusively resolve them in a timely manner.”

“So does that mean there’s no time limit...?” asked Himiko.

“Well, I wouldn’t say that,” Monokuma said ominously. “After all, class trials are meant to be entertaining. How can things be kept exciting when everyone ends up at an impasse or they’re just too stupid to figure things out?”

“Then what’s the time limit?” Maki decided to ask the obvious question.

“The **time limit is when I get bored!**” Monokuma said triumphantly.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!?” Tenko shouted in shock.

“Hah!” Kokichi laughed. “Why am I not surprised it would be a completely petty reason?”

“Just for reference, Father,” said Monotaro. “How bore would you say you are now?”

“Hmm,” Monokuma thought for a second. “I’d say...fifty percent.”

“You’re already at fifty?!?” exclaimed Tenko.
“What do you mean ‘already’!?” Kaito countered. “That just means we’re only at fifty percent!”

“Huh, so you’re the ‘glass half full’ types,” Tsumugi inquired.

“Time limit or no,” said Kaito. “It doesn’t change a thing. We hear out Shuichi, and worse-case scenario, we reach the time limit and vote for Kaede like you all planned.”

“I’m sorry, did you think I’d give you that big of a safety net?” Monokuma asked the astronaut.

“How?” Kaito said in response.

“Au contraire!” the headmaster shouted. “If you reach the time limit, I’m just gonna execute everyone!”

“WHAAAAAAAAAAT?!?” Tenko yelled even louder than before.

“What the hell!?” Kaito couldn’t keep his composure either.

“Then we can’t waste any time!” Kaede shouted, finally recomposing herself. “I don’t want anyone else to die because of what I did!”

“Kaede,” Shuichi decided to speak up as well. “I don’t want anyone else to die either-”

“Then why are you doing this!?” Kaede shouted at the detective. “Just vote for me, Shuichi! Vote for me and live on!”

“I can’t do that, Kaede!” the detective gripped his chest in response to his emotional pain.

“Why can’t you believe I’m guilty!?” from Kaede’s eyes, new tears started to form. “This is the truth I kept hidden from you! Isn’t it your duty as a detective to end this!? Was I wrong to trust-”

“IS THIS REALLY WHAT YOU WANT, KAede!?” Kaito yelled at the top of his lungs.

From the room came complete silence. The other students looked at the astronaut and saw that he was seething. He no longer expressed any sort of boisterous anger as if to overcompensate, what he showed was genuine.

The astronaut took a breath before talking again, “Kaede...I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’m disappointed in you.”

“Huh...?” Kaede responded.

Kaito looked away, “It’s just, all this time you were saying how much you wanted all of us to escape from here and become friends. And now...here you are wanting to die so easily...”

Tsumugi shook her head, “Kaito, that’s not fair...It’s not like Kaede has a choice.”

“The choice is right in front of her!” the astronaut shouted.

“Huh, what do you mean?” asked Tsumugi.

“I’m talking about Shuichi,” Kaito gestured to the student next to him.

“Shuichi?” Kaede repeated.

“Think about it,” Kaito continued. “He spent all that time explaining your trap, but now he comes
out and say you aren’t the culprit? There must be a reason for that, right?”

“Well yeah,” Kokichi interjected. “Because it’s a lie.”

“Call it whatever you want,” said Kaito. “But I’m gonna believe in Shuichi.”

“Kaito…” said the detective.

Kaede said nothing as she looked downward, taking in the astronaut’s words.

“That all fine and dandy!” Miu decided to break the tense atmosphere. “But that doesn’t mean I’m gonna believe in Poo-ichi!”

“Indeed,” Korekiyo followed. “You’ve made your stance quite clear, but what’s stopping us from still proceeding with the vote?”

Kaito remained silent for a brief moment before deciding on his next words, “Then let me put it this way...unless I hear Shuichi say his piece...I’m refusing to vote, even if you guys decide it’s time.”

“You’re refusing to vote!?” Keebo exclaimed. “B-But if you do that then that means…”

“He’ll get executed as well,” Kirumi answered.

“So instead of taking us hostage...he’s taking himself hostage?” Himiko wondered.

“G-Gonta no want Kaito to die as well!” said Gonta.

“Especially since it would be such a pointless death...and an easily preventable one at that,” Ryoma surmised.

“Kekeke,” Korekiyo laughed as he extended his arms in reverence. “For someone to risk their lives just to hear the words of one man...Spectacular, Kaito Momota, you have shown me the extent of your humanity quite well!”

“So what’s it gonna be?” Kaito asked the rest of the students.

“I for one, will gladly hear out Shuichi,” Keebo spoke out first.

“Gonta wants to hear what Shuichi has to say!” the entomologist agreed.

“Nyahaha!” Angie raised her hand excitedly. “I want to hear Shuichi, too!”

“Very well,” Korekiyo followed. “You have my attention, Shuichi.”

The rest of the students gave similar responses of agreement. The trial room was now silent and its occupants were now anticipating the words of one student who may or may not have the knowledge to turn the whole case around.

But before he could do that, Shuichi looked at the student who defended him, “Kaito...I can’t thank you enough.”

The astronaut looked back at the detective, “I don’t know what’s going on in that head of yours, but from what I guessed...you’re going to save her, right?”

“I...I truly hope that’s the case,” Shuichi said hesitantly.
Kaito scowled, “Don’t think I’m not disappointed in you, too.”

“What?” asked Shuichi.

“You could’ve done a lot better trying to get everyone to listen to you.”

“Oh...I’m sorry,” the detective said dejectedly.

The astronaut sighed, “C’mon, where was the Shuichi that walked down the shrine brimming with confidence?”

“Huh?” Shuichi was taken aback.

“I’m just saying you looked pretty badass at the time,” said Kaito.

“I...I didn’t even notice,” Shuichi admitted. “In my mind I didn’t really think about anything else. I was just so...so...”

“Determined?” Kaito finished.

“...Yes,” the detective answered. “I was determined...to save her.”

“Well here’s your chance,” the astronaut pointed out. “You only get one shot at this, so bring your A-game. After all, if you’re going to save her...you may as well impress her while doing so.

Kaito gave Shuichi a thumbs up and a wink. The detective could only blush at the astronaut’s implication.

“Hey, are ya done making out with your boyfriend, or are we gonna get this show on the road?” Miu asked.

“No...I’m ready,” Shuichi said with resolve.

“By the way,” Monokuma noted. “I’m now sixty-five percent bored of this!”

“Nyeh?!” Himiko squeaked. “A whole fifteen percent!?”

“Then let’s not waste anymore time!” Kaito declared confidently.

“Right,” Shuichi agreed.

The detective looked to Kaede who still had her head lowered. It seemed the girl decided to shut herself off from the rest of the trial as if she had given up completely. Shuichi didn’t blame her, after all she had gone through. However, even if Monokuma decided the trial was sixty-five percent over, Shuichi and a select few students knew...

....this was only the beginning.
“The truth is I had already discovered Kaede’s trap during the investigation,” Shuichi began. “It was when I looked at the murder weapon that I realized she was a prime suspect.”

“I see,” said Korekiyo. “And as previously deduced before, she had the most obvious opportunity to obtain the murder weapon out of the rest of us.”

“I came to that conclusion at the time as well,” Shuichi explained.

“For you to realize someone you were close to come up with such a scheme,” said Ryoma. “That must’ve been quite a shock.”

Shuichi glanced at Kaede who looked away in guilt and remained quiet.

“It was,” the detective said.

“B-But Shuichi say Kaede is not culprit, right?” Gonta pointed out.

“That point has been made quite clear,” Korekiyo stated. “Which begs the question, how exactly did you come to this conclusion?”

“The moment I realized Kaede could’ve done it, I needed to test it out for myself,” said Shuichi.

“‘Test’ it…?” Tenko wondered. “Test what?”

“Kaede’s trap,” the detective responded.

“Hmm,” Korekiyo looked at Shuichi inquisitively. “So at that point you had also figured out the method behind Kaede’s trap?”

The detective nodded his head.

“That seems awfully convenient,” Maki noted. “Is there anyone else here that can support your claim?”

As if on cue, Kirumi made an audible sound out of her mouth as if she had realized something, “Ah, could it be?”

The anthropologist looked at the maid, “Something you’d like to say, Kirumi?”

“There may be some merit to what Shuichi is saying,” Kirumi said to the other students.

Kokichi gasped excitedly, “What’s this!? There’s actually someone who can help prove Shuichi’s story to be true!? Gee, Kirumi, it’s a good thing you’re here otherwise I don’t think anyone else would’ve supported him!”

Keebo glared at the supreme leader.

“Shuichi,” Kirumi addressed the detective. “I recall there being a moment where you climbed up the ladder in the library to observe something.”

“He did?” asked Tsumugi.
“Oh!” Gonta suddenly exclaimed. “If Shuichi go up ladder, then he must’ve been checking…”

“The stack of books!” Angie finished for the entomologist.

“And it was at that moment when you realized the peculiar setup of those books, right Shuichi?” Keebo asked the detective.

“I was with Kaede in the room when she arranged them at the time,” said Shuichi. “So it would only be natural that I would connect those pieces.”

“And that’s why you asked for us to leave you alone in the library,” Kirumi concluded.

“He did what?” Tsumugi questioned again.

“I can attest to that,” said Ryoma.

“Feh!” Miu scoffed. “So that was the reason.”

“Ryoma and Miu, too?” Himiko noticed.

“Seems that everyone who was investigating in the library can give some support to Shuichi’s claims,” said Korekiyo.

“Hold on,” Tsumugi interrupted. “I was investigating in the library, too. So why didn’t I see all this?”

“Isn’t it obvious, you bespectacled lesbo?!” said Miu to the cosplayer. “It was when you took Kaede to the bathroom for a quickie when this all happened!”

Kaito blushed, “S-She did what, now?”

“Pay attention,” Maki sighed. “We already established Tsumugi took Kaede to the bathroom to prove she can’t disguise herself as other people. Miu’s just being an idiot.”

“D-Don’t c-call me an i-idiot…” the inventor stuttered. “Besides, it was that facial-haired idiot over there who took my words in that way!”

“Who are you calling a facial-haired idiot?!” the astronaut spat. “I’m not an idiot! You’re an idiot for wording it that way!”

“Correction,” the caretaker glared daggers at the two. “You’re both idiots.”

“D-Don’t call us idiots!” both Miu and Kaito yelled.

“We’re getting seriously off topic, here,” Ryoma plainly stated.

“Indeed,” Korekiyo noted, deciding to lead the discussion back on track. “So with there being credence to Shuichi’s claim, if he did ask for you guys to leave the library, I assume you followed his directions, correct?”

“No way,” Tenko said in disbelief. “You all just left him alone in the library?”

Ryoma tucked his cap downward, “Hmph, I highly doubted he would try to tamper evidence that far into the investigation.”

“I just thought he needed to be alone so he could tug one out,” Miu said bluntly.
“Why in the world would you think that?” asked Tsumugi.

“Well it’s because he’s a detective, right?” answered Miu. “Don’t they have like...a fetish for old-ass libraries or something?”

“Didn’t I just tell you to stop being an idiot?” Maki glared at the inventor again.

“S-Sorry...” Miu meekly said.

“What about you, Kirumi?” Korekiyo asked the maid. “Did you willingly leave Shuichi alone in the library?”

“I know that it’s my duty as a maid to fulfill a person’s request, but I couldn’t help but be cautious,” Kirumi explained. “I agreed to Shuichi’s terms on one condition.”

“Condition?” Gonta repeated.

“I asked that Shuichi have at least one person with him in the library,” said Kirumi. “And at the time, the person who made themselves available to watch Shuichi was K--’

“Kee-boy!” Kokichi suddenly shouted. “It looks like it’s your time to shine!”

Kirumi paused, “...Keebo?”

Keebo smiled and stood proud, “Kokichi, I will interpret your statement as a regular saying and not you making a reference to my metal body. That’s correct everyone, I was with Shuichi in the library when we tested out Kaede’s trap!”

Kaede, who was previously shutting herself off from the discussion, slowly raised her head in curiosity.

“You were?!” Tenko asked the robot.

“Why didn’t you mention that before, you walking vibrator?!” Miu exclaimed.

“Believe me, I would’ve wanted nothing more than to tell all of you as soon as possible,” Keebo explained. “It’s just that I was only following Shuichi’s-”

“One moment, if you would,” Korekiyo interrupted. “Who was the third person?”

“Huh?” questioned Himiko. “Third person?”

“Let’s assume everything up to this point is the truth,” the anthropologist began. “And Shuichi did indeed have the opportunity to test out Kaede’s death trap intended for the mastermind.”

“Which is supported now that Keebo confessed his involvement in this,” Ryoma pointed out.

“Precisely,” agreed Korekiyo. “If the two were both in the library bearing witness to the results of their little experiment, there had to have been a third person involved as well.”

“Oh!” Angie suddenly said, realizing the anthropologist’s point. “Someone needed to roll the shot put ball from Classroom A!”

Korekiyo nodded, “Again…..precisely.”

“Did they really need to go all the way to Classroom A just to roll a ball?” Ryoma wondered.
“Couldn’t they have just rolled it from within the library?”

“I couldn’t be too sure whether the results would’ve been accurate,” Shuichi explained. “I needed to be as authentic as possible, which means the trap needed to be reenacted in its entirety.”

“It would’ve been careless for a detective to half-ass an experiment like that,” Kaito supported.

“I agree,” Korekiyo nodded once more. “And assuming this all occurred as both Shuichi and Keebo stated, we can safely conclude that a third person also assisted in this test as well.”

“So who was third person?” asked Gonta.

“Kokichi,” Kirumi suddenly said. “It must’ve been you, correct?”

“Huh!?” questioned Tsumugi. “Kokichi?”

“K...Kokichi...?” Kaede broke her long silence.

The supreme leader looked around the room and noticed all eyes were on him, “H-Huh...M-M-Me...?”

“Why are you sweating?” Maki asked bluntly.

As the caretaker stated, Kokichi’s face was covered in perspiration as he fidgeted with his checkered scarf, “I-I-It’s j-j-just e-everyone’s l-l-looking at m-m-m-m-m-me and.................................I’m n-n-n-n-n-n-not sure w-w-what t-t-t-to d-d-d-d-d-d-d-do…………………………..”

“Kokichi...” Kirumi put her gloved hand to her forehead. “You’re not being accused of anything.”

“Oh,” the supreme leader smiled as he rested his arms behind his head. “Thank goodness for that.”

“You sure recovered fast from that,” Maki observed.

“So am I correct, Kokichi?” asked Kirumi. “You were the one who helped out Shuichi and dropped the shot put ball into the vent from Classroom A.”

“But why Kokichi, Kirumi?” questioned Kaito. “What makes you think it’s him?”

“Because he was the one who I assigned to watch Shuichi,” answered the maid.

“Oh he was, was he?” said Korekiyo.

“I guess the cat’s out of the bag,” Kokichi said happily.

“Oh great, now why didn’t YOU mention that earlier!?” exclaimed Miu.

Tears starting forming in the supreme leader’s eyes, “I’m sorry...everyone was just ganging up on Shuichi and Keebo and I didn’t want to get bullied either so I kept quiet.”

“You were the one who was bullying Keebo, you degenerate!” Tenko shouted.

“So is it true?” asked Gonta. “Did Kokichi and Keebo help Shuichi to test Kaede’s trap?”

“That’s correct, Gonta,” Keebo answered. “With Kokichi up in Classroom A, he was able to roll five shot put balls into the vent to test the accuracy of the deathtrap.”
“F-Five shot put balls?” Tsumugi said surprised.

“Five…shot puts…” Kaede muttered, seemingly putting together some pieces in her own mind.

“Don’t leave us hanging now!” Kaito became anxious. “What was the result of the test?”

“Shouldn’t that be obvious?” Korekiyo said pointedly. “This whole discussion came about because Shuichi was so insistent on proving Kaede’s innocence. He’s been so certain that she didn’t kill Rantaro, which could only mean…”

“Kaede’s trap didn’t work,” Shuichi finished for the anthropologist.

“Y-You serious!?” Kaito quickly asked, wishing for the detective’s words to be true.

“Absolutely!” Keebo declared. “I saw the whole thing, and each of the five shot put balls missed their mark completely! It didn’t land where Rantaro was supposed to be at the time.”

“Really?” Tenko took her turn to ask, her tone filled with newfound hope. “Did Kaede’s trap really not work!”

“If Kaede’s trap no work, then that mean Kaede no kill Rantaro!” Gonta himself became hopeful.

Angie brought her hands together in excitement, “Hooray! That means Kaede gets to stay with us in the land of the living! I guess her meeting with Atua will be put on hold.”

“Hahahahaha!” Kokichi laughed happily. “Exactly, guys! Kaede’s not the culprit! And it’s all thanks to Shuichi!”

Shuichi gave Kokichi a slight smile, he was wary of the supreme leader at first but now the detective was relieved that he was on his side.

“Yup!” Kokichi continued. “Thanks to him, he was able to figure out Kaede’s trap while also having Keebo as a witness AND had me roll five shot put balls into the vent to confirm that it didn’t work five-out-of-five times! Isn’t that...ISN’T THAT…”

Kokichi suddenly made a sinister face.

“…the most convenient lie in the entire goddamn world?” the supreme leader finished.

“...Huh…?” Shuichi muttered audibly.

“A...lie?” questioned Gonta.

“Are you refuting Shuichi and Keebo’s story, by any chance?” Korekiyo asked the boy.

“Y’know...I was going to go along with their lie…” Kokichi started lamenting. “...but then I realized how utterly ridiculous that story was. I mean, don’t get me wrong, I would want nothing more than for this lie to be the truth and have Kaede be innocent. Unfortunately, I’m a realist, and everything about that story screams ‘wish fulfillment’.”

“K-Kokichi!” Keebo pointed at the supreme leader. “What are you doing!?”

“Isn’t it obvious…?” Kokichi started trembling his words. “I’m trying...not to die…”

“D-Die?” Shuichi was slowly becoming worried about the events about to transpire.
“Yeah,” the small purple-haired boy started tearing up. “Because if I keep going along with this...everyone will think Kaede isn’t the culprit and vote for someone else. But I can’t let that happen! If we don’t vote for Kaede, then everyone will die except her!”

“So you’re saying that you still believe Kaede is the true blackened?” Korekiyo tried to clarify.

Kokichi sniffled, “Of course I still believe that!”

“Kokichi, stop this!” Keebo shouted. “You were helping me and Shuichi test out Kaede’s trap! I saw you holding the shot put balls! The two of us even put them back in the warehouse together!”

“Kee-boy…” Kokichi started. “I’m no longer gonna lie for you and Shuichi...the truth is...after Kirumi told me to watch Shuichi, Shuichi told me to leave him alone in the library!”

Kirumi’s expression turned dark, “He did what?”

“I-I didn’t!” Shuichi quickly exclaimed. “I told him to go to Classroom A and roll a shot put down the vent.”

“So you did tell him to leave the library?” Kirumi confirmed.

“I...Well yes I did…” the detective stuttered.

“So what if he did!?” Kaito cut in. “It was necessary for his experiment, right? And what about Keebo? Why would he lie for Shuichi?”

Kokichi chuckled, “Isn’t it obvious? He doesn’t want Kaede to die so he decided to help Shuichi come up with their grand whole lie of refuting the entire case! And also, Keebo’s a robot, so like, he probably doesn’t care if he himself gets executed cause he can, like, repair himself or something.”

“Do you even know how machines work!?” Keebo pointed his metal finger at Kokichi.

“Wh...What’s going on…?” Himiko was starting to become confused. “Is Kokichi telling the truth...or is he lying?”

“Of course he’s lying!” said Keebo. “Me and Shuichi wouldn’t tell you this if it wasn’t the least bit true!”

“Unfortunately,” Tsumugi sadly stated. “We have no way of knowing whether you guys are telling the truth about Kaede’s trap not working.”

“However,” Korekiyo followed. “We have no way of knowing whether the opposite is true, as well.”

“You mean if Kaede’s trap worked?” said Kirumi.

“Indeed,” the anthropologist answered. “Did the trap work? Did it not work? These are scenarios that are sadly lost to time.”

Kaito growled in frustration, “If only we knew about the trap earlier in the investigation, then we could’ve all seen it for ourselves.”

“What’s wrong with believing me and Shuichi!?” asked Keebo who was becoming more and more flustered.

“Even if we did believe you, that would only open up another can of worms!” said Tsumugi.
“Can of worms?” wondered Gonta. “Does Tsumugi also like taking care of bugs?”

“It’s merely an expression, Gonta,” Kirumi stayed patient with the entomologist.

“Oh...Gonta sees.”

“What do you mean, Tsumugi?” asked Tenko.

“If Kaede isn’t the culprit, then who is it really?” the cosplayer asked. “How did they do it? Where did they do it from? We would have to answer all these questions but we just don’t have enough time to do that!”

“I’m at 69%, in case anyone’s wondering,” said Monokuma.

“Wow, Pop, ‘69’?” Monosuke was unamused. “Really?”

“What can I say?” the black and white bear said in embarrassment. “I’m as vulgar as I am cuddly!”

“I thought that was me!” Monokid shouted.

“We’re running out of time...” Ryoma warned.

“Hey, as long as we still have time on the clock, we need to use as much as we can to solve this case!” Kaito tried to encourage.

“That’s very optimistic of you, Kaito,” Keebo complimented the astronaut. “But unfortunately we’re running out of ways to convince everyone that what we’re saying is the truth. What do you think we should do Shuichi…...Shuichi?”

After a few moments without an answer, Keebo looked at the detective who was deep in thought.

“There was a saying that was told to me back when I first became the Ultimate Detective,” Shuichi spoke aloud. “A little lie can support a bigger lie.”

“A little lie can support...a bigger lie?” the robot parroted.

“Oh yeah?” said Miu “Well my tight little vagina can support a bigger dick, what are you trying to say?”

“What I’m saying is that rather than try to contradict the bigger lie,” Shuichi began to explain. “I’m gonna go for the little lie. That way the support will come crumbling down and we’ll be one step closer to the truth!”

“Grrrah, are you even speaking the same language!?” Miu said in frustration. “What the hell does that mean!?”

“It means I’m gonna expose your lies, Kokichi!” Shuichi yelled out.

“Oh?” Kokichi raised his eyebrows in curiosity. “What’s this?”

“If I can’t prove Kaede’s trap didn’t work with my own testimony, then I’ll refute your testimony to prove that you indeed helped us and rolled the shot put balls into the vent!” Shuichi declared at the supreme leader.

“Interesting…” Kokichi gave the detective his signature mischievous smile. “You really think you can contradict my claim?”
“Quite easily, in fact,” Shuichi stated plainly.

Kokichi chuckled, “Oh ho ho! Was that a speck of confidence I detected from the detective?”

“If you were half the detective that I am, you would’ve come up with a better lie for me to contradict,” Shuichi countered.

The supreme leader’s expression slowly went to full reset mode as Kokichi stared at Shuichi with a plain blank look on his face.

Then he snickered.

Snickering turned into chuckling and the chuckling turned into laughter. The laughter suddenly grew in volume until Kokichi was finally laughing maniacally. His voice rang throughout the room as some of the other students had wary looks on their faces. Shuichi looked at his opponent as if he was analyzing his current actions. Kokichi laughing in that state was not exactly a foreign concept to anyone, but the detective noticed something odd. The volume of the sound, the tone of the laughter, something was different this time around. As if the other times before he was merely faking, and now Kokichi himself has found a genuine reason to laugh in this fashion.

“WHAT IS THIS FEELING I’M HAVING DEEP WITHIN ME!?” the supreme leader said in between laughs. “COULD IT BE SHUICHI, THAT, YOU’RE THE ONE!?”

“The one what?” Shuichi could only ask.

“THE ONE WHO CAN KEEP ME ENTERTAINED THROUGHOUT THIS ENTIRE KILLING GAME!”

Entertain...There was that word again.

“Well I came up with something good! In exchange for me helping you, and keeping things ‘on the down low’ I want you…”

The detective prepared himself for whatever scheme Kokichi had planned for him.

“...to give me an entertaining trial!” the purple-haired boy finally finished.

Kokichi’s laughter slowly subsided, but the boy continued in his deranged state, “If that’s how you want to play it, then fine! Let us engage in a battle of wits! My brain against yours! The Ultimate Supreme Leader versus the Ultimate Detective! This battle was inevitable but I don’t think anyone expected for it to happen so soon! So sit back everyone, and watch how a couple of pros show you how it’s done!”

“Kokichi,” Shuichi decidedly didn’t want to humor the purple-haired leader. “This isn’t a game. If you don’t take this seriously we’re all gonna--”

"I challenge you to a duel!” Kokichi suddenly yelled at the detective.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Shuichi asked the supreme leader.

“Oh Shuichi…” Kokichi sighed. “I take things one hundred percent seriously one hundred percent of the time!”
“Is that right…?” Shuichi put a hand to his chin.

“Of course!” said Kokichi “Oh, and speaking of ‘one hundred percent’, I suggest you hurry things up or else we’ll all die and this will be for nothing~!”

“Don’t you worry, I have a good idea on what your lie is…” Shuichi declared confidently, ready to hear his opponent’s testimony.

Kokichi smiled and took a breath before giving his rebuttal, “So you really insist that I helped you with your supposed experiment, but that’s just ONE BIG LIE! The moment Kirumi left the room you told me to leave the library as well. All to create this convenient alibi for yourself saying that you proved Kaede didn’t kill Rantaro. Doesn’t that sound a little fishy to you?”

The detective thought about his next words carefully before answering the supreme leader, “My actions are irrelevant at this point. The fact is that you helped me, and I can prove it!”

“Hah!” Kokichi laughed. “Then reveal your hand, Mr. Detective! Where’s the proof that shows my involvement? Did I leave any evidence behind? Were there any witnesses besides you and Keebo? Or maybe you set up some automatic cameras elsewhere and I got caught on film!”

"It doesn’t take a genius to see the contradiction from where I’m standing…” Shuichi thought to himself. “But the question is...why would Kokichi tell such an obvious lie?”
Shuichi listened to Kokichi’s testimony very carefully and found the contradiction he was looking for.

"Were there any witnesses besides you and Keebo?"

"There," Shuichi said to himself. He pointed straight at Kokichi ready to contradict his statement, “I’ll cut through your--"

"No, that’s wrong!"

Before Shuichi could finish his sentence, he was cut off by a voice. It was a voice he didn’t expect to hear at that very moment. Kokichi and Shuichi broke eye contact to look at the person who interrupted their showdown.

“Kaede?” Shuichi said as he saw her finger pointed at the supreme leader, her expression in a state as if she realized something herself.

“Umm...Kaede?” Kokichi looked displeased at the pianist. “What are you doing? Me and Shuichi are kinda having this dance right now and it’s very rude of you to just cut in between us like that.”

Gonta nodded his head, “Kokichi right, Kaede, it very ungentlemanly to interrupt dance between two people.”

“Hang on a sec, Gonta,” said Shuichi before turning back to the pianist. “Something on your mind, Kaede?”

“It’s just…” Kaede began. “Kokichi...you’re lying.”

“Hmm?” the supreme leader responded.

“You’re lying,” Kaede emphasized. “Because I saw you...I saw you walking around with the murder weapon!”

“You saw him?” asked Korekiyo.

“Yeah, and it wasn’t just me,” answered Kaede. “Tsumugi saw him too, right Tsumugi?”

“H-Huh...?” the blue-haired girl was taken aback before composing herself. “Oh, right...”

“‘Oh, right’!? Miu suddenly yelled. “OH, RIGHT’!? That’s all you two can say after you kept this from us the whole time!? Fuck me, why the hell is everyone hiding important information?!”

“S-Sorry!” Tsumugi quickly apologized. “I just thought it was one of Kokichi’s pranks, so I didn’t think it would be important to this case.”

“Pranks?” wondered Kirumi.
“Well, when we stopped him and asked him what he was doing, he told us he was going to the warehouse because he suspected the killer left an important piece of evidence behind,” Kaede explained.

“I see,” Korekiyo took note of the pianist’s recollection.

“But like I said, it was all just one of Kokichi’s dumb pranks,” said Tsumugi. “Because when we went with him to the warehouse, he made a mess of all the sports equipment that was there, and then we took the blame and the Monokubs had us clean the place.”

“Kokichi ran off before they showed up so he didn’t take any of the blame,” said Kaede. “It took us quite a while to clean that warehouse…”

“Kokichi!” Tenko yelled. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

The supreme leader gave an exaggerated surprised expression, “Is the cat out of the bag, AGAIN!?"

“So you admit it!” exclaimed the aikido master.

A sigh escaped from Kokichi’s mouth, “Yeah...it’s just...Rantaro’s death hit everyone so hard...I thought a little prank would lighten up the mood…”

“That’s what I thought,” said Tsumugi.

“Was it really all just for a prank, though?” questioned Shuichi.

“What does Shuichi mean?” asked Gonta.

The detective turned to the pianist, “What do you think, Kaede?”

Kaede looked at Shuichi “Huh? Me…?”

“You were there, after all,” explained the detective. “Did you really think it was just a prank?”

“I mean, you took the time to interrupt me and Shuichi’s battle, so you must’ve had a good reason in doing so other than just to point out my ‘prank’,” Kokichi followed.

Kaede bashfully twiddled her fingers, “You...You were holding the bloody shot put in your hand...That means the only time you were able to get it was when…”

“He was with Shuichi at the library,” Korekiyo finished. “Which means Shuichi must have given him the murder weapon to roll it from Classroom A. Kekeke, slowly but certainly the truth of this case peeks out at us.”

“‘Slowly’ is goddamn right!” Kaito shouted. “Why the hell did you lead us in circles just to get to this point, Kokichi!?”

“Well SOR-RY!” Kokichi shouted back. “I just wanted to have a go at the Ultimate Detective, but then a certain blonde bimbo decided to butt in on that!”

Miu glared at the supreme leader, “Who’re you calling a blonde--”

“NOT YOU!” Kokichi yelled at the inventor.

“Heeeeee! Miu squealed. “O-Of course it wouldn’t be me...why would it…?”
“Well what was I supposed to do?” said Kaede, knowing that Kokichi was referring to her. “I had no reason to keep what I knew to myself!”

“But that means you believe us now, right Kaede?” asked Keebo.

“Huh…?” questioned the pianist.

Shuichi’s mind lit up at that moment. He became lost in thought as an epiphany was slowly coming to him.

“You proved that fact yourself,” said Keebo. “That Kokichi was indeed helping us test out your deathtrap.”

“But he just walked into the warehouse with a bloody shot put and tripped,” wondered Angie. “How does that prove that Kokichi actually helped you guys?”

“Think about it,” the robot replied. “Kokichi didn’t go to the warehouse just to mess with Tsumugi and Kaede. If you connect his actions with what the two of us have told you then you’ll know his true purpose.”

“His true...purpose?” Tsumugi repeated.

“It…” Kaede hesitated before speaking. “It was to get the other shot put balls, wasn’t it?”

“DING-DING-DING!” Kokichi imitated a gameshow chime. “Another point goes to Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist!”

“Shuichi and Keebo did say that they were able to test out their experiment five times,” Korekiyo noted. “It makes sense for that to have been the moment they were able to obtain multiple shot put balls.”

“But why did they need five?” asked Himiko. “Couldn’t they have done it with only the original ball?”

“They probably wanted to test it out multiple times to further determine the accuracy,” theorized the anthropologist. “Impressive, Shuichi. As expected of a detective, you leave no stone unturned.”

“Or in this case, no metal balls unturned!” Angie added.

“Um, actually,” said Kokichi. “I thought of that little detail all by myself.”

“Is that so?” questioned Kirumi.

“Are you sure this isn’t another lie?” followed Maki.

“Geez, that’s a little mean,” the supreme leader pouted. “Fine, if you don’t believe me, ask Shuichi. Right, Shuichi?”

The purple-haired boy would get no response because Shuichi once again blocked off any outside conversations by thinking to himself.

“Shuichi?” Kokichi tried to get the detective’s attention. “Shuichi, buddy?”

“Hmm, it seems he’s a bit preoccupied at the moment,” Ryoma noted.

“This is starting to become a recurring thing for him,” said Kirumi.
“Though it is fascinating to see the actions of the Ultimate Detective in his element,” Korekiyo praised. “I would love to go into his mind and witness his inner machinations.”

“Well if he’s too busy jerkin’ off his brain,” said Miu. “Then he better hurry the fuck up and splurge his knowledge all over our faces!”

“Bleagh!” Tenko exclaimed in disgust. “I did NOT need that image!”

“Well if he’s too busy jerkin’ off his brain,” said Miu. “Then he better hurry the fuck up and splurge his knowledge all over our faces!”

“Anyway,” Kaito led everyone back to the discussion at hand. “Whether it was Kokichi or Shuichi, who cares about any of that? The point is Kokichi helped Shuichi and Keebo, and that means we now have three people who say Kaede isn’t the culprit! So that means what they’re saying HAS to be true!”

“That’s quite a leap in logic…” said Tsumugi.

“Kokichi aside, me and Shuichi have no reason to lie,” Keebo pointed out.

“Wowww, Keeboy,” Kokichi said, impressed with the robot. “You managed to do some damage to me and you didn’t even need a rocket punch for that!”

“Like I said, I would not have such crude functions,” Keebo replied.

“Keebo does make a fair point,” said Korekiyo. “They’re lives are on the line, so I don’t imagine they would have it in themselves to lie.”

“Maybe it’s the exact opposite of that,” said Ryoma.

“What do you mean?” asked the anthropologist.

The former tennis pro made a grim expression, “Let’s say everything those two said have been true and they did test out Kaede’s trap. However, results showed that the trap DID work and now they’re trying to lie for Kaede’s sake.”

The robot looked at Ryoma surprised, “Th-That is certainly not the--”

“Keebo,” Kirumi started. “Please let Ryoma finish.”

The maid signaled back at the convicted student, allowing him to proceed with his theory.

“Thanks, Kirumi. Now let me ask, if they are lying about the results of their test, then why?”

“Why…” wondered Himiko.

“Why would they lie, knowing they would die by doing so?” Ryoma finished.

“Obviously it would be to protect Kaede,” said Maki.

“Exactly,” agreed the ex-convict. “Maybe they realized Kaede’s intentions for creating the trap and decided she deserved to live…rather than the rest of us.”

“What!” Keebo exclaimed.

Miu became livid, “What a load of bullshit!”

The robot turned to the inventor in relief, “Yes, thank you, Miu, I couldn’t agree--”
“I’m talking about you, Keebo!” she responded.

“How!?”

“You’re willing to sacrifice a genius, such as myself, to save Kae-idiot!?”

Keebo shook his head, “N-No! We...I would never--”

“No way in hell is that true!” Kaito yelled. “These guys wouldn’t put all our lives in danger just to save one person!”

“But...isn’t that what they’re doing, now?” said Tsumugi.

“Seventy-five percent!” Monokuma said happily. “Puhuhuhu!”

“Gonta not very good with numbers,” the entomologist admitted. “Is that bad?”

“It is,” confirmed Ryoma. “And all we’ve been doing is going around in circles deciding whether or not we believe Keebo and Shuichi.”

“It doesn’t help when one of them is off daydreaming!” Miu said, trying to give a non-subtle hint to the detective, not that he would’ve noticed.

“Well then, let’s settle this once and for all,” Kaito proposed. “Who here believes Keebo and Shuichi’s claim that Kaede’s NOT the culprit?”

Gonta immediately raised his hand, “Gonta believes them!”

Angie followed just as quickly, “Angie does, too!”

“I-It’s not like me to believe in a degenerate male,” Tenko began. “...But if it means Kaede gets to live, then I’ll believe in those two.”

“Are you all serious right now?” Maki asked in a harsh tone.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kaito asked the caretaker.

“You’re all letting your emotions get the better of you,” the twin-tailed girl said. “You believe in Keebo and Shuichi’s words because you don’t want Kaede to die. That’s the only reason.”

“What’s wrong with believing in someone?” the astronaut’s tone started to become just as harsh.

“This is a class trial to prove that one of us is guilty in murdering someone,” Maki explained. “If we start determining guilt and innocence through emotion alone, we blind ourselves from the truth. The moment you put your own selfish ‘feelings’ in a class trial is the moment the truth is lost.”

“Well well well,” Kokichi smiled at the girl. “I didn’t expect such cynical views from the Ultimate Child Caregiver.”

Maki looked away from the supreme leader, “I’m just being realistic. Things like ‘trust’ and ‘emotions’ are irrelevant in a killing game.”

“You...” Kaito clenched his fists. “How can you think like that!?”

“Don’t give me that,” the child caregiver glared at the astronaut with dark eyes. “I barely know any of you, so why should I risk my life believing in a stranger’s words?”
Keebo sighed, “I suppose we now know Maki’s stance on this.”

“Unfortunately I agree with her on this,” said Ryoma.

Kaito looked at the tennis pro, “You too, Ryoma!?”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “But I know better than to get my hopes up. It’s a cruel world we live in, and I’ve had a firsthand experience in it.”

Kirumi raised her hand, “I’d also like to group myself with Ryoma and Maki. After all, Shuichi broke the promise he made with me back in the library, so I can’t help but feel there’s more foul play involved.”

“Great…” Kaito said in bitter sarcasm. “Then it’s three for team ‘Kaede did it’.”

“It’s okay!” Tenko said in hopeful optimism. “We still outnumber them, and with Himiko at our side, that adds another in our favor!”

“Nyeh?” Himiko reacted. “Me?”

“You’re on our side, right Himiko?” Tenko asked the mage.

The red-head paused before responding, “.........No.”

The aikido master flinched back in shock, “HUH!?!”

“I think we should just vote for Kaede,” said Himiko. “Time’s running out anyway, and it would be a pain to continue this trial when it’s already gone on for so long.”

“N-No…” Tenko looked at her friend with sadness in her eyes. “Himiko…”

“I ain’t believing in them, either!” exclaimed Miu. “Why the hell should I when Kae-idiot herself says she’s the culprit!??”

“H-Huh?” Kaede said, slightly surprised by the inventor’s statement.

“...!” Shuichi interrupted himself from his quiet thinking as he looked up in response. “There it is, again.”

“Kaede,” Keebo spoke to the blonde pianist. “Is that correct? Do you still believe you’re the culprit?”

“I...I...,” Kaede hesitated. “Y-Yes...I still do.”

Kaito gave a low groan in frustration, “Even now, Kaede?”

“I’m sorry…” the pianist sadly apologized. “I...know what I did...I just...I just can’t imagine someone else would have…”

“She’s starting to doubt.”

“I’m with Kaede on this,” said Tsumugi. “I can’t, in good faith, go against her wishes.”

"Of course, I’ve been going about this the wrong way…"

“What about the rest of you?” the cosplayer asked the opposing group. “Are you all willing to go against what Kaede herself believes?”
Rather than try to convince everyone else of Kaede’s innocence…

“If it means saving her, then you’re damn right we are!” Kaito declared.

There’s only one person who I need to convince!

“But with Kaede and Tsumugi on their side, we’re now tied!” Tenko informed her group.

“In that case, you can count me in to put the odds in your favor,” Korekiyo offered.

“Really?” Kaito was a little shocked. “Why?”

“I still doubt our three ‘trap testers’ would go to such lengths to risk their lives if there was no truth to their claim,” the anthropologist explained. “Also...there are some other concerns that have come to light…”

“Other concerns?” inquired Keebo.

“By all means, pay no mind to my ramblings,” dismissed Korekiyo. “But this should be sufficient, yes?”

“You’re damn right it is!” Kaito shouted happily.

“Hmm?” wondered Kokichi. “What’d you mean?”

“We have the majority,” the astronaut explained. “With Shuichi and Keebo, me, Kiyo, Tenko, you, Gonta and Angie--”

“Whoa whoawhoawhoa,” the supreme leader interrupted. “Why me?”

Kaito blinked at Kokichi, “.............What?”

Kokichi blinked back, “.............I never said I’d join you guys.”

“Oh come on!” Keebo yelled in exasperation. “Why must you always make things more difficult for us!?”

“Geez louise,” Kokichi raised his hands in defense. “Didn’t know robots could get angry.”

“I’m not angry--” Keebo realized his tone and composed himself. “You helped us with the test, so you know that Kaede’s trap didn’t work.”

“Well that’s not entirely true,” Kokichi pointed out. “Remember, I didn’t actually see the results of that test, y’know, due to me being up in Classroom A.”

“So you don’t believe me and Shuichi?”

“It’s not that I don’t believe you guys,” Kokichi said coyly. “But you know how it is.”

“No, I do not know!” the robot replied. “What exactly are your true intentions here?”


“I suppose that’s that,” Tsumugi concluded. “It’s eight to seven on wanting to end this trial.”

“Now hold on a second,” Kaito tried to steer the discussion from its current path. “Remember what I said before--”
“You said you would refuse to vote unless you heard what Shuichi had to say,” the cosplayer stopped him before he threatened his own life again. “You got what you wanted, so you can’t use yourself as a hostage anymore.”

“Tch, dammit,” the astronaut cursed.

“But this can’t be end…” Gonta said defeated.

“I’m sorry, Gonta,” Tsumugi told the entomologist. “Please allow us to make this difficult decision. In order for all of us to survive, we need to vote and we need to do it n--”

“It seems we’re split right down the middle,” Shuichi suddenly said.

“H-Huh?” Tsumugi said in response.

“Hey, if it isn’t, Shuichi!” Kokichi greeted. “Glad you could join us for this class trial!”

“That aside…” Monokuma also decided to join the conversation. “What was that I just heard?”

The detective glanced at the headmaster, “Oh, it’s just that we just established two groups with opposing views…and it doesn’t look like we’re going to reach a consensus anytime soon…”

“Are you perhaps suggesting we hold a Debate Scrum?” the bear asked Shuichi.

“A Debate Scrum!?” exclaimed Monosuke.

“B-B-But we already had one for this trial!” yelled Monokid.

“Funny enough, that one was about Shuichi, right?” Monophanie pointed out.

“Two Debate Scrums in one trial?” questioned Monotaro. “So we are competing for longest trial ever!”

“Shuichi,” Kirumi turned to the previously quiet student. “What are you doing?”

“It’s only fair, yes?” Shuichi suggested. “Let’s all get a chance to say our piece before we decide on where we proceed from here.”

“Is this wise?” asked Tsumugi. “After all, I don’t think we have much time for--”

“Sixty-five percent!” Monokuma announced.

“I-It went down!?” the cosplayer said surprised.

“Aww, I can’t resist a legit Debate Scrum,” the headmaster admitted. “I’m getting excited just thinking about it!”

“Damn straight!” Kaito yelled happily. “That’s my bro!”

Shuichi curiously looked at the astronaut, “Uh…’bro’?”

“I am fine with this outcome,” Keebo spoke with confidence. “This will be our last stand in swaying the others!”

“Oh ho ho!” Kokichi said with amusement. “Is that a challenge, Keeboy?”

“Himiko!” Tenko shouted at the mage. “I’m not going against you because I want to! This is for the
sake of our loving friendship!”

The red-headed mage pouted at the aikido master, clearly annoyed at this turn of events, “What a pain.”

Kirumi sighed, “Very well, I will fulfill this request for a debate and hopefully you will see the error of your logic.”

“And with a genius such as myself participating, you all have no hope of convincing us!” Miu told the group.

“They won’t stop no matter what,” Tsumugi lamented aside. “Well, even if it’s painful, we’ll just have to do our best and convince them, right Kaede? ………Kaede?”

The pianist gave no response, in fact, she didn’t even notice she was being spoken to. All Kaede could do was stare at Shuichi. She had convinced herself that all this time that the detective was lying for her sake, but as more witnesses came, as more evidence revealed itself, Kaede was slowly becoming unsure about the truths of this case. Rather, the truths that she had known at the time were slowly morphing into the unknown.

“Shuichi…” Kaede spoke to the detective.

“Yes, Kaede?” Shuichi quickly responded.

“I…I…” the girl hesitated her words once more before she suddenly shook her head. “I’m the killer. That’s what I believe right now.”

Shuichi breathed out calmly as he closed his eyes, “All right. That’s okay.”

With all the students ready for what’s about to begin, Monokuma pulled out a key from behind him and inserted it into a lock that was in front of him. At that moment the podiums in the trial room started raising up one by one until the trial grounds itself started morphing into a completely different area. Sets of podiums now faced against each other as if it became an actual room for debating rather than for mere discussions.

On one side stood Tsumugi Shirogane, Kirumi Tojo, Ryoma Hoshi, Miu Iruma, Himiko Yumeno, Maki Harukawa, Kokichi Oma, and Kaede Akamatsu. On the other side was Shuichi Saihara, Kaito Momota, Korekiyo Shinguji, Angie Yonaga, Tenko Chabashira, Gonta Gokuhara, and Keebo.

The question that stood on everyone’s minds: Is Kaede the culprit?

Tsumugi began the debate, “Kaede was the one who set up the murder trap.”

Shuichi was already quick to the draw, “I saw it with my own eyes that the trap didn’t work.”

“You were all alone in the library, so you could be lying,” Kirumi was also quick to point out.

“Shuichi wasn’t alone, Keebo was also there!” Kaito defended his newly decreed soul brother.

“Then they’re both lying to protect Kaede,” Ryoma suggested.

“What would be the point of lying if their lives were on the line?” asked Korekiyo.

Miu didn’t answer the anthropologist and offered her own argument, “Kae-idiot says she did it, so what’s the problem here?!”
“The problem is that even if Kaede herself believes it, that doesn’t mean she did it,” Angie was happy to counter.

Himiko was at her wits end, “Nyeh, this is such a pain...why don’t we just vote already?”

“Himiko, if we vote now, then we’ll all be killed!” Tenko did her best to convince the frustrated mage.

“Do you honestly believe that Kaede didn’t do it?” Maki asked the group.

“Shuichi prove that trap did not work, so Gonta will believe in Kaede!” the entomologist declared with complete sincerity.

“Well to be fair, it could’ve just been a fluke…” Kokichi said to his robotic opponent.

“How could it be a fluke when we tested it five times in a row?” Keebo retorted.

“Everyone please stop!” Kaede shouted in desperation. “I was the one who threw the murder weapon...I killed Rantaro...I’m the culprit!”

“No you’re not!” Shuichi shouted back. “The real culprit is someone else and they’re using you as a scapegoat!”

That was it. The one suggestion that could turn the case around; the one tiny step that could lead into a bigger leap into the unknown. Shuichi may not know the truth to the bigger mystery as of yet, but he was willing to do whatever it takes to get there and he knew he would not be alone in this.

”This is our answer!” Shuichi’s group declared.

”Please don’t do this!” Kaede quickly interrupted their momentum.

The pianist and the detective were now at odds with each other.

“Someone else?” Kaede said in an offended tone. “If there was someone else, you would have shown proof already!”

“Kaede…” Shuichi sighed at the girl. “I’m sorry.”

“How…”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t tell you sooner. All that guilt...all that sadness you built up inside yourself...I could’ve stopped that.”

“You…” Kaede began.

“Yes?” Shuichi responded.

“You...really do believe I’m not the culprit, do you?” the pianist genuinely asked.

“Of course I do,” Shuichi answered. “And...I’m sorry you don’t believe me.”

“You’re wrong,” Kaede plainly said.

“I know,” Shuichi said sadly. “It’s only natural that you think you were the one who--”

“That’s not it.”
“Huh…?” the detective questioned.

Kaede looked at her friend with tears starting to form in her eyes, “I want nothing more than to believe you. Every fiber of my being is telling me I need to. But...but I...can’t help it...I just feel that…”

“Kaede, Kaede,” Shuichi did his best to calm the girl down. “It’s okay.”

“...What?”

“It’s going to be okay,” the detective assured. “I’m here. You can trust me.”

Kaede looked at Shuichi’s calm demeanor. At that moment everything became clear.

“Kaede,” the detective interrupted.

“Yes?”

“Do you...trust me?”

The pianist looked at the boy before answering, “Of course I do.”

Shuichi closed his eyes and smiled, “Then I don’t have anything to worry about.”

She needed to trust him.

The tears that slowly formed in Kaede’s eyes started streaming down her face, “Sh-Shuichi...please help me. I’m...I’m so scared…”

“It’s going to be okay, Kaede,” the detective assured once again. “Come at me with any concerns...any arguments...and I’ll promise to refute all of it.”

“Okay...okay,” Kaede did her best to compose herself as she prepared her rebuttal. “You say there’s another culprit, but who could it be? The shot put ball was the murder weapon, so they would’ve had to know about my plan. Other than you, there was no one else who could’ve figured out my trap for the mastermind.”

“While it’s true I can’t point out a specific person,” Shuichi admitted. “Maybe there’s a way I can prove the possibility that another person could’ve killed Rantaro with a shot put ball.”

“Then please tell me how,” Kaede pleaded. “There’s no other evidence that was left behind. Our cameras didn’t catch anything or anyone out of place! Everything, even the way Rantaro died, matches up with how I designed my deathtrap.”

“I’ll cut through your words!” Shuichi shouted.

“Shuichi?” Kaede looked at the boy with hope. Those were the words she needed to hear.

“It’s…” Shuichi started. “It’s a bit of a minor detail but…”

“Please, Shuichi,” Kaede said to the detective.

“You said the way Rantaro died matches up with what you planned for your deathtrap, but I wonder if it was truly accurate,” the detective wondered.
“What do you mean?” asked Tsumugi.

“I didn’t think about this because we received the photos so late into the investigation,” said Shuichi. “But take a look at the one where Rantaro’s looking directly into the flash.”

“Mhmm, mhmm, I see,” Kokichi followed the detective’s logic. “That would also had to have been the moment just before the supposed shot put fell on top of his head.”

“There it is!” Shuichi quickly pointed at the supreme leader. “Say that again, Kokichi!”

Kokichi tilted his head, “It would have to have been the moment the shot put fell on **top of his head.**”

“Top of his head?” Kaede repeated. “But wait, the Monokuma File said that Rantaro was struck on the **back of his head!**”

“Exactly!” agreed Shuichi.

“Is that such an important point though?” questioned Tsumugi. “Gravity works in mysterious ways and Kaede’s shot put could’ve fell on the back of Rantaro’s head rather than the top of it.”

Korekiyo turned to the blue-haired cosplayer but remained silent.

“I placed the camera, myself,” Kaede explained. “I remembered not to place it too low or too high to make it seem less suspicious.”

“And it’s not as if the iron ball would come flying off the bookcase,” said Keebo. “It would only make a simple drop.”

“And look!” Angie followed as well. “The photo’s showing Rantaro looking directly at the camera with his head straight forward! Also, I just love the composition of this photo! It gives off a nice eerie vibe that screams ‘Someone’s going to die’!”

“Someone did die…” Maki said flatly.

“But this should be enough, right Kaede?” Kaito turned to the pianist.

The girl in question, however, was preoccupied as she looked once again at Shuichi. The detective as well, mimicked the pianist’s actions as he returned the stare back at her.

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The trial room was dark and empty with the exception of Shuichi. Suddenly a spotlight shined on top of him as the detective realized he experienced this type of ‘vision’ once before. At the time, it was when Kaede was trying to pass on her wish to him, when she was sure she had failed to catch the mastermind and accepted her prior fate. This time, however, Shuichi knew this time it was different. There was not going to be any unnecessary sacrifices, but at the same time he knew why this vision was here before him. Shuichi knew he wasn’t the only one experiencing this.

“So here we are,” Shuichi spoke to the empty room. “Now you know everything that I know. I’m...I’m sorry for keeping this all a secret from you until now, but I hope you’ll make the right decision. No, I shouldn’t be saying that...because I know you will. Because I know you have the strength to resolve this. So please, let us find the truth of this case...together.”

The spotlight that shined on Shuichi vanished along with the detective himself. The room was once again empty until another spotlight shined across the room on a different person. Kaede opened her
eyes and found herself in a familiar place.

“Shuichi,” Kaede spoke to the empty room. “You have done so much for me up to this point. I’m sorry...for everything I’ve done. I lied to you...tried to force my wish onto you...and I didn’t even believe you when you were defending me...even though I promised to trust you. Well...I promise to trust you now, and I also promise to pay back everything that you’ve done for me.”

She pointed forward, towards her new future, “I promise.”

I am not the culprit,” said Kaede.

Chapter End Notes

Shoutout to commentor "K" for bringing up a fair argument.
“Hmm?” Kokichi leaned forward and hovered his hand behind his ear. “Do you mind repeating that, Kaede? I didn’t catch that.”

“I’m not the culprit!” Kaede spoke louder.

“K-Kaede?” Tsumugi looked concerned at her friend.

