Dawn of Despair: A Danganronpa Trigger Happy Havoc Rewrite

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Summary

I thought the original Trigger Happy Havoc was wasted potential concerning character development, story and the horror atmosphere it was trying to go for. I want to keep the original tone of the game somewhat present but in this rewrite I am planning on making some major changes to the canon work, including changing up the murderers, victims and even to a degree survivors, as well as murder methods and executions.

I also want to give interesting characters like Mondo, Kiyotaka, Chihiro and Celestia more spotlight as I feel they were tossed away unceremoniously by Kodaka, even for a story about
a killing game. I will also be removing some of the more offensive aspects of the game such as Chihiro’s transphobic plot line, the creepy fanservice shit and Hifumi who will be replaced by an oc. The main POV will be from Kirigiri as I think she is very interesting and while I like Makoto, I feel the series is sorely lacking in female main characters. There will be more LGBT+ representation too because unlike Kodaka I’m not a coward.
It’s hard to describe how I felt when I woke up that fateful day. I suppose the best word to describe it is ‘fuzzy’. As my vision became less blurry my surroundings became clear. I was in what looked like an ordinary classroom, and I could hear the clock ticking away. It read 12 ‘o’ clock in the afternoon, or least that’s what it should have been.

I began to realise that something seemed off about the place, first, there was no natural light coming into the room. I quickly discovered the cause of this when I noticed that the windows were covered up by what seemed to be metal plates nailed there tightly. The first thing I did when I got up was to pound on them with my fist, nothing happened. I peered up at the corner of the room to notice a security camera. Of course, there was nothing too unusual about CCTV cameras in school environments, they were there to protect students from intruders and criminal activity, but for some reason the combination of that and the boarded-up windows made me feel unnerved, almost like I was being watched by someone, or something…

Suddenly I was startled when I heard a knocking sound at the door.

‘Is anyone there?’ I called out, trying to retain my cool but bracing myself for the worst.

‘Hello?’ a voice from behind the door came out. To my relief it was soft and gentle.

‘What the hell is going on here?’ I asked letting my guard down slightly. A beautiful young woman stepped into the room. Her body was everything mine lacked, compared to my short and somewhat pudgy stature, she was tall and slim. Her long flowing hair which she had dyed a bright blue whisked across her face. As she glided up to me I could smell her rose scented perfume too.

‘If only I knew’, sighed the girl, perching on a nearby desk.

‘What is this place?’ I asked, ‘It looks like a school but something about it makes it feel more like a prison’.

‘Well technically we should be in Hope’s Peak University’.

‘Hope’s Peak?’

‘How can you not know?’ her face suddenly lit up, ‘It’s only the most prominent university for young prodigies in the world!’

‘Huh?’

‘The students here are selected based on their talent, if you are the best in the country at what you do then the University is bound to recruit you’.

‘Can it be anything?’

‘Of course! For example, I am Sayaka Maizono, the Ultimate Pop Sensation!’

‘That rings a bell’, I pondered, ‘I think I saw your group mentioned in some music stores and magazines. Forgive me for sounding like an old fart but I’m not well versed in the world of pop, I’ve always preferred classical myself. Still, I would love to hear you sing one day’.

Sayaka beamed, ‘My group had a very successful tour across Japan this year. It cost us a lot and not
just in money’, she bowed her head, ‘but all that matters to me is that my fans remain happy, that’s all that I ask for’.

‘I see… so are there any others like yourself here Sayaka?’

She nodded, ‘Of course! There’s the Ultimate Martial Artist, Fashionista, Baseball Star, Swimmer and there is even an Ultimate Gang Leader and Gambler in our midst!’

‘Seriously? So… it doesn’t matter where your talent lies, as long as you are the best at it?’

‘Precisely!’ she laughed, ‘So if you don’t mind me asking, what is your talent?’

‘My name is Kyoko Kirigiri and…’ I paused, if I was supposed to be in a university for gifted students, then where was my talent? I tried to think hard, but nothing came to mind, ‘I don’t know…’ I mumbled.

‘You don’t know?’

I shook my head, ‘That doesn’t really matter to me right now, all I want to do is find out what the hell I’m doing here’.

‘Well we can’t stick around here forever, I have to introduce you to everyone. That’s why I came to find you’.

‘Where is everyone?’

‘By the entrance hall. There are probably still some stragglers, but I think most of us are accounted for. Come on, let’s not dally!’

Sooner than I knew it I was being whisked away by someone who I had never expected to cross paths with in my life. If I was into J Pop, it probably would have felt like a dream to be holding the hand of this gorgeous idol. Still even though I could not feel her delicate hands through my gloved ones, there was something comforting and warm about her presence as we ran through the dark corridor before us.

‘Not far now!’ Sayaka panted.

‘Do we really need to run this fast?’ I asked, ‘Won’t your makeup get spoiled? You look like you worked hard on it!’

‘Thanks for your concern Kyoko but I can patch myself up later. The others will be getting worried, I must let them know you are here!’ We soon stood before two great black doors. As I held my breath, Sayaka gently pushed them open.

‘I found another one!’ she cried out.

As I stepped into the room I felt the sensation of walking into a dark alleyway being watched by many junkyard dogs, not knowing how they would react. The eyes of everyone in that room fell upon me and I could even hear some whispering to each other.

A few seconds passed by before one of them stepped forward to investigate. He was tall, bulky and his presence felt imposing to say the least. Yet he reminded me of a Viking. He was indeed intimidating, but he clearly took great pride in his appearance, as I could tell by his distinctive hairstyle, a pompadour accompanied by long brown hair, resembling a small mane.
‘So, you found another one eh?’ he spoke in a growly voice to Sayaka.

‘Yes, Mondo I did’.

Mondo walked over to me, almost like he was sizing me up. When he got a closer look however, his face seemed to relax.

‘I don’t mean to frighten you lass’.

‘No not at all!’

‘Forgive me. I must come off as somewhat imposing. It’s my job ya know, otherwise how will the Ultimate Biker Gang Leader be taken seriously?!”

‘Indeed’, I nodded.

‘So lassie, do you have any idea where the fuck we are?’

‘The windows were boarded up and there were security cameras everywhere but that’s all I know’.

‘I see’, Mondo’s lip curled into a snarl, ‘At first I thought this was a trap set up by the police, but then I saw all you guys and now I have no idea what the fuck is going on’.

‘Maybe it’s a government conspiracy!’ another young man with bushy brown hair and baggy clothes piped up, ‘They might have trapped us here to conduct some weird experiment on us!’

‘Perhaps they think we are a potential threat to them’, a curvy young woman with blond pigtails and many hair accessories spoke up.

‘That’s what I would like to think but for some reason that’s not what my gut is telling me, and I always trust my gut!’ A plump young woman in a ponytail and tracksuit shrugged.

‘Does it really matter?’ a short and stocky young man in a crisp white uniform called out, ‘As long as we are here to learn, what could possibly be wrong?’. Everyone groaned in response.

‘I don’t like it here’, squeaked a tiny young girl in clothes that seemed way too large for her.

‘I too have a bad feeling about this…’ a muscular young woman with wild hair and very distinctive scars across her face and arms murmured, ‘just know if anything comes to the worst, it is my duty to protect you’.

‘Indeed, if anyone messes around with any of you, they will have me to deal with that’s for sure!’ I noticed Mondo twirl something silver in his hand.

‘Mondo, knives are prohibited on school property!’ barked the young man in the white uniform.

‘Shut up nerd!’ snapped Mondo.

‘He has a point Taka’, a small rugged young man with mane-like red hair slouched against the wall snickered. Looking closer I noticed that he had a small beer gut too.

‘That’s enough everyone!’ the muscular woman spoke, ‘We need to find out what situation we are in before taking precautions. In the world of martial arts, patience is a key to survival’.

‘Sakura has a point’, a girl spoke in a distinctive German accent, ‘I say that we wait and see what plays out, that’s the solution to becoming a winner after all’.
The girl in question stepped forward, she was wearing what seemed to be a gothic Lolita dress. She beckoned towards me like some kind of siren, needless to say I took the bait. I held out my gloved hand and she knelt down and kissed it, ‘Celestia Ludenberg at your service, Ultimate Gambler, but you can just call me Celeste if you insist’. 

I felt somewhat entranced, she looked like someone who could step out of a Fairy Tale. She was pear shaped in appearance, making her dress resemble a black and red flower. Her pale white skin reminded me of Snow White’s, which contrasted well with her ebony black hair and red colour contacts. I felt butterflies rise in my stomach as she leaned in closer.

‘Pleasure to meet you. I’m Kyoko, Kyoko Kirigiri’, I blushed. 

‘It looks like we are going to get along Kyoko’, she grasped my hands in hers, ‘of course we may not see eye to eye with everything but if we are going to get out of this situation whatever it may be, we might as well put our trust in each other hm? Where I come from I know this all too well’. 

‘What do you mean exactly? ’

‘I survived by having faith in others who I found difficult to trust at first, in fact many of my friends started off as bitter rivals of mine. But thanks to their wisdom I am where I am today. Hell, I don’t think I would have met ‘her’ if I decided to play it entirely safe’. 

“Her”? 

It was at that moment when two more figures entered the room. A tall young man with glasses wearing what looked like to be very expensive finery strutted through the great doors closely followed by a girl with brown pigtails and round glasses who seemed to look up at him in awe. The man payed little attention to her however as he walked up to the group and spoke, giving Mondo a taunting sort of glare. 

‘The Togami household sends their regards’, he sniggered, ‘When you are part of the one percent like me, you are essentially a puppet master of the world, it can only take one snap of my fingers to make a problem disappear’. 

‘That’s easy for you to say Richie Rich!’ growled Mondo. 

‘Do you have any idea who I am street rat? I am Byakuya Togami, head of the Togami corporation. Nuisances like you can steal a loaf of bread and get carted off to jail but me, I can resort to any tactic and the police won’t bat an eye’. 

‘Aren’t the police essentially in the hands of the rich anyway?’ , shrugged the young man in baggy clothes. 

‘Isn’t it obvious!? ’ snapped Mondo, ‘There have been mountains of bodies because of people like him, yet the government and the media doesn’t give a shit! Yet if I kill, even if the fucker deserves it, I would be hanged in no time. The system is fucked and it’s because of people like you Togami’. 

‘How am I expected to take you seriously if people like you resort to thuggery to get your way?’ 

‘In my world, if diplomacy doesn’t work then violence is the only cure. Otherwise how will I protect my gang’s honour?’ Mondo cracked his knuckles menacingly just as Sakura stepped in to break them apart. 

‘Hey, hey, hey, what’s going on here exactly?’ A lean young man swaggered into the room. His fashion sense was rather eccentric to say the least with a colourful pinstripe vest and a small top hat
adorned with feathers. ‘Why the long faces? I came to Hope’s Peak specifically to expand the foreign market for my business and I get no applause?’

‘What makes you more special than the rest of us?’ asked Celestia coolly.

‘See for yourself!’ he held out a hand, in it was what looked like a metallic beetle. At that moment he let out a loud whistle and the beetle’s eyes suddenly lit up red. To our astonishment, the little metallic creature began to crawl around and around the young man’s body. He let out another whistle and the beetle soon returned to it’s original spot in it’s owner’s palm and fell back into a dormant state.

‘It’s you, isn’t it?’ gasped Sayaka, ‘Akira Oshiro, the Ultimate Toy Maker!’

‘That is exactly right young lady’, he bowed, ‘my toys are beloved by children all over the world. They are literally to die for’, he gave a wicked grin before putting on a mock moaning voice, ‘but then the American Government didn’t like that I was too ambitious with my passions’.

‘Don’t you mean your toys were just dangerous?’ frowned Celestia.

‘What is life without taking risks my dear?’ he laughed out loud, ‘When I add just a little hint of danger and excitement, the demand goes up and soon everyone wants my products! I began my life in a shithole you see so I had to learn quickly an effective way to sell my craft and that’s how I became the businessman I am today’, he glared at Byakuya, ‘You see if you play your cards right, you don’t have to be part of the one percent to start a large and successful brand’.

‘At least I have not got a whole government after me!’ smirked Byakuya, ‘Anyone can pull off cheap and dirty tactics like yours, but the Togami corporation has the Japanese government in its clutches’.

‘I am a hard-working businessman and I built my corporation from the ground up. You are just where you are because your precious daddy pays for you’, Akira gave off his wide grin again, reminding me very much of the Cheshire Cat.

‘You can’t talk’, retorted the blond curvy girl marching over, ‘my fashion brand is to make women around the world feel empowered and beautiful at the same time. Junko Enoshima doesn’t see customers as pawns for her own gain!’

‘At least my brand doesn’t encourage underage eating disorders,’ shrugged Akira.

‘Hey! You watch your tongue!’ snapped Junko.

‘You are all corporate lowlifes to me’, scoffed Mondo, ‘I don’t care where you came from, or what your ‘goals’ are. You are all leeches on society either way’.

‘I can tell we are going to get along just splendidly!’ Byakuya sneered sarcastically as he strolled to the corner of the room. The girl continued to follow him, and he continued to ignore her. Just as I began to feel sorry for her somebody else ran into the room, a small boy wearing a hoodie.

‘… Hello?’ he stepped forward rather awkwardly, ‘I’m Makoto Naegi, am I late?’

‘You are very late indeed Makoto!’ barked the young man in the white uniform, ‘Add all the minutes you were late in one year and you will lose a surprising amount of time that could all be dedicated to learning!’

‘Give him a break Kiyotaka’, the plump girl scolded, ‘the poor boy looks terrified’.
‘Makoto is that you?’ I saw Sayaka squeal in delight, ‘Do you remember me from primary school?’

‘It’s wonderful to meet you again Sayaka!’ cried Makoto, ‘I can’t believe we are together again, in the University of Ultimates of all places’, they embraced in a friendly manner before Makoto went around introducing himself to everyone. I noticed that the rugged young man’s face went as red as his hair when Makoto got to him and spoke in a somewhat nervous manner. I wondered whether those two also had something going on between them as he approached me.

‘Hello, what’s your name?’

‘Kyoko Kirigiri’.

‘So Kyoko, what is your talent?’

‘I… don’t know…’

‘You don’t know? Really? Well maybe you are like me! Every year the University picks out one random lucky student in the country, and this year that student happened to be me of all people. My family couldn’t believe it either! Maybe they decided to experiment with a second lucky student’.

‘No, I think if I was the Ultimate Lucky Student I would have known that by now’.

‘I see’, sighed Makoto, ‘Well maybe you will find out sooner or later!’

‘Maybe she’s keeping it a secret!’ the rugged boy nearby suggested.

‘No Leon’, Makoto shrugged, ‘I don’t see her as an untrustworthy type, maybe she’s just shy’.

‘Oh Makoto, that’s so adorable of you’, Leon snickered again.

As I raised my finger to protest this claim we could suddenly hear the sound of bells echoing across the building. They did not sound like an ordinary school bell however, they sounded more like funeral bells. When the ringing had stopped I heard a voice, a chilling voice which surely did not belong to this world.

‘I see you are all here little cubs! Still, you cannot hang around here forever, please gather in the gymnasium where you will be given… further details! Well hurry along little cubs, otherwise I might decide to take a bite out of you for my dinner!’

‘What the fuck was that?’ gasped Mondo.

‘I dunno’, Sakura remained calm but there was a deep anger present in her eyes, ‘but I have very bad feelings about it’.

‘Will it really eat us?’ asked the tiny girl who was now trembling from head to foot.

‘Trust me Chihiro, if anyone tries to get their dirty mitts on you, they will have hell to pay’, Mondo turned towards the rest of the group, puffing out his chest, ‘I will take the lead’, he pulled out one of many knives stuffed inside his coat, ‘stick close together. If whatever the fuck this is tries to get to you, they will have to get past me first’.

‘And me’, growled Sakura, she looked down at the plump girl, ‘stick behind me Aoi’.

‘I trust you with my life Sakura’, a little of the fear that Aoi had previously died away as Sakura watched over her like a lioness.
Slowly, solemnly yet also alert, we made our way out of the entrance hall. Mondo poised his knife whenever we turned a corner while Sakura watched every direction like a hawk before we finally approached another set of great doors.

‘You ready?’ Mondo asked.

The rest of us nodded. Mondo leapt into the room ahead in an attacking position but again there was nothing there just a bunch of trophy cases.

‘I think it’s through these doors over there’, Chihiro pointed nervously at yet another set of large double doors in front of us.

‘Well what are we waiting for?’ again Mondo charged through, knife in hand.

‘Mondo no running in the hall!’ barked Kiyotaka as he walked at a brisk pace through the doors after him.

‘Come on Chihiro’, Aoi comforted the tiny girl who was as white as a sheet, ‘Sakura will protect us, whatever happens!’

Chihiro nodded as she followed the two girls through, followed by Byakuya.

‘Wait for me!’ cried the bespectacled girl in his tracks. Soon everyone was through except for Celestia and I.

‘What do you think will happen?’ I asked her.

‘Who knows?’ Celestia shrugged, ‘It could actually be fun for all I know!’

‘Fun, really?’

‘Well when you are street smart like me, you can turn anything into a game if you know how!’

‘I see’, I scowled, ‘still, we had better get to the gymnasium. The last thing I want is to end up as chow for whatever that thing speaking to us was’.

‘Well what are we waiting for?’ laughed Celeste as we pushed ourselves through the double doors together. We walked into what seemed again, like an ordinary gymnasium. Everyone else was gazing at the podium in the front.

‘Speaker with the slightly ominous voice,’ yelled Kiyotaka, ‘we are all here as you instructed, what do you have to tell us?’

‘I have a feeling this won’t be an ordinary welcoming ceremony’, murmured the young man in baggy clothes.

‘Indeed, you are right Yasuhiro! It will be much more fun than that!’ the voice spoke again.

The room suddenly became cold as ice and even though I was adept at standing cool and composed, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. Various members of the group had noticed what looked like black smoke trailing towards us, but we didn’t cry out until we saw the bright red light. It was only a pinprick in the dark but as it approached us, it seemed to grow bigger and something about it sent a wave of despair crashing over us. It was like the creature had come from Hell itself.

Several of my classmates screamed when they saw the jagged teeth and large paws with dagger like claws materialise out of the smoke. What we saw emerge looked like a large bear from a distance but
there was definitely something otherworldly about it. While one side of the creature resembled an ordinary polar bear, the other side was charred and blackened. Much of the flesh around its teeth and muzzle was peeled away. Was it some kind of undead being? Most frightening of all, while one eye seemed perfectly normal, the other eye was red and gave off an evil aura. When it sat down in front of us grinning widely, the smoke was still wafting around it.

‘W… w… what are you?’ asked the bespectacled girl. The animal let out a hellish laugh which made the gymnasium quake.

‘Why Toko, darling, I’m a bear of course! I am no ordinary bear however. My name is Monokuma and I am the dean of this establishment!’

‘You?’ asked Yasuhiro, ‘Shouldn’t you be in a zoo or something?’

The bear laughed his icy laugh again, ‘Don’t be stupid! I am not like one of those bumbling creatures. I have a very important duty here!’

‘What kind of duty?’ frowned Aoi.

‘I am merely here as an observer. My mistress, the one who summoned me to this pitiful world, controls the strings. I am just a puppet, here to watch over all you little cubs like a good bear should!’

‘What do you and your mistress have planned for us?’ asked Sakura.

‘Well, it’s simple really!’ Monokuma laughed, ‘You have to kill each other!’

‘What the fuck?’ gasped Mondo.

‘That’s crazy!’ cried Leon.

Even the cocky smile of Akira turned into a grimace, ‘You gotta be taking the piss surely!’

‘This is illegal!’ protested Kiyotaka, ‘If my father was to hear about this…’

‘Well if any of you want to see your friends and family again, you have to kill to get out. Why is that so hard for you all to understand?’

‘I won’t be able to see my family until we kill?’ squeaked Chihiro, ‘Oh no, oh no, oh no…’ she curled up into a ball on the floor like a hedgehog in fright.

‘You won’t get away with this Monokuma’, I raised a fist, ‘we will stop this, one way or another’.

‘Oh you little cubs are so adorable when you are angry!’ Monokuma was now in hysterics, ‘You are trapped here, simple as that. Now you had better start the killing soon, otherwise I will get very angry and trust me, you will not want to see me when I’m angry’.

‘Okay’, Mondo spoke through gritted teeth, ‘so if I kill someone here and now…’, he gazed at Togami who smiled smugly back at him, ‘…will I be able to escape this shithole?’

‘Unfortunately, it is not that simple little cubs, for in order to escape, you must not get caught! And that’s not even the last of it!’

‘Go on!’ Celestia raised an eyebrow.

‘Well whenever a murder occurs I will allow you all some time to conduct an investigation. When that time runs out a class trial will be held. It works this way, if the killer aka ‘the blackened’ gets
voted as the culprit, then only they will be punished. If you all vote wrong though…’, he slid a long claw across his throat.

‘So, if we don’t guess who the blackened is… then we all die?’ gasped Junko, ‘This is completely mad!’

‘Precisely, you are a clever little cub! You deserve a gold star!’

‘And what is the punishment for the blackened if they get caught?’ asked Chihiro nervously.

‘Why it’s execution of course! I have one planned out for each of you and they all relate to your talent in one way or another, just to spice things up a bit you know!’

‘You sicken me’, Sakura stepped forward, Mondo close behind her, ‘I avoid violence when I can Monokuma but when the harming of innocents is involved, I am not afraid to use my strength for that purpose. I once killed a bear who was attacking my village. At first, I was reluctant to kill the animal. When it started to snatch babies from their cribs however, I decided to track the beast myself and I strangled it with my own hands. Of course, that came with a price’, she pointed at the scars across her face and arms, ‘Nevertheless, I slew a bear once and I can do it again if I need to!’

‘I warn you’, Monokuma’s teeth were bared, ‘attacking the dean is forbidden you know!’

‘Sorry Monokuma, but if the harming of young ones is involved then I cannot stand back and watch!’

In seconds Sakura pelted full force at the demonic creature and wrestled with it. It reminded me of when Hercules fought the Nemean Lion. Unsurprisingly, Mondo soon joined in the fray too. Before we knew it, there was a ball of flailing limbs and claws swiping at each other. We all looked on with open mouths as Sakura managed to hold the bear in a headlock while Mondo raised his knife.

‘I will take your pelt back to my gang as a trophy when I am done with you!’ Mondo growled through gritted teeth, and he stabbed the beast in the heart. Black blood poured out of the wound but as the bear lay dying he grinned, like he had some other trick up his sleeve. When he finally succumbed to his wounds his body disappeared.

While Mondo and Sakura stared with confusion at the spot where Monokuma’s body had vanished seconds ago, smoke again began to materialise out of thin air from behind them. When I saw the teeth and claws reappear I cried out.

‘Mondo, Sakura! Watch out!’, cried Makoto. Before we knew it the great bear swiped at them both with it's powerful paws, knocking them into a wall and they fell into a crumpled heap on the floor. When they looked up they saw the bear padding towards them, a cruel malice in his eyes.

‘I told you, I am no ordinary bear!’ He towered over them on his hind legs, ‘I will allow you to get away this time. The next time you try to use force against me however, a fate worse than death will await you, do you understand?’

Mondo and Sakura who were now shaken up bowed their heads in defeat, got up stiffly and limped back over towards us.

‘Ah one more thing!’ the malice in Monokuma’s face died as he pointed a saucepan-sized paw towards a nearby box, ‘Your student handbooks, they are crucial to your stay here. They contain everything you need to know about your surroundings. I have also given you various essentials for your rooms’. He looked down, ‘Since you are all at that age I will allow more… intimate relations but please use the essentials I have provided for you. I don’t want any nasty, screaming, pooping
babies running around the place after all!’ he shook his head in disgust, ‘And of course I have your room keys over here’, he gestured towards a silvery pile, ‘As I implied I will allow the sharing of rooms, just make sure to wake up from time to time to check that your friend or lover isn’t holding a knife ready to slit your throat’, he laughed his chilling laugh again, ‘you never know who will betray you!’

‘Will there be wifi?’ asked Chihiro.

‘I could provide it, but I would have to kill you first’, chuckled Monokuma, ‘but don’t threat little cub, I have plenty of activities fit for the Ultimate Programmer! Look around, I have many video games just dying to be played, and I made them all myself to make it even better!’

‘Whoop de fucking doo!’ Leon replied sarcastically.

‘Anyway, unless you have any further queries that will be all for now. Let the games begin!’ and he disappeared in a puff of smoke.

After the bear had vanished before their eyes, we all looked at our handbook tablets, I opened mine, hoping to finally find out what my talent was but all I found was ‘???’ for my talent description. I sighed deeply.

‘Well at least whoever is keeping us here actually marked me down as a girl’, Chihiro took a deep breath, ‘At my last school my dad had to fight to get me included with the girls. He’s quiet and shy most of the time but he was a real father wolf when it came to defending me. At least he won’t have to go out of his way to defend me this time, that’s if he knows I am trapped here’, she looked up to the others nervously, ‘You guys don’t mind me being counted as one of the girls, right?’

‘Of course, we don’t mind! Do we?’ Aoi frowned in the direction of the others and they quickly nodded in agreement.

‘I don’t see why that should be an issue’, I said.

‘That clears it up then!’ Kiyotaka clapped his hands.

‘Now we need to find a way out of this dump’, Mondo stood before the others.

‘You don’t get it street rat, do you?’ Byakuya smirked, ‘We are trapped here. You may be feared on the streets, but here you are just another pawn’.

Mondo stared at Byakuya as though he had thrown a stone at him, ‘At least I can get up and fight after receiving battle wounds. You wouldn’t stand a chance in my world, let alone a murder game!’

‘You underestimate my capabilities street rat’, laughed Byakuya, ‘I can even make the Trump family tremble in fear when I need to. When I finally become head of my company I will be set for world domination!’

‘Oh yeah!’ snarled Mondo, ‘Don’t you feel a little helpless without your security guards to protect you?’

Byakuya’s face suddenly turned cold, ‘I wouldn’t do what I think you are going to do Mondo’.

‘I’m the ultimate gang leader, and nobody gets in my way, not even you Richie Rich!’ Mondo raised his fist, just as he was about to strike Makoto stepped in between the two of them.

‘Makoto no!’ cried Sayaka but it was too late. Soon the class watched as though in slow motion,
Makoto being tossed like a rag doll into the air.

It took a while for Mondo to realise his mistake, ‘Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit…’ he ran up to Makoto’s unconscious form as the others crowded around him, ‘Did I kill him?'

I placed my fingers on Makoto’s neck, ‘He’s alive. Still if you were not weakened previously from your encounter with Monokuma, I fear that the situation could have been much more… dire’.

‘You mean I?... I will carry him somewhere to rest…’ Mondo’s voice was shaking.

‘No Mondo, I think you have caused enough trouble today’, I said coolly, ‘Sakura will you carry him to his room? His injuries are not that severe, I’m sure he will wake up in just under an hour, if not less than that’.

‘I can do that!’ Sakura nodded as she gently picked up and carried Makoto as though she had just saved him from a burning building.

When she had left the room, I heard a voice from the corner, ‘I told you using brute force will get you nowhere!’

Mondo snarled and was about to charge at Byakuya again before the combined strength of Leon, Yasuhiro and Kiyotaka just managed to hold him back.

‘I hate to agree with him dude’, Yasuhiro strained desperately trying to keep hold of Mondo, ‘but he’s right, violence won’t get us out of this situation!’

‘Indeed’, agreed Celeste, ‘We have to be both street smart and brain smart in order to survive’, she bowed to me, ‘since I am both I will be the key to getting you out of here’.

‘Fine! Whatever!’ Mondo panted finally giving up, ‘I don’t give a shit! Just as long as we get out of here somehow!’

In a normal situation, I would not usually associate with figures like Celeste, who had for most of her life, been out for her own personal gain. I however realised that to get through the killing game I would have to act as devil’s advocate, so for now at least, I knew I had to trust her. Winning was her talent after all, and she was one of the best gamblers in the country.

‘Yes’, I nodded, ‘If Celestia can help us out of here, we have to put our faith in her’.

‘I will be happy to be of assistance!’ she blushed before she kissed my hand once again, ‘I will feel honoured to work by your side’.

I felt a wave of bliss course through my body as she spoke. The feeling was only temporary however as our life in the University of Despair had begun.
‘How is he?’ I asked as Sakura returned to the gym, ‘Did you manage to find his room okay?’

Sakura nodded, ‘I took a peak into my own room too, it seems whoever has us trapped here at least has our tastes and talents in mind. We have en suite bathrooms too’.

‘So, we are not sleeping in padded cells then?’ questioned Chihiro.

‘Not from what I’ve seen’, Sakura shook her head, ‘It’s a little better than a prison at least’.

Mondo snorted, ‘Either way, I’m used to it’.

‘I said ‘little’ better for a reason’, Sakura explained, ‘there are cameras in the bedrooms too’. Everyone gasped in horror.

‘Does that mean they can watch us while we’re… you know?’ asked Leon.

‘It seems so’.

‘Don’t tell me they have them in the bathrooms too?’

‘Yup’.

‘Oh no!’ cried Sayaka, ‘That will ruin my image for sure!’

‘This cannot be!’ Toko protested, ‘I hate being watched! Let alone when I’m…’ she shrieked in anger.

‘Well think about it this way’, Yasuhiro shrugged, ‘It will only be whoever has us trapped here watching us, it’s not like we are being broadcast to the world or anything!’

‘You have a point…’ I pondered, ‘Still I hope whatever has us trapped will show us at least some courtesy’.

‘Don’t worry little cubs, I assure you my mistress will only use the cameras when it is absolutely necessary’, the bear once again materialised out of thin air to everyone’s shock.

‘So, you won’t watch us while we are trying to take a shit then?’ Mondo growled.

‘Now, now, why would I need to do that? Just don’t go smashing them up okay, they are there for your safety after all! But more importantly, that equipment is bloody expensive!’

‘Pfff, safety my ass!’ muttered Junko.

‘While I am here I should also encourage you to look around a bit, the school is here to roam day and night! Your generation seems to be becoming ever more nocturnal after all!’

‘Even though you have us trapped here, I am obliged to thank you for your kind services!’ Kiyotaka saluted.

‘Just do me a favour and don’t force open the locked doors, they are locked for a reason, and you wouldn’t want to be caught cheating would you? My cronies do not like cheaters at all!’
‘Your cronies?’ asked Aoi, ‘Who are you talking about?’

‘Anyway, toodle pip my little cubs!’

‘The hairball has a point’, Celestia stared at the spot where the demon bear had vanished, ‘we probably should start investigating this place sooner or later’.

‘Yeah’, I sighed, ‘Seeing as we won’t be getting out of here any time soon, we might as well get used to our surroundings’.

‘Do you think we could find an escape route somewhere?’ Leon was shaking now.

‘I doubt it’, Junko stared around, ‘this place is heavily fortified’.

‘And even if we did, there is a good chance that we will be attacked, either by that fleabag from hell or by those cronies he mentioned’, Yasuhiro pointed out.

‘There is no harm in just looking surely’, winked Akira.

‘Just don’t do anything too hasty!’ Kiyotaka warned.

‘Well what are we waiting for? Let’s start looking around already!’ Aoi punched the air enthusiastically.

‘Woah there lassie!’, I noticed that Mondo had placed himself in front of the gym entrance, blocking it, ‘I don’t think anyone should be going around this place alone the first time round’, he gazed in Chihiro’s direction, ‘if we all go alone we could easily be picked off!’

‘Hold on a second! What makes you think you are in charge?’ I demanded.

‘We are in a fucked-up situation lass’, Mondo explained, ‘I may not have the brains but thanks to my upbringing, I have plenty of experience in getting out of tricky situations’.

‘We will not live under your degenerate lifestyle!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘As the Ultimate Moral Compass I cannot stand for it. I was brought up on order and discipline, not delinquency and chaos! I feel that is what will prevail against this demon’.

‘Tell me, if your principles will prevail, then how come war still happens?’ Mondo questioned.

‘He has a point though. I don’t think we are in the same situation as your gang Mondo’, I told him, ‘we are not dealing with rival gangs here. It looks like we have a bigger and more dangerous threat on our hands, perhaps something even this world cannot fully comprehend’.

‘Still’, Mondo tossed one of his knives in the air and caught it as though it was simply a toy, ‘I probably have more experience getting out of rough situations than most of you, often at great risk to my life and reputation. Sometimes I have even resorted to the most extreme measures to ensure the survival and honour of my gang. We all made a promise together you see, to stick together no matter the cost, a promise between men’.

‘Um hello?!’ Junko waved in his direction, ‘We aren’t all men here you know!’

‘Yeah, and we don’t exactly live ‘the thug life’ Mondo’, I pointed out.

‘Look everyone! Do you want to get out of here alive or not? Isn’t it a good idea to trust each other, even if we live different walks of life? I’m sure you would agree with me Celestia’, he grinned in her direction.
‘Fine!’ hissed Celeste under her breath, ‘Just don’t get in my way!’

‘I don’t see you as that much of a threat anyway lass...’

‘Sure I will!’ Mondo smirked before he looked around at the rest of us, ‘I think we should split into groups’.

‘I’m with Sakura!’ Aoi raised her hand.

‘Fine’, Mondo nodded, ‘Chihiro, it might be a good idea if you tag along by Sakura’s side too. I feel as a... more vulnerable member of the group, you should go with her’.

I noticed Chihiro’s face fall at these words.

‘Mondo!’ scolded Aoi, hands on her hips, while Sakura shot him an angry glare, ‘Chihiro is not weak!’

‘Sorry lass, but I am worried. Before my brother died in a fight with a rival gang, he always reminded me that picking on the weak was a cowardly act and that you should fight to defend them at all costs. Forgive me, I am only doing this to honour Daiya’s memory’.

‘I don’t care if you forced your way into leading us... I really don’t. But how about keeping your gang’s medieval codes to yourself huh?’

‘It’s fine Aoi... really’, Chihiro sighed, but I could tell she was still greatly demoralised by Mondo’s words.

‘Come on Chihiro’, Sakura told her kindly, ‘It will be alright’, the three girls left the room together.

Mondo then stared in my direction, ‘Since you and Celeste seemed to be joined at the hip I think it’s convenient that you both team up’.

‘I will happily oblige!’ Celestia curtsied and clutched my arm.

‘I will join you too’, Sayaka stepped in, ‘I was the first one you met after all Kyoko’, she put a hand on mine. Exploring the place with two attractive girls didn’t sound like a bad idea at all.

‘Fair enough’, I shrugged, ‘we shall go together then’.

‘Be careful out there ladies!’ Mondo waved us off as we finally made our way out of the gymnasium.

As we wondered back through the corridors we did not see anything that spectacular, just some more classrooms, a small store, an IT room and a few restrooms. That was until we came across a large set of golden framed doors, resembling those in old timey American cinemas.

‘After you’, I beckoned both Sayaka and Celestia through. I then jumped as I heard Sayaka scream.

‘Sayaka what’s wrong?’ I looked up and realised where her reaction had come from when I noticed what was in front of me. Before me was a majestic theatre in the style of a European opera house but while the materials seemed cheap, it was still impressive nonetheless.

‘I don’t believe it!’ squealed Sayaka in delight, ‘We may be trapped here but at least there is somewhere where I can sing!’
‘It’s not that spectacular’, commented Celeste, ‘It could do with some repainting’.

‘Yeah it looks like a Disneyland mock-up or something’, I observed, ‘Still it’s better than nothing’.

‘I love it!’ cried Sayaka.

‘Well of course you would’, scoffed Celeste.

‘It’s ideal! This is just like a dream come true. After I get this stage set up it will be a perfect place for me to sing. You will watch me sing right Kyoko?’

‘Yeah sure!’ I grinned ‘We could do with some morale boosting in our situation’.

‘Indeed, we are going to need all the morale we can get. I hope I can make you as happy as my fans’.

‘Choosing between trashy pop music and despair is like picking your poison…’, grumbled Celeste, I shot her a glare, ‘…but of course if I had a pistol to my head I would choose trashy pop music for sure!’ she laughed nervously.

‘I hope my music will be able to make even you happy Celestia’, Sayaka smiled, ‘I will do my best, I can promise you that!’

‘Pfff, I just want to know if there are any games around here!’

‘I’m sure there will be somewhere Celeste. We just have to look around, it will be just like a treasure hunt!’

‘There better be’, Celestia crossed her arms before we stepped onto the stage itself.

‘If we weren’t in a murder game, I would feel at home!’ beamed Sayaka, ‘Still it feels kinda lonely without the rest of the girls. I haven’t gone solo for a long time now. Oh well! It’s good to try out new things I suppose…’

‘Hey, it looks like we can go backstage’, I noticed two doors on each side of the stage where performers would come and go, ‘come on we should check it out’!

‘I dunno it looks kinda spooky’, Sayaka uttered.

‘Sounds like my cup of tea’, Celestia finally smiled as she strode towards one of the exits.

‘This reminds me of the cheesy horror shows I used to watch during my childhood’, I told them as we entered the darkened room, ‘I think this might be my cup of tea too!’

‘Indeed. This is much more up my alley!’ Celestia had spotted some gothic Victorian styled dresses and was clearly in awe, ‘I might have to steal some of these. It’s criminal that they have been shut away in a dark room for so long’.

‘Are you dressing up for Halloween Celestia?’ giggled Sayaka.

‘You got a problem with my fashion tastes?’ Celeste rounded on her.

‘No of course not! It just might be a bit scary that’s all…’

‘Goths are people too Sayaka!’
'Hey!' I called out, ‘In case you two haven’t noticed there is a staircase here!’

‘Well what are we waiting for?’ cried Sayaka, ‘Let’s check it out!’

We slowly ascended the winding metal staircase until we are on top a sort of balcony overlooking the stage, in front of us we could see the crisscrossing rafters.

‘Wow it’s a big drop!’ Celestia commented, ‘You wouldn’t want to fall down from there’.

‘You scared of heights?’ I asked her.

‘What? No, of course not!’ her face turned red.

‘Look we have more props back here!’ I pointed, noticing a flowery bench and a large sparkly moon.

‘Ah!’ squealed Sayaka as she sat upon the bench, ‘They have everything here! If you want to make a good first impression on stage, it’s good to reveal yourself in style’.

‘Aren’t you ever afraid that the cables will snap as you are being lowered down?’ asked Celeste.

‘At first. But I got over that fear a long time ago, it’s more of a weird sensation than anything. Still, my fans love it and I always aim to be a crowd pleaser’.

‘Well, we had better not hang around here let’s see what else is around!’, I realised that when we stepped out of the door marked ‘Performers only’, we were on the next floor up.

As we passed through we noticed Byakuya stride past us, carrying an expression that looked like one of revulsion. The bespectacled girl was still following him as though she was a beagle and I continued to feel nothing but pity for her. When we were about to head into the next interesting looking room I thought I heard her say, ‘Wait for me master!’

‘Wow she’s really desperate!’ tutted Celestia.

‘I feel sorry for her if anything’, Sayaka bowed her head, ‘Byakuya is such a jerk. I mean even when my fans get a little too enthusiastic, I would never treat them like the dirt on my shoe, never’.

We stepped into what looked like an art gallery, a variety of colourful paintings covered the walls, marble sculptures in dramatic poses stood on stone plinths and the curtains were made from delicately crafted needlework. I could hear talking too, which seemed to come from an art supplies room nearby.

‘Hey boys!’ Celestia gave a cheeky wave as we entered. Leon and Yasuhiro turned their heads while Mondo who didn’t seem to notice our presence at first, was investigating some crafting tools.

‘You into arts and crafts Mondo?’ questioned Sayaka, ‘I didn’t think it would be your thing!’

‘I like carpentry’, Mondo turned to face us, ‘it’s just a hobby though, it’s not going to be a full-time job of mine or anything’.

‘I bet you just like hitting things with a mallet’, snickered Celeste.

‘Oh really? You really think hitting things is all I do?’ he barked.

‘And yelling… don’t forget the yelling…’ she whispered in my ear.
‘What was that?’

‘Oh, nothing Mondo, nothing!’ I reassured him while giving Celeste a slight kick in the shins.

‘I see… so have you got anything to report back to me ladies?’

‘We were just exploring this theatre’.

‘The theatre… it just consists of a bunch of boring overpriced plays which only appeal to the small minority of the population who actually can get in…’ he grumbled, ‘anyway lass, what did you see?’

‘Nothing much really’, I shrugged, ‘Just some costumes and props really’.

‘Have you found any signs of an escape route Mondo?’ asked Sayaka.

‘Would I still be here if there was?’ Mondo gritted his teeth.

‘Did you find any trapdoors or anything in the theatre?’ Leon asked us.

I shook my head, ‘Even if there was, don’t you think Monokuma’s dear mistress would have noticed at this point?’

‘Still’, Yasuhiro commented, ‘everything we have in this academy is more than I have ever had back at home. I gotta say, this lifestyle aint too bad. It’s nice not having to worry about whether you are going to have enough money for food for the week’.

‘Yeah, at least until you get murdered’, mumbled Leon under his breath.

‘It didn’t help that I ended up being the only breadwinner for our apartment after my mother was laid off at her job. And it was made even harder since my fortune telling only really appealed to people at markets and fairs, so I often travelled alongside them with my tent and props to keep the little money we had flowing. I suppose this dedication just to support my home is the reason why Hope’s Peak recruited me as the Ultimate Clairvoyant. I know we are in a killing game, but now that burden is off my shoulders and I can finally have some sort of peace for once’.

‘That’s easy for you to say’, growled Mondo, ‘I already miss speeding around, dodging traffic and police, participating in knife fights… I would do anything to feel that adrenaline rush again. Thankfully my right-hand man Takemichi is taking care of the gang while I am gone, and I trust him more than anyone…’ I noticed him falter at these words and I swear his face turned a little pink too, ‘Anyway, where was I?’ he said rather abruptly, ‘Have you noticed anything else?’

I shook my head again, ‘Nothing of importance at least. I will let you know if I notice anything peculiar though’.

‘I admire your determination lass’.

‘This is boring!’ yawned Celestia, ‘I just want to know if there are any games here’.

‘I spotted Sakura, Aoi and Chihiro in the games room’, Leon told her, ‘I wanted to stick around there myself, but Mondo dragged us over here while ranting about the establishment or something…’

‘Arcade machines are just sick designs by corporations to trick the poorer sectors of society into thinking they will become rich overnight. They prey on their desperation and fill their already fat pockets as a result! It’s a typical stick and carrot method by the wealthy establishment’.

‘It’s just a lack of experience that’s all’, shrugged Celestia, ‘I was poor as dirt but after talking to
some particular experts in the gambling field, riches were in my pocket before I knew it’, she winked.

‘Anyway, we had better find that games room, otherwise Celestia might die!’ joked Sayaka.

‘But we don’t have any money do we?’ asked Yasuhiro.

‘Yes we do’, I explained, ‘Despite being trapped, the handbook states that we have our student loans as promised before we entered the University. Although apart from the store and games room... I honestly don’t think they will be much use around here’.

‘Yeah’, said Mondo, ‘at this rate I’m going to spend most of my loan on cigarettes and booze!’

‘Same here, but mostly booze for me’, Leon grinned sheepishly.

‘Isn’t that all you spend your money on anyway Mondo?’ Celestia raised an eyebrow.

‘Pretty much!’ Mondo went back to looking at the crafting tools.

‘Anyway, we had better get going, take care you three!’ I said waving them off, ‘I will let you know if I see anything important Mondo’.

‘I’m counting on you lass!’ Mondo called back as we left.

‘Come on let’s go!’ whined Celeste walking at a faster pace than normal.

‘Wait for us!’ Sayaka yelled, before Celeste slipped through a door revealing a rather impressive looking games room. At that moment Celeste resembled a child who had just walked into a toy shop, not sure where to begin as she was full to the brim with excitement

‘Hey guys!’ we were greeted by Chihiro, ‘You have to see this!’

There was a poker table, board games of all varieties were stacked upon the shelves and there was even a small bar. Nearby was an arcade room which resembled a miniature Las Vegas Casino. In the middle of the room was a large roulette wheel and along the walls there were a variety of slot and arcade machines, as well as a skill crane which was currently being operated by Aoi.

‘Damn it!’ Aoi stamped her foot on the ground as the plush animal fell from the crane’s metal claws soon after being picked up, ‘I have always hated these things. They are rigged I tell ya, rigged!’

‘There is no skill required at all with these types of games, just ‘luck’. That’s not what gaming should be about!’ tutted Chihiro.

‘I have never been much of a believer in the idea of luck myself’, said Sakura who was examining an air hockey machine, ‘In the world of martial art you only get rewarded after years of patience, meditation and intense training. Even though I am the Ultimate Martial Artist, I still have a lot to learn, you cannot expect to accomplish anything overnight’.

Celeste shuffled in her pockets and pulled out a few little coins, ‘What do you mean there is no skill required? Watch and learn from the queen!’

Aoi stepped back as Celeste inserted a few coins into the skill crane, looking very relaxed compared to Aoi’s earlier look of intense concentration, Celeste picked up one of the plush animals with ease. Within seconds she was holding one of them in her hands, a cat wearing a little pink bow.

‘I don’t see any need for this’, she walked over to Chihiro and handed it to her.
‘Oh my God!’ Chihiro squealed, ‘Thank you so much Celeste! It’s so cute! I can finally add this to my Beanie Babies collection!’

‘Good for you’, murmured Celeste before she continued to look around enthusiastically.

‘Have you guys noticed anything?’ I questioned the three other girls.

‘Nothing special in particular’, explained Sakura, ‘Aoi thinks she found something odd though…’

Aoi stepped forward, ‘As Sakura and Chihiro were investigating the lounge nearby, I peered briefly out the window and I swear I could see someone, or something dash past. I only saw it for a few milliseconds, it was just this black blur’.

‘Are you sure it wasn’t one of us?’ asked Celestia, ‘I mean we saw Byakuya lurking around earlier’.

‘No, I’m pretty sure it wasn’t Byakuya, as much as I don’t trust him. It looked like it didn’t want to be seen, whatever it was…’

‘Do you reckon it could have been one those cronies that Monokuma mentioned?’ Sayaka was now trembling slightly.

‘It could well be. Then again even if it was, it looks like they can’t interfere unless we are ‘cheating’ right? Still, it was freaky as hell and I was a little shaken up afterwards’.

‘Yeah, she was white as a sheet!’ Chihiro told us, ‘Then again, I would be too!’

‘Well let’s just hope that whatever it was leaves us alone’, Sakura gazed towards the door.

‘You had better tell Mondo when you see him Aoi’, I told her, ‘He told me to report on any kind of strange goings on’.

Aoi nodded, ‘It looks like Akira is carrying out his own little investigation too. We saw him in the lounge with Taka and Junko. He looked awfully pleased with himself, whatever he was up to…’

‘What was he up to?’

‘I dunno’, Aoi shrugged, ‘he seemed to be tinkering with one of his jitterbugs, it looked like he was attaching some kind of device to it’.

‘Well we had better check it out then!’ said Sayaka, ‘I just hope he’s not up to anything suspicious’.

‘I don’t think he is but still… he is a rich businessman and it’s not out of character for types like him to be shady. I can sort of see where Mondo was coming from’, I stared up at the ceiling, ‘then again, we have to trust each other if we are going to get out of this. Some of his gadgets may come in handy for investigating the school, especially smaller areas that we cannot get to’.

‘He could also use them to spy on us…’ Celestia pointed out.

‘Come on let’s go and see what he is up to!’ Sayaka opened the game’s room door and the three of us once again went exploring.

We didn’t have to travel too far this time to reach the lounge. Indeed, Kiyotaka was there, pacing up and down, Junko had curled up in one of the comfortable looking sofas and Akira was eagerly crouched in front of an iron grate in the wall, like a cat over a mouse hole.

‘What’s going on here then?’ I asked him.
‘I decided to use one of my jitterbugs to search the vents and smaller crevices of the school. I was able to attach a small camera to it and send it on its way. It should come back shortly, and I then will be able to upload the results onto a computer!’

‘As much as I hate to say it, that’s a pretty damn clever idea!’

‘See! I told you my toys were made to impress. It’s no wonder so many people are willing to die for them!’

‘Hopefully the Japanese market won’t be as gullible as the American one’, commented Junko.

‘They bring the money in’, shrugged Akira.

‘My dad once told me that no matter how bad things get in Japan, there is always something worse going on in America’, said Sayaka.

‘That’s right!’ shouted Kiyotaka ‘No matter how bad our rulers can be, at least they don’t have the mentality of a pre-schooler!’

‘You can say that again…’ Akira rolled his eyes.

‘Speaking of which, what do you think of Mondo as a leader?’ Celestia asked curiously.

‘Mondo’s leadership will bring us all down’, Kiyotaka barked, ‘his rule will bring about destruction and infighting if I allow it to continue!’

‘Not much of an optimist are you Taka?’ smirked Akira.

‘Order and justice will prevail when the Ishimaru clan regains power!’ Ishimaru spoke as though he was giving a passionate speech, ‘I will have Mondo shaking in his boots when he feels my wrath!’

‘Good luck with that…’ murmured Junko in a sarcastic tone, I noticed that she was reading a magazine.

‘Wow Junko is that you on the cover?’ I asked.

‘You have quite a different body type though’, Celestia frowned, ‘Did you drop a few pounds?’

‘You never heard of photoshop before?’ Junko questioned.

‘Junko you don’t need to do this to yourself!’ I told her, ‘Have you ever heard of body positivity?’