Tears still streamed from the pianist’s eyes, but they weren’t tears of sadness. Rather, they were tears of solace, “I take back my confession. I take back everything I’ve said because I don’t believe I’m the culprit anymore!”

“YES!” Kaito shouted in triumphant relief.

The group that defended Kaede all made similar remarks of celebration.

“Hooray!” Angie cheered. “We did it!”

“Gonta did it…” the entomologist said to himself. “Gonta protected one of his friends…”

“Wait...what just happened?” Himiko looked around confused, having trouble keeping up with the events that unfolded.

Miu was having a similar experience, “Yeah, why the hell does Kae-idiot think she’s innocent all of a sudden?”

“It must have something to do with Rantaro being struck on the back of the head rather than the top of his head,” Keebo surmised, not quite sure of what was going on himself, but happy and relieved that Kaede considered herself to be innocent.

“You’re absolutely correct, Keebo,” Shuichi confirmed. “Other than the fact that it further supports that Kaede’s trap didn’t work, what else does it suggest?”

“It would have to be the method of murder, correct?” the robot answered.

“All this time I was so sure that Rantaro died solely because of my trap,” said Kaede. “But with the location of his wound, along with the photographs we received from the Monokubs, it doesn’t add up. There’s a possibility...that someone else had the chance to kill Rantaro when my deathtrap failed.”

“Wonderful, Kaede,” praised Korekiyo. “Such display of resolve is a welcome contrast to the person who just moments ago resigned herself to her demise. As an added bonus, now the group that opposed us once before has lost a good portion of their credibility. Right, Tsumugi?”

The cosplayer quickly turned to the anthropologist in surprise, “Huh? Me…?”

“You deserve your fair share of recognition,” Kiyo explained. “After all, you spent a good effort defending Kaede in her decisions. Now you get to do so with the ease of knowing that she herself believes in her innocence. Isn’t that just ideal?”

Tsumugi gave Korekiyo a warm smile, “Of course it is. I’m so relieved that your group was able to prove Kaede innocent.”
“Kaede’s innocence hasn’t necessarily been proven without a doubt,” Ryoma noted. “But, I can’t in good faith, keep accusing her of being the blackened when she doesn’t believe it herself anymore.”

“Nyeh, I guess I’ll keep going along with this trial, too,” said Himiko.

“Himiko, I knew you’d come around eventually!” Tenko declared happily.

Miu sighed loudly, “Fiiiine, I guess I ain’t gonna vote for Kae-idiot.”

Maki remained silent and turned away in disinterest, “Do what you want.”

“If this is the true desire of the group then I will cooperate as well,” said Kirumi. “Shuichi, allow me to apologize for not believing you.”

“Ah, no that’s quite alright,” Shuichi said somewhat embarrassed.

“In any case, it’s too early to celebrate,” said Kaito. “We still need to get to the bottom of this whole thing.”

“Kaito’s right,” agreed Kaede. “We’re not in the clear just yet. Especially with Monokuma’s time limit looming over our shoulders, we have to stay diligent.”

“So what should we talk about now?” Gonta took it upon himself to ask the obvious question.

“Obviously the person who struck Rantaro in the back of the head!” said Tenko. “Alright, which one of you degenerates did it?”

“Hey!” Kaito shouted at the aikido master. “What makes you think it was a man who did this?”

“Hah!” Tenko scoffed. “Only a degenerate male would have the balls to frame Kaede for their murder.”

“Balls?” Kaede thought in her head.

“Oh I getcha!” said Miu. “With this we’re able to rule out half the suspects! Good job, Ten-crotch! You made this a hundred times easier for us!”

Tenko’s face scrunched up in disgust, “I’m...not sure how I feel about that compliment...or that degenerate-like nickname.”

“Well get used to it, because that’s what I’m calling ya from now on!” the inventor happily stated.

“What makes you think the culprit tried to frame Kaede in the first place?” asked Ryoma.

“So what, you think it was just a happy coincidence that the culprit and Kaede both tried to kill Rantaro at the same time?” Kaito retorted.

“I’m saying maybe they didn’t intentionally try to frame her at first, but then they saw her trap didn’t work and decided to take an opportunity,” the tennis pro explained his point in more detail.

“Oh ho!” responded Kokichi. “So now the question becomes whether this murder was premeditated or not.”

“If the shot put ball is still indeed the murder weapon, then it would had to have been,” said Kirumi.

”Shot put ball...”
“Unless that was just another ‘happy coincidence’,” Maki said sarcastically.

“But it just doesn’t make sense…” Shuichi said aloud while deep in thought. “If the shot put ball was still the murder weapon, then the killer would’ve known about Kaede’s plan from the start. They would’ve had to have been in close proximity in order to see that the trap didn’t work and then kill Rantaro themselves.”

“Close proximity…”

“Yeah, and unfortunately your cameras didn’t really catch anything out of the ordinary other than Rantaro,” Kaito pointed out.

“My cameras, first off,” said Miu. “And may I remind you, they go off on a thirty second pause timer after each shot they take. So maybe it was during one of those times the killer made their move!”

“In that case, where the hell did the killer run off to?” Kaito genuinely asked. “Tenko and I were right outside the library when the whole thing happened.”

“And the photos showed everyone running into the library when the body discovery announcement went off,” said Ryoma. “So the killer didn’t hide in there to begin with.”

“So the cameras didn’t show anyone exiting from either the front or rear entrances,” Keebo thought aloud. “That would suggest that the only location the killer could’ve left the library from was--”

“The hidden door,” Kaede finished.

Shuichi looked at the pianist with a surprised expression on his face, “The hidden door?”

“We just proved that the killer couldn’t have used any other entrance that lead in and out of the library,” Kaede explained. “So, by process of elimination, the hidden door would’ve been the only way the killer could’ve left the library. There’s also the missing shot put ball.”

“Missing shot put ball?” Himiko repeated.

“Specifically my shot put ball,” the pianist explained. “Shuichi and Keebo kept saying this whole time my shot put missed. If that’s the case, then why did we discover a bloody shot put ball at the crime scene?”

“A fabrication created by the culprit,” Korekiyo surmised. “Are you suggesting the killer used their own shot put ball to kill Rantaro?”

“Or maybe they used a different weapon, and just smeared Kaede’s shot put with blood to make it seem like it was the murder weapon!” Angie theorized.

“Either way, whether it was another shot put or a different weapon all together, the point is that item is missing from the crime scene,” Kaede explained further.

“I see,” said Kirumi. “And the only way for the killer to remove said weapon from the crime scene was to use the room inside the hidden door, is that what you’re saying?”

“Is that even possible, though?” questioned Shuichi. “The dust I left on the card reader suggested that it was unused before and after the crime occured.”

“Shuichi...I’m about to say something crazy right now,” warned Kaede. “What if...what if the killer was already inside the hidden door by the time the crime happened?”
“Huh?” Shuichi was taken aback by the pianist’s statement.

“Hmhm,” Korekiyo said inquisitively. “An interesting point. If I may ask, what exactly are you basing this theory off of?”

“Oh, yes,” Kaede half-sarcastically said. “An interesting point. If I may ask, what exactly are you basing this theory off of?”

“Other than the fact it’s the only explanation?” Kaede said half-sarcastically, trying not to offend the anthropologist. “That’d also be a way for the killer to get the drop on Rantaro.”

“‘Oh I see!’” said Angie. “Rantaro was hit on the back of the head, so the killer must’ve sneaked up on him somehow.”

“‘And like I said before, me and Tenko were right in front of the library, so no way did anyone enter or exit from there,’” Kaito added.

“But that begs the question,” said Kirumi. “How did the killer get on the other side of the hidden door without entering it from the library?”

“I…” Kaede tried to come up with an explanation, but couldn’t find one and looked down dejectedly. “I don’t know the answer to that…”

“I do,” Shuichi suddenly said.

Everyone turned to the detective.

“And it’s an answer that I can’t believe I didn’t consider until now,” he continued.

“Hey, join the club,” Kokichi said, looking just as dejected as Kaede did a moment ago. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that either, especially since I’m the Ultimate Supreme Leader.”

“Huh?” wondered Himiko. “Are those two on some kind of magical wavelength?”

“Shuichi,” Kaede said to the detective. “What’s on your mind?”

“Based on what has been said in regards to that hidden door,” Shuichi began. “There’s a high possibility that the library isn’t the only entranceway to the hidden room.”

“Huh?” questioned Tenko. “So you’re saying there’s more than one way to get into that room besides the door in the library?”

“Yes,” answered the detective.

“Of course!” Kaede came to a realization herself. “This academy was constructed specifically for this killing game! It would only make sense for there to be more than one way to get to that hidden room. After all the mastermind would need to--”

“Mastermind?” Monokuma suddenly parroted. “Are you still going on about a ‘mastermind’?”

“It’s the only explanation!” the pianist argued. “The only explanation for why the true culprit knew about my trap, for them to use the hidden room to kill Rantaro and sneak out of the library undetected. These are the actions of someone who knows a little too much about the structure of this academy. In other words, they must be the mastermind!”

“Mastermind this, mastermind that!” the bear taunted. “Are you sure you’re the Ultimate Pianist, cause you’re playing the same tune! It’s getting awfully boring.”

“B-Boring…?” Tsumugi said warily. “D-Does that mean--”
“Look alive, everyone, because we’re back to seventy-five percent!” Monokuma shouted. “Maybe that was a poor choice of words…”

“Not good,” observed Ryoma. “He added another ten percent out of a mere suggestion.”

“That just means he’s scared cause we’re getting closer to the truth!” Kaito said confidently.

“That’s right!” agreed Kaede. “Monokuma’s only threatening us because we’re closing in on the mastermind! In that case, I agree with Shuichi’s theory that there’s more than one entrance to the hidden room in this academy.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I agree with Shuichi, too,” said Keebo. “But how are we supposed to find the location of these other hidden passageways?”

“The academy’s super huge!” Angie added. “There could be passageways everywhere!”

“We’re going about this the wrong way,” suggested Kirumi. “Rather than going by the academy itself, there’s an alternate method of determining where the other hidden entrance was used.”

“I agree,” said Korekiyo. “We’ll have a much easier time finding this other passageway if we simply analyze everyone’s actions at the time of the murder.”

“Oh I get it!” Kokichi remarked. “If we just go over everyone’s alibis again, then we’ll see who had a chance to use another hidden passageway to get to the library and kill Rantaro!”

“In that case, we should probably go over those who don’t have airtight alibis,” said Tsumugi.

“That would be Ryoma, Keebo, and Kokichi, right?” Tenko recalled.

“Uh-oh, Kee-boy,” the supreme leader said. “Looks like in our quest to prove Kaede’s innocence, we ended up being suspicious!”

“No, that’s wrong,” said Shuichi. “The very fact that you two helped me, supports that neither of you are the culprit.”

“Otherwise, they would have just let me take the blame,” finished Kaede.

“But didn’t Kokichi try to lie his way out of proving Kaede’s innocence?” questioned Tsumugi. “I remember he denied any testimony that said he helped Keebo and Shuichi.”

Kokichi suddenly sniffled in sadness, “That’s a little mean, Tsumugi…I already told you that I just didn’t want to get bullied…”

“Even if Kokichi did lie about not helping the two of us,” Shuichi explained. “It doesn’t change the fact that he did end up helping me by rolling the shot put ball from Classroom A.”

“He even seemed to go out of his way to further help in the experiment by bringing in multiple shot put balls,” Korekiyo observed.

“At any point, he could’ve just not followed Shuichi’s orders,” Kirumi also added. “The fact that he cooperated with him in the end suggests that he was willing to find the truth as well.”

“And those don’t seem like the actions the true culprit would make,” said Kaede. “If anything, they would go out of their way to hinder Shuichi’s test.”

“So then, if culprit not Kokichi...and culprit not Keebo,” Gonta put the pieces together in his head.
“Then does that mean Ryoma is culprit?”

Ryoma’s podium then positioned itself to the center of the circle as all eyes now gazed upon him.

“Huh, I suppose given my reputation, this was inevitable,” the former convict said plainly.

The aikido master took a defensive stance, “So, Ryoma, what do you have to say for yourself?”

“Wait,” Kaede halted the discussion. “Are we sure Ryoma’s capable of killing Rantaro?”

Tenko looked confused at the pianist, “What are you saying, Kaede? This degenerate went to jail for murder!”

“That’s not what I meant,” Kaede explained. “Ryoma was supposed to be in his room at the time of the murder, right? If he really was the culprit, then there should be a hidden entrance in his room.”

“Makes sense,” Maki noted. “Want to have a passageway that leads all over the academy without anyone else knowing? Just put it in your room where no one but you can enter.”

Shuichi saw the logic of the theory, but remained skeptical, “But even if there was a hidden entrance in his room, it would still be a considerable distance going from there all the way to the library.”

“Ryoma’s the Ultimate Tennis Pro, isn’t he?” said Angie. “I bet he would be able to run that distance quite easily if he wanted.”

“Just because he’s a tennis pro doesn’t mean he’s a professional sprinter!” Kaito replied. “Even if he can run fast it’s just too great a distance to get from the dorms to the library and vice versa, secret passage or no!”

“Was Ryoma even in his room at the time of the murder?” asked Himiko.

“That’s what he told me,” answered Keebo. “But I will admit, that doesn’t count for much as an alibi.”

Ryoma chuckled.

“Something amusing, Ryoma?” Korekiyo questioned.

The tennis pro shook his head, “I just find it funny how things seem to find a way of working themselves out.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” questioned Maki as well.

“It just so happens I’m able to provide at least some evidence that I was in my room,” Ryoma responded.

“You are?” asked Tsumugi.

“Indeed, Ryoma,” Kirumi said with a smile. “Who would’ve thought that Shuichi kicking us out of the library would become a blessing in disguise?”

“Huh?” Shuichi reacted to the namedrop.

“Kirumi,” Kaede turned to the maid. “Are you saying you’re able to support Ryoma’s alibi?”

“While I’m not certain if he was in his room at the time of the murder,” the maid began. “I can
certainly answer whether or not a secret passage was located in that area.”

“Oh yeah?” questioned Kaito. “How so?”

“Because I cleaned it,” Kirumi plainly stated.

“Hang on a minute!” exclaimed Miu. “Since when are you allowed in our rooms, Ms. Walking Fetish?”

“Normally never unless it’s for a specific request,” the maid explained. “But in this case, it was when I decided to check on Ryoma who went back to his room after he left the library during the investigation.”

Ryoma nodded his head as if to corroborate her statement, “Since I wasn’t allowed to investigate in the library anymore, I decided to check back in my room and see if I could find something in there that proves my alibi. It wasn’t long after that that Kirumi knocked on my door.”

“When I looked into his room, I saw that it was a complete mess,” Kirumi added. “And I took it upon myself to clean the place up.”

“Heh,” the tennis pro gave a soft chuckle again. “Back in prison, I usually had to be so neat and tidy when it came to my cell, so here in this academy it was a breath of fresh air that I didn’t have to worry about that stuff.”

“Okay, so you cleaned a messy room,” Miu summarized. “How exactly does that prove there was no secret passage in there?”

“Do not underestimate my ultimate talent,” Kirumi stated calmly. “I am very thorough when it comes to my duty as a maid.”

“You can say that again,” agreed Ryoma. “She left no stone unturned when cleaning my room.”

“Believe me, if there was a hidden passageway in Ryoma’s room, I would’ve found it,” the maid concluded.

“Okay, then maybe the hidden entrance was located somewhere outside the dorms,” Tenko suggested. “Maybe even the lobby!”

“No way would the mastermind put a hidden entrance someplace so obvious!” Kaito countered. “They wouldn’t risk the chance of other people accidentally stumbling across it!”

“So I guess that rules Ryoma out as a potential suspect…” Keebo stated.

The tennis pro stared wistfully off to the side, “Hmph, didn’t expect luck to end up being on my side. It’s a nice change of pace…”

“Welp, who’s next?” Kokichi said nonchalantly.

“Won’t be long now,” Tenko started to pump herself up. “We’re getting closer to the true culprit, I can feel it.”

“Tenko’s right,” acknowledged Kaede. “All we need to do now is go around the room and see whose alibi doesn’t match up with the new information we have acquired.”

“Oh no…” Tsumugi audibly muttered.
The rest of the students slowly turned to the cosplayer who now had a rather distressed look on her face.

“No...oh no no no...” she continued to mutter.

“T...Tsumugi?” Kaede addressed her friend warily. “Are you...okay?”

The blue-haired cosplayer suddenly turned to the pianist, as if she was shocked by the girl talking to her, “Huh!? Oh! Oh it’s nothing!”

“Nothing?” Korekiyo repeated. “My poor dear, that look on your face displays the complete opposite of ‘nothing’.”

“I-I’m telling you it’s nothing!” Tsumugi stuttered as she started to get more flustered.

“Hey, if ya got something to say then say it already!” Miu shouted at the girl.

“C-C’mon, Tsumugi,” Kaede said half-jokingly. “You’re starting to scare me, here.”

The cosplayer gave no reply to the pianist.

“Tsumugi Shirogane,” Korekiyo suddenly stated in a slow and ominous tone. “Unfortunately we are pressed for time in this class trial, so as much as we would love for you to cope with whatever’s on your mind, I’m afraid we cannot allow that.”

Tsumugi hesitantly turned to the anthropologist.


“...Very well,” the girl spoke softly. “I suppose I couldn’t keep this to myself for any longer...”

“Wait, Tsumugi,” Kaede tried to process what was happening before her. “Y-You’re not suggesting that y--”

“Gonta,” the cosplayer suddenly said. “Why do you look most suspicious right now?”

A silence filled the courtroom, not unlike the time when Shuichi first tried to prove Kaede’s innocence. As if, once again, the students needed time to process the words they just heard.

“Huh?” Gonta was understandably the first to react. “M-Me?”


Korekiyo, who before stared at the cosplayer with intensity, slowly returned to his calm normal demeanor, “Interesting. Please elaborate, if you would, Tsumugi.”

“We’re suspecting people who had a chance of using an alternate hidden passageway to get to the library, correct?” Tsumugi explained. “Gonta locked himself in the A/V room at the time of the murder.”

“Ahh!” Kirumi suddenly realized the cosplayer’s point. “So you’re saying that was when...?”


“Yeah!” supported Kaito. “I thought we ruled out Gonta couldn’t have killed Rantaro from the A/V room!”
“From the A/V room, sure,” Tsumugi answered. “But what if there’s a hidden passageway in the A/V room?”

“I see,” replied Maki. “The A/V room and library are next to each other, so it would allow easy access to and from both rooms.”

“And since they’re next to each other, it would allow Gonta to keep an eye on whatever’s happening in the library!” Kokichi added.

“There’s also the fact that Gonta locked the door to the A/V room,” Himiko also added. “That’s definitely suspicious…”

“Gonta only lock door because Gonta needed to focus!” the entomologist tried desperately to defend himself. “Gonta went to A/V room because Gonta needed to watch bug movie to fill Gonta with fight!”

“Gonta…” said Tsumugi. “That’s not gonna work anymore.”

“But it true!” Gonta shouted.

“Hang on a sec, guys?” Kaede tried to calm everyone of their suspicions. “It’s...It’s a little too early to decide if Gonta really was the culprit…”

“Kaede, you have to admit that Gonta’s looking pretty suspect right now, right?” Kokichi asked the pianist. “Look, even Shuichi’s having his doubts!”

Kaede quickly turned to the detective and noticed that he was looking at Gonta and started to sweat with uncertainty.

“Shuichi,” she said to him. “Do you really think…?”

The detective looked back at her, “We...we can’t ignore this information.”

Kaede looked around at the other students and noticed their suspicions were growing as well.

“Kaede!” Gonta addressed the pianist.

“Huh!?” Kaede responded in surprise.

“You no think Gonta is culprit, right!? he spoke in desperation. “Gonta would never kill Rantaro! Gonta only want to protect friends!”

Kaede was hesitant to answer the entomologist. If she wasn’t the true culprit of this case, that would only mean that someone else had to be. So it wasn’t out of the question that Gonta would be capable of murdering Rantaro and framing her for it. She asked herself if the entomologist’s ‘Gentle Giant’ persona was all an act and if he was truly the mastermind. After all, she needed to accept whatever painful and frightening truth came before her in this class trial.

Suffice to say, the pianist was unsure of where to proceed from here.

”It can’t be”, Kaede thought to herself. "Is Gonta...really the true culprit?"
Monokuma sighed, “We’re suspecting Gonta again? Plus five percent for unoriginality.”

Monokid gasped, “But that means we’re already at one hundred percent!”

“Do you even know how math works!?” Monosuke shouted. “We’re at eighty percent now!”

“Oh my,” said Monophanie. “Everyone better hurry and find the blackened or else this trial room’s going to be stained with everyone’s blood. Just thinking about that makes me...makes me...BLRBLRBLRBLRBLRB!”

The pink bear proceeded to vomit where she was standing.

“Monokuma just changed the time limit again,” said Himiko. “Does that mean we’re right and Gonta’s the mastermind?”

“G-Gonta no mastermind!” the newly accused denied.

“Don’t lie to us,” the mage pointed her finger at the entomologist. “Or else I’ll use my magic to take away your muscles.”

“Gonta no can be Skinny-Gonta! How else can Gonta use muscles to protect friends?”

“C’mon, let’s just start the voting already!” Kokichi whined. “Gonta is definitely the most suspicious one right now, so he’s gotta be the culprit, right?”

“Hold on,” Kaede interjected. “First off, we don’t have any proof that there is a passageway in the A/V room.”

“Well you don’t have any proof that there isn’t one, do you?” Maki countered.

“Which leads me to my second point,” said the pianist. “Me and Shuichi checked every inch of that room during the investigation, so the two of us would’ve found something related to a secret passageway.”

“And not just them,” Kaito added. “Me and Himiko were there too, so you had four set of eyes looking around in that room for anything suspicious.”

“But Gonta was there too, wasn’t he?” questioned Himiko. “Maybe he wanted to keep an eye on us in case we found the hidden passageway in that room?”

“He really didn’t do anything to hinder our investigation, though,” said Kaede.

“Maybe it’s because he knew you guys wouldn’t find anything,” replied Ryoma.

“Wouldn’t find anything?” Kaito repeated. “We had the Ultimate Detective with us. I really doubt Shuichi of all people would’ve missed anything in the A/V room.”

“That’s right!” Kaede agreed. “Shuichi found the hidden door in the library, so of course he would’ve found a hidden passageway in the A/V room, if there was one.”

“I guess Shuichi did also discover your trap and proved you were innocent,” Tsumugi also pointed out. “Gee, Shuichi, you’ve become so reliable, I’m sure we’ll discover the truth to this in no time.”
Something about Tsumugi’s words struck a chord in the detective. It was as if the fate of the other students solely rested in his hands now. Shuichi started to become nervous as the pressure got to him.

“Y...You all give me too much credit,” the detective said.

“Huh?” questioned Kaede.

“We--,” Shuichi stopped himself before continuing. “I can’t be sure if I properly checked the A/V room for hidden passageways. There’s a chance I could’ve missed something.”

“Shuichi…” the pianist lamented the detective’s uncertainty.

“C’mon, Shuichi, don’t be like that,” Kaito tried his best to motivate him. “Kirumi’s confident that there wasn’t a hidden passageway in Ryoma’s room, so you should have faith in yourself that you did all you could to search that A/V room.”

“It’s not that,” Shuichi denied. “I don’t want to make any promises I can’t keep. If there’s even a small chance that I missed the hidden passageway in that room, then I won’t deny the possibility that there is one in there.”

“Good for you, Shuichi!” Kokichi playfully encouraged. “Not leaving things to chance and using good ol’ logic to solve this case. That’s wayyyyy better than just having some blind faith!”

“You tryin’ to say something?” Kaito took offense to the supreme leader’s words.

“It’s fine, Kaito,” Kaede assured. “We’ll prove Gonta innocent some other way.”

Though she said her words with conviction, Kaede wasn’t sure how to achieve her goal. In her mind, the girl didn’t believe that Gonta was really the true culprit. After all, he spent all that time defending her, but that itself wasn’t a good enough excuse. Time was running out and the entomologist was the closest thing they had to an actual suspect, so tensions were understandably high. The pianist decided to take a page from Shuichi’s book and allowed herself to become lost in thought as the other students engaged in their non stop debate.

“Alrighty, Tsumugi!” Kokichi excitedly addressed the cosplayer. “You were the one who brought this up, so why don’t you go over Gonta’s actions at the time of the murder?”

“Well it all started when he went with Kaito’s group down to the game room,” Tsumugi started to explain. “He knew there was a hidden passageway in the A/V room so that’s why he agreed to go down there.”

“Mhmm mhmm,” agreed Angie. “And then he must’ve locked himself in the A/V room so that no one else could see what he was doing!”

“Gonta told everyone already that Gonta needed focus to watch bug movie…” the accused entomologist kept trying to defend himself.

“Yeah, yeah,” Miu dismissed his argument. “So that you could fill yourself with ‘fight’ or whatever! But in actuality, you were doing something else, weren’t you!?"

“That’s right,” confirmed Tsumugi. “After locking himself in that room, Gonta used the hidden passageway and moved from there to the one in the library.”

“So that way, he could keep an eye on whether or not Kaede’s trap actually killed Rantaro!” Kokichi followed.
“And when he saw that her trap didn’t work, you’re saying that was when Gonta killed him?” asked Ryoma.

“Yes,” Tsumugi answered. “Once he saw all that take place, Gonta entered the library from the hidden door and snuck up behind Rantaro with his own shot put ball in hand.”

“And then BAM!” Miu emphasized. “Murdered his punk ass!”

“And then he took Kaede’s ball and replaced it with his,” the cosplayer continued to explain. “Thereby, effectively framing Kaede for his murder.”

“Hold on a second,” Kaito intervened. “Me, Tenko, Shuichi and Kaede all rushed into the room as fast as we could. How come the four of us didn’t manage to see him during all that?”

“The bookcase that revealed the hidden door was closing by the time you guys went there, right?” asked Tsumugi. “That means you all must’ve barely missed him as he re-entered the hidden door.”

"There!” the pianist thought to herself as she listened to the debate. "I’ll turn this lie, into the truth!"

“Gonta can’t be the culprit!” Kaede spoke aloud.

“What?!” Tsumugi’s voice nearly cracked. “I mean...what do you mean?”

“Because I saw him the A/V room before I rushed into the library!” the pianist revealed.

“You...saw him?” Maki asked with suspicion.

“Uh huh,” confirmed Kaede. “That sliding door in the A/V room was slightly open, so I took a peek inside and saw Gonta sitting on the couch watching a movie.”

“Oh?” Angie tilted her head far to the side in curiosity. “You did?”

“Yes, that’s right,” the pianist confirmed once again.

“Well well well,” Kokichi commented. “If that’s the case, then that should prove that Gonta really was in the A/V room doing his unimportant business. Oh, but before we continue on this discussion, I have a question for Kaede.”

Kaede looked at the boy with great unease, “…What is it?”

“Oh don’t worry, I’m sure it’s nothing, but since you took the time to check the sliding door from outside the A/V room…” the supreme leader flashed his sinister smile once again. “Why is it that the photo is showing you guys enter from the library’s front entrance?”

“Oh…” Kaede realized the slight error in her logic and flinched back.

“I mean you were right across from the rear entrance if what you’re saying is true, so why go through the trouble to enter from the front?” asked Kokichi.

“Well...I...that is...um…” Kaede desperately looked for a way to explain herself out of this situation. “Don’t tell me,” Tsumugi stated worriedly. “Were you lying just now, Kaede?”

“I…” the pianist had trouble forming her words properly.
“It wouldn’t be the first time…” Himiko pointed out.

“No!” Kaede reassured. “I’m not lying! I really did see Gonta...and I wasn’t the only one!”

Kokichi reverted his sinister expression and went back to a more curious look on his face, “Oh? Is that so?”

“Yeah!” the girl continued on with her lie. “Kaito saw him too, right Kaito?”

“Huh?” the astronaut looked confused for a brief moment before recomposing himself. “Oh yeah, I did see Gonta. I nearly forgot about that!”

“Are you serious?” Miu said under her breath before raising her tone. “Are you being fucking serious?! This is, like, the thousandth time someone left out an important detail on this fucking case!”

“Gee...sorry for watching someone watch a movie,” Kaito said sarcastically.

“So if you and Kaito did, in fact, witness Gonta already in the A/V room, it stands to reason that Shuichi and Tenko saw him as well?” asked Kirumi.

“Well yeah!” declared the astronaut. “Of course those two saw him!”

Tenko nearly choked on her words, “Um...what? Are you messing with me, you degenerate? I didn’t--”

“Tenko…” Kaede looked at the aikido master and gave her big puppy dog eyes. “You saw Gonta as well, didn’t you…?”

The other girl blushed and quickly averted her gaze from Kaede’s, but despite her reluctance, the aikido master couldn’t resist giving in to the image of an adorable female.

“Uh...yeah, I guess I did see that degenerate in the A/V room…” Tenko confirmed as well.

“That answers that,” Ryoma stated plainly,

“What about you, Shuichi?” Kokichi asked the detective. “Did you manage to catch a glimpse of our currently accused in the A/V room?”

Shuichi looked towards Kaede who gazed back at him with the same pleading eyes she gave Tenko. He then turned to his side and saw Kaito give him a sort of look as if he was telepathically trying to ask the boy to play along with their lie. The detective knew that what the two were doing was a big risk. On the off chance they were wrong with their assumption, all of their lives would be lost. However, Shuichi asked himself whether putting faith in someone was a viable option for a class trial. As a detective, he always moved forward using logic.

But is logic always the right answer? Was it logic that got him this far in the class trial? More importantly, was it logic that helped him save Kaede?

Shuichi already knew the answer to that question as he once again found his resolve and spoke, “It’s just as Kaede says. I peeked inside the A/V room along with the others and saw Gonta watching his bug movie.”

“And there ya have it!” Kaito quickly supported.

"Thank you, Shuichi,” Kaede said in her mind, wishing she could say her words out loud.
“Mmm, okay,” said Kokichi. “But that doesn’t really explain why the four of you ran through the front entrance when you were right next to the rear one.”

Kaito gave a rather loud sigh of regret, “You can blame me for that one.”

“Huh?” questioned the supreme leader.

"Huh?" questioned the pianist in her mind.

“I was the one who suggested we all charge in through the front entrance,” the astronaut explained. “At the time, when we thought the mastermind was in there, I thought it would’ve been obvious for us to enter through the rear door so I told everyone to enter from the front.”

“Is that really what happened?” Maki asked with a suspicious look on her face.

“Y-Yeah!” Kaede was the first to confirm the scenario. “That’s exactly what happened!”

“Ah...yeah,” Shuichi followed. “I recall that having occurred.”

“It’s as that degenerate says!” Tenko said with conviction. “He was the one who told us to enter from the front entrance!”

Kokichi stared at the four with a blank look on his face, “I see what’s going on here…”

“Y-You do?” Kaede hesitantly said.

“Eeyup,” replied the supreme leader. “Based on what the four of you are saying...there can only be one explanation for this…”

The pianist gulped out of nervousness, preparing herself for the small checker-scarfed boy to reveal their lie.

“...Kaito’s just a big dumb idiot!” Kokichi finished.

“What?” Shuichi said in response.

“Huh?” Kaede reacted as well.

“I said don’t call be an idiot!” the astronaut gave a different sort of reaction.

“C’mon, Kaito,” the supreme leader said. “You should’ve known better than to have your group all charge in from the front entrance. You could’ve divided yourself up into two teams and enter from both entrances! Oh well, I guess we’ll chalk this blunder up to Kaito’s idiocy.”

“That does seem like the sort of mistake he would do,” Maki said nonchalantly.

“Like I keep saying, don’t call me a--”

“I’ll admit, I thought that plan was kinda weird,” Kaede quickly said.

“K-Kaede?” the astronaut questioned.

“I remember asking, ‘why not enter through the rear door?’ and Kaito told us that’s what the mastermind would expect,” the pianist continued with the charade. “Oh, Kaito, you dummy, but that’s okay, we all make mistakes.”
“Hmph!” Tenko scoffed. “That’s the last time I take orders from a degenerate. And an idiotic degenerate at that!”

“I, um,” Shuichi was having a little more difficulty playing along. “What they said.”

“Gah!” Kaito said in frustration. “So I make one suggestion and suddenly I’m a big idiot? Let’s see you guys come up with the hard decisions after this!”

"Sorry about this, Kaito," Kaede thought. "But this is all to prove Gonta’s innocence, so bear with it for now."

“So did all that really happen?” asked Himiko.

“At this point, we should assume so,” said Korekiyo. “All four of them witnessed Gonta in the A/V room which means he wasn’t in the library killing Rantaro.”

“Maybe he already killed him by then?” suggested Tsumugi.

The anthropologist wagged his finger in disagreement, “There wouldn’t have been enough time for him to murder Rantaro, organize the crime scene, and go back to the A/V room like nothing’s happened.

“So then…that means Gonta isn’t the culprit!” Angie concluded. “Good for you, Gonta!”

“Gonta happy friends manage to prove Gonta innocent again,” the entomologist gave the four a gentlemanly smile. “But…did Gonta really not notice when friends peeked into room?”

“Who cares about that?” Kokichi dismissed. “So who’s next on the chopping block?”

“Whoever it is, it better be a good one!” said Monokuma. “Cause I’m at eighty-five perceeeeeent!”

“E-Eighty-five percent, now!?” Tsumugi exclaimed.

“Then let’s not delay,” said Korekiyo. “If I may, I’d like to provide a suggestion on who to suspect next.”

“Actually, Kiyo, if I may,” Kaede interrupted. “I…I also have my own suggestion.”

The anthropologist looked at Kaede and noticed her tense look, “Very well. I’ll leave this to you.”

Kaede recapped the information in her mind, ”If it’s not Gonta...if it’s not Keebo, Ryoma, or Kokichi...then there’s someone else here who had the chance to use a hidden passageway without anyone noticing. Also...they’ve been acting weird during this class trial and I just can’t ignore that. I don’t want to suspect them...but I’m left with no choice.”

The pianist spoke aloud, “I suspect--”

“Kaede,” Tsumugi cut off the girl. “Might I say something real quick?”

“...What is it?” Kaede asked.

“I just wanted to say…” the cosplayer began. “That I’m so glad you made it this far in the class trial.”

The pianist said nothing.

“I was so worried that we would end up losing you,” Tsumugi continued as soft tears formed on the
edges of her eyes. “I couldn’t bear the thought of you dying, so...I’m really happy that you’re here right now with all of us. Let’s escape this Killing Game together, Kaede, and after that...we’ll become friends. Maybe...maybe even best friends...”

A brief silence filled the room, but was then broken by the sound of laughter. It wasn’t a loud laughter, however, it was quiet and dignified. It neither increased in volume nor did it quiet down in silence. Tsumugi looked to her side and noticed it was Korekiyo who was the source of that laughter.

Kaede observed the anthropologist as he seemed to be beside himself. Though his mask covered most of his face, he still covered his mouth with his hand, as if he needed the extra support to contain his amused state.

To the other students, this seemed like an uncharacteristic outburst from the usually stoic anthropologist.

To Kaede, however, this was all the confirmation she needed.

“Tsumugi,” the pianist pointed at the girl. “I suspect you.”
The blue-haired cosplayer held a neutral expression on her face as she stared at her accuser. Seconds passed by and Tsumugi continued to give no response. Kaede did not waver, however. She was willing to wait for eternity if needed for the other girl to say something...do something...give any sort of reaction to her accusation.

Nearly a full minute passed and Tsumugi finally gave a response. She raised her finger and looked upwards towards the ceiling, as if a light bulb shined above her head.

“Oh, I see what you mean!” the cosplayer spoke at last.

“You...see?” Tenko echoed Tsumugi’s words.

“So you’re not objecting to Kaede’s accusation?” Korekiyo immediately asked.

“I’m saying I understand where her accusation is coming from,” Tsumugi answered. “It’s because I went to the girls bathroom at the time of the murder, right Kaede?”

“The girl’s bathroom?” wondered Shuichi.

“...That’s exactly right, Tsumugi,” Kaede confirmed.

The cosplayer smiled, “Aww, good for you, Kaede. Covering all your bases so that we can get one step closer to the truth. Well then! You’ll be happy to know that I can’t be the culprit!”

“Why not?” asked the pianist.

“Hmm?” Tsumugi tilted her head in confusion. “Didn’t we establish already that the mastermind wouldn’t put secret passageways in anyplace obvious? If I were the mastermind, I certainly wouldn’t put such a thing in a place where half of the people here would frequently go to.”

“E-Even so,” replied Kaede. “Like we did with Gonta, we should look into this theory and determine whether or not--”

“Then let me ask you, Kaede,” the blue-haired student cut her off. “Since my word wouldn’t mean much in this situation, did you notice any hidden passageways in the girls bathroom when you went in?”

“Tsumugi, that’s not fair,” the blonde pianist said, becoming more distressed as the discussion progressed. “At the time, I wouldn’t have known--”

“Did you notice any hidden passageways in the girls bathroom when you went in?” Tsumugi asked again, interrupting Kaede for the second time, her tone as innocent as ever.

The pianist decided to comply and gave her a straight answer, “N...No, I didn’t. But that doesn’t mean there couldn’t have been--”

And a third time, “What about the rest of you ladies? You all went into that bathroom at least once, right? Did any of you see any sign of a hidden passageway in there?”

The female students of the academy each took a turn to answer Tsumugi’s question.
“I went to the bathroom lotsa times,” Himiko answered. “But I didn’t see any hidden passageways.”

“Me neither!” Angie gave her reply.

“I didn’t see nothin’!” Miu stated.

“Unfortunately, I didn’t see any sign of a hidden passageway in the girls restroom,” Kirumi lamented.

“No,” Maki said in her usual straightforward manner.

“S-Sorry, Kaede, but I didn’t find a hidden passageway either,” Tenko apologized.

“Nope, didn’t see one either!” said Kokichi.

“Wh-Why are YOU talking?!” exclaimed the aikido master.

“As you can plainly see, Kaede, it seems very unlikely for a hidden passageway to be in the girls bathroom,” Tsumugi concluded.

“T-Tsumugi…” the pianist did her best to approach the situation as cautiously as possible. “I understand how quickly you want to prove your innocence, but we shouldn’t just dismiss this theory right off the bat like that.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” the cosplayer retorted. “You’re no longer being suspected of murder.”

“That only means I sympathize even more with what you’re going through,” Kaede replied. “But in order for us to prove your innocence, we need to get to the bottom of this ‘hidden passageway in the girls bathroom’ scenario.”

“What’s there to get to the bottom of?” asked Tsumugi. “Everyone already said they didn’t see any evidence suggesting there’s a hidden passageway in there.”

“Hold on a second,” Shuichi interrupted the conversation. “While it may be true that all the girls here went to the bathroom at some point during our time in this academy, there’s still a possibility that a hidden passageway could be located in there.”

“What do you mean, Shuichi?” asked Kirumi.

The detective gave his explanation, “Let’s assume for a moment that there is a hidden passageway in the girls bathroom.”

Tsumugi raised her hand, “I object to this line of conversation.”

“Now, now,” Korekiyo raised his hand only slightly, to calm the girl down. “This is merely a theory. Let Shuichi finish before we determine the actual accuracy of it, shall we?”

“I...I just don’t understand why we still need to talk about this,” the cosplayer replied.

The anthropologist chuckled, “Relax, my dear. If you truly are innocent, then you have nothing to worry about.”

After a small nod from Korekiyo, Shuichi took it as a sign to continue his explanation, “Going by the assumption I previously stated, if there was a hidden passageway in the girls bathroom, where would it logically be?”
“Where would it be?” Keebo repeated to himself.

“Well I’ll tell ya where it wouldn’t be,” Miu cut in. “Any of the bathroom stalls.”

“Exactly,” agreed Shuichi.

“But...isn’t that all that’s there in the bathrooms?” Keebo questioned. “If it wouldn’t be in any of the stalls, then where else would a hidden passageway be?”

Shuichi thought to himself for a moment and then looked to a certain pianist, “Kaede, mind if I ask for your assistance?”

“Huh?” Kaede replied. “Oh, of course not, Shuichi. What’s up?”

“I was wondering if you can give us your input,” said the detective. “Specifically, besides the stalls, what else is in the girls bathroom?”

“All right, Shuichi!” Kokichi suddenly blurted out.

“H-Huh?” Shuichi questioned in surprise.

“Welp, you heard the man, ladies!” the supreme leader eagerly shouted. “Time to reveal the age-old question that’s been on the mind of men since they were boys: ‘What is in the girls bathroom?’”

“Ugh!” Tenko exclaimed in disgust. “Is that really what you degenerates like to think about?”

“C’moooooon!” Kokichi pleaded. “This is arguably the biggest mystery that we males have been trying to solve since ancient times! Though, I guess for me personally, I don’t need to know the answer to that.”

“Please stop talking,” the aikido master said simply.

Kirumi looked to the sky wistfully, “It takes so much to be a man…”

“Gonta always thought that there were dispensers that gave out cookies, and the sinks shot out rainbows!” the entomologist happily gave out his remark.

“I...I’ll admit, I’m also a bit...curious as to what’s in the girls bathroom…” Kaito hesitantly said.

A certain caretaker could only facepalm in response.

“Um...all that aside, is there anything else in the girls bathroom that could hide a hidden passageway, Kaede?” asked Shuichi.

“Besides the cookie dispensers and the rainbow sinks?” Kaede said jokingly. “Let me think.”

Kaede looked deep into her mind and visualized all the noteworthy features of the girls bathroom. It was as if there was a wall blocking those images and she needed to break it down in order to uncover the truth. If the stalls weren’t an option then there had to be another place. She pictured the bathroom in her mind and saw the sinks, the mirror, but there had to be another thing she was missing. Bit by bit, she broke down the wall covering the answer and then it came to her. A place where a hidden passageway could be hiding; a place where she herself hasn’t checked.

“The utility closet,” Kaede finally said.

“Utility closet?” Shuichi repeated.
“Ladies!” the pianist quickly addressed the female students. “Did any of you, at any point, check the utility closet in the girls bathroom?”

Similar to when they first answered Tsumugi, the female students of the academy each took a turn to answer Kaede’s question.

“Huh, I went to the bathroom lotsa times, but I guess I never did look inside that utility closet,” Himiko spoke first.

“Me neither!” Angie gave her reply.

“I had no reason to, so why would I?” Miu stated.

“Surprisingly, though I did glance inside the closet for a brief second, I didn’t investigate it thoroughly,” Kirumi lamented.

“No,” Maki said again in her straightforward manner.

“I didn’t check the utility closet either,” said Tenko.

“What a coincidence, neither did I!” said Kokichi.

“Didn’t I tell you to stop talking!?” exclaimed the aikido master.

“And I didn’t check it, either,” Kaede gave her reply.

“So you’re saying there’s a chance that a hidden passageway could be in that utility closet?” Ryoma questioned.

“Yes, I am,” the pianist confirmed.

“But that’s just a possibility right?” Tsumugi was quick to ask. “There’s no proof that there’s a hidden passageway in the--”

“And there’s no proof to the inverse as well,” Korekiyo quickly stated. “But the fact remains that this possibility is starting to become the only explanation.”

“The only explanation?” the cosplayer said in disbelief. “All I did was go to the bathroom at an unfortunate time!”

Maki scoffed, “So you’re really playing this off as a coincidence?”

“Yes, and it’s one of the worst ones I’ve had the displeasure of experiencing,” the girl responded. “You gotta believe me, I’m not the culprit!”

“I want nothing more than to believe you, Tsumugi,” said Kaede. “That’s why I’m more than willing to hear your argument.”

“Argument…?” Tsumugi echoed.

“Please, tell us why you can’t be the true culprit,” the pianist clarified. “Once you do, we’ll be able to move on and be one step closer to the truth.”

“You say that, but how am I supposed to defend myself here?” the blue-haired girl started to tremble. “All I can say is that I went in and out of the bathroom…”
“If you want, we can change the topic away from the bathroom,” offered Korekiyo.

“H-Huh?” the girl in question wondered.

“Kiyo, what are you…?” Kaede wondered as well.

“For you see, Tsumugi’s outing to the girls restroom is merely a piece of the grander puzzle of her suspicion,” the anthropologist answered.

“Wh-what!?” Tsumugi exclaimed.

“Oh-ho!” Kokichi chortled. “So you’re saying there’s more evidence that supports Tsumugi being the real culprit other than our girls bathroom theory?”

“Indeed,” Korekiyo gave a small nod in agreement.

“Wait, hang on a minute, please!” Tsumugi shouted. “I didn’t do anything else suspicious during the time of the murder!”

The anthropologist silently chuckled, “Not during the murder, perhaps. That still doesn’t explain your actions during this class trial.”

“During this class trial?” Kaede questioned.

“I...have no idea what you’re talking about,” Tsumugi denied the boy’s accusations.

“I figured that would be your response,” Korekiyo anticipated. “So I’ll just ask the rest of our associates: When Shuichi first made his claim that Kaede wasn’t the actual culprit, who was the first of us to react?”

“If I recall correctly,” said Kirumi. “That would be Tsumugi.”

“Th-That means nothing!” Tsumugi quickly rejected.

“Very well, then another one,” Kiyo countered. “Who out of all of us was adamant that Kaede’s the culprit and tried to convince everyone that it was her?”

“Kokichi!” the cosplayer pointed at the supreme leader. “It was Kokichi who went against Shuichi and Keebo to convince us that Kaede did it, right?”

Kokichi gasped, “My god, Tsumugi, you’re…you’re…”

He flashed his sinister smile, “You’re getting desperate, aren’t you?”

“No!” the girl shouted. “You’re the one who’s the most suspicious here!”

“Actually, Tsumugi, that’s you,” said Shuichi.

“Wh-Why!” Tsumugi questioned.

“Because…” the detective thought back to a moment in time. “Because your words still ring in my ears…”

“Shuichi, that’s enough!”
The detective looked to the source of the voice and was surprised that it came from Tsumugi.

Tsumugi smiled wistfully as she continued, “I know how you feel, Shuichi...I really do. Up to this point, I had grown close with Kaede. The two of us shared some pretty good memories. I don’t want her to die...in fact, had you not tried to convince us she wasn’t the culprit a moment ago, I probably would’ve spoken out as well...and try to come up with an excuse why she couldn’t have done it.”

“But that’s not what she wants!” exclaimed Tsumugi, now with tears streaming from her eyes. “She did what she did for all of us, and the least we can do is not have her suffer anymore! Let’s end this trial...for her sake...okay, Shuichi?”

“I...I thought it was weird for you to easily accept Kaede’s role as the culprit,” Shuichi explained. “Even if you were just fulfilling her wish, I can’t imagine that you wouldn’t at least try to help us prove Kaede’s innocence.”

“Especially since she considered Kaede such a ‘dear friend’”, Maki added.

“Ooh, it’s almost as if she wanted to vote for Kaede from the beginning,” Angie ominously stated.

“Less ‘want’, more of a ‘need’,” Korekiyo clarified. “Considering this was after Shuichi claimed Kaede was not the true culprit—”

“She would’ve needed to start the voting as soon as possible,” Kirumi continued.

“And she would’ve needed to do it before Shuichi revealed his experiment and proved that Kaede didn’t really kill Rantaro,” Kaito further remarked.

“But alas, that wasn’t the case...and now poor Tsumugi’s been cornered like how Kira was caught by L,” Kokichi finished.

“T-Tsumugi?” Tenko said hesitantly. “Is this true? Were you really the one who...?”

The blue-haired cosplayer lowered her head to the point where her eyes were covered by the shine of her glasses, “First of all...it was Near who cornered Kira. L had already died at that point.”

Kokichi smirked, “Gee, thanks for the spoilers, ‘Kira’.”

“You...” Kaede addressed the girl with a serious tone.

Tsumugi didn’t flinch from her position as the other students looked at the pianist.

“You...framed me,” Kaede continued with tears forming in her eyes. “I felt so much guilt for such a long time...and it was really you all along. How...How could you!? I thought we were friends, Tsumugi!”

“...Friends...?” Tsumugi muttered. “Why...in the world...would I be friends...”

Kaede said nothing and waited for the girl to finish her statement.

The cosplayer lifted her head to reveal the tears streaming from her eyes, “...with someone who doesn’t believe in me?”

“H-Huh?” Kaede reeled back at Tsumugi’s unexpected response.
“K-Kaede, please!” the girl pleaded. “Please help me! I...I don’t know what to do!”

Ryoma shook his head in disgust, “Even now, she’s still denying her guilt.”

“Well she can deny all she wants,” said Kokichi. “We vote the guilty by majority, anyway, so there’s no need for us to continue this further.”

“Speaking of which,” said Keebo. “Monokuma, what percentage are you at currently?”

“Keebo you get an A- for that question,” the bear responded. “Cause I’m at ninety percent! ...Get it? ‘A-’? ‘Ninety’?”

“Phew!” Kokichi said in relief. “Looks like we made it with time to spare!”

“I...suppose that’s that,” Shuichi concluded. “Monokuma, it looks like we’re ready to--”

“I can prove it!” Tsumugi suddenly yelled.

Everyone looked at the cosplayer.

“You can what?” asked Keebo.

“I can prove it!” Tsumugi said again. “I can prove I can’t be the true culprit!”

Korekiyo narrowed his eyes, “How?”

“Because Kaede saw me leave the girls bathroom!” the cosplayer declared. “Right, Kaede?”

Kaede’s eyes widened, “Wh...”

The pianist wouldn’t be able to finish her statement as the other students gave their own responses of disbelief.

“What are you saying?” Shuichi asked in shock.

Miu growled loudly, upset once again that another one of her associates had apparently kept silent of such an important detail of the case.

“When was this?” asked Kirumi. “When did Kaede get the chance to witness you?”

“There was a moment, wasn’t there!” said Tsumugi. “A moment where Kaede was left all alone in Classroom A! And during that time, she decided to come down and use the restroom! That’s when we bumped into each other!”

"She’s lying,” Kaede thought to herself. "But...is she lying in order to reach the truth...or is she lying to escape from her own crime?"

“Is...is this true, Kaede?” asked Shuichi. “I’ll admit, I did leave you alone in that classroom for a time, but did you really go down to the girls bathroom?”

Kaede looked at Tsumugi and saw her pleading eyes.

"She wants me to lie for her..."

“Of course she did!” said Tsumugi.

Unbeknownst to the girl and a few other oblivious students, the more “focused” students of the
Tsumugi’s claim. Korekiyo, for instance, slowly shook his head. Kirumi covered her mouth with her gloved hand, Maki closed her eyes, Keebo remained silent, Ryoma hid his eyes behind his cap, Kokichi snickered, and even Shuichi put his hand to his chin in skepticism.

“No.” Kaede simply said.

Tsumugi tilted her head in confusion, “...What?”

“No,” Kaede said once again. “That was a lie, Tsumugi. I never went down to the girls bathroom during the crime. I never saw you.”

Tsumugi slowly furrowed her eyebrows sternly, “I see...So you’re willing to defend the likes of Gonta...but when it’s me, you’re quick to point your finger.”

Kaede looked down to reflect on the event that had just transpired.

The cosplayer continued her rant, “Kaede’s suspected of being the culprit and Shuichi and Keebo come in to defend her. Then Gonta becomes suspected and Kaede comes in to defend him. But when it’s me...why would anyone come to the rescue of someone so boring and plain? No one wants those two to die, so they start accusing the person who’s the most expendable. This...this isn’t a class trial to find a murderer...it’s just a glorified popularity contest!”

“H-Hey...” Tenko addressed the other students. “Are we sure that Tsumugi’s the actual culprit?”

“What, you’re starting to doubt!?” questioned Miu.

“I’m just saying,” said the aikido master. “She looks really shaken up about this.”

“Gonta no want to see Tsumugi like this...” Gonta said with a sad expression. “Maybe it better if Gonta was culprit instead.”

Kaito clenched his fist at the conflict that appeared before him.

“Calling my beloved class trial a gloried popularity contest?” Monokuma became appalled. “Looks like we’re at ninety-five percent now.”

“C’mon, c’mon, let’s start the vote!” Monotaro hurried. “If you don’t hurry, you’re all gonna dieee~!”

“So...who do we vote for?” asked Himiko.

“Who fucking else!?” exclaimed Miu. “It’s gotta be Tsumugi!”

“But...are we really sure it’s her?” asked Tenko.

“Like I said, who else could it fucking be!?” the inventor became frustrated.

“Tenko does have a point, though,” said Ryoma. “We only get one shot at this and if we choose wrong, we’re all gonna die.”

“Who else could it be?” questioned Kirumi. “All signs point to Tsumugi as the true culprit.”

“Well we also have Gonta and Kaede to suspect,” Kokichi offered.

“What are you saying!?” shouted Keebo.
“Hey, there could be a chance that we just got lucky with those five shot puts,” the supreme leader responded. “Who knows, maybe if we dropped a sixth one, that one would’ve hit Rantaro.”

“We can’t know that for certain!” Keebo replied.

“Yeah, we can’t know that for certain!” Kokichi countered back.

“Hmm,” Monosuke adjusted his glasses. “Looks like they’re having trouble solving this murder.”

“In that case,” said Monokuma. “Why don’t we give them a little motivation, my cute little cubs?”

“Oh ho ho!” Monokid replied. “I get what your saying, Pop! I’ll start us off then!”

“96%...” the blue bear said ominously.

“T-They’re counting down!” Tenko yelled.

“Actually, they’re counting up!” Angie corrected.

“Nyeh!” Himiko squeaked. “Wh-What do we do!?”

“Please!” Tsumugi shouted. “Don’t vote for me! We’re all doomed if you do!”

“Shut up, bitch!” Miu spat. “You ain’t making the call on this one!”

“97%...” Monosuke said ominously.

“If it alright with everyone,” said Gonta. “Gonta will vote for Gonta!”

“Gonta you don’t need to do that!” Kaito shouted.

“M-Maybe I’ll just close my eyes and pick someone at random...” Himiko said out loud to herself.

“Himiko, please don’t do that!” Tenko shouted.

“Ooh, that sounds like a fun idea, Himiko!” Angie complimented. “I want to try that too!”

“No! No! Stop!” the aikido master tried to halt the two’s actions.

“98%...” Monophanie said politely.

“Guys, we can’t be disorganized like this!” Kaede shouted through the chaos.

“Oh?” Kokichi turned to the pianist. “Then what do you think we should do, oh fearless leader?”

After a slight pause, Kaede quickly spoke once again, “Vote for me if you need to!”

Shuichi couldn’t believe what he heard, “K-Kaede! What are you...!??”

“It’s okay, Shuichi,” Kaede assured the detective. “Because I know the mastermind, and all they want is to have this killing game continue no matter what, even if it means convicting the wrong person!”

“Oh?” Kokichi took note of the pianist’s words.

“So vote for me!” Kaede continued. “But after you do, please...check that utility closet in the girls bathroom!”
“HUH!?!” Tsumugi reacted.

“Check the bathroom, check the A/V room, check anywhere where there might be a hidden passage!” the pianist declared to the other students.

“99%!” Monotaro shouted ominously.

“Kae no need to sacrifice herself!” said Gonta. “Everyone! Vote for Gonta! If it no matter who culprit really is then Gonta will be shield for rest of you!”

“Gonta…” Kaede was moved by the entomologist’s words.

“Okay, are we voting for Tsumugi?” asked Miu. “Are we voting for Gonta? Kaede? Who the hell are we voting for!?”

“Whoever it is, we need to do it NOW!” Kaito’s face darkened in fear.

“M-Monokuma!” Shuichi hastily shouted. “We’re ready to start the--”

“ONE-” Monodam began in a slow monotonous tone.

“We’re too late!” Tenko yelled.

“-HUNDRED-”

Kaito screamed in fear.

“PERCEN--”

“PAUSE!” shouted Tsumugi.

Monodam stopped suddenly.

“Huh?” questioned Himiko. “He just stopped.”

Monokuma also kept still for a brief moment before tilting his head, “...ninety-nine percent...ninety-eight percent…”

“Huh?” the mage questioned again. “He’s counting down.”

Kaede, however, had other things on her mind, “Tsumugi...that outburst just now…”

All eyes turned to the blue-haired girl in question, who once again had her head lowered and her eyes hidden.

“You know the mastermind…?” Tsumugi muttered the pianist’s previous words. “It doesn’t matter who the culprit really is…?”

The cosplayer scoffed as she continued, “Offering to sacrifice yourself...Asking everyone to check the girls bathroom...I always knew you had this self-righteous personality, but who knew it would end up being this bad? Even if this is supposed to be who you are...I just can’t…”

Tsumugi raised her head to look Kaede straight in the eye, revealing the furious anger displayed on her face, “I JUST CAN’T HELP BUT HATE YOUR CHARACTER ARCHETYPE!!!”

Kaede recoiled at the cosplayer’s outburst.
The blue-haired girl continued with her tantrum, “AT THE START, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SAID YOU WOULDN’T GIVE IN TO THE KILLING GAME, AND YET YOU PLANNED TO KILL SOMEONE! ISN’T THAT ENOUGH TO DECLARE YOU GUILTY!? SO WHAT IF SOMEONE TRIED TO FRAME YOU!? FACT IS THAT RANTARO NEVER WOULD’VE DIED IF YOU DIDN’T PLAN YOUR LITTLE MURDER TRAP! YOU’RE A SHAM! A LIAR! AND ALL I DID WAS TRY TO EXPOSE YOU FOR THE HYPOCRITE THAT YOU ARE!”

Her words echoed throughout the room until it slowly faded into silence.

And from that silence, Korekiyo spoke up, “Are we to take this as your confession, then?”

Tsumugi said nothing.

“I think...we can take that as a yes,” said Ryoma.

“We better hurry,” warned Himiko. “Cause there’s still the time limit--”


“Nyeh?” the mage squeaked. “Zero?”

“I suppose that means...we have no time limit to worry about,” said Keebo.

“In that case,” Shuichi spoke. “I’ll use this time to summarize the case. Will you help me, Kaede?”

“You want me to help?” the pianist asked the detective.

“Yes,” answered Shuichi. “We wouldn’t have been able to discover this truth without you, after all.”

Kaede took a moment to react to Shuichi’s words before she happily nodded her head, “Y-Yes! Of course I’ll help!”

With the two composed and ready, Shuichi and Kaede both shouted in unison:

”This is the truth of the case!”

The detective began the closing argument, “As previously deduced, it was indeed Kaede who set up the murder trap that was supposed to kill the mastermind. But what we didn’t realize, was that another trap was being set up in tandem with Kaede’s, and it was during the investigation when I had discovered this ‘other trap’. It all began in the library where Kaede and I had just finished establishing everybody’s alibis. All that was left to do was question a certain someone on their ability to disguise themselves as anyone. This person...would be a true culprit of this case. After the culprit dragged Kaede out of the library to prove their innocence, I was left alone in that room. With nothing better to do, I decided to check the body once again. There, I saw the murder weapon: the shot put ball. It was at that moment, I realized that there was someone who had the opportunity to obtain the murder weapon and keep it hidden until the moment of truth arrived: Kaede Akamatsu. From there I further discovered the entirety of Kaede trap. Fearing the worst, I took it upon myself to test out the trap and see for myself whether Kaede was truly the one who killed Rantaro. I tried to convince Miu, Ryoma and Kirumi to allow me some privacy in the library, and after making a deal with Kirumi, they were willing to let me have the room. The deal in question? Having Kokichi as my partner. I instructed Kokichi to take the murder weapon and roll it from Classroom A. Surprisingly, he complied and left the library to follow my orders. Little did I know, he set up his own plan into action.”
Kaede proceeded to continue the closing argument, “During this time, the culprit had just finished showing me why they couldn’t been the one who murdered Rantaro. The two of us exited the girls bathroom and we were on our way back to the library. That would’ve been the end of it had we not noticed a certain someone walking along the halls of the academy with the murder weapon in hand. Me and the culprit stopped Kokichi and started questioning him on why he was carrying the murder weapon around. He told us that he had discovered something peculiar about the murder weapon, and that the culprit left a piece of evidence behind at the warehouse that would incriminate them. At the time, I had thought that I was the true culprit in Rantaro’s murder, so naturally I thought that I was the one who left a piece of evidence behind. What I didn’t realize, however, was that the true culprit also felt nervous at Kokichi’s claim and the two of us offered to go with him to look for this ‘incriminating evidence’ in the warehouse, not knowing we both fell right into his hands. Once the three of us entered the warehouse, Kokichi put his ‘prank’ into action. He walked into the room first and pretended to trip. He then proceeded to fall onto all of the sports equipment, thereby making a mess of the warehouse. His plan worked too well as that commotion caused the Monokubs to appear. They scolded both me and the culprit and ordered us to clean the warehouse. During that time, Kokichi fled from his spot and grabbed five shot put balls before leaving the warehouse. With this, he was able to accomplish two things: obtain multiple shot puts and delaying the culprit from entering the library.”

Shuichi continued, “After getting the shot put balls from the warehouse, Kokichi finally went to Classroom A. There, he saw Keebo and ordered him to assist me in the library. With this, I was able to have someone corroborate the results of my little experiment. Once Keebo entered the library and Kokichi ready in Classroom A, it was time for the test to begin. We started with one shot put ball and results showed that it didn’t fall to where Rantaro was supposed to be. Then we tried another one. The results were the same. Finally Kokichi rolled three balls at once, and they all showed the same results. Five-out-of-five times the shot put balls missed their mark, which led me to one conclusion: Kaede wasn’t the actual culprit. But with this revelation, what actually happened during Rantaro’s murder?”

Kaede continued, “The night of the incident, Shuichi and I were in the 1st floor classroom. We were waiting for the mastermind to trigger the trap we set in the library. Around that time, there were four people in the dining hall, including the true culprit. After the motive was given, they knew that I had been planning something...but the culprit wanted some insurance. They would take action, if needed. The culprit excused themself from the dining hall and went to the bathroom. And from there, to the hidden room in the library that only the mastermind could enter. And there...they waited. With less than an hour before the time limit was reached, Rantaro moved the library’s bookcase...which set off the receiver Shuichi was holding. Shuichi ran out of the room, and I rolled my shot put ball into the air vent. At the same time, Rantaro was lured by the flash of the hidden camera I had set. He unwittingly stepped right into the path of the shot. The shot rolled down the path I had made, and then...fell right onto Rantaro’s head, killing him instantly, or so we thought. It turns out, that was just what the true culprit wanted us to believe. In actuality, my murder plan happened way differently. My shot put ball didn’t actually hit Rantaro. The true culprit saw that my plan failed, and stepped in to finish the job. The culprit jumped out the hidden room and attacked Rantaro from behind. And in their hand, the real murder weapon-their own shot put ball. Rantaro wasn’t killed by my shot, but the true culprit’s. They picked up my shot and left their shot put ball at the scene. My shot put ball in hand, they returned to the hidden room. Their crime complete, the true culprit went back through the hidden passageway. The hidden passageway led from the hidden room all the way to the girls bathroom on the first floor. While they were pretending to use the bathroom, they were actually using the hidden passageway. There was only one person who could’ve seized this opportunity at the time of the murder.”

Kaede and Shuichi both pointed at the true culprit who, as if they were a villain in an anime, adjusted
their glasses and gave the two a scowling look.

“This was your lie, wasn’t it?” said Shuichi.

“This was your ultimate lie to frame me, Tsumugi Shirogane, the Ultimate Cosplayer!” Kaede finished.
Utter silence.

This was the only response that Tsumugi could give after all that had transpired.

“Say something,” Kaede demanded.

The pianist waited for the accused to respond to her. Though she was able to solve the mystery of Rantaro’s murder, there were still questions that remained; questions that needed answers.

Tsumugi remained silent as she kept looking towards the floor with a scowl on her face.

“Say anything,” Kaede demanded once again.

She would receive no reply, however.

After a few moments of dead silence, Monokuma decided to take charge, “It seems our dearly accused is a bit tongue tied. In that case, let’s take it away, my adorable children!”

“Oh, we’re doing this for reals?” Monotaro questioned. “Well then, looks like the--”

“Looks like the debate’s finished, so that means it’s Voting Time!” Monophanie finished for the red bear.

“Alright, you bastards! Press the button in front of you to cast your vote!” Monosuke continued.

Monokid raised his guitar in excitement, “And make sure y’all vote, cause refusin’ to vote is grounds for termination!”


All the robotic bears raised their paws in excitement, “It’s...VOTING TI--”

Suddenly, a flash of white swift passed Tsumugi and the image of the blue-haired girl no longer appeared behind her podium. Instead a person with strawberry-blonde hair tied in pigtails dressed in a black cardigan, a white tie, and a red miniskirt stood in place of the cosplayer.

“Hey, are you sure about this?” the new person spoke.

“Oh?” Monokuma’s attention was grabbed.

“Wh-Who the hell is this!!” asked Kaito.

“A-And what happened to Tsumugi?” Kaede questioned further.

This new mysterious person merely ignored the comments from the other students and stared directly at Monokuma.

“Well?” the pigtailed girl spoke again. “Are you able to handle what will come afterwards, if they
vote for Tsumugi Shirogane?"

The black and white bear returned the gaze at the new girl. There was a brief moment of silence
between the two before he finally responded.

“Let me ask you something,” Monokuma began. “Do you know what makes a Killing Game great?”

Though the bear presented a question, he didn’t give any time for there to be a response as he
continued, “It’s not just about the murders, the trials, or even the punishments. I could care less about
the blood...the depravity...all of that is merely par for the course. Do you want to know what truly
makes a Killing Game great; the thing that really tickles my fur when watching one? It’s the
anticipation of the unknown.”

“The unknown?” the girl questioned.

“Sometimes, things don’t always go according to plan, as you of all people should know,”
Monokuma explained. “And in this delicate situation, it could very well spell the difference between
life or death. That goes for the participates, but the same goes for me as well. And in this moment,
every single person standing in this room is anxiously waiting for what comes next, because once I
give the word to start the vote, we’ll all receive a one-way ticket into the unknown.”

Kaede listened intently at Monokuma’s little monologue. Not just her, but the rest of the students
didn’t have it in them to interrupt him either. They had every right to ask questions, to make any sort
of remark, but no. They all stood there listening to the bear’s words, trying to understand their
meaning.

“Does my reasoning satisfy you?” Monokuma asked the mysterious girl. “I am fully capable of
handling this Killing Game, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

The pig-tailed girl took in Monokuma’s words and gave herself a moment to think.

“...Of course that’s what I’m worried about...” the girl spoke. “After all, I...I...”

Suddenly another flash of white zipped passed Tsumugi’s podium and the image of the mysterious
girl instantly changed back into the familiar cosplayer.

“I LOOOOOOVE THIS KILLING GAME!” Tsumugi cried out in joy.

“T-Tsumugi!?” Kaede reeled back in surprise at seeing the blue-haired girl once again, but noticed
one key difference about her.

The other students as well took notice as they saw Tsumugi’s eyes were now a complete bright
shade of blue and there were noticeable bags under her eyelids. Shuichi in particular noticed that
despite the vibrancy, it was as if the life faded from her pupils.

“Wait...what happened to that other girl?!“ Kaito questioned.

“Now, now,” Tsumugi raised both her hands in dismissal. “You’ll all get a chance to ask your
questions, but only after we finish with the proceedings!”

“Puhuhuhu!” Monokuma laughed. “You’re right! I think this trial has been delayed long enough!”

“PUHUHUHU!” Tsumugi returned the laugh. “Exactly! Who will be chosen as the blackened? Will
you make the right choice, or the dreadfully wrong one? IT’SSSSSS VOTING TIIIIIIIME!”
In an instant, all the screens attached to everyone’s podiums turned on simultaneously. There, it presented the students with a choice of who they thought the blackened of this case was.

Kaede hesitated for a moment as the reality of the situation hit her. She came into this trial thinking it would be herself whom she would’ve voted for. Instead, as if through some divine intervention, she was spared of her initial fate. Now, a new truth has entered the light, one that she never would’ve guessed, had things played out according to plan. The pianist found her resolve and chose the person who she knew was the true murderer of Rantaro Amami. Once she made her choice, the screen declared an announcement as it seemed everyone else had made their decision as well.

“Puhuhuhu,” said Monokuma. “It seems everybody made their vote. Let’s see the results.”

Another screen lowered itself into the trial room for all the students to see. The screen lit up to display the results of the voting and showed a unanimous vote for Tsumugi Shirogane.

Suddenly, the screen changed to display the verdict, and to most people’s relief, the screen displayed a flashing image of Tsumugi’s face, confirming once and for all that she was the true culprit.

Monokuma instructed everyone that they were free to remove themselves from their podiums. All the students placed themselves in various positions around the trial room, as if to create a more casual atmosphere after all that had transpired.

“Well well well, looks like you guys got it right!” the headmaster declared. “The killer of Rantaro Amami, the Ultimate hehBlehBLEH, is Tsumugi Shirogane, the Ultimate Cosplayer!”

Rather than say a word, Tsumugi chose to glance upwards at nowhere in particular with her index finger raised.

Monokuma could only chuckle at the girl’s nonchalant response, “Y’know, as an added bonus on completing your very first class trial, I’ll say this as well: The mastermind that you guys are so eager to find...is also Tsumugi Shirogane!”

Kaede’s eyes widened. Though the pianist had her suspicions before, to hear it straight out of the mouth of Monokuma was a different story.

“N-No way…” Tenko responded in disbelief.

Himiko started to sweat, “Y-You’re saying that Tsumugi...is the mastermind?”

Before anyone else had time to process this information, Kaede swiftly approached the cosplayer, who was still staring off into the distance with a complete disinterest at the conversation at hand.

“Tell us how to get out of here,” Kaede said to her.

...Utter silence.

The pianist would have none of that as she immediately grabbed the lapels on the blue-haired girl’s uniform and forced Tsumugi to look her in the eye.

“Tell us how to get out of here!” Kaede demanded.

Tsumugi turned to face her, “Oh, my apologies, Kaede, it’s actually a bit of a bad habit of mine.”

“What is?” Kaede immediately cursed herself for humoring the girl with that response.
The cosplayer smiled, “It’s nothing serious, I just \textbf{tend to ignore people that particularly annoy me.}”

The pianist breathed in angrily. She let go of Tsumugi in fear that she herself would do something drastic to the cosplayer in retaliation.

Seeing this, Shuichi decidedly took the pianist’s place in questioning the blue-haired cosplayer, “Tsumugi, we caught you as the mastermind red-handed. This Killing Game is over.”

Tsumugi turned her head towards the detective, “The Killing Game is over, you say? Hmm...that can’t be right…”


The cosplayer raised her index finger as if to give an inquiry, “I believe it’s Page 6 in the School Rules section of the Handbook that says ‘The killing game and class trials will continue until only two surviving students re—”

The girl was cut short, however, as Maki rushed in and proceeded to grab Tsumugi by the neck and started choking her.

“Stop. Fucking. With. Us,” the child caregiver said slowly and clearly.

The blue haired girl, on instinct, grabbed Maki’s wrists in an attempt to free herself from the girl’s grasp.

Tsumugi attempted to speak despite her current condition, “This...seems...a bit...redundant...wouldn’t you...say...?”

“She has a point,” Ryoma interjected.

“Excuse me?” Maki said to the former tennis pro.

“We exposed her as the blackened, didn’t we?” Ryoma explained. “That means she’s going to be executed.”

“But wait...Tsumugi wouldn’t let herself get executed just like that...would she?” questioned Keebo.

Maki, realizing her actions were leading nowhere, begrudgingly released her grip on Tsumugi as the latter started coughing for fresh air once she did.

“Yeah!” agreed Miu. “If she’s the fucking mastermind, she could control how this Killing Game goes. Why the fuck would she choose to die?”

“Because that’s how a killing game is supposed to be!” Tsumugi happily responded, eyes as demented as ever.

“Eeeugh…” Miu flinched back in disgust.

“So what you’re saying is that even the mastermind has to follow the \textbf{rules of the killing game}?” asked Kokichi.

“Of course!” answered the cosplayer.

“I see…” the supreme leader put a finger to his chin and backed off for the time being.
“H-Hold on,” Gonta took this opportunity to speak his mind. “Gonta still have trouble believing Tsumugi is mastermind!”

“The fuck do you mean, you giant bugbrain!?” exclaimed Miu. “Monokuma himself said so!”

“Miu’s right, Gonta,” said Tsumugi. “I’m the mastermind, plain and simple.”

“But...Tsumugi is supposed to be friend of Gonta,” the entomologist lamented. “Why...why would Tsumugi create killing game and trap us here?”

“Why?” Tsumugi repeated. “I already said it, didn’t I? It’s because killing games are so much fun!”

“Tch,” Maki scoffed at the girl. “So it’s only because you’re insane.”

“There’s more to it than insanity, I feel,” said Kirumi. “How else is one lone girl able to create an entire academy specifically for a killing game?”

Kaito shrugged, “I dunno, maybe she just has a lot of money?”

“Ah yes, the rich aristocrat living out her demented desires,” Korekiyo theorized. “That may also be supported by her fixated obsession over video games and anime.”

“So you’re saying that she’s watched anime and played video games to the point where she’s trying to recreate their scenarios?” Kirumi questioned.

“Aww, now let’s not blame all this violence on video games and anime!” Tsumugi argued. “I thought we were more progressive than that!”

“Then how?”

Tsumugi turned her head to see that Kaede was ready to question her once again.

“How were you able to create all this?” the pianist continued her interrogation. “To create Monokuma, the Exisals, or the End Wall? How did you manage to trap us all in here in the first place? What about all of our lost memories?”

Tsumugi could only smile at the poor pianist, “Oh Kaede, I bet you’d love to hear the answer to all those questions wouldn’t you? Luckily for you, if you progress far enough into this Killing Game, you’ll probably get the answers that you’re looking for!”

“So you do intend to have us continue this Killing Game…” said Kaede. “Even if you’re not around to witness it…”

The cosplayer nodded her head, “Thankfully a mastermind isn’t really necessary for a killing game to function properly. I’ve placed my hopes and desires to one I can trust the most!”

And on cue, Monokuma decided to jump into the conversation, “Thaaaaaat’s right! Don’t you worry, kiddos, you’re looking at an expert of keeping the killing game on the straight and narrow path!”

“Ah, speak of the fluffy devil!” Tsumugi said happily.

“And speaking of keeping things on track,” the bear began. “It’s nearly time for us to proceed with the best part of the class trial!”

“Oh, ooh!” Monokid shouted excitedly. “You’re talking about the execution, aren’t you, Pop!?”
“Of course he is!” Monosuke confirmed. “That’s the part that rakes in the big bucks for us!”

“Oh dear...I don’t like this part at all,” Monophanie said sadly.

“Is it because of all the blood?” asked Monotaro.

“That...and also we’ll probably have to clean up the mess afterwards, too...” the pink bear stated.

“Wait!” Kaede exclaimed. “I still have more questions!”

“If it’s anything about how to escape this place or how I was able to do all of this, don’t expect an answer out of me,” Tsumugi was quick to respond.

“But...But...” Kaede tried desperately to think of a way for Tsumugi to tell them anything useful.

“Ooh, I have a question!” Angie raised her hand.

“Yes, Angie?” Tsumugi said rather politely, as if she was imitating a school teacher.

The artist tilted her head, “What was that thing earlier, where you changed into a completely different person?”

“Hey yeah, I nearly forgot about that!” exclaimed Kaito.

“I bet you were using transformation magic, right?” Himiko pointed an accusatory finger at the blue-haired girl.

“No, that was just my cosplay,” Tsumugi said bluntly.

“C-Cosplay?” Shuichi questioned in disbelief.

“D-Don’t screw around with us!” Kaito matched Shuichi’s surprised state. “Like hell that was just some cosplay.”

“Of course it’s not ‘just some cosplay’, Tsumugi argued back. “It’s MY cosplay. As in, the cosplay befitting someone with the title ‘Ultimate Cosplayer’!”

“Fascinating,” Korekiyo said in admiration. “It wasn’t just the appearance, but your voice changed completely as well. Had you not been the person you are now, I would’ve loved to have a moment where I could analyze the specific aspects of your talent.”

“With you, Kiyo...probably not,” Tsumugi said jokingly. “Anyone else have any questions?”

After a pause from the rest of the students, Monokuma took it as a sign that no one else had a question they’d like to ask. At the very least, a question that anyone would hope would get answered by the increasingly secretive mastermind.

Right when Monokuma was about to declare the beginning of the blackened’s punishment, he noticed a hand slowly raising from within the group of students.

“I have a question,” Kokichi finally said.

“Oh?” observed Tsumugi. “This should be interesting.”

Kokichi shrugged in response, “Well, it’s sort of a question-sort of an observation kind of thing. It’s just, I couldn’t help but notice...you really love this Killing Game, don’t you, Tsumugi?”
“Of course I do!” Tsumugi said almost obsessively as if to further emphasize her point.

“Was that all you wanted to say?” questioned Kaede.

The supreme leader ignored the pianist and continued on, “I mean, you really really REALLY love this Killing Game, right?”

“Yes, of course!” the cosplayer continued to smile.

“And that’s why you confessed to the crime back then, right?” asked Kokichi. “Y’know, when Monokuma was doing his final countdown?”

Tsumugi’s joyful smile slowly started to fade as the girl was trying to determine where the boy was going with his questions. Nevertheless, the cosplayer saw no outright concerns in answering.

“Well, yes,” she responded. “That is why I chose to do that in the end.”

Kokichi laughed in relief, “Of course that’s why you chose to do that! You had to make sure the Killing Game continued, riiight?”

And like a flip of a switch, Tsumugi’s smile returned, “Y-Yes! I needed to make sure the Killing Game continued!”

“I understand completely!” Kokichi shouted in joy. “You worked hard to prepare this Killing Game for us to participate in, it would’ve sucked if the game had to end so prematurely.”

“Yes! Yes!” the cosplayer started to shout in complete euphoria. “I couldn’t let the Killing Game end on the first murder! Not when there was so much potential that could be explored!”

“Yeah! Yeah!” the supreme leader did his best to match the girl’s enthusiasm. “Games are no fun if they end too soon! You would do anything to continue this Killing Game, even if it meant your own life!”

Tsumugi laughed in triumph, “Exactly! I’m so glad you understand me, Kokichi!”

Kokichi returned the laugh, “Of course I understand you! I understand everything now!”

But slowly his laughter started to die down, “Well...there’s actually one thing I don’t understand. I’m wondering if you can help me out with this, Tsumugi?”

“Of course, Kokichi, what is it you want to know?”

Kokichi smiled, "Why did you decide to frame Kaede for Rantaro’s murder?"

Tsumugi’s smile vanished completely from her face, “H...Huh...?”

The supreme leader turned away from the girl and addressed a different person, “Actually, I have a better question for Monokuma!”

The bear in question, ever so curious, decided to take the bait, “Go on.”

"What would’ve happened had we voted for Kaede like we all initially planned?"

Chapter End Notes
Terribly sorry about the delay. I took this time to decide where exactly I want this story to go from here, so hopefully I'll regain my usual momentum. Next chapter will mark the end of the first "chapter" of the overall story.
“What would’ve happened, you say?” Monokuma repeated the question that was asked of him.

“Mhmm,” Kokichi nodded his head. “Had we all voted for Kaede to be the blackened instead of Tsumugi...what would’ve happened next?”

“I-Isn’t it obvious…?” the black and white bear stuttered for a brief second.

Noticing this, Kaede took a step closer at the conversing headmaster and student, curiosity ever-so increasing.

“Not really,” the supreme leader answered the bear. “I wouldn’t be asking, otherwise.”

Monokuma, who seemed to be growing more and more fidgety, looked back and forth at Tsumugi and the rest of the students whose eyes were now all fixated on him.

“It’s not that hard, Mr. Headmaster,” said Kokichi. “Just say who would’ve died and who would’ve lived.”

“Well, if you guys voted for Kaede…” Monokuma began. “Then she would’ve...uh no wait, uh, Tsumugi...no actually everyone else would’ve…”

Seeing the bear stumble over his words gave Kaede a terrifying realization. She slowly walked toward Monokuma, with only one question on her mind.

“Wait,” said the pianist. “If everyone had voted for me, and we never found out that Tsumugi was the actual murderer...would you have executed me after all that?”

“W-What?!” Monokuma became incredulous. “Of course not! If you were voted as the blackened, then I would’ve executed everyone EXCEPT Tsumugi!”

“Is that right?” said Kokichi.

“Of course that’s right!” Monotaro butted into the conversation.

“What, you think this game’s bein’ run by a bunch of unprofessionals?” Monosuke added.

“That is right,” said Monophanie. “We here, in this academy, take great pride in following the rules to ensure a safe and fair Killing Ga--”

“So why did you frame Kaede for Rantaro’s murder?” Kokichi immediately asked Tsumugi.

“AW SON OF A BITCH!” Monokid could only yell.

The cosplayer in question could only smirk at the supreme leader, “You think you’re so clever, don’t you?”

“Well, I mean, your options for excuses are easily refutable,” Kokichi said as he gave her an innocent smile. “For instance, had you said you did it so you could have an easier way to ‘graduate’ from the class trial as the blackened…”

“...Then why didn’t you just take the First Blood Perk when you had the chance?” Shuichi stepped in and finished Kokichi’s thought.
The supreme leader smiled at the detective, “Heyyyyy, not bad, Shuichi. Maybe you and I ARE on some magical wavelength.”

“I knew it!” said Himiko.

“There’s also the fact that she’s so passionate about this Killing Game,” Kirumi also pointed out. “I find it doubtful that she would risk ending the game so early even if she went through such lengths to start it in the first place.”

“Touche’,” responded Tsumugi.

“So then…” Gonta began. “The reason Tsumugi frame Kaede for murder…”

“It seems our suspicions were well warranted,” Korekiyo said as his expression turned dark. "Monokuma and Tsumugi were indeed willing to break the rules of the Killing Game and had planned for Kaede to be executed.”

At that moment, Shuichi felt a twinge in his heart. Had he not discovered Kaede’s trap during the investigation, he would be in a completely situation than he is now. One where Kaede would’ve been voted off as the blackened and Tsumugi getting away with her crime.

“I can’t believe it…” Kaede muttered. “This would’ve been for nothing. Rantaro’s death...this class trial...It would’ve been all for nothing.”

“But that didn’t happen!” Monokuma happily stated. “You guys managed to solve the crime and find the TRUE murderer! So technically no rules were broken at all!”

Kokichi shook his head, “Nope, the implication is damning enough. You were willing to break the rules of the Killing Game, that much is clear.”

The accusations were starting to take a toll on the robotic bear as he grew more agitated, “Oh yeah? Fine! You’re right, I’m willing to break a few rules of this Killing Game, so what? I’m the goddamn headmaster of this academy! What exactly are you gonna do about it!?”

The supreme leader shrugged his shoulders, “Guess I'll die.”

“H-Huh?” replied Kaede.

“Aww, giving up already?” Monokuma taunted.

“Not exactly,” said the small purple-haired boy. “I’m just refusing to play.”

“Refusing to play?” Tsumugi echoed.

Kokichi sighed, “Y’know, I was willing to go along with this Killing Game...I really was. I mean, it’s kinda fucked up, but I appreciated how much thought went into it. Now that I know the rules are pretty much nonexistent, there’s really no point in playing. Why would I play a game that’s rigged from the start?”

And from his words, the rest of the students were starting to see the supreme leader’s point.

“Hey, yeah!” Tenko shouted. “If you were willing to break one rule, who’s to say you’re not willing to break more of them!?”

“Then what’s even the fucking point of playing this game!?” exclaimed Miu. “I thought we were
supposed get a fair chance of escaping!"

“T-There is a fair chance for some of you to escape!” said Tsumugi who was slowly becoming more flustered.

“Is there?” asked Maki. “For all we know, there might not even get to be two survivors cause you’ll probably just kill them too, when it’s all said and done.”

“Oh, the old horror movie cliche’ where everyone dies in the end!” said Angie.

“S-So, you’re saying it’s all pointless, then?” questioned Kaito. “It doesn’t matter what we do, because those two are just going to screw things up for us!”

“Now, now let’s not make any dangerous assumptions, here!” Monokuma said, doing his best to calm the situation. “I’m still willing to follow the rules of the Killing Game. For instance, since you all successfully caught Rantaro’s murderer, the rules say that there’s some retribution to be called for!”

“Ah yes!” Tsumugi said excitedly. “The punishment!”

“Punishment?” Kaede repeated to herself.

“Don’t worry, everyone, seeing the blackened get punished will make you all feel a lot better!” the cosplayer continued.

“But the blackened,” said Ryoma. “Isn’t that you?”

“So?” the blue-haired girl replied. “Sure, I framed Kaede on the chance I’d get to continue this Killing Game as the secret mastermind, but I’m still willing to die for this game if the situation calls for it.”

“You are one crazy psycho bitch…” Miu stated under her breath.

“And speaking of ‘die’,” Monokuma spoke. “I’ve prepared a special punishment for Tsumugi Shirogane, the Ultimate Cosplayer!”

Tsumugi gasped in excitement as her face began to flush red in pleasure, “Ah! Here it comes...the best part of the class trials!”

“W-Wait, dammit!” Kaito shouted. “There’s still so much you need to answer for!”

“Good luck, everyone!” Tsumugi called out to her fellow students. “I hope you all have a joyous and wonderful killing game!”

And with the cosplayer’s final words, Monokuma held his stomach in boisterous laughter, “Let’s give it everything we’ve got! It’s...PUNISHMENT--”

“NO!” Kaede shouted at the top of her lungs.

Her yell reverberated around the trial room, managing to stop even Monokuma in his tracks.

The bear was not amused being interrupted, “Well that was certainly loud and annoying. Got something you want to say, Akamatsu?”

“You can’t execute Tsumugi,” Kaede told Monokuma directly to his face.
Tsumugi looked at the pianist, matching Monokuma’s unamused state.

“Oh really?” questioned the robotic headmaster. “And why not?”

Kaede paused for a brief moment. Standing in front of the being that had complete control over everyone’s lives made her understandably nervous. Nevertheless, the girl mustered every ounce of her courage to stand up to the bear.

“You and Tsumugi both broke the rules of this Killing Game…” Kaede started.

“I think we established that quite clearly,” Monokuma said sarcastically. “That’s why I’m executing Shirogane!”

“The execution is what the both of you want!” the pianist countered. “That is NOT a punishment!”

“Hey, I’m just following the rules of the Killing Game from here on, toots!” the bear argued. “Isn’t that what you’ve all been yelling at me about?”

“Not until you’ve paid a price that satisfies everyone here!”

Monokuma scoffed, “Okay, Akamatsu, I’ll play along. What, pray tell, would you prefer as a punishment for the both of us instead of me just executing Tsumugi Shirogane?”

Kaede’s expression turned serious. It was the most serious that anyone’s ever seen from her.

“Let her live,” she said simply.

The bear gave her a pause.

The cosplayer gave her a pause.

Even the rest of the students were quite shocked at Kaede’s proposal.

“I beg your pardon?” Monokuma finally replied.


The pianist turned her head at the laughter she heard coming from the blue-haired cosplayer.

“Even now, you’re still expressing that self-righteous attitude that I absolutely despise,” Tsumugi said as she approached Kaede.

The pianist said nothing as the cosplayer inched her self closer and closer until the two were face-to-face staring each other down.

“You think by sparing me, that will make up for all you’ve done?” asked Tsumugi.

Again, Kaede continued to stay silent, only giving her opponent a stern gaze.

“Or...do think that by some miracle,” Tsumugi continued on. “I would eventually tell you all that I know regarding this Killing Game? Is that why you want Monokuma to spare me?”

“Are you afraid that might actually happen?” Kaede responded back at the cosplayer.

Tsumugi furrowed her brow, “You realize I don’t care either way what happens to me, right? If I live, then I’ll get to witness my beloved Killing Game for that much longer. If I die, then I’ll die
Knowing that the Killing Game has proceeded as intended. You can’t win with these options.”

“I don’t care,” Kaede replied. “These are my terms.”

“Puhuhuhuhuhuhu!” Monokuma laughed. “‘Terms’? Terms for what? You talk as if you have all the power in this matchup! Why the hell should I even listen to you in the first place?”

The pianist shrugged her shoulders, “Guess I’ll choose death, as well.”

Tsumugi nearly stepped back in surprise, but managed to quickly recover from it while giving Kaede a mocking smile, “Do you think your life is valuable to us, or something? Just because I want this Killing Game to continue, doesn’t mean it’s enough that you’re able to use your own life as a bargaining tool. This game can go on even if it loses one extra student.”

“What about two?” Shuichi suddenly said.

“Sh-Shuichi?” Tsumugi stuttered as she looked at the boy.

“Shuichi…” Kaede muttered.

Kokichi leaned his head from behind the detective, “Hi there. It’s me, Kokichi, who already offered his life earlier rather than play this unfair game.”

Tsumugi looked at the two new students who were willing to sacrifice themselves and looked back at Kaede, who looked back at her with a confident smirk.

“Three people isn’t enough to stop this!” the cosplayer shot back angrily.

“Four,” Ryoma stepped forward.

A sweat started to form from the blue-haired girl’s forehead.

“It’s already been a pain getting this far,” said Himiko. “Maybe it’s better to just give up right now.”

“Fuck it!” Miu yelled. “If there’s no point in trying to survive, then we might as well rip that bandage off early!”

“Ah, excellent!” Angie said happily. “I already prayed on everyone’s behalf to Atua, so He shall be most pleased to meet you all!”

“If this is what everyone truly desires, then of course I am also willing to offer my life,” Kirumi complied.

“I suppose this isn’t the worse outcome…” Keebo said reluctantly. “At least we’ll die together as friends.”

“Agreed,” said Korekiyo. “I am truly moved at the camaraderie I’m witnessing. If this is indeed my last moments on this earth, I am satisfied that I got to see humanity’s true beauty.”

“G-Guys, c’mon,” Tsumugi said nervously. “Life is precious, y’know? You shouldn’t be so willing to throw it all away for nothing…”

Maki approached the cosplayer and gave her a dark glare, “I’d rather die seeing a frown on your face than living on seeing you die with a smile.”

The blue-haired girl gulped.
“Wait guys,” Kaito interrupted. “She’s got a point. We can’t just accept death so easily.”

“See?!” Tsumugi nearly jumped up in excitement at the astronaut’s response. “Kaito gets it! He’s willing to continue this game as long as it means he gets a chance to live!”

Kaito raised an eyebrow, “Who said anything about playing this game? I’m talking about one last stand against Monokuma!”

“W-What?” questioned the cosplayer.

“You heard me!” the astronaut exclaimed as he pumped up his fists. “Sure it’s a lesser chance of survival, but at least I’ll go out fighting rather than dying the way you want me to!”

“Gonta will fight too!” the entomologist proudly declared. “Gonta will use massive body to protect as many friends as he can!”

“I’ll show you dumb robots that my Neo-Aikido is not to be taken lightly,” Tenko said as she prepared a fighting stance.

“Well, you heard them, Monokuma,” Kaede said to the bear. “This is our answer.”

Monokuma remained silent as he looked back and forth at the events unfolding before him.

Tsumugi, however, was less stoic, “N-No…this can’t….you all have to…”

“What wrong, Monokuma?” asked Kokichi mockingly. “You were gonna do this before, weren’t you?”

“Yeah c’mon!” Kaito shouted. “Just bring out the Exisals or whatever, and let us fight!”

The Monokubs, as well, observed the scene with a slight hint of nervousness emanating from them.

“Woof,” Monotaro breathed out. “This is looking bad…”

“Oh c’mon,” Monosuke scoffed. “They’re just bluffin’. No way they want to die so easily!”

“B-But if you’re wrong, that means this room’s gonna be filled with everyone’s blood real soon!” Monophanie warned.

“Wait, if everyone dies and this game’s over…” said Monokid. “What the hell happens to us!?”

Monodam paused before speaking, “…EARLY-RETIREMENT…”

At this point, everyone started talking over each other, demanding for Monokuma to end this Killing Game by any means necessary.

“C’MON!” Kokichi shouted with a big smile on his face. “Just do it, coward! Kill us, already!”

“Yeah!” Miu shouted as well. “At this rate, I’ll die from suspense before you kill me with an Exisal!”

Tsumugi was at a loss for words. She had lost complete control over the situation and now whatever happened next was up to Monokuma to decide.

“Well, Monokuma?” Kaede once again addressed the headmaster.

“So I just have to spare Tsumugi?” the black and white bear finally spoke.
The students ceased their bickering at Monokuma and took in what he had just said.

Kaede didn’t respond as she waited for Monokuma to continue speaking.

“That...Those were your terms, were they not?” Monokuma asked the pianist.

Kaede looked back at her fellow students to see what their reactions were. They all gave curious glances at one another before all of them turned to the pianist and gave her a quick short nod of affirmation.

“Yes…” the pianist responded. “Those are my terms.”

“Wait!” Tsumugi yelled as she ran towards Monokuma. “You can’t possibly agree with that!”

The headmaster raised his paw to halt the girl, “My paws are tied here, sweetie. They called my bluff. There’s no way that this Killing Game can end so early. At the same time, I can’t have my students think they have no chance of winning this game. They’re right, it’s unfair and just plain unethical!”

“But sparing the blackened!?” Tsumugi exclaimed. “It’s unheard of! It’s unprecedented!”

“It’s my terms,” Kaede finished.

Tsumugi glared daggers at the pianist and approached her once again, “Rantaro’s death will go unavenged! Are you fine with that!? Do you want his death to be for nothing!?”

“Rantaro would want nothing more than to have every one of us survive this Killing Game!” Kaede yelled back at the cosplayer. “For better or for worse, keeping you alive will give us that opportunity.”

“I’m. Not. Telling. You. SHIT!” Tsumugi emphasized. “Between this and your death trap, this is BY FAR the worst idea you could possibly have!”

“What are you so afraid of!?” asked the pianist. “I thought it didn’t matter either way whether you lived or not?”

“You can’t have a class trial without the blackened being punished!” answered the cosplayer. “It’s like watching only the first half of an anime’s two-cour season!”

“Now...I didn’t say there wasn’t gonna be any punishment…” Monokuma suddenly said.

The two turned to the headmaster as he gazed at the floor with a dejected expression.

“Huh?” wondered Monotaro. “Is there still gonna be a punishment…?”

“Whaat?” questioned Monosuke. “But if youse is gonna spare Tsumugi…”

“...Then who the hell is gonna be on the chopping block!?” Monokid finished his brother’s thought.

Monokuma took a deep breath and slowly raised his head, ”...Me.”

All five of the Monokubs flinched back in terror.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-” Monotaro stuttered.

“BLRBLRBLRBLRBLRB!” Monophanie threw up.
“WHAT IN THE ACTUAL FUCK!?” Monokid exclaimed.

“Y-You can’t be serious!?” Monosuke said in disbelief.

“BUT-WHY-FATHER?” Monodam could only ask.

“Because I have abused my power as headmaster of this academy,” Monokuma explained. “In my quest to organize a successful Killing Game, I was willing to break the rules. That shouldn’t be something a leader does…”

“But Daddy!” exclaimed Monopanie. “The best leaders are the ones who abuse their power!”

“Sorry, my cubs, but the public has spoken. When it comes to Killing Games, one must be prepared to pay the price. Even if that one is a coordinator such as myself.”

“B-B-B-But, who’s going to be the headmaster of the academy if you’re going away?!” asked Monotaro.

“I think you mean ‘headmasters’!” exclaimed the black and white bear excitedly.

“Huh?” questioned the red bear. “Y-You mean…?”

Slowly, Monokuma’s expression became one of somber pride, “I’m placing my wish on the five of you. From here on out, you Monokubs are in charge of this academy.”

The pupils from behind Monosuke’s glasses widened, “W-We’re in charge…?”

“Shiiiiit!” Monokid exclaimed. “I know I should be pumped for this...but...but...SHIIIIIIIT!”

“Monokid’s right, Daddy!” said Monopanie with tears in her eyes. “We can’t accept this role if it means we have to lose you!”

“Enough!” Monokuma shouted. “I raised you cubs to be much stronger than that!”

The rest of the Monokubs proceeded to form tears in their eyes as well.

“B-But...Pops…” Monosuke sobbed.

The father of the Monokubs looked down on the floor once again, on the verge of tears, himself, “Promise me...promise me that you’ll all do your best...to make this a fun and fair Killing Game.”

“D-Daddy!” Monopanie cried.

“FATHERRRRR!” Monotaro shouted in despair.

From the group of Ultimates that were witnessing this scene unfold, one student was engaged in the moment as well and had tears streaming down her face.

“M-Monokumaaaa!” Tsumugi cried. “It...It should’ve been me instead of youuuuu!”

“I don’t know what the big deal is…” Ryoma said nonchalantly. “He’s probably just gonna come back like he did before…”

“Alright!” Monokuma said as he composed himself. “As newly appointed headmasters of this academy, you have a job you need to do!”
Monotaro sniffled, “...Yes...Father...”

“C’mon, now!” he encouraged. “This will be the first and last time I get to see you cubs do this, so let’s make this a good one for everyone here!”

“R...Right, Daddy-o!” Monokid yelled, amping himself up.

Monokuma turned to the students, “Especially YOU, Kaede. I want you to see this nice and clearly now...”

The pianist felt herself shiver at Monokuma’s ominous tone. Whatever were to happen in a few moments, she had a feeling she wouldn’t like it.

“Now then...” Monotaro began. “Let’s get started...”

“We have...” Monophanie hesitated before continuing. “...A very special...punishment...prepared for the Ultimate Despair Headmaster-”

“AND ULTIMATE DADDY!” Monokid added in.

“...Monokuma...” Monosuke finished.

“W-Wait, wait a second!” Tsumugi called out. “Monokuma, please, don’t...”

“Tsumugi, you better not lose,” Monokuma told the girl. “You can’t lose to those Ultimate students! I know you can beat them!”

“LET’S-GIVE-IT-EVERYTHING-WE’VE-GOT!” Monodam declared.

“It’s...PUNISHMENT TIIIME!” all five of the Monokubs cried out.

“I believe in you!” Monokuma shouted desperately. “So please, believe in yourself...Okay? It’s a promise.”

From atop the judge’s seat in the trial room stood the Monokubs. They each gave each other a short nod to prepare themselves for their first duty as headmasters of the academy. Monotaro proceeded to grab a gavel and smash it upon a giant red button.

Suddenly, the screens from within the room turned on and displayed a moving image showing pixelated versions of the Monokubs dragging away Monokuma with the message:

GAME OVER

Monokuma has been found guilty. Time for the punishment!

With the screen quickly shutting off, the students prepared themselves for what they were about to witness. Monokuma, though trying to remain composed, was also sweating bullets for what’s to occur.

And in the blink of an eye, a collar attached to a rope, gripped itself onto Monokuma’s neck area and dragged him out of the room. His tiny paws tried to grab the collar in a desperate attempt to get out of it...

...but he knew it was futile.

The screen once again turned on to display what appeared to be a title card, as if the execution
needed that extra bit of glamour.

‘Monokuma’s Grand Finale, Ultimate Despair Headmaster Monokuma’s Execution: Executed’ was what the title card displayed.

Monokuma found himself within an abandoned city. He walked around the empty streets as he was seemingly alone. Just then, from an alleyway he heard a noise. The bear cautiously turned his head to the source of what he heard. He readied himself for whatever was to jump out at him from within that alleyway.

The alleyway was completely empty, however.

Monokuma lowered his guard and sighed a breath of relief, only to turn around to find a mob of Monokuma’s all lined up and staring at him. Normally the former headmaster would’ve been glad to join them in their mob mentality to raid, pillage, or whatever their goal was. Monokuma had a suspicion that the army of bears weren’t gathered for that.

No...they were after him.

Monokuma ran away from the army as fast as he could.

“But why run?” he asked himself.

He knew what this was, so why was he trying to run? Perhaps it was merely an instinct that all sentient creatures have for themselves, to try and live no matter how bleak the circumstances. Maybe through some miracle, he would actually manage to escape from this execution and prove himself to be the true headmaster of the Killing Game.

Suddenly, a small explosion bursted in front of him. Monokuma looked up to see that there were Monokumas dressed in military gear throwing bombs directly at him.

The fleeing bear looked back to see the Monokumas slowly catch up to him as well. Merely running was not going to work in this situation. Monokuma saw one of the buildings in the city was open and hastily ran inside. Luckily the building’s entrance was lockable so the bear proceeded to confine himself from within it. With the murderous army locked out from his location, Monokuma took this moment to take in his surroundings. He appeared to be in a hospital. How he would get out of this situation, he had no idea, but at least he was able to take some time to assess his current predicament.

That time was cut short as a giant Monokuma head with small arms and feet crashed into the room from the ceiling. Monokuma, gazing at his new opponent, took a step back before finally running from the creature and into the hospital’s hallway. The giant Monokuma gave chase by rolling itself in an attempt to crush the former headmaster.

Once again, Monokuma ran as fast as he could, but the seemingly endless straight hallways of the hospital weren’t helping. Like an action scene in an adventure movie, Monokuma was running out of options as this giant boulder-like automaton was closing in on him. What worked once could prove to be beneficial for a second time as Monokuma dove into one of the rooms in the hallway, narrowly avoiding the ‘Ball Monokuma’. He breathed in and out heavily, but his moment of peace would be cut short once again.

From within the closet of the room, popped out another Monokuma. Its appearance, however, was completely disfigured and indistinct of its original model. It moved around on all fours with its elongated limbs, one of its eyes was bulging out from its head, and it sported a creepy toothy grin.
that was different from the sharp smiling chompers that the usual Monokuma models would have.

Monokuma shrieked in fear and immediately ran into another room from across the hallway. He immediately locked the door and found himself in a completely empty room.

He wasn’t alone either.

Two of his darling children were present in the room with him: Monodam and Monokid. Both were holding a device, what appeared to be megaphones, in each of their paws.

They took aim at their father and fired.

Each shot that came from the megaphones cause extreme pain to Monokuma, and each of them wasn’t the same kind of pain. One shot paralyzed Monokuma where he stood, another caused him to burst into flames, one even made him do a dance. The former headmaster pleaded to his cubs with his eyes to just end it already. In any other circumstance, they would’ve been happy to oblige, but this time wasn’t it.

It was time for the grand finale.

The ceiling opened up and another collar attached itself to Monokuma, dragging him away to a completely different location.

After what seemed to be an eternity, Monokuma was finally lowered onto some solid ground. The room he seemed to be in was dark, and his footing seemed unstable. What was much more worrying to the bear however, was the fact that the collar was still attached to him. He looked to his side to see two more of his kids, Monophanie and Monosuke, were both gripping a rope. Upon closer inspection, he realized the rope was the one that was attached to his collar. The two cubs pulled on the rope and made Monokuma stand on the very tiptoes of his feet. It was then Monokuma got a clear view of what he was standing on: a set of giant piano keys.

The lights of the room turned on to reveal a giant auditorium filled with Monokumas. Monokuma, himself, was set upon a stage with a giant piano, whose cover was protruding with giant spikes.

In front of the stage, on his own little platform, stood Monotaro dressed in his finest tuxedo. He needed to look his best for both the audience and his father because this would be the performance of a lifetime...literally.

Monotaro began conducting and the other two Monokubs, operating the rope as if it was like a pulley system, guided their father’s flailing body from one key to the next. The tune they were attempting to perform was ‘Flea Waltz’, albeit quite poorly due to their unorthodox method of playing the piano. The melody began slow, but gradually increased in speed as Monokuma struggled from his position, desperately trying to get the collar off. The song continued on, faster than it originally started as if someone hit fast forward on the remote until the tune was completely unrecognizable. Monotaro conducted as fast as he could. He conducted faster and faster and faster and faster until the performance finally came to an end.

Hanging in the middle of the stage was Monokuma’s lifeless body. Despite those circumstances, however, the audience of Monokumas applauded the performance. They threw bouquets and other lavish awards at the hanging figure. Monotaro, as well as the other four Monokubs, gave a bow of appreciation to the audience as the curtain fell...and so did the spiked cover of the piano…

...crushing Monokuma into a thousand pieces.
The Monokubs returned to the trial room in an emotional wreck.

“Fatherrrrrr,” Monotaro whimpered.

“C-C’mon...guys...we can’t...cry like this…” Monokid said in between sobs.

“At least...the worst part’s over,” said Monosuke. “But we can’t falter...not now!”

“He’s right, brothers!” Monophanie said raising her paws in the air. “We mustn’t let our Daddy’s wish die in vain!”

“That’s right!” exclaimed Monotaro. “Father would want something else to die, instead.”

Monosuke nodded in agreement, “Exactly! It’s our duty as the new headmasters of this academy to ensure a successful…”

“FUN!” Monotaro added

“EXCITING!” Monophanie added.

“SEXY!” Monokid added.

“AND-FAIR-KILLING GAME!” Monodam finished.

“Then what are we waiting for?” Monotaro shouted excitedly. “Let’s become the best headmasters that Father would be proud of!”