‘I am also a firm believer in body positivity!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Yeah yeah, I have heard of all that junk before’, sighed Junko. At that moment Sayaka jumped as a scuttling sound approached us. Akira carefully pulled off the iron grate and reached into the vent.

‘Come here you little beauty!’ he said softly as the metallic bug clicked back into a dormant position.

‘When will you have the footage ready?’ I asked.

‘By the morning hopefully!’ Akira told me grinning widely, gazing at his creation, ‘Yes, tomorrow we will see what secrets you have to reveal to us!’ he stuffed the little beetle into his breast pocket.

‘So what should we do now?’ questioned Sayaka, at that moment we heard a voice which seemed to be speaking over an intercom, at first we were dreading to hear the demonic speech of Monokuma
but instead we heard a familiar growly voice.

‘Hey ladies!’ Mondo’s voice echoed over us, ‘please get your asses into the dining room which is located near the dorms! Well get a fucking move on! I haven’t got all day ya know!’

‘Did he just take over one of the intercom systems?’ asked Junko.

‘Sounds like it! When I was a wee lad I used to do it all the time to prank supermarket goers!’ Akira giggled.

‘So basically you were a little annoying shit then?’ I asked coolly as we all began to descend and made our way to the basement where the dorms were located.

‘You could say that yes!’.

‘Well looks like Mondo had better be careful!’ I commented, ‘He may have a challenger on his hands sooner or later’.

‘Do you think he’s being serious?’ questioned Sayaka, ‘Taka I mean...’

‘It’s a well-known fact that his family was disgraced the last time a member of the Ishimaru clan was in power’, explained Celeste, ‘It’s no surprise that he has been wanting to take charge’.

‘He probably wants to restore his family’s honour’, I said, ‘Still Mondo is a tough nut to crack, I don’t think he will go down without a fight’.

‘Is that...’ I noticed Aoi emerge, sniffing the air as Sakura and Chihiro tagged along behind her, ‘food I can smell? It had better be, I’m starving over here!’

‘Maybe you are just imagining it?’ shrugged Celestia, ‘There might not be any food at all you know!’

‘Perhaps it’s the motive!’ snickered Akira, ‘Maybe they want to starve us so we will resort to killing and eating each other in order to survive!’

‘Shut up you two!’ cried Aoi as she dashed towards the door which was marked ‘Dining Room’. We all followed her until approached a room with a bunch of long tables stretched over the room.

‘Well... It’s not exactly Hogwarts is it?’ I saw Leon step out of the kitchen.

‘Is there food at least?’ asked Aoi.

‘Yeah loads!’ nodded Leon, ‘You should see for yourself!’

We all shuffled into the kitchen. The food all looked surprisingly fresh and it looked like it got replenished regularly. What’s more the kitchen itself had obviously been cleaned thoroughly, it was as good as new. I noticed that Yasuhiro seemed to be cooking something.

‘What’s on the menu?’ I questioned.

‘Noodles!’ Yasuhiro grinned, ‘I was going to bake a cake for everyone, but Mondo is allergic to butter so noodles it is! They are vegetarian too, I don’t know any of your eating habits, so I didn’t want to take any risks you know!’

‘It smells good!’ Chihiro commented, ‘I could be your assistant one day, I love baking and cooking!’
‘Me too!’ grinned Yasuhiro, ‘It’s one of the few activities that me and my mother could do together’.

‘You’re a bit of a momma’s boy aren’t ya Yasuhiro?’ we spotted Mondo leaning against the wall.

‘Hey Mondo!’ Sayaka waved, ‘Did you find anything else interesting?’

‘Nah’, Mondo shook his head, ‘Have you found anything?’

‘Some of us have some interesting accounts to share’, I told him.

‘I see’, Mondo growled, ‘well you can all spill the beans when dinner is ready, but right now I really need to have another smoke’.

‘Mondo!’ scolded Kiyotaka, ‘Cigarettes are very bad for your health! They are the number one cause of lung disease!’

‘Do you really think I don’t know that? So what if they shorten my life? A short life is a rite of passage for someone like me because I believe that quality of life is so much better than quantity! It’s what my brother taught me after all! A short exhilarating life is better than spending years confined to a home growing sick and old’.

‘You will probably regret saying that when bits of you are smushed all over a truck windscreen’, smirked Celeste.

‘Yeah whatever’, Mondo strode out of the kitchen and sat at one of the long tables, puffing away on a cigarette and putting his feet up. At that moment I wanted to get out one of my own cigarettes. Investigation was a stressful process after all. I wanted to spare myself however from Taka’s lecturing on the dangers of smoking, so I decided to wait until dinner was over.

‘You see!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘This is why smoking is such a serious issue!’

‘I smoke’, shrugged Junko.

‘Yeah me too’, said Leon.

‘And me’, added Celeste.

‘Why would you do this to yourselves?!’ cried Kiyotaka.

‘Because the world is shit that’s why, and you have to find a way to escape from it somehow, even if it’s just for a little while’, Leon shrugged, ‘A cigarette and a cold one can provide some satisfying relief after a stressful match. As I am *unfortunately* the Ultimate Baseball Star, it’s how I get by in life!’

‘Studying is what keeps me occupied!’ Kiyotaka stood proudly, ‘It provides much better stimuli for the brain than smoking ever will!’

‘Seriously Ishimaru!’ snapped Aoi, ‘I don’t smoke but I will be tempted to if you keep going on like this!’

‘Hey!’ we heard Mondo’s voice in the dining room, ‘Have any of you seen that rich bastard around lately?’

‘We saw him sneaking about earlier’, explained Sayaka, ‘that Toko girl was following him’.

Mondo sighed, cigarette still in hand, ‘Hang on!’ he marched out of the room. We waited for a few
minutes before we saw him return, holding the scruff of Byakuya’s neck, ‘Got you, you little shit!’ he threw Byakuya down to the ground.

‘Mondo, no!’ I called out.

‘Are you okay master, are you hurt?’ Toko looked down at him, Byakuya pushed her away irritably before he got up.

‘And just what do you think you were doing Richie Rich?’ Mondo rounded on him, ‘sneaking about were you?’

‘So what if I was?’ smirked Byakuya, ‘Unlike you peasants I actually plan on participating you see! The business industry is pretty cutthroat after all, this game will be good practice!’

‘You really see this sick situation we are in as a game?’ snarled Mondo, ‘Are you fucking with me right now?!’

‘I can’t make you participate, but I will happily watch you and the others dig your own graves. I had a little chat with Monokuma you see!’ he laughed, ‘I won’t give anything away, but he has a few plans cooked up… to stir the pot!’

We all looked at each other in horror, like we had been struck by lightning. Could one of us, if pushed into a corner, really resort to killing another? I didn’t want to think about it.

‘Everyone calm down!’ Junko stepped forward, ‘He’s probably just bluffing!’

‘You wish!’ Byakuya grinned.

‘Hey what’s going on here?’ we suddenly heard a familiar sounding voice. Through the door a smallish boy in a hoodie ran into the room, ‘Did I miss anything?’
As we ate our noodles it took a while for us to explain to Makoto our discoveries. Except for Byakuya who was brooding at the far end of the room and Toko who sat in the corner, constantly checking over her shoulder. We were all gathered telling our various stories, which Makoto listened to with much enthusiasm, especially when Aoi told him of her strange encounter.

‘So, who are these cronies?’ Makoto looked confused.

‘They make sure we don’t ‘cheat’ apparently’, said Aoi, ‘Either way they are bloody terrifying!’

‘Does Monokuma have some demon minions then?’

‘No, it seemed human, there didn’t seem to be anything supernatural about it. It was completely covered in black though, like it didn’t want to be identified or something…’

‘That’s weird!’

‘I know right?!’

‘Perhaps we will see more of them as the game goes on’, pondered Celeste.

‘I sure hope not’, trembled Chihiro, ‘Do you really think Monokuma has plans for us? Like… a motive?’

‘I wouldn’t put it past him’, Yasuhiro spoke, ‘he’s a demon. Demons were well known throughout many folklore stories to trick mortals like us into getting prizes to die for, even if it convinced them to commit horrible acts’.

‘They are just stories though, right?’ pointed out Sayaka.

‘Yes, but many legends are based on truth, aren’t they?’

‘Still, I can’t imagine we will resort to killing each other. No matter what motives Monokuma gives us, right?’ Makoto commented. We all looked at each other and said nothing.

‘It is in times like this when we should all be unified!’ announced Junko, ‘If we are to survive, we have to stick together through all the trials and tribulations this demon will throw at us’, she sounded very much like an army general, ‘I have the ideal plan to encourage unity amongst ourselves in this troubled hour!’

‘What genius plan do you have then Junko?’ Celestia yawned.

‘I propose… that we have a sleepover!’ Junko announced.

The girls began to talk excitedly among themselves while the boys cringed a little.

‘Maybe we could have like… a guy’s night out?’ suggested Makoto.

‘Over my dead body!’ grunted Mondo.

‘We could all take a bath together!’ shouted Kiyotaka.

‘What?!’
‘It’s a way to gain trust among men. You see, when your body is naked, so is your soul! If we can take our clothes off in front of each other with confidence, we can create a new bond between us’.

‘Nah, I don’t think staring at each other’s balls will get us anywhere’, Mondo looked down at the floor, his face turning red.

‘Believe me I know!’ laughed Leon, ‘Considering the amount of locker rooms I have been into throughout my career!’

‘Well it looks like this is just going to be a girls night then’, I frowned.

‘You girls are alright with Junko’s idea, right?’ Sayaka asked them, ‘I mean it will also be a good way to get to know each other!’

‘I haven’t got anything better to do I suppose’, shrugged Celeste.

‘Hang on! What about Toko?’ questioned Chihiro, ‘Won’t she want to join in?’

‘Hey Toko!’ Sayaka approached her, ‘Don’t you want to join in our sleepover tonight?’

‘Why would I want to join in something so juvenile?’ Toko hissed.

‘We just think it will be a good idea to hang out together you know. And don’t we need all the friends we can get during this time?’

‘Why should I trust anyone? Whenever I tried to befriend someone they would always stab me in the back! Why should I not suspect that you will do the same?’

‘Toko…’ Sayaka bowed her head, ‘Why would we do that?’

‘Just leave me alone! I’m busy!’

‘Fine! Fine!’ Sayaka backed down, looking defeated.

‘Don’t worry about it Sayaka’, I told her, ‘if she doesn’t want to go along we cannot force her’.

‘I just don’t want her to be alone that’s all…’

‘Perhaps she’s planning on murdering someone!’ laughed Celeste, ‘She can’t exactly draw out plans while we are all in the room with her, can she?’

‘I really hope not…’ I thought, ‘still, even if she’s a bit standoffish towards people, I don’t think she has a reason to murder one of us’.

‘Unless somebody got in the way of her ‘master’ I suppose’, pointed out Aoi, ‘Then we may be in some rough waters!’

‘I prefer girls anyway, so I don’t think I will be much of a threat to her’, I explained.

‘Me too’, nodded Celeste, ‘I wouldn’t want to touch Byakuya with a ten-foot pole! I think all of us would quite happily date a woman over him to be honest!’ Everyone laughed.

‘What does she see in that guy anyway?’ questioned Aoi.

‘Well think about it’, pointed out Sayaka, ‘just imagine if you were an ordinary girl, then out of nowhere, a rich guy comes along and sweeps you off your feet. The best thing is you don’t have to
make any effort. Don’t get me wrong, I find Byakuya repulsive, but I can sort of see where she is coming from you know…’

‘Also, it’s the kind of stuff she writes about too, being the Ultimate Writing Prodigy and everything’ mentioned Celeste, ‘Rumour has it that her romance stories make even Fifty Shades of Grey look vanilla by comparison!’

‘How is being dominated and controlled by a rich guy romantic exactly?’ I frowned.

‘She thinks she is living in one of her fantasies, but she is really just deluded’, sighed Junko, ‘Anyway, make sure to have some spare blankets ready for later. We will settle in the lounge, oh and bring some snacks along too. And one more thing’, she glared in the direction of the boys, ‘if I catch any of you peeping, you are totally dead, understand!!’

‘Okay calm down!’ Leon grimaced.

‘No worries’, Mondo cracked his knuckles, ‘I will make sure that they don’t!’

‘That just about clears it up then!’ Junko clapped, ‘I will see you all in the lounge tonight!’

‘Very well then, have fun ladies!’ Mondo nodded as we headed out of the dining room, ‘Don’t stay up too late okay?’

‘We won’t!’ winked Sayaka.

‘I haven’t actually got a chance to see my room yet’, I told Celestia as we walked towards the dorms, ‘maybe it will give me some idea about what my talent could be!’

‘Who knows?’ smirked Celeste, ‘I’m just excited to see what’s in my room!’

‘Well of course you are…’ We finally reached the dorm rooms where our names where marked with a golden plaque on the metal door.

‘Are you ready?’ winked Celeste as we stood by the door marked with my name.

I got out my room key, when the door clicked, I pushed it open. ‘Wow this is very peculiar’, I made a beeline towards my desk, where a box containing some kind of testing kit sat.

‘Shit, I hope I won’t have to end up using this’, I held up the box and began to carefully open it.

‘Wow this thing tests everything’, Celestia examined the packaging, ‘Blood, skin samples, hair samples, urine…’

‘I hope I won’t have to test that last one’, I cringed.

‘Are you into forensics Kyoko?’

‘It’s okay I suppose’, I shrugged, ‘back in school we used to play some old cheesy point and click educational games. Basically a murder scene was set out and we would have to figure out who the murderer was by gathering clues and evidence. They were nothing like real murders of course. It was so obvious they were toned down, I guess so it didn’t scare the kiddies too much’, I rolled my eyes.

‘Look what else is in here!’, Celeste opened a chest next to my bed, inside were a variety of items I was not expecting, a breath analyser, a large roll of yellow tape, handcuffs, a taser and there was even a diving suit, presumably for investigating things underwater.
‘I really hope I don’t have to use this’, I looked down at the diving suit.

‘What’s wrong? Are you afraid of water or something?’

‘Not necessarily, it’s just that… large bodies of water make me feel uneasy for some reason’, I sat down on the bed.

‘Can you not even go into a swimming pool?’, I shook my head.

‘I don’t know why, but whenever I am in water above a certain depth, I always feel a great sense of fear course through my body and I always want to get out as quickly as possible’.

‘Whatever you do, don’t tell Chihriho. She will probably go on about how you resemble a certain blue hedgehog’, giggled Celeste. I couldn’t help but let out a small chuckle too before I continued to investigate. I opened a small first aid kit next to my bed.

‘It seems they remembered our meds too as well as some… essentials!’ I held one of the ‘essentials’ up to the light.

‘Did they seriously put a picture of Monokuma’s face on a condom packet?’ shrieked Celeste, ‘For some reason I find him even uglier in chibi form!’

‘They are on some of our hygiene products too it seems!’

‘Oh God no!’ Celestia pounded her fist on the bed, ‘No! No! No!’

‘You can always draw over them if you are desperate I suppose’, I opened a small colourful cardboard box which resembled those that students received in their rooms upon arrival. I opened mine and found a cup noodle, a bottle of ramune soda, a pen, a notepad and for some reason a small sowing kit. I opened it and jumped slightly as it seemed to display a chart showing human anatomy, ‘Mondo was right’, I winced shutting the kit, ‘we really are in a ‘fucked up’ situation here!’

‘And there are the cameras of course’, she pointed at one in the corner, ‘which is a shame because I had some… interesting ideas on what to do with those handcuffs…’

‘I don’t think they are those kind of handcuffs Celeste’, I narrowed my eyes, staring up at the device, ‘Still, Monokuma did say those cameras would only be used if the situation was critical’.

‘They make me feel really uneasy all the same. I’m glad we have en suite bathrooms though’, she sighed in relief pointing out mine, ‘I really hate having to share!’

‘I think we should check out your room too Celeste’, I heaved myself off the bed. We both left the room and the door automatically locked itself.

As we walked to Celeste’s room we saw Leon in front of one of the cameras, breathing cigarette smoke into the lenses and making various hand gestures that were all very rude, at least until he was chased away by Kiyotaka. Finally, we approached the room that read, ‘Celestia Ludenberg’.

‘After you!’ I beckoned her through.

‘Why thank you!’ Celestia kissed my hand as I followed her into her room. As expected, it resembled a small casino with various gambling games around the room and much of her room decorations were inspired by playing cards. Celeste payed little attention to this however and instead seemed to be focused on the small photo next to her bed.
‘Are you a cat person Celeste?’

‘Grand Bois Cheri!’ she cried, picking up the photo which contained a photo of a fat grey fluffy cat, ‘My baby!’

‘Is he yours by any chance?’

‘He’s not just a pet, he’s family! He is my last reminder of ’her’!’

‘Who are you talking about? She must have been pretty important to you’.

‘She was just someone I knew’, sighed Celeste, ‘she’s dead now’.

‘Dead?’ Celestia nodded. ‘Oh, I’m so sorry!’ I clapped a hand to my mouth.

‘Don’t worry about it’, she stared back at the photo, ‘So long as I still have Cheri, her spirit will never truly leave’.

‘Does he remind you of her?’

‘Well he is naughty’, Celeste chuckled, ‘in that area they definitely share similarities!’

‘I used to have a cat too. She was given to me by my mother shortly before she died, a cute little tortoiseshell. She unfortunately had to be put down last year, then again… she was very old at that point’.

‘I see’, Celeste put her arm around me, ‘when we get out of here, I promise to introduce you to Cheri! That might cheer you up a little. He doesn’t like most people, but since I like you, I am sure he will at least tolerate you’.

‘Um… thanks’, I stared up at the ceiling, ‘well we had better get ready for this sleepover I suppose…”

We went into our respective rooms, changing into our night wear and making sure to bring extra pillows and blankets. After putting on my purple tartan styled dressing gown over my night clothes I started to make my way to the lounge. On the way I spotted Aoi with the help of Sakura carry out some junk food from the dining room, mostly boxes of doughnuts. I also saw Sayaka, compared to most of our relatively casual nightwear, her pyjamas were covered in many sparkling sequins.

‘Hey guys!’ we saw Chihiro emerge from her room, wearing a large sweater and was clearly struggling to carry something.

‘What on earth are you carrying Chihiro?’ asked Celeste, who was wearing a black hoodie with makeshift cat ears over her clothes.

‘Oh, just some…’ she tripped and to our astonishment, many plushies spilled all over the floor.

‘I see…’ we all helped to pick up the numerous stuffed animals and by the time we headed upstairs, we were all carrying at least three to four plushies along with everything else.

‘Is this your whole collection?’ asked Aoi.

‘That’s not even half of them!’ Chihiro laughed nervously as we trekked to the lounge.

‘Hey there ladies!’ to our surprise we saw Yasuhiro emerge from a nearby classroom.
‘What are you doing up here?’ I asked.

‘Yeah, have you come to spy on us?’ Celeste hissed.

‘Oh no! Of course not!’ laughed Yasuhiro, ‘I just decided to come up here and study, so I can concentrate better you know! Besides, I feel as though I have more of a ‘connection’ up here’.

‘What do you mean exactly?’ Sayaka questioned.

‘I feel I have another prophecy coming on’, he clapped his hands, ‘all kinds of exciting new visions have appeared in my crystal ball ever since I stepped in this place. I need a while to see all of them which is why I am staying up here tonight’.

‘Okay’, Celeste said through gritted teeth, ‘If any of us catch you peeping on us though, there will be consequences! Got it?’

‘Don’t worry I won’t!’ Yasuhiro laughed nervously, ‘Anyway have fun ladies! I have some visions I need to analyse!’ he stepped back into the classroom closing the door behind him.

Do you reckon his fortune telling is accurate?’ asked Aoi.

‘I don’t think so’, Celeste muttered, ‘most fortune tellers are just trying to feel into your wallet by giving you a false sense of hope’!

When we reached the lounge, Junko was waiting for us, still resembling an army officer who was preparing to put us through our paces.

‘So, you are all here?’ she stared down at us. Even in her pink unicorn onesie she looked intimidating, ‘Well what are we waiting for? Let’s get this place set up already!’

Quickly we began to set out food, blankets, cushions and everything else. Most of us made makeshift beds on the sofas, except for Chihiro who was investigating some of the video games.

‘If the boys thought we were going to have pillow fights in our underwear then they have another thing coming!’ Aoi placed a doughnut box on her lap and began to chow down.

‘I know right!’ laughed Sayaka as she began to snack on some cheese puffs.

‘These are just crappy knockoff games, probably the ones Monokuma created’, Chihiro stared at the game cartridges in disappointment.

‘Don’t worry Chichi’, grinned Celeste, ‘I have other ideas for party games!’

‘Like what exactly?’ I questioned.

‘Something that’s fun of course’, to my astonishment she pulled a silver knife out of her pocket, ‘and contains a little bit of tension!’

‘You’re not!’ gasped Sayaka.

‘She is…’ Junko murmured.

‘But Celeste, that’s really dangerous’, Aoi cried, ‘it’s not worth it!

‘I could play Russian roulette instead if you wish!’, Celestia bragged.
‘This is insane’, I sighed, ‘but at the same time I’m not surprised in the slightest…’

‘Have no fear, I always win, I always come out on top, no matter how high the stakes are’, she spread out her fingers on a table and held the poised knife in the other, ‘just you watch me!’

At an almost inhuman pace, she rapidly began to stab the spaces between her fingers like it was nothing. Chihiro covered her eyes while the rest of us watched with open mouths.

‘You see!’ laughed Celeste, as she continued to stab, ‘there is nothing like some good old-fashioned thrills!’ she looked back at us, ‘Are you not entertained? I can go further you know, someone cover my eyes with something! Well what are you waiting for?’

Quickly Sakura found one of Chihiro’s plushies, a long green snake and stood behind her.

‘Are you sure you want me to do this?’ she asked looking quite concerned.

‘What are you waiting for?’ Celeste cried out. Sakura shrugged before she tied the plush snake around Celestia’s eyes just like a blindfold, ‘Ah yes! This is more like it!’ She spoke in a calm yet somehow cold voice, ‘I began as nothing, and now I am a gambling goddess!’

‘She’s nuts…’ Aoi stared dumbfounded in her direction, ‘completely nuts!’

‘Any challengers?’ she looked around the room, ‘Or we can all just face that I win at everything and call it a day’, she finally released the knife from her grasp, panting slightly.

‘I will challenge you’, Junko stepped forward and sat at the desk.

‘Wow Junko, I didn’t think you would be into this kind of thing’, Celeste seemed to be stunned that someone dared challenge her at all.

‘Well the fashion industry can be awfully cutthroat’, to our surprise she pulled out what seemed to be a serrated machete, ‘well then let’s see what I have to offer to the table!’

Like Celeste, she spread out her fingers and to our horror and admiration, stabbed rapidly between them. While we feared Celeste would get bloody from this ‘game’ however, we legitimately feared that Junko would end up amputating herself with such a large weapon. Even Celestia seemed somewhat impressed at Junko’s daring stunt.

‘Chihiro, it’s safe to look!’ I called when Junko had finally finished.

‘Wow’, Celeste reached out to shake Junko’s hand, ‘I hate to admit it, but you are actually somewhat… good’, she crossed her arms, ‘Still… there is always room for improvement! Any other takers?’

‘No thank you. I think the rest of us want to keep our fingers’, Sakura politely declined.

After Celestia’s ‘party game’, we spent most of the evening talking, eating and drinking. Chihiro meanwhile was tapping away on her pastel pink laptop which was covered in ‘kawaii’ stickers.

‘It’s a shame Toko doesn’t want to join us’, Chihiro bowed her head, ‘this sleepover is quite fun, even though it was a little scary too…’

‘You working on something Chihiro?’ Sayaka sat besides her, a large bag of cheese puffs still clutched in her hands.

‘This is my most ambitious project yet! I don’t think anything like this has been done before, at least
not on this scale!’

‘Are you planning on taking over the world with this new technology?’ asked Celestia, ‘I’m sure it’s in the realm of possibilities given your talent and all’.

‘Not really’, Chihiro replied still clicking away.

‘Are you sure you aren’t the one who is imprisoning us?’

‘Oh God no’, she cried, ‘I wouldn’t want to do that to any of you. Sure, Byakuya is kind of mean but I wouldn’t want to wish him harm at all, or anyone!’

‘So, what are you working on?’ I questioned.

‘It’s called the Alter Ego Project!’ Chihiro beamed.

‘That sounds really cool! So, it’s like some kind of AI?’ questioned Sayaka.

‘That about sums it up! I have nearly finished, I just need to iron out a few bugs and she will be ready to go!’

‘Well we can’t wait to see it when you are finished Chihiro!’

‘That’s if I even survive long enough’, her eyes became watery again, ‘I was looking forward to showing off my years of work to everyone, now it looks like that dream is gone’.

‘Oh, don’t cry Chihiro!’ Aoi hugged her, ‘We will get out of this I promise!’

‘Mondo was right. I am weak. I am probably going to be picked off easily…’

‘Mondo is just an idiot’, scoffed Aoi, ‘He doesn’t have any idea about what people like you are capable of, people who don’t spend their whole lives trying to act like the top dog all the time! He doesn’t know strength outside his brand of masculinity. True strength comes in the form of ambition, determination, and loyalty to your teammates. Those things are the traits I needed to become the Ultimate Swimming Champion in the end, not pride and a desire to dominate others’.

‘I became Ultimate Gambler by dominating others’, Celeste commented, ‘Although you can’t just do that by throwing your weight around. If you want to survive in the gambling world, you must show everyone who is boss, either through the game or by… other means’.

‘I honestly don’t think Mondo intended to hurt Chihiro’, I mentioned, ‘still, his honour code seems pretty archaic to say the least’, I looked up at the clock, ‘Wow it is nearly midnight already!’

‘We had better get to sleep fairly soon’, Sayaka stretched, ‘otherwise Ishimaru might give us detention!’

‘Yeah we will need our strength in the morning’, Sakura rubbed her eyes before curling up on one of the sofas, Aoi joined her shortly afterwards, resting her head on her lap. Soon everyone began to curl up in their blankets and chose a comfortable sleeping position.

‘Two minutes to midnight’, Celeste uttered, ‘I wonder if we will all be alive by the time we wake up tomorrow’.

‘Just shut up and go to sleep everyone…’ groaned Junko covering her eyes with a pink fluffy blindfold.
It was the first time I was going to go to sleep in this hostile environment but at least, surrounded by all these girls, I wasn’t going to be alone. Just as I began to get comfortable and drift off however, the familiar chilling sound of funeral bells echoed throughout the school. The sound made us jump before we heard Monokuma’s terrible voice.

‘Good evening little cubs! Don’t get too comfortable now, please gather in the gym for further instructions. Well, don’t keep me waiting!’

‘Why the fuck is he summoning us at this time?’ Junko grumbled.

‘I don’t know’, I clenched my fists, ‘but something tells me that he wants to ‘stir the pot’ like Byakuya said’.

‘We had better go and see what he has planned then’, Celestia heaved herself out of her bed.

We all dragged our now heavy feeling bodies through the corridor, back down the stairs and slowly made our way down to the gymnasium. When we arrived at the familiar looking doors we saw some of the boys in their nightwear heading there too. Mondo stood in a tank top, presumably waiting for us to arrive. His arm muscles were huge, and it was obvious that he worked out regularly. I spotted several battle scars too and he didn’t seem ashamed to show them off.

‘Damn, talk about an absolute unit…’ whispered Sayaka as I approached him.

‘So, you are finally here then?’ he grumbled.

‘What even is going on?’ Chihiro was shaking again.

‘I don’t know lass’, Mondo stared towards the gymnasium entrance, ‘but it’s all totally fucked whatever it is!’ he pulled out a cigarette and took a puff before he opened the doors for us.

‘Where have you been?’, we saw Kiyotaka approach us, standing in a composed pose in pyjamas white as his uniform, ‘Come on, let’s go and see what this demon has prepared for us!’ The students were all gathered there now, most of them in nightwear but others like Yasuhiro and Toko still seemed to be in their normal wear. ‘Mondo! Are you smoking again?’

‘So, what?’ Mondo replied irritably, ‘Smoking is the only way for me to stay relaxed during tense circumstances you know!’

‘Hey… where are you bastard?!’ Leon called out loudly. His speech sounded rather slurred and it was obvious that he was not entirely sober.

‘Now, now! Has nobody taught you little cubs any manners?’ Monokuma appeared out of thin air yet again, ‘Kids these days seriously!’

‘Are you shitting me?’ growled Mondo.

‘Yeah! You had better pipe up about why you decided to send us down here at this time!’ snapped Junko, ‘It must be pretty damn important!’

‘Wow you are all so rude’, whined Monokuma, ‘But yes my dear Junko, this is important! Very important in fact!’

‘Go on then! Spit it out why don’t ya?!’ snarled Mondo.

‘Wow temper, temper!’ tutted Monokuma, ‘Well if you really want to know. I am here to present to
you, your very first motive! Now doesn’t that sound exciting?!”

‘Not particularly’, shrugged Akira.

‘Well? What do you have planned then?’ I glared up at the bear.

‘It’s pretty straight forward really’, Monokuma grinned revealing his many dagger length teeth, ‘I’m going to give you a time limit!’

‘A time limit?’ gasped Makoto.

‘Why yes!’ smirked Monokuma, ‘Look around you. In twenty four hours’ time I am going to fill this entire building with some extremely poisonous gas’.

‘How long will it take to kill us?’ Chihiro quaked.

‘You will be dead faster than an animal sent to a PETA shelter, that I can guarantee!’ Monokuma let out another one of his bone chilling laughs, ‘Don’t you worry though little cubs, there is a chance to save yourselves, with a price of course!’

‘A price in blood’, Byakuya commented.

‘That is correct my little prince! That is correct! Allow me to repeat myself properly, if neither of you have killed by tomorrow night I’m going to pull the plug on this class for good! Won’t that be such shame, losing all that young talent in one fell swoop?’ he roared.

‘How dare you!’ Sakura looked at the bear with wrathful eyes, ‘How dare you put us through this!’

‘Anyway, little cubs this is the last you will ever be seeing from me… unless of course one of you does decide to kill, then I will see you shortly before the first class trial! Happy killing!’ and as quickly as he came, he disappeared.
‘Do you think he is serious or is he just bluffing to try and scare us?’ asked Makoto.

‘I don’t know, it could be either for all we know’, Sakura stared up at the ceiling.

‘What are we to do then?’ trembled Aoi.

‘I don’t think there is much we can do’, I sighed, ‘I think all we can do is wait and see what happens’.

‘Waiting will definitely make things more exciting that’s for sure!’ Celestia grinned.

‘You are right’, Sayaka walked up to me, ‘and even if we do end up dying, it will be quick and it will be better than knowing that you have blood on your hands, right?’

‘Indeed’, Sakura nodded, ‘my family has stated for centuries that dying is always more honourable than killing an innocent for your own benefit’.

‘And we will be together, right?’ Chihiro looked up at her.

‘I guess’, Mondo was pacing up and down, ‘My gang has always been prepared for the event of my death, but not from something like this’, he fell to his knees and pounded his fist on the ground, ‘Fuck this! Fuck this all to Hell! I wanted to die fighting like my brother, not like an animal trapped in a cage!’

‘Perhaps Makoto is right though’, Junko pointed out, ‘Maybe Monokuma is bluffing and is just trying to scare us into killing’.

‘Whatever the case, I think we need some morale…’, Sayaka raised a hand.

‘So, what were you thinking exactly?’

‘Well I have always wanted to put that theatre to use’.

‘That sounds like a great idea actually’ Makoto beamed, ‘how about you throw us a concert!’

‘Then even if we die, at least we will die happy!’ agreed Kiyotaka.

‘Like they say, you might as well just celebrate the apocalypse!’ shrugged Akira.

‘What do you think Mondo?’ Sayaka blinked up at him, ‘I just wanna make people happy you know, even with death around the corner!’

‘Fine whatever…’ Mondo got up, ‘a bit of your music can’t hurt I suppose. I’d prefer to die in a manlier way but what choice do I have?’ he spat out his cigarette and lit a new one.

‘I’m probably just going to get pissed again’, yawned Leon, ‘it will take my mind off the inevitable doom surrounding us!’

‘Leon…’ Makoto ran up to him and clutched his arm.

‘I will go to the games room I think’, Celestia shrugged, ‘seeing as it is will be my last night on earth I am prepared to go open season in the casino! I will literally be drowning in riches!’
‘Let me guess Byakuya’, Mondo snarled, ‘you will be fucking off somewhere else right?’

‘You are correct street rat! I will be effing off most certainly!’ he smirked, ‘I wish to die in my bed, with one simple glass of champagne. And I want to be alone’, he glared in the direction of Toko who looked away from him nervously.

‘And if this is just a hoax, what then?’

‘As though I am going to tell a mere thug like you!’, Byakuya laughed.

‘Don’t worry Richie Rich’, Mondo bared his teeth, ‘You don’t need to tell me! I already have a pretty good idea about what upper class twits get up to! Your family has already ruined so many lives, so I find it no surprise that you would want to ruin more here’.

‘I’m probably going to just have a smoke in my room before I die’, Junko stared at the door, ‘I also brought in my last glass of wine to Hope’s Peak, as well as a pistol containing a single bullet, in case something dreadful was to happen…’

‘Like your company being exposed harbouring a major scandal or something?’ frowned Mondo.

‘Something like that. I created my fashion branch and it’s like they always say, it’s tradition for a Captain to go down with their ship!’

‘Just don’t shoot yourself until we know exactly what’s going on’, I cautioned her.

‘Typical business owners…’ Mondo took another puff on his cigarette.

‘Well then!’ Kiyotaka shouted, ‘I think we have agreed upon a plan!’

‘A plan on how we are going to spend our last moments at least!’ said Aoi.

‘What if someone does end up killing one of us before midnight?’ Chihiro was shivering despite the thick layers of clothing she was wearing.

‘If somebody does have the balls to commit a murder before the time limit, I think all we can do is to see what Murder Bear has planned for us’, Mondo was chewing on his cigar now, possibly his ‘manly’ way of showing nervousness. He cleared his throat before announcing, ‘I think it will be a good idea if you all went to bed, especially you Sayaka, you will have much rehearsing to do lassie’.

‘Hopefully I will be able to get my camera results tomorrow morning’, Akira reminded us, ‘I don’t know if they will of much use, but I will see if I can come up with something!’

‘Okay off to bed everyone!’ barked Kiyotaka much to Mondo’s annoyance, ‘You will need your strength in the morning!’

‘That’s assuming we will all live to see the morning!’ Byakuya laughed.

‘All of us in the lounge will be safe!’ snapped Aoi, ‘We have Sakura on our side! She will protect us!’

‘It’s alright Aoi’, Sakura blushed before putting a hand on her shoulder.

‘Good night everyone I suppose…’ grunted Mondo waving us off once again.

We trekked back in silence as we all wondered what would become of us this time tomorrow night. When we finally reached the lounge we no longer resembled a group of girls enjoying a sleepover
but soldiers waiting behind the front lines for an impossible battle the next day.

‘What do you think is going to happen to us?’, instead of crying, Chihiro’s face seemed completely blank as though her tears had dried up. Somehow it was an even more depressing sight.

‘All we can do is wait really’, Aoi returned to her previous spot on Sakura’s lap, ‘Whatever happens though, remember that you won’t be alone’.

‘I guess…’

‘Still, at least I will have the opportunity to sing’, Sayaka gazed at the metal panel that would have been a window, ‘I wish I could be with the girls but then again, I am just happy they are not in this terrible situation’.

‘I am sure you will do a good job Sayaka’, I told her.

‘Thanks Kyoko!’ Sayaka beamed, ‘It means the world to me!’

‘What got you into singing anyway?’

To my surprise Sayaka bowed her head, ‘I’m doing it as tribute to my younger sister, Sara. She loved listening to J Pop whenever it came on the radio or the TV and wanted to be a singer herself when she grew up. Sadly, when she was just eight years old, she was struck and killed in a hit and run. During Sara’s funeral I vowed to carry on her dream for her, it wasn’t easy though. My family… wasn’t the richest you see, and I ended up doing some… questionable things to get to where I am now. Still I did it all for her and I feel that she will be pleased with me if we do end up seeing each other again’.

I sighed, I wondered if her dead sister would instead tell her, ‘How could you do these things to yourself? You really didn’t have to go that far you know…’, but I said nothing.

‘I’m so sorry Sayaka’, sighed Aoi, ‘I am sure Sara would’ve been proud of you. If you need any help setting the stage up, I will be glad to help!’

‘I too will help if you require it,’ nodded Sakura.

‘I have music and mixing programs installed on my laptop’, Chihiro raised her hand, ‘There is more specialised software out there but I can see what magic it can make!’

‘Thanks guys!’ smiled Sayaka, ‘I would greatly appreciate it!’

‘Well we had better get at least some rest’, Sakura stroked Aoi’s hair, ‘If you can’t fall asleep, then I recommend meditating’.

‘Finally! Good God! I can get some sleep at last!’ Junko put on her fluffy pink blindfold again and curled up in her blankets.

‘I feel strangely cold’, Celestia exclaimed in a dramatic tone. I knew full well she was putting on an act, but I nevertheless cuddled up behind her, wrapping my arms around her waist.

‘Will you go to sleep if I stay like this?’ I frowned.

‘I will certainly find it easier!’ she yawned.

When my eyes finally drooped I experienced a vivid nightmare that I could never forget.
It started when I saw that distinctive red eye full of hate, malice and despair. The bear prowled up to what seemed to be a large structure. Looking closer I saw that it was a towering wicker man, looming over. I noticed there was somebody trapped inside, a man around his mid-thirties. His legs seemed to be broken and he had a pleading look in his eyes. He could only murmur one word to the bear which was circling around the structure.

‘Please…’

At that moment the bear’s two front paws seemed to become balls of fire. The man in his wicker prison let out a silent scream. The demonic creature swiped at the structure, immediately setting it alight. As the flames crept up, beginning to lick the man’s face, he cried out in agony, throwing himself against the makeshift cage but to no avail, especially as the smoke and the flames spread ever more quickly. Even though he was becoming obscured I could tell that his flesh was burning away as his screams of pain became more bone chilling and unnatural. With a large grin on his face the bear walked away. The screams inevitably became silent and the impressive structure now resembled a hellish beacon, making the area surrounding it appear blood red.

‘Kyoko! Wake up!’ I felt myself being shaken awake. My eyes gradually opened to see Junko, Celestia and Aoi crowded around me.

‘What happened?’ I murmured, ‘I think I had a nightmare or something…’

‘You were shivering and shaking all over!’ cried Aoi.

‘Yeah you were totally freaking us all out!’ exclaimed Junko.

‘Believe me I felt it!’ Celeste sighed.

‘What happened? If you don’t mind me asking that is…’ Sayaka looked at me in a concerned way.

‘It’s just another stupid dream. It must be! There’s no point in reminiscing anyway, we are probably all going to die anyway…’

‘You really are a little box of sunshine aren’t you Kyoko…’ Junko crossed her arms.

‘I’m only being honest!’ I snapped, ‘It’s nothing important, just forget it!’ The other girls backed off as I began to tidy up after myself.

When I packed up my things and returned to my room, the first thing I did was to lock myself in my bathroom and have a smoke. Unlike Mondo I wasn’t quite as confident at smoking in public, but it did help to ease some of the tension, at least for a little while. I may be dead tomorrow anyway so increasing my chances of getting lung disease didn’t really occur to me at this point. As for that horrible dream I had, something seemed familiar when I thought hard about it, but I couldn’t quite pinpoint what it was exactly.

At that moment I heard my doorbell ring. I turned on my speaker.

‘Who is it?’ I spoke into it.

‘Hello there Kyoko!’ I opened the door and Celeste stepped in.

‘Sorry about snapping earlier by the way. I was pretty freaked out by that dream so I wasn’t thinking straight’.

‘Don’t worry about it’, Celestia put an arm around me.
‘Well I guess this is it then…’

‘Come on Kyoko! You can’t spend your last day on earth all miserable like this!’

‘That’s easy for you to say’, I mumbled, ‘I don’t play Russian Roulette nearly every day’.

‘Well I suppose we had better make our way down to the dining room’, Celestia held out her hand, I took it and together we made our way into the room where most of the class were already serving themselves breakfast.

‘Did you have a good night, ladies?’ Mondo called, holding a large pot of some coffee in his hand, ‘Nobody tried to harm you at all?’

‘No’, I told him, ‘I mean it took a while for some of us to get to sleep but apart from that there was little disturbance’.

‘It’s probably because we had Sakura with us’, winked Celeste, ‘She can defend us against anything!’ She raised a finger as though a lightbulb had clicked in her head, ‘You and her should spar against each other at some point! It’s something I’m sure we have all been dying to see’.

‘Oh no! I couldn’t do that!’, Mondo spluttered while drinking his coffee.

‘Why not? Are you afraid she will beat you, tough guy?’ smirked Celeste.

‘Of course not! It’s just that, my brother always told me to never hit girls’.

‘But she’s one of the most powerful fighters in the world!’, I pointed out, ‘and if it’s arranged match, there should be no harm in that surely’, but Mondo shook his head again.

‘Rules are rules lass, even the Crazy Diamonds have to stick to them, otherwise we will fall apart for sure. That was one wish Daiya left before he died, and I want to respect it!’

‘The Crazy Diamonds? That’s your gang’s name, right?’

‘That would be correct lassie! When Daiya was in charge we were known and feared as the Diamond Brothers! Ever since the day he lost his life, I felt very much alone, even with the support of my fellow gang members. I mean what can you expect when you are the only half left of a deadly duo? After I while though, I fought my own battles and I came out on top!’

‘Men…’ tutted Celeste before she went over to the kitchen to prepare a cup of tea.

‘So what are you going to do for the rest of the day Mondo?’ I questioned.

‘Practicing knife throwing… before I have to watch over you lot at Sayaka’s concert. It’s not as thrilling as getting into brawls, but it will have to do! I am your leader after all!’

I got out of my chair, ‘I’m going to join Celeste and make some tea. Try not to accidentally lacerate yourself with those knives of yours!’

‘I won’t my dear lassie, you can trust me!’

‘We will see about that…’ I said coolly as I re-joined Celestia, ‘Is that rose tea?’

‘The best there is!’

‘I’m not usually a fan of scented tea but this is really refreshing!’
We stepped out to see Makoto who greeted us in the manner of a friendly dog.

‘Hey you two! Did you manage to sleep okay… despite everything…’ he stared down at his shoes.

‘Yeah I suppose…’ I sighed while Celeste simply huffed.

‘I think it is a good time to tell you something my uncle always used to tell me before he died, ‘live each day like it’s your last!”

‘Thank you, Makoto. I will make sure to keep that in mind. How is Leon by the way? He seemed a bit… tipsy last night’.

‘I let him crash in my room, he really was a nervous wreck. Then again, he’s often been like that. I mean constant pressure to perform well at all your games cannot be too good for your mental health I imagine. When I first saw him as an audience member, I didn’t realise how much pressure he was under at the time’.

‘I see… well you had better keep an eye on him, especially in the situation we are in’.

‘Of course I will!’ Makoto went to join Leon who had just walked into the room with noticeably heavy shadows under his eyes.

We went over to a table to eat whatever we could stomach. Our appetites had decreased quite rapidly ever since finding out Monokuma’s motive, so we just ended up eating a single grapefruit slice alongside our rose tea.

‘Hey!’ Kiyotaka came marching over, ‘Are you not going to eat more? Breakfast is the most important meal of the day you know!’

‘Yeah we know’, I sighed, ‘I’m not that hungry though, and what’s the point if we may not live to see the next morning?’

‘You have to make your last meals count!’

‘Yeah, yeah…’ I picked at the fruit with my fork, ‘So what are you doing today Taka?’

‘I’m going to do whatever I can to protect you all! Even if it ends up being futile. It will be told in the history books that the grandson of Toranosuke Ishimaru died in a heroic sacrifice to protect the students of Hope’s Peak, restoring the honour of the Ishimaru family!’

‘Mondo could be the first victim for all we know’, joked Celeste when Kiyotaka had left the scene, ‘Taka really wants his leadership position!’

‘He probably gets assassination threats constantly. I imagine he would know how to deal with them by now…’ we left the breakfast table, ‘As for Kiyotaka, he’s aggressive but being the Ultimate Moral Compass, I don’t think assassination is exactly part of his agenda’.

‘We will see about that!’

When we walked past the dorms we could hear music coming from one of the rooms.

‘Chihiro must be helping Sayaka to rehearse’, I said. As we prepared to walk upstairs to the game room, we passed by Sakura and Aoi who were heading towards the theatre.

‘Hey guys!’ waved Aoi, ‘Sakura and I are going to help set up for Sayaka’s concert this evening, I hope she will appreciate it!’
‘I am sure she will!’ I nodded.

‘Well we will catch you later okay!’

‘Sure thing!’ I waved them off.

As we ascended onto the next floor we saw Yasuhiro step out again.

‘Oh, hello again girls! You are off to the games room I suppose?’ he asked Celeste.

‘Indeed, we are’, Celestia muttered, ‘Tell you what Yasuhiro, if you are so amazing at fortune telling, can you tell us whether we are all going to be massacred tonight or not?’

‘I haven’t picked up anything yet’, he sighed, ‘but I feel I am getting closer to seeing a vision!’

‘Well you had better’, frowned Celeste.

Celeste and I didn’t talk much when we finally reached the games room. While Celestia was very engaged I wasn’t, much to Celestia’s annoyance of course.

‘You are no fun!’ she sulked.

I eventually gave up and we just decided to talk. Even then I found it hard to bring up anything and when I did, it trailed off into nothing and we ended up sitting in an awkward silence.

‘I think I’m going to head out to the dining room to get a bite to eat, if I have any appetite left that is…’, I murmured, ‘If I don’t see you before midnight, I just want to say… take care Celestia. I understand that we didn’t know each other for long but meeting you definitely made my life more interesting that’s for sure!’

‘Oh stop!’, Celestia teased, her face turning red, ‘I was being serious when I said you reminded me of ‘her’. She was not afraid to speak her mind, and neither are you Kyoko!’

‘Thank you…’ I blushed, ‘It was nice knowing you, even if we don’t see eye to eye all the time’.

‘Well… I guess this is goodbye then Kyoko…’ she put her delicate pale hands on mine.

‘Goodbye Celestia’, I bowed my head and walked slowly out of the room.

As I stepped out however I heard some strange muttering seeming to come from the lounge. My curiosity crept in and I decided to investigate further. To my astonishment I saw none other than Toko, who for once was not following Byakuya.

‘Hey Toko!’ I called.

‘When will Toko learn that that boy is no good for her!’ I heard her mumble to herself. Much to my surprise, it seemed her personality had completely changed, ‘Why won’t she just ditch him already?’

‘Are you okay?’ I crept into the room with some degree of caution.

‘And what do you want punk?!’ Toko rounded on me, speaking in a much rougher tone than before.

‘Um nothing really! I just wanted to see if you were okay… you don’t seem to be with Byakuya for a change’.

‘When will she learn? Oh, when will she learn?’
‘I thought you admired Byakuya though, I saw you practically fall at his feet!’

‘Toko doesn’t know what she is getting herself into’, she hissed, ‘That boy is rotten to the core!’

‘I know right, but why do you hang out with him if you hate him so much?’

‘Why would I hang out with that… oh you don’t understand do you punk?’ she giggled, ‘I’m Syo I share this body with Toko. I want to help her so badly but she keeps messing everything up! Bad Toko! Silly Toko…’

‘Have you got like, an abrasive side or something?’

‘I suppose you can look it this way’, Syo shrugged, ‘we share the same body, so naturally we should be looking out for each other. Two heads are better than one after all! But alas, Toko seems to be off in her own little world!’

‘Yeah she does. It’s scaring the crap out of everyone out to be honest!’

‘Tell ya what punk? If you see Toko again, tell her to cut the crap will ya?’

‘I’ll try… I guess?’ I smiled weakly.

‘That's the spirit!’ Syo laughed as I backed off.

On the way to the stairs I saw Yasuhiro step out again, this time with an unusually serious look on his face.

‘Have you seen something?’ I asked him.

‘Heed my words!’ his eyes were wide and he was trembling, ‘Only hope can conquer despair!’

‘Is that all?’

As quickly as he spoke these strange words, Yasuhiro looked around and scratched his head, as though he had snapped back to reality.

‘Where was I?’ he looked around wildly in confusion.

‘You went on about how only hope can conquer despair, I think?’

‘Did I now?’ he laughed, ‘Sometimes seeing into the future can put me into a bit of a trance!’

‘I see… well I had better get going! Take care Yasuhiro!’

‘Of course! Catch you later Kyoko!’

When I entered the dining room most of the class were gathered around Akira, except for Byakuya and Junko who were apparently in their rooms as they planned earlier.

‘You won’t believe what I caught on camera, some pretty juicy stuff if I don’t say so myself!’

‘Go on then, tell us what ya got already!’ barked Mondo.

‘Strangely enough, the most interesting sights came from the disposal room of all places!’

‘What did you see Akira?’
‘I only caught it for a few milliseconds but after freezing the frame there was definitely something going on let me tell you. It seemed to be a figure, it passed by so quickly that it was difficult to decipher what it was’.

‘Was it one of the figures I encountered?’ asked Aoi.

‘No, it was a little different I think. It wore something like a white lab coat and a rather freakish looking mask too!’ he displayed a very blurred picture. The mask had a wide grin which reminded me very much of a clown, making it somehow even more terrifying.

‘It looks like a clown’, Chihiro squeaked, ‘I hate clowns! They scare me!’

‘I don’t blame you to be honest’, I commented.