“Yeah!” the Monokubs cheered in unison. “SO LONG, BEAR WELL!”

And with that declaration, the five bears left the room.

Kaede stared in disbelief to what she had just witnessed. The other students, as well, had similar shocked expressions on their faces, but the pianist, in particular, felt the blunt force of that execution’s performance.

“Th...The way he died at the end…” Kaede spoke as she fell to her knees. “That…”

The rest of her classmates hesitated to speak. They, too, had an idea of what the message was that Monokuma wanted to send the girl.

One student, however, wasn’t gonna leave anything up to interpretation.

Tsumugi laughed. It began slow but eventually grew into a maniacal laughter.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA, YES!” the cosplayer screeched. “THAT BIT AT THE END WITH THE PIANO? THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE YOU, KAede AKAMATSU!”

Kaito stepped forward on the verge of stopping the demented girl, but was stopped by Kokichi.

“Wasn’t that amazing!?” Tsumugi continued on. “With that, now the Killing Game can TRULY begin! And it’s all thanks to you, Kaede!”

“What are you talking about!?” exclaimed Shuichi. “Kaede is innocent!”

The blue-haired girl turned to the detective, “She was the one who gave me the opportunity to kill Rantaro in the first place! If she had never planned her death trap, I wouldn’t have been able to frame
her. You hear that, Kaede? Maybe if you had just been an obedient assistant to Shuichi back then, Rantaro would still be alive!”

“I swear to god, if you don’t stop…” Kaito warned the girl.

The astronaut didn’t get a chance to finish his thought as he was interrupted by Kaede’s scream.

The pianist wailed in despair at all the events that had unfolded throughout this case, from Rantaro’s death to Monokuma’s execution. The weight of it all finally collapsed on top of her.

“I’M SORRY!” Kaede screamed. “I’M SO SORRY FOR EVERYTHING I’VE DONE!”

"Kaede..." Shuichi muttered sadly.

Some of the more kinder students, such as Gonta and Keebo, looked away not bearing to witness this depressing state of their mutual friend. Others merely pitied her with at least a sympathetic look on their faces.

“I...I just wanted to save everyone!” the pianist’s face was completely drenched in tears. “If...I knew what would’ve happened...I WOULD’VE NEVER DONE IT…I’M SO SORRY, RANTARO! I’M SO SORRY!”

The detective, having seen enough, approached his friend, ready to comfort her. However, another person walked in front of him towards the girl and cut the detective off before he had the chance.

Kaede, still sobbing, looked from her position to see Maki standing above her.

“M...Maki…” the pianist said. “Please...forgive m--”

The child caregiver proceeded to slap Kaede hard across the face.

Shuichi’s eyes widened, “M-Maki! What are you...?!”

“Hang on, Shuichi,” Kaito said as he halted the boy.

Kaede, whose cheek was now bruised in red, sat frozen in her position processing what had just occurred. She slowly turned her head back at the twin-tailed girl, who was glaring straight at her.

“No more apologies,” Maki began. “We know what you did and why you did it.”

“H-Huh...?” the pianist muttered.

“H-Huh...?” the pianist muttered.

The caregiver continued, “Apologizing repeatedly won’t do anything to get us out of this situation. You said that you would do everything in your power to get us out of here. Isn’t that still your goal?”

“B-But what am I supposed to do?” asked Kaede.

Maki bit her lip and hesitated before speaking again, “Y...You managed to reveal the mastermind like you wanted…That’s certainly more than any of us have done these past few days.”

“But Rantaro!” Kaede exclaimed. “It doesn’t change the fact that I played a part in his death!”

“You made a call,” Maki responded. “If it’s something you regret then make it up to us...make it up to him, by fulfilling your promise. You can’t give up yet.”

The twin-tailed girl proceeded to offer Kaede a hand, to help the girl up from her kneeling position.
To the pianist’s surprise, she saw a slight sympathetic smile on the caregiver’s face.

“We know you’re not the enemy, here,” Maki simply stated.

“Maki…” Kaede said, nearly bewildered at the girl’s kindness.

Regardless, the pianist accepted the child caregiver’s hand and picked herself from off the floor. Maki nodded at the girl to confirm her resolve. Kaede responded by clutching the girl in a tight embrace.

“Wh…!” Maki unintentionally squeaked as she was surprised by the pianist’s sudden action.

And in an instant, as if sensing the other girl’s discomfort, Kaede let go and simply returned the smile that Maki gave her.

“Thank you, Maki,” said Kaede.

The twin-tailed girl cleared her throat as if to clear the air of the awkward atmosphere, “Don’t mention it.”

Once again, a certain student would take it upon herself to ruin the mood.

“Aww, what a heartwarming moment between two loving friends,” Tsumugi taunted. “If this weren’t already a Killing Game I’d assume I walked right into a Yuri anime!”

The two girls narrowed their eyes at the cosplayer.

“No but seriously,” the blue-haired girl went on. “I’d expect nothing less from Maki to comfort someone in their time of need. After all...you really are the ‘Ultimate Child Caregiver’.”

Tsumugi smirked at the two and for a brief second, Maki’s eyes widened at the cosplayer’s last statement.

The blue-haired girl, however, felt a hand on her shoulder as she turned around to see Kirumi standing right behind her.

“That’s enough out of you,” said the maid. “It’s about time we head back to the academy.”

“But Tsumugi is mastermind, right?” questioned Gonta. “Wh...What we gonna do with her?”

“For the time being, I’ll keep watch of her for the rest of the night,” Kirumi suggested. “We’ll decide where to go from here in the morning.”

“But what about the hidden room in the library?” Keebo also asked. “Shouldn’t we check up on that as soon as possible?”

“For all we know, the Monokubs are already putting up roadblocks in our way from ever entering that room,” Ryoma lamented.

“It’s...It’s been a long day,” said Shuichi. “I think we all deserve a good rest after all we’ve been through.”

The rest of the students made short comments of agreement and decided that they should retire for the night as most of them made their way to the elevator. Shuichi, himself, was about to leave the room as well before he felt a tug on his sleeve. He turned to see Kaede was the one who gripped his
shirt, indicating that she didn’t want him to leave just yet.

Tsumugi, who was led by Kirumi, looked back at Kaede one last time.

“This isn’t over, Akamatsu,” the cosplayer warned. “You’ll regret sparing me. I’ll **make sure** you regret sparing me. Someone will die…and it will be because of me.”

Kaede didn’t bother responding to her former friend.

“Hey…” Kaito said as he approached Tenko and Korekiyo. “I just wanted to thank you guys for…y’know, defending Kaede with me and Shuichi.”

“Don’t get too comfortable, you degenerate!” Tenko replied. “The only way you’ll get me to cooperate with a male is if there’s a female that needs help.”

The astronaut chuckled, “Yeah well, thanks all the same.”

“Think nothing of it,” said Korekiyo. “To tell you the truth, my suspicions of Tsumugi increased as the trial went on. So naturally, I concluded for Kaede to be innocent.”

“I’ll admit,” said the aikido master. “Your help was very much appreciated, Kiyo. I doubt that we would’ve been able to successfully accuse Tsumugi if it weren’t for your observations.”

“What’s this?” Kaito said jokingly. “Are you warming up to ‘degenerate males’ now, Tenko?”

Tenko turned red in embarrassment, “‘L-Look, between Shuichi and Kiyo both playing a big role in proving Kaede’s innocence….maybe my opinion on degenerate…on males has changed ever so slightly.”

“My, my,” the anthropologist noted. “Coming from you that is certainly high praise. I will cherish your words with the utmost care.”

“Hah!” Tenko heartily laughed. “You play your cards right, I might even be willing to train you as a disciple in Neo-Aikido!”

Korekiyo thought deeply at the girl’s words, “Hmm…perhaps an opportunity that I shouldn’t let go to waste…”

Soon, all of the students exited the trial room until it was both Shuichi and Kaede left.

After a moment of silence between the two, Kaede spoke, “They don’t trust me anymore.”

“It’s like Maki said,” Shuichi replied. “They know why you did it. You’re not a killer in their eyes.”

“Still,” the pianist looked down dejectedly. “It will be awhile before they believe in my words again.”

Shuichi gripped both Kaede’s shoulders and looked her in the eye, “That’s why you need to show them. Show them that they were right to trust you…that they can still trust you. Like I do.”

Kaede gazed back at the detective’s eyes, “You…still trust me?”

He smiled, “I do.”

And in an instant, Shuichi found himself in a tight embrace similar to the one Kaede gave Maki. A clear blush emanating from across his face as he found himself unsure of what to do.
“Thank you, Shuichi,” Kaede whispered to him softly. “Thank you for everything that you’ve done.”

Hearing her words, Shuichi’s eyes widened at a realization. She was here. Forces beyond his control did their damndest to prevent her from surviving this day...and yet she was here.

And it was all because he took a second look at the murder weapon.

A tear nearly escaped from Shuichi’s eye as he returned the hug, “You’re welcome, Kaede.”

The two continued their embrace. It was as if both of them knew that they needed to cherish this moment because something will soon come along and annihilate their happiness.

“I wish there was some way I could pay you back,” said Kaede.

“You don’t have to do anything,” Shuichi responded.

“I want to,” the girl simply stated. “Even if it’s something little, I want to...I know!”

Shuichi looked to see Kaede’s face light up at that small epiphany. She smiled at the detective and slowly leaned her head towards his.

The boy’s eyes widened bigger than they ever did. Shuichi blushed furiously as he was unsure of how to respond to this situation.

But just like that, the implications would prove to be unfounded as Kaede merely leaned in to whisper in his ear.

Shuichi listened intently to what the girl had to say. His eyebrows raised in response as he leaned his head back to look at Kaede, who was waiting for his reply.

“S...Sure,” said the detective.

Kaede smiled as she ended the two’s long embrace, “Thank you, Shuichi. I’ll be waiting, then.”

And with that, the pianist made her way towards the elevator to return to the academy.

Shuichi remained in the trial room, thankful for managing to make it this far. As he was about to exit the trial room, himself, the boy heard a voice.

“...o close...”

The detective turned and to his surprise, saw Kokichi was still in the room, staring intently at the judge’s chair where Monokuma once sat.

“What did you say...?” asked Shuichi.

The supreme leader turned to the detective and gave him a big smile, “I said that was too close! Could you imagine what would’ve happened if the Killing Game ended just like that? Whew! That would’ve been no fun!”

Shuichi looked at the boy confused, “Wait...that’s what you’re worried about? You just don’t want the game to end so soon?”

Kokichi laughed, “I was worried for a second, y’know? I thought that this game truly was rigged and that we had no chance of playing it fairly. And because of that, the game itself would’ve had to end.
But now that we managed to catch all the cheaters involved, we can continue the game as intended!"

“Kokichi, you can’t be serious when you say you want this game to continue,” said the detective.

“Didn’t I tell you already, Shuichi?” the supreme leader responded. “I take things one hundred percent seriously one hundred percent of the time!”

“Is that why you denied that you helped me when I was first trying to defend Kaede?”

“Hmm?” Kokichi tilted his head.

“That lie you told when you said you didn’t help me test out Kaede’s trap,” Shuichi explained. “That was all for the sake of playing the game, wasn’t it?”

The supreme leader laughed mischievously, “I told you I wanted things to be entertaining, didn’t I?”

“What you did was reckless!” Shuichi exclaimed. “If Kaede had been voted at that moment, she would’ve--”

“Let me ask you, Shuichi,” the boy interrupted. “What would you have done if Kaede was voted off as the blackened?”

The detective paused at Kokichi’s words, “Wh...What would I have done…?”

“Yeah,” Kokichi affirmed. “Knowing what you knew, what would you have done afterwards, if Monokuma willingly executed Kaede for Rantaro’s murder?”

Shuichi gripped his fist tightly. He did not want to think about living in that world for even a second.

“I suppose,” the detective began. “I would’ve done everything in my power...to find the truth of this Killing Game...and save everyone. Just as she would’ve wanted.”

Kokichi raised his eyebrow, “Well, gee, that’s kind of a boring answer...but I guess that's fine. Be happy, Shuichi! You saved the damsel! You won! And hey, you even managed to give me an entertaining trial like we agreed!”

Shuichi sighed, “Right...our deal…”

“So things are pretty much square between you and I!” Kokichi said happily. “Hell, I’ll tell you what, if you need my help again, I’ll gladly give it to you. No strings attached, no payback necessary, I’ll be willing to help you pro bono.”

“Th...Thanks, Kokichi,” said Shuichi genuinely. “That does mean a lot…”

“Alright, alright, I think we witnessed enough mushy stuff today,” Kokichi said as he handwaved the moment away. “You have somewhere you need to be, ri iiiight?”

Shuichi’s eyes widened once again, “R-Right! Um, I’ll see you later, Kokichi.”

The detective ran off towards the elevator, leaving the supreme leader to be the last student in the trial room.

Kokichi narrowed his eyes as he once again stared at the judge’s chair.

After all that had transpired during the class trial, it was no wonder that night had already reached the
academy. Though he was quite fatigued, Shuichi made his way inside the halls of the main building and headed upstairs. Eventually, he reached his destination. For some reason, the detective was quite nervous and he himself wasn’t too sure why, but at the same time...he was excited.

The detective found his resolve and knocked on the door of the Ultimate Pianist’s Research Lab. With a creak of the door, he was greeted by Kaede.

“Shuichi!” the pianist said happily.

“Hi!” the detective said rather awkwardly. “Here I am…”

“Please come in,” Kaede said as she guided him into the room. “Have a seat.”

Shuichi did as told and placed himself on one of the chairs as Kaede made her way to the grand piano.

“P-Please forgive me if I don’t bring my A-game,” Kaede said bashfully. “A lot has happened and...you know…”

“O-Oh, I understand completely!” Shuichi said matching the girl’s shyness. “Just to have a chance listen to you play at least once is enough for me.”

Kaede gave him a warm smile. Something about seeing the Ultimate Detective act so shy and nervous felt...comforting to her. Her worries started to fade away as she readied her fingers.

“Ready?” the pianist asked her audience.

Shuichi smiled and nodded his head.

And there she played the song she had promised him: ‘Claire de Lune’ by Debussy.

The detective listened to her performance as he closed his eyes.

“"It’s a soothing song that calms your heart, like the moon’s reflection on water…” Kaede said as she gently place her hand on top of Shuichi’s.

Shuichi said nothing as he looked down at the girl’s hand.

"You noticed, huh?” said Kaede. “Yeah...I’m shaking too. But...I’d be a mess if you weren’t here. I wouldn’t have been able to do anything...I would’ve been so lost...I’m glad you’re here with me Shuichi. With you by my side, I feel like I can stand up to anything. You give me the courage I need to take on the mastermind. So please...be more confident.”

“I’m glad you’re here with me, too, Kaede,” Shuichi thought to himself. “I promise...I’ll work harder to help you...to help all of us get out of here.

As the pianist continued her performance, both parties in the room had a content smile on their faces. With this moment, however brief it was, they knew that they were ready to take on whatever challenges lie ahead.

And they would take on those challenges together.

Chapter 1: Her Class Trial, Our Class Trial
Surviving Members: 15
In a hidden area within the academy, the Monokubs had all gathered together.

“So then,” Monosuke began. “We all brought the ‘stuffs’?”

The other Monokubs nodded their heads and each pulled out a flashlight as the yellow bear did the same.

And all at once the five bears smashed their items onto the floor, leaving a scattered mess of metal and glass.

“That takes care of that,” said Monosuke as he clapped his paws clean.

“You sure this is the best option?” asked Monophanie. “These things were a very important asset to us…”

“We’re supposed to create a fair and fun Killing Game, aren’t we?” argued Monokid. “Thanks to that bitch basically being useless to us now, why should we stick with her plan?”

“It wouldn’t be very fair if we followed her narrative right after she was caught as the mastermind,” concluded Monotaro.

“But what are we supposed to do for a narrative, now?” questioned the pink bear.


“Monodam’s right,” agreed Monotaro. “As of this moment, all eyes are on us to get this Killing Game back on track.”

“Geez,” Monosuke lamented. “This Killing Game certainly deviated from where we wanted it to…Dammit, Pops, you sure left us with a heavy responsibility…”

“Don’t worry,” the red bear assured. “Monodam and I talked and he came up with a plan that will for sure get the Killing Game back up and running!”

“Yeah, I was there, and his plan blew my fucking mind!” Monokid shouted excitedly. “DAMN, MonoDAM, how come you never told me you were so clever!?”

“BECAUSE-YOU-WERE-ALWAYS-BULLYING-ME?” the green bear answered bluntly.

Monokid laughed, “Oh yeah! Guess that’s MY BAD!”

“In any case,” said Monotaro. “With this plan, and a few other wildcards, we’ll have ourselves a fun and fair Killing Game in no time!”

With their leader’s confident declaration, the Monokubs all laughed in excitement.

Kaede stretched her limbs as she rose from her bed. The morning announcement had already passed, but she decided to take a few extra minutes to reflect on all that had happened yesterday.

She still wasn’t able to completely process that Tsumugi was the mastermind and that she attempted to frame her for the murder of Rantaro. Despite catching her crime, there were still so many questions
on Kaede’s mind.

Which was precisely the reason she convinced Monokuma to spare the cosplayer.

The pianist finally stood up with determination. One way or another, she was going to get some answers from Tsumugi.

Kaede quickly walked out of the dorms and headed towards the dining hall. It sort of acted as an unofficial meeting area for the Ultimates, so it was natural for the girl to assume it was where the rest of her friends had gathered.

Her assumptions would prove to be correct as she heard some of her fellow students talking before she entered the room.

Kaede leaned her ear toward the door to hear some people already in the middle of a conversation.

“Stop talking out your ass, bitch!”

“C-Calm down, Miu!”

From what she heard, it seemed that the other students were conversing with each other.

Not wanting to be out of the loop, the pianist entered the dining hall. Just as she had previously assumed, the rest of the students were already gathered in the room, with her being the last person to arrive.

“Ah, good morning, Kaede,” Shuichi greeted.

Other students also made similar remarks of acknowledgement.

“Good morning, Kaede,” Tsumugi also greeted. ”How’s it hanging?”

Kaede stopped dead in her tracks as she stared wide-eyed at the cosplayer. The others, as well, looked at the blue-haired girl with shocked expressions on their faces.

“I’m glad to see you’re in such high spirits,” the cosplayer went on, staring at the pianist with her empty eyes. “You seemed to be hanging on by a thread the last time I saw you. I thought for a second you would become strangled by all the stress, so I guess I can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that you probably won’t drop the ball a second ti—”

Tsumugi didn’t get a chance to finish her sentence as Tenko lifted the cosplayer and tossed her onto the floor.

“HAIYAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!!!” the aikido master yelled.

“OOMPH!” Tsumugi blurted out in agony.

“That’s the first time I ever resorted to using my Neo-Aikido on a fellow female!” Tenko exclaimed. “But then again, someone like you is barely considered to be human.”

“O-Oww…” Tsumugi coughed as she picked herself from off the floor. “But I thought you only used your Neo-Aikido to defend...”

“I was!” Tenko corrected. “I was defending Kaede from your harsh words, you degen...you mastermind!”
“Tenko…” Kaede muttered in appreciation.

Kokichi laughed, “Ah, what a beautiful morning this turned out to be! It’s one of those moments where you’re just glad you got up out of bed in time to see this!”

Kaede shook her head and decided to ignore Tsumugi and Kokichi’s antics as she turned to one of her friends, “Kirumi, how are you feeling?”

The maid tilted her head in slight confusion, “Hmm? I’m doing fine, Kaede. Why do you ask?”

“Well, you were the one who watched Tsumugi for the night,” the pianist explained. “I was wondering if she gave you any trouble.”

“Oh, it was no trouble at all,” Kirumi replied sincerely. “Even as she slept, I made sure to keep a diligent eye on her.”

Kaede stepped back in surprise, “Wait…you stayed up all night watching Tsumugi?”

“But of course. In my experience, sacrificing at least one night of sleep is worth it as long as it’s for the well-being of others.”

“W-Wow…” the pianist said amazed.

“And that not all.” said Gonta. “Kirumi even took time to make breakfast for all of us.”

The entomologist gestured to the dining table, and there Kaede saw a widespread of food laid out. Italian omelet, buttermilk pancakes, smoked salmon, even Japanese cuisine such as rice balls and miso soup. Kaede felt her stomach growl as she looked at all the food. She was suddenly reminded that she didn’t get a chance to eat yesterday, on account of working with Shuichi and everything that had happened with Rantaro.

However, the pianist snapped herself out of her brief trance, “A-Anyway, I heard some of you guys talking to someone before I walked in…”

“Ah, y-yeah,” answered Shuichi. “We were trying to get some answers out of Tsumugi…”

“But that blue-pubed skank ain’t budging an inch on us!” Miu brazenly shouted.

“What did you expect?” Maki rhetorically asked. “If she wasn’t willing to divulge information to us yesterday, why would she suddenly change her mind now?”

“Then why the FUCK did we bother sparing her ass!” exclaimed the inventor.

“It wasn’t my idea,” Tsumugi plainly said.

“Indeed it wasn’t ,” said Korekiyo, agreeing with the cosplayer’s statement. “It was Kaede who insisted that we spare Tsumugi.”

“Ohhhh,” Kokichi grinned mischievously. “So you’re saying that if Tsumugi does anything bad, then it’ll be on Kaede to take the blame as well.”

“Huh?” Kaede reacted.

The anthropologist calmly sighed, “That wasn’t what I was saying at all.”

“But still…” Himiko commented. “It won’t look good on Kaede if Tsumugi does manage to kill
“Hey, Kaede may have been the one to insist that Monokuma spare Tsumugi,” said Ryoma. “But the rest of us all agreed to her terms, so Tsumugi’s actions are our responsibility as well.”

“Yeah, but the only reason we all agreed to that was because no one actually had the courage to outright say ‘I want Tsumugi dead’,” said Kokichi.

“That only means that, besides Tsumugi, no one else here is an outright killer!” Kaede was quick to say. “And if that’s the case, if we all work together then we’ll be able to beat this Killing Game!”

“And you,” the supreme leader said bluntly.

“What…?” questioned Kaede.

“You said ‘besides Tsumugi’,,” the small purple-haired boy clarified. “I think we established since yesterday that you are also willing to kill given the right circumstances.”

A noticeable bead of sweat dripped from the pianist’s head.

“Ooh, you’re right,” Angie said pressing both hands to her cheeks in surprise. “Kaede was willing to kill someone, wasn’t she?”

“Sh-Sh! She only tried to stop the mastermind and save all of us!” Keebo did his best to defend his friend.

“Still…” Kokichi continued to retain an impish smile. “Resorting to attempted murder? I don’t know if I could trust someone who would stoop so low…”

Shuichi was about to step forward and defend his friend as well, but Kaede raised her hand, signaling for the detective to hold it back.

If she were to gain everyone’s trust again, she would first need to trust in herself.

“You’re right,” the pianist began. “I tried to kill the mastermind...I wanted to kill the mastermind...For the sake of trying to end the Killing Game, I was willing to betray someone close to me…”

Kaede glanced aside at Shuichi, who looked back at her with uncertainty.

“.I was willing to betray all of you, too,” she continued. “Even though I said at the beginning I would never give in to this Killing Game. I broke your trust, that much is clear.”

She turned her head again to look at a certain child caregiver, who merely looked away uninterested.

“But,” the blonde-haired girl stayed firm. “I won’t apologize anymore. I will do what I can to make it up to you...to all of you, in my own way. I’m still determined to work together with you guys to escape from this Killing Game. So if you have something you’d like to say to me, please don’t hesitate. I want to work with all of you as an equal, so it’s best if we get that out of the way right now.”

Tsumugi opened her mouth to speak, but it was immediately covered my Kirumi’s gloved hand.

“Aw man, making a cheesy speech like that kinda ruins the fun,” Kokichi lamented.
“What’s wrong?” Maki asked dryly. “Don’t have any more accusations to throw at Kaede?”

“What are you saying, Maki?” the supreme leader asked astonished. “All that stuff I said before about me not willing to trust her? It was all a lie.”

“Yeah, right.” Tenko replied. “I bet that’s a lie, too.”

“I’ll be completely honest, Kaede,” Angie said as she raised her hand, expression as cheerful as ever. “It may take some time before I can actually start to trust you again!”

“That’s fine,” said Kaede. “And I’ll do the best I can to earn back your trust. Anyone else?”

Out of the rest of the other students, only Miu, Himiko, and to a lesser extent, Tsumugi, raised their hands.

The magician, hand still raised, noticed the small amount of people in the ‘don’t trust’ group and decidedly lowered her hand to put herself in the opposing majority.

“W-W-Wai-Wai-Wait!” Miu squealed. “I don’t want to be grouped in with Artsy-Fartsy and Tsu-mastermind!”

The inventor, as well, lowered her hand.

“So...only two people...?” Kaede noted, a little surprised at the small outcome. “G-Granted, this is not meant to be a definitive decision. I understand if some of you are in the middle ground.”

Everyone made comments of agreement at that sentiment.

“Alright!” the pianist suddenly exclaimed. “Now that that’s out of the way, we can get started on questioning Tsumugi!”

The cosplayer rolled her eyes and slouched herself onto a chair.

“But how are you going to get her to talk, Kaede?” questioned Keebo.

“I’ll find a way,” the pianist said determined. “Even if it takes me all day and night.”

Kaede’s eyes suddenly lit up, “AND, we have the hidden room in the library to investigate as well! In fact, if we all head into the girls bathroom right now, we might actually—”

“O-Kayyy!” Kaito exclaimed happily as he wrapped his arm around Kaede’s shoulder and led her to a chair. “You’re certainly raring to go, Ms. Eager! Y’know what I think, though? I think the best course of action to take, is to get some breakfast in you, first!”

“Breakfast?” Kaede questioned. “I can’t think of breakfast at a time like this! Not when we have the mastermind right here and her base of operations is right around the cor—”

The pianist was interrupted once again. Only this time, it was from the sound of her growling stomach.

Kaito gave Kaede a rather smug smile.

“F-Fine!” Kaede exclaimed, cheeks blushing red in embarrassment. “But let’s make this quick!”

With the hungry girl’s declaration, the others took this opportunity to join her as well and soon the atmosphere of the academy became that of a casual one.
“Mmmm!” the pianist savored the taste of one of Kirumi’s stacks of pancakes. “This pancake is so fluffy! And with the butter and syrup, it’s practically melting in my mouth!”

Tenko, herself, began eating a rice ball, “Mm-hm...The rice balls aren’t just ordinary ol’ rice balls, either! The outside is packed tightly so it won’t fall apart, but the inside is nice and soft! And cuz the rice wasn’t crushed, you can taste every sweet, sticky grain, even when it’s cold!”

“I must say, Kirumi,” said Kaito. “All this food’s pretty freakin’ delicious! You’d make someone one hell of a wife.”

“I am flattered,” responded Kirumi. “But I am a maid first and foremost. I haven’t even considered the thought of locking myself into marriage.”

“A-Aren’t you a little young to get married, anyways?” asked Shuichi.

Kirumi’s gonna be my mom before she becomes a wife!” Kokichi pouted.

“Gonta want you to be his mom, too!”

“Isn’t she even younger to be *that*?!” exclaimed Keebo.

Kaede smiled as she looked around the table to see all her friends conversing with one another. The lighthearted air that filled the room nearly made her forget about the Killing Game altogether. In the end, she was just thankful that she got a chance to share this moment with everyone.

After everyone had finished eating, Kaede led them all to the girls bathroom.

“So, this is the girls bathroom…” said Kaito as he took in his surroundings.

“Huh,” Ryoma commented. “ Doesn’t look that much different to the boy’s…”

“Ryoma, right,” said Gonta. “Gonta kinda disappointed to be perfectly honest.”

“Hey, it’s not our fault that you degenerates are having degenerate-like thoughts!” Tenko shouted at the boys. “What else did you expect for there to be in here?”

“Ah, this place hasn’t changed one bit!” Kokichi cheerfully said as he walked in.

The aikido master stared deadpan at the supreme leader.

“Well, for one thing, we’re hoping to find a secret passage in here,” Kaede responded. “And if our theory is correct, it should be in the utility closet.”

“Then let’s see what we can find…” said Shuichi as he entered the closet.

Tsumugi watched this scene unfold before her as she leaned against a wall with her arms crossed, “I don’t know what you guys are so excited about. Thanks to you all taking your sweet time ever since the class trial, the Monokubs have all probably jumped ship and taken everything out of that secret room.”

“Ah-HA!” Miu yelled as she pointed at the cosplayer. “So there IS a secret room!”

“Yes, Miu, there is a secret room, thank you for being so observant, WHERE WERE YOU FOR THE LAST FEW HOURS!?” Tsumugi yelled sarcastically at the inventor in one breath.

“Heeeeeeeeee!?” Miu exclaimed in fear.
“As much as I hate to admit it,” said Ryoma. “But there’s some truth to Tsumugi’s words. We haven’t seen the Monokubs or Monokuma since last last night. Who know what they could be planning?”

“‘Monokuma’?” the cosplayer repeated. “What the hell are you talking about? Monokuma’s dead.”

The former tennis pro shook his head, “I’m still doubting he’s gone for good. He came back last time he was destroyed so there’s no reason to believe he won’t come back.”

“H-How...cruel…” Tsumugi began to form tears in her eyes. “Monokuma sacrificed himself for the sake of the Killing Game. To make light of his death...it’s insulting to the life he lived! To the life he shared with all of us! Apologize! Apologize to the deceased Monokuma who entrusted his wish onto his children!”

“Hmph,” Ryoma scoffed. “I guess it was too much to ask to have a normal conversation with you…”

“O great Atua…” Angie started praying. “For though he may have sinned, please grant the deceased Monokuma entrance into your divine kingdom.”

“But Monokuma’s a robot, isn’t he?” questioned Kokichi. “Robots don’t go to heaven, silly!”

“Th-There’s no proof to that hypothesis!” Keebo shouted in defense.

“There!” Shuichi suddenly shouted.

After pressing his palm on the far wall of the closet, a passage opened up to reveal a pathway.

“A hidden passage…” Kaede stated. “C’mon, guys, let’s go!”

The remaining fifteen students proceeded to make their way into the hidden pathway. They found themselves in a long man-made hallway which assumably connected to the actual hidden room.

“Won’t be long now...” the pianist said with determination.

The cosplayer sighed, “By all means, get your hopes up. That way it will be more satisfying to watch you fall into despair as you realize this little field trip will lead to nothing.”

“You’re so sure of that, aren’t you?” asked Kaede.

“I’m merely speaking as ‘the mastermind’. There is still so much you don’t know and there’s no way in hell I’ll be telling you anything anytime soon.”

“Yeah...you mentioned that once or twice already,” the pianist remarked sarcastically.

“Wowww,” Kokichi said amazed. “Whatever is...or was in that hidden room must’ve been very useful to you as the mastermind.”

Tsumugi didn’t reply to the supreme leader.

“Gee,” Kaito whispered to some of the other students. “Who would’ve guessed that this’d be Tsumugi’s true personality?”

“She had always seemed so kind before,” Kirumi noted. “What in the world could’ve happened in her life that made her who she is now?”
“Every human being has a hidden side to them they don’t want others seeing,” said Korekiyo. “As such, we wear a mask in our everyday lives so that we appear as well functioned citizens of society. The question is, what circumstances would it take for us to remove our mask, and reveal our true selves to the world?”

“Yeah well that ain’t me!” argued the astronaut. “I always stay true to myself at all times, even if others don’t like it!”

“Even if they *really* don’t like it…” Maki quietly said to herself.

Eventually, the long pathway came to an end and revealed a closed door.

“This could be it, guys,” said Kaede.

After a brief moment of hesitation, the pianist slowly opened the door and exposed an entirely new room.

Tsumugi walked passed the girl and entered the room first, “See, what’d I tell you? The Monokubs already cleared the room and now all this time has...been...for...nothing…”

The cosplayer looked at her surroundings as the rest of her classmates all entered the room as well. What they saw was a huge area with cutouts of hearts and flowers hanging from the ceiling. Couches and tables were also placed in various parts of the room, and even more curious, was a strangely shaped object that was draped beneath a large curtain.

“Hmm, judging by your reaction, it seems that this room is indeed how you previously left it,” Korekiyo concluded.

“So then, this is it…” said Kaede. “This is what’s behind the hidden bookcase in the library: the secret room.”

“Bleh!” Miu said in disgust. “So you actually stayed in this gaudy room?!”

“Wait a second,” said Shuichi. “What’s that?”

Kaede followed the direction the detective was pointing to and saw that there was a bloody Monopad on one of the tables.

“A-Ah!?” Tsumugi exclaimed unintentionally.

“A Monopad?” questioned Maki. “Whose is it, and why is it covered in blood?”

“I don’t know,” Shuichi responded as he picked up the object. “But we should inspect it closely.”

As the detective was about to turn on the electronic handbook, it was quickly snatched away from his possession. Shuichi and the other students had barely enough time to react to what came next.

Tsumugi proceeded to smash the Monopad against her knee with all her might, rendering the device useless.

“Wh...What have you done…!??” Kaede said dumbfounded.

“Ow…” the cosplayer groaned as she then clutched her knee in pain.

And like a flash of lighting, Kirumi rushed towards the blue-haired girl and pulled her into a submission hold.
“OWWWW!” Tsumugi groaned even louder.

“Forgive me, everyone…” the maid apologized. “I leave her unattended for one moment and she managed to get a chance to sabotage our efforts. I’ll be more diligent as to not leave this criminal from my sight ever again.”

“Whose Monopad was that?” Kaede immediately asked the cosplayer.

“Fuck you, Kaede,” Tsumugi bluntly replied.

“This is quite unfortunate,” said Korekiyo. “That Monopad could very well have been an important piece of information.”

“Tsumugi was distressed to the point that she needed to destroy it immediately,” Ryoma added. “That alone is proof enough.”

“Uh...H-Himiko!” Tenko addressed the mage. “Y-You can repair it with magic, can’t you!?”

“Of course I can…” Himiko said while visibly sweating. “But...uh...I’m still digesting from breakfast so I can’t do repair magic right this second…”

“N-No…” Kaede said mournfully. “We were so close. I could feel it...We were so close to finding the truth…”

Shuichi looked at the pianist with a saddened expression, “Kaede…”

“Oh, will you fucks quit crying, already!?” Miu shouted.

Everyone turned toward the girl as she walked to the broken Monopad and picked up the pieces.

“Give me a few hours and I’ll get this feeble child’s toy repaired in no time,” the inventor said.

Kaede stared at the girl surprised, “Y-You can fix this!?”

“Are you fucking for real right now!?” Miu yapped. “Who the FUCK do you think you’re talking to!? If Miu Iruma, Gorgeous Girl Genius, can’t fix a measly prop like this, how the hell am I gonna wow the world with all my better inventions!?”

“Hrrrmng,” Tsumugi groaned in frustration this time, still locked in Kirumi’s hold.

“Are you sure about that?” Kokichi said mischievously. “Tsumugi nearly shattered her knee just to break the darn thing. If you repair that, you’ll likely become enemy number one to her...and we all know that she’s capable of killing.”

“Hheeeeeeeeee!?” Miu flinched back in terror. “S...So what? I...I ain’t scared of Tsu-mucky…”

With the inventor’s reluctant resolve, Kaede quickly wrapped her in an embrace.

“Thank you so much, Miu!” the pianist said cheerfully.

“Aaaaaaaah!?” the inventor nearly screamed at the other girl’s kindness. “Y-You trying to get under my skirt or something, you flat-chested bitch!? L-Let go of meeee!”

“Ah...sorry,” Kaede apologized as she let her go and watched the girl stumble back to the rest of the group.
“Phew,” Tenko said relieved. “I’m glad we were able to solve that quicky.”

“I know, right?” replied Kokichi. “It’s like every decision that Tsumugi has made so far has caused her to dig an even deeper hole for herself each time. If she really is the mastermind, then she’s a bad one at that.”

“Everyone!” the students heard Gonta shout. “Look what Gonta find!”

They looked at the entomologist who was located right across the room searching through a trash bin.

“Gonta,” Kirumi lectured as she removed her hold on Tsumugi. “It is quite unsanitary to search through someone else’s trash.”

“Sorry if Gonta look ungentlemanly, right now,” the gentle giant said with regret. “But look!”

As he said that, Gonta pulled from the trash bin a metal rounded object.

“A-Ah!” Shuichi let out a surprised gasp. “Th-That’s…”

“A shot put ball!” Kaede finished.

“Could it be…?” wondered Keebo. “The ball that Kaede had intended to use to kill Rantaro…”

Shuichi hastily walked toward the entomologist and examined the ball in his hand. He gripped with two of his fingers what appeared to be a piece of fabric connected to the object.

“A pink piece of fabric…” the detective told the others.

“...From when I wrapped it with my spare vest…” the pianist once again finished the detective’s thought.

“Kehehehe,” Korekiyo chuckled. “Once again, it seemed our suspicions were right on the money.”

Maki turned to the cosplayer, “You actually threw Kaede’s shot put ball in the trash, of all places?”

“What did you expect me to do?” Tsumugi responded. “It’s not like I anticipated for anyone to just walk casually in here at the time…”

“So I guess we can add another few feet into the hole you already dug for yourself,” mocked Kokichi.

“Wowiee!” Angie said joyfully. “Already we found two clues in this super secret room!”

“No kidding,” Kaito remarked. “I guess that just leaves…”

“...whatever’s hidden beneath that curtain,” finished Maki.

The group turned toward the one remaining mystery of the hidden room. It was placed on top of a small stage with wires connecting directly to it.

“So uh…” the astronaut blurted out. “Anyone care to do the honors?”

Simultaneously, everyone turned their heads towards a certain Ultimate Detective.

“H-Huh?” Shuichi reacted. “O-Oh...I guess it makes sense for me to do it…”
“Be careful, Shuichi!” Kaede said worriedly.

“R-Right,” the detective replied as he slowly walked toward the unknown display that sat on the stage.

Shuichi gulped as he reached out his hand to grip the large fabric and reveal what it was concealing, but before he could accomplish that--

“RISE AND SHINE, URSINE!”

The detective nearly fell back in shock as the Monokubs all appeared and stood in front of the concealed mystery object.

“Holy cow!” Monotaro chirped. “You guys made it!”

“How wondrous, this moment is!” Monophanie said joyfully. “You bastards made it!”

“Despite us doubting all of youse,” Monosuke adjusted his glasses. “Youse guys actually made it!”

Monokid rocked on his guitar, “I didn’t think you bitches would make it! Yet here you are! Guess I owe you 500 Monocoins, MonoDAM!”

Monodam remained silent.

“M-Monokubs!” Tsumugi quickly called out to the five. “What the heck is going on!?"

“What’s going on, you ask?” Monophanie replied. “Why, it’s a celebration!”

“A...celebration?” Kaede repeated.

“You guys worked so hard to find out about this place,” Monotaro explained. “So we thought we’d reward you and give you exactly what you want!”

“And we also didn’t want to miss out on the big unveiling,” Monosuke added.

“Unveiling?” questioned Shuichi.

“Duh!” shouted Monokid. ”What’s beneath the mysterious curtain!”

“W-Wait!” Tsumugi called to the bears once again. “You can’t be serious!”

Monotaro tilted his head at the girl.

“It’s too early!” the cosplayer continued. “We can’t possibly reveal that to them yet!”

“Um...excuse me?” Monosuke said sternly. “As newly selected headmasters of this here academy, we five can reveal whatever the hell we want!”

“In fact,” said Monokid. “I might reveal something a bit RISQUE if ya catch my drift!”

“Oh no no no!” exclaimed Monophanie. “That is not appropriate for a headmaster to do!”

“So c’mon, everyone!” the red bear addressed the room. “Let’s get this celebration underway!”

At that moment, the Monokubs took it upon themselves to grip the large curtain and reveal to everyone what was hiding beneath it.
There, the students of the academy saw an astonishing sight.

There, they saw a large Monokuma head resting inside a jar-like container.

“M-Mono...kuma...?” Kaede muttered.

“No…” said Ryoma. “This one’s...different from the Monokuma that we usually know.”

“Ya got that right!” Monokid shouted. “This ain’t just any ol’ Papa Kuma!”

“Youse got that right!” Monosuke shouted. “This here is the Monokuma to end all Monokumas!”

“You got that right!” Monophanie shouted. “She’s the overseer of the Killing Game, and the source of all Monokumas!”

“We got that right!” Monotaro shouted. “Allow us to introduce…”

”MOTHERKUMA!” the Monokubs shouted together.

All of the students kept staring in awe at the sight before them. The only exception was Tsumugi…

...who was staring slack-jawed at the Monokubs in bewilderment.
“Puhuhu,” the giant head named Motherkuma spoke. “If it isn’t my favorite students of this academy! I feel as if it was only last night that I saw you guys!”

“But Mother!” said Monotaro. “It *was* only last night that you last saw them!”

“Wait…Mama Kuma saw them last?” questioned Monokid. “I thought we were the ones who saw them last!”

“No no,” corrected Monophanie. “We were the last ones who left them, but Mommy was the one who last saw them!”

“Whoa whoa whoa whoa!” Monosuke quickly ceased the discussion. “Youse can’t do this to me! I can’t think of a motherly equivalent to the word ‘Pops’!”

The students of the academy paid no mind to the comedic behavior of the mascot machines. Instead, they just kept staring at the giant bear head, wondering what exactly to make of it. Though they managed to discover the secret of the hidden room, none of them were expecting it to be this entity that looked like it belonged in a bad sci-fi film. Kaede tried to find the words to say to this strange character, but couldn’t figure out where to start.

Kirumi decided to take the helm and ask her own questions, “‘Motherkuma’, was it? What exactly *are* you…?”

“The hell you talking about?” Monokid yelled. “Motherkuma is Motherkuma!”

“Now, now, my darling children,” Motherkuma spoke once again. “It’s only natural that they’d be confused, so allow me to explain. As my cubs have mentioned before, I am the overseer of the Killing Game, and the source of all Monokumas.”

“Source of all Monokumas?” Shuichi repeated. “So then…the machine that makes spare Monokumas in this academy…”

Though it seemed physically impossible, the disembodied head’s smile appeared to have grown wider, “See this amazing machine behind me? It creates spare Monokumas! All I gotta do is copy over my thoughts and…Presto! I give birth to myself!”

“Y-You’re able to make another Monokuma so easily?” Keebo hesitantly asked.

“You said just now that you copy your thoughts to a spare Monokuma,” Ryoma took note. “So that means you really *are* the Monokuma that has interacted with us this entire time.”

“Nyeh?” Himiko reacted in fear. “So then…he really didn’t die?”

“Oh great,” Miu said sarcastically. “That execution we saw him go through meant fuck all for us!”

“W-What are you saying!?” exclaimed Monophanie. “Don’t make light of Daddy’s death!”

“But that thing make Monokumas, right?” questioned Gonta. “Does that mean Monokuma come back?”

“Aw snap, here we go!” Monokid yelled out in joy. “Now we’re getting to the good part!”
Motherkuma took her son’s excited comment and decided to segue into an explanation, “Now y’see, here’s where things get a bit complicated. I can’t just make myself give birth all willy-nilly. I have a built-in voiceprint authentication system. Mainly… **I can’t birth Monokumas unless the designated person specifically says the word ‘birth’.**”

“And this ‘designated person’,” Kirumi began with her assumption. “You mean the mastermind, correct?”

The disembodied head chuckled ominously, “My my, you guys really are quick to the draw, aren’t you?”

“So that means… Tsumugi is able to command this ‘Motherkuma’ to make a spare Monokuma whenever she wants,” Ryoma concluded.

“Correction,” said Monotaro. “**Was**.”

“Huh…?” Kaede wondered at the red bear’s statement.

“Why don’t we give youse guys a demonstration?” offered Monosuke. “Tsumugi, if you would, please step forward.”

The blue-haired girl, after taking a moment to process the request, reluctantly complied with the bear.

“Good,” the yellow bear nodded. “Now, give the command to ol’ ‘Mops’ here and ask her to birth a Monokuma.”

“Wait!” Kaede immediately stepped forward until she stood right next to Tsumugi. “What are you doing!?”

Suddenly, Monodam raised his mechanical paw, “PLEASE-REMAIN-CALM.”

Kaede, not sure whether to take the green bear’s statement as cautionary reassurance or a legitimate threat, hesitantly backed off to see where this whole charade was leading to.

“Tsumugi, if you would,” Monosuke ordered once again.

The blue-haired girl looked at the glasses-wearing bear and then at Motherkuma. Ever since she was discovered as the mastermind, things seemed to take a turn for the worse for her. The moment everyone went into this hidden room, in particular, spelled doom for the well being of the Killing Game itself. Now that she has seen the Monokubs seemingly cooperate with the other students, she knew something was up. Something was leading to a denouement and this was merely another step towards that. Regarding the role she were to play in the Killing Game, she knew what was about to happen.

Nevertheless, Tsumugi cooperated, “Motherkuma, please give **birth** to a Monokuma.”

Motherkuma took in the cosplayers words. It heard her clearly; it understood her intentions clearly. Yet… nothing happened.

A few more seconds.

...Nothing happened.

The students waited for the giant head to do something. They waited with fearful anticipation for it to
create a Monokuma.

Yet…

“W-Why isn’t anything happening?” asked Himiko.

Realizing the truth, Tsumugi slowly shut her eyes in quiet frustration.

Near her was Kaede, who did the opposite.

“Wait...what does this mean?” the pianist asked.

The Monokubs all gave a dark chuckle.

“C’mon now,” said Monosuke. “I’m sure youse guys can figure it out at this point.”

“You were smart enough to find the mastermind on your first class trial, after all,” Monophanie continued.

“It wouldn’t be fun if we just expositioned all this shit at you guys,” Monokid crudely explained.

Monotaro nodded, “Yeah, just because Tsumugi’s not the mastermind, anymore, doesn’t mean we have to spell it out for you.”

The four siblings looked straight at him.

He looked back and asked with complete sincerity, “…What?”

The four Monokubs ‘facepawed’.

“Th-The hell you mean, Tsumugi’s not the mastermind anymore!?” Kaito shouted demanding an answer.

“It’s just as they said,” answered Motherkuma. “Tsumugi ain’t the mastermind no more!”

“Or to be more precise,” Monosuke explained. “She’s lost her status as mastermind of the Killing Game.”

“Lost her status?” Kaede repeated. “What does that even mean?”

“Ain’t it obvious?” questioned Monokid. “Tsumugi’s one of you guys, now. Just a regular ol’ player in this Killing Game.”

Monophanie jumped in, “In order to fulfill Daddy’s wish and retain a fair and just Killing Game, we stripped Tsumugi of the benefits she has received as mastermind, and therefore, is now a regular participant. In other words, you’re equal to her and she’s all equal to you.”

“But wait,” the pianist continued to argue. “She was already the mastermind beforehand. What’s stopping her from using any of her previous knowledge and take advantage of that?”

“I’m glad you asked,” responded Monotaro. “Everyone, if you would all pull out your respective Monopads, there are a few changes to the regulations we would all like for you to see.”

And all at once, everyone’s Monopads started beeping in unison, to signify that some sort of update has been made to it. Kaede did as instructed and turned to the ‘School Rules’ tab of the e-Handbook.
From what she saw, all the rules more or less remained the same. However, a few additional rules were added at the very end:

**NEW RULE:** Any student(s) who finds or enters an undiscovered area of the academy MUST inform his/her associates of its existence.

**NEW RULE:** The headmaster(s) of the academy is forbidden to directly or indirectly involve themselves in a murder of any capacity outside of motives.

And as usual, the handbook emphasized that failure to follow any of these rules would result in extermination by Exisal and the headmasters were free to add new rules at their convenience.

“As you can see,” Monotaro began. “The new rules were the result of the apparent… *ahem*...’controversy’ that came from the last class trial.”

“Controversy?” Tenko echoed. “You guys were the ones who broke the damn rules in the first place!”

“No shit, Miss Andry!” yelled Monokid. “That’s why we added these rules to make things more fair for you guys!”

“So in the end, we’re still prisoners of this Killing Game…” Ryoma made the obvious assumption.

“And how do *you* feel about this, Tsumugi?” asked Kokichi. “You just lost your status as mastermind, after all.”

The girl in question had continued to shut her eyes, but she wasn’t ignoring the boy. No...she was listening, rather intently, to everything. Though the other students didn’t notice it, the former mastermind was smiling. She saw it...what this was all leading to. Once she figured out the reason behind the Monokub’s actions...she knew.

For her, she no longer had to worry about the state of the Killing Game.

Tsumugi, who had remained silent after hearing of her demotion, slowly lifted her head to face the supreme leader...

...revealing once again, her glowing empty eyes and deranged smile- an image that was slowly becoming her default look.

“I couldn’t be happier!” the cosplayer said, a sense of complete honesty overflowing from each word that she uttered.

Kokichi didn’t respond and merely continued to stare at the girl with an innocent smile on his face.

“Honestly, it’s not like anything’s changed,” Korekiyo noted. “All she did was lose a few benefits she would’ve had as the mastermind.”

“What benefits would that be, exactly?” questioned Maki. “At this point, all we know is that the mastermind has access to this room and can make a Monokuma whenever they wanted.”

“Hmm, that’s a good point,” Angie said, casually putting a paintbrush to her lips as she thought deeply. “Those don’t really seem all that useful to a mastermind, if you ask me.”

“That is a gross underestimation of my abilities!” Motherkuma grabbed the attention of everyone once again. “You think all I do here is birth Monokumas and look pretty while doing so?”
“Why add in the ‘pretty’ part?” Keebo said to himself.

“So then…” Kokichi hummed. “You’re saying there are more things you can do besides what you’ve already told us?”

“Oh ho ho, that I can,” the giant head responded.

“Y’all ready for this?” Monokid prepped the students. “Cause here’s where things get extra CRAY-ZAY!”

“As I’ve mentioned before,” Motherkuma began explaining. “Not only am I the machine that gives birth to lovely Monokumas, I am also the overseer of this Killing Game.”

“Overseer?” Kirumi wondered. “Please elaborate.”

“You can say I’m the ‘heart and soul’ of the academy itself,” the head continued. “Meaning, I know and see everything that happens within the academy.”

“How exactly are you able to do that?” asked Keebo.

“Unfortunately for you, that’s still classified information, so we’re not going to disclose it!” replied Monophanie.

“Hmm,” Ryoma thought deeply. “Though we don’t know how exactly Motherkuma is able to surveillance the entirety of the academy, it would explain how Tsumugi came to know Kaede’s plan to kill the mastermind.”

Kaede did her best to control her frustration. Ever since she learned the truth, it was a bitter pill to swallow that Tsumugi pulled the wool over her eyes and managed to frame her for Rantaro’s murder with near success.

Shuichi took in all the information that was just given to them. Although they had just discovered, in rapid pace, a huge amount of discoveries and revelations, somehow it didn’t make sense to him. There was something off about the current situation. It seemed...too casual. As if they walked into the room and the Monokubs displayed all the answers to them on a grand stage. There was something more. There *needed* to be something more. To get this far alone with only one casualty required strict and careful detective work, so why would such secrets be brought out into the open so easily?

The detective decided to not leave his concerns left alone in his mind and asked aloud, “Why are you doing this?”

Monotaro tilted his head in curiosity, “Huh?”

“All this information,” he continued. “Why are you telling us this, all of a sudden? Beforehand, Tsumugi and Monokuma did their best to keep us away from this place at all costs. Why now, are you guys revealing seemingly everything about this room to us?”

“Ohhhhh,” Monophanie said as a flash of insight came to her. “I do believe there’s been a grave misunderstanding, here.”

“Misunderstanding?” Shuichi questioned.

“Did youse assume we told youse all this so that youse guys would have a better chance of escaping this Killing Game?” asked Monosuke.
“Then why are you doing this?” Kaede questioned, taking a step forward once again and positioned herself right next to the detective.

“You wanna know!?” Monokid exclaimed excitedly. “Here’s why we’re telling you all this…”

The blue bear paused.

“Aw mannnnn!” he resumed. “It feels like my heart's gonna beat outta my chest! I’m gonna be the one who says it this time! You ready!? Hell yeah! It’s for the--”

“MASTERMIND-PERK,” said Monodam.

“Huh?” Kaede could only mutter.

Monokid put his paws to his head in distress, “M-M-Monodam! Not again, MAN!”

“Forgive me, what was that you said?” Korekiyo inquired.

“MASTERMIND-PERK.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Monotaro. “He said it again!”

“W-What are you guys talking about!?” Kaede asked, getting more nervous at this turn of events.