‘Maybe a clown is about to murder all of us?!’ joked Celestia.

‘Shut up! Just shut up!’ Chihiro cried out in fright before jumping into Sakura’s arms.

‘Maybe it could be just another one of Monokuma’s friends!’ Kiyotaka suggested, ‘Perhaps they all dress differently!’

‘You could be right but looking at it, something about that figure seems different somehow’, said Aoi, ‘the figure I saw wasn’t wearing a mask, especially not one like that’.

‘If you look behind the figure there seems to be a trapdoor, maybe it came out from there!’ I noted, ‘The bolts around it look unscrewed too’, I squinted my eyes.

‘Do you reckon it leads to an escape route?’ asked Leon.

‘I don’t think so’, Akira said, ‘But it looks like an area we are restricted to go into so it’s definitely worth pointing out!’

‘Seriously though. Do you really think that thing may try and get us?’ Makoto stared at the picture.

‘Don’t worry, if some creepy clown fucker tries to get you then they have another thing coming!’ Mondo looked around at us, ‘Well you had better get ready for the concert or whatever. Sayaka said she should be ready around eleven ‘o’ clock, so if you are attending make sure to be at the theatre by that time I guess’.

I spent the last hour before Sayaka’s concert getting ready. As the time limit ticked closer, my heart began the beat at a rapid pace, as though it was fighting to escape my rib cage. I had no idea how Sayaka would be able to perform knowing that we would all be surrounded by deadly gas, trapped in this prison with no way out.

‘Come on… Kyoko, pull yourself together’, I finally got up, locked my door and walked towards the theatre, but this time it felt as though I was going through a long tunnel with no light at the end of it. Was I literally a dead girl walking? If Hell existed, I imagined it would resemble something like this. ‘It will be fine…’ I tried to reason with myself, ‘it will be quick. Death cannot be so bad, right?’ I wondered if those sentenced on death row carried the same thoughts as I finally made it to the theatre. Even though most of the class were present, it felt lonely not having Celestia alongside me. Kiyotaka stood on the side. Mondo and Akira were reclining and had their feet propped up on the seats in front of them. Sakura, Aoi and Chihiro meanwhile were huddled up together.

‘Hey guys!’ I saw Makoto run into the room, ‘I just wanted to make sure that Leon was okay, he’s in the games room… at the bar to be precise. Celestia is there too and told me she would keep an eye
on him’.

‘And what about Toko?’ Mondo questioned him.

‘I tried to convince her to come along, she’s in the lounge. But she told me to go away’.

‘That sounds like her’, shrugged Aoi.

‘I see… and what about Yasuhiro?’

‘He seemed quite fixated on his crystal ball, so I didn’t want to disturb him’, Makoto twiddled his thumbs.

‘Do you think he will be okay?’ piped up Chihiro.

‘Relax already!’ Akira yawned, ‘All the rooms are in close proximity to each other. If someone was being murdered, those around should be able to hear their screams of terror!’

‘Yes Akira…’ I sat next to the other three girls, before checking my watch, ‘not long now…’

Sure enough, Sayaka emerged from behind the curtain wearing a glimmering silvery blue dress, with a large bow and boots to match, making her resemble a sparkling diamond. She looked truly stunning to say the least.

‘Are you all ready?!” The girls as well as Kiyotaka applauded while Mondo and Akira’s claps were barely decipherable. ‘All right everyone, get ready for the night of your lives!” Her style of music was your typical pop music with a catchy tune in the background, except that I could tell her singing was actually coming from her, and not something that had been crudely autotuned. She really did seem to fit her Ultimate title. Deep down however, I could tell that she wanted to have the rest of her group at her side.

When Sayaka sang, the time seemed to go by much faster. That didn’t seem to be the case with Mondo and Akira who kept checking their watches. With ten minutes to midnight, I noticed Mondo tie a blindfold around his head and light up a cigarette, presumably his last.

With two minutes to go, the beauty of Sayaka’s singing and stunning appearance seemed distant to me. With one minute to go I saw Sakura tighten her grip around Aoi and Chihiro as though she was preparing to take a bullet for them. With thirty seconds to go I could see Sayaka begin to sweat, I was surprised she didn't do so previously.

I counted down the time in my head, four... three... two... one... I clutched my head, waiting for the poisonous gas to fill the room, consuming everyone in its path.

I heard a scream, followed by several sobs. I opened my eyes. Where was the gas? When I looked around at everyone I saw that they were all looking up high above Sayaka.

‘Hey what’s going on?’ Mondo uttered, taking off his blindfold, ‘Oh shit!”

‘Somebody actually did it!’ Aoi clapped her hand to her mouth. Chihiro keeled over and vomited on the floor.

I looked up and gasped in horror. Dangling limply with a rope around his neck, was the unflinching body of Yasuhiro.
The eerie sound of the funeral bells echoed throughout the building as we tried to comprehend what we were seeing before us. This couldn’t be real surely?

‘Everybody stay calm!’ Kiyotaka cried out.

Everyone in the room stood there stunned at the morbid scene that had unfolded before us. Around us the students who had not been attending the concert ran in. Byakuya came in wearing a silk dressing gown, Leon stumbled in clearly drunk and Toko was biting her nails. Junko and Celestia were the last to arrive, the former looking like she was close to fainting.

‘What’s going on?’ Celestia asked me.

‘Yasuhiro is dead’, I told her, ‘somebody must have strung him up from the rafters’.

‘Who would do such a terrible thing?’ cried Makoto, ‘It couldn’t have been one of us surely!’

‘Oh dear, sweet, naïve Makoto! I wish that truly was the case… but alas… it was indeed one of you who committed this crime’, Sayaka was so shocked at the sight of Yasuhiro’s corpse dangling above her that she did not react when the demonic creature appeared out of nowhere on the stage. He looked around at us, ‘Are you not going to give the great Monodini at least some applause for his act?’ None of us said anything, ‘You little cubs are such killjoys! It doesn’t matter anyway, for you all must partake in a very important group project! I know you probably all hate group projects but this one is a lot more fun trust me!’

In a normal situation we would have protested his insensitivity, but right now we couldn’t bring ourselves to do it. We were in the same room as a dead body, of someone who hours before was alive and treated us as a friend. Although my face didn’t show it, my heart ached for his poor mother, who may not even know the cruel fate of her son.

‘Take out your tablets, I have installed a hot new app onto it!’ Monokuma grinned.

We all took out our student handbooks and indeed a new app was present with icon being the all too familiar horrible chibi version of Monokuma, entitled ‘The Monokuma File’.

‘You will use this app to gather essential information and evidence to solve this case. This is important as you will need to present your findings to the class trial. The smallest details could be the difference between you making the right and wrong decisions. Trust me, in this situation you don’t want to make the wrong choice if you value your life!’

‘You will pay for this you monster!’ Mondo spoke in a quieter but deadlier tone, ‘When I go to Hell, I will make sure to drag your bitch of a mistress down with me…’

‘Good luck with your investigation my little cubs!’ laughed Monokuma, ‘It won’t be long until the first class trial starts, so you had better get going! Pip! Pip!’ and once again he vanished.

‘Come on’, I told everyone, ‘we can grieve later. Right now we need to focus on finding the killer and making sure that we gather the right evidence’.

‘We should take Yasuhiro down first’, Chihiro was still shivering.

‘I agree’, Sakura looked up, ‘we shouldn’t leave him like this’. She and Mondo proceeded to go
backstage to recover the body.

‘Be careful!’ I told them, ‘Set him down as close to the crime scene as we can. We want to get the most accurate picture of the crime possible if we are to solve this’. I trailed after them while the others followed me backstage and up to the rafters. Mondo and Sakura pulled Yasuhiro’s body up and carried him back to the balcony, Sakura then carefully removed the noose from his neck.

‘Well…’ I sighed, ‘We had better get on with the dirty work. Mondo, Sakura, will you guard the crime scene? We don’t want anyone tampering with the evidence’.

‘I will’, Sakura bowed, ‘I shall guard it with my life’.

‘I’ve got nothing else useful to do here I suppose’, Mondo pulled out one of the many knives from his coat and waved it around rather menacingly, ‘seriously though, if someone tries to mess with the crime scene, I will fuck them up real bad!’

‘Well let’s not waste anymore time’, I looked around at the others, ‘Celestia, Sayaka stick with me, the rest of you explore both the floors and the dorms. See if there is any sign of suspicious activity. Remember, the smallest details could mean the difference between life and death in this case, so keep an eye out!’

‘You heard her!’ Junko called out, ‘Let’s search this damn place already! Go on move it!’

‘My father never allowed a criminal to get away!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘And neither will his son!’ he left the balcony after the others.

‘We should first examine the body before we do anything’, I bent down over Yasuhiro’s corpse and slowly but surely began my investigation process, prodding and poking. Despite being alive hours before, his body was becoming increasingly colder. ‘Look!’ I examined his face, ‘Do you notice anything strange here?’

‘Well his eyes are almost completely closed for a start’, Sakura bent down, ‘If he was thrashing about in fright, I imagine his face would not be so relaxed’.

‘Indeed, he looks strangely calm, almost like his body was in an unconscious state when he was killed. If he was aware of his fate, I have a feeling there would be much more strain upon his face, and his eyes would be wide open from the terror too. Hanging isn’t exactly the most painless murder method either, so why would he look so relaxed during something so traumatic?’ I bent down and trailed a finger along the noose, ‘I wonder where the killer must have gotten this from?’

‘I think it will be worth checking the prop room. They had quite a few noteworthy things in there’, Celestia pointed out.

‘That’s what they are though right?’ Sayaka said, ‘They are just props, nothing more’.

‘Anything can be made into a weapon if you put your mind to it’, Mondo shrugged.

‘As much as I hate to say it, I agree’, Sakura bowed her head, ‘as I have sadly experienced, humans will resort to anything easy and convenient in order to achieve their selfish goals’.

‘Indeed, our killer might have gotten a little creative!’ agreed Celestia.

‘Celestia is right, I think it’s worth checking out’, I looked up, ‘Are you with me?’ Sayaka stared at me, ‘I take that as a yes. Well come on, what are we waiting for?!’
‘Good luck with your investigation lass’, Mondo told me, ‘we are counting on you!’

‘I trust that you will guide us down the right path in this investigation Kyoko’, Sakura bowed again.

‘Time is of the essence!’ Celestia beckoned us before we made our way down to the dressing room.

‘Hey over here!’ Sayaka ran behind one of the curtains, ‘I think somebody has been tampering with this rope, it even has some cheaper looking material attached to it to keep the curtains in place’.

‘Yes’, I lifted the heavy rope, ‘It looks like the rope at the crime scene and the one here are made of the same material too’.

‘It is strong stuff indeed’, Celestia gave it a tug, if it can hold up these curtains then it could probably hold up a person with no problem’.

I narrowed my eyes, ‘I think the killer just attached these temporary materials to keep the curtains in place, to not draw suspicion. Did you notice anything strange before the murder Sayaka?’

‘When Chihiro and I were in here for my first set of stage rehearsals, we didn’t notice anything peculiar. When I came back for a second round of rehearsals after taking a shower in my room, something did seem a little off. I didn’t think much of it at the time though’.

‘I see… Well let’s not dawdle, Monokuma will not wait forever you know’, I walked at a brisk pace back up to the balcony where Yasuhiro lay still and cold as ever while Mondo and Sakura continued to stand guard.

‘Are the pieces coming together ladies?’ Mondo asked as we passed by.

‘We are just getting started!’ Celestia answered.

‘We should investigate the first floor, that’s the most likely place the killer was operating’, I said as we entered the first floor corridor.

‘But where should we look? The killer could have been anywhere!’ Sayaka cried.

‘I have a hunch that we should check the art room. It had some interesting looking supplies in there’.

‘Do you think Mondo could have done it?’ wondered Sayaka, ‘He seemed pretty interested in those tools and I don’t think it would be beyond someone like him to use some of them as weapons’.

‘Wasn’t he with us during your concert?’, I frowned, ‘Besides even though Mondo is a scary fellow, I don’t think he is clever enough to pull off a murder quite like this’.

We made our way to the art room where we noticed Akira who was already investigating the scene.

‘Hey girls!’ he spoke in a childish sing-song tone, ‘You won’t believe what I found!’

‘Go on and tell us then!’

‘Okay then! You are getting warmer!’

‘We aren’t here to play your stupid games Akira’, I scolded him as I tried to locate his discovery.

‘Warmer… warmer… colder… warmer… warmer… you are so hot you are on fire right now!’

‘For goodness sake Akira just show us already!’, I was on the verge of pulling my hair out.
‘Here!’ Celestia was pointing at a spot on a large desk, “It looks like foundation or something. Whoever was working here must have left traces of it while they were carrying out their work”.

‘Remind me, who wears makeup?’ I pondered, “I know you two do, and Junko of course…”

‘So that narrows it down to three huh?’ winked Akira.

‘Not necessarily, this isn’t enough evidence to convict either of them. But it is worth noting down nonetheless’.

‘You don’t think I’m a suspect, do you?’ gasped Sayaka.

‘Yeah what’s your problem Kyoko?’ whined Celestia.

‘Look guys, I’m not trying to convict you. It could have been somebody else entirely. I just need to take in whatever odd details I can, since we don’t all die horribly by Monokuma’s paws’. I felt my stomach twist. Were these two girls truly capable of committing the heinous act of murder? ‘Of course, there is the possibility that the killer framed another to make it look like they are the culprit. Whatever the case may be, I am sure it will all come together in the class trial. Everyone will have an opportunity to give their side of the story’.

‘Indeed’, Sayaka bowed her head, ‘in the mean time we should just keep investigating. We can’t do much more than that’.

‘I can also see little bits of fibre here too. Of course, they could be leftovers from some of the textile materials in this room, but the place looked pretty clean when we first explored the place’. We made our way to the room with the crafting tools.

‘Wow check this out!’ Sayaka held up a saw.

‘Woah be careful with that thing now!’ grimaced Akira.

‘It’s alright’, I assured him, “It looks like it’s been worn down a lot. Look closer, I can see bits of fibre between the blades… well what’s left of them anyway’.

‘Are you suggesting that the killer used this to cut the rope we saw in the theatre?’ asked Sayaka.

‘Positive’, I uttered, ‘but why were there also rope particles on that desk too?’

When we finally stepped out we noticed that Aoi was taking interest in a large storage cupboard nearby.

‘Oh, hey guys! I don’t know about you, but my gut is telling me that there is something suspicious about this cupboard’.

‘Celestia rolled her eyes, ‘Are you really sure that a simple storage cupboard is a key to solving this mystery?’

‘You never know’, I looked up and down, ‘Like Mondo said, anything can be molded into a weapon if you put your mind to it. Quite a lot of these objects could make decent homemade murder devices’, I looked in Aoi’s direction, ‘So what do you think is suspicious about this Aoi?’

‘Well… I was helping Sakura find a protein shake earlier when I first searched here and I remember it being pretty well organised, even when we got what we wanted’, she pointed up at several drink packs which had been torn into, ‘but now it seemed like the place is cluttered. Whoever was in here
must have been searching quite frantically for what they wanted’.

‘Yes, it looks like someone has tampered around in here’. Peeping at the back of one of the other shelves was a cardboard box marked ‘!’, I carefully pulled it out before investigating the contents.

‘I definitely don’t remember seeing this’, Aoi told me, ‘It must have been tucked away pretty well!’

‘This is very fishy indeed’, I frowned, ‘it looks like this is stuff for the chemistry lab, assuming there is one here. The lab must have had so many supplies that they had to store some of them in here’, I picked up each bottle one by one and examined them closely. ‘None of these solutions will kill you instantly but they could do some serious damage’. Only one bottle interested me however, one marked ‘Chloroform’, ‘I think this one has been opened, the cork is looser and there is less content in here than the others. This stuff could knock you out pretty easily, even with a small dose’.

‘Didn’t they use chloroform as anesthetic a long time ago?’ asked Celeste.

‘That’s true indeed’, I held the bottle up at eyes length, ‘this is powerful stuff. It’s not much good as a poison but it’s ideal if you wish to drug someone’.

‘Do you reckon Yasuhiro was drugged then?’ asked Aoi.

‘It would make a lot of sense. When I examined his body, I noticed that his face seemed unusually relaxed and had a dazed look about it. Considering he was hanged, I imagine if he knew what he was going through his face would look a lot more different’.

‘And this was used to drug him, right?’

‘Positive, this will definitely be worth bringing up’.

‘You see! I told you I always trust my gut!’

‘Where should we search next?’ asked Sayaka.

‘I think we should check out the games room. You were there right Celestia?’

‘That would be correct! Leon was there too, but he was drunk as a skunk. I left early to go to bed’.

‘Why?’

‘I was just bored really’.

‘You left Leon alone?’ Sayaka rounded on her.

‘Yes, so what?’

‘Well if he was the murderer, he would not have to worry about getting caught by onlookers, would he?’

‘He was drunk, or at least a little tipsy. I really don’t think somebody that drunk could pull off an elaborate scheme like that’, I said, ‘I was honestly more concerned about him being a victim. In that state I don’t know if he could have pulled off much of a fight’.

‘It was foolish either way!’ scoffed Sayaka, ‘Can we trust you with anything at all Celestia?!”

‘Well excuse me princess!’ retorted Celestia, ‘Why would I want to spend the last moments of my life watching over a drunken bum?”
‘Cut it out already!’ I snapped, ‘That doesn’t matter right now. You can bicker about it after the trial’.

‘You’re right Kyoko, I’m sorry’, Sayaka said.

I stepped into the game’s room where Leon and Makoto were waiting, the former clutching his head in pain.

‘Fucking hangovers…’ grumbled Leon.

‘Yeah he looks pretty ‘pissed’ to me’, I put my hands on my hips.

‘Hey, I’m pretty sure you would be drunk off your ass too if you were in my situation’, Leon’s speech was indeed quite slurred and he was stumbling when he walked.

‘I think I have more ‘dignified’ ways of dealing with my problems Leon’, I said coolly, ‘however given the state you are in, I doubt you would have had the capability to commit a stealthy kill like the one we observed in the theatre’.

‘Don't take offence Leon’, Makoto told him, 'According to Kyoko you are one of the less likely suspects!'

'She could have put it differently...' Leon hiccuped.

'It's okay girls', Makoto sighed, 'I understand that in this situation you have a right to be inquisitive... we are doing this to save our skins after all'.

We left the games room. When the three of us reached the dorms we saw Byakuya who was slumped against the wall. Toko had obviously reversed back to her normal personality as she was not far off from him.

‘What do you think you are doing Byakuya?’ I crossed my arms, ‘Slacking off during the investigation are we?’

‘Don’t think that not participating will draw suspicion from you!’ Sayaka tapped her foot, ‘I wouldn’t be surprised if you killed Yasuhiro. You treat everyone who isn’t disgustingly rich as insignificant!’

‘Now now!’ Byakuya smirked, ‘There’s no need to start pointing fingers!’

‘Give us one good reason why we shouldn’t consider you a suspect!’ hissed Celestia.

‘Hey! Don’t you dare blame master!’ yelled Toko.

‘Shut up!’ Byakuya snapped at her.

‘Whatever you say master!’ Toko backed off.

‘That’s a very good question actually’, I frowned, ‘what were you doing this whole time? We didn’t see you at dinner and I don’t remember seeing you before the concert either!’

‘For your information I was in my room as I said I would be’, Byakuya explained, ‘I didn’t have a lot of peace though, I heard some truly awful music coming from one of the rooms next door’.

‘My music you mean?!’ Sayaka looked livid.

‘Just get to the point’, I said impatiently.
‘In the final hour before the time limit I was lying in bed simply drinking champagne. It’s family tradition, it’s what all members of the Togami family have done on their death bed’.

‘We will see about that’, I frowned, ‘I am going to need more proof, from what I know nobody else saw you today, so I am afraid it is necessary for this investigation’.

‘What are you going to do, torture information out of me?’

Ignoring him I told Celestia and Sayaka, ‘Keep an eye on him’.

I went to get the breath analyser from my room. When I presented it to Byakuya he looked astounded that I would use such a device on him.

‘You just have to breathe into this, it’s pretty simple’.

‘Are you treating me like a mere alcoholic?’

‘Just do it!’

Still looking affronted that I would consider such a thing, he stepped over and reluctantly breathed into the device.

‘It seems you were right all along’, I observed.

‘I still don’t trust you!’ Celestia glared at him.

‘You see, you should never judge a book by its cover!’ Byakuya shrugged, ‘Now bugger off will you?’ He looked behind us, ‘You too Toko!’

I turned round to see Toko who was peering from the girls bathroom quickly jump and hide herself away. At that moment I wanted to tell her to stop doing this to herself, as her second personality had suggested, but right now I did not have the time.

The three of us headed to the nearby disposal room where Chihiro and Kiyotaka were standing near a furnace. The trapdoor which we had seen in Akira’s video was now bolted tightly, but I paid little attention to it as I approached the two of them.

‘I found some evidence from the crime!’ Kiyotaka yelled, ‘Before we know it we will have them cornered!’

‘Yeah I have noticed something strange in here too’, Chihiro whimpered, ‘look just below the incinerator, Kiyotaka and I noticed some strange articles’.

‘This is peculiar indeed’, I knelt where I saw what seemed to be a small section of a thick rope, and a piece of cloth, both of which had obvious burn marks upon them as though they had detached from something that was engulfed in flames and dropped off as a result, ‘it seems our killer could have disposed of these objects but not done it properly’.

‘They must have gotten a bit too cocky!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘If we know one thing about the murderer, it’s that they are nothing more than a lowly coward!’

‘It seems they were in a hurry and got careless in the process. Instead of waiting for the incinerator to do its work, they decided to rush it and left all this evidence behind’.

‘Perhaps our killer wasn’t so smart after all…’ pondered Celeste.
‘Indeed, this is all very strange’, I got up, ‘at least we have more evidence on our side though, we need as much of it as we can get if we are to survive this thing’.

‘We will catch the killer red handed, you mark my words!’ Kiyotaka announced.

‘Won’t that make us killers though?’ Chihiro’s eyes filled with tears, ‘If we catch the blackened and condemn them to death, that will make us murderers too…’

‘Chihiro’, Sayaka bent down, ‘Monokuma, or whoever is controlling him, is the real killer in all of this. He forced us into this situation, it’s not yours or anybody’s fault we are stuck in this place’.

At that moment Junko strutted in as though she was on a catwalk.

‘You won’t believe what I found’, she clapped her hands, ‘this could be the deal breaker’.

‘What did you find?’ I asked.

‘Have you not heard of surprises Kyoko? Can you not wait until the trial? Besides haven’t you done most of the detective work anyway? You can’t hog all the glory you know!’ Junko pouted.

‘This isn’t about winning Junko’, I gritted my teeth, ‘this is a matter of life and death we are dealing with here. We are seeking out justice for a fallen friend, what kind of game is there in that?’

It was at that moment when that dreaded sound echoed across the building and we heard Monokuma speak once again.

‘Have you finished your investigation? Well too bad if you haven’t because it’s time for the very first class trial. Please gather on the ground floor besides the large red double doors on the ground floor!’

‘Come on, we had better get going!’ Sayaka looked around, ‘Otherwise we will all be in trouble!’

We did not have far to go as we saw everyone gathered by a set of red double doors which gave off a very unsettling aura. As I stared up at them I could feel all essence of hope in my body begin to drain, it seemed to have an effect on the rest of the group too as they either shuffled around nervously or stared blankly into space. Even the usually optimistic Makoto had an unusual look of great sadness about his face.

‘Are you okay?’ Sayaka asked me.

‘We just have to do it’, I said, ‘we have done all the investigating that we could. Now we just need to hope that we have enough evidence to catch the killer and survive this thing’.

‘Indeed it’s all we can do’, Junko agreed, ‘we will just have to go through whatever Monokuma throws at us’.

‘I’ve been in worse situations’, Mondo boasted, but I knew that even though he was better at hiding it, he was very afraid too.

Sure enough, coming from below we heard the clatter of something. The doors creaked open and an old-fashioned elevator stood before us.

‘Come on we cannot stick around here!’ Junko said before being the first to step into the mechanism.

‘We have a killer to catch!’ Kiyotaka was the second through, beckoning us to follow him.

The rest of us shuffled in. The haunting thought that there would be one less of us when we would
be allowed to return here chilled my bones, unless we were all killed horribly that is.

The steel doors shut behind us and soon enough the lift began to descend, down, down, down, taking us down into the blackness. As it did so Chihiro appeared to be hyperventilating. Sakura and Aoi tried to convince her to stay calm, but to little avail.

‘I wonder how far this goes?’ Akira looked down.

‘You scared Kyoko?’ Celestia murmured.

‘A little’, I shrugged.

‘Just think of it like a gambling match. The risk is great but the payoff if you win is even greater. It requires a lot of strategy which I am sure you will ace at’.

‘I guess…’ I stared down, ‘I suppose being to live another day in this game is pretty ‘great’ in itself’.

‘Hey what was that?’ Toko jumped in the air like a startled cat. I could understand why as an unnatural breeze seemed to wash over us briefly, like we had passed through some kind of invisible barrier.

‘That was weird’, I commented.

‘Look I can see light!’ cried Aoi.

Indeed, the lift clattered to a screeching halt before with a ding, the doors creaked open. When we walked out we noticed two silent figures dressed in black seeming to guard the way out.

‘Wow they are definitely taking this class trial thing seriously’, I looked around both in shock and awe. The architecture of the room looked medieval but unlike a lot of old fashioned buildings which wore away with time, the place looked pristine and grand. Elaborate gold carvings and statues lined the walls and the sixteen chairs which were in a neat circle.

‘Look!’ Sayaka pointed.

Upon one of the seats was what looked like a small shrine. There was a black and white photo of Yasuhiro surrounded by candles. Over the photo was a large red ‘X’. A chill ran through my spine. When I studied world history, I read that England was once struck by a terrible plague, and the houses of the infected would be marked by such a damning symbol.

‘Well it would be rude to not let him join in, wouldn’t it?’. On a platform overlooking all of us was Monokuma who had two more of his mysterious cronies dressed in black besides him.

‘Welcome to my home! It’s so good to be back! Little cubs, as I speak you are now in the Demon Realm!’

‘You mean Hell?’ asked Makoto.

‘Wow I wasn’t expecting to go to Hell this early!’ Mondo looked around bewildered.

‘That will be something to tell our families if we survive…’ Aoi agreed.

‘This is taking the term ‘School is Hell’ quite literally!’ laughed Akira.

‘If that’s what you mortals choose to call it, then yes, it is!’ Monokuma bared his teeth, ‘Don’t even think about escaping from this room, unless you want to be choked by ash and sulphur of course!’
‘How do you even survive in a place like this?’ asked Kiyotaka.

‘Well little cubs, I am in what you call the ‘crappy part’ of the realm. Basically, I caused so much grief for the demons that they ended up banishing me here, with no one to love me’ he pouted, ‘Until my beloved mistress summoned me at least!’

‘So not even the other demons could stand you?’ I raised an eyebrow, ‘Why am I not surprised?’

Monokuma seemed to brush me off as he gave us the nastiest of grins, ‘Please stand in your assigned places and we will begin shortly! I can’t wait! I can’t wait!’

We did as we were told, and it was at that moment when the first class trial began. Sooner or later, we would have to condemn one of our number to a terrible fate if the rest of us were to survive.
Class Trial 1

‘Well now you are all settled down we might as well make a start to this thing’, Monokuma prowled up and down upon his platform, ‘Think of this session like a class debate. When you have all given testimonies and evidence we will have a voting session to determine whodunnit! And you had better choose wisely, otherwise… well I explained what would happen earlier didn’t I?’ he laughed evilly. We didn’t think his laughter could get any worse, but in the demon realm it did.

‘Is that all?’ I asked taking my seat between Mondo and Sakura. I felt somehow protected having the two strongest students on each side, but I also lamented that muscle would be of no use here.

‘Pretty much! So first, little cubs there is the question of what weapon was used to bring about Yasuhiro’s demise’.

Kiyotaka announced, ‘One thing is certain! The murder victim is Yasuhiro Hagukure!’

‘It was a noose’, I told the bear, ‘those of us in the theatre tonight saw it happen. Before we knew it, he was dangling there from the theatre rafters. We all saw it clear as day don’t you agree?’, I looked around at the concert-goers and they nodded, ‘It is of my opinion therefore fair to say that those attending the concert have alibis’.

‘Ah’, Monokuma clapped his paws together, ‘narrowing the amount of potential culprits are we?’

‘Stop fucking around!’ Mondo snarled, ‘He was hanging right above us. How the hell would we be able to reach that high from where we were sitting?’

Makoto spoke, ‘Unless there was some kind of crazy mechanism in place, it’s most likely that the culprit was operating on the balcony above’.

‘You don’t exactly need a ‘crazy mechanism’ to hang someone’, brought up Junko, ‘all you need is some rope strong enough to hold up a human and you are good’.

‘Yes’, I nodded, ‘it is a simple method to kill someone, but as we saw in the theatre, very effective too’.

‘That’s what makes the murderer even more cowardly!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘When I inspected the rope at the crime scene, I discovered that it was made of some particularly strong stuff. That brings me to my next point…’

‘Are you suggesting that the rope used to hang Yasuhiro from the neck was in fact the same rope used for the theatre curtains?’ asked Monokuma.

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying. When I went to search the dressing room, Sayaka noticed that the rope had been tampered with’.

‘Indeed’, Celestia commented, ‘our killer seemed to replace the missing part of the rope with some other material to continue to hold the curtain in place. It would have been most inconvenient for the murderer if the stage was to collapse during their genius plan. It would have drawn suspicion from the others I’m sure’.

‘Yes, I saw it too’, Sayaka explained, ‘Chihiro and I were in the theatre for an hour to practice out with rehearsals. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary at that moment. I went to my room to take a
shower while Chihiro went for dinner. When we returned for our last set of rehearsals we both suspected that something seemed off. With the timer counting down to midnight however, we didn’t honestly think much of it at the time’.

‘It never occurred to me that something like this could even happen in the first place’, Chihiro’s eyes began watering again.

‘This is not the time to be sentimental’, Byakuya glared at her, ‘Still, either our killer is very clever, or you two are too stupid to notice anything significant!’

‘Excuse me!’ snapped Sayaka who was still disgruntled by Byakuya’s earlier ‘critique’, ‘Do you honestly think we were thinking straight and logically at the time?’.

‘You are one talk Byakuya. Who was the one slacking off again?’ I asked him coolly.

‘He could have been the one committing the crime for all we know!’ Mondo pointed at him, ‘Nobody saw him after breakfast. Ah ha! I think someone has been busted!’

‘I hate to burst your bubble Mondo, but I highly doubt that Byakuya is the culprit here’.

‘Use your common-sense lassie!’, Mondo protested, ‘He hates people like Yasuhiro and I, we are nothing but vermin to him. What makes you think that he won’t want to sacrifice one of us? It’s how his kind think! He thinks ridding the world of the poor is the solution to all the world’s problems!’

‘You leave master out of this you dog!’ Toko hissed.

‘Well of course you will defend him no matter what…’ Mondo groaned.

‘I hate to say it, but Kyoko is right’, Celestia intervened.

‘Indeed’, Sayaka bowed her head, ‘Turns out Kyoko has some pretty interesting gadgets at hand’.

‘I tested his breath earlier and it tested positive for alcohol. He must have been sipping champagne after all, that is also quite characteristic of his type’, I said.

‘Fine Richie Rich, I will let you off this time’, Mondo snorted irritably.

‘So where were we again?’ Makoto scratched his head.

‘Ah yes, the weapon!’ I remembered, ‘So we know that the same rope used to kill Yasuhiro was the same one used in the theatre. That brings us to our next point. It appears the killer was possibly making some little adjustments in the art room’.

‘What kind of adjustments?’ questioned Leon.

‘Well if you want to make a noose effective, you have to make sure it measures up to the size of the victim’, Junko explained, ‘There have been cases in which executioners have made the noose too short or too long, and the results were… a lot messier than what was intended’.

‘Indeed’, nodded Celeste, ‘but how did our killer manage to construct a weapon specifically designed to kill one specific individual’.

‘We know that the killer was most likely operating in the art room. The two girls…’, I indicated Celestia and Sayaka, ‘… Akira, and I noticed lots of little fibre bits in the room’.

‘Oh yes I remember!’ Akira clapped his hands together, ‘Then Sayaka waved a saw at me!’
'That saw wouldn’t have done any damage to you anyway’, Sayaka sighed, ‘somebody had worn it down so much that it is pretty much useless now’.

‘Indeed, it would have only been effective if you knocked someone over the head with it!’ laughed Celestia, ‘We discovered some of the same fibre between the blades too. Whatever the killer was cutting though must have put a lot of strain on the metal’.

‘Have you got any other evidence to prove that somebody cut the rope?’ asked Byakuya.

‘Ah ha!’ Kiyotaka yelled, ‘There was a piece of rope by the furnace which looked as though it had burned away from something else!’

‘Yes, I saw that too’, replied Chihiro.

‘But how did the killer get Yasuhiro’s proportions to cut the right sized rope?’ wondered Makoto.

‘That’s a good question actually’, I said, ‘Did any of you see Yasuhiro this evening? I spoke to him shortly before dinner’.

‘I saw him briefly too, about an hour before Sayaka’s concert when I was checking on Leon, he was clearly busy so I didn’t want to disturb him’.

‘What was he doing?’

‘Not much. He appeared to be looking into his crystal ball again’.

‘I saw Yasuhiro in one the classrooms at around 11:30. He was quite close to the art room and the theatre too, so I doubt the killer would have had to drag him that far’, Celestia answered.

‘So how could have the killer calculated all of that and murder Yasuhiro within half an hour?’ pondered Aoi.

‘That’s because they didn’t’, I replied, ‘they must have been preparing the rope before Sayaka’s concert, but how they did it… now that’s the tricky question…’ My question was soon answered.

‘Um…’ to everyone’s surprise it was Chihiro that answered, ‘I was exploring the whole handbook, because I was curious about the technology involved in such a device and… well… I came across profiles of all of you and…’ she gulped, ‘And they all list the height and weight of each of us’.

‘That’s an invasion of privacy!’ shrieked Junko, ‘I feel so violated right now!’

We pulled out our handbooks and indeed, all our stats were there. Height, weight and everything. Even though I was what one would call a ‘body positive’ person, I felt very uncomfortable at this revelation.

‘Oh no!’ Sayaka cried, ‘What if the paparazzi finds out?’

‘The body along with the mind, is what defines you as a person!’ Kiyotaka barked, ‘You should treasure them both no matter what’!

‘Well on the bright side, at least we know now’, Akira giggled, ‘how the killer was able to create this unique murder weapon that is!’

‘At least that part is covered’, Sakura looked up at the towering ceiling above us, ‘but how did the killer manage to commit the murder in such a short space of time?’
‘Indeed’, Byakuya smirked, ‘how did the killer manage to drag Yasuhiro to the theatre balcony without getting caught? There is also the question of how the murderer was able to string him up with such ease’.

‘Did any of you guys in the theatre hear any screaming from above at all?’ asked Leon.

‘Nope’, Akira explained, ‘even over the sounds of Sayaka’s music, if there was someone crying in distress at least one of us would have heard it. My ears are particularly keen and even I heard no such sound!”

‘You made some pretty interesting discoveries when you were examining the body didn’t you, lassie?’ Mondo told me, ‘You went on about Yasuhiro’s face being relaxed or something…’

‘Again, we have to refer back to the furnace’, I spoke, ‘for the rope fragment was not the only thing that was present besides it’.

‘Yes, there was also a piece of cloth in the room, it was rather foul smelling too’, Kiyotaka agreed.

‘That’s probably because it was covered in something, most likely chloroform’, I looked at Aoi.

‘Oh yes!’ Aoi raised a finger, ‘I followed my gut and I was convinced that this storage cupboard held the answer to many of my questions’.

‘What’s so special about an ordinary storage cupboard?’ asked Junko.

‘Well it’s like Mondo said’, I responded, ‘You can make anything into a weapon if you put your mind to it’.

‘That is correct lassie!’ Mondo nodded, ‘I don’t know how I would have gotten through my first years in the gang without getting a little creative sometimes. Before knives became my primary weapon, I used to love throwing Molotov cocktails! Sometimes I just did it because it was fun to watch the police panic and run like rabbits’.

‘You like to play with your food before you eat it I see!’, Kiyotaka barked.

‘Anyway… the point is, it’s really not all that difficult to make homemade weapons. It’s dead easy in fact, if you have all the necessary ingredients’, I explained, ‘The staff at my high school once had a field day trying to ban all sites giving recipes for weapons of this kind. That’s how severe the situation got’.

‘So, what caught your eye in there exactly?’ Monokuma asked, ‘I’m just dying to know!’

‘It seems that somebody left some chemistry supplies in there. Is there a chemistry lab somewhere in the university Monokuma?’

‘Well done little cub!’ Monokuma clapped his paws, ‘There is indeed a chemistry lab in the university somewhere. You just don’t have access to it… yet anyway!’ he winked.

‘When I was investigating the cupboard, I noticed a box that was full of solutions buried right at the back. One bottle was filled with chloroform but somebody had clearly opened it earlier. The cork seemed a little looser, and there was less liquid in that bottle than the others’.

‘That would explain why Yasuhiro’s face looked so relaxed when he died’, Sakura pointed out, ‘I’m no expert on such matters myself, but I’m sure that if he was conscious, there would have been a lot more strain and fear upon his face’.
‘His eyes were almost closed too’, Sayaka spoke, ‘like he was completely dazed or something’.

‘I think we can all agree that Yasuhiro was drugged before he was killed, making him much more vulnerable. The killer wouldn’t have had to worry about the victim struggling or making a sound either. That’s why we only noticed Yasuhiro’s murder after he was strung up. Now then… I suppose there is the question of, who?’ We all looked around at each other in silence, after a while I finally asked, ‘So remind me again, who around here has an alibi?’

‘Well there was everyone in the theatre, and Byakuya so that just leaves…’ Sayaka counted her fingers, ‘Toko, Celestia, Junko and Leon’.

‘Leon didn’t do it!’ Makoto rushed to his defence, ‘I know it!’

‘Feeling touchy, are we?’ tutted Byakuya.

Makoto cried out, ‘Just hear me out already!’

‘You are only defending him because you have feelings for him. You are a naive one after all Makoto’, Celestia intervened, ‘but I think you are right. I was with Leon before I left early to do my own thing. He was drunk too, as one would expect for a person of his character’.

‘Hey!’ Leon raised a finger.

‘Still, if Celestia’s testimony is true, then I doubt that somebody that drunk will be capable of committing a crime that calculated and stealthy’, I commented.

‘I saw him too before the concert and he was… not exactly sober’, Makoto explained.

Leon cried out, ‘I can’t help myself you know!’

‘I’m only doing this to save your skin!’

‘I see… well thank you I guess Makoto…’, he blushed.

‘Also, the table in which the killer was working had traces of foundation upon it. I would be hard pressed to believe that Leon would wear such materials’, I frowned.

‘I wouldn’t be caught dead in that stuff!’ Leon protested.

‘Wow somebody’s masculinity sure is fragile…’ Sayaka shook her head.

‘So… I suppose that rules out Leon then…’ my heart began to race, ‘there were three likely culprits and Celestia the girl who I had connected with the most, was one of them. Would I really have to send her to her death? Soon enough, my fears were realised’.

‘I think this will be a good time to reveal my piece of evidence, the key to all of this!’ announced Junko, ‘Behold… this!’ Before our very eyes, was a long ebony black hair, ‘I found this right at the crime scene, upon the balcony’!

‘Did you two see it?’ I asked Mondo and Sakura, they both nodded.

‘Junko went investigating in the balcony shortly after you three left the theatre’, Sakura told me.

‘I remember her crying out with joy when she found it’, Mondo recalled, ‘we asked what she had found but she refused to tell us. She discovered it right in the corner of the room’.
‘Well, well, well…’ Byakuya chuckled, ‘Looks like we have got this cat in the bag!’

‘Should we vote?’ suggested Aoi, ‘Surely our culprit is obvious at this point?’.

‘It’s true then, Celestia Ludenberg is the killer!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Wait!’ I shouted, ‘We still don’t know for certain yet!’

‘The hair was found in the far corner of the room, a place where I didn’t see Celestia during your investigation Kyoko’, Sakura bowed her head.

‘I understand you were close to her lass’, Mondo growled, ‘but right now our lives are at stake and if one of our friends has be sacrificed…’ he sighed, ‘well… shit happens I suppose’.

‘I’m serious! We still don’t know the full story yet! Celestia, Toko and Junko should have an opportunity to give their accounts at least’, I looked up at Junko, ‘since you brought this piece of evidence up first, I think it’s a good idea that you give your account first’.

‘I was in my bedroom like I planned earlier’, Junko recounted, ‘Unlike Byakuya however I didn’t plan on drinking until the first signs of gas appeared. I wanted to make it more symbolic that way you know, before I…’ she made a finger pistol.

‘I see… Celestia are you ready to give your account?’

‘I certainly am my dear! Simply put, I decided to rest in the lounge when I left the games room. On the way I bumped into Junko and we spoke to each other briefly’,

‘What are you talking about?’ snapped Junko, ‘I don’t recall that at all!’

‘Hey, I saw you, don’t you remember?!’ hissed Celestia, ‘Or are you just trying to cover your ass?’

‘You are just salty that I was willing to challenge you at the sleepover!’ Junko protested, ‘She is lying I tell you!’ Junko pointed a finger in her direction. ‘Celestia lives a life of deception and trickery, do you really think she can be trusted?!’

‘You can’t talk!’ when I looked at Celestia’s face she had the look of a cobra about to spit poison, ‘I am sure your massive fashion branch has its fair share of shady practices!’

‘My clothes are worn all over the world by influential women. How am I supposed to take somebody seriously who dresses up for Halloween every day?!’

‘Watch your tongue you preppy bitch!’

‘Holy shit it’s a cat fight!’ gasped Akira.

‘Ladies! Calm the fuck down already!’ Mondo looked dumbfounded at the standoff unfolding before us. Apparently, he was not used to such intense confrontations outside of his gangster lifestyle.

‘Please stop everyone…’ Chihiro spoke, ‘all this yelling scares me’.

‘This is getting really petty’, groaned Aoi, ‘let’s just finish off the trial already!’

‘Oh so, we have two conflicting accounts?’ Monokuma smiled with glee, ‘This is getting exciting!’

‘Um… will I be able to give my testimony?’ asked Toko.
‘Go on. I think Toko should be given the opportunity to give her side of the story before we go on making any decisions’, I said, ‘So, what have you got to say?’

‘I actually spoke with Celestia just before midnight’, Toko stared at her shoes, ‘I spent most of my time in the lounge you see. I saw Celeste and well… I didn’t want to die alone…’, she glared up at Celestia who looked utterly bewildered, ‘It’s not as though I like you or anything though!’

‘Even though Toko is such a simple creature I took pity on her. We didn’t talk much, as though I would like to hear more about that rich bastard. I see enough of his obnoxious face already!’

‘You take that back!’ Toko snarled.

‘It’s okay Celestia’, grinned Byakuya, ‘I don’t particularly like seeing your vampire face either!’

‘The point is, I was in the same room as her’, Celestia asserted, ‘That’s all that matters’.

‘Did you see her speak with Junko?’ I asked her.

Toko gulped before she nodded, ‘They bumped into each other in fact!’

‘Wait there must be some mistake… I was in my room I tell you!’ Junko cried out.

‘Sorry Junko but the evidence we have all gathered stands against you’, I declared.

‘What about the hair though?’ asked Makoto.

‘It only makes sense that Junko planted Celestia’s hair in the corner of the balcony to fool us. She must have obtained the hair while they were talking’, I answered, ‘I have a feeling that the ‘bumping’ was deliberate somehow’.

‘How could you do this to me?’ Celestia snarled, ‘I thought you were a leader. I didn’t particularly like you, but I at least had respect for you!’

‘She’s bluffing!’ scoffed Junko, ‘It’s what you’re best at after all isn’t it, you… witch!’

‘Oh please! I have been called that so many times that your words have no effect on me. What I am angry about is that you put your classmates in mortal peril. What do you have to say to that huh?’

‘How dare you!’

‘Again… I am so sorry about this, but everyone else has an alibi and you don’t. Toko was with Celestia at the time of the murder, therefore I find it hard to believe that she could be in two places at once’, I spoke.

‘What… this can’t be!’ Junko shrieked. She clutched her hair in her hands, causing her to look deranged.

‘It would be best if you stand aside. I have appreciated your presence among us, but I cannot allow my other friends to die in cold blood, especially for a murderer. Even if your motive had merits, it is still murder and you still put us all in danger. What do you have to say to that?’

‘Go on then Sherlock, why don’t you give the whole story. Then we will see if anyone believes you!’

‘Fine I will!’, I paused before giving my final verdict. My stomach felt like it was sinking, but I knew I had to do this to save my friends, ‘Here is what happened in this case!’
When most of the class were attending Sayaka’s concert, unknown to us, our killer was getting to work in the art studio. They were rather clumsy however as the keen-eyed Akira noticed traces of makeup on the table. Other members of the class wear makeup regularly however so we couldn’t come up with a definitive answer just yet. We know that Sayaka has an alibi since she was in her room getting ready, as confirmed by Chihiro who accompanied her throughout the day. Leon was drunk so it’s likely he wouldn’t have caught anything suspicious, which is why Celestia at first was a major suspect. I also don’t think somebody that drunk could have been able to set up such an elaborate murder plan.

While Sayaka was in her room getting ready, the killer grabbed a rope from backstage and tied some alternative materials to keep the curtains in place, to not draw too much suspicion. They then worked in the art room to determine a suitable length for the noose, using a saw to cut the rope. They most likely used Yasuhiro’s details from the student handbook to ensure a clean and quick kill. After dousing a piece of cloth with some chloroform taken from the storage cupboard, the killer left the room. On the way to the target, much to their dismay, they ran into Celestia who had come out of the games room nearby. While the two engaged in conversation the killer secretly took a hair from Celestia before the two separated and our killer tracked down the victim, Yasuhiro Hagakure in a nearby classroom. While Yasuhiro was caught unawares the killer drugged him from behind, causing him to become unconscious. This was more obvious as the storage cupboard looked untampered with to begin with, as mentioned by Sakura who went there previously to find a protein shake. The killer dragged the drugged-up Yasuhiro to the theatre balcony which was not far off.

The killer dropped Celeste’s hair in the room to frame her as the culprit. Thankfully for her and us, she met with Toko during this time, unknown to everyone else. Meanwhile our killer was getting ready for the ‘big show’, and grabbed the rope from the nearby art room. While we were all distracted after witnessing the murder, the killer disposed of the materials in the incinerator, but part of a drugged-up cloth was left over after the rest of it burned away, as well as a fragment of rope. This gave away more proof concerning the weapons used in the murder.

Being the Ultimate Fashion Designer means you are specialised in finding exactly the right measurements to fit. Doesn’t that make sense Junko Enoshima?!’

‘Okay…’ Junko sighed, ‘You got me... You might as well begin with the voting then huh?’ she glared up Monokuma, ‘Come on then you furball, let’s get this over with already!’

‘Why is she suddenly so eager for the voting to begin?’ Mondo whispered to me.

‘I don’t know’, I shrugged, ‘maybe she knows that her efforts are futile, especially as all the evidence is stacked against her’.

‘Still it seems odd nonetheless’, Sakura uttered before Monokuma finally spoke.

‘Wow Junko you are an eager one aren’t you!’ he laughed, ‘Well let’s not dilly dally!’ He held out one of his saucepan sized paws, ‘Let the voting commence!’

Suddenly we saw what seemed to be stone plinths rise from the floor. Upon each of them was a metal spike and a flat piece of slate.

‘So how do we do this?’ asked Makoto, ‘You haven’t provided us with a pen or anything’.

‘Ah, I should have explained’, Monokuma grinned, ‘You don’t need any pens for this, your blood is the ink here!’

Everyone cried out in protest.
‘Not to worry little cubs, you only need to sacrifice a drop or two. I trust you have had all of your shots! Unless you are one of those anti-vax weirdos. Anyway, it feels kind of like that, it’s just a little prick that’s all! The blood binds yourself to this procedure. Then all you have to do is write the culprits name on the slate and my magic will carry out the rest of the work.’

‘Do we really have to do this?’ Chihiro quaked, ‘I hate needles!’

‘So, it’s like a blood contract then?’ asked Sayaka.

‘Correctamongo!’ chuckled Monokuma.

‘This is some satanic ritual shit right here’, Mondo gasped, ‘But I am your leader, so I need to set an example here!’ With a wince, he pricked his finger on the spike and used it to write. As he did so a shiny golden residue remained where the blood had touched and stayed there. ‘What the fuck? This is insane!’ he gasped as the ‘ink’ then glowed before becoming a permanent mark in the rock, as though it had been carved with a chisel.

‘Go on it’s easy!’ Kiyotaka too winced as he pricked his finger on his own needle and began writing. Before I pulled off my glove to cast my vote, I rolled my sleeve down over my hand. Nobody needed to see what had become of it at this point in time.

Slowly but surely, we all did the procedure ourselves, even Chihiro who cried out in pain. For many of us however, the most amount of pain did not come from our bleeding fingertip, but internally, knowing that we were condemning one of our number to a terrible fate. Even if we survived this round it was likely that Monokuma would use another motive to convince us to commit murder again, and we would have to start this procedure all over again.

When the culprits name was carved into the rock with our blood, the plinths descended into the ground. The great bear then roared, and similarly to what I had experienced in my nightmare during the sleepover, seemed to create a great fireball using his paws. He pushed it into the centre of the circle, so we could all see it clearly. Looking closer I could see that it was forming into a shape, a humanoid shape. Before us in fire form, stood Junko Enoshima. The real Junko had her mouth open wide, the resemblance was truly uncanny.

‘So, this is your choice little cubs? You believe Junko Enoshima to be the culprit?’

Only Kiyotaka replied, ‘Yes’, while the rest of us nodded in silence.

‘Very well then! It has been decided!’ he clapped his paws together and the fiery image of Junko burnt out, leaving only a pile of ash behind. The bear to our surprise leaped from his plinth as though he was flying over us, yet landed without a sound. He then prowled around the inner circle, staring at each of us hungrily and licking his chops, ‘Will I get to eat today? Will I get to eat today?’ he uttered as the rest of us stood frozen, like a deer in the headlights, ‘I haven’t eaten anything good in a while after all. Just some crappy fish, berries and the occasional seal. I could do with sweeter meat… more tender… more young!’

‘Just fucking get on with it already!’ Leon cried out in an unnaturally high-pitched voice.

Finally, the bear sat down in the very centre of the circle and upon his hind legs, gave a slow clap, looking rather peeved as he did so, ‘Alas… it will not be today…’ he bowed his head, ‘you have done well little cubs, our culprit is indeed Junko Enoshima’.

‘So… what is going to happen now?’ Junko asked.

‘Well, you will have the opportunity to give your final goodbyes and then we can begin with the
punishment! So Junko, do you have any last words?’

‘Not much really’, Junko sighed.

‘Why did you do it?’ I rounded on her, ‘What if this time limit was indeed just a scare tactic by Monokuma?’

‘I couldn’t take any chances’, Junko bowed her head, ‘As they say, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, and sometimes sacrifices need to be made’.

‘Why Yasuhiro of all people though?’ questioned Mondo, ‘I would understand perfectly if you selected me. A lot of people want me dead! But why him?’

‘He was a good cook too’, Chihiro was tearing up.

‘I don’t really know why I selected him of all people, I just did…’

‘You just did huh? Really?’ Celestia said coolly, ‘Are you messing with us?’

‘No… well I suppose he was a little easier to kill… I imagine the rest of you would have put up a fight. Yasuhiro was fixated on that crystal ball of his when I drugged him’.

‘It’s true then, you are a coward!’ Kiyotaka snapped.

‘I guess you can call it that I suppose…’

‘Still…’ Sayaka sighed, ‘As much as I hate to say it… if Monokuma was indeed serious about his plan, she did save the rest of us, even if she committed a heinous act to do so’.

‘That has to be taken into consideration’, Sakura spoke, ‘but nevertheless I feel dishonoured knowing that our lives were saved by one of our number spilling the blood of another’.

‘Well you won’t have to feel dishonoured for too long Sakura, I will be taken to my death soon enough. And you will all get to carry on without me’.

‘We will have to carry on without Yasuhiro too though’, Chihiro sobbed.

‘Alas for better or worse, I have done my bit. Girls, I hope you will be able to carry on without me. I know I did not turn out to be the best leader in the end, but I hope my little sleepover inspired you to stay motivated and unified. Morale is always crucial in a dark situation, and I hope that you will be inspired to follow it’.

‘I suppose that is all we can do’, I hung my head.

‘I just hope there are no more killings’, Aoi looked unusually depressed.

‘Oh, there will be little cubs, don’t you worry!’ Monokuma winked.

‘Not if I can help it!’ Junko stood in front of him, ‘I may be gone but I hope that I will be able to inspire some degree of hope for those still living. My fashion brand has empowered millions over the world, I hope I will be able to inspire you lot too’.

‘Well your words had better provide some merit, for it is almost time for your punishment’.

‘You might as well get on with it’, Junko stared the great bear down, ‘I cannot think of anything else I have to say’.
‘Very well. We shall begin! Please step into the centre of the circle!’

At that moment a spherical carving on the floor lit up. Junko walked towards it, as though she was heading towards a firing squad. The moment she stood still, metal spikes rose up from the floor around her, trapping her in a makeshift cage.

‘Now I have prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Fashionista, Junko Enoshima!’

‘Just get on with it furball’, murmured Junko.

‘The time has finally come at last. It’s punishment time!’ Monokuma roared.

The sphere appeared to be a panel, as before our eyes, the iron cage and it’s prisoner seemed to descend into the floor.

‘Follow me to see the show little cubs!’ Monokuma directed us to the elevator. When we stepped inside we recognised that there were even more floors below this one, around fifteen of them in total. When we were all inside the elevator door shut behind us and we descended downwards. We stopped about two floors down from the courtroom.

When the door finally opened, a bright light fell before us. Soon we realised that we were in a glamorous fashion studio. A huge camera was placed onto the wall and there was an elaborate chair in the centre of the room. It didn’t take us long however to realise that there were restraints on each side, making it look eerily similar to an electric chair.

‘I was expecting to see some weird shit in Hell but not this!’ Mondo gasped.

‘It looks like she is in for a zapping’, Byakuya laughed.

‘Shut up!’ snapped Sayaka, ‘She doesn’t deserve this. Nobody does, no matter what!’

‘Are they really going to do it here of all places?’ asked Aoi, sweat dripping down her face.

Chihiro looked like she was close to vomiting again, so Sakura pulled her close, ‘I won’t let you see this. Just look into my eyes okay!’ Chihiro nodded as Sakura bent down to her level.

‘What is this?!!’ Kiyotaka jumped back in alarm.

A neon sign had descended from the ceiling. When we comprehended the situation, we noticed that the letters flashing up read, ‘Execution for the Ultimate Fashionista Junko Enoshima: Picture Perfect’.

Through a door we saw Junko being dragged by two of the figures in black. To our surprise, she seemed to be struggling to break free and was protesting loudly compared to her relatively calm attitude earlier.

‘Let go of me! This is not what we agreed to!’ she cried out as the two figures strapped her in the chair, ‘There must be a mistake! It wasn’t supposed to be this way!’

‘What’s going on? She seemed strangely confident about it just a few minutes ago’, I observed.

‘Maybe the reality of her situation finally hit her’, Celestia answered as the figures in black tied the last of the ropes and retreated, ‘Knowing that you are going to die is an especially troubling thought. Perhaps she was containing her anxiety and she just couldn’t keep it in anymore’.

Junko continued to scream before the ‘punishment’ had even started, and the sound would continue
to haunt our nightmares during our stay at the University of Despair.

‘What the Hell?!’ cried Makoto.

Before our very eyes, strange shapes seemed to fall from the ceiling. When I looked closer, they appeared to be giant versions of emoticons that would appear on a mobile phone app. As they fell down, the room changed different colours and tones as the giant camera began to shoot. Giant metallic rainbows, accessories, emojis, hearts, flowers and animal faces all began to fill up the room and we looked on helplessly as Junko was being caved in.

Finally to top it all off, an even bigger emoticon, one depicting a chibi face of Monokuma, fell right above Junko. She did not have time to scream, all we heard was the sickening crunching of bones as the grotesque structure fell upon her, crushing her underneath. When the dust had cleared all we could see through the rubble was a delicate hand with red nail varnish upon it, giving one last twitch.

‘Well, it looks like the deed is done!’ Monokuma grinned nastily, as he manifested behind us.

‘We were murderers!’ Chihiro sobbed, ‘We condemned her to death, we are her killers!’

‘No Chihiro we are not the killers here, this demon got us in this situation!’ Sakura glared up at the bear, ‘How can you make us do this and then watch as…’ For the first time, she looked truly terrifying. The look of pure rage which I had never seen in the usually calm and collected girl was unforgettable, ‘We will put a stop to this!’ she growled, ‘No matter what, we will put an end to this madness!’

‘I wouldn’t get so hasty now Sakura, otherwise you will get more than what you bargained for!’ Monokuma unsheathed his claws.

‘You want to try me?’ Sakura raised her fists, ‘You may have bested me in battle earlier Monokuma, but I have other ways of getting around you’.

‘Hey! Don’t get so cocky now!’

‘I’m not doing this for myself, I’m doing this for my friends’, her eyes softened very briefly when she looked in Aoi’s direction, ‘There will be no more killing! I won’t allow it!’

‘I’d be careful if I were you’, the bear showed off his teeth, ‘mortals like you don’t want to go mess with a demon. I will mess with you right back!’

‘We will see about that…’, Sakura backed down but that fire in her eyes was ever present.

‘Right then! You had better head off back to the campus little cubs. I’m very much looking forward to part 2, but I haven’t decided a motive yet! In the mean time feel free to do whatever you see fit’, Monokuma laughed, ‘You had better head off to bed first though. I’m sure this whole class trial has made you all very sleepy!’

In an ordinary situation we would have been begging to rest, but at the University of Despair, getting a good night’s sleep was truly a challenge. When we finally stepped back into the elevator Monokuma waved with one of his great paws, ‘Good night little cubs! Sweet nightmares!’

And that was the last time we heard his horrible laugh for a while, at least until he gave us his next motive.
We did not go to bed straight away after the class trial, at least most of us. Byakuya and Toko unsurprisingly didn’t join us and Chihiro who was feeling nauseous went to bed early. The rest of us worked in the art room constructing makeshift memorials for our fallen friends using a variety of old craft materials. While some questioned the idea of providing a murderer with a mark of respect, we came to realise that something so heinous most likely wouldn’t have happened outside of this sick ‘game’.

One may be wondering, ‘What happened to Yasuhiro’s body?’. When we went to investigate the theatre, the body had vanished entirely as though nothing had happened. It was almost as if Yasuhiro didn’t exist, but Sakura insisted that he and Junko remained with us in spirit.

After placing the memorials outside of Yasuhiro’s and Junko’s respective rooms, we held a minute of silence before we finally went to bed. We hoped this would be the last time that we would have to hold this ritual but deep down we knew that this was not to be. As was expected we did not sleep soundly that night. Makoto and Leon shared bedrooms, so did Sakura and Aoi. Others like Mondo spent the night alone. While most of us went to bed clearly shaken up, Mondo had the look of an old circus tiger about him, as if he was used to situations like this. Celestia followed me into my room. We then snuggled together as though we were small burrowing animals keeping each other warm while an unforgiving blizzard raged outside. We didn’t talk too much but I felt much safer with her at my side, nonetheless.

“You really need to consider having an aesthetic’, I heard Celestia murmur as I woke up the next morning.

‘There won’t be much point if we have to murder each other’, I sighed. The image of Junko’s twitching hand, was still embedded in my mind.

‘Oh Kyoko, just because we are in a horrible situation doesn’t mean you can’t do a little bit of renovation from time to time!’

‘Are you the little spoon again Celeste? I feel like you have a preference!’, I teased her.

‘I must admit that I do… it’s just that… I was always the little spoon back when I was with her, so I’ve assumed that position ever since’.

‘That’s cute. Are you ever going to tell me her name?’

‘She went by many names, too many to count in fact! But I just called her ‘the white fox’, it was what we in the gambling circles referred to her as since she never disclosed her real name. She had hair as white as snow, yet she was cunning and full of determination!’

‘If you don’t mind me asking, is your name not real either?’

Celestia shook her head, ‘When I started to refer to myself as Celestia Ludenberg, it marked a new dawn for me. Those in the gambling community were filled with fear and awe when they first heard it. As though I would keep my miserable birth name!’

‘You certainly have a point! To be honest if I was part of some underground system, I would probably want to change my title too’, my laugh faltered, ‘So what do you think is going to happen now Celeste?’
We will just have to wait and see won’t we!’ We got ready together before we slowly headed down to the dining room. On the way we bumped into Sayaka. To my surprise her eyes looked very bloodshot.

‘Hey Sayaka!’ I waved in her direction, ‘Rough night?’

‘I suppose you could say that’, she yawned, ‘what about you guys?’

‘We made it’, Celeste grinned.

‘Hey, do you know where Sakura and Aoi went?’ we saw Chihiro running up to us.

‘Are you feeling better Chihiro?’ I asked her.

‘A little I suppose… I wish I could have joined you for Yasuhiro’s and Junko’s memorial service, but I was so shaken up from last night I…’

‘Don’t worry about it’, Sayaka reassured her, ‘I’m sure if the two of them were alive they would understand completely’.

‘Yeah, I guess… I still feel bad though…’

When we approached the dining room, Chihiro made a beeline towards Aoi and Sakura.

‘Did you guys sleep alright?’ questioned Aoi.

‘With some difficulty…’ Celestia stretched.

‘Us too’, Aoi stared down at her cereal, and picked at it with her spoon, ‘But I had Sakura with me, so I got through alright! Still I hope we can uncover who Monokuma’s mistress is before anymore killings happen. Then Sakura will kick her ass for sure!’

‘You are too optimistic’, Sakura blushed, 'but yes, I hope we can eventually bring this individual to justice, in one way or another’.

‘Just imagine having Sakura’s muscular arms wrapped around you!’ Sayaka whispered, blushing slightly, ‘Aoi is one lucky girl!’

‘Feeling a little jealous?’ winked Celestia.

‘No… But if she ever asked me out, I wouldn’t say no’, Sayaka shrugged, ‘I have always kind of liked big girls. Still… I think her and Aoi are pretty cute together!’

‘Hey ladies, did you sleep well?’ Mondo was once again seated with a large coffee pot in hand, ‘Holy shit Sayaka you look dreadful! What have you been smoking?’

‘Like you can talk…’ scoffed Sayaka, ‘I can smell your cigarette breath from here!’

‘I cannot allow this to go on!’ he grunted, ‘My leadership skills were unmatched before this shitshow, now two of my fellow classmates are dead’.

‘Or maybe you are just a terrible leader…’ murmured Celestia.

‘Don’t test my patience lass’, he took a large swig from the pot, ‘I need to up my game if I want to remain at the top, otherwise everything my brother and I worked for will mean nothing’, He glared in the direction of Kiyotaka who had just entered the room and was in the process of scolding Leon for
a seemingly minor misdemeanor, ‘Even within the gang you have to watch out. If you display any signs of weakness as a leader you could be in some serious trouble!’

‘Life isn’t about being top dog all the time you know’, I said.

‘You are an intelligent lassie Kyoko, but you have to live the gang life in order to truly understand it’, Mondo took out a cigarette from his pocket, ‘One slip up in my position and I will end up going the same way as Julius Caesar!’

‘Sounds like you need to get new friends Mondo’, Sayaka shook her head.

When we got up to get our food Sayaka asked us, ‘Do you reckon he has any proper friends? You know, ones who are not part of a scary biker gang? Ones who won’t judge you if you show a little vulnerability? I feel kind of sorry for him…’

‘Who knows…’ I sighed, ‘… he couldn’t have had the best start in life if he ended up being brought up in such a way’.

‘Hey guys!’ Makoto waved at us, ‘Leon and I did a little exploring earlier. A new section of the school has been opened up!’

‘Really?’ cried Sayaka.

‘Yeah. I mean it’s not much different to the other floors but there are certainly some interesting rooms up there too. You should see for yourself. This place is insane I tell you!’

‘When we have eaten, we will have to check it out for ourselves won’t we girls?!’

‘Indeed’, I nodded, ‘you up for some more exploring Celeste?’

‘Fine! But it had better be good!’ she began preparing some of her favourite rose tea.

When we finished breakfast, we made our way up to the first floor where indeed, a new stairway had opened. With both intrigue and fear we ascended. One of the first rooms we came across was labelled ‘Physics Lab’.

‘This is definitely rocket science!’ I gazed around the room to see many large machines whirring away. Similarly to the art room there were many work benches except this time, most of the materials were metal. The biggest machine in the room reached up to the ceiling and read ‘air purifier’.

‘I wonder if this thing provides air to the whole school?’, I looked up and down at it.

‘Hey watch this!’ Sayaka placed her hand upon a metallic ball, which caused her hair to stand up, ‘This hairstyle looks like it will be great for a spooky aesthetic at my shows. No stylist required!’

‘Honestly Sayaka… it just looks like you have been struck by lightning’, Celestia rolled her eyes.

‘Wow girls come and see this!’ I pointed at a flight simulation machine.

‘Oh my God!’ squealed Sayaka, ‘This place has everything! Can we try this thing out?’

‘Go ahead you miserable child…’, Celestia huffed before the three of us climbed into the machine.

‘Buckle up girls, we have a long journey ahead of us!’ Sayaka pressed a large green button on the dial. The doors closed, and footage appeared on the would-be windows, to make it look like we were flying over a wide-open ocean.
'Do you reckon we will ever be able to go outdoors again?' I asked. Celestia and I didn’t say much while Sayaka simulated diving, spinning and looping through the air. When we stepped back into the lab, and into reality we decided to explore the new floor further.

‘Wow this sure looks interesting, I always loved visiting museums as a kid’, I stared up at two large oak double doors. Encrusted in gold upon them, were the letters ‘Museum of World and Natural History’, ‘My primary school class once had a sleepover in one. I remember some of the boys getting scolded for making dinosaur noises’.

‘I used to think the exhibits would come to life at night when no one was around’, joked Sayaka.

‘I didn’t see any exhibits come to life, although at the museum I frequented ghosts were said to travel around the corridors. One of the antique dolls was also rumoured to stare at guests whenever they passed by her, it was probably just a trick of the light though’.

‘Okay that’s creepy’, remarked Celeste.

‘After you!’ I opened the doors and it turned out that we had several choices of where to explore, but we decided to visit the prehistoric exhibits first. We came across Mondo who was staring up at a life size model of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. It towered over us and its teeth were even longer than Monokuma’s.

‘Weren’t these things just supposed to be giant chickens or something?’ he stared up at the beast, ‘Either way it doesn’t scare me in the slightest!’

‘You probably wouldn’t want to say that to its face’, I pointed out.

‘Oh please, nothing can beat me!’ As soon as he had his back turned to it however, the creature seemed to come to life and let out a deafening roar.

‘Holy shit!’ Mondo jumped back in fright, startled. We looked behind the model to see Chihiro waving at us, shortly after having pressed a large button.

‘This must be some kind of animatronic’, I commented, ’Pretty impressive…’

‘Chihiro you little shit!’ Mondo panted, ‘You made me jump right outta my skin!’

‘Aww is the big, bad gang leader scared?’ Aoi who appeared from nearby cooed.

‘Shut up…’

‘Hey guys!’ Sayaka waved, ‘Good to see you both here. Where is Sakura?’

‘She’s just exploring the armoury, she took a great interest in the Samurai stuff. I don’t blame her really, it was pretty cool!’

‘There’s an armoury here? Where?!’ Mondo looked around wildly.

‘Come on we will show you!’ Aoi beckoned us all forwards.

We passed by many large dinosaur skeletons looming over us before we reached the natural history section, where I took interest in a small exhibition room next to it.

‘Hey, come and see this’, I told the group, we looked around at the curious specimens including a frozen mammoth calf in a sub-zero display case. I read the golden plaque nearby, ‘Samples of all specimens here have been taken for the purpose of the Hope’s Peak de-extinction programme’.
‘Some Jurassic Park shit is going on here!’ Mondo exclaimed.

‘Do you reckon they will actually be able to bring back these creatures?’ gasped Aoi who was staring at what seemed to be a mummified dodo head.

‘It will be difficult’, I explained, ‘DNA breaks down over time until there is nothing. This project might work with some of the more recent specimens, but those are not terrifying primeval monsters. While a part of me wishes for these creatures to return, another part of me is glad they are gone’. I had my eyes fixed on a large tooth marked ‘Megalodon’. The creature it once belonged to could probably tear even the largest of whales to pieces.

‘You don’t reckon they have these creatures in the school, do you?’ Chihiro gulped, ‘What if Monokuma sets one of them loose on us??’

‘Let’s hope that will not be the case’, Sayaka laughed, ‘I mean… I highly doubt they would keep a large, dangerous predator locked up in a school, right?’

‘I wouldn’t put it past them…’ Mondo growled, ‘This place is fucked!’

We carried on through the natural history section which consisted of skeletons, including one belonging to a small whale. There were many stuffed animals too, the majority of them being birds, their weather-beaten feathers were probably much brighter and more colourful when they were alive.

Finally, we approached a sign which read ‘Armoury this way’. We followed it and met with Sakura who seemed very intrigued by a Samurai suit of armour. All around, in display cases, upon the walls were weapons of all shapes and sizes, from all over the world and from the whole of human history it seemed. We also spotted Kiyotaka who was gazing up at a large samurai sword.

‘Wow Mondo probably should watch out!’, Celestia whispered to me.

‘Hey Sakura! Has anything been happening since we left?’ Aoi asked the muscular girl.

‘Not much’, she turned to face her companion, ‘Although I did see Byakuya in here a few minutes ago. He was taking interest in an old dagger that once belonged to his family. I noticed the Togami family crest straight away. Even in the mountains where I spent most of my life, that name is not unheard of’.

‘The Togami name must have been around for centuries’, Aoi stared at the display case where indeed, a gold dagger was placed. It was in pristine condition and still looked sharp. The Togami crest was etched into the hilt and glistening.

‘Indeed’, Sakura nodded, ‘The Togami family was significant throughout many parts of history, their most recent noteworthy achievement being providing the funds to build this very university shortly after the Second World War. That would probably explain the contribution of this family heirloom’.

‘Holy shit! I have never seen so many knives in my life! Just look at all you little beauties!’, Mondo was gazing at one of the pull-out cabinets, which contained many knives with elaborate carvings.

‘Seriously Mondo have you got like… a knife fetish or something?’ asked Aoi.

‘No…’, Mondo quickly shut the cabinet.

‘What is this I am hearing?!’ Kiyotaka shouted.

‘Come on Taka, everyone has some kind of kink even if they don’t want to admit it!’ Celestia
winked.

‘I know… it’s just that knifeplay of any kind is very dangerous!’

‘I told you I’m not into…’ Mondo raised a finger, his face turning red.

‘Hey now, there’s no need to kinkshame!’ Celestia shrugged.

‘Um… don’t you think this could be a perfect armoury for the killing game?’, Sayaka raised an eyebrow.

‘I don’t think so’, I explained, ‘Most weapons get sharpened down before they get put on display and the ones that are still sharp are in high security cabinets, like the Togami dagger here. Even the most skilled lockpicker would have trouble breaking into them I imagine’.

‘Well my lock picking skills reached level 100 when I last played Skyrim!’ Chihiro beamed.

‘This isn’t a video game you know…’ Celestia tutted.

‘And even if you did break in, I don’t regard you as much of a threat Chihiro’, Mondo patted her on the head, ‘Surely a lassie small and sweet as you wouldn’t dream of handling such a weapon? You might hurt yourself!’

‘Chihiro is not weak!’ Aoi snapped, ‘You seriously need to stop putting her down like this! What kind of leader are you, huh?’

‘No Aoi, it’s okay’, once again Chihiro’s self-esteem looked crushed.

‘Wow check this out!’ Sayaka pointed at a small crossbow which was behind a high security display case. The mechanism was made of jade while the wooden limbs and grip were made from bamboo.

‘Apparently this weapon was once owned by a Chinese Warrior who killed over 1000 enemy troops, or so they say’, Sakura told us, ‘According to ancient rumour, when he was captured the enemy respected his ferocity on the battlefield so much that they let him choose his own execution. As the warrior loved his crossbow so much, he desired to have one of the enemy soldiers shoot him with it, so his wish was respected. Of course, it could merely be an urban legend’.

‘That’s so fucked up but pretty badass in a way too!’ Mondo gasped.

We spent most of the time exploring the museum, where we came across numerous artifacts, mostly from Japan but there were plenty of objects from all over the world including some elaborate Ancient Egyptian Jewellery, a whole suit of elephant armour from India and a large totem pole from Canada. We also passed by Akira who was fascinated by some clockwork automatons from 18th and 19th century France, and was clearly looking for some inspiration.

After spending a long time admiring all these astonishing historical objects however, we eventually grew hungry and trudged back to the dining hall for lunch. After waving Sayaka off, Celestia and I decided to spend some time in the games room, this time without the threat of incredibly poisonous gas looming over us. To our surprise Makoto was sitting at the bar, alone.

‘Hey Makoto, where is Leon?’ Celestia asked him.

‘Um… he left early. He’s just a little worked up after the trial so he’s getting a little rest'.

Celestia and I took some drinks from behind the bar and sat down besides him.
'If you don’t mind me asking, how did you get to know Leon? How could an average Joe like you get to know someone that prominent in the sports industry?'

'Well despite not going to the same high school, we didn’t live all that far away, and we often bumped into each other as a result. After I began attending his matches, he started to offer me free tickets for my dedication!'

'So, it was like a celebrity crush then?'

'I suppose so, but there were times when he just wanted to live a normal life. In his heart I could tell that despite being very talented, he was burnt out after being expected to please the crowd constantly. He loved just kicking back, laughing and having a drink. To him, I was his connection to the non-celebrity world and that’s how we eventually bonded'.

'Clearly fame isn’t all it’s cracked up to be’, I took a sip from my drink.

'That’s why I prefer the underground lifestyle’, Celestia commented, ‘the entertainment industry has always been so artificial. You don’t have to sacrifice your sanity to gain riches in my society’.

'You have a point I guess’, sighed Makoto.

'Yeah’, I said, ‘When I was younger, I was upset that I could never match the image of the girls in anime shows and magazines. When I asked her about dieting, my mother told me that I was beautiful in my own way and to ignore peer pressure from the media’.

'I remember my younger sister having similar worries. It’s all absurd really! I mean which girl, even ones like Sayaka can reach that so-called ‘ideal’ image? You would end up becoming a human doll!’

'I see you two have been working on your feminism!’ winked Celeste.

We continued to talk until around 8pm when the three of us went down for dinner. On the way down, we bumped into Toko who had a wide grin across her face.

‘What’s going on Toko?’ I raised an eyebrow.

‘Oh boy! It’s all going down in the dining room!’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Makoto.

‘I love seeing boys fight!’ Toko giggled, ‘Almost as much as I love master!’

‘Oh crap… I think I know what might be going down’, Makoto clapped his hands to his mouth.

‘We should put out this spark before it becomes a forest fire!’ I quickened my pace.

When we reached the dining room, we saw Mondo and Kiyotaka circling each other like lions over a carcass. Both had their fists raised, a glint of brass shining from the knuckles of the former.

‘What the Hell is even happening?’ my jaw dropped.

‘Your leadership has been a disgrace Mondo Oowada!’ Kiyotaka yelled, ‘I cannot allow myself to stand and watch any longer!’

‘You are one to talk!’ Mondo snarled, ‘Your family has quite the reputation doesn’t it!?'

‘I will restore the honour of the Ishimaru name! I will defeat you!’
'Is that a challenge?' Mondo growled.

'If that’s what you call it, then yes!'

‘In the gang if somebody ever had the balls to challenge my leadership, we would usually have a fight to the death’, Mondo shrugged, ‘of course nobody has ever challenged me before, so the fact that you have the nerve to challenge me is… admirable really’, his cheeks turned pink, ‘but no matter, lets finish this now!'

‘Alright then let’s do this!’

‘Wait a second you two!’ I jumped in between them.

‘Kyoko get out of the way!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Look guys, I’m not intending to disrespect your way of life, but if one of you ends up killing the other, you do know we will have to have another class trial, right? The killer will also be obvious so, you will both end up losing’.

‘You have a point I suppose lass’, growled Mondo

‘Yes, we need another idea!’ barked Kiyotaka.

‘How about an endurance contest?’ winked Celestia, ‘It’s something that will suit big, strong men like you I’m sure!’

‘Yeah that’s a good idea, but where will such a contest take place?’ frowned Mondo.

‘I know an ideal place!’ suggested Kiyotaka.

‘Where exactly?’

‘I challenge you to an endurance contest in the sauna!’

‘Well what are you waiting for! Let’s go!’

‘Wait, won’t you guys need judges?’ questioned Makoto.

‘That’s a good point actually’, I nodded, ‘It is a contest after all’.

‘But if we are in the sauna won’t we be… you know?’ questioned Mondo.

‘Girls sharing the same room as boys? Preposterous!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Kyoko and I prefer women anyway, so you won’t have worry about us gawping’, Celestia shrugged, ‘besides we could always sit outside while Makoto acts as observer’.

‘Okay girls’, Mondo said, ‘You two can observe, but purely in a competitive way. Besides Kyoko would make a pretty decent judge, as was proven last night’, he bowed his head.

‘Then it is settled!’ Kiyotaka clapped.

‘Let’s do this shit!’ Mondo roared.

The spa and sauna were located opposite the dining room. When we entered, we were greeted with a large sitting room, surrounded by lockers.
‘Makoto could you fetch some towels?’ Mondo asked.

‘Right away!’ Makoto saluted before presenting them.

‘Thank you, Makoto. Ladies, we are going to need you to look away for a second…’

‘Okie dokie!’ I replied as Celestia and I averted our eyes.

‘Okay you can look now!’ We turned to see Mondo and Kiyotaka wearing nothing but a towel around their waists. I was not surprised seeing Mondo’s muscular structure but all of us in the room, including Mondo were shocked when we saw Kiyotaka’s body for the first time.

‘Holy shit! You are fucking ripped! I clearly underestimated you’, Mondo then smirked, ‘But still… a greater challenge means greater fun!’ I noticed he had many more scars across his body, some more severe than others. He had clearly not been exaggerating when he talked about his rough gang lifestyle.

‘I value my body very much’, laughed Kiyotaka, ‘Working out helps to keep yourself and your spirit healthy, ensuring that you will bring morality and peace to the world’.

‘Well clearly, I’m a shining example…’, Mondo snorted, ‘well… we might as well get on with this thing, shall we?’

‘Your leadership is coming to an end Mondo! Just you wait!’

We followed them both into the sauna room. Steam wafted around us as we felt the temperature dramatically increase. Makoto, Celestia and I had to remove several layers of clothing, just so we wouldn’t faint in the intense heat.

‘Oh my! If you don’t mind me saying so… that’s a very nice tattoo you have there Mondo!’ Celestia told him.

Indeed, I noticed a tattoo upon his lower back which seemed to be depicting the emblem of his gang, a large white diamond displayed in the middle with two dragons circling around it. There were words inked below the crest in gold, which spelled out, ‘The Crazy Diamonds’.

‘Where did you get it?’ asked Kiyotaka with a surprising level of curiosity before they both sat down.

‘The guy who did it claimed that the Yakuza were regular customers of his, but I’m not sure if I believe him. One thing I do remember however was the excruciating pain. It was like having hot coals tied to your back’, he indicated the scars upon his chest and arms, ‘This is small potatoes in comparison, but it was all worth it in the end!’

‘Wow… that must have been intense for you huh?’

‘Who am I kidding? This test of endurance is nothing compared to that, which is why after this, no one will want to challenge my leadership again!’

‘We will see about that!’

The two of them did not budge. For what felt like an hour, we observed them sweating profusely and occasionally yelling at each other.

‘Jesus fuck Taka! You look just like one of those hot spring monkeys!’ Mondo exclaimed.
‘You don’t say!’ Kiyotaka’s teeth were gritted.

‘Are you guys going to decide a winner at some point, I think I’m about to pass out here!’ Makoto panted, his legs looking weak.

‘Yeah we are going to get heatstroke if we stay in here any longer!’, I was clutching my knees.

‘If I get out of here, the first thing I’m going to do is book a trip to Siberia!’ Celestia’s makeup was starting to drip down her face.

‘Can we just let you both settle this?’ I asked, ‘I feel like I’m on fire right now!’

‘Yeah whatever, skedaddle’, Mondo shrugged.

‘Thank God!’ I sighed, ‘I think I need to go and have a lie down after this!’

‘Come on old lady’, Celeste teased before helping me and Makoto exit the sauna.

The yelling did not stop until we closed the sauna door. We decided to leave the two young men to their own devices, but that was another story...
Part 2 Fallen Stars: Bonus Chapter, Sauna Showdown

Chapter Summary

This is the first of some shorter bonus chapters I have planned, told from outside the point of view of Kirigiri. While I want to stay mostly focused on Kyoko's story in my rewrite, I thought it would be a good opportunity to expand on character development, and possibly future foreshadowing by using others from the story. These chapters will be rare but they are interesting to write, so expect at least a few of them in my rewrite!

‘Are they gone?’ Kiyotaka asked.

‘I think so’, I told him, ‘It looked like they were pretty determined to get out of here anyway!’

‘You don’t say!’ he stared at me, ‘Are you okay Mondo?’

‘I wish I had just burned my Hope’s Peak recruitment letter like I had originally planned. Even if there was no killing game, I would still feel caged. Hope’s Peak is just a fancier version of juvie. At the end of the day, a golden shit is still a shit’.

‘So, what was it about Hope’s Peak that appealed to you? I didn’t think somebody like you would want to attend’.

‘I don’t know why I accepted my recruitment letter into the university. I mean… I knew the potential for someone like me to succeed would not be high, but perhaps that is the reason why I accepted. The university has a reputation for bringing out the best. If this place can’t help me nowhere can’.

‘How many high schools did you go to?’ Kiyotaka gasped.

‘A lot! But in every single one of them, I was regarded as a lost cause. So, in the end I just gave up and decided to learn everything on the streets! A lot of things they teach in school are fucking pointless anyway. I mean, who is going to need algebra in the real world? My brother taught me more life skills than any education system would! But…’ I hung my head, ‘I want to land a job you see, and the university was my last hope of achieving the qualifications I need. But alas…’ I stared up at the ceiling, ‘It looks like I will be dying here instead’.

‘Mondo…’ Kiyotaka placed a hand on mine, ‘We will get out of here!’

‘What’s the point?’ I sighed, ‘Even if I do escape from this shithole, what prospects will be out there for me? I mean… the Crazy Diamonds won’t last forever will it? And besides if I am to survive this capitalist system, I need to make a living for myself’.

‘Are you considering leaving the gang then?’

‘Indeed, but I don’t want to lower myself by working for some corporation. I want to start my own business, show that the common working man can achieve such ends!’

‘What were you planning?’

‘Well… to tell you the truth I was hoping to become a carpenter!’
‘Seriously? Well if that’s the case you will have to build me a house one day!’

I let out a weak laugh, ‘Well I kind of like hitting things you see... That’s not something to be proud of I know… but I thought if I used that aspect of my personality to create rather than destroy, that might help me channel my anger elsewhere, instead of… somebody’s face. Also, I can do something productive for once in my life!’

‘Well it’s good to know that you have further aspirations! I think you are the one surprising me here Mondo!’

‘But at the rate this is going, I don’t think I will ever see that prospect let alone the outside world… And even if I did escape, what will I have going for me? Sure, I will have the gang, but sooner or later the members will want to go their own way and I will be left with nothing…’

‘You can always stay at my place until you can stand on your own two feet! I might have to speak with my dad though, he’s a police officer so he may need some convincing to… allow someone of your background to stay. I will try my best though! As the Ultimate Moral Compass, it is my duty to help anyone, no matter their walk of life!’

‘That’s adorable’, I smirked, ‘but thanks anyway… I heard that your family has been going through a bit of a rough patch too huh?’

‘Indeed. For my whole life I been trying to restore the Ishimaru name, and to fix the mistakes of my grandfather. That’s why I have spent most of my life studying. My grandfather was naturally intelligent, but he took that for granted and it eventually cost his leadership as well as the Ishimaru reputation. It’s one thing to be a genius, but it will get you nowhere if you don’t work hard. That is why I intend to be everything my grandfather wasn’t!’

‘You need to let yourself free sometimes Taka’, I stretched, ‘studying can only get you so far in life’.

‘Well of course you would say that!’ Kiyotaka frowned.

‘I should take you for a ride one day’, I chuckled, ‘once you have the wind flowing through your hair, you will understand the true meaning of freedom’.

‘We will be wearing helmets, right?’

‘If you insist, I guess…’, I rolled my eyes, ‘I will have to introduce you to the boys too!’

‘Introduce me to your gang? Seriously?’

‘Fuck yes! Don’t worry though they won’t bite, unless I tell them to of course!’

‘Hey!’ Kiyotaka jumped, ‘Don’t scare me like that!’

‘Don’t worry, Taka. I have gained much influence since I led the Diamonds. The gang members will take my word seriously, let me tell ya!’

‘So, about this challenge then? We’ve been at it for a while now, should we just call it a draw?’

‘Why the fuck not? I kinda like you Taka… no not in that way!’ I shook my head, ‘I just admire you a lot that’s all, almost as much as Daiya!’

‘That was your brother wasn’t it?’

‘Correct’.
'If you don’t mind me asking… how did he, you know?’ Kiyotaka looked worried.

‘He took a knife to the chest while we were fighting a rival gang. Did so defending me of all people…’ I laughed feebly, ‘When the rest of the gang members drove the enemy away he spent his last moments in my arms. He died before the paramedics could arrive’, I felt my eyes water and I rapidly rubbed them, ‘I struggled to get the Diamonds back on their feet for a while after that. It was never quite the same without my brother at the helm, but I knew I had to carry on his legacy’, I sighed before I asked, ‘So, do you really work out often?’

‘Correct!’

‘I guess so… I mean your muscles are nice, firm and….’ I broke off, ‘Forget I said anything…’

‘That’s a shame I was going to say the same about yours’ Kiyotaka looked me up and down. Wearing nothing but a towel, I felt as though I was being X-rayed in the moment.

‘May I?’ he nervously stretched out a hand.

‘What? Oh… I get it, but only a little bit you hear!’

As he felt my muscles it seemed as though a wave of fire blazed through my body. Something about it however felt kind of good.

‘Okay I think that’s enough now!’, I turned away and hid my red face in my hands.

‘Whatever you say bro!’

After spending a little while longer in the sauna we left. While Kiyotaka went to the locker room, I examined my surroundings as I would do on the streets.

‘You notice anything strange about this room?’ I asked him as I stared in each corner.

‘Not particularly’.

‘You idiot…’ I grumbled, ‘Clearly you need to work on your street smartness! You can learn much more observing your surroundings than from a mere text book!’

‘How is that even possible?’

‘Well if I didn’t know the locations of every CCTV camera, I wouldn’t have been able to borrow shit from warehouses!’

‘Stealing you mean?!!’

‘Whatever… anyway what do you notice?’

‘Let me think’, Kiyotaka narrowed his eyes, ‘Well… for one thing, I can’t see any cameras in here!’

‘Exactly! I suppose you are not as much as a dumbass as I thought!’ We changed into our clothes before Kiyotaka asked.

‘What does that mean then?’

‘Well I… I don’t know how to put it exactly…’

‘You can tell me Mondo. There is nothing to be ashamed of after all!’
‘Well… I think you are hot stuff Taka…’ I froze on the spot, ‘Shit!’
Kiyotaka’s face went red, ‘It’s okay Mondo! Calm down already and tell me!’
‘No, I didn’t mean it that way…’ I gulped, ‘It’s not what you think…’
‘It’s okay! Just take a deep breath!’ Kiyotaka tried to reassure me, ‘You can trust me!’
I exhaled, ‘Kiyotaka, if it gets out… I’m dead… I’m so fucking dead…’
‘Leon and Makoto are openly dating and they seem perfectly fine! What’s holding you back?’
‘They could be bi for all I know, at least they have a variety of options, I don’t have that luxury. All
my relationships with girls failed. I wanted them to be successful, but in bed I never felt any kind of
attraction towards them, as much as I wanted to. After a few nights the girls felt like little more than
props and they got understandably fed up… A lot of people in my society just thought I was a bad
boyfriend, but my brother and my circle of close ‘friends’ knew what was really going on’.
‘Your brother knew about this?’
‘Well we grew up together, it’s normal for siblings to share secrets with each other! Also… he kind
of got the idea when my father caught me being a bit too ‘friendly’ with one of my male classmates
as a kid, and he… ‘made an example out of me’ let’s say…’
‘Oh my God…’ Kiyotaka clapped his hand to his mouth.
‘When I told him my secret Daiya was accepting but also surprised when I opened up about it to
him, especially as I was still quite scarred by my father’s reaction to it. My father was eventually
arrested after beating my mother and I am at peace somewhat knowing that he is in prison. Still I
worry a lot… if the gang finds out I could be in for much more than a beating…’
‘That won’t happen on my watch!’ Kiyotaka barked, ‘I’m sure my father can protect you!’
‘It’s fine, it will just cause more unnecessary trouble. Besides I have a few ‘associates’ in the gang.
Before I took charge Daiya would cover us saying we were taking part in a theft operation, while we
all got together. The gang member I was closest to, was a young man called Takemichi. One of the
reasons we grew close was because we were both pretty... short. That was what we had in common.
I was the little brother of Daiya, quite literally...'
‘You... short? You are the second tallest after Sakura!’
‘I was a late bloomer. It got awkward when I finally hit my growth spurt though, I either had to pick
Takemichi up or bend down to kiss him’, I blushed, ‘we broke our relationship off when Daiya died
and I had to step in as leader, but I allowed him to be my second in command. Those who were
counted as my 'associates' also got to be in my elite guard because I knew I could trust them. Some
older members of the gang were not too happy about it at first, but they warmed up eventually’.
‘Why can’t you just come out though? Surely it will make your life easier? This is the twenty first
century after all!’
‘Ugh!’ I clenched my fist, ‘You are so naïve Taka! You really don’t understand, do you?’
‘I just think you should learn to accept yourself!’
‘Look, I know coming out in what you call the ‘normal’ world is no picnic, but in my world, well…


it is not the most liberal of societies let’s say… and even if my gang did know, I have a big influence outside of the Diamonds. Every major gang in Japan knows my name and if they were to find out, I could be a dead man walking. Why would my gang want to deal with that?’

‘Mondo…’ Kiyotaka put a hand on my shoulder, ‘I’m sorry… I was putting too much pressure on you. You should know however that I’m perfectly okay with it’.

‘You won’t tell anyone?’

Kiyotaka shook his head, before holding out a hand, ‘It’s a promise between men!’

Rather awkwardly I held out my hand and we shook on it, ‘You have a good memory Taka!’ I put a hand on his cheek, ‘I wish I was more like you’.

‘Well I appreciate you for your honesty Mondo’, he leaned in closer.

‘Are you ‘out’ too, if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Only to my dad really… it sounds hypocritical given what I said earlier but the only reason why I’m in the closet is because I don’t want my family getting any more unwanted attention’.

‘Yeah the tabloids would lick that shit up!’ I exclaimed before I asked, ‘Do you reckon this place could be our ‘spot’? I don’t want to take any chances with those cameras… Also, there could be someone spying for Monokuma’s dear mistress for all we know…’

‘I really hope that is not the case, but if that’s what you would prefer, I will be happy to oblige!’

I laid back on one of the couches and Kiyotaka rested besides me. When our bodies touched that familiar fire ran through my body again.

‘Your heart… it’s beating like crazy!’ Kiyotaka commented as I wrapped my arm around his shoulders, and he placed a palm on my chest.

‘Shit, really?’

‘Yeah’, Kiyotaka smiled before he asked, ‘Mondo are you really into knifeplay?’

‘Yes… but only if you are willing to participate of course!’ I winked.

‘I think we should start out with baby steps first. That sounds a little too intense for my liking…’

‘I don’t blame you, it requires the upmost trust after all! It’s for professional kinksters only! Like you said, baby steps’, I said as Kiyotaka pushed my hair back, ‘So have you ever ‘done it’? If you don’t mind me asking that is…’

‘Well at my all male private high school, me and some of my classmates did some ‘experimenting’ in our graduation year, but not much more than that’, he peered towards one of my pockets, ‘Speaking of which, have you got… protection of some kind? It’s absolutely vital!’

‘Of course, I carry it everywhere, even more than my knives actually. We will have to make do with those horrible ones that the bear provided but it’s better than nothing…’ at that moment I stared blankly up at the ceiling.

‘Mondo what’s wrong?’

‘If we are serious about this, there is something else you should know. For your safety more than
mine’, I looked away.

‘It’s alright, you can tell me!’ Kiyotaka looked into my eyes before I began to tremble, ‘I won’t tell anyone! It’s a promise between men remember?’

With some reluctance at first, and with sweat running down my face, I managed to tell him my ‘other’ big secret. After telling him, I once again had to restrain myself from crying on the spot.

‘Really?’

I nodded.

‘It’s okay, you will get through this. We will get through this! Whatever happens, I will support you. Through thick and thin!’

‘These aren’t marriage vows you know!’ I grumbled, ‘But thank you for your generosity Taka, I really appreciate it… and I love you for that…’

‘I love you too Mondo, very much’.

Not entirely thinking straight we embraced and I could feel Kiyotaka’s warm breath as his lips met mine. All of my greatest fears and doubts in that moment were extinguished, at least for a little while.
Groggily waking up after my first somewhat peaceful night staying here, I got up to have a shower. The smoke from the sauna during Mondo and Kiyotaka’s showdown last night had helped me to get to sleep quickly. Once I got dressed, I smoked a cigarette upon my bed before I heard the doorbell ring.

‘Hey Celestia!’ I yawned, ‘You up for some breakfast?’

‘Indeed’, as we walked to the dining room she said, ‘Let’s hope we won’t walk in to see Kiyotaka holding up Mondo’s severed head!’

‘I hope not!’, we entered the room but to my surprise everyone in the dining room looked shocked and wide-eyed.

‘Hey, what’s going on here?’ I saw Sayaka walk up from behind us.

‘I think I know’, I pointed in the corner. Mondo and Kiyotaka each had an arm over the other’s shoulders, laughing merrily. While they were both giving each other a death stare last night, the two of them now seemed inseparable, as though they had been friends for years.

‘Do you think something has happened between them?’ asked Sayaka.

‘Quite possibly’, I stared dumbstruck at the two of them, ‘but at least they didn’t kill each other!’ They both stood up.

‘Are they about to announce their engagement or something?’ Akira giggled. ‘Is that everyone?’ Mondo looked around, ‘Well apart from Byakuya and Toko, but that was to be expected. Anyway, I have an important announcement to make!’ He gestured towards Kiyotaka, ‘I am delighted to say the two of us are now joint leaders!’

‘You are a crappy leader already Mondo, but this has to be your worst decision yet!’ Leon protested. ‘Silence!’ yelled Kiyotaka, ‘Mondo has given me the opportunity to fix the wrongs of my family and I will take that with open arms!’

‘You said it bro!’ the two of them bumped fists.

‘There are going to be some big changes around here!’ Kiyotaka paced up and down, ‘From now on we will gather for a meeting once in the morning and once in the evening, to ensure everyone is together and to notify us if you see anything peculiar!’

‘Well if I can put my jitterbugs to work then I’m all for it!’ Akira stroked one of them gently.

‘We shall gather here at 8:30am in the morning and 6:30pm in the evening’, Mondo said, ‘if we are to get out of this shit, we need to be more organised here!’

‘That doesn’t sound like a bad idea actually…’ Makoto shrugged, ‘These meetings could be a great opportunity to get together too!’

‘Don’t give them ideas Makoto…’ Celeste raised a finger.
‘Also, the locker room outside the sauna is out of bounds from eleven to twelve ‘o’ clock at night!’ Mondo announced.

‘Not as though any of us were planning to use it at that time, but why?’ Aoi raised an eyebrow.

‘It’s our conference room!’

‘Why shouldn’t we have any input?’ questioned Celestia.

‘A lot of leaders have secrets!’ Kiyotaka explained, ‘When my grandfather was prime minister, he had a special room in which he would invite guests to discuss important and private matters’.

‘We aren’t exactly discussing nuclear codes here’, frowned Akira.

‘This is Japan, we don’t exactly have those…’ grunted Mondo, ‘Besides, you can come in at any other time, just not the time slot we mentioned!’

‘Okay, okay, jeez!’

‘Also, no running in the halls!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘Or littering!’

‘Yeah don’t litter kids….’ Mondo growled, ‘Big corporations have fucked up the environment enough, please don’t make it worse than it already is!’ he paused, ‘I think that just about clears it up!’

‘Good speech bro!’ Kiyotaka patted him on the back.

‘No bro, I think you are the one who deserves the credit here!’ Mondo ruffled Kiyotaka’s hair.

I watched as the two of them bumped chests before sitting back down and serving each other coffee. Though they were thick as thieves however, Kiyotaka still politely refused a cigarette as Mondo offered one out to him.

‘Well you know what they say, opposites attract!’ exclaimed Aoi.

‘At least Ishimaru didn’t ban sex’, shrugged Leon before taking out a cigarette of his own.

After breakfast I wanted to explore the museum more, Celestia however wanted to play in the arcade room so I went alone. I passed through the great oak doors once again. If we were not in the middle of a killing game, I was sure that I would be happier than a guest at Disneyland. As I passed by all the weird and wonderful artifacts, feelings of nostalgia came swooping back.

I remembered the days when my mother took me through all the great museums in Tokyo, pointing enthusiastically at everything she came across and passionately lecturing me. As I stared up at the Aztec mural in front of me, I wished that I had inherited her enthusiasm, her hope…

‘Hey punk!’

I jumped, ‘Shit!’ I spun around to see Syo. I was still getting over the fact that she shared Toko’s body, ‘What the hell do you want?’

‘Hey! There is no need to be so rude!’ she stuck her nose up in the air.

‘You are one to talk’, I frowned, ‘Anyway, what do you want from me?’

‘Oooh!’ she put her fingertips together and smirked, looking vaguely like a cartoon villain, ‘You will not believe the things I have seen Kyoko!’
‘Well what have you seen? It had better be important!’

‘I saw that Togami bastard sneaking around!’

‘Doesn’t he always sneak around? That’s pretty much his schtick isn’t it?’

‘Well for one thing, he seemed to be doing a bit of prodding and poking in various places!’