“We actually have you guys to thank for this idea,” Monophanie immediately answered. “Since you outr Tsumugi as the mastermind, obviously we needed to break ties with her as soon as possible.”

“So we had already planned to rid her of the status as mastermind,” Monosuke continued.

Monotaro spoke next, “But then, an idea struck us! It wouldn’t be all that fair if only one participant of the Killing Game got a chance to play ‘mastermind’!”

“That’s when we all decided to give the rest of you guys a shot to experience the same things that Tsumugi got to experience!” Monokid finished.

“Hence, the ‘Mastermind Perk’!” the Monokubs all said in unison.

“Mastermind...Perk?” Kaede repeated to herself, still having difficulty understanding the situation.

“Effective throughout the entirety of the Killing Game,” Monotaro elaborated. “One of you will get chance to have complete access to this room. All you need to do...is become the mastermind of your very own murder!”

“S-Slow the fuck down, will ya?” Kaito shouted. “We’re still having trouble processing what you said!”

“First of all, ‘become the mastermind of our very own murder’?” Kirumi pondered. “What on earth does that entail?”

“Okay, okay okay,” Monosuke began. “Let’s say, for example, that Monodam here is capable of killing Monokid.”

“W-What!?” shouted the blue bear. “M-Monodam would never do that!”

“I’m just using it as a hypothetical, bro!” the yellow bear shouted back. “So, let’s say that Monodam is HYPOTHETICALLY capable of killing Monokid, right? Now, let’s say that I urge one of my
brothers, here, to kill the other. It either could be by the power of suggestion, outright ordering one of them to do so, or maybe I create an elaborate scenario where they have no choice but to kill one another. If I manage to succeed and one of them does end up killing, the murderer would become the blackened, yes, but I would end up with the Mastermind Perk, and now this room’s all mine for my use!"

“I see,” Korekiyo concurred. “So the candidates eligible for this Mastermind Perk are not ones who would choose to the blackened, but the ones who take it upon themselves to create a blackened?”

“Yup!” confirmed Monotaro. “No killing necessary! All you gotta do is get someone else to kill someone!”

“I still can’t comprehend this,” said Keebo. “Why in the world would you offer us such an advantageous perk?”

“We’ll be perfectly honest here,” the red bear went on. “We understand how difficult and stressful this situation can be for you guys.”

“I highly doubt that,” Maki muttered.

“I mean, let’s face it,” he continued. “The only way to win the Killing Game is to either become the blackened and risk getting executed, or survive until the final two, which, we’ll be the first to admit, requires a bit of luck.”

“And winning a game based solely on luck isn’t really fair, is it?” said Monophanie.

“Which is why we added a perk that rewards skill rather than luck,” Monosuke explained. “You manage to get this Mastermind Perk, and you’ll pretty much be guaranteed safety for the rest of the Killing Game.”

“A completely secluded safe room, perfectly good couches to lounge around in,” Monokid listed. “And best of all, the complete cooperation of our dear ol’ Mama Kuma, here!”

Motherkuma laughed, “Puhuhuhuhu! That’s right! If you receive the Mastermind Perk, I can tell you all there is to know about the academy! Where anyone is located, where the best hangout spots are, and maybe...even a few other secrets of the academy as well…”

“A few other secrets, huh?” Kokichi noted.

The other students, however, looked around at each other unsure of how to take in this information. In the end, they knew the perk was created to start up the Killing Game once again.

Kaede shook her head, “There’s no way that any of us would take advantage of this perk!”

It was the Monokubs’ turn to look around at one another before gazing back at the girl and all at once, they shrugged and said, “Okay.”

“Huh?” the pianist responded.

“Take the perk, don’t the perk…” said Monokid. “That shit’s optional, babe.”

“Like we said,” Monosuke followed. “This perk’s in play throughout the entire length of this Killing Game, so there’s no rush to it, sweet-cheeks.”

“But speaking of rush…” Monotaro said ominously.
Suddenly, an Exisal leaped from out of nowhere and landed right in front of the students.


“Everyone, please make your way to the exit behind you that leads to the library,” Monophanie said calmly. “Failure to do so will result in your immediate death.”

The students didn’t take the risk of arguing with the Monokubs as they followed their orders and hastily made their way out of the room.
“Oh hey, this really does lead to the library,” Kaito said as he looked at his surroundings.

With the sound of the hidden bookcase closing, the secret room of the academy was once again off limits to any unwanted outsiders.

The room of the library suddenly became filled with an eerie silence. For the Ultimate students, there was so much information they needed to take in. As a result, no one had any courage to speak first, in fear of the discussion that were to arise from it.

However, there was at least one student who took that chance.

“So, that Mastermind Perk,” said Kokichi. “How ‘bout that?”

Ryoma raised an eyebrow at him, “What about it?”

“Oh nothing...nothing…” the supreme leader raised his hands in defense. “I’m just saying, that’s a thing now.”

“No shit!” yelled Miu. “You trying to say you wanna take that perk all for yourself!!?”

“Miu?” Kirumi said sternly.

The inventor looked back at her nervously, “N-Not that I’d...try and take that perk for myself…”

“Hmm,” Korekiyo interjected. “This scenario feels awfully familiar.”

“It was like this when Monokuma first introduced the First Blood Perk and then the initial time limit for us to kill someone,” Maki recalled.

“Ah yes, that is quite right,” the anthropologist replied.

“But we know better than to fall for their cheap ploys!” Kaito shouted with confidence.

“Yeah, that’s right!” Kaede followed the astronaut’s momentum. “We managed to make it this far together, so there’s no way they’ll divide us with this!”

Tsumugi laughed at the two, “Pffff-hahahaha! You’re such an obvious hypocrite, it’s hilarious!”

“What was that?” Kaito said harshly as he was halted by Kaede.

The former mastermind approached the pianist, “I’m sorry, you said we managed to make it this far? If I recall correctly, there were sixteen of us back then. And counting now...oh my! There are fifteen of us, currently! Well, fourteen cause I don’t think you guys would count a plain person such as myself into your group.”

“Also because you were the mastermind and the one who killed Rantaro,” Kaede countered.

“Aww, but that doesn’t change the fact that *you* gave in to the time limit and tried to kill someone, Kay-ay-day!” Tsumugi sang Kaede’s name in a playful voice and booped her on the nose.
The pianist was unamused.

“So what we supposed to do?” the entomologist continued the discussion.

A simple yet important question. The students of the Ultimate academy had worked hard to get to this point and yet it seemed they had made no progress at all. Sure, they had discovered what was in the secret room, but at the same time, the Monokubs were confident enough to divulge the secrets of that room to them. Combine that with the new perk they introduced, some of the students, Kaede in particular, felt like they were back at square one.

The only difference was that there was one less student amongst them.

“I’ll tell you what we’re gonna do,” Kaito replied. “We’re gonna ignore it!”

“Nyeh?” questioned Himiko. “Ignore it?”

“You heard those multi-colored bastards,” the astronaut went on. “That perk isn’t mandatory for any one of us to use. So why the hell should we worry about it?”

“So you don’t think one of us will take advantage of the perk?” asked Maki.

“...I can’t say for sure…” Kaito said reluctantly. “But what I do know is that in order to even get the perk, someone would have to convince one of us to kill for them. And no way in hell is anyone here dumb enough to fall for that!”

“Well...maybe Gonta,” Himiko said bluntly.

“G-Gonta would never kill one of his friends!” Gonta quickly said.

“He’s right, guys!” Kokichi declared. “We won’t let those Monokubs manipulate us like that! Besides, why should we even bother with that Mastermind Perk, when we have our own mastermind right here!”

The supreme leader gestured to a certain blue-haired girl, who in response, looked away from him in disinterest.

“I agree,” said Kaede, regaining some assurance to their current situation. “We shouldn’t let the Killing Game get to us. Not when we already have a plan in mind.”

“Still not telling you anything,” Tsumugi said with a sigh.

“We’ll see about that,” the pianist countered.

“Um...before you do that...” the students heard Monotaro’s voice say.

Kaede turned around to see that the Monokubs were standing on top of a bookcase looking down at the Ultimate students.

“Aaaaaah!” Tenko screamed in response. “It’s them!”

“Wh-When did you...?” the pianist began to speak.

The five bears jumped down to ground level in order to properly address everyone.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” said Monosuke. “We were so caught up in your little ‘power of friendship’ moment, that we didn’t have the heart to interrupt.”
"Not that we have hearts in the first place!" Monophanie pointed out.

“That’s why they had *me* do it for them!” Monotaro stated happily.

“Okay, but why are you even here?” questioned Kaede, clearly annoyed at this turn of events.

“Again, that’s our bad, dudes,” said Monokid. “We rushed you guys out of that secret room so fast that we forgot to give you your other reward for completing your very first class trial!”

“Other reward?” repeated Shuichi.

At that moment, each of the Monokubs pulled out a strange object and offered them to the students.

“A Dragon Gem!” shouted Monotaro.


“A Hexagonal Crank from some zombie game!” Monophanie politely said.

“An Ancient Passport!” yelled Monokid.


Kaede looked at the Monokubs confused, “And what...are we supposed to do with this...stuff?”

The bears didn’t answer the girl’s question and instead hoisted their items onto her. Kaede, surprised at the cub’s sudden actions, desperately tried to keep hold of the junk.

“Didn’t we just say youse guys were smart enough to figure stuff out on your own?” Monosuke shouted.

“What kind of instructors of this academy would we be if we just gave everyone all the answers immediately?” questioned Monophanie.

“Um...good ones!?” exclaimed Kaede.

“Eeeek!” Monokid shrieked. “This bitch’s wild! Let’s bail!”

“SO LONG! BEAR WELL!” the Monokubs shouted before exiting the library.

Once again, the room became silent, as Kaede looked down at the items she held in her arms.

Himiko glanced at the objects and pouted, “Nyehhh, those don’t look like very good prizes…”

“If no one wants it, I’ll take the Dragon Gem,” Kokichi commented. “I feel like, as a supreme leader, I should have something like that in my secret lair or...whatever…”

“Clearly there’s an alternative objective the Monokubs had in mind when handing us these objects,” said Korekiyo.

“It might have something to do with those strange monuments that are located all over the campus,” said Shuichi as he analyzed the items.

“Oooh, it’s like a big puzzle!” Angie said ecstatically.

“In that case, let’s hand these over to Shuichi,” suggested Kaito.
“H-Huh?” the detective reacted. “Me?”

“You’re the Ultimate Detective, yeah?” the astronaut gave him a thumbs up. “You should be good at weirdo puzzles like this.”

“...I guess so,” Shuichi said reluctantly.

Kaede took another glance down at the objects she was holding and then turned to the two conversing students, “A-Actually, you guys, it’s okay. I can do it!”

“You sure, Kaede?” questioned Kaito.

“Of course!” the pianist said eagerly. “Let me do some of the heavy work, for once. It’s the least I can do to make it up to everyone.”

“‘Least’ is certainly right,” Kokichi said aside. “But I’m not one to complain about it! You go, girl! Go and solve this dumb puzzle for us!”

“At the very least, I can help,” Shuichi offered.

Kaede smiled, “Heh, back to the dynamic duo, huh?”

Shuichi turned his head as he felt himself blush, “Ah...yeah.”

The two’s moment was quickly cut off as Kokichi placed himself between them, “Hold your horses. Actually, Kaede, there was something I wanted to discuss with Shuichi, if you don’t mind.”

“There was?” asked Kaede.

“Oh...that’s right,” the detective seemed to confirm the supreme leader’s claim. “He had already asked me this morning...”

“I...I see,” the pianist responded, a hint of disappointment in her tone. “Well if you already had a previous engagement, then don’t let me keep you.”

“Splendid,” Kokichi smiled. “As long as we’re on the same page.”

“But wait,” said Kaito. “What are we gonna do about Tsumugi?”

Kirumi approached the cosplayer and gripped her arm, “Don’t worry, I can keep watch of her.”

“Are you sure, Kirumi?” Kaede asked with concern. “You already spent all night watching her...”

“It’s no trouble, I assure you,” Kirumi replied.

Kokichi raised his index finger and pointed at the maid, “Uh, Kirumi? I had already requested that I needed to discuss something with you, too.”

The maid covered her mouth with her gloved hand, “Oh my, that’s right. How could I have forgotten?”

“You’re gonna talk with both of them?” questioned Kaito.

“Yes, and it’s something of a personal matter,” the supreme leader replied. “So forgive my tone, but please don’t ask me about this anymore.”
The astronaut raised an eyebrow, “Geez alright, but again, what are we gonna do about Tsumugi?”

Kokichi turned to the cosplayer and thought for a second before turning back to his associates. “Let Kaede watch her.”

“Wha...M-Me?” the girl said surprised.

“Hey now,” Kaito responded. “She already volunteered to find out the secret of all that junk. Having her watch Tsumugi on top of that...”

“What’s the problem, here?” Kokichi genuinely asked. “Tsumugi being here was all thanks to Kaede in the first place. It makes sense for her to have at least some responsibility towards her, don’tcha think?”

“But still...” the astronaut looked at the pianist with a worried expression.

Kaede smiled at him in response, “It’s fine, Kaito. Actually, this could work out in our favor. I’ll be able to get a chance to talk to her and see if I can get her to reveal something.”

“If you say so,” the astronaut said, finally dropping the subject.

Kirumi approached the students and ‘passed’ Tsumugi down to Kaede.

“I am in your debt, Kaede,” the maid said. “But please, retain caution.”

"Uh yeah..." Shuichi said reluctantly. "Be careful."

“Don’t worry,” the pianist replied. “I will.”

With the atmosphere easing from its previous tension, the other students took this opportunity to explore the academy as well, with the only exception being Miu, who went back to her lab in order to fix the broken Monopad.

To say that things turned awkward for Kaede would be an understatement.

With the students splitting up to explore the academy, the pianist had time to reflect on her current status within the group. Though most of them were willing to accept the girl’s trust again, Kaede had noticed that no one outright forgave her for her misdeeds. Maybe it was just her being paranoid, or maybe she was needlessly looking for something she didn’t need to, but that thought still lingered in the girl’s mind.

Nevertheless, what the other students thought of Kaede wasn’t a immediate concern.

What was a immediate concern to the pianist, however, was the fact that her former friend turned mortal enemy was begrudgingly walking alongside her in the hallways of the academy.

Kaede looked down at the items she was carrying, then at the cosplayer, “Y’know, you could at least help me carry some of this stuff.”

Tsumugi covered her mouth with her hand to stifle a laughter as she glanced at the pianist.

The blonde narrowed her eyes and she stopped in her tracks, leaving the other girl to walk a few paces ahead of her until Tsumugi, too, ceased her walking to look back at the pianist in confusion.

She watched as Kaede dropped the items she was carrying all at once.
“H-Hey, what are you…?!” exclaimed Tsumugi.

“I mean, all this stuff’s for progressing further into the Killing Game, isn’t it?” said Kaede. “Why else would the Monokubs give these to us? So maybe...I shouldn’t even bother figuring out what they should be used for.”

Tsumugi frowned at the girl’s stubbornness, but at the same time, she was impressed by it. The pianist knew her weaknesses well despite the cosplayer revealing her own true personality only just last night. Threatening the status of the Killing Game was indeed a decent way of getting Tsumugi to cooperate with someone. Of course, there’s only so much that she’d be willing to do.

Nevertheless, in order for the Killing Game to continue, Tsumugi complied with the other girl’s previous request and picked up the ocarina, the dragon gem, and the magic key in order to lighten the other girl’s load.

After seeing the cosplayer take one last elongated look at the last item she had gathered, Kaede gave herself a satisfied smile and picked up the other two items as they both then continued their walk down the hallway.

As the two continued their trek, Kaede thought to herself once again. She was supposed to use this time to ask Tsumugi some questions, but where was she going to begin? First of all, there was no way that the cosplayer would even answer any question involving this Killing Game. Secondly, the pianist had already made the safe assumption that Tsumugi hates her guts, so unless she did something drastic, there was no way that the blue-haired girl would even acknowledge her.

Kaede couldn’t give up now; she needed to try something.

The pianist glanced at the other girl, “Look, I know it’s pointless to try and ask you anything at this point.”

Tsumugi glanced back at her, but said nothing.

Kaede continued, “But I think we both know that there are some things you would like to say to me. I gave everyone a chance to say their piece regarding my past actions back at the dining hall, but you were stopped before you got your chance to speak. I’m giving you your chance right now.”

The blue-haired girl continued to look at the blonde, clearly taking in her words.

After a brief moment of silence, Tsumugi accepted the girl’s offer.

“You just had to have missed, didn’t you?”

Kaede sighed loudly and rolled her eyes.

“I get it, I get it,” Tsumugi continued. “You think I’m a monster, a horrible person yadda yadda yadda, but why don’t you think about things from my point of view, huh? It’s not easy being a mastermind, y’know?”

“Aww, you poor baby,” the pianist said with pitiful sarcasm.

“Oh ha ha ha ha ha,” the cosplayer laughed dryly. “Listen, everything would’ve been so perfect had you been willing to accept your guilt back at the class trial. After everything you said back when the Killing Game first started and then the deathtrap you made at the library? That’s not just your simple irony. That’s poetry!”
“Yeah, well sorry I didn’t play by your rules,” Kaede replied.

Tsumugi laughed genuinely this time, “See, that’s where you’re wrong. You DID play by my rules. You gave this rousing speech on how you’re all going to beat this game, catch the mastermind, and become such great friends, but then you go ahead and play the game anyway! That’s not all. You think you’re trapped in this game with a bunch of saints? If someone like me or you is capable of killing someone, then what makes you think the others aren’t the same?”

A pit formed in Kaede’s stomach. As much as she didn’t want to admit it, Tsumugi just brought up a point that demanded a fair bit of attention.

“W-What I did…” the pianist did her best to come up with a counterargument. “You know it was because I wanted to kill the mastermind…”

“The Killing Game doesn’t discriminate motivations,” the cosplayer shot back. “Killing is killing, and once someone does so, the game moves forward.”

Kaede stopped in her tracks and looked directly at the girl, “So then what happens now? It’s clear that neither you nor the Monokubs actually have the balls to just kill all of us outright, so what happens when there’s no murder ever?”

Tsumugi glanced aside solemnly, “I guess…we would just have to live out the rest of our days in this academy together.”

The pianist shook her head, “Like, what, just live here for the rest of our lives? You can’t possibly expect any of us to accept that as our fate!”

The former mastermind looked at Kaede right in the eyes, “You’re in this situation even if you had asked for it or not. I’m sure at some point, you had your own life all planned out. Maybe you had dreams…desires…even anticipation for what your future would bring you. After all, that’s just a plain basic instinct that we human beings have. Well, my apologies to that young innocent Kaede from back then, because she would never have known that this was what would be in store for her. And now here you are, with thirteen other people who are sharing that same unfortunate experience with you. If it wasn’t you, then it would’ve been someone else. You just ‘lost’ the coin toss, as it were. You’re right, it’s awful, cruel, and downright hellish, but life isn’t fair, sadly. People die young, some live out their entire lives unfulfilled, and others…get trapped in an awful, cruel, hellish situation. If the game were to ‘pause’ here and now, then this is the best alternative you could take. You are no longer at a point where you can judge the glamour of your situation. It’s either live or die from here on and if you truly want to live, then I suggest getting used to living in this academy because it only takes one moment for someone to let it set in, that everything starts to fall apart. Boast all you want about escaping from here and living your life in the outside world, but the moment someone dies, they lose that hope. Would you let them keep hoping? Or would you have them accept their fate now? Which one is more cruel and which is more merciful?”

Kaede couldn’t find the words to say back at Tsumugi. The blue-haired girl said what she needed to say, all while retaining a smug smile on her face, as if she tried to bait a reaction out of her. All the pianist could do was stare back at her with an astonished expression. She couldn’t believe that a person could be so…morbid. Despite her reactionary response, Kaede also realized that Tsumugi gave some valuable information in the two’s little discussion. Even if things looked bleak and the enemy that stood before her was formidable, she couldn’t lose hope.

“We will beat this Killing Game,” Kaede finally said.

She didn’t allow the cosplayer to get another word in as Kaede continued walking with her items,
determined to move forward one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for such a short chapter after a rather lengthy wait.

Other than that, I've been meaning to say thanks to those who recommended this story in the Fanfic Recommendations of the Danganronpa TvTropes page. I am honored and humbled to see that some of you consider this to be up there with "Three-Point Shot" and "I'd Trade My Life for Yours".
“I wouldn’t touch that if I were you…” warned Himiko.

After placing the Ancient Passport on an indentation in the wall, it revealed a hidden hallway which led to another Ultimate Research lab.

Specifically, the Ultimate Magician’s lab.

Kaede retracted her hand away from the cauldron in the middle of the room at Himiko’s request.

“Oh, sorry,” the pianist apologized. “I just didn’t think I’d ever see something like this…”

“Why not?” questioned the self-proclaimed mage. “That pot is collecting mana...and I’m the Ultimate Mage, after all.”

“Ah, but these other things…” Kaede said as she gazed around the room.

The blonde noticed the human-sized trick box with a buzzsaw towering over it, as well as the cage filled with doves. Outside of the cauldron, the rest of the objects in the lab were more akin to what a magician would use rather than a mage.

Kaede decided not to point that out to Himiko, if only to not get at her bad side.

However, there was a concern that needed pointing out.

“Some of these are kinda...dangerous, aren’t they?” the pianist stated as she emphasized the sword stabbing prop and the buzzsaw.

“It’s okay,” Himiko assured. “I’m an S+++ class mage, so these magic spells won’t hurt me one bit.”

“Sure, I’ve no doubt about that,” Kaede played along. “But there’s no lock to this room, right? I’m more worried about what other people might try to do with these ‘spells’, if you catch my drift?”

“But the others aren’t mages,” the magician countered. “They wouldn’t be able to do anything.”

While Himiko’s small but determined delusion was cute to Kaede, the pianist couldn’t help but think that it would eventually lead to some dire consequences down the road. Though she may not have known her for that long yet, Kaede believed that Himiko was the type of person who could potentially be easily manipulated.

“All the same, maybe we should get rid of anything that might be used to hurt someone,” the pianist suggested.

“Aw, what’s wrong, Kaede?” Tsumugi asked mockingly. “Worried that the Killing Game might start up again? I’m surprised you aren’t more trusting of the others.”

Kaede and Himiko turned to the cosplayer.

“Like you of all people should be saying that,” the pianist retorted. “If anyone were to try and start the Killing Game again it would be......what the hell are you doing?”

After getting a good look at the blue-haired girl, Kaede noticed that Tsumugi had placed her head inside the frame of the guillotine.
“What?” asked Tsumugi. “I’ve never seen a guillotine before in real life, so I wanted to get a close look at it.”

“Looks like you’re getting a really close look at it…” Himiko noted.

“Hey, Kaede, could you do me a favor and look for a lever or a rope or something?” the cosplayer requested. “I wanna see if this thing actually works.”

“I am absolutely not doing that,” Kaede said bluntly.

“Aw, don’t be such a wet blanket,” Tsumugi whined. “I know I’m not exactly your favorite person right now, but you could at least humor me a little.”

“Tsumugi, I’m not gonna attempt to kill you,” the pianist emphasized.

The blue-haired girl sputtered in astonishment as she removed herself from the guillotine, “Whaaaaa? Who said anything about killing?! Sheesh, Kaede, between this and what you said to Himiko, it seems like you can’t get the Killing Game off your mind.”

“Again, pot meet kettle,” Kaede argued.

“Don’t you mean, pot meet cauldron?” Himiko interjected.

The other two students turned to the mage with deadpan expressions.

“...Nevermind,” said the red head dejectedly.

The two’s next stop was the second floor of the academy. Gonta, Angie, Ryoma and Maki were already there, looking around for any unusual monuments that would correlate with the items that the Monokubs gave to Kaede.

“Hey, guys,” greeted Kaede. “Find anything?”

“Hey, Kaede,” Ryoma returned the greeting. “And you could say that.”


“Find verrrry big thing,” Angie followed up.

“It seemed fairly obvious,” Maki said as she pointed her thumb towards the subject of interest.

Kaede followed her direction and noticed the dragon statue.

The pianist furrowed her brow and turned towards Tsumugi, “You think you’re pretty coy, don’t you?”

“Hmm?” the cosplayer responded.

Kaede put her hands to her hips, “Don’t think I forgot our very first interaction when we awoke in this academy.”

"Ah, is it alright if I ask you something too?” questioned Shuichi. “Earlier...you looked as if you were thinking hard about something. What was it?”
“Oh yeah!” exclaimed Kaede. We needed to ask her that! Nice job, Shuichi!”

“Ah…that bronze dragon statue over there,” explained Tsumugi. “I’m just plain curious about it.”

Shuichi and Kaede turned to the huge dragon statue.

The cosplayer continued, “It almost seems like it’s floating, right? Doesn’t it look pretty out of place?”

“Wow,” replied Tsumugi. “I’m genuinely surprised you remembered something like that.”

Kaede turned away from her, “Yeah well, ever since we outed your true self, I’ve been trying to remember everything that you’ve said in the past.”

“Y-You have!?” the cosplayer said worriedly as she started to sweat. “Oh no, I accidently gave a hint on where all the exits were to the outside world!”

The pianist scowled at the girl.

Tsumugi returned Kaede’s gaze and eventually dropped her worried expression, “Ahh okay, you got me! Just kidding!”

Kaede said nothing as she briskly took the dragon gem from Tsumugi and placed it into the statue’s eye.

Discovering the secret to the dragon statue opened up the second floor even further. From there, Kaede and the others found research labs for Gonta and Kirumi (who couldn’t see it for herself due to her meeting with Kokichi) as well as a pathway to the third floor of the academy.

The third floor revealed Ryoma’s lab, who unfortunately didn’t seem particularly interested in its existence.

“Now that leaves this research lab,” Kaede said as looked at the red door in front of her.

“Uh huh…” Tsumugi replied somewhat dejectedly.

“Are you okay?” asked the pianist, not necessarily for the cosplayer’s well-being but more as an innate curiosity. “You’ve been acting depressed ever since we opened up the second floor.”

“You screw up once as a mastermind and suddenly it’s fine to just throw out an entire narrative apparently,” the blue-haired girl responded vaguely.

“The hell is that supposed to mean?” questioned Kaede.

Tsumugi sighed, “Nothing...and I’m being completely honest here, it’s literally nothing.”

After a wary look, Kaede decided to not question the girl any further and continued her attention at the research lab.

As she reached for the doorknob, Maki suddenly popped up from inside the lab and quickly closed the door behind her.

“Can I help you?” the child caretaker asked dryly.
Kaede flinched back in minor shock, “Ah, Maki! So this is your research lab?”

“Maki!” Tsumugi shouted happily, her attitude perking up in an instant. “Right, this is your lab, isn’t it?”

Maki glared at the cosplayer, as if to give her a warning with just her eyes alone.

“Um,” Kaede quickly said. “Do you mind if I take a look inside?”

“Yes,” the dark-haired girl replied just as quick.

The pianist looked at the girl with a surprised expression. In her mind, Kaede thought that she and her had become closer ever since the class trial, even if only slightly. Maki had gone out of her way to bring her from the depths of despair and motivate her to survive the Killing Game, so it was disappointing to Kaede to see the cold distant student be as cold and distant as ever.

Though it was probably not a good idea, Kaede decided to push her luck a bit, “…’Yes’ as in we can go in, or ‘yes’ as in you do mi--”

Maki reentered her lab and slammed the door.

After a brief pause, Tsumugi leaned her head towards Kaede, “I think ‘yes’ as in she does mind.”

Kaede put a hand to her head in frustration, “Geez...we’re supposed to be working together. Why does she have to be like that?”

Tsumugi shrugged her shoulders, “Maybe since she’s the Ultimate Child Caregiver, she realizes how useless her talent is in a Killing Game, so that’s why she’s separating herself from the rest of the group.”

“It’s not like my talent is of any help, either,” the pianist replied. “It’s probably because that’s just the type of person she is.”

The cosplayer smiled, “Yeah, that’s most likely it.”

Kaede sighed, “No point in fretting about this now, I suppose. There’s still more areas to find.”

The two students turned their attentions towards the other defining feature of the third floor hallway: The large pixelated door.

Using the magic key, the door collapsed and revealed a pathway to the academy’s fourth floor.

“Another staircase?” Kaede noted. “You must’ve really wanted the Killing Game to start if you weren’t willing to open up this academy until then.”

“I supposed it isn’t any harm to tell you that, yes, with each class trial we complete, the academy opens up slightly bigger each time,” explained Tsumugi.

“Slightly?” the pianist echoed. “We already discovered the fourth floor.”

“Yeah well...meh,” the cosplayer said dismissively.

With Tsumugi’s half-hearted response, the two proceeded to climb up the stairs and into the next floor.

Once they reached their destination, Kaede noticed the eerie change in atmosphere of the fourth floor
“Well this place isn’t creepy at all,” the pianist said sarcastically.

Tsumugi chuckled at the other girl’s unease, “Y’know, legends say that a brutal murder took place on this floor.”

“Yeah?” replied Kaede. “Y’know, I heard a similar story. Only the murder took place in the library!”

The blue-haired girl immediately started laughing, “Pfff-f-hahaha! Touche’! You just plain curb-stomped me there!”

Despite the creepy nature of the hallway, Kaede continued on with her exploration.

“Three rooms in a row and they’re all empty!” Kaede concluded from her findings.

“Ah yes,” said Tsumugi. “Three rooms, all eerily similar, located in a dark hallway within an academy designed for a killing game. Isn’t it just a perfect scenario for a murder to happen?”

“Hush, you,” the pianist could only reply.

“Yahaaaah!” greeted a familiar voice.

The two turned to see Angie walking towards them.

“Hi, Angie,” Kaede greeted back. “Find anything interesting?”

“As a matter of fact, yes I did,” answered the artist. “Atua, with His gracious guidance, has led me to my research lab.”

“Good for you, Angie,” Kaede said genuinely. “I’ll be excited to see some of the art pieces you’ll be able to make thanks to your lab.”

Angie nodded her head, “Of course, of course. Assuming, you’re still willing to make that offering you promised?”

Kaede started to sweat, “O-Offering? You mean…?”

“How many pints shall it be then, Kaede?” asked the artist.

“N-None!” the pianist quickly shouted. “I’m still anemic…”

Angie nodded once more, “I see, I see. What about you?”

Tsumugi noticed that the girl was pointing directly at her, “Me?”

“The blood of a sinner is acceptable, too.”

The cosplayer suddenly became excited, “In that case, put me down for as many pints as you want! Hell, even gallons if you have to!”

“Nyahahaha!” Angie cried joyfully. “Well aren’t you an eager donor!”

“No, don’t!” Kaede ceased this line of topic. “Tsumugi might die of blood loss!”

“Kaede!” Tsumugi exclaimed in a scolding tone. “Are you thinking about the Killing Game again?”
“I’m just being cautious, because I know you’ll try to take advantage of any situation that presents itself to you!” the pianist explained.

“Now, now, Kaede,” Angie reassured the girl. “Atua is an all-knowing god. He knows when an offering is enough to satisfy His will.”

“See, Kaede?” said Tsumugi. “All I wanted was to see Angie’s artwork, so you can pull out that stick up your a--”

“All joking aside, there was an actual reason why I approached you, Kaede,” the artist quickly stated.

“Ehhh?!” the cosplayer reeled back in shock. “You weren’t serious!?”

The pianist breathed a sigh of relief, “An actual reason, you say?”

“Uh huh,” the white-haired girl responded. “If all of us are to work together to beat this Killing Game, then we should share any detail we find, no matter how small. Isn’t that right?”

“Right,” replied Kaede.

“Well then, I should let you know, that my research lab is different than the other ones we have found so far,” Angie began to explain.

“Different?” the blonde repeated.

“You see,” she continued. “I am merely a vassal for Atua as He is truly the one who creates the art. However, in order for me to become one with the great Atua, I must shut out all people and noises. Therefore, the difference between the other research labs and mine is that my lab has a lock.”

Angie pulled out a key from her jacket pocket in order to emphasize her point.

“A lock?” Kaede wondered. “I guess I understand your reasoning behind it, but still…having a lockable room in this academy outside of our dorms…”

“Is just asking for a murder to happen!” Tsumugi finished. “Is that what you wanted to say, Kaede?”

“…More or less,” the blonde replied reluctantly.

“Hmm, yes,” said Angie while standing in a meditative pose. “Which is why I wanted to let you know about this, so that you don’t assume any ill will from my end.”

“O-Of course not!” Kaede quickly reassured.

“Good!” the artist said happily. “Feel free to share this information with the others. With that, I bid you two a bye-onara!”

After a farewell from the artist, Kaede was left feeling more unease with each discovery that came to her from exploring the academy.

Outside of the three empty rooms and Angie’s lab, there was one more noteworthy place in the halls of the fourth floor.

Kaede stared in awe at the enormous room filled with books and various artifacts. To her, this place was practically a museum.
From behind her, she heard the door creak open as Korekiyo entered the room.

“My word,” Kiyo said as he gazed around the room. “It would appear this is my lab. The Ultimate Anthropologist’s lab.”

“This is some lab you got, Kiyo,” said Kaede. “I’m actually a little jealous.”

“Kehehe…” Korekiyo laughed. “No need to feel that way, my dear. If anything, I’m actually feeling a bit wistful.”

“Huh?” questioned the pianist.

“All these exhibits...all these books, it’s a shame that they are presented to me within the context of being trapped in a Killing Game,” the anthropologist explained.

“Ah,” Kaede immediately saw his point. “Yeah...that’s true.”

“Not really,” Tsumugi said, leaning against a wall as she read one of the lab’s many books. “You’re all trapped here forever, so you have plenty of time to enjoy everything this lab has to offer.”

Kaede frowned at the girl while Korekiyo merely chuckled in amusement.

“Kehehe, now that is certainly a morbidly optimistic viewpoint. If it were anyone else, I would assume they’d be trying to find the silver lining to our situation, but since it’s you, I know that your words don’t have any......what are you holding?”

Tsumugi peered her eyes from out of the book, “...A book?”

Korekiyo calmly shut his eyes, “Let me rephrase, then. Where did you get that book?”

“From that display case,” answered the cosplayer, gesturing to the now empty exhibit case.

To Kaede’s surprise, the anthropologist started to visibly sweat.

“C-Can it truly be?” questioned Korekiyo as he carefully approached the blue-haired girl. “Tsumugi, would you kindly hand that over to me, nice and careful?”

The girl thought for a brief second, “Mmm...nope.”

Korekiyo stared at her with a neutral expression. Kaede noted that Kiyo wasn’t the type of person who gets easily angered, though the pianist was curious if Tsumugi would be the one to put him in that position.

“Allow me to explain, then, Tsumugi,” Kiyo said calmly. “What you are holding there is an extremely precious document, said to contain the history of a village destroyed long ago. So please, I ask that you cooperate and carefully hand that over to me…”

Suddenly, his expression turned dark, “...before I tear out your nerves.”

At that moment, Tsumugi had a genuine look of fear on her face, “Ah...O-Okay...I was...just joking around…”

The cosplayer did as she was told and handed the book to Korekiyo.

“What exactly is that book, Kiyo?” asked Kaede. “You said it was the history of a destroyed village?”
“Ah, yes,” the anthropologist addressed the pianist, returning to his usual calm demeanor. “The fabled Caged Dog Village. They had a reputation for using many dark arts and spells. Unfortunately, the village was destroyed at the hands of a feudal lord who feared their power, but one girl- the lone survivor- risked her life to write this book.”

“I see,” the pianist replied. “Which explains why it looks like it was bound by hand.”

Korekiyo nodded in agreement, “Indeed, this is all in her handwriting. Though there are a few copies that exist in this world, to think I’d be able to lay eyes on the real one…”

“Looks just like a plain old book to me…” Tsumugi said begrudgingly.

“In any case,” said Korekiyo, turning to the cosplayer. “I heavily advise against touching things without permission. These are all precious relics, after all.”

“Whoa, look at that katana!” shouted Kokichi.

The supreme leader suddenly popped up inside the room and grabbed the katana sitting in another display case.

Korekiyo sighed, “Looks like another troublemaker has revealed themselves.”

“Kokichi!” the pianist shouted. “I thought you had a meeting with Kirumi and Shuichi?”

“That’s all done and over with,” the purple-haired boy answered as he held the sheathed weapon. “Now I’m catching up with all the interesting things you found!”

“Wait,” the anthropologist warned. “You mustn’t be so careless with--”

“Yes, I see it now!” Kokichi said as he unsheathed the katana and raised it over his head. “Thousands of my subordinates defeated at the hands of the hero! They burst into the final room where I await and there...I pull this out as my weapon! Now me and the hero are locked in the heat of battle!”

To further emphasize his scenario, Kokichi began to swing the katana at the air randomly.

“Aaah!” Kaede shrieked. “K-Kokichi!”

“This does not bode well…” said Korekiyo.

“Hiyahh! Slice! Slash! One-sword style!” the purple-haired boy shouted with his strokes.

“Kokichi, Kokichi!” Tsumugi shouted excitedly. “Over here! Slice me!”

Kokichi happily turned to the cosplayer and raised the sword above him as if to comply, but suddenly slumped over as if he became depressed.

“...It’s not much fun when it’s *you* who’s encouraging me…” the supreme leader said somberly.

Tsumugi once again reeled back in astonishment, “Ehhhh!? You’re not gonna do it!??”

“Kehehe,” Korekiyo chuckled.

“You’re laughing at this?” questioned Kaede.

“I was certainly about to scold Kokichi for being reckless,” answered Kiyo. “But I managed to catch
a glimpse of a genuine manzai routine that I couldn’t help but be amused.”

The pianist tilted her head in confusion, “M...Man-what?”

Korekiyo looked at the girl with a minor shocked expression, “Why, Kaede, do you not know what manzai is?”

“Yeah, Kaede,” Tsumugi followed. "Why, manzai is a popular Japanese confection!"

Kokichi lightly slapped Tsumugi’s shoulder with the back of his hand, “That’s manju, Shirogane.”

“Allow me to explain,” the anthropologist began. “Manzai is a traditional style of stand up comedy in Japanese culture. It usually involves two performers: the straight man, or the ‘tsukkomi’, and the funny man, or ‘boke’. The main source of comedy comes from these two performers playing off each other in various ways. It is important to the routine that the performers have a good chemistry with each other, else the act falls apart.”

Kaede slowly nodded her head in understanding, “Hmm, I see...so what you’re saying is...Kokichi and Tsumugi have excellent chemistry with each other!”

Tsumugi had a big smile on her face at Kaede’s words, while Kokichi had the biggest look of disappointment on his.

“We do!?"

“We do NOT!”
After exploring the academy and solving the puzzle of the Monokubs’ strange items, most of the students regrouped outside of the dining hall on the outdoor side of the academy.

“A pool and a casino?” questioned Shuichi as he finished listening to Kaede’s findings.

“I know, right?” the pianist shared the detective’s confusion. “This is looking less like an academy and more like a resort.”

“I actually kind of like it!” admitted Tenko. “I’ve always dreamed of swimming in a big fancy pool!”

“But didn’t you tell me that you didn’t know how to swim?” asked Keebo.

“Well…” the aikido master hummed nervously. “Sure it’s a far off dream, but not impossible!”

“I admire your optimism!” said the robot. “If that’s the case, then maybe it’s not too farfetched to say that one day, too, *if* will be able to swim!”

“HAH!” Kokichi cried out. “And maybe one day a fairy godmother will appear at night and turn you into a real boy!”

“D-Do not compare me to some fairy tale puppet!” Keebo replied to the supreme leader.

Shuichi turned to Kaede, “The pool itself is fine, but what I find more concerning was the rule that you mentioned.”

“Ah yes,” noted Korekiyo. “The rule that states, ‘Swimming is prohibited during nighttime’.”

“Apparently that rule’s important enough that it needed to be added to the regulations,” said Ryoma as he looked at his Monopad.

“What about the other rules?” asked Kokichi. “‘Do not die from leg cramps’, ‘Do not die from slipping’, and ‘Do not die from choking on your food’? Hey, Kee-boy! At least you don’t have to worry about those rules!”

“What are talking about?” replied the robot. “I can slip just as much as all of you can!”

“That’s the part you’re concerned with?” questioned Himiko.

“In any case,” Kaede interrupted. “Tsumugi explained that entering the building should be fine, but touching the water itself is in violation of the rules.”

“Tch, Tsumugi…” Kaito spat out. “I’m not really fond of hearing that name…”

“I don’t like it anymore than you do, Kaito,” said the pianist. “But she *has* been giving me some information now and again.”

“Only information on the rules of the Killing Game,” the astronaut countered. “What we need is information on how to escape the Killing Game.”

“Well she does want us to play the Killing Game no matter what,” explained Kokichi.

“Yeah, and it’s either that or live in this academy for the rest of our lives…” Kaede added.
“Speaking of which,” said Gonta. “Gonta no see Tsumugi. Where has Tsumugi gone?”

“She’s in the dining hall,” answered Kaede. “Kirumi’s in there, too, watching her.”

Angie put a paintbrush to her chin in contemplation, “Ohhhh, that explains why she isn’t here, either.”

“Miu, as well, is still continuing to repair that mysterious Monopad back in her lab,” Keebo informed.

“And, uh, what about Maki?” asked Shuichi.

The pianist frowned and crossed her arms in a huff, “She stuck herself inside her lab…”

“Stuck herself?” the detective repeated.

“We found her lab, but she refuses to let anyone go in there, and she refuses to come out,” Kaede explained further.

“What!” exclaimed Kaito. “After we all promised to work together? That stubborn little...why I should go over there and give her a piece of my mind!”

“Oh, let’s leave her be,” Kokichi said dismissively. “What we should focus on is a certain failure of a mastermind, who awaits us just beyond this door.”

“Any reason why she’s in there?” asked the astronaut, referring to Tsumugi. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not exactly itching for her to be here with us, prattling on about her precious Killing Game…”

The supreme leader shrugged, “Don’t look at me! I didn’t tell Kirumi to watch Tsumugi in the dining hall.”

“It was me,” Ryoma quickly said.

Everyone turned to the short-statured student.

The former tennis pro looked at Kaede, “It’s like Kaito said...if we’re really gonna work together to escape this Killing Game, then we each need to do our part. And any suggestion, no matter how small, could be able to help us to do so in some way.”

Tenko displayed a determined expression, “So you’re saying you found a way to help us escape from this Killing Game?”

Ryoma adjusted his cap in reluctance, “I’m just offering a suggestion based on my own real life experiences.”

“Huh?” wondered Kaede, still uncertain on Ryoma’s main point.

“Look,” the ex-convict began to explain. “We, to put things lightly, have apprehended a criminal.”

The pianist thought about his words and agreed, “I guess you could put it that way.”

He continued, “And right now, we’re trying to get this criminal to reveal her secrets to us, but the problem is that she’s not willing to divulge that information.”

“Of course she isn’t,” Kokichi scoffed. “To put it in her own words, she’s not ‘telling us shit’.”
“The same could be said for any person in the world,” said Ryoma. “No one’s willing to share their most precious secrets to anyone. Especially criminals.”

“Especially criminals?” Kaede echoed. “Wait...do you mean--”

Ryoma nodded his head, “What do you do when you catch a criminal you need information out of? You **interrogate them**.”

“Nyeh?” questioned Himiko. “Interrogate?”

“Oh I get ya,” said Kokichi in understanding. “Well well, Ryoma, that prison life sure comes in handy, doesn’t it?”

The tennis pro turned away, “Let’s just say I’ve heard and seen a few success stories during my time.”

Kaede started to smile in agreement, “Yeah...Yeah, I think this could work! As long as we say the right things to her, Tsumugi may reveal something crucial to us!”

“But even if we decided to legitimately interrogate Tsumugi, how would we go about that?” questioned Keebo. “None of us have any actual police experience…”

“Correction,” said Ryoma. “**One** of us does.”

Everyone slowly turned their heads towards a certain detective.

Shuichi, noticing this, widened his eyes in response, “W-Wh-What!? Me?!”

“There’s no better person for this job than the Ultimate Detective,” Ryoma said with a determined look.

“B-B-B-But!” the detective stuttered. “I’m only an apprentice! I’m...I’m not really such an ‘ultimate’ detective…”

Kaede grabbed Shuichi’s hands in order to plead with the boy, “Please, Shuichi? If anyone could do it, it’s you!”

“Kaede…” the detective muttered as he looked at the girl’s hope-filled eyes.

The boy then felt an arm wrap around his shoulder.

“Yeah, c’mon man!” Kaito said encouragingly. “We would have never caught Tsumugi in the first place if it weren’t for you!”

“Kaito…” Shuichi muttered the astronaut’s name as well.

Soon, all of the other students gave their own words of support to the detective.

“There’s no harm in trying, Shuichi,” said Keebo.

“That’s a fair point,” said Korekiyo. “Whether this outcome results in success or failure, the important thing is that you tried in the first place.”

“It okay, Shuichi,” assured Gonta. “Even if Shuichi can’t do it, friends won’t blame Shuichi!”

“I’ll cast a buff that increases your chance of success, Shuichi,” said Himiko as she started to wave
her arms as if casting a spell.

“There ya go, Shuichi!” said Tenko excitedly. “Now with Himiko’s spell, you can accomplish almost anything!”

“And Atua shall be there to guide you as well, Shuichi!” said Angie as she calmly prayed.

“Everyone…” Shuichi looked around to see everyone’s looks of encouragement. The detective took a deep breath and built up his resolve. “Alright…Alright, I’ll do it!”

Kaede let out a breath of content and gently let go of the detective’s hands, “Thank you, Shuichi.”

The detective nodded at the pianist’s words and had a look of determination as he began to approach the door of the dining hall.

“Hold on,” Ryoma stopped Shuichi in his tracks. “I think we should have one more.”

“One more?” Kaede repeated.

“One more person to go with Shuichi,” the tennis pro clarified. “Just in case he needs help or if Tsumugi proves to be too much to handle.”

“In that case, why don’t we all just go in there and interrogate her?” suggested Kaito.

“All of us?” questioned Keebo.

Ryoma shook his head, “We can’t overwhelm her. If she sees all of us with the intention of wringing information out of her, then she’ll become tight-lipped for sure.”

“I can’t argue with that,” Kaede admitted. “After all, she managed to share info with me since it was just the two of us at the time.”

“But wait a second,” the astronaut said suddenly. “Wouldn’t Tsumugi realize what’s going on the moment Shuichi walks in the room and starts asking her questions?”

Upon hearing that, the ex-convict glanced away from the group, almost bashfully, “Actually…that’s the other reason on why I suggested Shuichi…”

“Huh?” questioned Shuichi.

“Oh, I see!” Angie said happily. “It’s because Shuichi’s the type of person that one would lower their guard towards!”

“Wha…?” the detective reacted again.

“Shuichi is a pretty meek individual,” Korekiyo added. “That makes him easy to approach and certainly someone you wouldn’t expect to retain any caution to.”

“Shuichi so nice!” Gonta complimented. “Gonta always feels relaxed when talking to him!”

“I…I see,” the detective replied, not sure on how he should be taking in their words. “So then…who would the other person be, Ryoma?”

Ryoma thought to himself for a moment, “It would have to be someone intelligent enough to handle this…”
“Ooh, then it can no be Gonta,” said the entomologist. “Gonta not very smart.”

“I can probably do it,” Himiko offered. “I’m a mage, so my ‘Intelligence’ stat is very high.”

Tenko took a defensive stance, “I-I refuse to let Himiko partner up with a degenerate male!”

“It’s not just intelligence,” Ryoma continued on. “This person also needs to be able to work well with Shuichi, too.”

Kaede suddenly sparked up. There were only a few people who had interacted with the detective for such a long length of time, after all.

“They would have to know him well enough to play off his strengths, and vice versa,” the tennis pro explained.

The pianist was starting to become excited and she wasn’t too sure why. The two had already investigated together before, but the thought of performing an official interrogation with Shuichi gave Kaede a certain sense of enthusiasm. As if she was about to give off the best performance of her life.

“But who here has those qualifications to accompany Shuichi?” asked Keebo.

“Alright,” Kaede said with confidence. “I’ll do i--”

**Kokichi,**” Ryoma turned to the supreme leader. “I think it should be you.”

Kaede stopped in her tracks, “...Huh?”

The boy in question, who had his arms crossed behind his head and looked off into the distance as if he was in his own little world, suddenly realized he was being addressed, “Hmm? What, you want me to do it?”

“There no other person I feel that’s more appropriate for the job,” the former tennis pro explained.

Kaede stepped back rather awkwardly, “Oh...uh...s-so why--”

“Why Kokichi, Ryoma!?” Kaito quickly asked, unknowingly finishing the pianist’s thought.

“If you recall the class trial,” Ryoma started to explain. “The back-and-forth that these two shared was nothing short of intense.”

“Back-and-forth?” Himiko repeated. “Is that a tennis thing, or something?”

Korekiyo closed his eyes to remember the events, “You’re talking about the times when Kokichi would try to refute anything that Shuichi said, and in turn Shuichi would do his best to contradict Kokichi’s lies, correct?”

“Interesting…” Kokichi gave the detective his signature mischievous smile. “You really think you can contradict my claim?”

“Quite easily, in fact,” Shuichi stated plainly.

Kokichi chuckled, “Oh ho ho! Was that a speck of confidence I detected from the detective?”

“If you were half the detective that I am, you would’ve come up with a better lie for me to contradict,” Shuichi countered.
Ryoma fidgeted with the toothpick-like candy in his mouth, “Call it cliche’, but it seems that the Ultimate Supreme Leader and the Ultimate Detective naturally share a certain ‘rapport’ with each other.”

“Actually,” Keebo said optimistically. “You may have a point, Ryoma. Not only that, but I have no doubt that Kokichi is also capable of getting under someone’s skin.”

“That should be no problem for you, Kee-boy, since you don’t have skin!” Kokichi cried out.

“Case...in...point,” the robot said dryly.

“Hey, yeah!” Tenko said, starting to become onboard for the suggestion. “Not even Tsumugi would be able to handle Kokichi’s antics!”

“Agreed,” Korekiyo simply said.

“This sort of outcome is nothing short of a miracle,” Angie stated joyfully. “Praise be to Atua!”

Kaito looked surprised at the others before sighing and slowly resigning himself to the situation at hand. “What do you think, Shuichi? It should be your call.”

The detective thought to himself in regards to the plan. He glanced at Kokichi and then at the entrance to the dining hall where Tsumugi was.

“There’s no harm in trying,” Shuichi concluded.

Kokichi gave off a joyous laugh and wrapped his arm around Shuichi’s shoulder, “Looks like I get to offer my assistance to the Ultimate Detective once again!”

“Ah...oh...sure…” the detective could only say.

The supreme leader glanced to the side and noticed a certain dejected pianist, “Hmm? What’s wrong, Kaede? You look disappointed for some reason.”

The pianist quickly shot up with wide eyes, “H-Huh!? O-Oh no, it’s nothing! I...I think this is a good idea...too?”

“That’s good,” Kokichi nodded. “Because this is all for the sake of escaping this Killing Game, so there shouldn’t be any objections to this if they involve personal feelings.”

“N-No, no!” Kaede stammered. “Of course not!”

“Kokichi,” Shuichi quickly said. “We shouldn’t waste any time.”

The small purple-haired boy unwrapped his arm around the detective and stood at his side, “Alright, alright, let’s get this show on the road!”

The two proceeded to walk to the dining hall and opened the door.

From within the room, they saw Tsumugi quietly sitting in a chair with Kirumi standing right behind her.

The maid noticed the two students entering the room and softly smiled, “So it begins...I shall leave you to it, gentlemen.”
Kirumi performed a small curtsy and exited the dining hall, closing the door behind her and joining the others outside.

Tsumugi could only raise an eyebrow at the events occurring before her.

Now, only three people were present in the dining hall:

The criminal, and her two interrogators.
The dining hall was as silent as it could be. Tsumugi stared at the two students in front of her, waiting for them to state their business.

Shuichi quickly tried to determine what their first move should be. Should he just be blunt and honest with the former mastermind? Perhaps he should start with a friendly demeanor in order to ease her into the situation. Maybe a coordinated act of intimidation between himself and Kokichi in order to catch Tsumugi off guard?

Of course that last option would be a little difficult for the usually reserved detective.

However, none of that would matter as Kokichi took it upon himself to make the first move, “Hey there, ‘Master Mindless’!”

“Hey, ’tsukkomi’, Tsumugi immediately shot back.

After a split second of a shocked look from the supreme leader, Kokichi quickly ran it back and began laughing, “Hahaha, wow! I start by summoning a monster in Attack Mode, and you just go in and reveal your trap just like that!”