‘Yeah, so?’

‘Well it’s probably just a rumour, but every university has its secrets!’ she laughed, ‘Anyway it is said that in this very building, there is a secret room. One that can only be opened up by a Togami family member, they helped to build this place after all!’

‘Why would the Togamis need a secret room here? To hide a giant monster which attacks people they don’t like?’

‘Hey now! I just thought it was worth pointing out!’, Syo hissed.

‘Look I don’t like him much either and I know he’s a little shady, but you need evidence to back up your claim. So far, I don’t see any proof that such a place exists’.

‘Like I said, it’s merely a rumour, but rumours don’t come from nowhere…’ she gave a wide grin, ‘Anyway punk, you got any updates on dear Toko?’

‘Not particularly’, I shrugged, ‘She still seems to be entranced by Byakuya I’m afraid. I swear if Byakuya was the culprit during the class trial, Toko would have taken the bullet for him in his stead’.

‘Bad Toko! Naughty Toko!’ Syo stamped her foot.

‘She did seem to enjoy Mondo and Kiyotaka’s showdown last night though’, I shrugged.

‘I don’t blame her for that really, I think we all secretly enjoy watching boys fight, don’t you agree?’

‘Not really’, I shook my head, ‘I have always found the notion that boys should compete with each other constantly kind of toxic really. I’m honestly quite relieved they are not fighting anymore’.

‘I saw those two head into the dining room earlier, they are like a married couple now!’

‘I’m sure they are just friends Syo…’, I thought of how Mondo would react to such a statement, ‘and even so, love at first sight scenarios only happen in musicals and fanfiction’.

‘You’d be surprised! Besides I saw the way you were addressing that goth chick! If I were not mistaken, I would say you two are enamoured by each other!’

‘Yeah, so? And what has that got to do with anything?’

‘I was just wondering what you see in her. Is there something I am lacking?’ she blinked up at me.

‘Are you hitting on me?’ I narrowed my eyes.

‘Maybe…’ Syo giggled, ‘Anyway punk, I have some exploring of my own to do! I need to see if that Togami is up to anything fishy before Toko comes back’.

‘Whatever you say, I guess…’
After Syo left I spent a little more time in the museum. I explored the history of fashion section, coming across many elaborate dresses and kimonos. As I gazed in awe at all the amazing colours surrounding me, I wondered if Junko would have happily basked here had she survived.

When I had finished observing everything, I decided to make my way to lounge. On the way I walked past Togami whose eyes were darting around, apparently checking to see if Toko was in close pursuit behind him. Finally, I reached the lounge door and opened it.

‘Hey Kyoko!’

‘Hey!’ I stepped in the lounge to see Aoi sitting on a couch reading a magazine. Chihiro and Sakura meanwhile were engaging in a light tussle. It reminded me of the play fights my cat and the much larger family dog, an akita used to have. Although Sakura was the ultimate martial artist, she did an excellent job keeping at Chihiro’s skill level.

‘Mondo is going to eat his words by the time Sakura has trained her up!’ she smiled before looking up at me, ‘Anyway Kyoko, where have you been? It’s strange not seeing you with Celeste’.

‘I wanted to explore the museum, but she wasn’t in the mood so I ended up going alone’.

‘I suppose she’s not as much of a museum junkie as you are then?’

‘Not particularly’, I looked at the cover of her magazine with the headline, ‘The Genocide Jack Case, Ten Years On’, ‘what are you reading Aoi?’

‘Oh, just the sport sections! I’m not one to stay in tune with the news’, she handed it over to me and I began to scour my way through until I reached the section concerning the Genocide Jack Case.

‘Are you a serial killer enthusiast Kyoko?’

‘Not really’, I answered reading through, ‘I’m just interested in the murder cases really’.

‘I see, because I heard there are some weirdos out there who collect serial killer memorabilia... Anyway, wasn’t Genocide Jack that fiend who got executed ten years ago for the murders of countless women across Japan?’

‘That’s the one’.

‘The four queens case has to be the most messed up incident though. According to police reports, the killer murdered four prominent businesswomen in a year. In the hand of each corpse, a card was placed, depicting one of the four queens in a normal deck of cards’, she clenched her fists in anger, ‘The bastard obviously hated women and couldn’t stand seeing them being successful. I’m glad he’s gone. I want to go out at night without having to fear for my life!’

‘I’m glad he’s gone too’, I said as Chihiro and Sakura went to sit next to me.

‘I was hoping there were some good gaming magazines. They all seem to be written for men though’, Chihiro grumbled, ‘I mean… I like girls but I enjoy a little more variety’.

She picked one up and opened a poster from inside. It depicted an illustration of a girl with rather exaggerated proportions, wearing only a chain mail bikini top and thong.

‘Yeah that is pretty stupid’, I commented, ‘It would probably hurt a lot ‘down there’ too…”

‘Also, I imagine your nipples would be screaming in agony if they are constantly rubbing against
metal like that!’ Aoi exclaimed.

I looked the image up and down, ‘Straight men sure are weird!’

‘Agreed!’ the girls around me all murmured.

‘Indeed, this artist is not exactly well versed in the world of smithery’, Sakura frowned.

‘Do you wear armour Sakura?’ Chihiro beamed at her, ‘I would love to see you wear some!’

Sakura chuckled before placing a large hand on her tiny shoulder, ‘If we escape from here, I can show you the suits of armour my family has acquired in our dojo’.

‘That would be so awesome!’

‘You in armour?’ I noticed Aoi blush, ‘You may have to invite me along too Sakura!’

‘If we get out of here, I want you to know that everyone is welcome in the Oogami household’, Sakura told us, ‘But I warn you, my village is up in the mountains so it’s a long trip!’

‘Well I have been swimming alongside great white sharks in my career, so going on a trip to the mountains should be a piece of cake for me!’

‘That’s brave of you!’ I gasped.

‘Well they are just like any other wild animal, respect them and they will respect you in turn!’

After Aoi told us of her many underwater adventures the clock drew closer to 6:30. For the last hour beforehand I decided to spend time with Celestia, so I waved goodbye to the three girls. When I arrived in the games room, she was at the bar sipping some Victorian lemonade.

‘There seems to be fewer alcoholic beverages than what I remember’, Celestia narrowed her eyes.

‘Really? That seems odd. On the other hand, I understand why somebody would want a few drinks in the current situation we are in’.

‘Yes, but this seems a bit excessive don’t you think?’

‘It is peculiar’, I took out a cherry soda and cracked it open, ‘You been up to much Celestia?’

‘Not particularly’, Celestia sighed, ‘These games are actually getting a little dull now. In my career variety is the spice of life. I have walked into casinos all over Japan and the world! I don’t tend to stay in one place for more than a few days at a time’.

‘Did ’she’ travel alongside you?’

‘Of course! She traveled with me wherever I went, we were partners in all aspects! We journeyed to Las Vegas, Paris, Marina Bay, all the major gambling cities in the world!’

‘We went on a family holiday to California once and we travelled to London to witness the marriage of one of my distant cousins, but apart from that, not much. My parents were occupied with work you see, and I with studying. We didn’t really have time for that sort of thing’.

‘Well when you are a free bird like me, the world is at your fingertips!’

‘If we get out of here, before I go back to my studying, I might be able to accompany you for a little
while abroad. I probably won’t be gambling though’.

‘I think you would like Paris’, Celestia’s eyes became dreamy, ‘It’s considered the most romantic city in the world for a reason. The Moulin Rouge especially is a must visit!’

‘Observing many glamorous French girls dancing? That’s not a bad idea if I don’t say so myself!’

‘Indeed, it can get quite saucy in there!’

‘I bet!’ I laughed before I took a sip of my soda.

At around 6:00pm we decided to head downstairs for the planned daily gathering, and dinner. Indeed, when we arrived Mondo and Kiyotaka stood proudly, resembling Viking Jarls looking over the long tables. Within a few minutes everyone appeared, even Byakuya and Toko but they sat far away from us, clearly not intending to stick around for long. For dinner we decided to prepare our own meals from what we could find. Celestia and I made a simple ramen before sitting down with Sayaka.

‘How are you feeling Sayaka?’ I asked her.

‘Fine, just fine…’ she picked at her food, ‘I have been practicing my singing in my room, I would have done so in the theatre but after what happened to Yasuhiro I…’

‘Don’t worry about it, I understand’, I tried to reassure her.

‘Are you all here?’ Kiyotaka looked above us, ‘Good! Then we can begin!’

‘So, have any of you noticed anything suspicious around here lately?’ Mondo asked.

‘Well I keep seeing a shadow following me’, smirked Byakuya from the far corner of the room, ‘but then I pick up the smell’, he glared in the direction of Toko who looked away embarrassed.

‘Hey! That’s not very nice!’ Aoi scolded him.

‘If you were in her proximity you would understand. Seriously Toko, have you even bathed? No boy, or anyone for that matter will want to be near you if you don’t know basic hygiene skills!’

‘That’s enough!’ Kiyotaka snapped.

‘Do you want me to snap your neck Byakuya? Because I am very tempted to right now!’ Mondo prepared to lunge at him but Kiyotaka placed a hand on his shoulder.

‘Calm down bro! He’s not worth it!’

‘You’re right, my bad!’ Mondo backed off.

‘Have you been doing some more investigating Akira?’ I asked him.

‘Yes, but when I checked the jitterbug cam this morning, I didn’t notice any strange goings on. I did see the occasional black robed figure making their rounds but not much more than that. Although’, he smiled, ‘I did see Leon make off with some beers from the bar!’

‘What has that got to do with anything?’ Leon’s speech once again appeared slurred.

‘I just don’t think it’s a good idea to get yourself flat out drunk in our situation’, I explained, ‘You could make yourself an easy target, especially if you are alone!’
‘Yeah if somebody is approaching you with a deadly weapon, you won’t have a lot of time to react’, Akira nodded, ‘and even if you did notice them, how could you fight back effectively?’

‘What he said’, agreed Mondo, ‘Even a lowlife like me knows that too much alcohol can fuck you up!’

‘Somebody should probably get him to bed’, Sayaka stared in his direction.

‘Shut up all of you! You don’t know me!’ Leon yelled back in a drunken rage.

‘Leon they are right’, Makoto begged, ‘I wouldn’t want you getting hurt’.

‘What’s the point’, Leon grumbled, ‘If I survive in this dump I will just go back to baseball, back to a mere object of admiration. What’s the fucking point?’

‘Leon… I’m sure we can figure something out when we get out of here, but now we need to be vigilant’.

‘What do you know? You don’t know what it’s like to have your parents sell you out!’ Leon was shaking now, ‘Once you are in my position there is no going back!’

‘There is a way Leon, I can help you with that! But please, have some common sense!’ Makoto’s eyes were beginning to fill with tears, ‘I just don’t want you to die…’

As soon as he said this, we heard that dreaded sound echo across the campus once again, and we all froze in our places like timid rabbits.

‘Well, I am getting pretty damn bored!’ The hellish voice of the bear spoke, ‘It’s been a while since blood has been spilled in this university and if none is shed soon, the point of this game will be lost! Please my little cubs, make your way to the gym where I will give you your next motive!’

‘Shit, not another one!’ I gasped.

‘What choice do we have?’ Sakura stared towards the door.

‘He really won’t give us a break, will he?’ sighed Celestia.

‘Come on Mondo’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘This will be your chance to prove yourself as leader again’.

‘Your leadership skills will be crucial at this time too bro’, Mondo got up and we all followed him and Ishimaru to the gymnasium, ‘Still, I don’t know if even your leadership abilities will stand up to that furry fuck’.

‘We shall not allow injustice to prevail! No more blood will be spilled on my watch!’

‘We will see about that!’ grinned Byakuya.

‘Don’t diss bro like that!’ Mondo rounded on him, ‘I will trust Taka with my life!’

‘Same to you bro!’ replied Kiyotaka.

When we arrived at the gymnasium the great bear apparated before us. As he did so, we noticed what looked like a great wooden chest standing behind him.

‘Okay, what have you got for us furball?’ Akira smirked.
‘Why Akira, that is your next motive! How about you all look inside the nice big box over there!’

‘Or not!’ Mondo snorted, but at that moment we noticed some of the dark robed figures standing behind us ominously, as though they had detected his resistance, ‘Okay then… we might as well get this over with!’

‘Come on Mondo you won’t want to miss this! These objects even have your names on them, my dear mistress made these all specially for each of you!’

‘I didn’t think anything could get worse than loot boxes but here we are…’, Chihiro was the first to take out an item from the chest, a simple CD.

‘Let me guess do we have to play these?’ I asked.

‘That’s correct’, the bear smiled wickedly, ‘You should be able to play them in the IT room just fine!’

I was the last to take mine out. Indeed, rather crudely written on the box was the name ‘Kyoko Kirigiri’. As I looked around I saw the others staring perplexed at theirs too.

‘Well hurry along to the IT room little cubs and enjoy the show! And you had better because otherwise my little friends will set you right!’ He appeared to wink at the black robed figures behind us, ‘Anyway, I will see you all just before the next class trial. Happy killing!’

Slowly but surely, we all made our way into the IT room. My heart racing, I sat on one of the chairs put on a headset and switched the computer on. All around me the others were doing the same.

My hands trembling, I inserted the disk. Upon the screen was what seemed to be a short film playing. Memories I wanted to forget came rushing back to me. I was looking into a black sky. As the camera panned in, I heard a familiar terrible scream and smoke rising into the air. As the wicker structure the man was trapped in was set alight, the sky surrounding it turned crimson.

‘Oh, poor sweet Kyoko Kirigiri! You are more ignorant than you think!’ I grinded my teeth as I heard Monokuma’s voice. ‘There is so much you do not know, your history, your family and even your own talent! You love solving mysteries, don’t you? You love playing devil’s advocate, even if it comes at the expense of your friends. Justice is in your blood, but do you know why that is?’

The man’s screams became inhuman. I wanted to believe the video playing before me was fake but it seemed all too real, as it had been in my nightmare. Was it one of those snuff films that were rumoured to infest the dark web? Still, I wondered how such a scene could make it into my dreams. Did the bear have some kind of psychic ability?

What’s worse, something about Monokuma’s voice made me want to know more. It was like a siren song. I was desperate to know the truth. Why had I ended up in this Hell? The beast was likely hiding all the answers I was desperate to know since I first turned up here. What did I do to deserve this?

‘Do you want to know the true meaning of the glorious scene before me? If you want to know, all you must do is commit the act of murder. Surely there is someone you are willing to sacrifice? You are already experienced in sending your fellow students to their deaths anyway, aren’t you? This should be easy peasy for you! If you kill someone, I will tell you everything at your graduation! Sayonara my dear!’ The video cut out just as the great fiery structure crumbled.

I went from being in a trance, to fuming at what I witnessed. Did this demon think I would really be willing to kill someone just to pry some secrets from him? Would it even be worth it? Did I even
want to know in the first place? Was the truth too horrific for me to comprehend?

I was certain I would not fall for the bear’s trick, and I thought in the moment that nobody else would be tempted either. But as this despair filled story will later show, I was dead wrong.
It felt like minutes but within a few seconds after my trance, I began to hear the horrified reactions of my classmates.

‘My family!’ cried Makoto, ‘No! This can’t be real!’

‘Yuta! Oh God no! I can’t lose you too!’ I heard Aoi cry.

‘All that Daiya and I worked for, it was all for fucking nothing!’ Mondo was on all fours, ‘I failed my brother, the Diamonds, I’m nothing but a fucking failure!’

‘Mondo…’ Kiyotaka approached him, shaking, ‘it’s okay, they could just be fake for all we know!’

‘Yes, we cannot be certain’, I stood up, ‘the worst thing we can do in this situation is panic’.

‘Kyoko is right’, said Sakura, ‘This could just be a trick by the bear’.

‘But it looked… so real’, Chihiro uttered, ‘My parents were right there crying out for help!’

‘They could have been using actors that happen to look like our friends and relatives’, Akira stated.

‘I know my cat’, Celestia hissed, ‘he was most definitely not a fake!’

‘Monokuma is a demon’, I explained, ‘Creating convincing visions is likely something he’s capable of’.

‘How can we be so sure though?’ Makoto asked.

‘Yes’, Mondo stood up shakily, ‘Whether what we witnessed is real or not, we must remain calm’.

‘That’s right bro’, Kiyotaka tried to reassure him, ‘we cannot allow our emotions to take over logic in this dire situation we are in. We have to stick together, no matter what’.

‘You are right bro… I made you my joint leader for a reason’.

Perhaps the worst reaction however was from Sayaka. Her face had become pale and expressionless, her eyes looking unusually blank. It was very surreal to see a usually bubbly personality in a state like this.

‘Sayaka…’ Makoto approached her, ‘Are you okay?’ She said nothing.

‘We don’t know what exactly is going on yet’, I walked up to her too, ‘It could just be Monokuma messing around with us!’

Suddenly she bolted from the room, her face in her hands.

‘I will go and find her’, Makoto assured me before he proceeded to chase after her.

‘I think we should discuss what to do next at the morning gathering’, Mondo told us, ‘we cannot do much more now…’

‘Cheer up bro! We can figure this out’, Kiyotaka then whispered something in his ear, before barking, ‘Okay everyone, off to bed now!’
‘I can’t believe that furball would do such a thing!’ Celestia looked livid as we exited the room, ‘My poor Cheri! I cannot bear to think of him trapped and alone. He needs me!’

‘We will figure out what is going on Celeste. I will make sure of that! Still, if they are real, I wonder how he managed to track down our loved ones’, I pondered, ‘He knows our medical and personal details, so it’s not far of a stretch for him to know our friends and relatives. He’s also a demon and is possibly an omniscient one at that. I think that speaks for itself. The only thing I find confusing is why his mistress would allow such a thing to happen... She must be taking a lot of risks, how will something like this go unnoticed by the public?’

‘Then the authorities need to get an exorcist or something! Whatever it takes!’

‘The military could be attacking this very university for all we know. But considering how fortified it is, even the most advanced weaponry would struggle to get through these walls I imagine. This place is made of strong enough materials to make a good fallout shelter. If nukes can’t penetrate this place, nothing can’.

‘I don’t care what it takes!’ shrieked Celeste, ‘I just want my cat back!’

As we went back to the dormitory, I saw Chihiro join up with Aoi and Sakura to spend the night together. Mondo and Kiyotaka gave each other one last friendly pat on the back before heading into each other’s respective rooms. We also saw Leon leaning against the wall, biting his nails anxiously.

‘Have any of you seen Makoto anywhere?’ he asked nervously, ‘Sayaka could have got him to separate from the rest of us so she could easily ambush him!’

‘She’s a total wreck right now, I am not sure if she would be capable in such a state!’ Celestia replied.

‘Oh look!’ I pointed, ‘Here he is now, thank God!’ At that moment I saw Makoto walk over to us accompanying a shaken up Sayaka, ‘Is she okay?’

‘I think she just needs some rest, that’s all!’ Makoto explained.

‘Hey Sayaka! Do you want to spend the night with Celestia and I?’

‘No… it’s okay’, she looked up at me, still looking pale as ever, ‘thanks for your offer though Kyoko’.

‘Okay, just look after yourself alright?’ I told her as she walked still blank eyed, to her room.

‘C’mon Leon, we had better get some shuteye’, Makoto held out a hand to him and he took it, ‘Look dude I’m scared too, but whatever happens, I will be here!’

‘Thanks Makoto’, Leon sighed, ‘Sorry about earlier by the way’.

‘It’s fine… I think we should just get some rest and start figuring out things in the morning’,

‘I think it will be a good idea if I spent the night alone’, Leon told him, ‘I’m not feeling particularly good anyway, I feel like I have a fever coming on’.

‘Okay’, Makoto placed a hand on his shoulder, ‘But please be careful and let me know if you change your mind. Have a good night then’!

‘I wish you a good night too Makoto’, Leon nodded as they both trudged to their bedrooms.
‘Come on Celeste’, I told her, ‘we cannot stick around here’.

‘I guess you are right…’ Celestia exhaled, ‘At least he’s not dead. I just hope that Monokuma’s mistress remembers to feed him correctly! He only eats smoked fish and drinks the finest goat’s milk’.

‘He has rather exquisite tastes then?’.

‘He is my last reminder of ‘her’. I can only provide him with the very best!’

‘My cat was just happy with a dose of catnip. She would go crazy for that stuff!’

The two of us got changed and crawled into bed. I cuddled up behind her, her silky black hair brushing my cheek. The night ahead was rough but once again, I felt more protected having Celeste by my side.

‘What did you see in your video by the way?’ she murmured to me.

‘It’s complicated’, I let out a deep breath, ‘I think I will explain some other time if you don’t mind’.

‘I see… Well whenever you feel like changing your mind, you should know that you can trust me!’

‘Thanks Celeste’, I said as I stroked her hair, ‘I appreciate it’.

When we got up the next morning and made it to the breakfast hall, I noticed someone missing.

‘Hey where has Leon got to?’ asked Aoi who was once again sitting beside Sakura and Chihiro.

‘He had a fever I think’, I explained, ‘How did you three manage last night?’

‘Poor Chihiro was trembling the whole time and I couldn’t get to sleep. Sakura did a good job watching over us though. I don’t know what we would have done without her’.

‘Do you really think Monokuma has our relatives held hostage?’ asked Chihiro.

‘I don’t know’, I sighed, ‘It’s hard to tell…’

‘They were alive at least… my parents. They did look terrified though. I hope Monokuma doesn’t do anything to them’.

‘They won’t’, Sakura growled, ‘I will not allow it’.

Before we sat down, we also went to greet the two leaders.

‘Good morning lass’, Mondo greeted me in a gloomier manner than usual. Once again, he sat closely alongside Kiyotaka. Instead of having his usual coffee pot with him, he was holding a bottle of beer, ‘You haven’t seen any dead bodies lying around have ya?’

‘Not yet! Are you feeling better Mondo? I asked.

‘Not particularly… I mean… I watched the work of my brother and I becoming undone right before me, didn’t I?’ he took a large swig, ‘Even if I attempt to assemble another gang, it will just be a mere mockery of my brother’s vision…’

‘There, there bro!’ Kiyotaka patted him on the shoulder.
‘On the bright side, Taka has been very supportive throughout my whole ordeal’, he looked at him affectionately before he let out a deep sigh, ‘I don’t know why the Diamonds split up… we had everything going for us. That devil must have been responsible somehow’, he banged his fist upon the table angrily causing it to quake.

‘Well he captured my father according to the film I saw’, Taka explained, ‘He was not one to be taken down easily, only something out of this world could have bested him’.

We eventually sat next to Sayaka. Once again, her eyes looked very bloodshot and her face was still white as a sheet. She was also shivering slightly from head to toe.

‘Hey Sayaka, you okay?’ I asked her.

‘Oh…’ she jumped, ‘Yes I’m fine! Nothing to worry about here!’

‘Sayaka what did you see?’ questioned Celestia.

‘It’s fine, it was nothing! It was probably just a hoax anyway’, she laughed weakly.

‘Pfff… Yeah right’, Celestia said coolly before I lightly elbowed her in the ribs, ‘Hey watch it Kyoko!’ she cried out, before I suddenly noticed everyone turn their heads towards the door.

Leon came stumbling in, almost tripping over his own feet, before falling over flat on his face.

‘Holy shit!’ Mondo looked dumbfounded at the sight before him.

‘What the hell is going on here?’ Akira also looked up bewildered, ‘Leon, have you been drinking?’

‘Leon!’ Makoto ran up to him, ‘Why would you do this to yourself?’

‘It helps me Makoto’, he hiccuped, ‘It’s the only thing keeping me from going completely insane in this shithole’!

‘Alcohol isn’t the way to go about it buddy. Why did you lie to me Leon? I thought you trusted me. You can’t carry on like this. It won’t help you or anyone’.

‘I’m sorry Makoto. I was just so scared by what I saw last night and… I just needed to numb that feeling somehow you know?’, he let out another large hiccup.

‘Somebody needs to take him to his room I think!’ Kiyotaka stood up.

‘I will help him up’, Mondo strode over to him, ‘Come on laddie, up you get!’

‘Me too’, Sakura stood up too.

‘Taka will you watch over the others while Sakura and I take Leon to his room?’.

‘Sure thing, bro’ Kiyotaka bowed as Mondo and Sakura left, Leon hanging upon their shoulders.

Shortly after they left, to our surprise, we saw Byakuya enter, Toko close behind him.

‘Have you finally come to join us?’ Kiyotaka looked stunned to see him at this time.

‘The jade crossbow has been stolen! I was exploring the museum and it was gone, just like that! It looks like somebody has gotten serious about participating in the game’, Byakuya explained giddily.
‘He’s right!’ Toko cried out, ‘It’s like it just disappeared!’

‘What?’ I gasped, ‘You had better show us!’

‘I wonder who would go out of their way to steal such a priceless object?’ asked Celeste, ‘Aren’t those glass cases supposed to be extremely difficult to get into?’

‘It is definitely peculiar’, I frowned, ‘The bow didn’t come with arrows so I don’t understand why someone would want to use it in the killing game. Unless someone gets creative again of course…’

‘Besides, that weapon is centuries old’, Aoi said, ‘I don’t know if it would even be functional. It would have to be extremely well maintained if that’s the case’.

‘Who knows? Either way if such a weapon has been stolen, it will be a good idea to look out for possible vantage points where an attacker could fire from’.

‘If what the legend says is true, that it killed 1000 men, we should probably be wary’, Kiyotaka told us.

‘Naturally’, nodded Byakuya, ‘Adding one more to that number shouldn’t be too difficult I imagine!’

We finally arrived at the two large oak doors. After passing by the many large dinosaur skeletons and stuffed animals leering at us, we finally reached the armoury. Indeed, the jade crossbow was nowhere to be found.

‘I wonder how the thief didn’t trigger any alarms’, Kiyotaka looked at the empty cabinet, ‘Most museums containing highly valuable objects have top notch security. Arguably the best you can find in the country, that’s what dad told me anyway’.

‘Do you think Monokuma’s mistress might have disabled them?’ asked Sayaka.

‘Perhaps’, I said, ‘That would definitely make a lot of sense. Still these cases are awfully difficult to break into without smashing the glass. Somebody must have picked the lock.’

‘We may have a lockpicking master among us after all!’ grinned Akira.

‘Who could have done it though?’ gulped Chihiro.

‘That’s the question isn’t it?’ I looked around. Who among us would go through all the trouble to steal this priceless item? Was there anything to be gained from it?

After leaving the museum and heading back to the dormitories, Celestia and I spent some time in her room where we played some simple card games, much to the former’s disappointment.

‘This is amateur play…’ she grumbled, ‘I want to play a game with more ‘edge’ to it you know…’

‘Hey, look Celestia, you won again!’

‘Pfff… yeah, yeah…’ she sighed, ‘I can win in my sleep’.

At that moment I could hear running from outside, ‘Hey what’s happening?’ The two of us got up and opened the door to see a frantic looking Akira.

‘Oh my God!’ he was panting, ‘Come quick!’

‘Akira please calmly tell us what’s going on!’ I told him sternly.
‘What’s going on?’ Aoi asked peering out of her room.

‘Oh please, it had better be something important!’ Byakuya also emerged.

‘Mondo is attacking Sakura in the gymnasium! Hurry!’

‘What on earth?’ Sayaka tilted her head, ‘Seriously??’

‘Come on, there’s no time!’

‘Oh my God!’ cried Aoi, ‘Lead the way Akira! I will stop him!’

‘No running in the halls!’ I heard Kiyotaka yell once again as we all stampeded through the corridors.

Within seconds we were all pelting after Akira, almost tripping over each other. When we reached the gymnasium, our jaws dropped. Mondo in his tank top had knives in-between each of his fingers, throwing them in Sakura’s direction. She was dodging them at an almost lightning speed, rolling, jumping, sometimes even contorting herself to evade the blades.

‘Mondo! What the Hell do you think you are doing?’ yelled Aoi, ‘You have really crossed the line this time you brute!’

‘It’s fine Aoi’, Sakura leapt up.

‘Wait, there has to be some misunderstanding!’ Kiyotaka ran up between them both and they froze in their tracks, ‘Can you please explain to us what is going on here?’ We all gathered around.

‘Training!’ Mondo shrugged.

‘Yes, I am so convinced!’ Aoi rolled her eyes, ‘Sakura wouldn’t hurt a fly! Why would you go attacking her like this?’ she was fuming.

‘Aoi, he’s right’, Sakura walked over to her, ‘I merely wanted to practice my reflexes. Mondo didn’t want to fight me head on, so we decided on a no contact duel as an alternative’.

‘You weren’t trying to kill her?’ Aoi rubbed her eyes.

‘Of course not! Why would I do that?’ Mondo shrugged, ‘To be honest I was quite reluctant to do this, but Sakura insisted this would be good training for her. So in the end I just decided to trust her’.

‘They don’t call me the Ultimate Martial Artist for no reason Aoi’, Sakura gently ruffled Aoi’s hair.

‘Still, you both nearly gave me a heart attack!’ Aoi was shaking.

‘I think that’s enough training for today Sakura’, Mondo bowed, ‘You have done well for a girl!’

‘Don’t make me revoke my forgiveness!’

‘Come on Aoi’, Sakura bowed back, and the two girls exited the room, Chihiro accompanying them.

‘What a shame, I was getting quite excited there!’ Byakuya tutted.

‘Will you just fuck off already you little pest?!’ spat Mondo before Kiyotaka turned him around.

‘I know the intentions from you both are good, but please tell us next time before you conduct such a
stunt! You had us all terrified there!'

‘I know…’ Mondo sighed as he went to pick up his knives, ‘I’m sorry bro!’ When he was finished, he walked over to fetch his coat which was draped over a nearby bench.

However, that was when we heard a roar of anger.

‘Hey, what’s wrong ?!’ Kiyotaka pelted towards the source of the sound.

‘Someone had the balls to steal from me!’ Mondo looked frantically through his coat.

‘Um Mondo…’ Makoto asked, ‘Did you not misplace them or something?’

‘I know where I keep all of my knives laddie and I am missing three right now! I can’t keep my gang together and apparently, I can’t keep my own stuff together either! What will Daiya think of me now!?’

‘Mondo calm down!’ I stressed, ‘I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I will help you get your knives back!’

‘You will?’

‘Sure, I guess…’

‘Don’t mess this one up lass!’ Mondo stamped his foot, ‘We don’t just have murderous bastards here, but we have thieves too!’

‘Yeah right, and how many things have you stolen Mondo?’ sneered Byakuya.

‘Well I have pickpocketed a few people’, he shook his head, ‘but that’s not the point, I cannot rest until I find them. I just can’t!’

‘Do you feel powerless knowing that someone stole something from right under your nose?’

‘Byakuya, I swear to fuck…’ he was about to lunge out, before Kiyotaka, Makoto and I held him back.

‘Mondo, stop!’ I strained as I held onto him. He was indeed very strong and I immediately began to regret my decision, ‘He’s trying to get a reaction out of you! It’s what he wants!’

‘And besides, do you really want to sink to his level?’ Makoto panted.

‘They are right bro!’ Kiyotaka reassured him, ‘But trust me, we will find them! You mark my words!’ Mondo’s body relaxed, much to my relief. After he had calmed down, Byakuya had left the room.

‘I wonder if the thief who stole your knives is the same person who took the Jade Crossbow?’

‘What?’ gasped Mondo, ‘Somebody stole it?! Are you serious?’

‘Indeed’, I nodded, ‘Do you know anything about it, Mondo?’

‘What are you trying to imply lassie?’ Mondo bared his teeth.

‘I don’t want to accuse you or nothing, but since you have… some knowledge about thievery, I was just curious that’s all. The glass case wasn’t shattered at all, so somebody must have picked the lock
to retrieve it’.

‘Oh, I see… well I have picked locks before to break into houses and shit like that. But I have never
gone out of my way to steal a priceless artefact before’.

‘So, you didn’t take it then?’

‘Even if I could, I couldn’t be arsed. Besides, knives are my trademark weapon! Most criminals have
one and knives are mine. I don’t need a crossbow, as you saw with my training session with Sakura,
they make good projectile weapons on their own if you know how to use them right!’

‘You see!’ Kiyotaka yelled, ‘Mondo is not the one responsible here!’

‘Thanks Taka’, Mondo smiled, ‘This is why I trust you!’

‘I think you need another sauna session too bro. Just to help you clear your mind! When your body is
relaxed you can concentrate better, so you can also find your knives easier!’

‘That doesn’t sound like a bad idea actually…’

‘I am on laundry duty, so I need to get that sorted out first, but then it’s game on!’ Kiyotaka winked.

‘Game on!’, Mondo roared, this time in anticipation before they gave each other a ‘manly’ hug and
left the room together, arm in arm.

‘I still can’t believe that the Ultimate Moral Compass is going out of his way to defend a notorious
biker gang leader!’ Celestia exclaimed, ‘Very strange indeed…’

‘Well that deescalated quickly!’ shrugged Akira, ‘Well at least that leaves me more time to spend
with my glorious inventions! Catch you all later!’ he skipped out as though nothing had happened.

‘He was the one who got us all in this situation to begin with!’, Celestia scoffed.

‘Well at least no one was hurt!’ I said as we left the gymnasium and made our way back to the
dormitories. As we returned to her room, she asked,

‘So, Kyoko…’

‘What’s up Celeste?’

‘How about we have a bath together, I mean we have known each other for a while now… There is
an indoor spring bath next door to the sauna you know’.

‘I guess so…’ I shrugged, ‘I will probably just sit at the side of the pool though’.

‘Oh yes you fear water above a certain depth, don’t you?’

I nodded, ‘We can share the same room, I may dip my feet in but no more than that…’

‘I think we should have one before the evening meeting, I like to arrive at dinner refreshed after all!’

We had one more game of cards before we made our way to the large bathroom. The room next door
to the sauna led to a circular pool with steam wafting around it.

‘I wonder why we never used this previously?’ Celestia asked as we went into the locker room and
picked up some towels, ‘Well, what do you think?’
‘Pretty neat, I guess…’

‘Are you ready then?’

‘I think so’. At that moment we began to strip off.

Standing naked together felt awkward at first but it didn’t take too long for that feeling to fade once the initial shock was over. Without her corset Celestia seemed rounder than what I first expected, which I found pretty… cute.

‘Are you blushing Kyoko?’ Celestia asked as she wrapped a towel around herself.

‘Well… you do have a nice body’, I uttered as I wrapped around my own towel.

‘Oh, Kyoko you are making me blush!’ Celestia teased, ‘You are not so bad yourself!’

‘It’s nothing special…’, my face turned pink as we stepped into the room and locked the door.

‘What were you saying about body positivity again?’ Celestia winked before she unraveled her towel and slipped into the pool while I sat to the side. Before basking in the hot water Celestia swam a few laps. Seeing her pale white skin and flowing black hair trailing along behind her reminded me very much of a mermaid.

‘Are you sure you don’t want to try it out?’ Celestia looked back towards me, ‘The water is fine!’

‘Maybe a little’, I shuffled my way to the edge of the pool and dipped my feet in. At first the water felt scalding hot, but also strangely soothing against my skin, ‘This feels kind of nice actually…’

‘You like it?’

‘I don’t know if I will go much further than this though…’

‘Oh Kyoko, I bet your muscles are sore after all of that investigating! You could do with a dip! It’s not that big a body of water and it’s better than a swimming pool by a long stretch’.

‘At least no one has pissed in it I suppose…’ I chuckled, ‘Okay Celeste, I will try it out for a few minutes but if I need to get out, then I need to get out…’

‘Sure thing, Kyoko’, Celestia beamed, ‘You can hold my hand if you are nervous’.

‘Thanks…’ I stripped off and gradually stepped in. As I did so my body trembled, and I felt an urge to jump right out again but something about Celestia’s presence and the sensation of the water held me back from doing so.

‘Take my hand’, Celestia offered one out to me.

I took it and we sat at the side of the pool, hands still clasped, the water flowing around us. While we had slept together before, it was quite different with our naked bodies touching. As I felt her skin against mine, my heart rate quickened, and I was shaking again but for another reason entirely.

‘Are you okay?’ she asked me.

‘Yes… I’m fine…’

‘Your face is red as a cherry right now!’ Celestia gasped.
'Really?' As I looked towards her, I could see that her face was red too.

'Hey, did you hear that?', On the other side of the wall we could hear two familiar loud male voices.

'Looks like our ‘friends’ have turned up again!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, that’s them alright…’ Celestia commented as Mondo and Kiyotaka’s voices became more decipherable, ‘Do you think something is going on between them, if you know what I mean?'

‘Maybe... Whatever the case, that showdown in the sauna really must have changed them a lot!’

‘Indeed…’

After spending a little while longer in the small pool, Celestia and I stepped out, and we got ourselves dried up and changed.

‘They are still here it seems’, Celestia looked towards the sauna door.

‘Yeah’, I laughed, ‘I prefer it this way though, rather than them being at each other’s throats’.

‘I suppose you are right’, Celestia shrugged as we walked slowly back to our rooms.

As we came closer however, we could tell that something was wrong.

‘What’s that noise?’ I asked.

‘What noise?’

Indeed, we could hear something. It sounded a lot like whimpering coming from nearby.

‘Come on!’ I ran towards the source of the noise as fast as I could.

‘Hey wait up!’ Celestia called back.

What I saw next made a combination of anger and fear coarse through my body. Around the corner I saw Makoto sobbing uncontrollably over a still form below him. When I stepped closer, I immediately recognised the second victim lying before me.

‘Leon! Wake up! Please!’ despite Makoto’s pleas the young man did not stir. I looked closer and noticed that three arrows were lodged in Leon’s chest and stomach. Blood had dripped down, turning his shirt scarlet.

‘Makoto’, I placed a hand on his shoulder, ‘He’s gone…’

It was at that moment when the sound of the funeral bells echoed throughout the university, but that was not the most shocking thing. On the other side of Leon’s body, I noticed something. Letters written in blood, clearly spelling out the name, ‘Makoto’.
Once again, I could hear running from all directions as everyone gathered around the crime scene.

‘Stop right there criminal scum!’ Kiyotaka yelled. He and Mondo had turned up wearing bath robes.

‘You have been caught red-handed!’ Toko shouted. She and Byakuya were the last to arrive on the scene as we were once again wishing that the sight before us was just a horrible nightmare.

‘What do you have to say for yourself laddie?’ Mondo growled.

‘Hey wait! We cannot be certain that Makoto is the culprit’, I stood in front of Leon’s body, ‘Somebody could have framed him for all we know!’

‘Oh yes Kyoko! With the obvious name written in the victim’s own blood, it is totally just a random coincidence’, scoffed Akira.

‘Well, well, well!’ At that moment the bear appeared, grinning broadly, ‘Alas, it looks like another one of your number has taken their chances!’

‘Just get on with it Monokuma!’ I snapped.

‘You know the rules little cubs, I’m sure! When you have all done your fair share of investigating, we will all meet up for the class trial! Now won’t that be fun? Anyway, please open up your student handbooks and you will see that the Monokuma File app has gotten a little upgrade!’

I took out my handbook and indeed, when I tapped on the ugly chibi Monokuma icon. The details that had previously displayed Yasuhiro’s, now displayed Leon’s.

‘Well, I think you know what to do little cubs!’ the great bear clapped his paws together, ‘This case will definitely be interesting for sure! I can’t wait, I can’t wait! See you at the class trial!’ and once again he vanished.

‘Well we had better start investigating then’, I looked around at everyone, ‘Mondo, when you and Taka have gotten changed, will you help guard the crime scene with Sakura?’

‘I will be right on it, lassie!’, he bowed before he and Kiyotaka went off to get changed.

‘Makoto, you had better go to your room to calm down for a little while. When you have settled down, I would appreciate hearing your account’.

‘Okay Kyoko’, Makoto replied shakily, ‘I will give my account as soon as I can’.

‘He was clearly the criminal!’ hissed Toko, ‘He was right there at the scene!’

‘He is most definitely a suspect. But right now, we must focus on gathering all the evidence we can just to make sure’, I explained, ‘All the little details matter, remember?’ At that moment I saw Mondo return fully dressed, and together him and Sakura stood guard.

‘Sayaka, Celeste, will you be alright investigating alongside me again?’ I asked them, ‘You both did a pretty good job acting as my assistants last time’.

‘I would be glad to!’ beamed Sayaka, taking my hand.
‘If you insist’, Celestia took the other.

‘Let’s get on with it then’, I bent down to examine the body.

‘You should probably investigate that bloody message first’, Mondo jerked his head towards it, ‘I don’t know how you can write in such a way if you are bleeding out, but what do I know?’

‘How do we know the victim wrote that message anyway?’ frowned Aoi.

‘His finger is covered in blood, look!’ Akira pointed, ‘It must have been him surely!’

‘That definitely looks like Leon’s blood’, I said, ‘But how do we know that the killer didn’t use his blood to frame another? Whoever it was, must have known that him and Makoto were close. Doesn’t it seem a little ‘too obvious’ that Makoto is the killer?’.

‘I was thinking that too’, Aoi pointed out, ‘That’s what my gut is telling me anyway!’

‘Well your gut wasn’t wrong last time, so I hope I we can trust your word again Aoi’, I narrowed my eyes, ‘This is interesting indeed. Something about it seems a little off. I just find it hard to believe that someone who was attacked in this manner would be able to write like this’, I stood up,

‘We should probably investigate the murder weapon next I suppose’, Mondo grunted.

‘How will we do so without damaging the evidence?’ asked Sayaka, ‘They are lodged deep in there. One arrow will require a lot of effort to remove surely?’

‘Kyoko should be able to’, Celestia looked at me, ‘she wears gloves so she would pose the least risk tampering with the crime scene’.

‘Okay’, I rubbed my hands together, ‘I will remove one arrow just to see what this stuff is made of’.

‘Whatever you say Kyoko’, Sakura told me, ‘Just be careful’.

‘Okay… one, two, three!’ I grabbed one the arrows with both of my hands. Indeed, the arrow was firmly stuck there, and my arms ached as I pulled with all my might. Finally with one big tug, I managed to yank the bloody arrow out and I placed it to the side’.

‘This is the strangest arrow I have ever seen’, Akira bent down, ‘It’s a Franken-arrow!’

‘As tasteless as Akira’s joke is, it does seem like this arrow was constructed from various materials’, I examined it closer, ‘This is a very well-made weapon, as crude as it is. There is a peacock feather at the end, the middle seems to be made from a metal rod, and the point has been firmly duct taped in place’.

‘Hey this looks familiar!’ Mondo gasped, ‘Holy shit! My knives! Somebody had the nerve to do this to my beauties, huh? Well I will show them!’, he twirled one in his hand.

‘So, it turns out that the person who stole Mondo’s knives was the killer’, Celestia pondered, ‘Makes sense if I don’t say so myself’.

‘If they stole Mondo’s weapons then it’s likely that they were the one who stole the Jade Crossbow too. But we need to find where the killer hid it if they really did use it’, I explained.

‘But it could be hidden anywhere in the university!’ cried Sayaka, ‘How will we find it in time?’

‘We have to find a ‘trail’ and fast’, I said, ‘that way we might be able to find out where the killer may
have attacked from’.

‘Once again, I wish you well in your search Kyoko’, Sakura nodded.

‘I trust that you will find the bastard who stole from me lassie’, Mondo growled.

‘Come on! Let’s get going already!’ Sayaka exclaimed as she, Celestia and I left the crime scene, ‘Where do you think we should investigate first?’

‘Hey!’ I heard Kiyotaka run up to us from the laundry room, ‘You won’t believe what I found! This could be the key to solving this mystery!’

‘Show us!’, we followed him. He was pointing towards a large table cloth. At first, we were confused as to why such a thing would be significant in the murder case, but as I stepped closer, I let out a gasp.

‘It’s a peacock feather!’ exclaimed Sayaka, ‘Just like the one upon the arrows!’

‘It’s completely battered due to it being in the washing machine but it’s a peacock feather nonetheless’, I picked it up, ‘Good spotting Taka!’

‘Don’t mention it!’ he laughed, ‘I was on laundry duty today and I didn’t notice it until I returned here to investigate. The table cloth was already in the machine, so I just turned it on’!

‘What is a peacock feather even doing there in the first place?’ frowned Celestia, ‘The only other place where I saw such things was in the museum’.

‘Yes, and why would it be in a blanket of all things? On paper they could have been using it to cover up their identity, but covering yourself with this thing will restrict movement surely? You won’t be able to make a quick getaway either’.

‘It is indeed very confusing, my dear Kyoko. But with your genius, I am sure everything will come together in the class trial’, Celestia reassured me.

‘I believe in you Kyoko!’, Sayaka gave me a thumbs up.

‘Um… thanks guys’, my face turned pink

We made our way towards the museum and to the natural history section, once again surrounded by many stuffed birds. In our current situation they felt much more macabre than beautiful.

‘Okay girls, can any of you find any peacocks around here? It shouldn’t be too hard to find one, they are not exactly hard to miss’, I told them, ‘That’s kind of their purpose’.

‘I wish humans were more like birds’, muttered Celestia, ‘with them, it’s the males who are expected to put extra effort into their appearance’.

We wondered through a sea of fading colours until I heard Celestia call out,

‘Over here!’

Sayaka and I ran over to see an elaborate peacock. It had the brightest feathers in the room, it’s blue and green plumage resembling sapphires and emeralds. If there was sunlight, I’m sure it would have looked dazzling. As I looked closer however, I noticed that some of its beautiful tail feathers were missing.
'I think this is the one’, I looked closely, ‘I swear when I last saw it, the tail was fully intact’.

‘Yes, it looks like the feathers were only recently plucked out’, Celestia commented, ‘I suppose our killer wanted to murder in style!’

‘I dunno, peacock feathers are actually quite popular in archery’, I mentioned, ‘Either way, at least this is all coming together. We just need to know where the other ingredients of the… ‘Franken-arrows’ came from’, the other two girls followed after me and we exited the museum.

‘We should probably investigate the physics lab’, I told them, ‘There seemed to be all kinds of interesting bits and bobs in that place’.

‘Whatever you say’, sighed Celeste as we entered the room once again, where we saw Byakuya and Toko investigating.

‘Have you found anything worth presenting Byakuya?’ I asked him.

‘I think I may have an idea about what may have been used’, he held out a thin, sturdy metal rod, ‘On the Togami Estate we have land specially for hunting, although I sometimes go on hunting trips to Africa too. We have a whole room full of trophies, many of them shot by yours truly!’

‘So, you like killing endangered creatures for fun? Why am I not surprised?’ Celestia hissed.

‘Go on’, I egged him on.

‘I prefer to use my trusty rifle although I do sometimes opt for the crossbow if I am feeling more adventurous’, he snickered, ‘Anyway the bolts I use have contain a very similar material. You want something light but powerful at the same time in order to create the perfect weapon’.

‘Will I ever get to see your ‘weapon’ master?’ giggled Toko.

‘Will you bugger off already, you freak of nature?!’ Byakuya snarled at her.

Toko let out a soft cry as she hid behind the large air purifier.

‘So, do you reckon this rod made up the ‘body’ of the arrow?’ I asked.

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying. If you get everything exactly right when designing your weapon, you can easily take down an elephant or other large game animal’, Byakuya bragged.

‘Well it’s good to know that you are using your talents to wipe out the already dwindling elephant population’, I commented sarcastically, ‘But thank you for your account anyway Byakuya’.

‘Don’t mention it!’

‘Look here, master!’ Toko cried excitedly, ‘I found the duct tape! And some super glue too’, Byakuya ignored her.

‘Oh, good spotting Toko!’ Sayaka told her.

‘Indeed, we have found another piece of the puzzle’, I said, ‘So now we know where all the arrow parts came from. Now we need to find out the location of the damn crossbow’.

My question however, was soon to be answered when we noticed Akira running towards us.

‘Oh my God! You won’t believe what I have found!’
‘What have you found Akira?’ asked Sayaka.

‘I think I know where the Jade Crossbow is hidden, come on follow me!’

‘Well we had better do as he says I suppose’, I rolled my eyes before I followed him back downstairs, towards the crime scene. To my surprise however he pointed towards the ceiling, at a large grate, ‘Are you suggesting it’s gotten into the vents somehow?’ I questioned.

‘I sent my jitter bugs into the vents shortly after the body discovery announcement’, he explained.

‘Why would you send them in there of all places?’

‘Well those vents are actually pretty spacious, I imagine a small person could fit in there quite easily’, he shrugged, ‘Anyway my jitterbugs found what appeared to be the Jade Crossbow in the vents, just above where we are standing actually!’

‘Are you saying that the killer hid the crossbow here?’ asked Sakura.

‘Indeed, I am pretty certain that either one of the smaller or thinner students made their way into the vents, or one of the bigger students sent a smaller person up there to assist them’.

‘That’s a good point. Speaking of which, I wonder how the rules applies to accomplices?’

‘That is a very good question indeed little cub’, I heard Monokuma speak, and within seconds the bear manifested right in front of us, ‘I had better update the rule book!’

‘If you act as an accomplice and the killer doesn’t get caught, can you escape too?’

‘Yes’, Monokuma spoke softly, ‘but there is a catch!’

‘What would that be?’ asked Mondo.

‘You will be weakened somehow before you will graduate’, Monokuma explained, ‘just to even things out you know! After all, it was the killer who did most of the work. It’s only fair’.

‘And what if they both get caught? Will the accomplice be punished too?’

‘The accomplice will not face execution, but yes little cub, whether their actions were intentional or otherwise, they will face a smaller let still effective punishment. Again, they will be weakened in one way or another, it just won’t be fair to let them get away Scott free. That’s not how justice works after all, I’m sure my good friend Kyoko knows that!’ he shot me a nasty glare.