Shuichi placed a hand on his associate’s shoulder, “Kokichi. Settle.”

The supreme leader looked at him before merely smiling and taking a step back, “Alrighty. You’re the boss.”

The detective then slowly approached the cosplayer.

Tsumugi, being the anime fanatic she was, rested her elbows on the table and interlocked her fingers together resembling a certain antagonist from a mech anime.

“What do you think you’re doing, Shuichi?” she asked the detective.

The dark-haired boy placed both his hands on the table as he looked at her right in the eye, “I think you know exactly what I’m doing, Tsumugi.”

The cosplayer chuckled in response, “So this is what’s happening then? You’re going to attempt to interrogate me?”

Shuichi remained silent and did not waver in his gaze at Tsumugi.

“What are you hoping for me to tell you?” the cosplayer continued to speak. “There’s no way to escape from this place, so you won’t get any information about any exits from me.”

“Who said anything about exits?” asked Kokichi. “Quite frankly, it’s obvious you’re not gonna spill the beans on that, and let’s be honest, do you think I’d even be here if we were trying to end the Killing Game just like that?”

Tsumugi locked eyes with the supreme leader, “It wouldn’t be the first time you deceived me.”

“Only because you cheated,” Kokichi shot back. “Other than that, I’m all in on this Killing Game.”

“Then why?” the cosplayer asked as she returned her gaze towards Shuichi.
The detective looked back at his partner who in turn gave him an innocent thumbs-up.

Shuichi mentally sighed and deeply thought about his next words carefully. Whether Kokichi was honest about his intentions or not, he successfully managed to open up the discussion. As long as it didn’t involve ending the Killing Game, Tsumugi was willing to at least listen to what they had to say. The detective’s next move was going to be an important one, so he needed to make it count.

“I...was hoping you’d tell me more about the Killing Game itself,” Shuichi finally said.

Tsumugi raised an eyebrow at him, “What?”

“There are some things I’m still confused about regarding the rules of the Killing Game,” he explained further.

“You want all of us to play the game, right?” Kokichi followed. “How can we do that if we don’t fully understand the rules?”

“Everything you need to know about the rules of the Killing Game is in your e-Handbook,” Tsumugi answered. “If you have any further questions, please feel free to ask the Monokubs.”

“Yeah, but the Monokubs are so annoying!” the supreme leader whined. “At the very least, you’re tolerable if only by a small margin.”

“A-And besides,” continued Shuichi. “The questions that we have can only be answered by you…”

“Only by me?” the cosplayer repeated.

The blue-haired girl thought for a second, trying to determine the detective’s meaning. Suddenly, a smile crept up on the girl’s face as she came to a realization.

“Shuichi, you slick schemer!” Tsumugi shouted happily.

The dark-haired interrogator took a step back in surprise, “W-What?”

“Questions only I could answer, right?” the cosplayer echoed his words. “As in, questions only a mastermind could answer!”

“W-Wait!” Shuichi stuttered. “Please, just...hold on a se--”

Tsumugi stood up from her chair and pointed at the detective, “You want to know more about the Mastermind Perk, don’t you?”

Shuichi’s eyes widened, “Th-The Mastermind Perk?!”

Suddenly, Kokichi appeared at the detective’s side, “That’s right! You caught us red-handed on that one!”

“Kokichi?” questioned Shuichi. “What are you--”

“But, uh, quick question,” the supreme leader continued as he ignored his associate’s concerns. “Didn’t the Monokubs create that perk only recently? Why would you know anything about that, Tsumugi?”

In response, the cosplayer confidently wagged her finger at them, “Those tiny adorable headmasters may have removed my status as mastermind, but that doesn’t mean I’m not able to pick up on a few things here and there.”
The former mastermind gestured for the two interrogators to lean in closer, as if there was a secret she wanted to share with them.

Shuichi and Kokichi both complied as Tsumugi began to whisper, “Because they made the perk so recently, the Monokubs are probably determining the specifics of it as we speak.”

“The...specifics?” questioned the detective.

“I mean, sure, they established how to obtain the perk quite clearly,” the cosplayer admitted. “But how it plays to the Killing Game, itself, is another story entirely. For instance, what happens if one person gets the Mastermind Perk, but then another person fulfills the prerequisites for that perk as well? Can there be more than one mastermind, or will the title have to be switched around? Things like that, y’know?”

“Interesting,” replied Kokichi, seemingly interested in the girl’s words. “But of course, all of that is mere speculation. Like you said, the Monokubs are probably figuring out the answer to those questions, so why does it sound like *you* know what the answers are?”

Tsumugi smiled rather excitedly, “That’s the beauty of having a rule such as, ‘there may be new additions to the school rules according to the convenience of the headmaster’. Whether they come up with it on the spot or maybe get the idea from someone else, the Monokubs can add whatever rule they please.”

“While that’s true,” Shuichi began. “They also made sure to never acknowledge you as a mastermind ever again, so they can’t exactly add any rules at your suggestion…”

“And why not?” she questioned. “Everyone else also has that ‘power’, after all. As long as it makes things interesting, any one of us could ask the Monokubs if they can add a rule to the Killing Game.”

“Ohhhh,” Kokichi put a finger to his lips mischievously. “I didn’t know we could do *that*.”

The former mastermind covered her mouth with her hand in response, “Oops! Maybe I shouldn’t have said that…”

Shuichi felt a great deal of unease as he noticed the unusual ‘playfulness’ that Tsumugi had with her last words. It was almost as if she didn’t care that she had shared such a crucial piece of information with them. After all, it was one that makes the Killing Game more dangerous than it already was.

“I’ll admit my situation’s a bit more...delicate than the rest of you,” said Tsumugi. “So I can’t exactly go to the Monokubs and just start giving them suggestions, and likewise I can’t imagine they can just come up to me and ask for help.”

“In that case,” inquired Kokichi. “Are you, perhaps, hoping that the Monokubs are listening in on our conversation right now? That would certainly enable them to get ideas without having to directly interact with you.”

Tsumugi gave the boy a mischievous smile, “It’s almost kinda precious, isn’t it? They already promised to cut ties with me, so now they’re finding other ways to hear my ideas. For example, a platform in which I am able to freely speak my mind. Such as...an interrogation.”

“That’s assuming the Monokubs are willing to listen to you at all,” responded the supreme leader. “How do we know you’re not just giving yourself too much credit and the Monokubs, in reality, aren’t really interested in whatever you had to say?”
The blue-haired thought for a brief second about his words, “Hmm...I guess we won’t really know for sure. But say for one moment, that I give you guys my thoughts on how the Mastermind Perk should be implemented, and then later...all our Monopads start beeping because the school rules have been updated. And then, surprise! There’s the details of the Mastermind Perk, my words previously, all there in the school rules! Wouldn’t that just be...foreboding?”

Shuichi started to visibly sweat, though the boy did his best to maintain his outward composure.

Tsumugi sat down back on her chair and relaxed her posture, “So then, gentlemen, where should we go from here? I can sit here and talk all day about this...or the three of us can walk out of this room and you can tell the others about your unsuccessful mission.”

Kokichi could only smile at the girl’s ‘ultimatum’, “I see no problems in continuing this. Go ahead, let’s hear what you have to sa--”

“Kokichi,” the detective grabbed the boy’s attention. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

“Oh?” the purple-haired boy replied. “Well of course you can, silly! You’re in charge of this interrogation, after all!”

“R...Right,” despite that title, Shuichi doubted the accuracy of it.

The supreme leader turned to Tsumugi, “Okay then, ‘Mindless Master’, you just stay there and let your ideas fester in your head. We’ll be riiight back.”

Tsumugi, in response, merely propped up her head with her elbow resting on the table while Shuichi led Kokichi to the corner of the room.

“Wassup, boss?” Kokichi asked nonchalantly.

“I don’t think this is a good idea,” the detective answered while whispering.

“Whaaaaat?!” the supreme leader exclaimed while also maintaining a whisper.

“We can’t risk the Monokubs adding any new rules, especially at Tsumugi’s suggestion.”

Upon hearing those words, Kokichi breathed a sigh of relief, “Oh is that all?”

“H-Huh?” the detective questioned.

“Relaaaax, Shuichi. It’s not even guaranteed that the Monokubs even care about Tsumugi or her ideas.”

“E-Even so, we--”

Kokichi wrapped his arm around Shuichi’s shoulder in assurance, “And even if they did, it’s not like anyone would take advantage of the Mastermind Perk to begin with. Remember that Kaito even said that we should just ignore it, so ignore it we shall. No matter what additions the Monokubs bring to it.”

“I…” the detective hesitated. “I know that...but…”

“Shuichi, you should be more trusting of the others,” Kokichi said carrying a worried, yet also seemingly relaxed, expression on his face. “Everyone’s doing their part to escape from this Killing Game, and now it’s up to us to do the same. Let’s just let Tsumugi talk for a bit; let her get everything about this Killing Game out in the open for us to hear. Before long, we’ll be able to piece
together all the information she gives us and we’ll be able to find some sort of loophole to the Killing
Game itself. Hell, I wouldn’t put it past her to screw up again and give us another piece of crucial
information.”

Shuichi remained silent as he turned his head away from the boy and thought to himself.

At that moment, Kokichi, while the detective wasn’t looking, put on a sinister smile, “C’mon,
Shuichi, we can’t disappoint everyone. Especially not Kae--”

“It seems you two are understandably reluctant to this situation, so why don’t I give you an offer?”
Tsumugi suddenly said.

The purple-haired boy quickly became annoyed at being cut off from his momentum as he and
Shuichi turned to the former mastermind.

“An offer?” the detective echoed.

“Tch,” Kokichi spat dismissively. “It better be a good one.”

“Ah, such an apt response!” said the cosplayer. “One.”

“Eh?” the supreme leader narrowed his eyes.

Tsumugi raised her index finger, “Let me say one suggestion in regards to the Mastermind Perk, and
I will give you one piece of information that will certainly be beneficial to all of you.”

“One...piece?” Shuichi repeated her words once again.

“One piece does exist!” she exclaimed excitedly. “And trust me, I think you’ll want to hear what I
have to say on both accounts!”

The detective, like before, was reluctant to let the girl speak. Even if it was one suggestion, it was
risky maneuver to allow Tsumugi a method to lead the Killing Game in her favor. On the other hand,
if there were a piece of information that he could obtain which would prove beneficial to everyone, it
was his responsibility to seize it.

Shuichi thought about Kokichi’s words. He thought about everyone who was patiently waiting
outside the dining hall. In order to end the Killing Game...in order to save everyone...risks needed to
be taken. He had to trust in the others. That they would never succumb to this Killing Game. If he
could do that, then he doesn’t have to worry about whatever Tsumugi had to say.

The boy took a deep breath and made his decision, “...Deal.”

Both Tsumugi and Kokichi looked at him, each with different reactions.

“Oh?” the blue-haired girl tilted her head.

“It’s a deal,” the detective emphasized. “You say whatever you want to say, and you tell us this piece
of information that you say we’ll ‘benefit’ from.”

The former mastermind clapped her hands together in excitement, “Splendid! I’m so thankful for this,
Shuichi!”

Tsumugi laughed light-heartedly and then rested her elbows once again on the table, hand still
clasped together.
After a brief silence she began to speak, “Ah, the Mastermind Perk. I’ll admit, it was an ambitious move from the Monokubs. Just orchestrate someone to kill another, and you get access to what pretty much is a safe house for the rest of the Killing Game. But again, there are some things that remain unclear in regards to that perk. I already mentioned certain specifics from before, but sadly I limited myself to only one suggestion. That’s certainly the hard part, to say the least. It’s probably a long shot that my suggestion would even be considered by the Monokubs, if they are even watching this to begin with……but assuming they are…what could I say that would make the Mastermind Perk and, to a larger extent, the Killing Game more interesting?”

A monologuing criminal in an interrogation. Shuichi had read and watched many detective stories involving this exact scenario. And no matter the situation, no matter what advantages the police force had at their disposal, the subtext remained the same: The villain always had the upper hand.

Tsumugi continued, “If I had to make one suggestion and I could come up with any rule I wanted for this perk…”

Suddenly a loud sigh from Kokichi interrupted the girl, “Yeah, okay, it’s pretty obvious you’re just taking us for a ride here, so I’m gonna stop you there.”

“Kokichi!” exclaimed Shuichi. “Weren’t you the one who wanted Tsumugi to talk in the first place?”

“Well I thought it would’ve at least been interesting!” the supreme leader replied. “Let’s face it, Shuichi, Ms. ‘Has-Been Mastermind’ over there has nothing substantial for us. And also, she’s probably lying about that ‘beneficial’ piece of information, so I say we cut our losses, and just end this interroga--”

“**Whoever obtains the Mastermind Perk has the power to end the Killing Game,**” Tsumugi finally said.

Both students stopped their conversation to hear Tsumugi’s words. They each took a moment to process what she had just said.

“Wh…” Shuichi let out unintentionally before managing to properly form his words. “What…?”

“My suggestion,” the blue-haired girl clarified. “If one were to obtain the Mastermind Perk, then they should have the power to end the Killing Game entirely.”

And again, the detective needed time to process Tsumugi’s words. His associate, however, started to give a different sort of reaction.

Kokichi began laughing uncontrollably, “HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! Okay! Okay, I admit, you got us with that one! Just call me a frying pan because I got egg on my face!”

Tsumugi tilted her head innocently, “What’s so funny, Kokichi?”

The supreme leader wiped a tear off his face, “After all your talk on how you love this Killing Game, you just offer a suggestion that completely spits on its face? Sorry, missy, but I find that a little hard to believe.”

“Geez, that’s a little insulting,” Tsumugi said, offended. “I’m not just some ‘one-track-mind’. Sure I love the Killing Game, but I also know that it can’t last forever…”

“Then why?” asked Shuichi.

“For the sake of fairness, I suppose,” she answered. “If the goal of the perk is to give someone the
same benefits that I had as mastermind, then they should have *that* power as well.”

“So you had the power to just end the Killing Game anytime you wanted?” the detective continued to question.

“Mhmm, I could’ve just said the word, and Monokuma and the Monokubs would’ve complied no problem.”

Shuichi put a hand to his forehead in frustration. More than anything this suggestion was basically a taunt from Tsumugi; a reminder of how she had deceived everyone.

“Well if that’s your one suggestion, then why don’t we move on to *your* end of the deal?” said Kokichi.

“Right...my crucial information for you…” Tsumugi said reluctantly.

“Well, Ms. Has-Been?” the supreme leader waited. “We’re all ears.”

The cosplayer calmly smiled at the purple-haired boy, “Actually...Shuichi’s all ears. You’re pretty much done here.”

Kokichi blinked and tilted his head, “I’m sorry?”

“What I have to say, I only want to say to Shuichi,” the girl explained. “As long as you’re present in this room, I don’t feel comfortable speaking.”

The supreme leader scoffed, “And you think you get to make that call? Well then, I guess what you have to say isn’t really all that important if you’re just gonna play around like this!”

Shuichi placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder in an attempt to calm him down, “Kokichi, I think it would be best if you just humor her…”

Realizing the tense air in the room, Kokichi immediately regained his composure, “Whoops! Sorry there, Shuichi! I got too into my role as ‘bad cop’, I plum forgot what our goal was!”

“In that case, the door’s right over there, Mr. Frying Pan,” said Tsumugi. “Or are you unable to see it with all that egg on your face?”

Kokichi quickly turned to Tsumugi and gave her a demented smile, “Nee-heehee! Tsumugi, you’ve certainly become interesting rather recently, haven’t you? I’ll be sure to keep my eye out for you…”

With those last words, the supreme leader made for the door and exited the dining hall, leaving one final interrogator with the criminal.

With a creak from the door, Kaede and the others saw Kokichi exiting the dining hall.

“What happened?” asked the pianist as she approached the boy. “Where’s Shuichi?”

“Is he still in there with Tsumugi?” questioned Kaito.

“If so, that’s a precarious position he put himself in,” Kirumi observed. “Is it a good idea to leave him alone with her?”

Seeing everyone’s concerned expression, Kokichi merely smiled in response, “Shuichi made a call. Now we wait and see if it was the right one…”
“Huh?” Kaede replied worriedly.

“Sheesh, what a drama queen!” Tsumugi exclaimed.

Shuichi turned to the girl and remained silent.

“I just plain asked him to leave the room, but he takes it like I was asking him to put down his dog or something! You get what I’m saying, Shuichi?”

Again, the detective remained silent. Noticing this, Tsumugi leaned back against her chair as if to change the atmosphere into a more casual one.

After taking a heavy breath to clear herself from the previous tension, Tsumugi spoke, “I should’ve known something was off.”

Shuichi, curious to what she was referring to, took a step closer to the girl.

“When you first walked into the Shrine of Judgement,” the girl explained. “I should’ve realized something was wrong when you walked past everyone all confident like that. Especially without that cap of yours.”

“What would you have done?” asked the detective. “It had already been too late and I already knew Kaede wasn’t the true culprit.”

“Yeah, you have a point there,” Tsumugi admitted. “I suppose the best I could’ve done was actively try to convince Kaede of her guilt even further and much earlier than before.”

“Th-That’s horrible!” Shuichi exclaimed. “When I discovered that someone framed her for Rantaro’s murder...I...I promised myself that I would find whoever was responsible! That I would bring them to justice! And to think that it was you this whole time! I’ll...I’ll never forgive you for that!”

Tsumugi suddenly stood up from her chair, “So you still refuse to cast any blame on her?”

“Kaede’s not the one at fault here!” he quickly replied.

“Isn’t she?” the cosplayer shot back as she moved from her position and approached the detective. “She betrayed you, and yet you still seem to trust her with your very life.”

“Kaede, apologized for all that she had done. That’s enough for me.”

Tsumugi gave a spiteful laugh, “One little, ‘I’m sorry’, and that’s that, huh? You may as well put that cap back on because you haven’t changed one bit from when you first woke up here.”

“Wh-What is that supposed to--”

Before Shuichi could finish his sentence, Tsumugi had already walked toward him face to face. There, he saw the emptiness in her eyes up close and personal.

“She’ll be the death of you,” the cosplayer told the boy.

“...What?” Shuichi could only say in response.

“As long as she’s still alive, as long as you’re willing to follow her no matter what...your fate is sealed,” Tsumugi gave him a big wide smile. “You’re doomed, Shuichi.”
“That...That’s not true.”

“What you did before…it was all for her sake, wasn’t it?” questioned the cosplayer. “It was only because *she* became a suspect that you desperately tried to uncover the truth, right?”

“N-No!” the detective stuttered nervously. “That’s...T-That isn’t…!”

“Easy now...easy...” Tsumugi mockingly tried to calm the boy down. To his shock, the cosplayer softly placed a finger on his chest. “I just hope, for your sake, that you put that much effort into the next investigation when someone else gets killed.”

“N-No one else is going to be murdered...” Shuichi quietly said. “We’re not playing this Killing Game anymore...”

“Heh...that reluctant resolve...” the cosplayer said matching the detective’s vocal volume. “At the same time, that uncertainty for the future...it makes me...nostalgic.”

Shuichi was getting increasingly uncomfortable due to Tsumugi’s ominous words and more importantly, the closeness of her body to his. He quickly moved away from the girl, leaving a considerable distance between the two.

“Is this all what you wanted to tell me?” asked the flustered detective. “Was this the information that you offered?”

The blue-haired girl chuckled playfully, “Of course it isn’t. To be honest, what I’m about to tell you, you would’ve found clues to it in a bit, so I may as well tell you the answer to this ‘puzzle’ right off the bat.”

The detective raised an eyebrow as the girl was about to tell him her supposed ‘crucial’ piece of information.

“So...wait any one of us can just ask the Monokubs to add a rule to the Killing Game?” Kaede questioned the supreme leader.

“Yup,” he replied. “Of course, the Monokubs probably get to make the final call, so I can’t imagine they’ll just put in any ol’ rule.”

“Obviously not,” noted Korekiyo. “I’m curious to what they hope to achieve by granting us this ‘power’.”

“They?” Ryoma wondered. “The Monokubs don’t have anything to do with this. If they wanted this rule out in the open, they would’ve just added it to the official school rules.”

“That’s true,” replied Keebo. “The only way we obtained this information was due to Tsumugi.”

“So this is *her* ploy rather than the Monokubs’,” Kirumi surmised.

“Why Tsumugi do such a thing?” questioned Gonta.

“She’s desperate to start the Killing Game, again,” said Kaede. “She’s willing to say whatever comes to mind in order to cause tension amongst our group.”

Kaito slammed his fists together in determination, “Right! So it’s not like the Monokubs even agreed with the rule to begin with!”
“But what if they do eventually add that rule to the Killing Game?” asked Himiko. “Does that mean Tsumugi can just add whatever rule she wanted just by saying it out loud?”

“She may have ultimately failed, but she was the original mastermind…” Keebo said warily. “It’s hard not to imagine that the Monokubs would still be willing to work with her.”

The pianist, too, felt a little nervous at the prospect of the Tsumugi once again working together with the academy’s headmasters.

Before long, the girl again addressed the supreme leader, “Did she say anything else?”

Kokichi put a finger to his chin and contemplated, “Did she say anything else of noteworthy? Mmm...nope!”

“I see…” Kaede sighed.

“Hey, fuckfaces!” Miu shouted as she approached the group.

Everyone turned to the inventor and noticed she was holding a Monopad.

“M-Miu!” the pianist shouted as she ran towards the girl. “Is that…?”

“Boy are you lucky you had the gorgeous girl genius on your side!” Miu exclaimed with confidence. “You all better start singing my praises after today, because I, Miu Iruma, will have single handedly saved us all from this fucking Killing Game!”

“Hey, why don’t you shut your trap, and let us see what’s on the damn Monopad, already?” demanded Kokichi.

The inventor flinched back, “I...you...fucking...I...ugh, fine!”

With a press of a button, the Monopad started up, and everyone gathered around so see what was so special about this particular device. Then it activated, revealing a screen with the words: “Survivor Perk”.

“Survivor Perk…?” questioned Kaede.

“There’s...another perk?” Tenko wondered as well.

“Miu, please proceed, if you will,” Kirumi requested.

The inventor complied and suddenly the screen changed to a map of the Ultimate Academy. What was surprising was that the map was of the academy in its entirety, revealing areas that weren’t even readily available to the rest of the students. What’s more, the map revealed the existence to the hidden room in the library.

“Whoa...whoever had this had one hell of an advantage…” said Kaito.

“No kidding,” replied Ryoma. “Even the hidden room is right there to see.”

“Wait…” said Kaede suddenly. “What’s that?”

The pianist pointed to a text bubble sitting below the map. In response, Miu put her finger to the icon and the screen changed once more.

This time, the screen read, “Clue to end the killing game”.

“Hey, why don’t you shut your trap, and let us see what’s on the damn Monopad, already?” demanded Kokichi.

The inventor flinched back, “I...you...fucking...I...ugh, fine!”

With a press of a button, the Monopad started up, and everyone gathered around so see what was so special about this particular device. Then it activated, revealing a screen with the words: “Survivor Perk”.

“Survivor Perk…?” questioned Kaede.

“There’s...another perk?” Tenko wondered as well.

“Miu, please proceed, if you will,” Kirumi requested.

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The pianist pointed to a text bubble sitting below the map. In response, Miu put her finger to the icon and the screen changed once more.

This time, the screen read, “Clue to end the killing game”.
Kaede’s eyes widened, “A clue to end the killing game!?”

Miu continued forward and the screen gave more detail in that area,

‘The mastermind who is behind the killing game is hiding somewhere within the academy. Your best chance of exposing them is when Monokuma needs a spare. At that time, the mastermind will go to the library’s hidden room.

To prove this hint is accurate, I will predict something. The first thing you will remember is the Ultimate Hunt.

Only share this information with people you know you can trust. How you determine that will mean your life or your death.

Rantaro Amami’

Kaede nearly took a step back in shock, “...Rantaro...Amami...?”

“So this Monopad belonged to Rantaro…” Ryoma surmised as well.

“Hang on a moment,” said Angie. “In that one photo, wasn’t Rantaro holding a Monopad?”

Upon hearing those words, the pianist suddenly grabbed her backpack and looked for the photograph in question.

And there it was, plain as day in his left hand.

“So it wasn’t just a regular Monopad he was holding,” said Tenko.

“But...But why Rantaro have special Monopad?” wondered Gonta. “Where he get it from?”

“That’s the question, isn’t it?” said Korekiyo. “Seems our deceased associate had been keeping a few things from us.”

“He always seemed to be the most mysterious one out of all of us,” said Kirumi. “But like Gonta said, how did he come across such a unique Monopad?”

“It said it was a ‘Survivor Perk’, right?” questioned Ryoma. “So did he maybe earn it somehow?”

“‘Survivor Perk?’” Miu repeated. “What the hell is so special about Rantaro that he’s granted a ‘Survivor Perk’!?”

“I can answer that,” Shuichi said as he walked out of the dining hall, with Tsumugi right behind him.

“Shuichi!” exclaimed Kaede as she now quickly approached the detective.

With everyone else following suit, the group was now all gathered together.

“Hey buddy,” greeted Kaito. “You doing okay?”

“I’m fine,” answered the detective.

“So…” said Kokichi. “What did you mean you can answer why Rantaro had a survivor perk?”

“It’s because…” Shuichi began. He glanced back at Tsumugi, who looked away from the group in disinterest and then turned toward the others. “Because Rantaro is the Ultimate Survivor.”
“Ultimate...what?” Kaede was the first to ask regarding Shuichi’s revelation.

“I believe he said Ultimate Survivor,” Ryoma clarified while also sharing the pianist’s concerned state.

The other students, as well, seemed perplexed at this new information. To put things in simpler terms, that meant that Rantaro’s talent was ‘surviving’, which unfortunately is contradicted by the green-haired boy’s current status.

In response to this information, Kokichi merely laughed.

Kirumi glanced at the amused student, “Do you find this hard to believe, Kokichi?”

“Are you kidding?” said the supreme leader as he wiped a tear from his eye. “It’s so sad and ironic that I have no choice BUT to believe it! Oh, Rantaro, if only you had regained your memories sooner, then maybe you wouldn’t have died such a stupid death!”

“But is it really true, though?” questioned Korekiyo. “Even if he did lose memories of his talent, I would highly doubt if he didn’t at least retain some aspects of it. After all, all sentient creatures have a natural instinct for survival and if Rantaro truly was the ‘Ultimate Survivor’, then I would assume that instinct would be greater in his case…”

“At this point it’d be safe to say that it is the truth,” answered Shuichi. “After all, the proof is right there in that Monopad."

“The Survivor Perk…” Kaede muttered as she looked down at the repaired device Miu was holding.

The inventor scoffed, “Well, gee, that sure ain’t fair!”

“Miu?” questioned Shuichi.

“Why the hell did Rantaro get special treatment for this Killing Game?” the inventor ranted. “What exactly makes him so ‘ultimate’ at surviving when the rest of us are suffering from this shit too!?”

“I think you’re on to something, Miu,” the pianist stated.

Miu nearly flinched back in surprise, “I...am…? Um-oh I mean of course I am! HAH HAH! Miu Iruma once again comes in to save the day!”

“Oh goodie!” shouted Kokichi. “Then please explain to us plebeians your hypothesis, ‘girl genius’!”

“Nice try, Pedo-Bait!” the inventor countered. “Actually, I’m gonna let my lackey, Kae-idiot, do the explaining!”

“When exactly did I become your lackey…?” asked the girl.

“The moment you decided to open your big BJ-hole!” yelled Miu. “Now get to explaining!”

The inventor’s crass words aside, Kaede shrugged it off and began to explain, “Look, doesn’t
anyone else find it weird that Rantaro was the only one of us that had access to a survivor perk? On top of that, he’s also the only one of us who didn’t remember his own talent.”

“I see,” noted Kirumi, putting the pieces together in her own head. “If it was only one of those, we could’ve assumed it to be merely a coincidence…”

“But two suggests a pattern more than anything,” Korekiyo finished the thought. “Which means that Rantaro, out of the rest of us...was a special case.”

“Special case?” questioned Gonta.

“From the beginning, Rantaro was given a special item that gave him an important hint to the Killing Game,” Keebo summarized. “Mainly, where the hidden room was and a clue to the mastermind’s true identity.”

“But why would they give Rantaro something like that?” asked Tenko. “All because he had a talent for surviving?”

“What makes you think *that* is even a coincidence?”

Everyone glanced to the source of the voice to reveal that Maki had decided to rejoin the group.

“Ah, Maki,” Kokichi greeted rather dismissively. “I was worried for a sec that we would’ve had to recap everything back to you when this was all done. So, did you finally get your fill of your lab or whatever?”

“I don’t have to explain myself to you,” the child caregiver returned the boy’s disdainful attitude.

“More importantly,” Kaede interrupted. “What was that you said before, Maki? About Rantaro’s talent not being a coincidence either?”

“I overheard you guys finding out about his talent,” she explained. “Which made me think about other things we assumed were ‘coincidences’.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kaito.

“The Ultimate Survivor,” Maki stated. “Seems too convenient for someone with such a talent to randomly wake up in a killing game.”

“Seems like a match made in heaven to be perfectly honest,” Kokichi commented.

“Same goes for an Ultimate Detective,” Maki said as she turned towards Shuichi.

The detective looked away from the girl while taking in her words.

“Well it makes sense,” Kirumi commented. “Tsumugi, in some fashion, managed to kidnap all of us for the sake of playing a Killing Game. I imagine during that process she would also target those with talents that would be appropriate for said scenario.”

“Then, I suppose Rantaro really was given the survivor perk just to make things interesting…” Keebo assumed.

“So what the hell does that make the rest of us!” exclaimed Kaito.

“I suppose we’re the ‘scraps at the bottom of the barrel’, as it were,” answered Korekiyo.
Though it wasn’t exactly a pleasant thought to have, Kaede couldn’t help but agree with the anthropologist. For one, there was no real good reason for an Ultimate Pianist to participate in a killing game, especially when compared to the talents of some others. In the end, however, the girl admitted to herself that she did end up ‘playing’ the game and created a deathtrap to kill someone, but that had little to do with her talent and more with what the girl had to work with at the time.

Which begs the question: Outside the likes of Shuichi and Rantaro, why were Ultimate students only targeted?

It was to the point where even an entire Ultimate Academy was created as an entire setpiece. Is it because everyone’s special talents would create unique murders and executions that one wouldn’t have if ordinary people were targeted instead? Did Tsumugi just have some sort of vendetta against those with Ultimate talents? She herself had an Ultimate talent, so that explanation made little sense.

“Uggh,” Himiko groaned. “But I’m just the Ultimate Mage! Why couldn’t an ‘Ultimate Murderer’ be kidnapped instead of me?”

Miu glared at the red head, “You sayin’ you’d rather put us in more danger if it meant you didn’t have to be here!?"

“Hey don’t yell at Himiko!” Tenko defended. “She’s just scared and said the first talent that came to her mind!”

“Oh yeah, speaking of which,” said the inventor. “I bet your Ultimate Aikido bullshit is really useful if you want to hurt someone!”

“What’s that supposed to mean!?” the aikido master shouted.

“Oh if we’re talking about talents that could be used to kill people…” Kokichi took it upon himself to add to the flames of the conversation. “Didn’t Ryoma already use his to kill some people in the past?”

“That was a different case entirely,” the former tennis pro explained sternly. “Also, should you be the one pointing fingers right now? After all, you also have that strange title…”

The purple-haired boy smiled and casually rested his arms behind his head, “Ooh...you’re talking about the ‘Ultimate Supreme Leader’, right? That’s super suspicious!”

Kaede could feel a migraine coming along as her friends began to argue. It seemed that with every revelation they discover, there always had to be something that drove a wedge within the group.

The pianist looked to her side and noticed that Shuichi was deep in thought, and from the girl’s past experiences, that could either be a good or bad thing.

“Shuichi?” the girl said as she approached the boy. “Everything okay?”

The detective met her gaze, “Do you remember back when Monokuma first gave us that time limit to start the Killing Game?”

“How could I not?” answered the pianist.

Shuichi nodded his head, “I remember as well, and I recall Rantaro had some interesting things to say during that time.”

“Interesting things?” Kaede echoed.
"This is exactly what Monokuma wants us to do…" Rantaro said as he crossed his arms. "So what else is part of his plan? Is my memory part of it too? If it is, then...can I even trust myself?"

"Rantaro...?" questioned Shuichi. "What's wrong?"

"'What's wrong,' he says..." the green-haired boy commented.

After what seemed to be a pause of hesitation, Rantaro spoke again, "Hey, I have a question. This might sound a little weird, but...Does the term Ultimate Hunt ring a bell for anyone?"

"In the end, he never got a chance to follow up on that," Shuichi noted.

"Ultimate...Hunt…" Kaede said aloud.

"Interesting," said Korekiyo, deciding to join the two’s conversation. "Do you think Rantaro’s knowledge of this ‘Ultimate Hunt’ is the next piece of the puzzle we need to solve?"

"I can’t say for sure," said the detective. "But it’s a safe bet that this is something we should look into."

The anthropologist nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Shuichi sighed as he began to rub his forehead in frustration.

"What’s wrong?" asked Kaede.

"We’re close to something…" the detective answered in almost a whisper. "I can feel it...I just don’t know what…"

"Don’t push yourself," the girl said with concern. "Everyone’s doing their best--"

"And I need to do mine," Shuichi walked past the pianist and the others and headed toward the dormitory. "I’ll be in my room if you need me."

The rest of the students slowly ceased their bickering as they observed the detective making his leave.

"Hey, Shuichi!" Kaito called out. "Don’t be like that, man!"

"Perhaps this is for the best," said Korekiyo.

"What do you mean?" asked Kaede.

"We’ve done all we can as a group, so maybe it’s time we take a moment and do some individual brainstorming by ourselves," the anthropologist suggested.

"Hmm...that sounds fair," Kirumi concurred. "Then let us spend the rest of the day figuring out this new piece of information, and we will share our thoughts with each other tomorrow morning. Is that acceptable for everyone?"

There were no arguments to be had at that moment. With everyone in agreement to the current plan, the students of the Ultimate academy went off in their separate ways. Tsumugi, as well, was led by Kirumi to the former’s room in the dormitory. Only Kaede and Maki remained where they were.
The pianist chuckled nervously as she turned toward the child caregiver, “Sorry you had to, uh, come all the way down here only for everyone to just...split like that.”

“Whatever,” Maki replied unconcerned. “I just came down to offer my two cents on what you guys discovered. No more...no less.”

Kaede smiled, “So that means you wanted to check up on us, right?”

The dark-haired girl glanced over her shoulder at the pianist, expression neither angry nor joyful, “I’m going back to my lab.”

Maki wasted no time as she immediately walked away from the girl toward her previously stated destination.

“Ah, s-sure!” Kaede quickly said. “I’ll catch you later, then!”

With that awkward exchange out of the way, the pianist couldn’t help but feel exhausted after everything that had happened since the day began. From discovering what was inside the hidden room, opening up the academy with Tsumugi in tow, and now finding out Rantaro’s forgotten talent, the girl was ready to just crash for the rest of the day. However, Kaede knew that that would be the last thing she would ever do in this situation. She was determined; bound by resolve to find some way to escape from this Killing Game. Unfortunately, everyone had already decided to figure things out by themselves, including Shuichi, so Kaede was more or less on her own. Even so, the girl wasn’t about to give up there. She headed towards her room as well, hoping that some revelation or answer comes to her to solve the mystery of Rantaro.

Kaede sat on the edge on her bed. A few good minutes had past and the girl couldn’t think of any additional answers to the greater mystery.

Ultimate Hunt…

Ultimate Survivor…

Rantaro was someone important to this Killing Game. There had to be a reason why he was the only one who couldn’t remember his talent, a reason why he had access to a special perk, and most ominously…a reason why he had to be the first one murdered.

She cursed herself. Kaede cursed herself for being the cause of his ultimate demise.

Though she didn’t actually kill anyone directly, it was because of her that allowed Tsumugi the opportunity to kill Rantaro. If not for her, then maybe he would still be alive to recover his lost memories. Perhaps he would even discover a way to end this Killing Game.

Kaede was certain that the others have come to this conclusion as well.

The pianist had already apologized to everyone this morning, and as a group everyone more or less forgave her. Whether they forgave her individually, however, was a different story entirely.

The girl couldn’t help herself. She had some free time before nightfall, so she decided to check up on the others.

As she exited her room, Kaede noticed Kirumi, who was standing right in front of Tsumugi’s room opposite of the doorway.
“Kirumi?” Kaede somewhat greeted as she approached the girl.

“Afternoon, Kaede,” the maid replied. “Is there anything you need of me?”

“Uh, no,” answered the pianist. “Kirumi...I realize that we need to keep Tsumugi under lock and key, but...are you going to guard her all day?”

The maid gave her an amused chuckle, “Worried about my well-being?”

“Well of course,” Kaede replied. “You said this morning that you spent all night watching Tsumugi, right? I just hope you’re not overdoing it for our sake.”

“I am truly grateful for your concern,” Kirumi said with sincerity. “And fear not, Kaede, for I am already taking in your words into practice.”

“My words?” questioned the pianist.

“In that I must consider my own needs in order to perform optimally in serving others.”

Though it had been awhile, Kaede did recall a previous discussion that the two shared. Back when she and Shuichi initially planned to catch the mastermind in the library, Kaede spent some of her free time talking to her peers, Kirumi being one of them. The pianist was worried that the Ultimate Maid, in her desire to serve others, would end up spoiling everyone.

“So, as a result, I’ve enlisted the aid of a few others to help me watch Tsumugi,” Kirumi explained.

“That’s great, Kirumi!” Kaede complimented. “Who did you ask to help?”

“Uh, well, Kaito, Tenko and Gonta, to answer your question,” the maid replied. “Though, to be perfectly honest, they were the ones who offered before I could ask.”

“Ah, so I guess we’ll have to wait a little longer before the Ultimate Maid makes a request of her own, huh?”

Kirumi smiled in amusement, “So it seems.”

Kaede smiled back.

________________________________________

“Pardon the intrusion,” Kaede said as she entered the Ultimate Anthropologist’s lab.

Korekiyo, who had been skimming through ‘The Caged Village’, casually closed his book and and stepped forward in order to properly address the girl.

“Welcome, Kaede,” he greeted. “Though I do appreciate the courtesy, you know you are free to enter this lab as you please, right?”

“I know,” she replied. “I just wanted to make sure I didn’t interrupt you in case you were in here.”

Though the pianist had difficulty noticing, Korekiyo gave her a gentle smile from under his mask, “I am truly unworthy of such kindness. Kehehehe...*ahem*. Now then, did you need something from this lab, or perhaps you were seeking assistance from me?”

Kaede scratched the back of her head in embarrassment, “You got me there, Kiyo. I was wondering if you came up with anything...y’know, regarding what we learned about Rantaro and all that?”
The anthropologist sighed wistfully, “Alas, I’m afraid I have come up empty handed when it comes to solving that riddle.”

In response, the pianist gave a sigh as well, “Ah well, it was worth a shot. Sorry to bother you. I’ll let you get back to your reading.”

Kaede began to make her way towards the exit.

“One moment, Kaede,” Korekiyo halted the girl.

The pianist turned to face him, “Yes, Kiyo?”

The masked teen said nothing, but merely gripped his chin as he silently observed her.

Kaede was taken aback by the anthropologist’s actions as she instinctively took a step back.

“K-Kiyo…?”

After a few more seconds of silence, the boy shook his head in disappointment, “Just as I feared…”

“‘Just as he feared’?” Kaede thought.

The girl wondered what he meant by that. Korekiyo was an anthropologist, so while a bit unnerving, it shouldn’t come as a surprise to her that Kiyo would spend some time just quietly observing people.

But why her? What, at this moment, would he notice about her that he already hasn’t?

Kaede was the type of person who wears her heart on her sleeve. She tries her absolute best to be completely honest and genuine with people, so why--

…

‘Honest and genuine’.

‘Just as he feared’.

Suddenly, it became all too clear to Kaede as to why Korekiyo was silently observing her.

Or to be more precise...silently judging her.

Of course, it was because Kaede was no longer honest and genuine. Because she had lied to everyone.

It seemed that Korekiyo added himself to the list of students that no longer trusted her.

The pianist did not blame him. Why would she? In fact, she was expecting something like this. Even if she did lay everything on the table earlier that morning, she knew there would still be fallout for her mistakes.

“Just as you feared, huh?” Kaede said aloud.

“Indeed,” replied the anthropologist. “I can see it quite clearly. From your expression and your overall demeanor.”

The girl gazed downward in guilt.

“You, my dear…” Korekiyo said in almost a whisper.
Suddenly, he extended his arms outward, as if to declare a revelation, “...have become far too overworked!”

Kaede raised her head to look at the boy, “H-Huh...?”

“Yes yes, no need to hide it from me,” Korekiyo said as his tone became lighter. “After everything that has happened today, it’s only natural that you’d be fatigued.”

“Wait,” the pianist did her best to piece together the anthropologist’s thought process. “You think I’m just tired?”

Though there was a bit of truth to that sentiment, feeling tired was only a minor annoyance compared to everything else that she had been feeling up to this point.

Did he not notice the guilt she was feeling? The reluctance? The reduction in confidence?

“Well, I suppose we can add confusion to the list of emotions I’m currently feeling,” she thought to herself.

“Now, Kaede,” Korekiyo went on. “I understand the need to figure out a way for us to beat this Killing Game, but one must make the time to take care of their well-being as well.”

Kaede started to get a sense of déjà vu.

More importantly, Korekiyo had a point. For so long she had focused on trying to build herself up back in everyone’s eyes that Kaede had begun to neglect herself. That wasn’t a healthy way of thinking and it certainly wasn’t going to help things in the long run.

The pianist could only smile in response, “Y’know what, Kiyo? You’re right...I really need to start taking care of myself.”

“Precisely!” the anthropologist declared happily. “We are friends, are we not? And it is the duty of ‘friends’ to look out for one another.”

“Yes, that’s right,” said Kaede. “I was starting to unravel there for a sec...thank you, Kiyo.”

“Think nothing of it.”

“Hmm, let’s see,” the pianist thought out loud. “When it comes to calming myself, I guess the first thing that comes to mind is...playing the piano?”

“Is that a question?” the anthropologist asked rhetorically.

Kaede frantically shook her head to take the edge off and declared much more confidently, “I’m gonna play the piano!”

She gave Korekiyo a quick bow to excuse herself and nearly bolted to her own lab.

Before she did, however, she stopped herself to address Korekiyo once more, “Kiyo? You’ve been a great help to me. Probably much more than you realize, so...if you have any requests, you’re free to join me and I can play something for you.”

Kiyo stared at the girl with a neutral expression. He was as still as a statue as he once again quietly observed Kaede.

Almost as if he was trying to determine something.
The boy shook his head, this time in wistful regret, “At any other time I would’ve taken you up on that offer, Kaede, but for now I am currently preoccupied with my own interests, so to speak.”

“Say no more,” replied the pianist. “Maybe next time, then.”

“Certainly,” stated the anthropologist. “Next time.”

And so, Kaede left Korekiyo to his own devices as she quickly ventured toward her own lab.

As she made her way to the second floor hallway, Kaede realized this was the first time she would get to fully appreciate her own lab.

When Kaede first woke in the academy, her lab was one of the ones that was open from the start, but because she was so focused on escaping, she never got the chance to enter it during that time.

The only other time when she finally entered her lab was last night, when she played for Shuichi as thanks for saving her and proving her innocence. Even then, she wasn’t really focused on the lab itself, rather her guest instead.

But now, the pianist finally had an opportunity to appreciate her ultimate talent in full as she glanced at the appropriately themed door that was in front of her.

It may have been a little indulgent and selfish, but as her friends have said, ‘one must look out for their own well-being’.

Kaede opened the door to her lab and entered inside, gazing in awe at what she saw.

Was the piano always that big?

I didn’t even notice the CD rack…

This room’s so brightly lit, I wouldn’t even have guessed something like this would be in the same place as a killing game.

A plethora of thoughts swirled in Kaede’s head. She assumed that the others must’ve felt the same way when they each entered their respective labs.

As she continued to gaze around the room, the girl made her way towards the piano.

Kaede sat down and looked at the 88 keys in front of her. She felt her own pulse slowing down from its former rapid pace as she felt herself starting to relax.

“Now let’s see...how ‘bout we start with Chopin's ‘Prelude, Op. 28 No.15’? That’s a personal favorite!”

And as if her own heartbeat became a metronome for her art, Kaede let her fingers guide her to the calming serenade that her very soul needed to hear.

At that moment, there was no Killing Game.

At that moment, there was no mystery to be solved...No silent evil lurking in the shadows.

Indeed, at that moment, there was no silence.

There was only music.
Whew...so yeah...been a hot minute, eh?

No excuses, cause I try not to make excuses for myself. Either I decide to work on a chapter or not, it's my own fault either way. That being said, if this sort of thing does happen for a third time, I'll try to always bring back the momentum if it comes to that.

Thank you all again for remaining so patient.
The Path Leads to a Crumbling Wall Part 8 Daily Life

*ding dong, bing bong*

All the monitors in the Ultimate Academy turned on to reveal the Monokubs in their usual living space, that of which being a giant couch long enough to fit all five of them.

“This is an official announcement from the Ultimate Academy,” said Monotaro. “It is now 10 p.m.”

“A.K.A., the first official night of the Monokubs as fully transitioned headmasters!” Monokid proudly declared.

“Dats right,” Monosuke confirmed. “All the paperwork has been signed, we filled out the insurance forms, and made sure to hand out the waivers to each student!”

“Huh?” questioned Monophanie. “I don’t remember that last part.”

The yellow bear adjusted his glasses, “Hmm, I guess youse’s right, sis. We *didn’t* do that last part!”

“Cause who needs waivers when you’re all going to die!” exclaimed Monotaro.


“Ooh, maybe we’ll even wake up to a dead body once morning comes!” the red bear said excitedly.

“Well we ain’t gonna find out until we fall asleep!” Monokid shouted. “Hell yeah, this is like Christmas Eve!”

“So long, bear well!” the Monokubs gave their parting catchphrase.

“And a Merry Christmas, one and all!” Monokid added.

The monitors of the Ultimate Academy proceeded to shut off.

Shuichi paced frantically around his room. Night had already fallen in the academy and he was nowhere near close to figuring out the true mystery of Rantaro’s final clue.

"Ultimate Hunt…" the detective kept repeating in his mind.

It was a name that felt both familiar and unfamiliar.

Was it the title of someone’s talent?

The name of an event?

‘Hunt’: to search determinedly for someone or something. With a name like ‘Ultimate Hunt’, even if it didn’t refer to a person, one could assume that those with ultimate talents were involved somehow.

Though, the question was how were they involved specifically? Was it an event where Ultimates had to go hunt for something? Or...were Ultimates themselves hunted for some reason?

That would explain why he and the others were captured for this killing game. But again, for what
purpose? Tsumugi made it clear that all she wants is for everyone to play the killing game. If that was
the case, was the killing game the end goal of the Ultimate Hunt? What exactly is Tsumugi’s true
position? She acted as the initial mastermind but was quickly demoted to being an expendable player
of the game, so did that mean that there was someone higher than her- a true mastermind?

The boy tried desperately to remember any sort of event in his life that would connect the dots to this
Ultimate Hunt, but unfortunately there was no memory to look back into. The first time he ever
learned of the existence of that term was because of Rantaro and only Rantaro. No one else seemed
to remember it except for him. And now he was dead.

Dead…

"She’ll be the death of you."

Shuichi immediately shook his head. He scolded himself for even remembering those words. What
Tsumugi said back then, it was clearly to mess with him and nothing more. A desperate attempt to try
and make him doubt Kaede. No...even further from that. It was an attempt to make the detective
perform suboptimally in this Killing Game. He had a duty as the Ultimate Detective. He needed to
find the answers and save everyone. If Rantaro was specifically targeted for this Killing Game
because of his ‘Ultimate Survivor’ talent, then Maki had a point when she suggested he himself was
targeted as well because he was the Ultimate Detective. Was it really just to make the game more
interesting?

Well he wasn’t going to play into that. He was going to use his talent to find a way out of the
academy. He had to…

Otherwise…

...otherwise…

Shuichi’s thought process was interrupted as he heard the doorbell to his room ring repeatedly.

“Shuichi? You in there, man?”

The detective heard Kaito’s voice from outside the door. He opened the door in order to let him in.

“Kaito?”

“Hey, come hang out with me a sec,” said the astronaut.

“Huh?” questioned the detective. “Now? But it’s nighttime…”

“C’mon, man, there’s no rule about walking around at nighttime, right?” Kaito refuted. “I’ll be
waiting at the courtyard.”

Before Shuichi could even respond, Kaito made his way out of his room and to the previously stated
destination.

“Ah, w-wait!” Shuichi shouted.

It was too late, however, as the boy was left in his room alone once again.

“The courtyard at this time of night?” he asked himself. “What does he want?”
The previous questions that were clouding Shuichi’s mind that night were quickly replaced with new ones thanks to Kaito. Ultimately, the detective still wasn’t sure what to make of the Ultimate Astronaut as he seemed the type of person who went by the beat of his own drum.

However, there was one particular moment from before that assured Shuichi that Kaito was a good person.

Back when the detective first tried to convince the others that Kaede was innocent, Kaito was the one who made everyone listen to what he had to say. The astronaut even risked his own life in order for Shuichi to get a chance to say what he needed to say.

The least the detective could do was meet up with him like he had asked.

Shuichi made his way out of his room and walked toward the courtyard. As we was walking, he noticed Gonta standing in front of Tsumugi’s room. Kirumi had told him and some other students that she and a couple of other volunteers would alternate in guarding Tsumugi in order to relieve the maid of overwork.

The detective gave a quick wave to Gonta and the entomologist happily returned the favor.

Shuichi exited the dormitory and was quickly greeted by Kaito, who was right in front of him.

“Oh good,” the astronaut said relieved. “You actually left your room.”

“Gah!” the detective couldn’t help but shout. “P-Please don’t do that…”

“Do what?”

Shuichi resigned himself, “...Nothing.”

“Anyway, follow me,” the astronaut said as he led the boy to the courtyard.

“So...what exactly did you want to talk to me about?”

Kaito glanced at the detective, “You always gotta know the answer, don’t you?”

“Huh?”

“You need to learn to take it easy, Shuichi. Instead of figuring out what the answers are, let the answers just come to you.”

“‘Let them come to me’?” Shuichi questioned. “What does that--”

The detective’s sentence trailed off when he started to hear a familiar voice.

“...forty-one...forty-two...forty...three…”

The two reached the courtyard and there Shuichi saw a rather peculiar site. At least, one he didn’t consider he would see.

Mainly, Kaede doing push-ups.

“K-Kaede?” the detective questioned.

The pianist looked up and saw the two. She quickly stopped what she was doing and stood up.
“Shuichi!” Kaede eagerly greeted. “You made it!”

“Um, I’m sorry?” Kaito said to the girl. “‘Forty-three’? When I left you here, you started at *one*!”

“Well...there’s a lot of things you don’t know about me!” Kaede retorted quite sassily. “I can do push-ups pretty quick, y’know!”

“Mhmm,” the astronaut stared at the girl deadpan. “Of course, there’s also the possibility you could’ve been cheating.”

“Cheating?!” she echoed. “Me? No way...I wouldn’t...there’s no way that I would ever…”

Kaito shrugged his shoulders, “Well then. Since it looks like you didn’t even break a sweat, then I suppose doing another fifty would be a piece of cake for you!”

“Another fifty?!” Kaede puffed her cheeks at the astronaut, “I don’t exactly see *you* doing any push-ups, mister!”

“Don’t turn this around on me! I was just getting Shuichi!”

The detective in question looked back and forth at the two students bantering at each other.

“How about it?” Shuichi repeated. “K-Kaito, what the heck’s going on here?”

The astronaut looked at the detective with enthusiasm and gave him an extravagant thumbs up, “Work out with us!”

“H-Huh…?”

“You heard me!” said Kaito. “Since I was chosen as an astronaut trainee, I’ve trained everyday, but I haven’t done any training here at all! So, c’mon man, let’s get a move on!”

“What…?” Shuichi desperately tried to halt the boy as there was a lot to take in. “Why me?”

“Doesn’t matter, let’s get started!” Kaito exclaimed. “Take off your coat!”

“Wait, why--!?”

“Instead of complaining, just do fifty push-ups!”

“Kaito, Kaito!” Kaede calmed the astronaut of his eagerness. “Easy now. I think Shuichi deserves some sort of explanation.”