‘Yes…’ I replied coolly, ‘Monokuma, what does this ‘weakening’ involve exactly?’

‘You will find out soon enough my little cub’, Monokuma smirked, ‘Anyway you had all better get on with this investigation if you want to bring justice to this poor unfortunate soul here’, he pointed a massive paw towards Leon’s body, ‘You haven’t got much time left you know!’

‘Well we had better see if Akira’s claim is right’, I told everyone around me as the bear vanished.

‘What are you going to do, send someone into the vents to retrieve it?’ gasped Sayaka.

‘That’s what I hope to do, we just need to find an access point. Do you know any entry points around here?’ I questioned Akira.

‘Of course I do!’
‘Can you show us?‘

‘Say please!‘

‘For fuck’s sake Akira, just show the lass where the goddamn entrance is!‘, Mondo snapped.

‘Okay, okay, big guy! Keep your hair on!‘ he then beckoned me and the other two girls forward. On the way, we ran into Aoi and Chihiro.

‘I heard that you found the Jade Crossbow Akira!‘ Aoi gasped.

‘Indeed, I have dearie!‘ Akira explained before he faced Chihiro, ‘Ah ha! You are the perfect candidate!‘

‘What are you talking about?‘ Chihiro tilted her head to the side, ‘You aren’t going to experiment on me are you?‘

‘No, but I do plan on using you as a guinea pig of sorts!‘

‘You will do no such thing!‘ Aoi stood in front of her.

‘Do you want to solve this thing or not?‘ Akira jeered, ‘Besides, it will be nothing too extreme. I just need someone to retrieve the crossbow from the vents for me!‘

‘Did you choose me just because I’m small?‘ Chihiro asked.

‘Being small has it’s advantages missy, you can get into smaller places where others can’t!‘

‘But won’t it be claustrophobic in there?‘

‘You will be doing a great honour by retrieving an important historical artifact. Also, the location of the crossbow could give us a rough idea of where Leon’s killer attacked from!‘

‘I will see if I can find you a head torch Chihiro, then you can navigate easier‘, I told her.

‘Wait! You are not in on this too Kyoko, are you?‘ gasped Aoi.

‘I’m not usually for shoving people in the vents, but seeing as our lives are at stake here…‘

I dashed towards my room and from my box of supplies, I managed to dig out a head torch. I ran back to the group and handed it over to Chihiro, ‘You will able to adjust it according to your size‘, I explained to her.

‘Thanks Kyoko…‘ Chihiro replied weakly as she put it on, before Akira led us to a small warehouse.

‘Are you really going to send her through there?‘ Aoi shot Akira an angry glare.

‘Aoi, it’s fine‘, Chihiro stepped forward, ‘I want to help out‘.

‘Whatever you say… But how will she be able to navigate?‘

‘I have the perfect solution for that’, Akira reached into his pocket and pulled out two maracas.

‘Are you serious?‘ Sayaka's eyes were wide open.

‘He is…‘ Celestia shook her head.
‘So Chihiro’, Akira explained, ‘If you can hear the maracas then that means I am around, I think that’s quite straightforward isn’t it?’

‘This is insane’, I placed my face in my hands as Akira unscrewed the large grate covering the vent entrance, ‘but if we are to survive this round, it’s necessary’.

Chihiro turned on her head torch, ‘I trust you Akira!’ she told him before she made her first steps into the vent, ‘I’m ready!’

Akira’s method of guiding Chihiro though the ventilation system was bizarre, but also effective. As he shook the maracas, we distinctly heard pattering upon metal above us.

‘You are almost there! You are doing great!’ Akira called up as we approached the crime scene where Mondo and Sakura stared at us, perplexed.

‘What the fuck are you doing?’ Mondo yelled angrily, ‘Show some fucking respect will ya?’

‘Yes’, Sakura nodded, ‘I find this performance in front a dead body to be rather distasteful’.

‘We will explain shortly!’ I told them both, ‘It’s not what you think it is’.

‘Hang on, I think I hear something in the vents!’ Sakura jerked her head up shortly before we heard a muffled but familiar voice come from the grate above us.

‘It’s okay I’ve found it!’

‘Did you send Chihiro up there?’ Sakura clapped a hand to her mouth.

‘Don’t you worry my dear’, Akira explained, ‘She’s up there for an important mission!’

‘Will somebody get me down?’ Chihiro cried out.

‘Sure thing!’ Akira got out his screwdriver, ‘Mondo would you be able to lift me up so I can remove the grate? I think Chihiro should be able to fit through it just fine!’

‘Fine, whatever…’, Mondo lifted Akira up high and the toy maker unscrewed it with relative ease.

‘How will I get down though?’ Chihiro asked, as I looked up, I saw a distinctive glimmer of jade in her hand, ‘It’s quite high up here!’

‘I will catch you’, Sakura stood below, ‘Do you trust me?’

‘Of course, Sakura!’, Chihiro dropped down, the Jade Crossbow in her hand. If there wasn’t a dead body present, we would have applauded her efforts.

‘I’m surprised Leon didn’t wake up from the dead Akira!’, Mondo growled, ‘That was awful!’

‘At least we got the crossbow though’, I sighed in relief, ‘It will be a crucial piece of evidence’.

At that moment I saw Makoto emerge from his room. When he came across Leon’s corpse again, he bowed his head solemnly, ‘Hey Kyoko’, he murmured, ‘I think I can give my account now’.

‘What do you have to say Makoto?’, I asked, ‘Do remember however, that whatever you say can be used against you in the class trial’.

‘I left my room to go and check on Leon and he lay in this very spot, not breathing or stirring. His
body had already become cold at that point too, he must have been dead for a while before I even turned up’, a tear rolled down his cheek, ‘If only I was here earlier, I might have been able to save him’.

‘Oh Makoto’, Aoi came ran up to hug him, her eyes were also watering.

‘Hey, don’t go cuddling up with the murderer!’ cried Akira.

‘Just stay out of this will you?’ Aoi snapped at him.

‘I’m just saying’, Akira shrugged, ‘It looks like he could fit through those vents, and he was the only person in this area at the time, as far as we know’.

‘We will find out exactly what was going on at the class trial’, I asserted before the sound of the funeral bells echoed through the class once again, ‘Speak of the devil…’ I looked around, ‘Come on we had better get going, the bear will not wait’.

Makoto was kneeling besides Leon’s body once again, holding his stiff hand.

‘Come on Makoto’, Sakura told him gently, ‘We will find justice for him, no matter what’.

‘Thanks Sakura’, Makoto smiled feebly up at her before reluctantly letting go of Leon one last time.

Slowly we made our way to the familiar hellish red double doors.

‘Well it looks like we are going straight to Hell and back again’, Byakuya grinned, ‘But of course, one of you will not make it’, he shrugged as we heard the elevator clatter upwards.

‘This is it’, Kiyotaka looked over to make sure everyone was there, ‘Come on everyone, let’s get this over with’, he beckoned us all inside the ancient mechanism.

‘We will find out whoever did this’, Mondo said as the doors closed and the elevator began to descend, ‘you mark my words!’

‘While I want justice for Leon… I…’ Makoto stammered as that whooshing feeling came over us, signalling our arrival into the Demon Realm, ‘… I don’t want anyone to die, and I’m sure Leon wouldn’t have wanted that either’.

‘Who did kill him though?’ pondered Sayaka.

‘Who knows? The answer may surprise you’, Celestia winked.

‘We will find out’, I said as the elevator came to a halt, ‘we have a lot of evidence on our side’.

Once again, we walked passed by the figures in black guarding the exit, and into the elaborate courtroom. The bear sat proudly upon his platform, two of his henchpeople either side of him.

‘Well I see you are back for round two!’ he grinned, ‘Well come on everyone, gather round! Let’s not keep this thing waiting!’

As we stepped into our places, we noticed that two more seats had been replaced by glowing shrines. Junko and Leon had joined Yasuhiro among the damned, a large red ‘X’ over their respective pictures.

Once again, we were back in this cruel predicament, but we all knew deep down that it had to be done if we were to stay alive. For a second time, we would have to condemn another and leave them
to a terrible fate in the hands of the beast standing before us.
'Okay then everyone!' Monokuma announced, ‘Are you all seated comfortably? Good! Then we can begin! The curious case of Leon Kuwata’s murder’, he sat down in a composed fashion, ‘So little cubs, how about we begin with the subject of the murder weapon!’

‘It was a crossbow that killed Leon. The Jade Crossbow to be precise’, I was the first to speak up. ‘Ah! That weapon has quite the reputation doesn’t it, Kyoko?’

‘Yes, that’s not all though, once again the killer had to get creative. Since there were no working arrows in the museum, they had to construct some themselves’.

‘Tell me more! Tell me more!’

‘Our killer had to assemble an effective set of arrows by using materials found across the university’, Celestia explained, ‘it’s extremely tacky I know but if you are desperate as the murderer was, you will most likely resort to anything. Keeping it classy clearly didn’t matter to them’.

‘Does the killer’s ‘classiness’ level really matter?’ Aoi snapped.

‘On paper no, but on the other hand it gives us some clue into the mindset of our killer’, I commented, ‘I think the killer may have resorted to using what they could out of desperation. But that doesn’t matter right now, we need to discuss what this arrow was made of’.

‘I can testify to that!’ Mondo yelled, ‘The bastard must have stolen my knives from me when I had my back turned! If there is one thing we know for sure, it’s that the killer is a fucking coward!’

‘You said it bro!’ Kiyotaka agreed.

‘Okay Mondo’, I held out a hand, ‘but yes. It appears that the point of the arrow was constructed using some of your knives. Looking closer at the weapon, it seems the killer had attached them by using a combination of duct tape and super glue, some of which was found in the physics lab by Toko’.

‘They will pay for this!’ Mondo hissed, ‘Defiling my weapons with super glue were they?!’

‘When did they take the weapon though?’ questioned Sakura, ‘Before Akira gathered everyone in the gymnasium, we didn’t see anyone else turn up during our training session’.

‘That’s a good question’, I frowned, ‘I bet the knives were stolen while we were all gathered around you both. The thief must have taken them while we were all distracted’.

‘That makes a lot of sense!’ barked Kiyotaka.

‘Indeed’, Chihiro nodded, ‘But where did the killer obtain the other items?’

‘Byakuya believes he found one of the items’, I pointed in his direction, ‘Would you like to explain further sir?’

‘I would be delighted to. I often use a crossbow when I go on hunting trips, so I have a rough idea about the kind of mechanisms used to construct such an effective weapon’.

‘The body was made from a metal rod wasn’t it?’ Sayaka asked.
‘Positive’, answered Byakuya, ‘Like the crossbow bolts I use, it was light and sturdy. I use weapons made from similar materials to bring down large game in Africa, so it should be able to take down a human with relative ease’.

‘It’s just a shame you didn’t get mauled by lions on your trips’, Mondo growled, ‘If you use firearms to bring down animals that can’t fight back, it’s a sure sign that you have no balls!’

‘Leave master alone you ruffian!’ shrieked Toko.

‘We can discuss animal rights later Mondo. Right now, we need to find the other pieces of the puzzle. We need to discuss where the feather was obtained, and I have a hunch where’, I nodded in Sayaka’s and Celestia’s direction.

‘Oh yes!’ Celestia grinned.

‘They were peacock feathers, weren’t they?’ asked Aoi.

‘That’s right!’ Sayaka nodded.

‘Where did the killer obtain them though?’ questioned Makoto.

‘There is a peacock specimen in the natural history section of the museum’, Celestia recalled, ‘When me and the girls went to investigate, we noticed that several of it’s tail feathers had been plucked right off. I’m pretty sure I remember it having a much fuller tail when I last saw it’.

‘I have to walk by the natural history section of the museum to get the armoury’, Sakura spoke out, ‘I passed by that specimen many times and its feathers were fully intact, somebody must have tampered with it the night before’.

‘That would make sense’, I replied, ‘But then we must move onto our next point, what was a peacock feather doing inside of a tablecloth?’

‘Oh yes’, Kiyotaka clapped his hands, ‘I was on wash duty and I remember putting that tablecloth in the wash shortly before meeting Mondo in the sauna. I just thought it was another article of dirty laundry’.

‘Speaking of which…’ Aoi spoke, ‘When Sakura, Chihiro and I went to the dining room for lunch we noticed that one of the tables lacked a cloth. Again, we didn’t think much of it’.

‘Why would the killer need such an item?’ Sayaka questioned, ‘Even if it was used to cover up the killer’s identity, I imagine it would heavily restrict movement. Also, while I am no expert on archery, I don’t think you can effectively fire a crossbow with a large thing like that covering you’.

‘What if the killer didn’t fire from the ground though?’ Mondo suggested, ‘What if they fired from above? That way you would have longer to escape the scene, covered up or not!’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Back when I used Molotov cocktails, I would often throw them from above. The confused looks on my assailants’ faces were so fucking funny. It took them longer to figure out where I was if I attacked from above rather than the ground. That would allow me more time to get away too, since I am pretty good at roof hopping!’

‘It’s official! Mondo is Spiderman!’ laughed Akira.
'Can we please just get on with the trial already?’, I grumbled.

‘Mondo has I point though’, Sakura said, ‘Attacking from above does have its advantages’.

‘Do you really think the killer attacked from the vents?’, Sayaka frowned.

‘I am sure that some of the smaller students can fit in there quite easily, as Chihiro so kindly proved to us’, Akira winked in her direction, ‘She found the Jade Crossbow there too, which was hidden just above the body’.

‘That’s right’, Chihiro bowed her head, ‘I don’t think it was there by mere coincidence’.

‘What about the blanket though?’ I pondered, ‘How did that play a role?’

‘Do you think the killer may have covered themselves up with the table cloth before climbing into the vents?’ Kiyotaka frowned.

‘Well upon his arrival, Akira did have a habit of sending his jitterbugs in there’, Celestia told him, ‘I don’t think the killer wanted to risk being identified by the camera system he installed’.

‘Ah! That makes sense now!’ Kiyotaka shouted.

‘Where did the killer attack from though?’ asked Makoto.

‘When I unscrewed the grate, it was unusually loose and I was able to remove it quite easily’, Akira recalled, ‘given all of the evidence so far. I think the grate had been removed by somebody else previously and they fixed it quickly before leaving the scene’.

‘Do you think the killer used the ventilation system as a vantage point then?!’ gasped Toko.

‘Wasn’t it pretty obvious from the beginning?’ Akira shrugged.

‘That grate was huge’, Chihiro commented, ‘You could probably aim it from there, and you had a pretty good viewpoint too. The vents were also surprisingly spacious, for someone of my size anyway’.

‘That narrows it down then doesn’t it?’ Byakuya smirked, ‘The culprit must have been someone small and or skinny enough to get into the vents!’

‘I guess that narrows me out then…’ sighed Aoi, looking down at herself.

‘Isn’t that a good thing?’ Sakura reassured her, ‘Besides, I wouldn’t want you to change for the world!’ she gave a soft smile in her direction.

‘Thanks Sakura…’ Aoi blushed, ‘That means you are ruled out as well, right?’

‘Me too!’ yelled Mondo, ‘And Taka is too heavy’, I briefly saw Mondo’s face turn scarlet before he looked down at his boots, ‘Trust me I know!’

‘I don’t think I would be able to manoeuvre in there, even with a corset on’, Celestia shook her head.

‘I probably could go in there but it will be so uncomfortable that I won’t be able to get a good aim’, I said, ‘so, who does that leave then?’

‘Makoto, Chihiro, Akira, Sayaka, Byakuya and Toko I think’, Celestia counted them on her fingers, ‘Unless one of the bigger students sent them down there of as an accomplice’.
‘I see we are now on the subject of the culprit’, Monokuma spoke, ‘My claws are itching with anticipation!’.

‘Don’t you dare blame Chihiro!’ Aoi raised a finger.

‘It’s fine’, Chihiro spoke, ‘It’s true though, I was with Sakura and Aoi throughout the day’.

‘Can anybody else give their account?’ I asked.

‘Master didn’t do it! I was with him the whole time!’ Toko cried.

‘As much as I hate to say it, Toko is not the suspect either’, Byakuya sighed, ‘Even when I couldn’t see her, I could always sense that she was nearby. Mostly due to the smell of course’, he snickered.

‘While I find that snide comment of yours unnecessary, I think it safe to rule you both out’, I nodded, ‘Would you be happy giving your account Sayaka?’

‘I most certainly would Kyoko!’ Sayaka beamed, ‘After witnessing Mondo and Sakura’s training session I decided to head up to the games room’.

‘I see, Akira what about you?’

‘I was in the museum too’, Akira explained, ‘mostly investigating old toys. I wish to take them apart one day so I can harvest them for my inventions! Oh boy, I can feel my creative juices flowing!’

‘Did you both see Akira around?’ I eyed Byakuya.

‘I saw him lurking around’, Byakuya shrugged, ‘We kept our distance though’.

I bowed my head, ‘What have you got to say Makoto?’

‘I was in my room but…’

‘Look at him’, Toko called out, ‘It is so obvious he is the one! You and Leon had a bit of a fight earlier in the day, didn’t you? Was that the straw that broke the camel’s back?’

‘Fights are a common part of relationships’, Makoto gulped, ‘I mean even before the killing game, Leon and I did have the occasional fight’.

‘Yeah right! What about the bloody letters clearly spelling out your name?’

‘Yes Makoto, how will you explain that one?’ sneered Akira, ‘Looks pretty fishy doesn’t it?’

‘I didn’t kill him, I swear I didn’t!’ Makoto’s eyes began to water, ‘He was already dead by the time I got to him and his skin was cold. I think he was heading to my room but on the way, he was shot’.

‘Did you hear any cries of pain? Any screaming at all?’ asked Celestia.

‘No, it seems the murderer managed to take him out quietly’.

‘I wonder how they managed to do that?’ frowned Aoi.

‘Well first he was drinking earlier so I imagine his reactions and reflexes were not up to scratch at the time’, Mondo suggested, ‘I also have a hunch that the arrow in his stomach was the first to be fired, in order to stun him. Then the killer fired a second arrow into his chest. The third one I imagine was precautionary, to properly make sure he was dead’.
‘Mondo’s commentary makes sense. It also adds to the argument that Makoto was framed, seeing as the victim most likely died before he could leave such a message. There is something else too’, I pulled out my student handbook, revealing a photo of the bloody letters, ‘Notice anything strange?’

‘The message looks like it’s… upside down’, Chihiro trembled, ‘Considering the way Leon was murdered, I highly doubt that he would have had the strength to write in such a manner, let alone the wrong way round’.

‘That’s a very good point, isn’t it, Sayaka?’ I glared in her direction.

‘Ooo! Things are getting heated up!’ Monokuma purred.

‘Kyoko, what are you doing?’, beads of sweat began to run down her face, ‘Weren’t we friends?’

‘I will ask you again. Did you or did you not write that message in the victim’s blood?’

‘What makes you think I would do that? I was in the games room, just like I said!’

‘Do any of you disagree with this claim?’

At first there was silence but then I saw Aoi raise a hand, ‘About forty-five minutes before the body discovery announcement, I was on my way to the loo and I came across Sayaka heading into the little warehouse. I thought at first that she was just getting music supplies but now I think she was there to examine the vent entrance’.

‘Don’t be ridiculous Aoi!’ Sayaka cried out.

‘Sayaka’, I sighed, ‘Nobody else was present in that area around the time’.

‘And I didn’t see you in the games room either Sayaka’, Aoi looked quite sick as she said this.

‘Surely you all have this wrong!’ Sayaka stammered, ‘I didn’t kill Leon I swear!’

‘I think this will beg to differ’, Celestia held out a crumpled note, ‘I found this in Leon’s pocket! It claims to be from Makoto, telling Leon to meet him at 5:30pm in his room’.

‘The killer must have forged this letter, and slipped it under Leon’s bedroom door, instructing to meet him at the time specified. That was about twenty minutes before the body discovery announcement, and I assume that was the time the actual murder took place’, I thought.

‘It’s Makoto’s handwriting I swear!’ cried Sayaka, ‘It wasn’t me!’

‘I would beg to differ on that one’, I frowned, ‘have you got some hand-written notes lying around?’

Shakily I saw Sayaka pull out a tatty piece of paper from her pocket and she held it out. It looked like a song sheet, but one thing was certain, the handwriting indeed matched that of the note.

Sayaka let out a faint cry upon discovering that she was cornered, ‘Kyoko, you were my friend. We went through so much together. How can you do this?’

‘I don’t want to do this either Sayaka. I really don’t… but I must’, my heart dropped like a stone, ‘all the evidence points to you being Leon’s killer’.

‘I was the one who killed him’, Sayaka’s face had turned blank, ‘But I beg that you understand why’.

‘I will ask you again. Did you or did you not write that message in the victim’s blood?’

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‘I was the one who killed him’, Sayaka’s face had turned blank, ‘But I beg that you understand why’.
The courtroom around me felt like it had turned to ice. Some of my classmates let out sobs while others stared into space, not knowing how to react to the fact that the sweet and bubbly Sayaka had turned out to be a traitor and a murderer. After about 30 seconds of silence I spoke.

‘I will be happy to hear your reasoning Sayaka but right now we need to summarise this case’.

‘Are you ready to give a full account of Leon’s tragic murder?’ asked Monokuma.

I let out a deep sigh before I stared up at the bear, knowing the inevitable, ‘Okay Monokuma I am ready’, I cleared my throat, ‘Here is what happened in this case!

In the dormitories the victim Leon Kuwata who had been drinking earlier, had taken three arrows in the torso ensuring a quick and quiet kill. It appears that the killer had stolen the crossbow from the museum the night before. To construct arrows, they used feathers plucked from a peacock located in the natural history section of the museum. To make the arrowhead they stole three of Mondo’s knives when he left his coat upon a bench. They most likely stole them while we were distracted by his and Sakura’s ‘training session’. To construct the arrow body they used a metal rod taken from the physics lab and to fasten everything together they used a combination of duct tape and super glue.

The killer fired the arrows from a hidden vantage point, the vents. It was also the place where the murder weapon was hidden. The killer was slim enough to fit through and unscrewed the grate so they could attack from that point before re-screwing it. The killer covered themselves in a tablecloth to prevent detection by Akira’s jitterbug cam system. Not many of us could fit through the vents, but most of those who could were ruled out as suspect as they were confirmed by others to be in different rooms at the time.

At first the biggest suspect in this case was Makoto Naegi as he was discovered alongside the body at around 5:50 pm and were concerned that he had tampered with the evidence. However, if he had intended to tamper with the evidence, he probably would have gotten rid of the bloody letters next to the body reading ‘Makoto’. This was laid out by the killer to make it look like the victim had written out Makoto’s name in his own blood as he was dying. The victim died however before he could do such a thing. The message was also upside down, further proving that Makoto had been framed.

When Aoi, Sakura and Chihiro were in the dining room they noticed that one of the table cloths was missing. It was later discovered in the laundry room, mixed in with other clothing articles on wash day by Kiyotaka before he joined Mondo in the sauna. We also noticed a peacock feather tucked within the cloth, giving us some proof that it was used by the killer. The final crucial piece of evidence however was a note forged by the murderer addressed to Leon in order to lure him out at a specific time and to further pin the blame on Makoto, to make it look like the murder had actually taken place twenty minutes after the true time at 5:30pm.

Does this all sound familiar to you Sayaka Maizono?’

‘Good job Kyoko’, I heard Sayaka’s voice trail off, ‘Even now, I still find your mystery solving skills admirable’, she brushed a tear from her eye.

‘Sayaka…’ my voice became distant too as the bear stood up.

‘Are you ready to begin the voting ritual?’ he grinned.

‘Just get on with it… hairball…’ Sayaka murmured.

Once again, we saw the familiar spiked plinths rise from the ground and I rolled down my sleeve a second time before removing my glove. When I pricked my finger and wrote down Sayaka’s name
in my blood, the pain had been numbed by the knowledge that I was sending a friend, the first student I had encountered at the university to her early demise. All around me many of the other students seemed to feel the same way. She had tried to keep morale after the first motive by throwing us all a concert, she had acted as one of my assistants and her kind, happy nature had kept our spirits up in our terrible situation.

As the plinths descended back into the floor, I felt very sick inside and I could not feel my toes.

‘I see you have all made your decisions!’ announced the bear.

Once again, Monokuma conjured up a large ball of fire using his two front paws before it floated towards the centre of the room. Within seconds we saw the fire manifest into a spitting image of Sayaka.

‘So little cubs, is this the dastardly culprit?’, Nobody said anything, we all just nodded solemnly. ‘Then it has been decided!’ he clapped his paws together and the fiery image of Sayaka turned into ash. For a second time the bear leapt from his platform and landed without making a sound in the middle of the room, before prowling around us.

‘No worries little cubs, I’ve just been considering how I’m going to cook you all! Should I boil you? Fry you? Stew you? Or should I just throw you all into a giant blender and make the ultimate smoothie!’ he roared with laughter.

‘Just fucking get on with it!’ snarled Mondo.

‘Well little cubs, it looks like I am out of luck again’, he sulked as he plopped himself down on the floor, ‘Sayaka Maizono is indeed the fiend who murdered Leon Kuwata’.

‘Sayaka…’ I asked her, ‘Why did you do it?’ I was upset and angry at the same time, ‘What could possibly have driven you to do such an awful thing?’

‘That night, when we were given the motive videos. I saw the other members of my band, all lying sprawled and unflinching upon the floor…’ she gulped, ‘… it looked so real you know. When I saw them in that state, I couldn’t just leave them… because for a long time, they were my only friends’.

‘They were your only friends? Seriously?’ gasped Makoto, ‘In your position?’

‘Oh, little cubs, you are so naïve. You really have no idea about the cruel nature of the entertainment industry, do you?’ he let out one of his chilling laughs, ‘Well, I think it is time I told you a story, a tragic story of two child stars. Now I’m sure you have heard this tale numerous times, it is all too common after all’, heloomed over Sayaka, ‘You had a rough start in life, didn’t you?’

‘That’s true’, Sayaka sighed, ‘My mother died in my early teens, and for a long time I only had my father and my little sister, Sara. My dad was overworked and for little pay, so it was often just my sister and I’, she looked up at the ceiling, ‘to pass the time we would often turn on the radio or tv and watch our favourite girl bands perform. But one day, the economy got bad and my father’s job wasn’t enough to keep us going. The landlord became impatient and threatened to kick us out numerous times so I decided to resort to more extreme measures to keep us going’, she smiled weakly.

‘What kind of “extreme measures”?’ asked Kiyotaka.

‘Sometimes I would steal valuables from people so my father could sell them and keep the landlord quiet, at least for a little while. Over time I could break into people’s houses using a lockpick, and for some time, I was known as the ultimate thief. I was never caught however, nobody suspected an
innocent little girl after all…”

‘But then one day, tragedy struck, didn’t it my dear?’ Monokuma said.

‘Was that when… you sister…?’ Aoi questioned.

‘Yes. For those of you who don’t know, my little sister was killed in a hit and run’, she wiped her eyes. ‘That was when everything changed. As you may know, my sister wanted to be a singer when she grew up and, in her honour, I was determined to pursue that dream myself’.

‘You really had no idea what you had signed up for, did you Sayaka?’ the bear spoke.

‘Indeed’, Sayaka looked forlorn, ‘I sacrificed many, many things to get to where I am, my body and soul. The record label I had signed up for was my puppet master and to get the top, I had to follow their every whim, even if I felt uncomfortable doing so…’, I could see tear tracks running down her face now, causing her makeup to bleed, ‘I couldn’t date, go out when I wanted, my diet was always restricted and if my complexion was slightly off, I would not get paid. While the girls and I smiled on stage, we were screaming on the inside. It was all just an act’.

‘Sayaka…’ Aoi’s eyes were watering too.

‘The girls were the only people I could truly be myself around, and the only shoulder I could cry upon. We stuck together, even during the worst of times’, she sobbed, ‘we were like a family, the closest thing I had to having a sister again, so seeing them like that in the video utterly broke me. I knew I had to get out of here, otherwise what will my efforts have been for? Here, the only reminder of my time with the girls is cocaine. When the girls were not around, it was all I had to help me cope with the pressure from the music industry’.

Monokuma stood up, ‘So I suppose you are wondering, where does our deceased friend, Leon fit into all this?’

Sayaka’s face turned cold, ‘He killed my sister’.

Everyone clapped their hands to their mouth, Makoto looked down at his shoes.

‘Leon was charged for manslaughter and underage drinking after running her down. However he was famous in the field of baseball and had rich parents as a result’, she gulped, ‘All he got was a fine, a fucking fine!’ her face was in her hands, ‘My sister’s life was insignificant to them’.

‘You see little cubs’, Monokuma grinned, ‘Leon is not quite the ‘innocent victim’ after all here!’

‘The moment I set eyes on him, I knew that if I was to kill anyone here, it would be him. That way he could finally pay properly for my sister’s death’, Sayaka clenched her fists.

‘I’m sorry about your sister Sayaka’, I was trembling slightly too, ‘I really am, but murder is certainly not the way to go about it’.

‘Besides, Leon’s life in the spotlight wasn’t so peachy either!’ explained Monokuma, ‘Surely you know that my dear Makoto! You were the closest to him after all!’

‘Leon’s talent was known throughout Japan since he was ten years of age, but because of his talent and ‘cuteness’ it become apparent that the sports industry had its eyes on him. Baseball managers would bid thousands if not millions to get him on their teams. He was little more than a racehorse to them basically’, Makoto bowed his head, ‘I tried to encourage him to pursue his true dreams and quit baseball for good, but once you are in the industry, it’s difficult to escape. That’s why… he turned to
drink eventually. I tried to get him to stop, but the combination of pressure at a young age and depression created a toxic circle which had been around him ever since’.

‘Wow, it’s no wonder he hated baseball then!’ exclaimed Mondo.

‘The only times he was truly himself was when he was with me, when he could just kick back and relax. But…’ Makoto sighed, ‘But everywhere else, he only had the bottle for company and that often caused reckless behavior including… underage driving’.

‘Both of these cases are just two examples of child stars going ‘crazy’. I mean, most of them snap eventually don’t they?’ Monokuma smirked, ‘Well I think that little story covers up the motive behind this whole tragic case. We cannot dwell here for much longer however, because in a few minutes I have to give Sayaka a very special punishment!’ he winked in her direction but Sayaka didn’t look him in the eye.

‘I’m sorry I have let you all down like this’, she let out a deep breath, ‘I wanted to make you all happy but instead I ended up committing a terrible crime’.

‘Sayaka!’ Makoto called out, ‘You were brilliant, you tried to keep morale around here and for that I forgive you. I know you wouldn’t have done it in any other situation’.

‘I admire you in a way lassie’, Mondo told her, ‘back when I was a wee lad and couldn’t fight people above a certain size, I also had to rely on stealing to survive. Also I know how it must feel for your group to be torn apart from you… after all the effort you made…’ he stared into space.

‘I’m going to miss you weirdly enough Sayaka’, Celestia told her, ‘Even though we had our fair share of differences, it will feel quiet without you’.

‘You were the first person I came across during my stay here’, I told her, ‘And I hate myself for doing this to you, especially after what I heard’.

‘No Kyoko’, she spoke, ‘The fault is mine. I should have stuck alongside you all, just like I did with the girls’.

‘Okay everyone, I think we have had enough chit chat!’ Monokuma announced, ‘Sayaka, I am sure you know what to do’.

My body filled with a red-hot anger at the bear as Sayaka stepped onto the tile which Junko had after the first trial. Sure enough, metal spikes shot up around her and soon, she descended into the floor.

‘Come on little cubs, you will not want to miss this one!’ Monokuma directed us to the lift, ‘I will get Sayaka to sing just one last time!’

‘What the fuck are you planning?’ I rounded on the bear but the beast ignored me.

‘Come on, into the elevator! Otherwise my friends will have to coax you in!’ Indeed, the figures in black had stepped closer to ensure we were all in the lift, and that we would all witness the execution which was about to unfold before us.

Once we were all inside, the doors clattered shut and we descended further down, until we reached our destination.

The room we stepped into smelled of many fragrances, reminding me somewhat of a perfume shop. It was a theatre, bigger than the one at the university but something about it was a lot more ominous. All around statues of monkey-like creatures leered at us, like gargoyles upon a church roof. That was
not the most frightening thing about it however. Upon the stage was a large bronze bear, which seemed to be in a roaring position. To my horror on the side of the metal beast, I noticed what looked like a hatch, and a pile of wood below it.

‘Chihiro’, Sakura told her, ‘Look away’.

‘They’re not surely?’ Aoi gasped, ‘That’s sick’.

‘What the fuck? What did Sayaka do to deserve this?’ Mondo’s teeth were gritted.

Once again, a neon sign came down from the ceiling, reading, ‘Execution for the Ultimate Pop Sensation, Sayaka Maizono: Sayaka’s last song’.

Sure enough, we watched as Sayaka was dragged in by some of the black robed figures. Unlike Junko, she wasn’t crying out in fright and instead had a look of acceptance in her eyes, like a soldier doomed for the firing squad. Another figure opened the hatch and roughly, she was tossed in.

I never forgot the look she gave us as the hatch was slammed shut and she was trapped in the metal prison.

‘What are they going to do?’ cried Kiyotaka.

‘I have a hunch’, answered Byakuya.

To our horror, another figure came in bearing a torch and tossed it onto the wood. At first there was silence, but as the flames rose up. A most terrible noise echoed from the chambers of the bear. On the outside it seemed like the brazen bear was roaring, but we all knew the horrifying reality of where the source of the ‘roaring’ came from.

Sayaka’s bloodcurdling screams carried throughout the room. It was a sound that we could never forget and would become embedded in our nightmares for the rest of our lives.

After minutes but for what seemed much longer than that, the screams finally stopped. One of the black robed figures put out the fire before two others reopened the hatch and reached inside.

Sayaka’s body, broken and blackened by soot was almost unrecognisable. The first student I had met, the one who I held hands with, who had helped solve investigations with me was now little more than a pile of charred bones. We all stared in shock, even after Monokuma’s cronies had carried Sayaka’s body away. It was then that I began to hear crying coming from my classmates.

‘Hey! Hey! Don’t cry little cubs! We brought justice to a murderer!’

‘Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t rip you apart!’ Mondo spoke in his quiet yet deadly voice.

‘She was our friend!’ Makoto cried angry tears, ‘My friend, our friend!’

‘We will find out what is going on’, I confronted the bear, ‘I will seek justice for all of my friends’.

‘You are one to talk, since you are the one who condemned them’, Monokuma grinned, ‘you can’t have it both ways when you play devil’s advocate!’

My lips could not form words as the bear looked around, ‘Well it looks like our work is done, for now at least…’ he snickered, ‘they do say that two is company but three’s a crowd after all!’ he winked as we all stepped back into the elevator, ‘Now you had better get back to the university! I
need to think of an all new exciting motive in the mean time!’ he laughed, ‘Anyway, good night little cubs! Sweet nightmares!’

With those final words, the elevator doors closed and we ascended upwards to the real world once again.
For the second time during our stay at the university of despair, we all, except for Byakuya and Toko, made our way to the art room. Chihiro was fit to join us this time, and together we constructed two more memorials. Again, they were made from old, cheap materials but we felt that Leon and Sayaka would have appreciated our simple gesture in their memory.

Indeed, when we returned to the dormitory, Leon’s body was gone, and it was though nothing had happened. After we placed our makeshift memorials besides his and Sayaka’s respective doors we once again held a minute of silence. When the memorial service was over Makoto broke down sobbing on all fours, I couldn’t imagine how he must have felt, especially considering that he lost both his dating partner and old school friend in one night.

As usual Sakura joined Aoi for bed, Makoto on the other hand was alone and once again, I couldn’t comprehend how much emotional pain he would be in for this night.

‘Poor Makoto’, Celestia sighed as we walked hand in hand to my room, ‘Losing two people who were close to you in one night certainly can’t be easy’.

‘Still, I hope his senses come back to him’, I said as I got changed and ready for bed, ‘now that four of us are dead, we have to be more alert than ever’, I laid down upon my bed looking up at the ceiling, ‘I really hope this damn game will end already. I don’t want to send any more people to their deaths. Even if I do get out of here, I will be leaving with blood upon my hands’.

‘Oh Kyoko’, Celestia sat on the bed next to me and smoked a cigarette, ‘You know it’s that bear who is putting us up to this and I hate to say it but… by finding out the murderer in both cases, you helped to save the rest of us. You are reason we are both still here Kyoko’.

‘But it will just repeat itself won’t it? And it will keep repeating until there is only one of us left I imagine, unless we find out the identity of Monokuma’s mistress before then’.

‘So, Kyoko, what did you see in the motive video? If you are okay telling me of course!’

‘I wasn’t exaggerating when I said it was complicated’, I explained trying to recreate the image in my head, ‘I will describe it the best way I can, but I am not sure if you will believe me’.

‘You can tell me my dear Kyoko’, Celestia ran her fingers down my cheek.

‘I was watching an execution, it somewhat resembled Sayaka’s. There was a wicker man and there was a victim inside, a man in his mid to late thirties, I think. Monokuma was also there, he set the structure ablaze and the victim was cooked inside’.

‘That is definitely strange… Did you get a good look at the victim?’

‘Not really, but something about my visions struck a chord with me. That’s not the only strange thing about it though. I saw the exact same scene in my dreams too, on the night we had the sleepover’.

‘Maybe you are psychic!’

‘Perhaps!’ I shrugged, ‘It must mean something though if Monokuma was willing to use it as my motive. I wonder if it holds the answers to our current situation somehow?’

‘Don’t you reckon you are just seeing things?’
‘If only, but something about it certainly seems familiar. Perhaps I will find out more exploring the university, I just hope more lives won’t be spent in the mean time’.

‘Me too Kyoko’, Celeste nodded as I held her from behind.

Neither of us wanted to go to sleep, knowing that the inevitable sound of Sayaka’s screams from inside the brazen bear would haunt us in our nightmares. After a while however, sleep took us and we both had to watch a repeat of her terrible fate inside our heads.

Almost instantly after we woke up, we both reached over to grab a cigarette. Celestia then went to her room to change and shower. After my own shower I got dressed before greeting her outside of my room, waiting for me to accompany her to breakfast.

When we arrived in the dining hall, it was once again a gloomy atmosphere. Makoto was present but he sat alone, not eating much and sitting slumped over the table.

‘Hey Makoto, are you alright?’ I asked him.

‘Oh… yes, I’m fine. Still, it is going to be lonely without Leon and Sayaka too’.

‘What was Leon’s ‘true dream’ by the way?’ Celestia wondered.

‘Ah’, Makoto smiled weakly, ‘he was hoping to join a punk band’.

‘Seriously?’

Makoto nodded, ‘When we were dating, he would often talk about his favourite punk bands from history and he could even do a good job jamming on an electric guitar’, he sighed, ‘It’s such a shame. Maybe if his parents and the sports industry didn’t put so much pressure on him, he would have been able to flourish. Perhaps he wouldn’t have died either’.

‘Leon loved you very much Makoto’, I told him, ‘it sounds like you meant a lot to him. I imagine that if he was alive, he would want you to follow your dreams and to not fall under peer pressure’.

‘Yes, I could see him saying that… thanks Kyoko, that really means a lot to me’.

'Look after yourself okay', I told him.

We then greeted Mondo and Kiyotaka, the former still clutching a beer bottle in his hand.

‘Mondo, I don’t want to be a killjoy’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘but my father always said that you should never drink alcohol in the morning or coffee in the evening’.

‘Don’t fret bro’, Mondo took a swig, ‘Besides I am only sticking to two pints a day!’

‘Still after what happened to Leon, shouldn’t you be just a little cautious?’ I asked.

‘Don’t worry about me lass! Besides if anyone tries to take me out, I will rip their throat out’, he took out a cigarette and a lighter, to which Kiyotaka politely declined again.

‘Did you both have a good night?’ questioned Celeste.

‘It was a bit shit really’, Mondo growled, ‘I couldn’t forget the screams of that poor lassie’, he took a puff, ‘only a twisted fuck could do something like that to a girl’.

‘After what happened to Sayaka last night, I honestly don’t know how our situation can possibly get
any worse’, Kiyotaka sighed, ‘but whatever happens, we have to keep our spirits up’.

‘You are right’, I agreed, ‘As hard as it may be’.

At that moment I saw Sakura, Aoi and Chihiro walk in.

‘Hey everyone!’, Aoi announced, ‘Sakura and I woke up early and we didn’t feel like going back to
sleep... for obvious reasons... Instead we decided to do some exploring as a morning walk. We
fetched Chihiro and the three of us investigated to see if any new areas of the university had been
opened’.

‘Is there anything new?’ asked Celestia.

‘Yes’, Aoi nodded, ‘It seems Monokuma opened up a new floor for us overnight’.

‘What’s going on?’ Akira yawned as he wandered in.

‘So, it seems everyone is here’, Mondo frowned, ‘Apart from the usual candidates of course…’

‘Byakuya and Toko were on the third floor when we investigated, and I have a feeling that they will
be staying there for some time’, Sakura explained.

‘Well if that’s the case, at least Richie Rich won’t be sneaking around as much…’

‘So, what do you say Mondo? Shall we finish off this meeting and start exploring already?’ Akira
asked, ‘We might discover some further secrets about this place!’

‘Sure, why not?’, he paced up and down, ‘Okay everyone, lets go exploring I guess… Pick your shit
up and let’s get going already!’

‘We should let them eat first! Remember, breakfast is the most important meal of the day!’ Kiyotaka
reminded him.

‘Of course,’ Mondo nodded, ‘How could I forget that? Anyway, when you have all finished meet
me and Taka outside the dining room and we can begin!’

‘Well I guess we have no choice!’ Celeste shrugged.

After breakfast and gathering at the designated spot, we had a long walk ahead of us to the third
floor. When we got there however, were couldn’t help but feel somewhat excited.

‘God forbid if you use a wheelchair’, I panted when we reached the new floor, ‘They should really
consider constructing elevators around here, and not ones that lead to literal Hell!’

‘Sweet!’ Mondo gasped.

‘What is it bro?’ asked Kiyotaka as he followed him down the corridor and the reason for his
excitement became more obvious.

‘Holy shit. Look at all of this!’ Mondo laughed with delight as ahead of us we saw a gym, containing
a lot of expensive looking equipment, ‘Finally somewhere for me to work out! It’s not as good as the
road but this should keep me occupied in the mean time!’

‘Yes, this will be ideal!’ Aoi beamed, ‘You should have seen Sakura’s face when she first saw it!’

‘This is pretty neat’, I paced up and down the room, ‘My high school had a gym a bit like this too,
but the equipment was really cheap, tacky and it was always breaking’.

‘Maybe I can try out some of this equipment too someday’, Chihiro commented, ‘I could start off small and with Aoi and Sakura’s help, I can become a little more confident in myself!’

‘Are you sure you should be handling that kind of equipment with your… kind of stature lassie?’ Mondo frowned, ‘You could end up hurting yourself you know!’

‘Mondo, I swear to God!’ Aoi rounded on him.

‘I’m serious! Do you really think someone like her can handle such heavy equipment? I’m surprised someone like you can handle it to be honest, let alone Chihiro!’

‘Is that because I’m a girl?!’

‘Well that’s just biology isn’t it? Girls are naturally weaker, aren’t they?’

‘Seriously Mondo, one more word…’ Aoi was fuming now before Kiyotaka jumped in front of his friend, as though he was protecting him, ‘What are you doing Taka?’

‘Bro didn’t mean to hurt anyone!’

‘Please stop yelling…’ Chihiro murmured but nobody heard her.

‘Are you seriously still defending him?’ Aoi snapped, ‘You are supposed to be the Ultimate Moral Compass, I thought you would be at least willing to call him out! But instead you seem to be cuddling up to him!’

‘He is my friend, of course I will defend him! He is the only close friend I have had in a long time!’ Kiyotaka asserted.

‘I’m sorry about that Taka, but out of all the people you could have befriended, why him?’

‘You don’t understand!’

‘Oh, I understand alright!’

‘I think this is the part where we run away’, Celestia whispered to me.

I nodded as the two of us left the room, still hearing Kiyotaka’s and Aoi’s angry yells as we went to explore further. We came across two oak double doors. They were smaller than the ones that led to the museum but were just as elaborate. In similar golden lettering were the words ‘library and archive’.

‘Again, this is more my cup of tea’, I commented as I opened the door and let Celestia inside. As we began to explore, I felt a pang of pain realising that Sayaka wasn’t among us. I wondered how she would have reacted to seeing the large walls of books before us, containing titles of every genre.

‘This is incredible’, I gazed around, ‘Do you have a favourite genre Celeste?’

‘I’m into old fairy tales myself… before Disney made a complete joke out of them…’

‘I’m more into crime fiction although I do enjoy a little bit of English Literature sometimes’.

‘Meh, I prefer works from German and Scandinavian authors. There is just something more fantastical and atmospheric about them!’
I’m surprised. I thought English literature would be right up your ally, especially works from the romantic period. They would fit your gothic ‘aesthetic’ quite nicely I imagine.

‘They were not gothic, they were emo’, Celestia grumbled as we explored further. On the way we saw Byakuya seemingly studying in the large archive room, while being gazed at by a dreamy-eyed Toko.

‘I thought she would be more interested in the books given her talent’, I frowned, ‘I suppose even they can’t get in the way of her love for him’.

‘Well considering the sort of books she writes I am not surprised in the slightest’, Celeste rolled her eyes, ‘It’s like what Junko said, she is living in one of her fantasies’.

‘A lot of teenage girls turn to escapism under society’s pressure. All too often in their fantasies men, especially handsome ones will not judge them no matter what’, I explained, ‘But this is completely insane!’

‘Well! It certainly looks like Stephanie Meyer has some competition!’

We both laughed as we continued to look up and down the many shelves. To our surprise however, we came across Akira who seemed to be browsing the botany section.

‘Hello Akira’, I greeted him, ‘I didn’t think you would be into something like botany!’

‘I’m not’, Akira’s eyes were narrowed as he looked the large shelf up and down, ‘There’s just… something interesting about this place that’s all’.

‘Seriously Akira?’ sighed Celestia, ‘Are you just messing around again? What could possibly be so interesting about a section of the library concerning plants?’

Annoyingly, Akira waggled his finger at us, ‘A businessmen doesn’t share his secrets little lady. You keep your nose out of my business and I will keep my nose out of yours!’

‘What are you doing in the library at all anyway Akira? I didn’t think you would be into books’, I frowned.

‘I created a few pop-up books back when I lived in America’, he grinned, once again putting on a Cheshire Cat-like look, ‘They got banned of course. The authorities didn’t like the fact that I put party poppers between each of the pages, to make it more dramatic you know’.

‘Why am I not surprised?’

‘The authorities are no fun’, Akira huffed, ‘I came up with something original and because of a few angry moms, they got pulled from the shelf just as they were gaining traction’.

‘I think it was probably more than just ‘a few angry moms’ Akira’, I raised an eyebrow.

‘To be honest, I am actually quite curious to see what an exploding pop up book would function’, shrugged Celestia as we left Akira to his own devices and discovered a reading lounge.

The room was filled with many cosy looking bean bags, we both plopped in one either side of us. I looked to my left side and noticed a small pile of books stacked up on the wooden table which I looked through enthusiastically.

‘Did you find something?’
'It’s like this room was calling to me’, I held up a copy of the complete Lord of the Rings trilogy, ‘My mother read all these books to me when I was a kid! Have you ever read Tolkien before?’ Celestia shook her head, ‘Oh you are missing out on so much! I recommend starting with The Hobbit, then reading the trilogy, and if you are into something more ‘grimdark’ the Silmarillion is a pretty good choice!’

‘You are such a nerd Kyoko’, smirked Celeste, ‘But I love you for that!’

We spent most of the time before the evening meeting hanging around in the library. I curled up upon my bean bag, reading the first few chapters of my favourite childhood book while Celestia read a book concerning horror stories and urban legends from all over Japan.

With about ten minutes to go we made our way down to the dining room where Mondo and Kiyotaka were already seated.

‘Hey ladies’, Mondo nodded in our direction.

‘Hey Mondo’, Celestia curtsied.

‘You should at least give Chihiro a chance Mondo’, I told him, ‘her skills might surprise you. Anyone can become physically strong with a bit of training’.

‘Hey, I don’t mean ill to anyone! I’m just worried that’s all’, Mondo looked downwards, ‘I’m only going by what my brother taught me’.

‘I know you loved your brother very much, but you should develop your own opinions for a change’.

‘How can I?’ he took out a cigarette, ‘My brother was the only role model I got to grow up with. Most adults tended to give up on me, so I looked to Daiya for guidance’.

‘Could you at least tone down the whole ‘women are weaker’ thing?’

‘Again, I’m only going by Daiya’s word. In the Crazy Diamonds chivalry was a top priority and it was our duty to protect the weak and vulnerable, especially women and children’.

‘What if you encounter a woman trying to kill you with an axe?’ asked Celestia, ‘Would your code of chivalry apply then tough guy?’

‘Um…’

‘Hey!’ Kiyotaka pointed while trying to change the subject, ‘Looks like everyone is turning up!’

Indeed, everyone did arrive, even Byakuya and Toko who took their spots far from the rest of us. To our surprise the former seemed to be reading a newspaper taken from the library.

‘Whatcha looking at Byakuya?’ Akira spoke in a sing-song voice.

‘Why should I tell you?’ Byakuya rolled his eyes, he held it out, ‘No matter though, it’s not all that important really’.