The astronaut sighed, “C’mon, Kaede. It’s sort of a ‘guy thing’ to not second guess things and just do it, y’know?”

“Uh...no I don’t know,” the pianist replied. “Probably because I’m not a guy. And Shuichi...he’s different than most guys, wouldn’t you say?”

“Is...is that a good thing or a bad thing?” asked Shuichi.

“It’s a good thing to me,” replied Kaede.

The detective blinked in shock and bashfully glanced away.

Kaito sighed again, “Fine, go ahead and explain it to him.”
After composing himself, Shuichi looked Kaede’s way, “Kaede?”

“You see, Shuichi…” the pianist began to explain. “This isn’t just training for the sake of it. It’s training...to become stronger.”

The detective tilted his head, “But...isn’t that the point of physical training...?”

Kaede put her hands on her hips, “No, dummy, not ‘become stronger’ physically! I mean, that will happen regardless, but ‘becoming stronger’ so we can beat this Killing Game!”

“How?” questioned Shuichi.

At that moment, Kaede looked down in guilt, “Look...I’m sure this isn’t a surprise to you, but...ever since...*that* incident...with Rantaro and the library...I haven’t really been the same since then.”

Shuichi eyes slowly widened, “Kaede…”

“To be honest…” the girl continued. “The only reason that ever happened; why I even considered making that deathtrap...It was because I was weak.”


“Save everyone?” Kaede questioned. “I endangered them even more! For so long I thought it was me who was Rantaro’s true murderer, but then you came along and revealed it wasn’t. It was actually Tsumugi. What would’ve happened if you all voted for me and Monokuma decided to play by the rules? Everyone would’ve been executed except for her.”

“But that’s not what would’ve happened!” the detective responded. “Tsumugi said herself, she wouldn’t let the Killing Game end so easily.”

“Still, it’s the principal…” the girl stated somberly. “I made a rash decision that helped no one.”

“It helped us find the mastermind…” Shuichi muttered.

“Yet we’re still in this Killing Game…” Kaede muttered back.

The courtyard became silent. The silence of the area could have lasted a good few minutes, had it not been for a certain astronaut.

“Alright, alright!” Kaito quickly shouted. “We got all that out of our system now? Good! Cause now’s the time where we need to build ourselves back up!”

Kaede started to perk up as well, “Yes, exactly! Which is why Kaito suggested to me this nightly workout routine!”

Shuichi looked at the two, “And this workout routine...you think it’s gonna help?”

“Hell yeah it will!” Kaito exclaimed. “Training is the only way to overcome your weakness.”

“And…” after coming to a realization, it was the detective’s turn to gaze downward in uncertainty. “So I guess that’s why you invited me…”

Kaito suddenly looked at Shuichi with a serious expression, “I’ve noticed that you’ve been doubting yourself.”

The boy looked up at the astronaut.
“Even after everything you done up to this point,” Kaito went on. “I thought you would at least gain some amount of confidence.”

“Ah…” Shuichi muttered.

“But that’s why we invited you to train as well, Shuichi!” Kaede explained as she pumped up her fists in determination. “Let’s all become stronger together!”

Kaito extended his hand, “What do you say, man?”

‘Becoming stronger’...

Shuichi thought about those words. He thought back to Kaede’s reasons for wanting to become stronger.

"I never thought that Kaede would have such doubts about herself like this…”

When they first awoke in the academy, Shuichi saw Kaede as this fearless leader. An unbreakable wall that kept standing tall no matter what obstacles come to try and tear it down. Certainly, Kaede made an unfortunate decision in the past, but Shuichi never blamed her for that. Her reasons for doing so were rational and selfless. She was a person who was in a stressful situation and anyone else would’ve probably cracked even deeper than she had. If anything, the person to blame for Kaede making such a decision was…

...

...it was…

"I believe that if one of us can create spare Monokumas... They are the mastermind of this killing game.”

Kaede began to sweat nervously. “So, the person who’s responsible for all our suffering... is one of us?”

Shuichi put a finger to his chin in contemplation, “Of course, this is just what I’ve deduced, but it is entirely possible. That’s why I didn’t want to talk about this in front of everyone... If we told them now, they might all try to find the mastermind,...”

"And be led to murder.”” Shuichi finished those words in his head.

It was him.

He was the one who put that thought into Kaede’s head. The thought of a mastermind that needed to be stopped.

She trusted him; trusted in his detective skills. And that’s why she set that trap.

It was his fault. She trusted in his detective work, and because of that he endangered her life.

"She’ll be the death of you.”

Now more than ever, Shuichi understood the meaning behind Tsumugi’s words-the true meaning.
If Tsumugi truly believed that Kaede would be death of him, then it stands to reason that the opposite would be true as well:

That he would be the death of her.

In fact, that nearly happened. Had he not taken a second look at the murder weapon, had he not looked at the top of the bookcase, had Kokichi decided at any moment to not cooperate with him…

“…sorry,” Shuichi whispered.

Kaito raised an eyebrow, “What was that?”

“I said I’m sorry,” the detective spoke a little louder. “But I have to refuse your offer.”

The astronaut leaned forward in confusion but then suddenly laughed, “Shuichi, you need to come up with better jokes. Though you nearly had me there for a sec!”

The detective said nothing and instead turned himself around and started to walk back to the dormitory.

“Sh-Shuichi!?” Kaito flinched back in shock.

“Shuichi…” Kaede muttered sadly.

There was a pause of silence as Shuichi further distanced himself away from the two with only the sounds of his footsteps echoing in the night.

After a moment, Kaito had a look of disappointment in his face and started to shout, “Okay fine! Go ahead and run back! But there’s only one path to the finish line, and sooner or later you’ll have to make your way towards it! And me and Kaede, we’ll both be waiting for you there, so don’t keep us waiting too long, OKAY!?"

Kaede, who wasn’t sure if the astronaut’s words were words of encouragement or not, walked up to him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Give him time, Kaito…”

“I know…” he simply replied. “...I know.”

Kaede smiled, “Come on, let’s continue where we left off. If I recall, I was at forty-five and you were at zero.”

“Nice try, Akamatsu,” Kaito gave her a smug grin. “I may be a bit slow, but I’m not an idiot. You were at forty-three!”

The pianist happily clapped her hands together, “Ah, that’s right! Thank you for reminding me!”

Kaito’s eye’s widened as he realized what he just said, “W-Wait, no, that’s not what I...you weren’t at forty-three, you were at--”

“Instead of complaining, just do fifty push-ups!” Kaede exclaimed.

The astronaut groaned as he placed himself on the ground to do his push-ups.

“And don’t worry,” said Kaede. “Once I’m done with mine, I’ll be sure to keep a close eye on you so that you don’t cheat.”
“Great…”

Shuichi walked into the dormitory. Somehow, even though he didn’t join Kaede and Kaito in their workout regimen, he still felt exhausted. In his case, it was more of a mental exhaustion than a physical one.

Even so, he couldn’t falter at this point in time. Now more than ever, he needed to find a way to escape from this Killing Game. Before someone else succumbs to the game’s influence, and before he loses those he cares about.

“Evening, Shuichi,” the detective heard a voice say.

Shuichi looked up and saw Kokichi leaning on the handrail in front of his room.

“Kokichi…”

“So,” the supreme leader began. “What were you doing out and about in the middle of the night?”

“Oh uh,” the detective stuttered. “I was just...talking to some friends…”

“Talking to friends, huh? That doesn’t sound like a very productive use of your time.”

“What?” Shuichi questioned.

“I mean, we’re trying to figure out the meaning of the ‘Ultimate Hunt’, right?” Kokichi questioned. “Unless, of course, you were talking about that with your friends?”

Shuichi looked back at the dormitory’s entrance, “...No...we weren’t...exactly...talking about that.”

“Does that mean you already figured something out?” asked the supreme leader. “That’d be good news if you did.”

“...No,” the detective could only say.

In the back of his mind, Shuichi expected a witty retort to come out of the supreme leader’s mouth. However, when he looked up, he was surprised to see Kokichi with a depressed look on his face.

“Yeah, I don’t blame you,” the purple-haired boy said with a sigh. “I mean, look at me. I’m out here as well just getting some needed fresh air.”

“Couldn’t come up with anything either, huh?”

“Not exactly,” Kokichi clarified. “I do have some theories, but they’re kinda crazy and outlandish, so I wouldn’t deem them as credible.”

Shuichi chuckled, “Yeah, well maybe we need some crazy and outlandish theories right now. They’re better than nothing, right?”

Kokichi returned the chuckle, “Maybe I need someone to tell my theories to. And that way I could see if they really are as crazy as I think.”

The detective raised an eyebrow, “Huh?”

“How ‘bout it, Shuichi? Let’s work together on this one. We’ll trade theories and hypotheses and see if we can come up with anything substantial.”
“Wait,” Shuichi said skeptical. “You actually want to cooperate in order to solve this mystery?”

“Why not?” Kokichi replied. “I think it’s safe to say that we two are some of the smartest students in this academy. Wouldn’t it be advantageous of us to work together? The probability of solving this thing would certainly increase at the very least.”

“That’s true…” the detective said as he put a finger to his chin.

“Besides, didn’t I say before? If you need my help, I’ll be happy to give it to you!”

In all honesty, Shuichi really didn’t have any reason to refuse the boy. Indeed, if there was a greater chance for him to solve any kind of mystery, as the Ultimate Detective, he had an obligation to take it. Not only for his sake, but for the sake of everyone trapped in this Killing Game. They were all counting on him…

Shuichi nodded his head and walked up the stairs towards Kokichi’s room.
“Merry Christmas, ursine!” the Monokubs greeted from the monitors.

Monotaro tilted his head, “Wait...is it even Christmas?”

“Who knows?” replied Monosuke. “We ain’t keepin’ up wit specific dates in this academy.”

“And everyday is Christmas day when you’re watching a Killing Game!” Monokid shouted excitedly.

“Speaking of which,” said Monophanie. “I wonder if someone’s dead…”

“Ooh, how ominous, Monophanie,” commented the red bear.

“Don’t get me wrong,” the female Monokub replied. “I’m not chomping at the bit to see a dead body anytime soon, but this is a Killing Game, after all.”

“Damn straight!” exclaimed Monokid. “Hey, if any of you are dead, let the others know so we can get this shindig started!”

“So long, bear well!”

Kaede felt her muscles ache a little as she got out of bed. She may have joked with Kaito last night, but the girl took it upon herself to still commit to the fifty pushups in the end. After all, if she just tried to avoid the strenuous exercise, it would be missing the point entirely of why she participated in it in the first place.

Sore muscles aside, what was more worrying to the girl was the fact that she was starting to get used to waking up in the academy. At least, compared to the very first days she was here, where the pianist couldn’t even process the situation she was in. But now, it was to the point where she expected herself to wake up in the academy everytime she went to sleep, as if this was starting to become the norm for her. Suffice to say, Kaede did not like to have that feeling one bit.

After taking a quick shower, Kaede got herself dressed and ready to meet everyone in the dining hall.

Breakfast was as swift as it was served. The only thing that was on everyone’s minds was getting down to business and finding a way out of this academy as soon as possible.

Shuichi, as the resident detective and expert investigator, decided to take the reins and lead the discussion, “So, here’s everything we know about Rantaro as of now.”

Kaede looked around the room to see everyone listening intently to the detective. Well mostly everyone, as the pianist glanced to see Tsumugi slouching on the table looking away from the group with disinterest. Ever since she was outed as the mastermind, Kaede noticed that the cosplayer seemed to operate on two switches: complete insanity or complete boredom.

If it didn’t pertain to the Killing Game, the former mastermind had no interest in any other
conversation whatsoever. Especially if the conversation was *escaping* from the Killing Game.

She observed as the former mastermind just gazed off into the distance. Kaede wondered what kind of thoughts were going on in that girl’s head. As of now, Tsumugi did not seem that much ‘defeated’ in terms of being an adversary of the Killing Game. Indeed, every moment that she remained alive, there was a chance for the killing to start up again. Though some precautions were made in order to somewhat detain her, there was still no telling what Tsumugi was capable of.

“...aede?”

The pianist finally realized she too was distracting herself away from the conversation.

“Gah, sorry about that,” Kaede said. “What were you saying, Shuichi?”

“We’re gonna go around the room to see if anyone came up with any theories regarding the whole Rantaro mystery,” the detective answered. “We wanted to start with you.”

“Oh,” the pianist sheepishly scratched the back of her head. “Sorry, but I didn’t really come up with anything substantial, unfortunately…”

“Don’t be,” Shuichi said genuinely. “We only received all this information yesterday, after all.”

“Gonta also sad to admit that he’s not smart enough to solve mystery,” the entomologist lamented.

“I’m afraid I’m in the same boat,” Ryoma chimed in. “To me, it seemed that Rantaro only got that Survivor Perk because it fit his talent as Ultimate Survivor.”

“Ultimate Survivor, huh?” Kirumi repeated to herself. “I wonder why the Ultimate Initiative chose to give Rantaro that title in particular...”

“Or even what he had to go through to be considered that title in the first place,” Keebo added.

“Nyehhh,” Himiko groaned. “The guy lived his life and ended up as an Ultimate Survivor, only to be the first one killed in a killing game...That’s pretty sad.”

“Hah!” Miu exclaimed. “You’re actually feeling sorry for that traitor?”

Everyone, sans Tsumugi, turned their heads toward the inventor.

“Traitor?” questioned Keebo.

“What do you mean, Miu?” Shuichi followed.

“You wanted theories to the Rantaro mystery?” the young inventor replied. “Well Miu Iruma’s got a hell of a banger for ya!”

“Banger?” Maki repeated dryly. “This isn’t some rock concert, you know.”

“Oh this ought to be good,” Kokichi sighed and leaned back in his seat.

“Yeah, you go ahead and slouch,” Miu said to the supreme leader. “But pretty soon, you and your crotch are going to stand straight up when this gorgeous girl genius reveals *everything*!”

“Miu’s gonna reveal everything?” Gonta asked worriedly. “S-Should Gonta cover his eyes?”

“Miu, what’s your theory?” Kaede quickly asked, wanting to get to the point of the matter as soon as
The inventor crossed her arms and smugly shook her head, “You wanna know why you shouldn’t feel sorry for Rantaro? Well, it’s because **Rantaro Amami was working with Tsumugi all along**!”

Simultaneously, the rest of the students raised an eyebrow at the girl’s claim.

Even Tsumugi, who had been previously ignoring the group’s discussion, suddenly gave a hint of evidence that she was paying at least some attention to it as she slowly turned her head toward the inventor in skepticism.

Shuichi cleared his throat, “And, uh, what...do you base this theory on?”

“You kidding me!?” exclaimed the girl. “We all knew Rantaro was sketchy the moment we met him! That shit about forgetting his talent? It was all a lie just so we wouldn’t know he was the Ultimate Survivor!”

“And how do you explain the Survivor Perk he received?” asked Kirumi.

“Pfft, a red fucking herring!” answered Miu. “It was just so that it looked like he was an innocent player of the killing game like the rest of us. Think about it, Rantaro just happened to stumble across a perk that gives a hint to where the mastermind is? Seems awfully convenient to me.”

Kokichi chuckled softly as he sat up in his chair, “Okay, okay. I’ll be the first to admit, some of that logic does hold up.”

“Hahaha, see!?” Miu laughed. “I knew the little man would rise up in lust for me!”

“No exactly,” the little man wagged his little finger. “There is a tiny glaring flaw in your theory there.”

“Oh yeah?” questioned the inventor. “And what’s that?”

The supreme leader slammed both hands on the table, “WHY IS RANTARO DEAD!?”

“Hеееее?!” Miu shrieked as she flinched back.

“Or to be more specific,” Kokichi continued. “Why would he be working with Tsumugi when she was the one who killed him?”

“I-I don’t fucking know!” the inventor brazenly admitted. “Maybe she ended up betraying him in the end!”

The former mastermind in question could only rub her temple in response.

“Oh sure,” the supreme leader said sarcastically. “Or maybe Rantaro isn’t really dead. Maybe he faked his death and is just hiding somewhere!”

Shuichi shook his head at the suggestion, “That...seems unlikely. I examined it myself, and that was undoubtedly a deceased body in that library.”

Kokichi pointed at the detective excitedly, “THEN MAYBE! Maybe Rantaro had a **twin brother** and it was *his* body that we discovered instead of Rantaro himself!”

“A twin brother?” Maki repeated unamused.
“Yeah, I kinda find that hard to believe…” Kaede added.

“That’d be a pretty boring twist, to be honest.” Angie stated nonchalantly.

“Okay, I wouldn’t go as far to say that…” Tsumugi muttered.

“Kokichi,” addressed Kirumi. “Are you messing around right now?”

The purple-haired leader shrugged his shoulders, “All I’m saying is that we can throw theories left and right, but to be honest, it will all probably lead to nowhere.”

“What exactly are you trying to say here, Kokichi?” questioned Keebo.

“Wanna know what I think?” Kokichi said to the others. “I think this whole business with Rantaro is a big waste of time and we should just scrap that mystery entirely!”

“Huh…?!?” questioned Kaede.

“What!?” Miu shouted. “I spent a good chunk of my time coming up with my theory, not to mention repairing that goddamn Monopad and you’re telling us to just forget all about it?!”

Kokichi looked at the inventor, “To be fair, Miu, your little theory was a load of crap anyway, so I think I did us all a favor in that regard.”

Miu once again flinched back in shock and then started to fidget with her hair in embarrassment, “It’s...it’s because you’re too ignorant to see the genius in my theory…”

“As for the Survivor Perk,” the supreme leader went on. “Look, we know what happened between the time Rantaro followed the directions of that perk to when he bit the dust. There’s really no more mystery to be solved there.”

“Yes there is,” Kaede replied. “You’re saying that Rantaro is no longer relevant to us, but that’s not true. Did you forget that he was the only one of us who had the memory of the ‘Ultimate Hunt’?”

“Good point,” Ryoma acknowledged. “We still don’t know anything about that.”

“Oh, is that all?” Kokichi placed his knuckles on his hips. “Well then, anyone care to offer their theories on this? I wonder how maybe theories we can come up with by the end of the day? Maybe the day after that?”

“At least we’re trying to find the truth,” Kaede argued. “It’s better than just doing nothing for the rest of our days here.”

“That’s not the point I’m trying to make here, Kaede,” Kokichi argued back. “You don’t find the truth just by throwing theories around and hoping one of them sticks. You need evidence, and unfortunately our only ‘witness’ to the mystery of this Ultimate Hunt is dead, and believe me if there were a way to get the answers out of him, then I’m all for it!”

“And what if there was?”

The other students along with Kaede and Kokichi turned to see Korekiyo with his head lowered and hands clasped together, as if he were deep in thought.

“Yo, Kiyo,” said Kaito. “We nearly forgot you were here. You nearly gave some of us a heart attack speaking up so suddenly…”
“Some of us more than others, it seems,” Maki observed.

“Kehehe,” the anthropologist laughed humbly. “Forgive me, I was merely waiting for an opportunity to offer my proposal to the rest of you.”

“Proposal?” Kaede repeated.

“What if there were a way we could speak with Rantaro?” Korekiyo asked the others. “A way we could finally hear the truth we’re so desperately searching for straight from the source’s mouth, so to speak.”

Miu glared at him, “What, you planning on reviving him or something?”

The anthropologist laughed again, “Kehehe. Of course not, but I do know of an alternate method of speaking with Rantaro. I suggest that we perform a seance.”

“A seance?” Kirumi wondered.

To the surprise of some, Kaito took a step back nervously, “W-What, you mean ‘seance’ like summoning a spirit?”

“The very same,” Kiyo replied.

“You havin’ a laugh right now, Kiyo?” asked Kokichi while giving off a particularly bad English accent.

“I can see most of you are quite doubtful of my proposal,” Korekiyo observed. “Understandable, certainly, which is why I hesitated to offer it until this very moment.”

“I think most of us are just surprised, Kiyo,” Kaede tried to offer an explanation. “We didn’t really expect you of all people to suggest something so...unique.”

The young man glanced at the pianist, “And why not? Seances are genuine occurrences, I’ll have you know. They are written of in literature the world over. Moreover, this isn’t unknown territory to me. I myself have participated in seances a great many times.”

Korekiyo then pulled out his book of the fabled Caged Dog Village, “On top of that, we have here a rare chance to perform the legendary seance, The Caged Child.”

“Kiyo, I understand that you mean well,” said Shuichi. “But performing a seance? I...I don’t think now’s the time for something like--”

“Oh?” commented the anthropologist. “And I suppose throwing baseless theories around is a better use for our time?”

Shuichi turned away in guilt, “Ah...”

The masked student sighed, “Please forgive me, Shuichi. It was not my intent to question the processes of a detective. But, again, I don’t see any harm in taking my route for a brief moment.”

“No harm, you say?” questioned Ryoma.

“Indeed,” Kiyo replied. “If the seance works, then we’ll get a chance to speak with the ever-so mysterious Rantaro. If it doesn’t, well then we continue on as we were before. So you see, no harm no foul.”
“You say that, but still...” Shuichi decidedly remained reluctant.

Kaede, however, decided to be a bit more optimistic at Kiyo’s proposal, “You know...I actually agree with Kiyo. I mean, it’s like he said, this could be a good opportunity for us to talk to Rantaro...assuming the seance does work.”

“Splendid, Kaede!” Korekiyo exclaimed happily. “I’m happy to see you so willing to defend me.”

“That’s what friends are for, right?” the pianist responded. “Just because this seance thing is a bit unusual doesn’t mean we should dismiss it entirely.”

“In that case,” said the anthropologist. “Does that mean you’d be willing to volunteer, Kaede?”

Kaede looked at him in slight surprise, “Huh?”

Kiyo once again presented his book, “As with most other seances, they require more than one participant in order for it to effectively work. And the Caged Child requires five people.”

“Five people, huh?” Kirumi echoed.

The pianist thought to herself briefly. Again, she didn’t see any immediate harm going with Korekiyo’s plan.

“Sure, Kiyo,” the young girl replied. “Count me in!”

“Excellent,” the anthropologist responded as joyful as his demeanor allowed. “In that case, please gather four others who are willing to participate and meet me in my lab, if you please.”

Korekiyo began to exit the room.

“H-Hey!” Kaede quickly shouted. “Hang on a sec, Kiyo!”

The anthropologist slowly stopped in his tracks and turned towards the girl, “Yes, Kaede?”

“Aren’t you going a little too fast?”

“Too fast?” the masked student wondered. “Is there something of importance that I’m keeping you from other than this?”

“Not necessarily,” Kaede answered. “But, c’mon, you can’t just ask a girl to perform a seance with you and expect her to be ready right off the bat.”

Korekiyo tilted his head and remained silent.

“She’s got a point,” Angie chimed in. “I’m not sure how I or Atua should feel regarding this whole spirit summoning business, but when one summons a resident of His domain, one must be fully prepared spiritually as well as physically.”

“Angie right,” agreed Gonta. “Gentlemanly thing to do would be to give Kaede and others time they need to prep themselves for seance.”

After hearing the two’s response, Korekiyo slowly nodded his head understanding and laughed softly, “Kehehe...how eloquently put. I must offer you my sincerest apologies, Kaede. I was so eager to perform this particular seance, that I forgot to display the basic manners that all human beings possess.”
“Don’t worry about it, Kiyo,” Kaede assured.

“In that case,” the anthropologist followed. “How about you and four others meet me back in this dining hall later in the afternoon? I trust that will be more than enough time to mentally prepare yourselves?”

“Can’t argue with that,” the pianist replied.

“Oh great,” commented Miu. “And while the five of you go and perform your stupid seance, what will the rest of us be doing?”

“Actually,” Keebo suddenly stood up from where we was. “I would like to offer my own proposal in that regard.”

“Keebo?” Shuichi turned to the robot.

“If you all will indulge in my selfishness for a moment…” Keebo hesitated a bit as he put his metal finger to his chin. “Though I did not come up with any theories in the case of Rantaro or even this Killing Game for that matter, I do have a suggestion that may at the very least help us move forward.”

“Move forward, you say?” said Maki.

“I-If I may…” the robotic student once again hesitated before speaking. “I...I would like to try and go through the Death Road of Despair again.”

“The Death Road of Despair?” Ryoma echoed. “You mean the underground passage that’s below the boiler room, right?”

“Yes,” Keebo simply replied.

“Why the sudden interest, Keebo?” inquired Shuichi.

The robot turned to the detective, “I know we originally written off that place as a waste of our time, but we can’t know for sure unless we discover what’s truly at the end of that tunnel.”

“Whoa whoa whoa,” halted Kokichi. “Weren’t you one of the first who gave up trying to go through it? Are you a heartless machine or a hypocrite?”

Despite the harsh words of the supreme leader, Keebo decided to not take the bait, “I shamefully admit that your point is valid. At the time, I did not fully grasp just how high the stakes were. And now...now one of us is dead and another whom we thought an ally is actually our enemy.”

“Keebo…” Kaede muttered.

“Your will to reattempt the Death Road of Despair is understandable enough,” said Kirumi. “But why do you require permission from the rest of us?”

“Because,” responded the robot. “I would also like some of you to assist me as well.”

“Some of us?” questioned Maki. “How many?”

Keebo thought for a moment, “Maybe a few...no, in fact the more people who participate, the greater our chances will be.”

“Uh didja forget already, Keebo?” said Miu. “All of us already tried our damndest to escape through
that fucking tunnel.”

“I actually wonder about that…” the maid said suddenly. “Though we did try multiple times going through that passage, we didn’t really have any sort of game plan when we originally discovered the area.”

“What do you mean, Kirumi?” asked Kaede.

“Maybe…just maybe,” Kirumi took a glance at the door of the dining hall which led to the hallway. “If we were more well equipped for such an endeavor, then perhaps our chances would indeed be greater.”

“Well equipped?” questioned Ryoma.

“Items that could help protect us from the various traps,” the maid clarified. “I’m certain that we could find at least a few within the academy. The warehouse alone, I imagine, has a few things we could use to our advantage.”

“Are we even allowed to do that…?” wondered Himiko.

“There’s nothing that says otherwise in the rules,” mentioned Kokichi. “So I don’t imagine the Monokubs siccing an Exisal on us for doing so.”

Kaito punched his fists together in determination, “Now you’re talking my language! Count me in, Keebo. I’m not about to laze around just waiting to die here!”

“Count Gonta in too!” said the entomologist. “Gonta did not become strong just so he would do nothing with muscles!”

The mage groaned, “Going through that hard maze again? That definitely sounds like a pain…”

“A pain, you say?” said Korekiyo. “Then perhaps those of you who aren’t as ‘physically capable’ of trekking through that passage could join in my group for the seance?”

“So one group goes with Keebo and attempt the underground passage, while another group of four go with Kiyo to do his seance?” Tenko summarized.

“And any person who chooses neither gets to be known as a useless member of the team!” Kokichi added. “I wonder which of you slackers will be in *that* party!”

Any lingering doubts that Kaede had regarding the group’s morale soon started to dissipate. Now more than ever did it seem that they were all united with the same goal.

She was thankful that she managed to survive this long and see this moment for herself.

“Then it’s settled,” said Kirumi. “Those of us who are to go with me and Keebo, we shall use this time to search for anything in the academy that would be of use to us.”

“As for my group,” said Korekiyo. “Please decide amongst yourselves who will join me for the chance to perform ‘The Caged Child’ seance.”

“Let us all regroup here at precisely 3 p.m.,” suggested Keebo. “Then, we’ll commence our respective operations!”

“‘Operation’?” Kokichi pointed out. “Hah, what are ya, some sort of stone-cold killing machine? Of course the latter part is accurate, but I also wouldn’t be surprised of the former…”
“Why do you say that as if those two aren’t mutually exclusive?!” the robot pointed an accusatory finger at the supreme leader.

Despite the bickering of the two students, the others gave responses of affirmation to the ‘operation’.

Come later in the afternoon, the first coordinated plan of the Ultimate students would commence.
“Maki, wait up!”

The Ultimate Child Caregiver was about to enter her lab when she looked back to see Kaede running up towards her.

“What?” the dark-haired girl said simply.

The pianist slowly stopped as she caught up with the girl, “I was, uh, I was wondering where you were heading off to?”

Maki said nothing and merely stepped to the side to show the door to her lab.

“Oh,” Kaede responded. “Your lab again?”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“N-No!” the pianist raised her arms in defense. “No, no of course not! In fact, I think it’s really charming that you’d be so fond of your lab so much.”

“Charming?” Maki repeated.

“Mhmm,” Kaede nodded her head. “I actually spent some time in my own lab recently and I can see the appeal. With each lab tailored to our respective talents, it gives us a chance to unwind a bit, wouldn’t you say?”

“Hmm,” the caregiver muttered. “If that’s how you want to put it.”

“Ooh, I know!” the pianist suddenly exclaimed. “Maki, do have any favorite piano pieces? You can come to my lab and I can play whatever you--”

“I’m sorry, is there something I can help you with?” Maki interrupted in a quick and stern tone.

Kaede flinched back slightly, realizing she overstepped her boundaries with the dark-haired girl.

“...Actually, yes you can,” the girl managed to answer. “You know how I’m volunteering to be apart of Kiyo’s seance, right? Well, we’re trying to find three other people to help us and, um...I was wondering if you wanted to join?”

Maki raised an eyebrow at her, “...Me?”

“Yeah,” Kaede replied. “Everyone else will probably group up with Keebo to explore the underground passage. So I was thinking about asking those who aren’t as physically capable of going through that.”

The other girl looked back with a slight wary expression, “Not physically capable?”

“Y’know, cause...” the pianist started to fidget her fingers. “You’re the Ultimate Child Caregiver? I just sorta assumed you wouldn’t want to do something so...intense.”

“You don’t think taking care of children is intense?” Maki asked the girl.

“I-I mean, I’ve never done it myself so I wouldn’t know,” Kaede quickly elaborated. “I’m sorry, it
wasn’t my intention to make light of your talent.”

To the pianist’s surprise, Maki managed to form a small but noticeable smile on her face—more likely due to amusement rather than genuine happiness.

Along with the change to her expression, the child caregiver also gave out a light and quick breath of a chuckle. “Hmm, I already told you how I used to take care of the kids back in my orphanage, didn’t I?”

“Well yeah,” Kaede replied, recalling the few times she had spent with Maki which had happened before Rantaro’s death. “You said it was pretty normal stuff back then. Though, I guess even if it was, it probably required a lot of energy just to keep up with all of that.”

“There you have it,” the dark-haired girl concluded.

“Huh,” the pianist said curiously, as if she learned something new. “Is that why Kaito wanted you to join his group right before we discovered Rantaro’s body?”

Maki sighed, “Who knows? He also asked Angie and Himiko of all people. I don’t think anyone can guess what goes on in that guy’s head.”

“To be fair, the same can be said for most people in this academy,” said Kaede.

“Like you,” Maki suddenly said with narrowed eyes.

“Huh?”

“Let me ask you this,” the dark-haired girl started. “Who else did you ask to join the seance besides me?”

“Oh, well…” Kaede stammered. “You’re actually the first person I’ve asked so far.”

Maki turned her head and tucked her hair behind her ear, “That’s what I thought.”

“What?” questioned the blonde. “Is there something wrong with that?”

“Why me?” the other girl asked back. “There were more obvious people to ask, so why did you make the conscious decision to come running after me first?”

There were many things Kaede did not know about the caregiver. For so long she had intentionally left herself mysterious and aloof to the others for reasons the pianist did not know. What she did know, however, was that Maki wasn’t a person with an average to below average intelligence. With the girl’s aloofness and her impersonal interactions with the group also came about an air of perceptiveness. Perhaps it was due to not being in the forefront of any conversation she’s apart of that Maki was able to pick up on certain things others wouldn’t notice. Not exactly on the level of an Ultimate Detective, but just enough that she would be able to figure things out quicker than most.

“I’m gonna be honest, Maki,” Kaede began. “But you’re probably the only person here who I can’t get a read on.”

“A read?” Maki repeated. “You’re sounding an awful lot like Keebo.”

Kaede pointed an accusatory finger at her, “That’s robophobic.”

The caregiver blinked, “I’m gonna ignore you just said that.”
“Look my point is, is that I wanted to use this as an opportunity to get to know you better.”

Maki stared at the girl once again, “I’m sorry, you thought a seance would be a good opportunity to get to know me better?”

“Well, considering the other option is going through the underground passage, yes I think the seance would be the better of the two for that!”

“Stop,” the dark-haired girl replied. “I’m gonna stop you right there.”

“Maki?” questioned Kaede.

“Why are you trying so hard to befriend me?”

The moment the caregiver asked that question, the pianist started to glance around the room in awkward nervousness, “Wh-What are you talking about?”

“You seriously thought I wouldn’t notice?” Maki replied with a sigh.

Kaede gave a sigh of her own. There was that perceptiveness that Maki was so good in displaying.

After a brief pause, the pianist spoke, “Hey, can I ask you a question?”

“You’ve already held me up for this long,” Maki answered simply.

“...Why did you help me back at the class trial?”

It was the caregiver’s turn to give a brief pause, “...What?”

Kaede looked at her straight in the eyes, “I felt utterly hopeless back there. Seeing what would of been my own execution...and knowing that the killing game would’ve continued even if I had sacrificed myself...I reached my breaking point because of that.”

Maki listened intently to the girl’s words, her face matching the other’s in seriousness.

“And when it came time for someone to finally bring me back to reality, it wasn’t Shuichi who stepped up to me.”

“Kaede--” Maki tried to say.

“Not Kaito, not Gonta, not Tenko…” Kaede continued. “But you...It was you.”

The child caregiver tried her best to give out some sort of response, she remained calm and composed, but for seemingly the first time, she was left utterly speechless.

“We had barely interacted with each other up until that point,” the pianist said. “So will you tell me why you decided to help me?”

For a brief moment, Kaede could’ve sworn she saw a bead of sweat form on the caregiver’s forehead. It seemed that for whatever reason, Maki had difficulty in answering her question.

Before long, however, the dark-haired girl finally let out a response, “Look, what I did back there…”

“Yes?” Kaede awaited the girl’s answer.

Maki fiddled with one of her twin tails and avoided eye contact with the pianist, “The reason I
helped you out was because--"

“Kaede!” the two girls heard Tenko’s voice shout. “Kaede, are you here?!"

The sound of quick moving footsteps echoed through the 3rd floor of the school building as the aikido master approached the two’s location.

“Kaede!” Tenko shouted again as she managed to track her down. “Oh, Kaede, thank goodness I found you!”

“Tenko!” Kaede matched the other girl’s tone as she became worried about her frantic state. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is *not* okay!” Tenko replied. “You need to come with me right now!”

“Huh!?” the pianist was taken aback by this sudden turn of events. “What happened?!"

“It’s Himiko!” the aikido master answered with near tears in her eyes. “She’s...she’s been…!”

Kaede’s eyes widened, “Oh no...Please don’t tell me…”

The aikido master quickly grabbed Kaede’s sleeve, “There’s no time! We gotta move NOW!”

And before anyone could react or say anything else, the pianist was dragged away, leaving Maki alone in the vicinity.

After a moment to process everything that had just transpired, Maki clenched her fist.

“...Dammit,” the girl cursed as she followed after the two.

“T-Tenkoooo!” the pianist yelled as the two descended the stairs of the academy. “You need to talk to me!”

“You’ll see soon enough! We’re almost there!”

“Geez!” Kaede shouted in exasperation. “Stop being so cryptic!”

Eventually Tenko, with Kaede in tow, managed to reach her destination: the Ultimate Magician Lab.

“In here?” asked Kaede.

Tenko nodded her head, her face still deep with worry and anxiousness.

Kaede gulped as she too expressed fear and worry. She had no idea what was beyond the door to Himiko’s lab. Deep in the back of the pianist’s mind, however, she knew the answer. No matter how hard she wanted to deny the possibility, it wouldn’t matter if it happened in reality.

But she couldn’t falter. Now now.

The pianist opened the door to the Ultimate Magician Lab and there...she saw it. A most astonishing sight.

**Himiko Yumeno, the Ultimate Magician, on the floor in her lab...**meditating next to Angie.

Kaede blinked.
She looked at Himiko and Angie, and then back to Tenko.

The aikido master looked back at her in anticipation, as if she was waiting for a reaction out of the girl.

Kaede looked back at the two meditating students and blinked again.

“I tried talking to her, Kaede,” Tenko began. “But Himiko just won’t listen.”

“...” Kaede struggled to find the words in order to properly respond. “Wh...What am I looking at?”

Tenko looked at the young pianist in surprise, “Kaede, don’t you see!? Himiko’s clearly being brainwashed!!!”

At that moment a loud thud was heard right outside the lab. Tenko and Kaede quickly looked to see Maki standing there.

Right next to what appeared to be a newly formed crack on the wall.

“Maki!” Tenko said in relief. “Good, you came too! Maybe you can talk some sense into Himiko!”

The child caregiver immediately turned a complete 180 and walked away from the lab.

“M-Maki?!” exclaimed the aikido master. “Wh-Where are you going!?”

Maki turned her head ever so slightly and said in a low dry tone, “Do me a favor. Don’t ever do that to me again.”

“H-Huh...?” Tenko asked confused, as the caregiver completely removed herself from the area. “Do what?”

“Tenko!” Kaede shouted sternly.

The girl flinched back, “Y-You too, Kaede!?”

“We thought you found a dead body!”

Tenko flinched again, “A dead body!? Where?!”

“No--I--we--!” the pianist used both her hands to cover her face in frustration. “Nevermind…”

“We’re being disturbed again, Angie…” Himiko said suddenly while still meditating.

“Worry not, Himiko,” replied the artist. “Just focus on your prayer and let the presence of Atua wash over you.”

“So…” Kaede began, finally calming herself down. “What are you two up to?”

“Ahhh, I also sense the presence of Kaede,” Angie said. “This is actually a good opportunity.”

“Her coming here isn’t just a coincidence, is it?” questioned Himiko. “Is this the will of Atua?”

“Now you are starting to see, Himiko!” the artist declared happily. “Come now, Kaede, please join us!”

“Uhhh, join you…?” Kaede spoke hesitantly, clearly wanting more context on what’s going on.
“Why, yes,” Angie answered. “For the two of us have decided to also be a part of Kiyo’s seance.”

“Oh,” the pianist said genuinely intrigued. “You and Himiko?”

“I don’t want to do the underground passage again,” said the magician. “So I decided to follow Kiyo’s advice to do his seance with him.”

“And of course, with my close connection with the great Atua,” Angie followed. “It’s only natural that I also join in on the seance.”

“Oh!” Kaede responded, getting a better idea of the situation. “So that’s why you two are…?”

Angie nodded her head, “But it’s not just for the seance. We’re also preparing for the future.”

“The future?” the pianist repeated.

The white-haired girl smiled, “That’s not important right now. So will you join us, Kaede?”

“Don’t do it, Kaede!” Tenko exclaimed. “With Himiko, it’s already bad enough as it is, but if you do it too I’ll have no hope left!”

“Seriously, is everything okay, Tenko?” questioned Kaede. “Is there a problem with Himiko praying with Angie?”

“I’d be fine if it were just that,” Tenko answered. “But Himiko’s using Atua to abandon reality!”

“Abandon reality?” the young blonde echoed.

“Nyehhh,” the mage-girl chirped as she kept praying. “By submitting myself to the great Atua, I can forget about being trapped in this nightmare. As long as Atua is watching over me, I don’t ever have to worry about this killing game.”

“Isn’t that escapism?” questioned Kaede.

“Quite the contrary,” replied Angie. “Himiko has merely abandoned reality to speak to Atua.”

Now Kaede was starting to see why Tenko was becoming worried.

“Himiko,” the pianist said while approaching the girl. “I know it’s hard to come to terms with our situation...but trying to ignore it will only lead to trouble in the future.”

“Exactly!” Tenko said in agreement. “Himiko, please listen to Kaede! She’s wayyy better than some lousy god!”

“Atua isn’t lousy…” groaned Himiko. “At least I don’t have to worry about Him ever attempting to murder anyone.”

“H-Huh!” Kaede reacted.

“H-Himiko!” Tenko said astonished before turning to the pianist. “She didn’t mean it, Kaede…”

“I did mean it,” the mage confirmed. “Between the two, I trust Atua more than Kaede.”

The aikido master pointed a finger at the red head, “Himiko! You apologize to Kaede this instant!”

“Why should she?” questioned Angie. “She was merely stating facts, after all.”
“Even so,” Tenko replied. “She didn’t need to bring it up again.”

“Why not?” asked the artist. “Our sins follow us to our graves, I’ll have you know. And Kaede...she performed a very ‘grave’ sin.”

The pianist, in response, looked down at the floor dejectedly.

“However, perhaps her sins could be absolved if she were to pray for forgiveness to Atua,” Angie said with a wink.

Tenko looked back at the pianist once again with nervousness, “K-Kaede, you don’t have to do this, you know…”

“It’s...It’s fine, Tenko,” Kaede looked up at the girl with a smile of acceptance. “I was gonna pass anyway.”

The aikido master gave a sigh of relief.

“Oh that’s too bad,” Angie said with a smile. “Maybe next time.”

“Yeah...next time,” the pianist answered with great uncertainty. “In any case, I still need to find one more person to join in the seance.”

“Doesn’t matter one way or the other to me,” commented Himiko. “As long as Angie and Atua are with me, I’ll be happy.”

Tenko felt her heart shatter into a million pieces upon hearing those words.

Kaede, deciding that she had outstayed her welcome in the young mage’s lab, began to exit the room.

But before the pianist made her leave, she heard Tenko cry out,

“HOLD IT!”

The young blonde looked back to see the aikido master take a fierce and determined stance.

“Y-You don’t have to look any further, Kaede!” Tenko continued. “F-For I, Tenko Chabashira, shall also join the seance! HAIYAH!”

“My my, how interesting!” Angie exclaimed joyfully. “But is that really wise? You are one of the more athletic students here in this academy, Tenko. Wouldn’t your physical prowess be more useful for the others going through the underground passage?”

“W-We already have people like Gonta and Kirumi for that!” answered the aikido master. “B-Besides...I need to be in the right mindset in order for my spirit energy to be fully unleashed! ...And it’s not, so I would basically be useless to the others when it comes to using my full physical potential!”

“Doesn’t matter one way or the other to me,” Himiko commented again. “As long as Angie and Atua are with me, I’ll be happy.”

Tenko recoiled, “Himiko...you don’t need to keep saying that...”
At long last, the time finally arrived for the ultimate students to perform their plans of action.

Kaede and her group, along with Korekiyo, were the first to meet up in the dining hall.

“What, yes…” the anthropologist noted as he observed the seance participants. “Yes, this should do quite nicely.”

“I’m glad to see you’re in good spirits, Kiyo,” the pianist replied to the rather gleeful masked student.

Korekiyo laughed in amusement, “‘Good *spirits*’? Kehehehe, what a magnificent pun! I must applaud your wit, Kaede.”

Kaede smiled back at the masked student, though unable to admit that she made said pun unintentionally.

“Thanks for letting me join your seance, Kiyo,” Tenko expressed her gratitude. “I know it must be weird for you to see someone like me be one of the volunteers.”

“No need to harbor any awkward feelings, my dear,” the anthropologist stated calmly. “I’m ecstatic that all four of you have eagerly stepped up to offer your spiritual energy for the greater cause.”

“Y-You know me, Kiyo!” Tenko exclaimed in hesitant enthusiasm. “I’m all about lending a hand for the greater cause!”

“Though if you were to satiate my curiosity,” the masked student went on. “Exactly, *why* did you decide to volunteer for the seance, rather than the underground passage?”

“Oh, uh…” the girl stammered nervously. “Y’know, I just uh...wanted to broaden my horizons!”

Tenko looked back at the other two seance volunteers: Angie and Himiko. This didn’t go unnoticed by Kaede.

“Kehehehe, what an admirable response!” praised Korekiyo. “In that case, once this is all finished, perhaps I’ll take you up on your previous offer and have you teach me Neo-Aikido?”

Before an answer could be given, the main door to the dining hall opened and Keebo along with Kirumi, Gonta, Ryoma as well as Kaito and Miu entered, regrouping with the five already in the room.

As Kaede observed each person that entered the room, she noticed that some of them were holding various types of equipment from the warehouse such as rope and flashlights. She also noticed that Ryoma was holding onto a tennis racket and had a backpack filled with tennis balls. The last notable observation she made was that Miu was carrying a rather wide and horizontally elongated metal suitcase, presumably originating from the inventor’s lab, or perhaps the girl had invented it herself.

“Ah, it seems that some of us have gathered now,” Korekiyo observed.

“Did you guys manage to find some things that could help with the underground passage?” Tenko asked the other group.

“We did our best searching through the academy,” Keebo answered. “And we decided our best advantage would be utilizing the equipment in the warehouse.”
“That explains all the rope you guys have,” commented Himiko.

“It’s not much,” replied Kaito. “But when you’re dealing with an underground passage filled with pit traps, having some goddamn rope is probably a good way to deal with those.”

Though it was hardly the moment to do so, Kaede started to reminisce when they had attempted to go through the ‘Death Road of Despair’ for the first time. She remembered all the traps they had to endure. Bombs, cages, pits...Kaede nearly shook with PTSD from having to deal with all of that. Indeed, the pianist loathed that underground passage, for not only did it cause needless suffering to everyone, it also gave them all a false hope: A hope that they all could escape from the academy and the killing game.

As a result from the group’s first trek through the death road, the morale was severely crippled and managed to practically give everyone the idea that working together would be utterly pointless.

Kaede hoped that this time around, things would play out differently.

“Other than what we decided to bring with us,” said Ryoma, staring down at his tennis racket. “We’ll have to manage the rest with our **Ultimate talents**.”

“Are you sure about this, Ryoma?” Kirumi asked the tennis pro.

“I know I said the ‘Ultimate Tennis Pro’ was already dead and buried,” the short-but-serious student replied. “But with our current situation, maybe this is also a way for ‘him’ to redeem himself. Using his talent to save people rather than kill them.”

“You had already used your talent to save people, Ryoma,” Kaede simply stated.

The former convict said nothing, but looked at the pianist and gave her a short nod.

“And what about you, Miu?” Korekiyo turned to the inventor. “Looks like you have something to bring to the table as well.”

Miu smirked, “Oh? As I expected, Kiyo, you were curious about the gorgeous girl genius. Well you are a guy after all, and no guy could possibly resist me.”

The anthropologist raised an eyebrow before turning to the others, “So I suppose we still have to wait for the rest of our associates to arrive--”

“H-Hey, wait hang on!” the inventor pleaded. “A-Aren’t you the least bit curious about my invention?”

“Ooh, another invention?” Angie questioned happily.

“Miu calls it ‘Secret Weapon’!” Gonta replied.

“A secret weapon?” Kaede repeated.

The artist playfully swung her head back and forth, “Lemme see, lemme see!”

“Hey, hands to yourself!” Miu pointed at the pianist. “This is only for an absolute emergency. It'll be our last resort and no doubt the shining star in our little mission here!”

Kirumi sighed, “Honestly, if you think it will help so much, I don’t understand why we don’t use it at the very beginning. Why does have to be our last resort?”
“Look, I only had time to build one of these and they aren’t easy to make!” the inventor exclaimed. “In fact it only has so much juice before it needs to be recharged again.”

“Seriously, what the hell is even in that suitcase?” asked Kaito.

“For God’s sake, can you give a girl some time before you ask her to reveal it all?!” Miu shouted flustered.

The astronaut raised his hands in defense, “Alright alright, damn!”

“For all our sakes, can you save your hot-headed energy for when we start going through the underground passage?” Maki said as she entered the dining hall.

“Ah, Maki!” greeted Keebo. “Does that mean you’ve chosen to go with our group and explore the Death Road of Despair?”

“As much as I’d like to stand around and summon dead people, I feel I’ll be more useful if I go with you guys,” the caregiver replied with a slight hint of sarcasm.

“I see,” the robot concurred. “It seems you were faced with a difficult choice, then.”

Maki didn’t bother replying to the metal student’s naivety.

The dining hall door that led outside suddenly opened and Tsumugi started walking into the room. Kaede suddenly realized that the people who would usually watch her were already present in the room and that meant that the former mastermind wasn’t originally with them. That either meant that Tsumugi was either being watched by someone else, or she was by herself for a time.

However, Kaede also noticed that the cosplayer’s wrists were tied together around her back, so she couldn’t really do all that much on her own to begin with.

Tsumugi looked at the pianist, and the gaze was returned back at her.

The cosplayer smirked mischievously, “You’re never gonna escape from th--GAAH!”

Before she had time to finish her sentence, Tsumugi was promptly kicked from behind and she fell onto the floor of the dining hall.

Kokichi, who was standing behind her with his leg stretched outward, merely smiled and looked down at the blue-haired girl before entering the room himself. Shuichi, who was standing behind him, followed into the dining hall as well.

“Kokichi…” the detective said disapprovingly at the boy’s previous action.

“Kokichi!” Kaede shouted in astonishment.

“What?” the supreme leader shrugged calmly. “She killed Rantaro. That was just a bit of revenge for his sake.”

“This is only my personal opinion,” said Kirumi as she brought Tsumugi back to her feet. “But I do not think Rantaro would appreciate such petty revenge.”

The boy smirked, “We don’t know that for certain though, right? We barely knew him at all, so for all intents and purposes, he could’ve been that petty!”

Maki crossed her arms, “So is that why Tsumugi was with you? Just so you could fulfill some dark
revenge fantasy?”

Miu blushed, “I-Is that why her hands are tied up? I expected this kind of kinky sex play from the sadistic imp, but I didn’t think Poo-ichi to be into that sort of thing!”

“H-Huh?!” exclaimed Kaede who couldn’t hide her blush either.

Shuichi became red himself, “W-What?! No, you got it all wrong! We were just interrogating her!”

“No?” questioned Himiko. “You’re interrogating her again?”

“For what reason?” asked Kirumi. “Were you, perhaps, able to divulge information out of her in order for us to escape this killing game?”

Kokichi stepped forward, “Well…no. Actually that’s a lie. Yes. Wait…maybe…?”

“Well, which is it!?” exclaimed Miu.

The supreme leader reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He unfurled it to reveal a drawn (in crayon) layout of what appeared to be a level in a 2D platformer.

“Buh-BAM!” Kokichi shouted triumphantly.

Kaede stared at his drawing, “And, uh, what exactly are we looking at?”

The short, purple-haired boy looked at the paper and then back at the others in confusion, “Is...Is it not clear? Granted, I’m not an artist like Angie, but I think I did a pretty good job all things considered.”

Kirumi approached the drawing and examined it closely, “Hmm, this gate...and the floating objects...could it be? Kokichi, is this perhaps a layout of the underground passage?”

The pianist’s eyes widened, “Wait, seriously!?”

“Well it’s only up to the first half,” the supreme leader replied. “But yeah, this should make things easier for us, wouldn’t you say?”

Maki narrowed her eyes, “And how exactly did you guys manage to get Tsumugi to reveal this information?”

Kokichi mischievously put a finger to his lips, “Let’s just say a mutual deal was made.”

“Y’know we’re gonna need more than that,” Ryoma said as he shook his head.

“Hey, I’ve been talking this whole time,” he replied. “Maybe it’s best if you hear the reason straight from the source’s mouth.”

Kirumi turned to the cosplayer, “Well, Tsumugi?”

Tsumugi scowled at the supreme leader before she spoke, “Tch. He said I was gonna act as your guys’ ‘shield’ when we go through the Death Road. So rather than having to deal with that the whole way through, I decided to give you all half the answers.”

“Act as our shield?” questioned Keebo.

“Seems like a fair way to deal with those traps, right?” said Kokichi.
“I getcha!” responded Miu, catching on to the boy’s thought process. “With the blueberry bitch taking the blunt of the blows, that’ll make things way easier for us!”

“Gonta think that seem a little mean…” the entomologist commented.

“Again,” the supreme leader stated simply. “Killed Rantaro.”

“Um, look,” Shuichi stepped into the conversation. “Point is, thanks to this, we managed to cut down on half of the potential struggle through the underground passage.”

Kaede smiled at the detective, “That’s amazing, Shuichi! At the pace you’re going, it’ll be hard for the rest of us to keep up when it comes to contributing to our eventual escape.”

“C-C’mon…” the young man said bashfully. “I haven’t done all that much…”

“ Seriously?” Kaede said with playful sarcasm. “You saved me from being the blackened.”

“No to mention you revealed Tsumugi as the mastermind as a result,” Kirumi added.

“You even got her to reveal Rantaro’s mysterious talent!” Angie responded.

The detective, though amused, continued to be embarrassed from all the praise, “B-But I didn’t do that all by myself. Kokichi and Keebo helped me through most of that.”

In response, the supreme leader leaned his elbow on Shuichi’s shoulder, “Aww, you’re welcome, buddy! Hey, Keebo, he said my name first, so that means he likes me more than you!”

The Ultimate Robot could only roll his eyes at the boy.

“Speaking of,” Kaito suddenly said, looking at both Shuichi and Kokichi. “ Seems the two of you have been getting rather chummy lately.”

“What can I say?” replied Kokichi. “After partnering with this guy in our first interrogation, it’s only natural that our ‘partnership’ would continue afterwards. It’s like being a part of certain cliques in school where people of similar levels of intelligence would just hang out together.”

“What about you, Shuichi?” asked the astronaut. “You feel the same way Kokichi’s feeling?”

The detective covered his mouth with his hand in contemplation, “That is...Well...I--”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, *WHOA*!” Kokichi interrupted. “Am I not allowed to be his friend or something? I thought we all wanted to become friends with each other.”

Kaede quickly stepped in front of Kaito, “Of course that’s what we all want. And you’re right, Kokichi, there’s nothing wrong with the two of you hanging out. Right, Kaito?”

The astronaut looked at the girl with a surprised expression. Eventually he resigned himself and merely shook his head and turned away.

“A-Anyway,” Keebo said as he attempted to change the subject. “It seems that you have also acquired the volunteers you needed, Kiyo.”

“Ah yes,” the anthropologist said with a hint of excitement. “The spirits from beyond have blessed me with quite a fortunate result. Kaede, Angie as well as Himiko and Tenko have graciously offered their services to my cause!”
“I see,” Shuichi commented.

The artist clasped her hands together, “But of course, Kiyo! You know I would do anything for the chance that you all become closer to Atua!”

“Mhmm,” Himiko said while meditating. “Anything to become closer to Atua.”

“Oh?” Kokichi remarked. “That sounds like a fun combination of people and all, but...am I mistaken or did I hear Tenko’s name in that list?”

“Y-Yeah!” Tenko expressed with mild hesitation. “Got a problem with that, degenerate?”

“Ooh yeah, big problem,” Kokichi replied bluntly. “Y’see, since the rest of us are going down that underground passage filled with traps and other dangerous so-and-so’s, wouldn’t it be more beneficial for us if someone were there to defend us against said dangers, Ms. Ultimate Aikido Master?”

Tenko winced, “W...Well, Gonta’s going with you guys. I’m sure he can take more than enough for your guys’ sake.”

“Yeah!” the entomologist happily agreed. “Kokichi should no worry. Gonta will be there to protect everybody from the bad ‘Soensohs’!”

“And what if Gonta gets blindsided by a trap?” the supreme leader counter-argued. “What if Kirumi? Ryoma? Who will be there, then, to defend us in our time of need?”

“Hey,” Kaito interrupted. “Remember how you have the freedom to hang out with whoever you want? Well Tenko can do whatever she likes, too!”

Kaede stepped forward, “I’m with Kaito on this. Tenko already said she wasn’t feeling up to taking on the underground passage so she decided to perform the seance instead.”

Kokichi put a finger to his chin as he eyeballed Tenko’s defenders, “Oh, I get it. Gee, why didn’t you just say so?”

Despite the light-hearted tone of the boy’s words, somehow the pianist knew that this wouldn’t be the end of it.

The small purple-haired student smiled, “Why didn’t you just say that you don’t really care about escaping from here?”

“K-Kokichi…” Shuichi said trying to reel back the student.

Kaede sighed. Like one of her piano recitals, her guess was perfect and precise.

“What are you on about?” Maki asked slightly irritated.

“Don’t look at me,” the boy replied. “I thought it was ‘all hands on deck’ when it came to finding a way to escape this place. If we can be lax on our main objective like those three over there, then why should the rest of us overcompensate for them?”

“Bullshit!” Kaito exclaimed. “No one’s being lazy here!”

“Then tell me, Tenko,” Kokichi turned to the aikido master. “Wouldn’t it be better if you played into your strength and join everyone else in the Death Road of Despair?”
“J-Just like a degenerate male!” Tenko claimed in accusation. “All you lot ever do is try to get females to do your bidding, regardless of how they feel! Well I’m not feeling up to it right now, I’m tired!”

“Tenko!” Tsumugi shouted surprised. “You shouldn’t say things that could be taken out of context!”

The blue-haired girl quickly turned toward Keebo and winked at him much to the robot’s confusion.

“How…” the supreme leader muttered while trembling. “How can you be so selfish?”

“Kokichi…” Kaede said with a wary tone. “What are you--”

“Because I’m not feeling up to it, either!” the boy suddenly replied with tears in his eyes.

“Huh?” questioned the pianist.

“Kokichi,” said Kirumi. “Is this another one of your lies?”

The tears did not cease from his eyes. “No it’s not! And you know why it’s not a lie? Because I’m still willing to go with you guys to the underground passage!”

Kirumi, though still suspicious of the student, decided not to question him on that spectrum.

The supreme leader bit his thumb in frustration, “Even so...even if I am scared of the pain...the exhaustion...from going into that damned death road, I'm still willing to go. That’s how deep my resolve goes! THAT'S HOW MUCH I WANT TO ESCAPE FROM THIS KILLING GAME!”

The room became silent from Kokichi’s rant. Even if he was lying, the boy did have a point. Escaping from the killing game is their number one priority. Though there was no immediate danger to them, that did not mean that they should become complacent.

“Tenko,” Kirumi suddenly spoke.

“Yeah…?” the girl replied.

“Are you really not feeling up to the task?”

The aikido master’s eyes widened, “W-What do you mean?”

“You say you do not have the motivation to trek through the underground passage,” the maid elaborated. “But is it really due to a lack of strength and energy?”

Miu scowled, “If you ask me, she’s been full of energy ever since we walked into this room!”

“She’s been especially full of energy when she was talking to me,” Himiko suddenly remarked.

“H-Himiko!” Tenko exclaimed.

Kokichi smirked, “Is that right?”

“Hmm,” Ryoma simply stated. “So that’s why.”

Korekiyo shook his head in disappointment, “Honestly. You know I’m taking this seance quite seriously, yes? All I ask is that you would do so as well, and not use it as an opportunity for some... social call.”
I-It’s not like that, Kiyo!” Tenko quickly attempted to defend herself. “I’m just as serious about the seance as the rest of you!”

“Would you still be saying that if Himiko decided to come to our side, then?” questioned Kokichi.

“Kokichi,” said Kaito. “Enough already. Why the hell do you need to make a big deal out of this?”

“All it takes is one misplaced card to knock down the pyramid, my friend,” the boy replied. “To be fair, I’ll be the first to admit that probably, whatever the hell lies at the end of the underground passage, I am 99.9% sure that it will NOT be an exit to this place. Also, even if we do fail to cross that death road, we could always try, try again whenever we feel like.”

“So there shouldn’t be any problem,” the astronaut surmised.

Kokichi wagged his finger in disagreement, “Ehh, not exactly. Let’s say we do find something there-maybe an exit, or some other important clue to this killing game- the ‘powers that be’ will not be particularly fond of that, I’m assuming.”

“You mean the Monokubs might try and...stop us?” Miu asked nervously.

“I would think so,” answered Kokichi. “I’m 49.8% certain that might happen and wouldn’t it be nice if we had all of our able-bodied friends on the front-line in case that happens?”

“First of all, why not a full 50%?” Kaede said to the supreme leader. “Secondly, Kokichi, I don’t think you need to worry about the Monokubs being a threat to you guys down at the underground passage. If they were really that paranoid, they would’ve forbade us to go down there at all.”

The supreme leader shrugged in resignation, “I suppose you have a point there.”

“So do you have any further objections on why Tenko shouldn’t join the seance?” the girl asked.

“Hey now,” Kokichi said mildly offended. “You’re making me sound like some kind of jerk who can’t read the mood. The only reason I was suspicious was because I wanted all of us to escape from here as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

“Oh yeah right,” Kaito quickly denied. “I see what you were scheming. You probably wanted to find a way to sneak out of being part of the ‘Underground Passage Team’ and tried to switch places with Tenko to join Kiyo’s seance!”

Slowly, but ever so noticeably, Kokichi formed a smile on his face. However, it wasn’t a smile of ‘you got me’, but a smile of...

“Not exactly,” the supreme leader replied.

“What?” questioned the astronaut.

“I’m surprised, Kaito,” said Kokichi. “You managed to figure out most of my true intentions. In fact, I’ll go so far as to say you figured out two-thirds of it. Didn’t expect that from an idiot like you.”

“Don’t call me a--” Kaito managed to stop himself from catching the bait.

“So it’s true then?” questioned Kaede. “The only reason you called out Tenko was so that you could join--”

“Not me,” Kokichi interrupted. “I’m sure if all of us weren’t talking all over ourselves, he probably would’ve spoken up sooner.”
“He?” Tenko echoed. “He who?”

Kokichi’s smile remained on his face as he looked back, “Hey, Shuichi, you gonna say something anytime soon, cause I can only prep them for so long.”

Everyone’s eyes darted towards the detective, who flinched back in response.

“Shuichi?” the pianist said curiously.

“N-no, no it’s fine,” Shuichi said as he tried to resolve the situation. “Between the five of you, you guys should have no problem.”

Korekiyo looked at the boy, quickly determining his objective, “Ah, I understand. Hmm, yes, this does pose a complication. A minor one, but one nonetheless.”

Kaede looked at the anthropologist in confusion.

“Like I said,” Shuichi went on. “There’s no need to worry about that. Especially with Kaede there, she’ll know what needs to be--”

“Shuichi,” Kokichi looked at the detective with a serious expression. “Remember what I said before about how we *all* need to play into our strengths in order to end this killing game?”

After a brief moment of hesitation, Shuichi acknowledged his colleague’s words and had a look of conviction himself, “Actually, I’m sorry for causing any trouble, but I would like to be part of the seance as well.”

“H-Huh?!” Tenko exclaimed.

The detective bowed his head, “There are some things that I need to ask Rantaro, so please, if you’ll let me!”
Out of all the areas in the Ultimate Academy for Gifted Juveniles, the three empty rooms located on the fourth floor of the main building seemed the most mysterious. With no windows or switches, the only source of light came from one dimly lit candle on each side of the wall. Also, the floorboards in each of the rooms were merely resting on top of a crosspiece, which meant that the stability of the floors were suboptimal at best. More curious, however, was the fact that all three of the rooms had a hole located in the corner of the floor, which gave to the conclusion that that was not a case of an accidental design flaw, but a deliberate choice.

All these factors tied together was most likely the reason why the students had chosen to perform the seance in one of these rooms.

Kaede watched as the anthropologist poured salt onto the floor, fashioning it into what looked like a magic circle. In her hand she held a piece of small paper, containing the lyrics to The Caged Child’s song, of which she had to memorize. Kiyo had already performed the melody to everyone, so that they could get a better grasp at memorizing the song. Of course, being the Ultimate Pianist, Kaede had little difficulty when it came to memorizing lyrics and melody. In fact, she almost felt a little wistful not being able to perform the actual melody on a piano, thinking it could add to the atmosphere of the event.

That is to say, if any addition to the environment was needed, which it wasn’t. There was no need with the darkness raining down on what little light there was, and the complete silence of the room, other than the tiny sprinkling sounds of salt gently colliding with the floor.

Perhaps it was one part nervousness and another part excitement, but the other students did not feel a need to converse with each other as Kiyo prepared the circle. They all had their reasons for joining in the seance and they were using this time to reflect on that and what may come from it. The thought of possibly reuniting with a fallen acquaintance of theirs, if only for a moment, made them anxious.

Kaede, in particular, was getting more tense with each passing second.

“W-Wow, Kiyo,” the pianist spoke, attempting to break the silence as well as ease her nerves a little. “The magic circle’s looking great. Are you sure you don’t need a reference?”

“Not at all,” the masked student replied. “Like I mentioned before, I am quite the fan of The Caged Child. I have memorized it quite perfectly, and this circle should be no different. By the way, you did check your side of the room, yes?”

“Oh, yes of course,” she replied. “Nothing out of the ordinary on that end. And you?”

“Nothing on this side, either,” the anthropologist replied.

The girl smiled, “I’m glad.”

Korekiyo looked at her, “Glad, you say?”

“Yes,” she answered. “I’m glad that you were able to come up with this. I’ll be honest, I still have my doubts whether this will work or not, but the fact that you offered this idea to us...I’m just glad.”

The anthropologist paused for a moment and then continued to draw the magic circle.

Before the room could fall back into silence, he spoke once more, but chose not to face the girl,
“Kaede, do you regret your actions?”

Kaede looked at Korekiyo in surprise, immediately knowing what he was referring to, “What’s this all of a sudden?”

“I couldn’t help but notice you’ve been holding yourself back ever since the end of the class trial.”

“Holding myself back, huh?” the girl repeated. “I don’t think we need ‘Assertive Kaede’ back anytime soon. After all, look what good that did…”

“So then, you blame yourself and not Tsumugi?”

The pianist cracked a small smile at her own expense, “How many times have I heard that line?”

Indeed, ever since Kaede gave the others closure to her past actions, nearly everyone expressed their forgiveness to her everyday since then. Saying things like, ‘It’s not your fault’ and ‘It was Tsumugi’s doing’. Unfortunately, even after all this time, the girl didn’t feel she was ready to forgive herself quite yet.

“Well, if you want my opinion on the matter,” said Korekiyo. “Then I, myself, do personally blame Tsumugi for Rantaro’s death.”

“Is that so?” questioned Kaede.

The anthropologist chuckled, “It wouldn’t have mattered whether she knew about your death trap or not. Rantaro was led to that library by the mastermind. Couple that with the time limit and his mystery of a talent, it suggests that Tsumugi had already planned Rantaro to be the first victim of the killing game.”

“Well, sure I can put the blame on her for that much,” said the pianist. “It’s just that everything else...how should I put it? I’m just disappointed in myself.”

“Let me ask you this, Kaede,” Korekiyo began. “Do you believe in killing for a just cause?”

“Huh?”

“Certainly the act of murder is frowned upon in society, there is no doubt about that,” he explained. “But if that were the absolute truth, then why do concepts such as ‘justifiable homicide’ and ‘manslaughter’ exist in our world? There have been moments in human history as well as in fiction, where individuals were presented with good reason to kill.”

“I get what you’re trying to say, Kiyo,” Kaede responded. “But bringing those up isn’t really gonna make me feel better about what I did. Who cares whether or not I had a good reason to try and kill the mastermind? The fact that I was willing to do that without any sort of hesitation just shows how severe I handled things. And let me remind you, I’m just a high school girl.”

“I’m merely expressing the fact that the world isn’t in black and white,” said Korekiyo. “People do have reasons why they do the things they do, and I do see the reason why you did what you did.”

“I guess I can appreciate that much,” Kaede expressed her gratitude.

“However,” Korekiyo said suddenly. “I couldn’t help but notice you didn’t actually answer my question.”

“Your question?” the girl wondered.
“Do you believe in killing for a just cause?” the anthropologist asked again.

“Oh that,” the pianist recalled. “In that case…No.”

“No, you say?”

“If it was an accident, then I can understand,” Kaede went on. “And maybe if you had asked me before the class trial, I would’ve said yes. But now? No. Even if the one who murders has a good reason for doing so, I can at least sympathize, but I won’t believe in their actions.”

Korekiyo paused once again and chose to face the girl. There, he saw that Kaede had a tenacious look about her. I was as if her strength of will refused to crumble on this matter.

“I see,” the anthropologist replied. “I admire your determination. Yes...yes, I can accept that. I suppose that settles things.”

“Settles what?” asked Kaede.

Korekiyo dusted his hands clean of the lingering salt, “The magic circle, of course. I am finally finished.”

“Nyeh?” Himiko adjusted her mage hat. “You’re done already?”

“Precisely,” he replied. “I ask that you watch where you step from here on out.”

“So what next, Kiyo?” asked Kaede.

“Next, we must choose a spiritual medium so that Rantaro may have access to the mortal realm.”

“Since Rantaro’s a male, it’ll probably work better if another male was the spirit medium!” Tenko suddenly spoke.

Kiyo shook his head, “I can see how one would come to that conclusion, yes, but in the grand scheme of it all, gender does not really have a factor when it comes to the spirit medium.”

“Besides, we need Kiyo to guide us through the process of the seance,” said Kaede.

“Then it’s a good thing we have another male with us,” Tenko replied. “Right, Shuichi?”

The aikido master pointed at the detective.

Though the boy’s request to be apart of Korekiyo’s seance was sudden, there were no objections to it as everyone saw immediately Shuichi’s logic. Other than the fact that he was the Ultimate Detective, Shuichi was also the first of them to discover Rantaro’s previously unknown talent. If they wanted to get the most information out of Rantaro, then Shuichi needed to be there, as he seemed to have the most questions to ask their deceased comrade.

At the time of Shuichi’s request, however, there was one complication that needed amending.

Angie raised her hand, “Oh, if Shuichi wants to do the seance, then I guess I’ll go with the others to the underground passage!”

“Wha?!” Himiko exclaimed.

“Are you quite sure, Angie?” asked Kirumi.
“Y-Yeah!” the mage went up to the artist. “You should be with us in the seance, Angie! You’re connected with Atua, after all!”

The cheery artist smiled at her friend, “Oh, Himiko. All living beings are connected with Atua. And since I’m already so close to Him, this is a perfect chance for everyone else to bond with Atua as well!”

“How, I see,” Kokichi commented. “So that’s why you’re willing to give up your spot so easily?”

“Nyahahaha!” Angie laughed. “I’m so proud of Shuichi! Taking the initiative and wanting to meet Atua is something I won’t get in the way of!”

“Well…it’s more of meeting with Rantaro than with Atua…” Shuichi tried to clarify.

“But we were supposed to do this together!” pleaded Himiko. “I’m… I’m not ready to do this on my own yet! You need to be there to guide m--”

Still smiling, all the while, Angie walked up to Himiko and gave her a comforting hug.

“Hmmmmmm,” Angie purred.

“Nyeh!” the mage replied.

“I have already taught you what you need to know,” the artist spoke softly. “You won’t need me for the rest of it. After all, you are now in the hands of Atua, who is a better guide than any in the whole universe.”

“Atua…will be guiding me?” questioned Himiko.

“Mhm,” Angie nodded as she ended the embrace. “And His guiding hands are nice and gentle.”

“Gentle, huh?” said the mage. “I like gentle.”

Tsumugi snorted.

“Um, Himiko,” Tenko spoke up. “You won’t be alone because I’ll also be there for you!”

“That’s okay, Tenko,” assured Himiko. “All I need is Atua.”

The aikido master recoiled back as if she struck by an opponent’s jab.

“Excellent,” said Korekiyo. “Now all that’s left is to decide the ‘venue’ of which to perform our seance in. I must note that the seance must be performed in a room with as much darkness as possible. Any suggestions?”

Kaede thought to herself, “Hmm, what about one of the empty rooms?”

“The empty rooms?” questioned Kirumi. “You mean the ones on the fourth floor?”

“A wonderful suggestion, Kaede,” replied Korekiyo. “However, there are three empty rooms. Which one do you suggest we use?”

“Well, I guess the middle would be too obvious, right?” Kaede said jokingly. “How about the first room then? The one closest to the stairs.”

“And so it has been decided,” the anthropologist concluded. “Very well. Let us go forth and make
the preparations. The four of you can help carry all the necessary equipment from my lab.”

“Hold on a second, if you please,” halted Kirumi. “But I’m afraid you can’t use the left room.”

Korekiyo turned to the maid, “...And why is that?”

“Because there’s a loose floorboard in that room,” she answered. “I discovered it just this morning.”

The anthropologist put a finger to his chin in curiosity.

“Oh ho ho,” Kokichi perked up in interest. “And what exactly were *you* doing sneaking out and about in the empty rooms so early in the morning, Mommy?”

“Please refrain from calling me that,” said Kirumi. “Secondly, I was merely catching myself up in all the new areas that were discovered recently.”

“Huh?” questioned Kaito. “You didn’t get the chance to see them, Kirumi?”

“No,” the maid answered. “If you recall, Kokichi requested a meeting between myself and Shuichi. Once that was over, I only got a chance to see everything else *except* the fourth floor.”

“To be fair, we did seem to unlock a lot of new areas,” Kaede added.

“Now,” Korekiyo spoke. “You said there was a loose floorboard in the left room. Does this apply to the other rooms as well?”

Kirumi faced the anthropologist, “Unfortunately I did not get a chance to check the other two rooms. I only had so much time to spare before I needed to perform my morning duties.”

“Ah,” the masked student said warmly. “Then you need not worry for our sake. We’ll check the other two rooms and see if there any ‘precarious’ places within them.”

The maid nodded in agreement, “I shall leave it to you, then.”

Kaede chuckled, “I guess the obvious choice is sometimes the right one, then? Middle room it is.”

Shuichi looked at the others and cleared his throat, “As much as I’d like to volunteer, I need to be around to talk with Rantaro. There’d be no point in me being here, otherwise…”

Much to Tenko’s chagrin, the detective had a point.

“So since both males, that includes myself, are out of the question, I guess that leaves one of you ladies to be the spiritual medium,” Korekiyo glanced at one of his classmates. “Kaede, since you were the first to volunteer, would you care to do the honors?”

“Me, huh,” to the surprise of some, Kaede didn’t seem unguarded with Kiyo’s suggestion. “I guess I could.”

“Then it is settled?” acknowledged the anthropologist. “Very well, if you will come with me, Kaede.”

The pianist began to follow Korekiyo to the magic circle, but was suddenly stopped by Shuichi’s grasp on her wrist.
“Kaede,” said the detective. “Are you sure?”

Kaede turned to properly face the boy, “Shuichi?”

“It’s just,” he began. “I assumed you agreed to do this because you wanted to see Rantaro, too.”

The girl sheepishly rubbed the back of her head, “O-Oh, you managed to figure out that much, huh?”

In response, the detective himself suddenly turned sheepish as well, “A-Ah, s-sorry if I crossed a boundary there! I just wanted to make sure if, um, you had changed your mind or…”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to see him again,” Kaede admitted. “Or rather, am I worthy of seeing him as I am now?”

“Of course you are, Kaede!” Tenko interjected. “In fact, out of everyone here, you’re the one who deserves to see him the most!”

“But what would I even say to him?” the pianist asked. “‘Hey, Rantaro, good news is that I wasn’t the cause of your death, but boy I sure tried’?”

“I highly doubt you would say it in that tone,” Korekiyo observed.

“Kaede, I think this is something you need to face head on,” said Tenko. “Not just for your sake, but so that Rantaro can get closure too.”

“I guess you have a point,” Kaede replied before looking back at Kiyo. “Sorry ‘bout that, Kiyo. Looks like I won’t be the spiritual medium after all. Not with Tenko twisting my arm there.”

“K-Kaede!” the aikido master exclaimed.

In response, the pianist playfully stuck her tongue out at the other girl, “Kidding!”

“Very well,” said Korekiyo. “Though we still need a medium.”

“I’ll do it,” said Himiko.

“Ah, splendid!” the anthropologist rejoiced. “As Angie’s disciple, you should have no trouble acting as the bridge between us and the afterlife!”

“Oh?” said the masked student. “Is there a problem with Himiko being the spiritual medium, Tenko?”

“It’s...It’s just...I’m just worried for Himiko’s safety, y’know?”

“Her safety?” the boy repeated. “You’ve no idea what being the spiritual medium entails in the first place.”

“I know enough that if Himiko’s the medium, then she’ll become possessed by Rantaro!” the girl shot back. “And I, for one, know that she’s too pure for something like that to happen to her!”

“I’m not sure why,” commented Shuichi. “But you’re making it sound like Rantaro’s some kind of criminal...”
“Or more like a degenerate?” Kaede corrected.

Korekiyo sighed, “Then am I to assume that *you* will be the one volunteering for the role of spirit medium, Tenko Chabashira?”

“Hey,” said Himiko. “I said I would do it, so I’m gonna do it.”

The aikido master flinched, “B-B-B-But Himiko!

“I trained all this time with Angie,” the mage explained. “She’s trusting me to be one with the realm of Atua.”

“You’ve only been with her for a few hours!” Tenko argued.

“Now, now,” hushed the anthropologist. “If Himiko wishes to become the spiritual medium for the sake of our escape from this accursed killing game, then we should not hinder such a noble act.”

“Exactly,” the red-head agreed. “You’re not the boss of me, Tenko.”

Tenko recoiled once again, “H-Himiko, I...I’m not--”

“You were never into this seance in the first place,” the mage continued. “You just wanted to come and annoy me.”

“A-Annoy...?” the once energetic girl became somber. “You think I’m annoying?”

“Right now you are,” answered Himiko. “You’re being a pain.”

“Ughh,” Tenko groaned.

After a quick rub to the forehead to calm his mind, Korekiyo turned to the mage once more, “So are we set then? Yes? Very well. Please follow me to the magic circle, Himiko.”

The small student did as she was told, but not before taking a momentary glance back at the other girl she had just insulted. To her own confusion, the mage did not feel any sense of pride or satisfaction from saying what’s been on her mind for awhile.

“Now then,” the seance expert began. “I would like the spirit medium, Himiko, to sit within the center circle...Please be sure to walk on the path, so as not to disturb the magic circle. Next, you must be as a turtle within that circle...”

The anthropologist walked to the center circle and placed a rock inside of it.

“Please rest your forehead upon this stone marker I’ve placed here.”

Himiko was about to so, but was then stopped by the masked student.

“But before you do,” he said. “I must ask that you remove your headwear.”

Tenko gasped in shock, “But that’s Himiko’s precious mage’s hat! That piece of clothing carries a good chunk of her Intelligence stat!”

“It’s okay,” complied the mage as she gave the hat to Kiyo. “I’ll be gaining more points in my Faith stat soon, so it will even out.”

The aikido master pouted and whined like a puppy.
“It was a good shot, though,” consoled Kaede.

Following Korekiyo’s instructions carefully, Himiko slowly walked along the path of the magic circle to the center. She then turned to face the path and knelt down low until her forehead was touching the stone.

“Like this, right Kiyo?” Himiko asked.

“You’re a natural,” the boy complimented. “Bear in mind, that you must remain in that position until the seance is complete. Whatever you do, you mustn’t raise your head or change positions.”

“You don’t have to worry,” assured red-haired girl. “I’m a master at staying in one position and doing nothing.”

Satisfied with the status of the spiritual medium, Korekiyo then turned to the other seance participants.

The anthropologist pointed to a cage that was located on the other side of the room, “With these next few steps, I request assistance from the rest of you. First we must place this iron cage atop Himiko. I shall leave that to Shuichi and Tenko. And please keep in mind...walk carefully so as not to disturb the magic circle.”

The detective and aikido master both nodded and each took a side of the iron cage and lifted it off the ground. Carefully, they traversed the salt-sided path in order to place the cage on top of the turtled mage.

“Careful. Himiko,” warned Tenko. “This cage is really heavy, so don’t let it get caught on anything when we put it down.”

“It’s made of iron, after all,” Shuichi said with a slightly strained breath. “No wonder it’s heavy.”

Ever so slowly, they lowered the cage until it finally touched the ground.

“Next,” said Korekiyo. “The cage must be covered completely in a white cloth. I shall take that role.”

In his hand, Kiyo held up a folded white cloth. He approached the cage and carefully engulfed it with the fabric.

As the masked student continued to do so, Kaede glanced toward Shuichi.

“Can you believe we’re actually doing this?” she whispered to the detective almost excitedly.

“Oh, uh, yeah it’s kind of a surreal moment when you think about it.”

“Do you...do you think it'll actually work?” asked the girl.

“I can’t say for certain,” the boy replied. “But we need to at least try, right?”

“Exactly,” the pianist said with determination. “So in the event that it does work...what do you plan to ask Rantaro?”

The detective paused, “...I want to see if he remembers his talent.”

“You think he will?”
“Even if he doesn’t, I’ll remind him,” answered Shuichi. “Hopefully if that happens, it will spark some memory into him.”

“But he would be a spirit, right?” asked Kaede. “Can spirits regain memories? They don’t technically have brains…”

“That’s...entering a territory that’s out of my jurisdiction…” the detective said with defeat.

Kaede giggled as the two smiled at each other.

After making sure everything involving the cage and the cloth was satisfactory for the seance, Korekiyo exited the magic circle, “Alright, everything is prepared. Himiko...how are you doing?”

“I’m doing fine, I guess,” the voluntary medium gave a half-hearted response.

“The final step is to place a wooden statue of the Dog God atop the cage…” Korekiyo explained. “The four of us may need to do this together. The statue is quite heavy.”

The four remaining seance participants each took a corner and began to lift what was essentially a giant statue of a dog. True to the masked student’s word, even with the four of them, the statue was no pushover to lift.

“H-Holy crap!” Kaede exclaimed rather ungracefully. “It really is heavy!”

“D-Did I not say so?” said Korekiyo who was also struggling a bit. “But not to worry, it is not much more than 175 pounds…”

“Maybe we should’ve had Gonta volunteer for the seance...if we knew about this sooner,” Tenko said putting in a little extra effort.

“Isn’t it...a little...late for that?” Shuichi said nearly out of breath.

And with cooperative effort the four managed to safely place the statue on top of the cage. Now effectively, Himiko was stuck inside the upside-down basket and with only the help of others would she be able to get out.

“I don’t know what’s going on out there,” Himiko said from inside the cage. “But sounds like something really big is on top of the cage…”

“Are you sure this is safe, Kiyo?” questioned Tenko. “What if the cage breaks and that statue there crushes Himiko?!”

“I-It’s gonna what me!?” exclaimed the mage.

“The iron cage was made specifically for seances, so it can hold this weight,” the boy explained.

“Well...I guess if Kiyo says so, then it should be safe,” Himiko replied.

“Great, now she’s putting her trust on degenerates…” the aikido master said under her breath.

The four students then withdrew from the magic circle, being careful as to not disturb Kiyo’s creation.

“This is the point of no return, Himiko,” said the anthropologist. “After this point, you mustn’t speak. The next time you open your mouth, it will be Rantaro speaking through you.”
“Got it,” replied Himiko. “Between now and the end of the seance, I will become one with Atua.”

“Atua still sounds like a pervert to me!” Tenko unabashedly added.

Korekiyo cleared his throat so that attention would fall on him once more, “The rest of us shall move to the corners of the room. Please go to one of your choosing.”

Each of the four students stood in a different corner, all of them facing the dog statue atop the iron cage.

“Now we shall darken the room,” instructed Korekiyo. “Kaede and Shuichi, please blow out the candles. The walls shall be your guide back to your positions in the dark.”

“And once the room is dark I will begin the song,” explained the anthropologist. “Please sing along with me. Then I will call out to Rantaro. Until he replies, there must be silence.”

Kaede reached into her pocket and pulled out a few matches, “And then when the seance is over, me and Shuichi are supposed to light the candles again, right?”

“Correct,” replied Korekiyo. “Please use the matches I gave you that I brought from the warehouse.”

“Alright,” said Shuichi as he approached the candle closest to him. “I guess it’s time to blow out the candles.”

“Don’t worry, Himiko!” Tenko decided to declare one final assurance to her friend. “I’ll be sure to keep an eye out for anything suspicious.”

“It’s gonna be pitch black, Tenko,” Kaede pointed out as she approached hers. “It’d be better if you kept an ear out instead.”

And in perfect sync, both students blew out their respective candles, leaving the room in complete darkness. A darkness where nothing could be seen.

The two utilized the wall, per Kiyo’s orders, and eventually returned to their corners.

Unable to see whether or not the two students returned to their positions, the anthropologist waited a bit before he began singing. Until then, the room was once again filled with a deafening silence, which was now accompanied by a pitch black void of emptiness. An emptiness that small children and some adults fear every time they go to bed.

After waiting a few more seconds, Korekiyo’s soft voice broke through the silence,

”At last, at last, at long last.”

He led the others in The Caged Child song and everyone began singing as one,

”Young dog and little lost girl sealed within an iron cage”

”at mountain’s bottom, within the darkness.”

”At last, at last, at long last.”

”How many will there be by dawn?”

”Will there be two or just--
“Atua’s on my side,” said Angie as she gracefully skipped and hopped past the falling cages in the Death Road of Despair. “Gimme strength!”

After managing to avoid the last falling cage and near the edge of another, the rest of Keebo’s group followed suit and caught up with the artist. Seeing no clear threats in their current position, decided to take a moment to rest at this safe point.

The robot looked at the obstacles that lay ahead. What he saw were floating platforms that seemed to follow a predetermined path, but he knew that was probably a trap. And as if that wasn’t enough, there were also Monokuma-shaped bombs that were flying out of various vents in the ceiling, waiting to catch their prey.

“Alright,” said Kirumi as she looked around at the group. “Is everyone present and accounted for?”

Kaito took a deep breath and sighed deeply, “I’m a little winded, but I’ll be fine.”

“Easy for...you to...haah...say...PHEW!” Kokichi said before collapsing from near exhaustion.

“She said if we were all here,” Maki noted. “Not if anyone needed a breather.”

“Hey, you’re supposed to be a caregiver, right?” questioned the supreme leader. “Then why don’t you put that talent to use and give us some ‘caring’?”

“Child Caregiver,” the girl replied. “Though with the way you’re acting, I guess there isn’t much of a difference.”

Kokichi smirked, possibly out of frustration, “There, ya see? A couple of encouraging words and now I’m all set to prove you wrong.”

“5...6...8…” Keebo began counting. “Ten! It looks like all of managed to make it this far together. This progress is exceeding all expectations!”

“Well you say that now, Keebo,” Miu said with with a hint of skepticism. “But we’re way past Kokichi’s cheat sheet and now who knows how much of this passage is left!”

“Maybe our little, ‘protective barrier’ can offer us an insight to our progress?” suggested Ryoma.

“Oh, if you talking about Tsumugi,” said Gonta. “She not able to speak, but no speak very good.”

The entomologist turned around to reveal him carrying the girl on his back. After acting as the group’s frontline soldier at the beginning of the passage, she could only take the blunt of its traps for so long before she became out of commission. Now the cosplayer was near close to unconsciousness and what little consciousness she did have were merely dazed delusions she was having.

“what’S YOur FaVORiTTe DORRYMAN epiSHode...?” Tsumugi said with her head swinging back and forth. “MAi fAvorItTe iz wendy’s X-over wIth THE SToRY Of SeEsEs french...fries....”

“Well...” Gonta looked back at her worriedly. “She able to speak, but no speak very good.”

“Coming from Gonta, yeah that means she’s pretty useless to us now,” said Kokichi. “Then again,
she’s just useless in general.”

“You know she can’t understand you to fully take in that insult,” responded Ryoma.

The supreme leader looked down dejectedly, “I just wanted you guys to agree with me so I could get some vindication…”

“In any case,” said Keebo. “We must be getting closer to the end. We’ve reached uncharted territory and it’s only a matter of time!”

“Oh,” Angie cooed rather ominously. “Unless this underground passage is endless, and then we’ll be trapped here for the rest of our lives…”

“Why the hell are you saying something so terrible now, you scantily clad bitch!?” Miu shouted.

“No way in hell is this damn death road endless!” Kaito denied.

“Oh yeah?” questioned Maki. “What makes you so sure?”

The astronaut caught brought his fists together, “Because the only thing that’s endless is space! And I’ve already set my sights in conquering that, so anything here on Earth is a no-brainer for me!”

“Ah, how appropriate,” commented Kokichi. “A ‘no-brainer’ for a ‘no-brain’ such as yourself.”

“Hey!” exclaimed Kaito. “How ‘bout you say that to my face and I’ll turn ya into a ‘no-teeth’?!”

“Here’s a suggestion,” interrupted Kirumi. “Why don’t we utilize our remaining energy into finding the end of this passage instead of at each other?”

“I got a better idea,” said Kokichi as he turned toward Miu. “Why don’t we let Miu use her ‘secret weapon’ now so that the rest of us can regain our energy?”

“A-Are you crazy!?” Miu yelled as she tightly clutched her suitcase. “I said we can only use this in an emergency!”

“Uh, hellooooo?” the supreme leader said sarcastically. “We’re kinda running on fumes here, Miu. Besides, I thought you would jump at the opportunity to show off to everyone.”

Miu moaned in pleasure.

“I don’t think he meant ‘show off’ in *that* way,” suggested Ryoma.

The inventor shook her head and brought herself back to reality, “A-Anyway, I’m not taking the chance to reveal my secret weapon just yet!”

“And why not?” asked Maki.

“B-Because…” the girl stuttered nervously. “W-What if the Monokubs are watching? The moment they see my invention, they’ll for sure try and take me out with an Exisal!”

“That’s what you’re worried about?” Kokichi replied dryly.

“I do not think we have to worry about the Monokubs at this point in time,” said Keebo. “After all, they did not bother to show up when we entered and got this far through the death road.”

“Hmm,” Ryoma thought deeply as he listen to Keebo. “Now that you mention it...doesn’t that seem
“Strange?”

Everyone looked to the former tennis pro.

“What do you mean, Ryoma?” asked Kirumi.

“It’s something that I didn’t really notice until now,” the short male replied. “But now that I’ve noticed it, it does look weird…”

“Don’t leave us hanging, man,” said Kaito. “What’s on your mind?”

Ryoma paused before speaking in an attempt to get his thoughts together, “Let me ask you all this: when was the last time you heard a certain catchphrase?”

“A certain…catchphrase?” Keebo repeated.

“Oh, you mean like ‘That’s all, folks!’” Angie offered an example. “Or ‘Heeeeeeere’s Johnny!’?”

“EL PSY TUTTURU~” Tsumugi shouted before fading back into unconsciousness.

“No,” Ryoma said simply. “I mean something more along the lines of… ‘rise and shine, ursine’.”

Kirumi raised an eyebrow at him before slowly coming to realize what he meant, “Rise and shine… when was the last we had heard that?”

“Are you kidding me?” said Miu. “I heard that all the fucking time whenever the morning announcement went on.”

“The morning announcements, sure,” agreed Ryoma. “But when was the last time we heard that straight from the ursines’ mouths in person?”

Everyone took a moment of silence to think.

“Basically what you’re asking is, when was the last time we interacted with the Monokubs?” Keebo surmised.

“Bingo,” replied the tennis pro. “Or rather, when was the last they they showed themselves to us?”

“If I recall,” said Kirumi. “The last time we saw them in person was when they gave us our ‘reward’ for completing the class trial.”

“Or to be more precise, the keys to unlocking some of the academy,” Keebo clarified.


In response, Kokichi yawned and looked at the others with a bored expression, “But does that really mean anything though? They’re the new headmasters, right? They probably don’t have time to shoot the breeze with us like they normally do.”

“And in so doing they let us group together and work harder to escape from this killing game,” Ryoma argued. “That seems counterproductive.”

“So that maybe once we find there is no way to escape then that’ll crush our hopes even more. And THAT’S when they’ll come out and gloat in our faces,” Kokichi countered.

The tennis pro sighed in resignation, “Hmph, maybe you’re right. Perhaps I’m focusing on the
“It’s cool, Ryoma,” assured Kaito. “We know you’re just looking out for us.”

“Yeah, sorry for straying from our current goal,” apologized the former convict. “It’s just...I can’t help but think with the absence of the Monokubs that they’re planning something big. Either that or they’re waiting for something.”

“Well,” the astronaut said as he began stretching. “We can think about that after we find out what the hell is at the end of this passage.”

“Yup!” Kokichi said excitedly. “I’m good to go!”

“Excellent,” said Keebo. “It shouldn’t be too long now. Somehow I can feel it.”

“Everyone should get behind Gonta,” the entomologist suggested. “Gonta will act as shield from here on.”

As everyone was getting ready to move on to the next obstacle, Kirumi looked back at the rest of the passage they had previously conquered...perhaps even beyond.

“Waiting for something…” the maid said to herself.

“HRRRGH!” cried a voice from the darkness.

“WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING, YOU DEGENERATE?!”

Kaede’s ears perked up. The Caged Child’s song was suddenly interrupted by the sound of bodies hitting the ground and shouting voices.

“K-Kiyo?! Tenko!?” the pianist recognized the two voices. “What happened?!”

“Kaeda…!” Korekiyo’s voice exclaimed. “Stay where you are! Something appears to be...amiss!”

“K-Kiyo…!?!” Shuichi shouted.

“You as well, Shuichi!” the anthropologist continued. “Please hold your position!”

“Don’t listen to him, guys!” Tenko yelled. “Light the candles, now!”

“N-NO! You musn’t under ANY circumstances…!”

The pianist was blindsided at this turn of events. She didn’t know much about seances, but this certainly was not what’s supposed to happen. Both of her friends were on the other side of the room, sounds of struggle on their end; engaged in some conflict resulting in them freaking out as if the devil himself were in the room.

Something was definitely wrong.

“Shuichi!” Kaede yelled. “Light your candle!”

“Wha?” she heard the detective say. “O-Okay!”
Kaede quickly clinged to the wall in order to navigate to the candle. She frantically reached for the match in her pocket and tried, as fast as she could, to light it and the candle. After a few desperate tries, she managed to strike the match and light the candle. Shuichi, as well, on his side managed to do the same.

“I got it!” Shuichi shouted.

“Me t--”

Kaede was about to confirm it as well, but was cut short as she and Shuichi saw what was going on in the other side of the room.

Tenko and Korekiyo were both on the floor with the aikido master locking the anthropologist in a submission hold and the other was desperately trying to remove himself from her grasp.

“T-Tenko?!” the pianist exclaimed. “What are you…?!”

“Kaede!” the aikido master shouted. “It’s not me! Kiyo was the one who--”

“Ah, Kaede, Shuichi,” Korekiyo spoke calmly. “It appears something has overcome our mutual friend Tenko.”

“O-Overcome?” questioned Shuichi. “What are you saying?”

“I’m not sure whether something went wrong with the process, but this irrational behavior could only be the work of an evil spirit!” concluded the anthropologist.

The pianist looked at the two distressed and confused, “An evil spirit....? You’re saying Tenko’s possessed?”

Tenko tightened her grip on the masked student, “You lying little...I am not possessed! You’re the one who was acting weird!”

“Tenko, tell us what happened!” said Shuichi. “Why did you assault Kiyo?”

“Because I heard his voice move!” the girl answered.

“H-Huh?” questioned the detective, visibly confused.

“While we were singing,” Tenko clarified. “I heard Kiyo’s voice getting closer and closer to me.”

“I assure you, Tenko,” reasoned Korekiyo. “That was all part of the seance.”

“Liar!” the aikido master shouted.

Kaede slowly approached the two, “A-Alright, you guys. Why don’t we just calm down and take a moment for both of you to explain your sides of the--”

“K-Kiyo…?”

Everyone turned toward the iron cage as they heard Himiko’s voice.

“H-Himiko!” the anthropologist said nervously. “D-Did I not say you must remain silent throughout the duration of the seance?

“Is...Is this still part of the seance…?” the mage genuinely asked.
“No it’s not, Himiko!” shouted Tenko. “Kiyo’s planning something. You need to get out of there!”

“Himiko!” Korekiyo shouted. “Under no circumstances should you move from your position! Do you understand me? This is VERY IMPORTANT!”

“Don’t listen to him, Himiko!” the aikido master pleaded.

“I…I don’t know what’s going on…but it sounds like something really bad is happening outside this cage,” the mage said warily. “Maybe it’s safer if I just stay--AAAAH!”

With the sound of Himiko’s sudden shriek, Kaede made a beeline to the iron cage, walking on top of the salt-made circle in the process.

“Kaede!” Korekiyo exclaimed. “I told you not to step on the--”

The pianist paid no heed to the boy’s words and walked right up to the cage.

“Himiko!” she shouted. “Are you okay!?”

“…I…I think so,” muttered the mage. “Just now I felt something sharp hit the back of my neck…”

Kaede’s eyes widened, “Shuichi! We need to get this cage off now!”

The detective, nearly in a trance from witnessing the events unfold, quickly snapped out of it and walked toward the iron cage, placing himself right next to the pianist.

“What should we do about this statue?” the boy asked.

“We might not be able to lift it between the two of us, but maybe we can tip it over to the other side.”

Shuichi nodded and the two began to push the dog statue. Little by little removing it from atop the cage.

All the while, Korekiyo continued to struggle from Tenko’s grasp, “No no no NO! You’re ruining it! You’re ruining my wonderful creation!”

With a loud, deafening thud, the statue fell onto the floor of the empty room. Kaede wasted no time and removed the cloth from the iron cage.

There, the two saw an astonishing sight: What appeared to be a sickle placed on top of the cage, with the blade facing downward.

Right toward the back of Himiko’s neck.

From what the two could see, Himiko was still kneeling from inside the cage, though she no longer had her forehead on the stone marker.

“Himiko, do not move,” Kaede instructed. “Just stay where you are.”

Shuichi quickly and carefully grabbed the sickle and tossed it aside and proceeded to lift the cage with Kaede, freeing the mage.

Now that she was unobstructed by the cage, Kaede and Shuichi got a better look at Himiko’s current state. They both noticed a small trickle of blood dripping from the back of her neck. It appeared that the girl was barely grazed by the sickle’s blade much to their relief.
Himiko looked up, “Kaede? What’s happening?”

Kaede grabbed onto the mage’s hand, “Alright, just get up slowly. You’re going to be fine.”

Tenko looked up from her position, “Himiko! Are you...Are you okay!?”

At that moment, Korekiyo noticed it. It was a split-second, but it was all he needed: he felt the loosened grip of the aikido master.

Then, with all of his strength, the anthropologist shoved Tenko to the side and ran toward the other students.

It had all happened in an instant. Korekiyo moved in a flash and with one hand, grabbed the sickle that was thrown onto the floor, and with the other…

...grabbed Himiko and locked her in his arm.

The anthropologist proceeded to position the sickle right in front of Himiko’s neck.

“KIYO!”

“What are you doing?!”

“You bastard!”

“K-Kaede...Shuichi!” Himiko shouted. “T-TENKO!”

But the masked student chose to ignore the frightened cries of his associates and merely walked slowly to the opposite end of the room with his hostage in tow.

Once he felt he got a reasonable distance between the three other students, Korekiyo came to a stop.

What was once filled with frantic panic, the room suddenly grew into an eerie silence.

Before long, Korekiyo decided to speak, “My my, now isn’t this quite the predicament we’ve ended up in…”

Kaede slowly shook her head, unable to process this turn of events, “Kiyo...what are you doing...?”

“Kehehe,” the anthropologist laughed. “‘What am I doing’ she asks. Well, certainly you of all people can relate, correct?”

“Wh…” the pianist was at a loss for words. “Wha--”

“It could have only been you,” Shuichi suddenly said.

Kaede turned to look back at the detective.

“That sickle was placed under the cloth when we found it,” he explained. “It wasn’t there when we first placed the cage on top of Himiko.”

“And Kiyo was the one who placed the cloth himself,” Tenko followed, keeping a fighting stance ready to take down the anthropologist once an opportunity arose.

"Kiyo,” said Shuichi. “You were using this seance to kill somebody weren’t you?”

The pianist felt her heart sink and her stomach tighten.
“As expected from the Ultimate Detective.” Korekiyo sighed in response, “And now look at what’s happened...all that time I spent last night planning and preparing, all gone to an unfortunate waste.”

“Tell me this is all a lie,” Kaede trembled. “Please, Kiyo, just tell me this is just some cruel...sick joke you’re playing on us…”

The anthropologist looked at the pianist directly in the eyes, “Would you like for this to be a lie, Kaede? Would you accept it, if I said this was merely a jest?”

The girl opened her mouth, but the words did not come out. The situation was too confusing, too horrible for her to come up with anything cohesive.

Instead, she looked at Kiyo’s eyes. She expected to see the eyes of a madman. Eyes widened and irises shrunken, but this was not the case. These eyes were calm and collected. They were calm as they were before the seance began. Just a few moments ago, she was having a friendly chat with this calm and collected person, but now, he was threatening the life of one of her friends.

Himiko looked back and forth between her abductor and the others from across the room with tears in her eyes.

“So what now, Kiyo?” questioned Tenko.

“That’s the question now, isn’t it?” Korekiyo replied. “Where do we go from here?”

Shuichi furrowed his brow as he placed himself in front of Kaede hoping to shield the girl from any dangers if the need be, “Surely you don’t expect to walk away from this scot-free, do you?”

“Yes, you do have the point,” the anthropologist admitted. “Unfortunately my fate was sealed the moment you discovered the sickle.”

Tenko herself inched closer to the masked student, “There’s nowhere to run or hide to, degenerate. You so much as cut Himiko’s hair with that weapon, I’ll make sure the punishment you receive from being the blackened won’t be the only thing you’ll be worried about.”

“Tenko…” Himiko muttered.

Korekiyo laughed once more, “Kehehe, I am simply trembling. Though, if there’d happen to be no witnesses to my crime, I wonder how better I would fare then.”

“So you’re going...to kill all of us?” questioned Shuichi.

“How exactly are you going to explain that one to the others?” Tenko followed.

“You know…” the anthropologist began. “The Monokubs told me something quite interesting. Did you know that if by some twisted turn of fate, if one of us were to become possessed by a spirit and that spirit were to kill someone using our body, we would not be given the blame for it?”

“What...?” questioned Kaede.

“Indeed, it would be the spirit who would be marked as the blackened,” said Korekiyo.

“And what does that have to do with anything?” asked the detective.

“Oh, yes, the seance was a rounding success,” the masked student played off a scenario. “Using myself as the medium, we successfully contacted Rantaro...but with great consequence. Yes, our
lack of knowledge to Amami’s true character would prove to be our undoing as, in a fit of revenge, he murdered the other four seance participants, using my body to do so.”

“That’s…” the pianist couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “That’s insane…”

“You expect everyone to believe that story!?” exclaimed Tenko.

“And why not?” questioned Kiyo. “After all, the only people with the exact knowledge of how the Caged Child seance works are already present in this room. A few arrangements to the scene here and there, and I can probably create an unsolvable mystery. And this is merely an assumption, but between me, a living friend feeling tremendous guilt, or an already deceased stranger whom we barely know, which of us would our colleagues end up voting for as the blackened? My vote is for the latter.”

“Bastard,” Tenko muttered under her breath. “You really think you can kill me, Kiyo? We both know that’s not gonna happen in a million years!”

“Merely a setback, my dear,” the anthropologist brushed that detail aside. “And believe me…I’ve dealt with my fair share of setbacks, but always end up succeeding in the end.”

“What does that mean…?” Shuichi asked, wary of the student’s tone.

“Kiyo, please stop this!” Kaede suddenly exclaimed. “Killing someone would be pointless now! Please just let Himiko go and we can talk this out rationally.”

“There’s no reasoning with him, Kaede!” argued the aikido master. “He’s a degenerate, after all...No, worse than that. This guy’s worse than any degenerate male. He’s...He’s a menace.”

“Kehehehe, a menace am I?” Korekiyo's grip on the sickle tightened. “What rubbish. What I’m doing is for a just cause. Yes, I am doing this because I believe in what I do. Not myself, but for something greater, much greater than any of you can hope to understand!”

“Kiyo…” Kaede tried to halt the masked student.

“But perhaps you’re right,” he suddenly admitted. “Perhaps this time I was too ambitious in my planning. I agree, I cannot foresee a conclusion where I can get out of this with no reprimand. Not unless a miracle occurs.”

Then suddenly, Korekiyo brought the sickle closer to Himiko’s neck.

“AAH!” the mage shrieked.

“HIMIKO!” Tenko shouted.

“So maybe the best course of action, is to just cut my losses!” Korekiyo exclaimed, readying the weapon in his hand.

“NO!” Shuichi shouted.

“WAIT!” Kaede yelled.

“T-TENKO0OOO0000!” Himiko screamed.

At that moment, all of which occurred within mere seconds, the door to the empty room suddenly burst open. Before Korekiyo could even get a chance to react, he was instantly struck at the back of
the neck by a gloved hand. Slowly, his consciousness faded away as his grip on both the sickle and Himiko loosened until finally, the anthropologist collapsed onto the floor along with the weapon.

Himiko herself nearly collided with the floor as her legs gave out from shock, if not for the very same gloved hand catching her from her fall.

The three other seance participants looked on surprise.

“K...K…” Shuichi stuttered.

“Kirumi!” Kaede shouted in relief.

The maid, embracing the former hostage in her arms, was nearly out of breath, but gazed at the others with relief on her face as well.

“It looks like...I made it in time.”

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