Peering down I read the article, ‘Japan’s most infamous Yakuza group sees rapid increase in membership’. In smaller but bold letters I also noticed, ‘Tensions increase as another major gang war erupts across the country’. ‘The Kuzuryuus? Who are they exactly?’ I looked up at Mondo.

‘Oh, they are only the most dangerous and most feared Yakuza gang across all of Japan!’
‘Do you know them?’ questioned Makoto.

‘I have had a few… encounters with them before but little more than that. When you get involved in my kind of lifestyle you are going to run into one eventually’, he shrugged.

‘Even the police fear them’, Kiyotaka told us, ‘So much so, that they tend not to interfere in their affairs. So long as the Kuzuryuu family remains in the shadows, the police force will just see it as a waste of resources to get involved. Still if a large-scale gang war is brewing, that means trouble, particularly in the current economic climate. If that happens the police will have no choice but to get involved, especially if innocent civilians end up getting caught in the crossfire’.

‘The Yakuza lifestyle is more than just brawl fights in dark alleyways’, Mondo said, ‘If the Kuzuryuus are recruiting that many members in a short space of time, they mean business. It’s best not to meddle in their affairs, even for someone like me’.

‘Whatever the case you had better be careful when going out at night’, Byakuya smirked, ‘you never who could be lurking around the corner!’

‘Anyway’, Mondo looked around at everyone else, ‘did any of you find anything else of interest?’

‘You have no idea of secrets which lie in this university! Things simple minded fools, like you peasants cannot comprehend’, Byakuya reclined in his chair.

‘Hey, don’t insult bro like that!’ Kiyotaka snapped.

‘Why don’t you just spit it out already Byakuya?!’ Aoi gritted her teeth.

‘My family helped to build this very university’, Byakuya sighed, ‘there are some things here that are to be strictly kept within the Togami household and I promised them that’.

‘Fine have it your way! But sooner or later we will discover the secrets for ourselves’, Celestia hissed.

‘Kyoko will probably crack it regardless’, Aoi raised a thumb, ‘She is an ace at mystery solving!’

‘Oh, it will take much more than that believe me’, Byakuya bragged, ‘There just cannot be anyone else here who knows. Only a Togami heir is provided with such information. Some families have secrets and I plan to keep mine. Now please bugger off, I am trying to read here’, he grabbed the newspaper and his nose was buried in it once again.

‘Master is so mysterious!’ Toko drooled, ‘That makes me want to get to know him more, to dive deep into his crevices, to explore every nook and cranny!’

‘Did you hear me? I thought I told you to bugger off!’

‘Sure! Whatever you say master!’ Toko backed off nervously.

‘Does anyone else have anything worth talking about?’ Kiyotaka asked. Nobody said anything.

After we ate our meals most of the students left the room. When they did so, I noticed that Byakuya had left his paper behind so I decided to give myself a peek.

‘I will meet you in your room Celeste, I just want to investigate this for a little while’.

‘Whatever you say Kyoko! I shall see you then my dear!’ and gracefully she walked out of the room.
‘Sakura and I are going to work out. Do you want to join us?’ I saw them ask Chihiro.

‘I think I will catch up with you later. I feel that my project is almost complete!’ Indeed, she was carrying what looked like a laptop case.

‘Okay then’, Sakura nodded, ‘You know where to find us though, right?’

‘Sure!’, Chihiro nodded, ‘Don’t worry I will be fine!’

‘Well, we will see you later alright!’ Aoi told her before shooting Mondo and Kiyotaka an angry glare.

‘See you!’ she waved them off.

As Kiyotaka proceeded to leave, Mondo told him, ‘I will meet up with you shortly, I just need one more beer’.

By the time everyone else had left, only Mondo, Makoto, Chihiro and I were in the room.

‘It’s probably best if you stick to computers Chihiro’, Mondo said, ‘You would probably break your arms trying to handle that stuff in the gym. The two girls have good intentions, but do they really know what they are getting a young lassie like you into?’

What I saw next shocked me. I watched Chihiro slam her laptop shut, stand up and walk up to Mondo who was much bigger than her in comparison. It was like watching a kitten face down a lion. Even Mondo looked befuddled at what he saw before him.

‘What the Hell?’ gasped Makoto.

‘Chihiro, what’s wrong? I am only looking out for your safety that’s all!’

‘I will tell you what’s wrong…’ Chihiro hissed, ‘… For all my life I was told that I was nothing but a weakling. Bullies would kick me around like a football, I was always the last to be picked for teams, and even some of the teachers mocked me for my stature too’, she began to cry angry tears.

‘Chihiro please don’t cry!’ Mondo held out his hands, ‘I think there has been a misunderstanding here!’

‘I’m tired of you putting me down all the time. When was first recruited to the university I was over the moon. Ever since my arrival however, all you have done is remind me of how weak I am!’.

‘But… I just want to protect you, it’s what Daiya would have wanted!’

‘Will you at least give me a chance?’ Chihiro pleaded, ‘I can prove myself!’

‘What are you suggesting?’

‘I will be happy to show you what Sakura and Aoi have taught me throughout my stay here’, Chihiro explained, ‘How about we meet up at some point where I can show you what I know. Perhaps you can teach me some stuff too Mondo!’

‘You want to join me for a workout session? Well I don’t see what’s wrong with that…’ he shrugged, ‘How about tomorrow night?’

‘Sure thing!’ Chihiro smiled nervously, ‘but can I lay down a few rules first?’
‘What kind of rules?’

‘Well I would appreciate it if you didn’t yell… it’s nothing personal. It’s just that if I get shouted at, I get frightened’, she gulped, ‘and please… no knives either, they scare me…’

‘Whatever you say I suppose…’ Mondo grunted, ‘I will leave them tucked up in my room!”

‘Pinkie promise?’

‘Sure…’, the two of them shook on it, ‘Tomorrow then! At midnight! Be there or be square!’

‘I will be right there on the dot!’ Chihiro saluted. She returned to her laptop where she tapped more enthusiastically than she had done previously. Mondo meanwhile drank the last of his beer and left.

‘Well it’s good that they both sorted themselves out quickly!” Makoto wiped a bead of sweat from his brow, ‘Chihiro is really quite scary when she’s angry!”

‘No kidding…’

I folded up the newspaper. Apart from the front page, most of it was just unimportant rubbish. I then walked out of the room to re-join with Celestia.
Part 3 A Knife in the Dark: Day 2 Normal Campus Life

Celestia and I slept somewhat easily the following night, even though the sounds of Sayaka’s cries still echoed throughout our dreams.

‘Good morning Celeste!’ I sat up and stretched.

‘Where shall we head to today Kiyoko?’ Celestia yawned.

‘I would like to explore the archive. There might be some possible hints concerning our situation’.

‘What if the bear has hidden some of that vital information?’

‘That is what I fear but I feel we should investigate just in case. You never know what we may find in there. Sometimes you can find some real gems working with archival materials’.

Celeste shrugged, ‘Well I haven’t got anything else to do so I might as well assist you’.

‘That would be much appreciated’, I told her, ‘Going through documents can take a surprisingly long time, I need all the help I can get!’

‘How long are you talking?’

‘Years sometimes, depending on the archive in question!’

‘Why would I want to spend years of my life just searching through some old documents?’

I laughed, ‘Don’t worry Celeste, I only wish to study the most recent years in Hope’s Peak’s history. Who knows, we may find some vital clues too’.

After getting ready we left my room and headed to the dining area. We came across Chihiro, Sakura and Aoi who looked like they were planning a morning workout session. On the other side of the long table, Akira was showing off one of his inventions to Makoto, a dog plushie that attempted to bite everything you put near its mouth. Mondo and Kiyotaka meanwhile were whispering things to each other, arm in arm.

‘What on earth was Akira on about yesterday though?’ Celeste spoke in a hushed tone, as we sat down to drink some tea, ‘Do you reckon he has like a secret weapon or something?’

‘Perhaps he is hiding secret formula for his toys between the pages of one of those books. It will be a good spot to hide them, seeing as his interests and botany are about as unrelated as you can get!’

‘That makes sense. His toys are beloved by children all over the world, as dangerous as they can be. I imagine he would want to protect the secret to his success at all costs!’

‘I suppose…’ I frowned before I saw Kiyotaka and Mondo stand up.

‘Status report!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘Have any of you seen anything worth telling us about?’

‘I sent by jitterbugs through the vents, but I checked the camera last night and I saw nothing’, Akira sighed, ‘Again there was the occasional ominous black robed figure, but not much more than that’.

‘My big project is nearly complete,’ Chihiro beamed, ‘I just need to make a few adjustments and it should be ready for operation! I hope it will be of some use once it is up and running’.
'I hope your genius will be of great use to us lass’, Mondo nodded.

‘I will do my best!’ Chihiro winked up at him.

‘What about you Kyoko? Found anything worth telling us about?’

‘Celestia and I were planning on investigating the archive today’, I nodded in her direction, ‘I wouldn’t get too optimistic though. The bear banned internet access so we wouldn’t ‘cheat’, so I assume a lot of the information relating to our situation will be removed there too’.

‘Still, it’s worth checking out right?’ Celestia winked.

‘Indeed, Kiyotaka yelled, ‘Even the smallest piece of information could provide a vital clue!’

‘Of course. We may not find concrete evidence, but we might be able to pick up little scraps of information that could be useful. I cannot guarantee I will find anything of significance though’, I shrugged, ‘Sometimes if you are lucky however, you can come across some real information treasure troves!’

‘Nerd!’ called out Akira.

‘I’m surprised I have never seen you in the kiddie section of the library Akira’, I scoffed, ‘It would be ideal for someone like you!’

‘Why have you gotta to be so mean Kyoko?!’ I ignored him.

‘Good luck lassie!’ Mondo nodded in my direction.

After breakfast we began our long journey to the third floor. On the way to the library we could see Aoi and Sakura taking Chihiro through her paces. I wondered if she would be able to impress Mondo the upcoming night before we approached the familiar oak double doors.

We passed by the mountains of books, including the ‘mysterious’ botany section, before we finally approached the vast archive. Once again Byakuya was present, which meant Toko was nearby. This time, she was sitting down on the floor, book in hand. She would often looks upwards towards him, before nervously diving back into whatever she was reading whenever he turned his head in her direction.

As expected, when we began browsing through the long aisles of the archive we were met with relative disappointment, as curious as I was about the University’s history.

‘There isn’t much going on here it seems’, I sighed, ‘Most of the documents here relate to special events and council meetings, nothing relating to demonic bears at all’.

‘Look Kyoko’, Celestia pointed, ‘there are two completely empty shelves here, I wonder why that is? Do you reckon that was information that Monokuma wanted to keep hidden from us?’

‘I don’t know, that can’t be case because the information stops at this year. It’s not uncommon for archives to have empty shelves at the ready. They are always in need of extra space as more information comes in. You won’t believe how quickly they can get overcrowded with documents. New information arrives all the time in various formats every day, so it is hard to keep track’.

‘It still seems weird though’, Celestia walked up and down the aisle, ‘it’s completely barren here, you’d think they would use this area at least for temporary storage. I bet Hope’s Peak has a vast history so it’s confusing that these facilities are going unused’.
We went to explore what looked like a photo gallery, depicting many smiling Ultimates and events taking place on the campus, some of which dating back to over fifty years.

‘Just look at how radically fashion has changed!’ gasped Celestia, ‘Still, I am glad that some of these clothing choices remain stuck in the past’.

‘Look here’, I pointed at one of the larger pictures in the room displaying a variety of faces, ‘it depicts all of the deans throughout Hope’s Peak’s history. Although, it looks like the most recent one has been blacked out’.

‘I wonder why that is?’ Celestia frowned, ‘Did they hold any significance?’

‘Looks like they did if Monokuma wanted to censor their image. Suspicious indeed…’

‘Do you reckon they could be Monokuma’s mistress?’

‘Who knows’, I shrugged, ‘It’s all very weird either way’.

We continued to look around the room, not coming across anything particularly significant. That was until I stared dumbstruck at something I had spotted on the floor.

‘What the Hell?! Celestia come here!’, I picked up a photograph, not believing what I was seeing.

‘What now?’ she asked before she clapped a hand to her mouth.

The high-quality photograph displayed what looked like Yasuhiro, Sayaka and Junko frolicking around in a classroom, quite like the ones in the university. Too similar in fact.

There was one major difference however which had really caught my eye. The metallic panels which covered the windows were nowhere to be found and daylight shone through the room.

‘Hey, I don’t remember this’, I truly couldn’t comprehend the image before me, ‘And I certainly don’t remember natural light ever coming into this accursed place’.

‘Maybe it’s just a trick the bear is playing on us?’

‘It could be, but this just looks too real!’

‘Hey what’s going on here?’, an ominous voice echoed near us. Sure enough, the great bear materialised right before our eyes, his back almost touching the ceiling.

‘Hey Monokuma, I wasn’t expecting you here’, Celeste looked up at him.

‘What do you want you miserable creature?’ I gritted my teeth.

‘I believe you have something of mine’, he looked unusually livid.

‘And what would that be?’

‘That’, he pointed a claw at the photograph.

‘Oh really, why did you leave it lying around if it’s so valuable?’

‘Just give it to me already!’ Monokuma snarled, ‘Otherwise I will take it from you the hard way’.

‘Fine, fine!’ I handed it over to him, ‘Anyway, you sorry excuse for a polar bear, what do you have
planned for us?"

His face relaxed, ‘Nothing like you little cubs have ever experienced before!’

‘We will be ready for this one. You mark my words’.

‘We will see about that! You really do underestimate what your fellow students are capable of’, he laughed, causing dust to fall around us, ‘Anyway, tata little cubs!’ and he vanished.

‘What on earth was that all about?’ Celeste rubbed her eyes.

‘Well it’s clearly something the bear didn’t want us to see’, I couldn’t quite comprehend what had happened either, ‘Why the hell would he just leave it lying around though?’, I rolled my eyes, ‘Still, we did find some things worth talking about didn’t we?’

‘Indeed’, Celestia nodded as we returned to the main archive and carried out further research,

We both picked up some newspapers, trying to find a story of importance. Of course, most of it was junk although we did spot several interesting materials.

‘There is a whole page debating the ethics of the J Pop and K Pop industries’, Celeste gasped, ‘There is a picture of Sayaka and that looks like her group in the back. Poor dear… don’t get me wrong she had awful tastes, but she deserved so much better’.

Later as we continued to read, we found articles concerning baseball matches where Leon had become a sporting hero, police chases involving Mondo’s gang and Aoi breaking swimming records. Going further back we even found an article concerning the story in which Sakura had killed the man-eating bear which had terrorised her village. Going through the various newspapers many more familiar faces appeared.

‘Look’, I pointed, ‘Makoto has turned up!’ There was a photograph of a beaming Makoto, accompanied by his proud parents. The title of the article read, ‘Congratulations to Makoto Naegi, this year’s lucky pick for the Ultimate University!’

‘Don’t tell him I said this, but he actually looks quite adorable here’, Celeste trailed off.

‘He is in a way. Still, I hope his parents are okay…’

To my disappointment however, the only student who was never mentioned in the newspapers was me, no matter how hard I looked. Even Celestia was mentioned in several articles, although she was never pictured. Once again, I was faced with a sinking feeling, all hope of me finally discovering my true talent, and my past, was gone.

‘What’s wrong Kyoko?’ Celeste asked me.

‘Oh nothing’, I sighed, ‘I am just confused as to why I am never mentioned at all. Unless of course, Monokuma intends on hiding my information for some reason’.

‘Maybe you have some superpower that you do not know about?’ Celestia joked, ‘Perhaps you harbour power capable of bringing him down and that’s why he wants to keep it hidden from you!’

‘Perhaps’, I bowed my head, ‘I don’t want fame, I just want to know the truth…’

Exhausted from browsing the vast archive, we collapsed in our favourite beanbags and began to read. The chapter of Lord of the Rings I had left on was ‘A Knife in the Dark’.
I could very much relate to the hobbits as they traveled through the exposed wilderness, being pursued by something truly evil and capable of things far beyond what they could comprehend.

Like the heroes in a Tolkien story, we felt like we were facing impossible odds, hope all but dashed. The only things keeping us all from falling apart was our friendships. We were all going through this despair together, and we didn’t know how or when we would escape it.

After a couple of hours, we made our way downstairs for lunch. On the way we passed by Chihiro, Sakura and Aoi who looked exhausted but satisfied.

‘Hey girls, did you have a good workout session?’ I asked the three of them

‘Yes, it was amazing!’ beamed Chihiro, ‘I can’t wait to show Mondo what I learned tonight!’

‘Kick his ass Chihiro’, Aoi patted her on the back.

‘How did your search in the archive go?’ Sakura took a sip of some protein shake.

‘Not spectacularly’, I told them, ‘but something very weird happened let me tell you!’

‘What exactly?’ Aoi looked up at us, puzzled. When we told them of the photo and of Monokuma’s appearance, the three of them looked confused as ever.

‘But those three are all dead, aren’t they?’ Sakura questioned.

‘Correct’, I said, ‘But it looked so real’.

‘Are you sure it wasn’t just the bear trying to mess with you?’ gasped Aoi.

‘That’s what we thought, but he was clearly pissed that we laid a hand on it!’

‘Why would he leave something like that lying around then?’

‘Beats me!’ I shrugged.

‘Well, that will be something to tell everyone!’ Chihiro piped up, ‘Even if it is a hoax!’

‘Most definitely’, Celeste nodded as we made our way downstairs.

The five of us prepared some simple sandwiches. When we had finished Mondo and Kiyotaka strolled in together and sat themselves down.

‘Hey boys!’ Celestia waved in their direction

‘Did you find anything interesting in your search?’ Mondo asked us.

‘Oh boy have we got a story to tell you!’ Celestia grinned.

‘Well what are you waiting for lassie? Tell us already!’

After I told them about my strange encounter with the bear, they had the reactions I expected.

‘That was not what I was expecting!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘If one thing is for sure, that photograph must be important if the fleabag didn’t want us seeing it’, I recalled, ‘It looked very real but at the same time, how is such a photograph even possible?’
‘Like you said, he’s a demon. He’s probably capable of anything. Perhaps it is just an illusion’, Celestia sighed, ‘still it was very weird all the same’.

‘He’s probably just trying to mess with our heads or something!’ Kiyotaka said.

It was at that moment however when we heard that dreaded sound. The knell of the funeral bells for a third time echoed throughout the university.

‘Oh, I will mess with your heads alright!’ I heard the bear roar, ‘I will mess with all of you, real good! Well, I am sure you know the procedure by now little cubs! Please make your way to the gym and I can deal with you all there!’

‘Shit! Why now?’ Mondo looked around wildly, ‘You must have pissed him off quite a bit Kyoko!’

‘He was planning on doing this anyway’, I explained, ‘he told me, although he never gave me details’.

‘What do you think is going to happen?’ I heard Chihiro tremble nearby as we left the room. I saw Sakura too, she said nothing but again, she looked quite terrifying as that fire had been reignited in her eyes.

‘Is he going to kill us?’ asked Toko who we passed by as we headed to the gym.

Soon we also came across Byakuya, Makoto and Akira making their way downstairs.

‘I don’t think so’, Byakuya grinned, ‘He is like a cat who has caught a mouse, he likes to play with his victims before he kills them. When you have a group of weak and vulnerable people at your mercy, I imagine you would want to have a bit of fun with them!’

Akira looked very irritated, ‘I was in the middle of researching for an all new invention and that damn bear broke my pattern of concentration!’

When we stepped into the gymnasium the beast was already present, his grin looking nastier than it had been previously. He prowled up and down, gazing at us all hungrily.

‘The first two motives were just warm up rounds, but now little cubs we are about to have some proper fun!’

‘What do you plan on doing to us you sick fuck?’ Mondo snarled.

‘Yes, how can you possibly make our lives even worse than they already are?’ I glared hatefully up at the bear.

‘I am tired of you little cubs trying to meddle in my affairs. How I think it’s only fair that I meddle with yours’, he stood on his hind legs sniffing the air, ‘Ah ha! Here they are!’

As we looked behind us, we saw the figures in black carrying what looked like nail guns.

‘You are going to shoot us all?’ gasped Makoto.

‘Hey, hang on a second! Won’t that ruin the point of the game?’ Akira asked.

One by one, each of the figures stepped to the side of us and placed the nozzle of the gun at the side of our heads. Most of us didn’t move and stood frozen on the ground but Mondo had to be tackled and restrained in a headlock by the biggest figure present.
‘Mondo, if you struggle, things will only get worse for you!’ Monokuma grinned, ‘Besides I haven’t explained the motive yet!’ He clapped his paws.

Our assailants pulled the triggers, I was expecting to die instantly. For a few milliseconds I was hopeful that I would slip away quickly and painlessly, but it was no bullet that entered our skulls.

I felt a sharp sting when the trigger was pulled, the pain faded quickly however. Nevertheless, unprecedented dread surged through me after the ‘bullet’ had been planted in my brain.

The other students had similar looks of panic in their eyes, resembling cattle about to go to the slaughter. The bear basked in our moment of terror for a few seconds before he finally spoke.

‘What the fuck did you just insert in our brains?’ yelled Mondo.

‘Agh my head!’ cried Toko.

‘Oh, little cubs, it is quite simple really’, the bear grinned, ‘The items that were just planted into your brains were very tiny little microchips. Originally they were designed by the Ultimate Neurologist to project positive feelings into the brain’.

‘What happened to the Ultimate Neurologist?’ questioned Kiyotaka.

‘Oh! They died in the tragedy!’

‘What tragedy?’ asked Aoi.

‘That doesn’t matter right now’, Monokuma growled, ‘Anyway little cubs I have done my own bit of tweaking to these devices! I have changed these microchips so that instead of projecting happy thoughts, they project your worst memories, your darkest secrets and your greatest fears! They will activate at random times and when you least expect. They won’t do any physical damage but the mental damage this thing is capable of is said to be unbearable to its host!’

‘Doesn’t that count as torture?’ squeaked Chihiro.

‘Is there a way to deactivate them?’ Makoto shivered.

‘Yes’, the bear nodded, ‘and I think you all know how to do that! Don’t you little cubs? ’

‘You are going to psychologically torture us until we kill someone?’ gasped Kiyotaka.

‘Pretty much!’ Monokuma shrugged, ‘Of course you don’t have to kill any one. But be warned, if you don’t play the game, these microchips remain active until you die’.

‘We will not resort to killing no matter what you throw at us’, Makoto glared up at the bear, ‘isn’t that right guys?’ he looked towards the rest of us but we all stared blankly at the floor and ceiling.

‘That is easy for you to say. They inject so much despair into the victim however, that I doubt you will last more than a week without wanting to take matters into your own hands, if not just a few days’, the bear explained, ‘These things act like parasites, they will eat away at the host’s sanity until there is nothing left to cling onto! They will feast on every drop of hope until there is none left!’

‘We will find a way around this!’ Makoto insisted.

‘Believe me little cubs, you will be doing yourself a favour by killing someone. Trust me on this! Anyway, happy hunting!’ and he vanished, his cronies too fading into the shadows.
We couldn’t bring ourselves to form words. While I had some hope that no killings would occur after Monokuma’s first two motives, my hope had all but drained in this case. The colour had drained from us all, even in optimists like Makoto.

Truly, we had to prepare for the prospect of someone dying. The big question this time being, who?
The following evening was one of the most difficult times for me to recall during my time at the University of Despair. Having a microchip forcefully planted in your brain against your will does that to you. I will recall what I can however.

We attempted to go about the rest of the day as normal. No matter how many times we tried to forget about it however, our darkest thoughts came to us at the most unexpected and most random of times. I could be going about my business and thoughts that I hoped I would never have to relive, returned to my mind with a vengeance.

As the pain got worse, I could see Celestia who sat beside me occasionally wince and clutch at her head. Whenever the visions came flooding into my mind, I wanted to scream each time. We both tried reading, playing games and exploring, to take our minds off the pain. As the projections became more frequent however, we were losing concentration and it all began to feel pointless.

We both agreed that we needed some time alone. We hoped that we could sit it out, that this was just a trick by the beast. But as past traumas came flooding back to me, clouding my mind with complete and utter despair, I began to doubt this.

When I lay in my bed, occasionally hearing the screams and cries of other affected students, it all came crashing down. They came back as bright as day, as though they had only occurred yesterday. My two worst memories repeated themselves time and time again, as though a movie projector was playing itself on repeat in my brain.

A young girl was sitting at her desk, her nose in a book while the male students rough-housed each other and the female students were discussing the latest episodes of their favourite anime series.

It was at that moment when a solemn faced teacher came in. At first the girl was confused, but when she asked her to follow her to the headmaster’s office, a wave of gloom came crashing over her. She wasn’t in trouble, but what she was in for was far worse. The girl anxiously took a seat in the small, cluttered office surrounded by filing cabinets and paperwork sprawled all over the large desk.

The headmaster at first did not know how to form words, knowing that he was the deliverer of bad news. When he finally gave the girl the news of her mother’s early death he could only watch as the girl broke down in tears. The girl had known that her mother was ill, but surely this was too soon? Her light in the darkness, the person she looked up to was gone and she was never coming back.

She went home early, not to a house silent with grief however, but to two men in a heated argument, her father and her grandfather. Seeing the sight broke her down internally. With nobody to comfort her in the moment when she needed it most, she opened the door to her bedroom and slammed it shut, her face in her knees.

The second sequence that played out in my head was even more terrible. If nobody had deactivated the microchips that night, I feel as though this was the memory that would have finally made me 'snap'.

A teenage girl in the bleak winter stood upon a bridge, looking over a wide body of water. A large, ravenous, unforgiving black monster that was ready to devour anything in its wake.

The girl edged forward, the cold metal bridge the only thing holding her back, the chilling wind licking at her face as she stared blankly at the icy cold depths below her.
Finally, like a stone, she fell into the belly of the beast. The icy temperature of the water caused her insides to squirm and scream in pain, like she was being stabbed a thousand knives. Her lungs felt like they were being constricted by a large metal hand. She fell, deeper, deeper, deeper… the surface of the water drifting further and further away.

What followed was a bright white light, but not the welcoming kind. It was almost blinding, and she was surrounded by many masked faces and beady eyes staring down at her. All around her wires were attached and needle after needle was injected. As she lay strapped to the bed, she felt hopeless, like she was insignificant, something to poke and prod at, an object.

The doorbell ringing later that evening seemed distant to me as I got up and answered.

‘Hey Celestia’, I murmured, ‘You ready for dinner?’

‘Wow Kyoko, you look dreadful’.

‘I’m okay’, I lied, ‘I just needed a little bit of time to clear my head. Are you okay Celeste?’

‘It could be better…’

‘Come on, we had better get something to eat. I just hope everyone else is okay’.

When we walked to the dining room, we caught sight of the other students. As I stepped in however, I noticed someone prominent missing.

‘Hey Taka! Where has Mondo got to?’

‘Oh, he’s alright’, Kiyotaka told me with a forced smile upon his face, ‘he should be here shortly. He just needed a bit of nap that’s all!’

‘I see…’, I frowned, ‘has anything happened?’

‘Not lately, anything worth mentioning on your side of the fence?’, I shook my head.

‘I was in Mondo’s situation pretty much, I have been resting ever since Monokuma set up the motive’.

‘I see, well take care of yourself Kyoko, whatever you do!’

We made ourselves some simple toast for dinner, seeing as most of us had all but lost our appetite. Indeed, the only one of us who seemed to eat a hearty meal was Chihiro, who obviously wanted to be prepared as possible for her planned workout session, despite the circumstances.

Just as we finished our meals, Mondo finally turned up. While he kept a straight face, his eyes seemed to express the most pain out of all us.

‘Are you okay there Mondo?’ asked Makoto in a concerned manner.

‘I’m fine’, he grinned weakly, ‘I just needed a little rest, for the workout session later you know…’ I could tell he wasn’t being entirely truthful.

‘Are you sure it’s a good idea to be working out in the state we are in?’ I questioned him.

‘It’s keeps my mind off things lass. Sometimes cigarettes and booze just don’t cut it you know! They always tell you that when you are feeling down, you should just punch something to relieve the stress! Who needs therapy when you can just let off steam in the gym?’
‘Okay’, Celestia nodded, ‘just so long as the object you are punching is inanimate!’

Soon after Mondo had finished his meal however, he cried out in pain and shook his head violently, like he was trying to shake the device out of his brain, but to no avail.

‘Mondo!’ Kiyotaka comforted him.

‘I’m fine’, he panted, ‘It’s okay really… I think I just need to rest a little longer’. As he walked out, he gestured towards Chihiro while clutching his skull, ‘I will see you later, okay lassie?’

‘Sure, thing Mondo!’ Chihiro waved in his direction as he left early, Kiyotaka accompanying him. Soon after Mondo’s departure, many of us decided to leave too. While Sakura, Aoi and Chihiro left the room together as normal however, they seemed to be arguing.

‘Chihiro are you sure you should do this? It’s just that I have a bad feeling about the whole thing…’ Aoi bowed her head, ‘I just don’t want you getting hurt’.

‘You sound a lot like Mondo’, Chihiro grumbled.

‘No, I don’t mean it that way! It’s just that after Monokuma’s motive… I don’t know how Mondo will react to it, and given his way of resolving issues… I’m just worried that’s all…’

‘I’m not afraid of Mondo!’ Chihiro asserted, displaying an unusual level of determination, ‘And I am not afraid of the bear either. I want to prove myself! I can do this!’

‘Well we cannot stop you’, Sakura sighed, ‘but please be careful Chihiro. Keep your guard up’.

‘I will’, she bowed her head, ‘I’m sorry Aoi, I just want to prove myself, no matter what. I am going to try and be brave for a change!’

‘Whatever you say’, Aoi put a hand on her shoulder, ‘but please look after yourself okay?’

‘Don’t worry I will!’

‘It is admirable that you are displaying bravery in times of such darkness, Chihiro’, Sakura smiled faintly as the three of them made their way to Aoi’s room.

For the rest of the evening, Celestia and I decided to seek comfort in each other, spending the night in her room. We laid on either side of the bed, facing one another but not talking much. When midnight came closer however, we decided to kill the time by chatting.

‘What are we going to do Kyoko?’ Celeste asked me.

‘I don’t know. For the first time I truly feel trapped’.

‘Kyoko… what did you see?’

I closed my eyes before I summarised the visions which had been repeating in my brain throughout the evening, ‘Well first I revisited the day that I received the news of my mother’s death…’ I gulped, ‘and then I witnessed something else… something that happened in my teen years’, my eyes began to water, ‘I was watching the day when I made an attempt on my life…’

‘Seriously?’

‘I can’t exactly remember why I did it. I just felt at that point, it was the only way to escape from everything’, I exhaled, ‘At the time I felt as though I had nothing to live for’.
‘You don’t need to tell me why my dear!’ Celestia told me, taking my hands in hers, ‘I am just glad you are still here! I don’t know if I would have coped in this place without you’.

I smiled feebly before I told her the next part, ‘After they recovered my body from the river, I was sectioned for six months due to my suicide attempt’.

‘Did that help?’

I shook my head, ‘My doctors and nurses had good intentions but during the time I was institutionalised, I felt more alone than ever, cut off from the world. Nobody there took my concerns seriously. I was a mere object to them, worthless’.

‘Kyoko…’ she placed a hand on my cheek.

‘I never thought I would get out, I truly thought I would be stuck there for good. Even when I was dismissed, the trauma of that place never truly left me. I have tried to forget, I went to therapy, and for a while it seemed to work, the antidepressants helped a lot too’.

‘Well it looks like you took the right steps’, she reassured me.

I nodded, ‘Ever since that fucking bear set his latest motive however, it has been ingrained in my mind and I cannot escape it. Unless somebody here kills another, I never will be rid of it’.

‘Whatever happens, we shall stick together’, Celeste said, ‘Just you and me’.

‘Of course,’ I nodded, ‘what did you see?’

‘I saw the day ‘she’ died…’ Celeste rubbed her eyes.

‘How? If you don’t mind telling me?’

‘Shortly after the economy crashed, there was a large tuberculosis outbreak as more people were forced to live on the streets. Those who had not adapted to rough sleeping were the first to be hospitalised and if they were not caught in time, they were the first to die too’.

‘The remember reading about that outbreak, it was headline news. It was truly awful wasn’t it? Apparently, it was only recently that the rates of infection began to decline’.

‘Indeed… As the cold weather hit, it started to affect more people at an alarming rate, mostly those of a student age. There were reports of emergency services having to pick up the bodies of the dead and the dying every morning that winter. It seemed like nobody could escape it at that point’.

‘Yes. I remember at high school when actual nurses came in to administer TB shots to all the students. That’s how dire the situation had become, it had become a nationwide epidemic. According to my relatives, vans offering the vaccinations came to their places of work too, although the situation wasn’t quite as urgent in their case’.

‘Other countries like the United States offered their ‘aid’, but as history goes to show, thoughts and prayers don’t work. Most of the burden fell upon the government’.

‘Facebook likes do jack shit’, I agreed, ‘Especially in times of crisis’.

‘If only they did more’, Celeste sighed, ‘She could have been saved. When she displayed the first signs of being infected, she insisted it was a mere cold. I mean… she was always a resilient one. Soon however she became so weak that I had to take her to an already overcrowded hospital. Doctors did
what they could of course, but one night she went to sleep and never woke up again’.

‘Celestia, I am so sorry’.

‘After her funeral I spent most of my life alone, I was pretty much a gambling drifter at that point. It’s one of the reasons why I wear black too. In the 19th century, families living in America and Britain would wear black to mourn their loved ones, often for life’.

‘Have you not worn anything outside of black since she…?’

She shook her head, ‘I can never bring myself to wear a different base colour since her death. I felt very little hope indeed. When I saw you for the first time however, it changed my life for the first time in years. Don’t expect me to stop wearing black though’.

‘Really?’

‘If we can get out of here, I can start anew again with you by my side. I will feel reborn once again, I will be able to gamble and travel the world while feeling fulfilled for the first time in years!’ she stared lovingly into my eyes, ‘You might be my savior Kyoko’.

‘Seriously?’ I blushed.

‘I think so’, nodded Celestia, ‘I love you’.

‘I love you too Kyoko’, I stroked her hair, ‘I think you have saved my life too Celestia!’

As I kissed her, her lips had the essence of cherry about them. I wrapped my arms around her body, and she wrapped hers around mine. I then caressed her back and hips with my hands, while she moved downwards to kiss my neck and chest. My heart sped up faster than it had done before, and I could feel her heartbeat too as her soft silky skin brushed against mine.

During the moment I felt as though nothing could come between us.

Just as I was starting to embrace it however, I felt a strange buzzing sensation in my head. And as quickly as my dark memories came, they vanished.

‘Hey what just happened?’ I rubbed my head, ‘Did that microchip just get deactivated?’

‘I felt it too’, gasped Celestia, ‘Does that mean…?’ We both sat up, not knowing what to do in the moment, ‘You don’t think one of us has been killed do you?’

‘I sure hope not…’

After about five minutes but for what felt longer than that, we decided to step out and see what was going on for ourselves. After putting on our dressing gowns and opening the door, we could see that other students had thought the same thing as they stood around looking scared and confused, not quite sure what to do in the moment.

A minute later we could hear something that sounded like a wounded animal coming towards us. Within seconds, however we discovered the source of the noise.

‘Mondo!’ Kiyotaka came running up to him, ‘What has happened to you?’

Rather than wearing his usual leather coat, Mondo was wearing a black tracksuit. Looking closer, I noticed that one of his hands was limp and bloody.
‘That doesn’t matter right now!’ he panted, ‘I can’t find Chihiro anywhere! We were attacked… I didn’t see our assailant, they were too quick…’

‘Chihiro is missing?’ Aoi clapped a hand to her mouth, ‘Oh no…’ tears began to swell up in her eyes.

‘What’s going on?’ Byakuya emerged, ‘More blood has been spilled has it?’

I ignored him, ‘We have to find her, now!’

‘Come on bro!’ Kiyotaka caught Mondo as he stumbled, possibly due to blood loss, ‘You need to go to the first aid room straight away’, he looked up towards the rest of us, ‘I need to protect Mondo, the killer could still be out there. Kyoko, I am temporarily putting you in charge. Divide yourselves into groups and start looking!’

‘Come on!’ I called out, ‘Makoto, Celestia and I will search the ground floor, Aoi and Sakura, you scout the third floor, the rest of you, investigate the first and second floors!’

Soon we were all searching frantically around for our friend, desperately calling out her name, but being met with no response every time. We thrust open every classroom door only to be met with darkness. Finally, we decided to check the gymnasium. Despite no demonic bear being present this time, the sense of dread somehow felt greater.

‘Look over here!’ Makoto indicated a door which seemed to lead to a smaller room, presumably where equipment was kept. I pelted towards it.

As I stepped in, a stench wafted throughout the room, the stench of blood. It was coming from a large equipment cupboard. Makoto and Celestia stood back as I slowly opened it. My heart in my throat and my hands shaking like they had never done before, I hoped to open it and see nothing, that this was all just a sick joke.

As cruel reality came crashing down however, a tiny body fell out, blood draping her clothing. A rag was tied tightly around her neck. When I removed it and heard the knell of the funeral bells, I saw to my horror, that somebody had slit Chihiro’s throat.
Within minutes, most of us were gathered around the small body of Chihiro Fujisaki. Aoi was the most devastated, within seconds of seeing what had become of her close friend, she was sobbing into Sakura’s chest. It was hard to imagine the motive behind someone who was willing to kill someone so kind and gentle, in cold blood.

‘Celestia’, I told her as I carefully laid out the body, ‘Tell Mondo and Kiyotaka what happened’.

Celeste gave a simple nod and left.

‘Who could have done this?’ Aoi cried, ‘What did she do to deserve this?’

‘Aoi’, Sakura comforted her, tears also appearing in her eyes, ‘We will find out who did this. Her death will not be in vain’.

At that moment the bear appeared behind us, licking his lips.

‘Well, it seems that the microchips have done their magic!’ Monokuma grinned as he looked down at Chihiro’s body, ‘I think it's fair to say that the experiment was a success!’.

‘Don’t you dare touch her’, Aoi stood in front of her dead friend.

‘Oh, how touchy!’ he leered at her before he announced, ‘As you may know by now, the Monokuma file has received a new update!’

Once again, we took out our handbooks to see that the app had indeed been updated. As with last time, the details of the murder victim had changed. Seeing Chihiro’s profile was truly heart breaking.

‘Well you had better begin with your investigation little cubs!’ Monokuma laughed, ‘You haven’t got long before the third class trial and the fun begins’, he unsheathed his claws, ‘now get going, otherwise I will be forced to punish you all! Anyway, good luck’

When he finally vanished, I turned towards Aoi.

‘Aoi, as Mondo is injured and Chihiro was a close friend to you, would you be happy to guard the crime scene with Sakura?’

‘Okay Kyoko’, she nodded, ‘I am sure she would have appreciated that’.

At that moment Celestia returned.

‘How is Mondo?’ I asked her.

‘Oh, Kiyotaka was just patching him up, he is on the mend though’, she bowed her head, ‘Of course after I told him the news, he was devastated’.

‘I hope to get his side of the story’, I frowned, ‘even if he relies on hyperbole a bit too much for my liking...’

‘Well I suppose we should investigate the body first’, Makoto told us shakily.

‘Please be gentle with her’, Sakura said.
‘Don’t worry I will’, I approached the body and proceeded to examine it closely.

‘What do you see Kyoko?’ Makoto asked.

‘It was most definitely a bladed weapon that killed her’, I explained, ‘There are two smaller stab wounds in her chest and stomach. At first glance, it the killer stabbed her in those places before they went for the killing blow’, I indicated the large red gash on her neck.

‘That’s sickening’, Aoi gasped.

‘Still… something seems a little bit odd though. The neck wound is legit, the knife clearly sliced through her throat like butter but there isn’t nearly as much bleeding with the smaller wounds’, I stood up, ‘very strange indeed’.

‘I wonder who is capable of so much cruelty?’, Sakura clenched her fists.

‘Hmmmm… Who do we know around here who loves playing with knives?’ Aoi questioned sarcastically, ‘I can’t quite put a finger on it…’

‘Are you talking about Mondo by any chance?’ asked Celestia.

‘Of course I’m talking about Mondo! Do you know of any other knife wielding maniacs in the University Celeste? I sure as Hell don’t!’

I sighed, ‘He is the prime suspect as of this moment but… the point is Aoi, we need to gather all the evidence we can to determine for certain which particular individual carried out the murder’.

‘Chihiro went to the third floor to have a workout session with him and the corridors have been painted with her blood’, Aoi’s emotions had changed from sadness to pure rage, ‘He’s a gang leader, violence is in his nature!’

‘Is that where you think the killing happened?’

‘Isn’t it obvious? You will believe it when you see it for yourself’.

‘Again, we need a complete picture of the crime scene before we can go pointing any fingers’.

‘You saw how he reacted to the microchip at dinner Kyoko, that’s why he was late too. That thing was driving him mad. I wouldn’t be surprised if he lunged out at Chihiro in order to stop his own pain. She was the first person in his vicinity and she would have been easy prey for him’, she began to shed tears again, ‘Not as though she wasn’t strong, because she was, but compared to someone like Mondo who lives and breathes barbarism, she wouldn’t have stood a chance’.

‘I don’t like to point the blame on anyone’, Sakura bowed her head, ‘But I saw what was up there too, and my suspicions are pretty firm on who committed the deed’.

‘I agree that the microchip was having a negative effect on his mind, especially after what I had observed at dinner. One thing still confuses me however, why was Mondo wounded? It wasn’t a small injury either’, I told them.

‘Indeed, his hand looked as limp as a fish’, replied Celeste, ‘It was pretty nasty, I don’t think he will be able to use that particular hand for some time’.

‘Also, how did Chihiro’s body end up here?’, I questioned.

‘I don’t think Mondo was attacked at all!’ Aoi hissed.
‘Do you think Chihiro could have attacked him in self-defence?’

‘I couldn’t imagine her doing that’, Celestia exclaimed, ‘Chihiro wouldn’t hurt a fly!’

‘I’m not so sure about that’, Akira spoke up, we hadn't realised he was still here.

‘What the Hell do you want?’ snapped Aoi, ‘Here to cause more trouble are you? Why don’t you go and be a nuisance away from a dead body!’

‘Oh no, I’m not here to cause anyone any trouble’, Akira shrugged, ‘we just have to consider all the possibilities here! It’s just that whenever something or someone is attacked, they will often fight back due to the adrenaline rush!'

‘Are you high?’ Celestia asked him, ‘Or is this something that can actually help us here?’

‘I had a pet snake and in the states it’s typical to feed them live food, mice usually. One got so scared however that as the snake tried to gobble it up, the mouse lashed out and bit my poor snake so hard that it bled out. You never know what the smallest and most innocent of creatures are capable of’.

‘I see where you are coming from’, I told him, ‘but I don’t think Chihiro is someone who is capable of giving someone like Mondo blunt force trauma to the hand’.

‘I’m just saying’, Akira said, ‘So where to next girls? I’m going to check out the third floor, are you going to follow me?’

‘We might as well’, I nodded as Celestia and I followed him upwards.

Standing at the top of the stairs was Byakuya, Toko drifting closely nearby.

‘Hey Byakuya’, Akira waved, ‘What do you have to contribute?’

‘Quite a lot I hope’, Byakuya grinned while looking unusually calm and laid back, ‘It’s hard to believe that within few minutes, this corridor was turned almost completely red. It’s quite impressive really!’

‘I wouldn’t call the act of murder ‘impressive’’ I put my hands on my hips, ‘Still, feel free to show us the way’.

‘You know the number one rule for hunting?’ he questioned us seemingly out of nowhere.

'Is this really the time for riddles?’ scoffed Celeste.

‘Follow the blood trail’, I answered.

‘Correct’, he took us through the corridor. 

What we saw next was utterly horrifying. First, we noticed a large bloodstain upon the wall and then a long bloody trail heading towards the gym. As I looked inside, I noticed there was blood upon the equipment too, much of which lay shattered. It looked like a bomb had gone off in the room as I gazed down at the damaged equipment before me.

‘Holy shit!’ I exclaimed, ‘What the Hell has happened here?’

‘Wow talk about a bull in a China shop!’ Akira gasped, ‘I guess this is where Mondo was attacked then, either by the killer or by the victim!’
‘It seems so. What do you think happened then Byakuya? Take your time’.

‘I think Mondo must have stabbed Chihiro in the gym. She ran out trailing blood, but he quickly caught up to her and slit her throat further down the corridor. That would explain the large bloodstain on the wall there’.

‘What is Chihiro’s body doing all the way on the ground floor though?’

‘He must have used something to carry her body towards the equipment storage room. I mean she’s not that hard to carry, is she? Mondo would have been able to stash her away quickly before we all realised someone had been killed’.

‘I will keep your theory in mind Byakuya’.

‘Master is such a genius!’ Toko cried out.

‘Thank you, Kyoko’, Byakuya nodded as he left the room, ignoring Toko in the process, ‘I cannot be certain of course, but that is what I have to offer’.

‘I appreciate your contribution sir’, I nodded in return before he and Toko vanished.

‘I will catch up with you ladies later’, Akira told us, ‘I just need to check something real quick’.

‘Whatever you say’, I replied. To my surprise he seemed to be heading towards the library, ‘Why the Hell is he going in there of all places? Surely there is nothing there that is relevant to this case’.

‘Unless Chihiro’s throat was cut with a very sharp book corner’, Celeste shrugged.

I reached into my bag and pulled out a set of syringes, ‘I just want to take a few blood samples, I will need to extract some from the victim too’.

‘Good luck getting past Aoi!’

‘Don't worry, I am sure once I have explained the procedure, she will understand'.

‘Isn’t it obvious who killed Chihiro by now?’ Celestia sighed, ‘I don’t like Byakuya either but as much as I hate to say it, his theory seems very convincing. Also, he doesn’t tend to go around wielding knives. If he did, he probably would have stabbed Toko by now!’

‘I understand where you are coming Celeste’, I told her, ‘I really do, but I just want to be certain’.

‘I think it’s time to put your testing kit to use Kyoko’, she winked at me.

‘That’s what I plan on doing’, I collected three samples, one from the gym equipment, another from the trail and the third from the distinctive bloodstain on the wall, ‘We should get going’, I pocketed the samples, ‘we don’t have long’.

‘Okie dokie!’

We descended back to the ground floor and walked back to the gymnasium where Aoi and Sakura still firmly stood guard, the former pacing up and down.

‘Aoi’, I asked her somewhat cautiously, ‘would you mind stepping aside for a second’.

‘Why? Haven’t you done enough poking and prodding? Chihiro isn’t an object you know’.
‘I know’, I tried to reassure her, ‘it’s not much, I just need to take a small blood sample. It might be the difference to us winning or losing the trial’.

‘Okay fine, but please be careful’, reluctantly Aoi stepped aside. I bent down over Chihiro’s body, took out the last of my syringes and extracted the last blood sample I needed.

‘Thank you Aoi’, I bowed in her direction, ‘Remember that I am doing this for her sake too’.

‘I’m sorry Kyoko, it’s just that she was a living breathing person less than an hour ago, so it’s hard to see her in a position like this suddenly…’

I put a hand on her shoulder, ‘Don’t worry, we will find out whoever did this’.

On the way to my room I stepped into the first aid room where Mondo was sitting upon a bed, his hand in a cast, Kiyotaka at his side.

‘Hello Mondo’, Celestia shook her head, ‘I think you have some explaining to do!’ I gave her a small kick before walking up to him myself.

‘How’s the hand?’ I asked him.

‘Fine… I suppose’, he growled, ‘the fucking bastard caught me completely off guard’.

‘I see, did you get a look at the killer’s face?’

‘They were too fast for me to get a good picture of them. They must have been like… a trained assassin or something… I tried to fight them off, but they too were strong, and they ended up overpowering me’, he held up his bandaged hand.

‘What happened next?’

‘After I regained myself, I couldn’t find Chihiro anywhere, the attacker must have killed her quickly before I could catch up to them’, he bowed his head, ‘I couldn’t save my brother and I couldn’t save her either, it’s like I cannot be trusted with anything…’

‘Mondo, it wasn’t your fault’, Kiyotaka placed a hand on his shoulder, ‘we will make Chihiro’s killer pay for their crimes!’

‘Okay Mondo, I will take your story into account’, I nodded.

‘Look… I know it’s hard to believe, but trust me, I didn’t kill Chihiro’, he pleaded, ‘To do so would be to dishonour my brother’s wishes and the code of my gang. Well… what’s left of it anyway’.

‘I stand with bro!’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Thank you’, I bowed, ‘obviously since you were the closest to the victim, I have no choice but to list you as a prime suspect. But whatever the case, everyone will have the opportunity to tell their side of the story and the truth may be radically different than what we previously thought’.

‘Please would you excuse us? Mondo needs some much-needed rest before the trial starts!’ Kiyotaka was obviously none too pleased with my statement, ‘Besides don’t you girls have some further investigating to do?’

‘It’s alright Taka’, Mondo smiled back at him, ‘I didn’t know you had skills in first aid’.

‘At my high school a basic first aid training course was compulsory in case of situations just like
this!

As we left Celestia took one last look at the first aid room door, ‘Doesn’t his story sound a little…
convoluted?’ she raised an eyebrow.

‘It certainly does’, I frowned, ‘Why would Chihiro just vanish out of Mondo’s sight like that? Unless
the killer was exceptionally skilled of course’, I unlocked my door, ‘Whatever the case, I hope to get
to the bottom of all this at the trial’.

We entered my room together where I began to dig through my box of supplies. After a while I
finally pulled out the kit and began to arrange it.

‘Are you sure this thing is reliable Kyoko?’ questioned Celeste, ‘Are you sure it isn’t just a toy?’

‘This definitely isn’t a toy’, I explained as I took each of the blood samples from my pouch, ‘Also I
don’t think an item that is marketed as testing blood and urine is aimed at kids exactly…’

Celestia sat on my bed, as one by one I carefully tested each individual sample. My tongue sticking
out in concentration, I then took out my notepad and began to write down my findings.

‘Eureka!’ I clapped my hands as I jotted down the final results.

Just after my discovery we heard the bells ring, summoning us to the elevator.

‘What did you discover Kyoko?’ questioned Celeste.

‘I will reveal it at the trial’, I told her.

‘Are you saving the best thing until last?’

‘Not necessarily, I’m just doing my job really’, I shrugged.

We all gathered by the elevator doors, wondering who was going to be tossed into the bear pit this
time, as the ancient device clattered ominously towards us.

‘Well’, Taka stared up at the doors, ‘let’s go’.

‘We will catch the bastard who did this’, Mondo snarled, ‘Anyone who lays their hands on a girl like
that deserves death, plain and simple!’

Aoi shot Mondo a wrathful stare, she had obviously not changed her stance as we all gathered in and
the elevator closed its doors. For a third time we descended into the very bowels of hell as the
contraption began to go down.

The whole way down Sakura was comforting Aoi, the latter trembling violently.

‘Seriously though, who could do such a thing?’ she whimpered.

‘I know’, Sakura stroked her hair as she gripped her tightly, ‘I know’.

‘What could have Chihiro’s killer possibly gained from attacking a sweet soul like her?’ Makoto
said.

‘Don’t worry’, Byakuya told us, ‘we have plenty of evidence on our side to track down the killer,
hopefully this will be quick’.
‘Yes’, Toko replied, ‘Master will be able to catch this monster!’

We felt the short breeze indicating that we had left the real world far behind us. Finally, the elevator slowed down and grinded to a halt. The doors clattered open and we were back in the familiar courtroom. All around, Monokuma’s cronies watched us like ravenous vultures as we proceeded to take our assigned places.

After we took our seats, I noticed that two more shrines had been propped up. Seeing Sayaka’s and Chihiro’s pictures covered by that large red ‘X’ was almost too horrifying for me to comprehend.

Up above, the bear glared down at us, ‘It is good to see you again little cubs! You are here to bring justice to poor little Chihiro I see!’ he stood on his hind legs, ‘well you had better get comfortable for we are going to be here for a while’.

As the third-class trial began, I wondered whether even the killer of someone so gentle and so innocent, deserved the fate that the bear had to offer. Surely, even a fiend like that should not be subjected to such a cruel end. I thought this as I composed myself and waited for Monokuma to begin the terrible process for a third time.
‘Okay everyone! We shall begin!’

‘Can we get on with the voting already?’ Aoi was fuming.

‘What was that?’ Monokuma looked excited, ‘Did I hear that correctly?!’

‘It’s so obvious isn’t it?! The killer is right there!’ she pointed in Mondo’s direction, ‘I can see no other way around it!’

Mondo snarled, ‘You think I’m a Goddamn criminal, do you?!’

‘Isn’t that what you usually are Mondo?’ Akira raised an eyebrow.

‘I didn’t kill Chihiro! You have to believe me!’

‘He’s right! I know he is!’ barked Kiyotaka, ‘Mondo wouldn’t commit a heinous crime like that!’

‘All the evidence stands against you’, Byakuya asserted, ‘The blood trail leading to the gym, the weapon used to carry out the murder, what else is there?’

‘As much as I can’t stand Byakuya it all adds up’, Aoi said, ‘come on, let’s put an end to this already!’

‘Hold up!’ I shouted, ‘We haven’t even started to look at the evidence in question yet!’

‘What evidence do we need?’ Byakuya smirked, ‘It’s right there in front of you!’

‘If you all just let me speak then we can get to the bottom of this quickly’, I became frustrated, ‘Please just hear me out!’

‘Thank you lass!’ Mondo sighed.

‘I really hope you are telling the truth Kyoko’, Aoi sighed.

‘Chihiro was killed by a blade of some kind, that is obvious’, I remembered, ‘The rag tied around her neck was supposed to act as a tourniquet so blood splatters would not lead us to the place where the body was hidden’.

‘When did the killing happen though?’ asked Makoto.

‘Around the time we felt the ‘buzzing’ I reckon’, I recalled, ‘which was about 12:15 at night. Soon afterwards Mondo appeared, shortly followed by Byakuya. The latter I imagine was in the library’.

‘That is correct’, Byakuya nodded.

‘And you were supposed to be joining Chihiro for a workout session weren’t you Mondo?’

‘Yes’, Mondo answered, ‘soon after we met up however, we were attacked, and I sustained an injury. After I was overpowered by the attacker, Chihiro was gone and there was a trail of blood’.

‘Did you catch a glimpse of them?’ questioned Akira.

‘No, they were too fast’.
‘But who here is capable of bringing down Mondo?’ Toko commented, ‘The only person I can picture in this room who could do that is Sakura’.

‘Don’t you dare!’ Aoi raised a finger, ‘And besides, Sakura was with me the whole evening!’

‘What about the blood trail?’ Makoto brought up.

‘The blood trail does lead to the gym’, I explained, ‘A very convincing trial for the untrained eye. However, when I tested various samples taken from the scene and compared them to the blood of the victim, I noticed some very interesting results indeed’.

‘And what was that exactly?’ Byakuya’s lip twitched slightly.

‘Only one blood sample matched that of Chihiro’s. The other two samples I collected came from two different sources entirely!’

‘Seriously?’ Aoi clapped a hand to her mouth.

‘Yes, only the large bloodstain on the wall contained the same DNA as that from the victim’.

‘What about the other samples?’

‘The blood trailing the wall to the gym was older and it wasn’t even human’.

‘It was animal blood?!’ cried Toko.

‘Yes, I imagine the killer laid it out to make it look like Chihiro was stabbed in the gym. Obviously, they were unaware of my trusty little kit! It links to the smaller wounds upon the body too’.

‘How?’ asked Makoto.

‘To make it look like Chihiro had run out after being stabbed in the chest and stomach, before the killer finished them off with a knife to the throat. Seeing as the trail turned out to be animal blood however, and also noting that the victim’s smaller stab wounds were not bleeding nearly as much, I think they were inflicted post-mortem’.

Aoi cried out, ‘What the hell?! What twisted person would do that?’

‘What about the blood that stained the gym equipment?’ Celestia frowned.

‘That blood was definitely human’, I said, ‘And it was fresh too, like Chihiro’s’.

‘Are you sure it was different?’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘Positive’, I nodded in Mondo’s direction, ‘And I am pretty sure who it belongs to’.

‘That would make sense’, Mondo nodded, ‘I was attacked there, and the killer must have stabbed Chihiro further down the hall’.

‘We cannot rule out Mondo yet though surely?’ called out Celeste.

‘Wait a minute!’ to my surprise Makoto spoke out, ‘Kyoko, do you remember when Mondo and Chihiro first planned out their workout session? Mondo clearly promised to her that he would leave his knives behind’.

‘Oh yes I remember’, I nodded, ‘You are right, I was present too’.
‘How can you be so certain that Mondo kept his promise?’ snapped Aoi, ‘People like him always end up breaking promises!’

‘Are you calling me disloyal?’ growled Mondo.

‘We cannot be certain on that alone’, I mentioned, ‘Mondo, you are still wearing the tracksuit that you wore to the workout session, right?’

‘Yes, I generally prefer keep my knives hidden in my coat, it’s safer for them there’.

‘Also Mondo didn’t return to his room when we first saw him’, Kiyotaka told me, ‘If he really did have knives on his person, he didn’t get the opportunity to hide them! And afterwards I was with him the whole time, if he was trying to conceal something I probably would have known!’

‘What if he hid them in his tracksuit though, just like the way he does in that coat of his?’ frowned Byakuya.

‘There is only one way to prove it!’ Akira raised a finger. Out of his backpack he pulled out a small metal detector, ‘The Gold Digger 5000’, he proudly showed off his invention as though he was on a TV auction, ‘Just 500 yen! Not including shipping!’

‘This isn’t a time for product placements Akira’, I rolled my eyes, ‘Just get on with it already’.

‘Mondo can I borrow your tracksuit for a moment?’

‘Um… sure, whatever…’ Mondo muttered, rolling it into a ball and tossing it in his direction.

‘Thanks dude!’

‘Don’t mention it…’

As Akira ran his device over the suit, we jumped as we heard a beeping sound.

‘Oooo boy! What do we have here?’

We braced ourselves before Akira revealed the contents of Mondo’s pockets in the manner of a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

‘It’s a wrapper for gummy worms!’

‘You eat gummy worms?’ Celeste laughed.

‘They taste nice, okay! Gang leaders can like sweet things too ya know!’ Mondo grunted, ‘Now give me back my tracksuit already, it’s motherfucking cold here!’

‘But your biceps are so nice!’ Akira sighed.

‘Don’t make me come over there you little shit!’

‘Fine! Fine!’ Akira tossed his tracksuit back to him, ‘No knives! Sorry to disappoint you all!’

‘One thing is certain then, Mondo didn’t kill Chihiro’, I pondered, ‘But… I am still skeptical of his claim that he was attacked’.

‘But if he was not the killer, how did he obtain that hand wound?’ Kiyotaka asked.
‘We will get to the bottom of that later, however. Right now, we need to figure out the true murder weapon and how the killer managed to hide the body’.

‘Mondo isn’t the killer?’ Aoi scratched her head, ‘But if not him… who?’

‘I… don’t know’, I sighed, I was completely and utterly stumped.

‘Little cubs, you are going to have to select someone! We can’t hang around here all day you know!’ Monokuma reminded us.

‘How did the killer manage to get Chihiro’s body downstairs so quickly without leaving traces of blood? Even with the makeshift tourniquet, I imagine it would have been very difficult to not leave evidence behind. I mean with a wound like that, a lot of blood would have been spilled surely?’

‘Indeed, I’m surprised I didn’t see any blood at all going down the stairs. As far as I know there is no other way to the ground floor’, Celestia shrugged.

‘There couldn’t be like, a secret passage or anything could there?’ gasped Makoto.

‘That’s some Willy Wonka shit right there’, I replied, ‘but still… I think I remember somebody mentioning something about a secret passage, I just can’t put a finger on it…’

‘I’m waiting!’ Monokuma drummed his claws on the platform.

‘Ah ha! I think I’ve got it! But… I don’t know how to explain it exactly’, I turned towards Toko, ‘Toko how do you summon ‘her’?’

‘Who?’ asked Toko.

‘You know… the super edgy version of yourself who speaks in mainly insults?’

‘What the fuck are you on about lass?’ Mondo frowned.

‘Are you on drugs Kyoko?’ asked Aoi.

‘You want me to bring ‘her’ back?’ Toko trembled, ‘No way! I will make a complete fool of myself if ‘she’ emerges. Besides the procedure for bringing her back is uncomfortable…’ she gulped.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Don’t worry’, Akira raised a hand, ‘I got this!’ To our bewilderment we watched as he pulled out what looked like a super soaker, ‘Monokuma do you know where I can get some water?’

‘Yeah, yeah…’ Monokuma replied in a disgruntled manner before snapping his claws, as soon as he did so, water appeared in the device as if by magic.

‘Cheers Monokuma!’ Akira saluted in the bear’s direction before aiming the weapon at Toko.

‘What are you doing?’ Toko cried out.

‘It’s just like they say in the commercials!’, Akira grinned, ‘Just add water!’

‘Wait no!’ but it was too late. A powerful jet of water hit Toko right in the face.

‘Akira what an earth are you doing?’ Kiyotaka yelled, ‘Super soakers are banned!’
After much spluttering, I noticed Toko’s mouth curl into a smile, and her eyes turn wide.

‘You knew about this all the time Akira?’ I frowned.

‘Of course!’ he grinned, ‘When she wasn’t looking, I would sometimes prank her with this thing!’

‘I don’t know if that counts as pranking or just plain bullying’, commented Makoto.

‘Hello everyone!’ Syo announced as though she had just walked into the room, ‘Well this is a strange place isn’t it?!’

‘It’s okay Syo’, I reassured her, ‘I just need to ask you a few questions’.

‘Wow punk, I wasn’t expecting to see you here!’

‘Just get to the point. What was that you were telling me about a secret passageway through the university?’

‘Oh yes!’ Syo clapped her hands, ‘I remember now!’

‘Do you know where it is located?’

‘Of course, I do!’ she winked at me, ‘But only one person in this room can open it remember?’

‘Will you be able to tell us?’

‘I think it will be better if I showed you all!’

‘She’s lying, Byakuya stood up. It’s just a rumour, nothing more!’

‘Monokuma’, I looked up at him.

‘What?’

‘Would you be able to give us a little recess break?’

‘And why should I let you do that?’

‘Well… it might interest you too Monokuma’, I grinned up at him, ‘I am sure you would like to know more about this university too!’

‘A secret room?’ He stood up, stretched and yawned, ‘Okay little cubs, you can go on recess to find this little room. But if I find out that you have been lying, I will gobble you up. Got it?’

The elevator journey back to the main campus was very uncomfortable as we had to share it with the giant bear, causing us to be pressed against the sides.

‘Holy shit Monokuma, what have you been eating?’ Mondo was the closest to the bear’s mouth.

‘I can barely breathe’, Makoto strained.

‘Are you calling me fat?’ the bear growled.

‘No…’ Makoto laughed nervously, ‘of course not!’

The elevator doors much to our relief finally opened and we were allowed room to breathe.
‘Okay Syo, feel free to show us the way!’ I panted.

‘I will be right on it! Follow me punks!’

Syo skipped ahead while we, with a large bear padding besides us ascended the stairs and made our way past the bloody scene on the third floor.

‘Here we are!’ she opened the oak doors to the library, and we all stepped in.

‘Look!’ cried Aoi, she pointed at the floor where there were little specks, of what was undoubtedly blood, ‘Why would there be blood here of all places though?’

I bent down and examined it before we all followed Syo to none other than the botany section.

‘What is it with the damn botany section?!’ exclaimed Celeste.

‘What was the point of coming here?’ questioned Byakuya, ‘My family helped to build this very university and there was no mention of a secret passage anywhere!’

‘Oh yeah?!’ Syo mentioned, ‘What were you doing the whole time sneaking around then?’

‘Why should that be of any concern to you? Besides, I think I would know if there was a secret passage here!’

At that moment, Akira held up the back of his hand to something that seemed to be disguised as a black book. To our shock we heard a loud beeping noise and as if by magic, the bookcase descended downwards into the floor.

‘What the fuck?’ gasped Mondo.

‘It can’t be!’ Makoto jumped back.

Behind the bookcase was a steel door with a very similar symbol upon it, that of the Togami’s.

‘H-how did you find it?’ Byakuya stammered as Akira opened the door and allowed us to enter.

‘Because I am a Togami heir!’ Akira grinned.

‘No, it can’t be… I never saw you mentioned in the books at all!’

‘That’s because I didn’t want to rely on my hereditary status to become rich and famous. So, I just dropped out of the ‘game’. I wanted to construct my own path to the world of business instead’.

‘What ‘game’ are you talking about?’ questioned Makoto.

Meanwhile the rest of us were all looking around in astonishment. The place was arranged like a miniature house, with seating, desks and even a smaller library of its own.

‘Wow this is actually pretty neat!’ exclaimed Celeste, ‘It’s like something straight out of a spy novel!’

‘Look what I found!’ I pulled out a tarp which was propped on the side of the wall, dots of blood covering it, ‘I imagine the killer used this to transport the body’.

‘Over here!’ I heard Aoi summon us over.

‘Holy shit!’ gasped Mondo as I noticed Sakura holding a very familiar looking blade.
'The Togami dagger!' gasped Kiyotaka, ‘But what is it doing here?’

‘I think I know the answer to that’, I answered as I pulled out a wastepaper basket. Inside were several wipes which were stained red with blood.

‘Are you saying this is the murder weapon?’ The bear stuck his head inside.

‘Positive’, I nodded.

‘Indeed’, Sakura nodded, I came across the dagger several times whenever I visited the University’s museum. Ever since yesterday however and as someone whose family is also knowledgeable about the field of smithery, I couldn’t help but notice something odd about the blade. It lacked it’s distinctive shine for one thing’.

‘Do you think the real blade could have been swapped out with a fake?’ Syo asked, ‘The only weapons capable of doing any harm are locked behind the tight glass containers’.

‘That’s true, and Sayaka only got past the barriers because she had a long history of thievery’, Celestia recalled.

‘Well it’s easy isn’t it?’ Akira showed us the back of his hand, ‘Whenever a Togami heir is born, a special identification chip gets inserted into their skin. That way they are given access to all Togami property throughout the globe’.

‘They are given access at birth then?’

‘Precisely’, Akira grinned, ‘the ‘game’ starts the moment you are born and by giving you access to the Togami property it raises the stakes, as other heirs will be after it too!’

‘What the hell are you on about?’ frowned Aoi.

‘I think he’s trying to say that the killer, who we now know is most likely a Togami heir, was able to swap the daggers out easily’, I said, ‘now we just need to see if that claim is true’.

We were about to head out before Akira said, ‘Wait! We can take the short cut’!

‘I will meet you in the armoury little cubs’, Monokuma growled, ‘going down that tight stairway will hurt my back!’. Once again, he vanished.

As we descended the passageway, I asked Akira again, ‘Why didn’t you tell us about this previously?’

‘I just think it’s good that you figure out things for yourself sometimes’, he shrugged before we reached another steel door.

He held the back of his hand to a small scanner, there was a loud beep and the door opened. When we looked behind us, we saw that the entrance had been hidden by a large Aztec mural.

‘Okay this is getting insane’, I uttered.

We dashed to the armoury where the bear was waiting for us. As I looked down at the dagger, I did indeed notice there was something off about it. I nodded in the direction of Akira. There was another loud beep and the glass case popped open.

‘Sakura, do you still have the blade with you?’ she nodded and handed it over to me.
At that moment I took off one of my gloves, much to the shock of the others.

‘Oh my God Kyoko, what happened to your hands?’ Aoi cried out.

‘That doesn’t matter right now’, I said as I laid out my scarred hand and poised the blade in the other. Even with the slightest touch of the steel against my palm, little droplets of blood began to fall, ‘This is an effective weapon’, I held it out, ‘I am pretty sure that this is the one’.

‘Oh boy!’ Monokuma grinned as I reached for the dagger in the cabinet.

For a second time pressed the blade against my palm, and there was nothing, ‘This one is most definitely a fake’. I reached into my pocket for a plaster and put my glove back on, ‘The Togami blades were definitely swapped out. Now we just need to see where the rest of this passage leads’.

After repeating the entry process, we descended again and to our final destination. One last beep and the ground floor door revealed the inside of a large storage cupboard. The distinctive scent of blood was still present. When I opened the closet door from the inside, I once again saw Chihiro’s tiny body sprawled upon the floor where we had last left her.

‘Alas… It is all coming together’, we all emerged out of the closet and gathered around Chihiro’s body. Upon seeing her lifeless form for the first time, Mondo fell on his knees.

‘Come on’, I uttered, ‘We should put this to rest once and for all’.

‘Can I just do one more thing before we leave?’ I watched as Aoi bent down and closed Chihiro’s eyes. It now looked like she could have been sleeping.

Slowly we made our way back to the elevator where the bear was waiting. When we returned to the courtroom, I was the first to speak.

‘Well, I feel it was pretty obvious since we discovered the secret passageway, but I think we have narrowed it to one candidate’, I glared at Byakuya, ‘I don’t think the culprit would have been so willing to show us the truth about the Togami’s role in the University’s history. You also mentioned you were in the library that evening’.

‘I… didn’t think you would find it’, gasped Byakuya, ‘I didn’t know Akira was an heir. It could have been him for all we know, he was just messing with you like he always does!’

‘Actually, Akira was with me’, Makoto explained, ‘He wanted to show me some of his inventions to help distract us from these terrible microchips’.

‘How could you do this Byakuya?’ Aoi snarled.

I raised my fists up at him, ‘I knew you treated the 99% percent like dirt on your shoe, but I hoped you would not resort to murder. Now however I am not surprised’.

‘You can’t punish me, though right?’ Byakuya stared up at the bear, ‘My family helped to build this university and we own one of the most prominent businesses in Japan’.

‘If you were in the outside world, rich bastards like you can get away with anything, even murder’, Monokuma growled, ‘But Hope’s Peak is an equal opportunity place where everyone gets treated fairly. Your family’s influence and corruption will not save you here’.

‘No, it can’t be, that’s not how it works surely?’ Byakuya began to sweat, ‘Syo this is all your fault. You only exposed me because you were salty that I didn’t want to kiss Toko’s ugly face’.
‘I had other reasons punk, but that was the main one!’ exclaimed Syo.

‘If it were allowed, I would kill you myself’, Mondo growled.

‘Don’t act like you didn’t have anything to do with Chihiro’s death Mondo’, I frowned.

‘Why the fuck are you accusing me now? We already cleared it up that I am not the killer! Did that not get into your fucking skull?’ Mondo rounded on me.

‘I don’t believe you killed Chihiro directly. However, I think you fill the criteria for an accomplice, albeit an accidental one’.

‘Mondo didn’t have anything to do with it!’ Kiyotaka cried out.

‘You do not want to go accusing me Kyoko’, Mondo spoke in his quieter but significantly more venomous tone of voice, ‘believe me’.

Unphased by Mondo’s threat I explained, ‘If Byakuya had attacked you, I am pretty sure I would have picked up at least some DNA samples from him, but the only distinctive ones present in the gym were yours. Explain that one to me’.

‘I was trying to protect her’!

‘Oh really? I feel that Aoi was somewhat right about you, even if you were not the killer’.

‘Why don’t you prove it, genius?!’ Mondo hissed.

‘I saw how you reacted to that thing at dinner’, I bowed my head, ‘I’m surprised I didn’t react in a similar manner. I cannot imagine what pain you must have been going through, but that’s no reason to lash out at someone, especially someone who trusts you and means no harm’.

‘I didn’t…’

‘You took out your anger on her. She was left vulnerable due to the way you treated her. Byakuya took the opportunity to carry out the deed when she ran out, emotionally in tatters and not aware of the danger’, I gave him a cold stare, ‘You should have protected her, but instead you led her to her early death and smashed the gym up in a rage, injuring yourself in the process’.

Mondo’s face relaxed but at the same time, he had the look of someone falling down a deep dark hole, ‘It’s true… I failed Chihiro that night. During my rage, I only recognised she was gone when I felt the ‘buzzing’ in my head. By then, it was too late for me to save her…’

‘Mondo why did you lie to us?’ Kiyotaka’s eyes began to fill with tears.

Monokuma’s eyes gleamed, ‘Well it seems we have cleared everything up then! And we have our very first accomplice, an accidental one but still an accomplice nonetheless! Oh, how long I have been waiting for this day!’

‘Are you ready for me to give my summary?’ I asked the bear.

‘Sure, sure, go ahead!’

‘Okay’, I cleared my throat, ‘Here is what happened in this case!

At midnight Chihiro met up with Mondo, seemingly for a workout session. Unknown to her, the chip was having a negative effect on Mondo’s mental state. She must have unintentionally provoked
him as he began to trash the room in a rage. While she did manage to escape the room, our killer was waiting around the corner. When Chihiro had made it to the end of the corridor the killer sprung out and slit her throat, leaving a large bloodstain on the wall.

While Mondo was in the room recovering from his outburst, the killer trailed animal blood towards the gym door to make it look like Mondo was the one who knifed Chihiro. Mondo had no knife on his person however, due to an earlier request from Chihiro and Mondo’s willingness to respect that. He was wearing a tracksuit which was discovered to contain no weapons. He did not return to his room afterwards and spent time in the nurse’s office due to injury, guided and watched over by Kiyotaka. He couldn’t have had the time to hide such articles if he did have them in his possession.

At some point Mondo injured his hand while in the middle of his breakdown, causing some of his blood to stain the gym equipment, again this would go on to help the killer put the blame on Mondo. Mondo himself was not completely innocent however, as he had for one reason or another, lied about being attacked by the killer.

Our killer had enough time before Mondo emerged from the room to wrap the tiny victim’s body in a tarp and take her to the library and to the secret room. While Mondo was searching frantically for Chihiro, the killer got to work. They carried Chihiro’s body down the secret passageway, which we discovered with the help of Toko (in the form of Syo) and Akira who is a Togami heir. The passage finished with the gymnasium store cupboard, where they hid the body.

By the time the killer had hidden the body, Mondo had arrived downstairs, so the killer did not make it to their room by the time we all emerged, therefore leaving them with no alibi. The most vital clue however was the murder weapon, a dagger. The dagger in the display case was a fake, while the one we discovered in the secret room was real. It was clear that the daggers had been swapped out.

Does this ring any bells Byakuya Togami?'
‘What’s the big deal?’ Byakuya yelled, ‘At the end of the day she was just another cog in the machine. Her loss will mean little, but mine, it could have a severe impact on the world. You don’t know what you are doing!’

‘Chihiro is just like any of us’, I frowned, ‘She could have made a huge contribution to the world, but you slit her throat before she had the opportunity. What does that say about you?’

‘One less rich bastard on this earth, that doesn’t sound like a bad idea to me’, Mondo growled.

‘You sicken me Togami’, Aoi looked towards him before she began weeping again, ‘And Mondo, I understand what you were going through, but you should have protected her…’

‘I know’, Mondo sighed, ‘I shouldn’t have gotten angry like that…’

‘Biggest understatement of the year’, Celestia shook her head.

‘Well little cubs, I think it’s about time that we get on with the voting!’ the bear sat down.

‘Just get on with it’, Byakuya snapped as the familiar spiked plinths rose up from the ground.

We had all gotten used to the blood ritual at this point, it was not as painful as when I had tested the Togami dagger for one thing. When we had all finished, the plinths descended downwards, signalling the counting of the votes.

As he had done the last two times, Monokuma conjured up a large ball of fire before causing it to levitate to the centre of the room. This time it took the shape of Byakuya.

‘So little cubs, is this the evil bastard that killed Chihiro Fujisaki?’ Once again, we all nodded and said nothing, ‘Then it is settled!’ he clapped his paws and the fiery version of Byakuya turned into a pile of ash upon the floor.

For a third time he sprung into the circle and prowled around looking at us hungrily.

‘I am going to need to hibernate soon little cubs’, Monokuma yawned, ‘which means I also need to fatten up! Eating all of you would be perfect for that purpose, even if there are not as many of you as there were previously’.

‘You do know polar bears don’t hibernate right?’ I told him.

‘Whatever nerd’, Monokuma grumbled, ‘It doesn’t matter anyway, for you have guessed correctly. On the bright side however, we do have our first accomplice!’ he shot Mondo an evil glare, ‘I will deal with you later’.

‘Why can’t you just kill me?’ Mondo gritted his teeth.

‘Because otherwise it wouldn’t be fair, you didn’t commit the murder after all! Byakuya on the other hand, you will be receiving that great honour’.

‘All I can hope is that I go with dignity’, Byakuya pulled out a small hipflask and drank from it. Presumably it contained his beloved champagne.

‘So Byakuya what is the ‘game’ exactly?’ questioned Makoto.
‘It’s complicated’, he explained, ‘You see, the Togami family doesn’t operate like most hereditary bloodlines. My mother, and Akira’s, were just broodmares to my father. They wanted the credit of being the mother of the next Togami heir. As expected however, various women from all over the world wanted a slice of the pie’.

‘Of course, the children of those women grew up, and when they discovered their identity they began to compete’, Akira told us, ‘But what made you so afraid Byakuya? Especially after what happened to your siblings!’

‘When the Togami children were starting to get assassinated by competitors, I knew that I would soon be targeted too, especially with my success. Even with top security, I always feared that there was an assassin right around the corner. The fear got so bad that eventually, I decided to take things into my own account and I got some outside help’.

‘Who did you get help from?’ asked Celeste.

‘The Kuzuryuus, at the time they were growing in membership and they had a large influence across Japan. With my earnings at the time, I managed to hire hitmen to take out the remaining contenders for the company and it was successful. All of the killings were eventually labelled as freak accidents...’ he took a deep breath, ‘However, when I did manage to take hold of the company, I gained new enemies. Even with my main competitors gone, I had several attempts on my life. So when I ended up stuck in a situation where I was a mere pawn, I became more afraid than ever’.

‘Why did you kill Chihiro though? She was no threat to you’, Sakura pointed out.

‘That fear worsened when the microchip was installed. So again, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I had never killed anyone directly myself, so when I saw Chihiro in the state she was in, I realised that sacrificing her would be my opportunity to get out of here’.

‘You killed her because she was an easy target to you? You really are nothing but a pathetic little coward, aren’t you?!’ Aoi raised an eyebrow.

‘Then again, at the time I had no idea that another Togami heir was in this building’, Byakuya stared in the direction of his newly discovered sibling, ‘Then I could have escaped!’

‘Sorry Byakuya’, shrugged Akira.

‘So that is what happened. I couldn’t allow the Togami Corporation to fall. I was the only heir left because the others had been killed, then again who knows what would have happened to the company if one of my rivals took charge? Considering how they ended up, it would probably have disastrous consequences...’

‘You live by the sword you die by the sword’, Monokuma nodded, ‘What a shame. You were the cleverest killer so far in this game, it was only luck that bested you. But alas, we must get on with your punishment, and I have a very special execution planned just for you!’

‘That’s what you get for treating Toko like shit punk!’ yelled Syo. At that moment however, she sneezed and before our eyes, Toko returned.

‘What is going on?’ she cried, ‘This isn’t what I think I’m seeing! Master no!’ she began to bawl loudly, ‘Master doesn’t deserve this!’

‘I may be an evil genius but not even I would resort to killing my competitors’, Akira shrugged, ‘Dammit! I could have hired Chihiro to hack into the websites of my rivals’.
'No Monokuma, you have got it all wrong!' Toko begged, ‘Mondo is the real culprit, he is the one who started the whole thing! Send him to the slaughter instead!’

‘I would not object to that’, Mondo uttered.

‘As much as I object to it, all games have to have rules. In this particular game only true murderers are legible for execution. Don’t worry though. Mondo will get his punishment!’

‘Just get on with it Monokuma’, Byakuya looked up at him.

‘Okay then! Byakuya, please stand on the panel!’ Indeed, Byakuya walked onto the panel and metal spikes shot up from the ground, trapping him, ‘Because you act like you are the king of the world, I have decided that I should treat you as such’.

‘Wait, what are you planning?’

‘Are you ready little cubs? Because it’s punishment time!’

After a few seconds Byakuya began to descend into the floor as Toko cried out, ‘No, no, no!’

‘Well hurry along little cubs! You do not want to miss this!’

One by one we gathered in the elevator and we descended downwards to witness the third execution. When we stepped out, we were met with what looked like a palace. It was decorated to simulate a coronation ceremony with bright red and gold tapestries draping the walls, there was even a golden throne facing us.

The crude neon sign came down reading, ‘Execution for the Ultimate Affluent Prodigy, Byakuya Togami: The Midas Touch’. At that moment some of the figures in black entered, trailing Byakuya along. They tied him with golden chains to the throne, he tried to struggle against them but of course they were far too strong.

‘Look’, Celeste whispered to me, she was pointing at what looked like a giant vat propped up above him, from which I could hear bubbling.

‘Oh no…’ I uttered.

Throughout the room some sinister music began to play. Looking up I could see some more of Monokuma’s henchpeople playing a mournful tune on the violin.

‘I really don’t like where this is going…’ murmured Aoi

The rest of Monokuma’s cronies stepped towards a lever. After giving each other a nod, one of them pulled the device sharply downwards. As though it was in slow motion, the large vat tipped.

‘No please!’ screamed Toko, ‘Anyone but master!’

I saw what it was when I began to hear Byakuya’s screams of torment. A shining, golden liquid was poured on top of him. To my horror, I realised that it was solidifying too and soon we could smell the combination of burning flesh and molten metal. It only took seconds for the screaming to stop, but as it did the other times, it felt much longer than that.

When all the liquid had been emptied, we saw that Byakuya had become a morbid golden statue, his face twisted in an eternal scream.

As Monokuma’s henchpeople rolled him away, I questioned whether Byakuya, who had so little
regard for human life himself, deserved such a horrible fate.

‘Well’, Monokuma stepped forward, ‘Since he loves gold so much, I thought it would only make sense for him to become it himself’, he clapped his paws, ‘It’s a shame his crowning went by so fast! But no worries! For we still have a bonus round!’

There was a look of desperation in Mondo’s eyes, ‘Monokuma please, just kill me…’

‘Everyone, into the elevator! Mondo is in for a good roasting!’

‘Please…’ Mondo begged him again as we ascended upwards and returned to the courtroom.

‘Well little cubs, please gather round!’ Monokuma announced, ‘It’s time for me to spill the beans!’

‘What do you plan on doing?’ I cried out.

‘I am here to make an important announcement! Mondo Oowada, known as the Ultimate Biker Gang Leader across Japan is also a gay man!’

‘No! I’m not!’ Mondo cried out, ‘I swear I’m not!’

‘And that’s not all!’ Monokuma grinned, ‘He is sick too!’

‘No, you don’t understand!’, tears began to appear in his eyes as my hatred for the bear grew stronger, ‘I’m not sick! It’s not like that!’

‘How can you do this?’ Sakura growled as the bear continued to torment his latest prey.

‘What’s this then?’ Monokuma gestured towards one of his cronies who was holding out some prescription tablets. They threw the box in Mondo’s direction who grabbed it quickly and desperately tried to hide it, ‘I am sure you remember the big day’.

‘Monokuma please stop!’ Kiyotaka cried, ‘Mondo, he is just trying to spread fear and deception, don’t listen to a word of it’.

Mondo was trembling, ‘I was hospitalised for a stab wound and I first found out when doctors tested my blood’, he swallowed, ‘I was told that I was… HIV positive. Upon finding out, I became more afraid than ever. In the moment, I felt like I was falling down a deep dark pit, hopeless and alone’.

‘Mondo it’s alright!’ Aoi tried to reassure him, ‘The treatment is so much better than what it used to be. It’s not a death sentence. Don’t listen to him’.

‘Yes’, Makoto told him, ‘It’s not hopeless, you still have so much to live for. Whatever happens we are here to support you!’

‘Maybe if you were not so reckless then none of this wouldn’t have happened to you!’ Monokuma taunted him, ‘With your kind of lifestyle Mondo, you were kind of asking for it’.

At that moment I watched as both Makoto and Aoi lunged out at the bear. Thankfully they were grabbed by Kiyotaka and Sakura respectively as Monokuma’s cronies thrusted what looked like spears in their direction. Sakura’s eyes as she tried to hold off her friend from attacking the cruel beast, held that familiar fire which seemed to burn brighter than it had ever done before.

‘Let me go!’ Aoi strained as Sakura held onto her tightly.

‘I didn’t imagine you would be so defensive of the man you tried to condemn earlier Aoi!’,
Monokuma snickered.

‘I wouldn’t say such a thing to my worst enemy!’ Aoi continued to struggle against Sakura’s grip. ‘You are just a lowlife fearmonger! Mondo is twice the man that you will ever be!’

‘Mondo’, Kiyotaka approached him, ‘I can help you! I can offer you a place of refuge!’

‘It’s not as simple as that Taka, especially considering Mondo’s ‘friends’’, the bear chuckled. ‘Turns out Byakuya was not the only one cosying up to the Yakuza. Despite coming from entirely different backgrounds, they are more alike than you think!’

Mondo nodded feebly. ‘As some of you may have suspected, I do have links with the Yakuza. On the day of my diagnosis and Daiya’s death shortly afterwards, I knew I had to get stronger. When Daiya was in charge I was the ‘starry eyed kid brother’, so I knew I had to up my game if I was to take over. In turn however, I broke some of the promises I made to him’.

‘Like what exactly?’ questioned Akira.

‘My brother wanted nothing to do with the Yakuza when he was in charge. But the gang was declining when he died, and I feared that sooner or later someone would suspect and ‘out’ me for what I truly was. I eventually got into contact with the Kuzuryuu clan and since then, the Crazy Diamonds became a major Yakuza recruitment base. Because of our new-found influence, tensions increased across the country and a major gang war erupted’, he took a deep breath, 'Alas... It wasn’t long before I resorted to killing to keep my honour, and that of the Diamonds too, especially if I was to remain in the Kuzuryuus favour. If I displayed any sign of weakness in front of them, I was as good as dead’.

‘The world is truly a cruel and scary place for those who are different or misunderstood’, I sighed, ‘And I understand why you resorted to doing what you did. But killing is still killing no matter the motive behind it, and you certainly shouldn’t have lashed out at Chihiro the way you did’.

‘Because I was ashamed of who I truly was and tried to hide it for a long time, I ended up releasing my personal demons upon others...’

‘Why did you take out your anger on Chihiro though?’

‘Because she saw hope in the face of despair, and I didn’t’.

‘They always say show don’t tell’, Monokuma grinned, he clapped his paws and a large screen came down on thick chains, ‘This is why I don’t want you tampering with my cameras because we can get some truly amazing footage, like this’.

What we saw before us seemed to be camera footage playing out. It displayed the gym. Mondo and Chihiro were present and had just finished doing their rounds on the dumbbells.

‘You have done well so far lass’, Mondo told her, ‘I have clearly underestimated you’.

‘Thanks Mondo’, Chihiro beamed, panting slightly, ‘I feel stronger than I have ever been before and because of this, I want to change!’

‘I see’.

‘Just you wait and see what an unstoppable force we have become! We will get out of here together, and we will see our family and friends again!’
‘Yeah…’ Mondo murmured.

‘What’s wrong?’

At that moment Mondo clutched at his head in agony, ‘It must be so nice mustn’t it?’

‘Mondo what’s going on?’

‘It must be so nice having family and friends to go back to, people who you can trust’, he spoke in that dreaded quieter tone of voice.

‘I didn’t mean to offend you or anything’, Chihiro backed off as Mondo started to resemble a cornered beast, ‘what’s wrong? You can tell me!’

‘At least you have something to go back to… And what do I get? Nothing!’

‘I can help you!’

‘You really have no idea… You have a nice cosy home and a loving family but for me, there is nothing left but shit. At least you don’t have to worry about dying cold and alone on the streets. I made a promise to Daiya that I would become a strong leader if something ever happened to him. But I failed him, all because I allowed my weakness to take hold’.

‘You are strong Mondo and I admire you for that. I don’t think you are a failure at all!’

‘Oh really, you think I’m strong, do you? Are you fucking with me?’, his eye twitched, ‘Why did my gang abandon me then? Why did they always doubt me and look down upon me?’

‘You don’t have to listen to them!’

‘You don’t understand, the gang has been my livelihood. They are the only thing keeping my brother’s legacy afloat. Now because of my weakness that was all ruined!’, he shook his head violently, ‘If he was still breathing, then I am sure Daiya would be standing by your side, making a mockery out of me’.

‘You are not weak, you are one of the strongest people I have ever met’, Chihiro’s eyes began to fill with tears, ‘I am not trying to insult you, I really do admire you very much’.

‘That’s easy for you to say! You don’t know me!’ he yelled.

‘Mondo…’

‘Oh now you are just taunting me! You can go back to your loving family Chihiro, I am sure you will be greeted with open arms unlike a weakling like me!’ his fists were clenched now, ‘Why don’t you tell them how strong you are while I rot in the gutter why don’t you?’

‘I’m only trying to help…’

‘You have spent most of your life fixated on a computer screen while I have seen the real world for what it really is. You don’t know anything, and I doubt you ever will! So yeah, go back to computer programming or whatever it is you get up to while I waste away! Just get outta my sight!’

Chihiro couldn’t take it anymore. Upset and angry, she ran out with her face in her hands. Mere seconds after she had fled, Mondo clutched his head in pain one last time.

Then right before our eyes, with brute force that seemed surreal even for him, he began to trash up
the gym and I feared that the verdict would have turned out very differently if Chihiro had stayed in that room any longer. Mondo’s rampage continued until we heard a loud crunching of bone and he keeled over, clutching his hand which was now dripping with blood.

The film cut to a second camera where we saw a humanoid figure waiting in the shadows, a glint of steel in their hand. We quickly found out the identity of the figure when they grabbed the distraught Chihiro from behind. There was a glint of metal, and Chihiro had no time to cry out as Byakuya swiped the blade across her throat. Finally there was a flash of scarlet, and the film cut out.

When the screen ascended upwards Mondo broke down and he resembled Chihiro on the very first day of the killing game, curled up in a ball and trembling violently.

‘Mondo’, Kiyotaka bent down, ‘It’s going to be okay. You are going to be okay. Remember the promise we made?’ But no matter how much he tried to reassure his ‘friend’, it seemed that his efforts were in vain.

‘Monokuma’, Aoi wept, ‘How can you and your mistress continue to torture us like this? What did we do to deserve it?’

‘He broke Chihiro’s poor little heart! How does he not deserve it?’

‘I am pretty sure Chihiro wouldn’t have wanted it’, I glared up at the bear, ‘Because unlike you, she was pure of heart and never would have allowed anything so cruel to happen to her friends if she had any control over it.’

‘You should be thankful if anything little cubs’, Monokuma shrugged, ‘I have given you an easy target for the next round. Of course, you can go the challenging route but we bears tend to go for the weakest prey. It’s just more practical! Anyway, I will see you in the fourth round. Since 4 is one of the unlucky numbers, it is the round I am looking forward to the most! Sayonara!’

We said nothing as we ascended the elevator back to the university. Mondo looked shell-shocked for the whole journey while Kiyotaka tried to get a response out of him. The only sound we could hear was Toko’s endless sobbing. When we finally arrived in the real world, Mondo turned towards us, a dark shadow across his face.

‘I never should have come here. I should have burned my Hope’s Peak application when I had the chance’.

‘No Mondo’, I tried to tell him, ‘We can find a way around this’.

‘And it’s perfectly fine to be gay too’, Makoto attempted to reassure him, ‘We will accept you no matter what. You shouldn’t let that demon get to you, it’s what he wants!’

Mondo turned his back to us, ‘I saw Hope’s Peak as my last chance to be able to live a normal life, a place where I could escape the gangster lifestyle once and for all. But instead I ended up contributing to the death of one of my friends and I will only hurt more people if I stay in your company. I will be nothing but a burden’.

‘Mondo, don’t you remember our promise?’ Kiyotaka ran in front of him and grabbed his shirt.

‘I never should have dragged any of you into this’, he looked into Kiyotaka’s eyes especially, ‘I’m sorry for everything’.

‘Mondo you are not a burden or an abomination or anything of the sort’, Makoto pleaded, ‘We can help you if you only gave us a chance!’
‘None of you fucking get it do you?! I have already hurt one person and I don’t want to hurt anybody else!’

Before we could react, Mondo bolted. We tried to chase him down but it was no use as he slammed his bedroom door behind him. Kiyotaka screamed in desperation for him to come out, but no matter how hard he tried calling his name, there was only silence.
The night after the third class trial was rough. Chihiro’s death at least for Sakura and I, was the hardest to face so far. Even when we were constructing memorials for her and Byakuya, it was still difficult to comprehend that she was gone for good. I couldn’t imagine how her parents would react if they heard the tragic news of their daughter’s early demise. Barely anyone talked in the art room, Mondo was absent and Toko was present, but sobbing nonstop.

Sakura and I placed Chihiro’s memorial beside her bedroom door. It was painful to think that we would never see her happy and enthusiastic face emerge again.

After we held a minute of silence for Chihiro and Byakuya, we slowly made our way to bed. Like Kyoko and Celestia who were arm in arm, Sakura and I wanted to spend the night together. I opened the door to my room where I was greeted by large trophy cases and medals decorating the wall.

‘Maybe Mondo was right, perhaps I should have burned my application too’, I sighed as I looked up at all the awards I had won throughout my career, ’I thought I was going to have the time of my life here where I could show off my talent but I guess some things are too good to be true huh?’

‘On the other hand, I would never have met you if you decided to burn your application’, Sakura kissed me on the forehead before getting changed into her nightwear.

‘Of course’, I uttered, ‘if we are going to be stuck here, I might as well stick by someone who I can trust’, I looked up at her affectionately as I myself got changed.

Sakura curled up on the mattress before I snuggled up next to her.

‘A lot of people feared me beforehand, often referring to me as ‘ogre’. You and Chihiro on the other hand were kind and I have never felt more relaxed in my own skin with you both at my side’.

‘What are we going to do though Sakura?’ I spoke as I rested my head against her chest, ‘I cannot believe that Chihiro is dead… I just can’t’.

‘I am sure if she was here, she would want us to live our lives to the fullest and to stick together no matter the circumstances. She was one of the bravest and most determined people I have ever got to know and it’s utterly devastating that she had to die so young’.

‘Her poor parents too… I cannot imagine how they would react to hearing the news of their daughter’s death. It’s just too awful to imagine’, I sniffed.

‘I know. I cannot imagine anything more tragic than a parent losing their child…’

‘Indeed’, I sighed as Sakura stroked my hair in comfort, ‘Still we have to continue to fight on, otherwise Chihiro’s death would have meant nothing’.

‘That’s true’.

‘And… while I never particularly liked Byakuya to begin with, nobody deserves to be punished in such a barbaric fashion. As for Mondo, although he was a total asswipe to Chihiro, it was horrible that Monokuma just outing him like that. I had a friend in high school who had something similar happen to her and she was traumatised for weeks’.

‘It truly is hard to comprehend how humanity is capable of such evil', Sakura growled, 'but if you
look closely, it doesn’t take long to recognise the symptoms’.

‘I’m glad that those terrible devices are no longer operating but why did it have to come at the cost of somebody so innocent?’, I wept, ‘After having to witness my little brother’s death playing out in my mind, and then seeing Chihiro in the state she was in… I just couldn’t bear it…’

‘You lost a sibling too huh?’

I nodded solemnly, ‘I am angry at Mondo and Sayaka for what they did, but at the same time I ‘get them’, you know? Losing a sibling like that can mess you up big time’.

‘If you feel like telling me, what did happen to your brother?’

‘Before I go into full detail you should know this. The sea is like all of nature. It is both a great and terrible thing, and it will show you no mercy if you don’t have your wits about you’.

‘Indeed, the sea is a cruel and unforgiving beast’.

I exhaled, ‘It happened when we were on a family holiday. My parents had managed to rent a beautiful house on the coast. The weather was good, and my siblings and I could see the sea through our bedroom window. At the time, none of us expected that the ocean would become a source of such tragedy’, tears began to run down my cheeks again.

‘Aoi…’, Sakura wrapped her arms around me.

‘It’s okay’, I rubbed my eyes before continuing, ‘My two younger brothers and I went swimming one evening. The water was calm, the sky was clear, it couldn’t have been better. It was so good that the three of us swam further than we had ever done before. Our parents had warned us not to swim beyond a certain point, but we felt confident enough to bend the rules a bit’, I began to tremble.

‘It’s alright…’

‘Anyway, we swam out so far out that the house became tiny in the distance and any people on the beach would have looked like pinpricks from our viewpoint. However, we suddenly noticed clouds beginning to gather in the sky. We rapidly began to swim back to the coast, but the storm was faster’, I took another deep breath, ‘My youngest brother, Asahi, was not a great swimmer. He was only six after all and had to rely on me and my second youngest brother, Yuta. He loved the sea though and wanted to be just as skilled as his siblings, so he was willing to go along, and we wanted to help’.

‘You three sounded like you were pretty close’.

‘Yes, but I fear that is what led to the tragedy that evening. Soon we found ourselves battling the tide which seemed determined to drag us down to the dark depths’, I swallowed, ‘We desperately tried to keep ourselves together, but the sea was too strong, and Asahi was swept out. Yuta and I desperately tried to save him, but he vanished under the water’, I gritted my teeth.

‘Aoi, it’s not your fault’, Sakura tried to reassure me.

‘How can it not be?’ I cried, ‘Yuta and I tried to recover him, but he just disappeared. We were forced to abandon him and save ourselves. If you could think of a feeling that was worse than how my brother and I felt when we swam to save our own skins and back to distraught parents, it would be hard to. Of course, rescue services were summoned but they never found him, not until his body washed up the next day that is…’ I held Sakura’s hand tightly as I told her this.

‘There, there’, Sakura held me closer, ‘It’s okay…’
‘Even before the microchips were implanted, I could distinctly remember it for a long time after it happened, and the guilt has never left Yuta and I since. Our reckless behaviour got our dear little brother killed and now we have to live with that mistake forever’.

‘I’m so sorry Aoi’, Sakura’s eyes were beginning to water too.

‘On the other hand, our brother’s death encouraged us to become more ambitious in our swimming if you can believe it’, I sighed, ‘They say that when you fall off a horse you have to get back on, and the sea is no different. Also... it is what we believed he would have wanted. When we were not competing in swimming tournaments, we also gained small jobs in life guarding. Because of our influence we would sometimes even give talks in schools across Japan, to teach kids to love the ocean, but to respect it too and to be aware of the unique dangers the big blue had to offer’.

‘Well...’ Sakura sighed, ‘It’s good that you didn’t give up on your career and used your past experiences to do good in the world. Sometimes that is the best road to recovery. Although with my traumas meditation was the key to my coping, especially as my dojo is located far away from civilisation. I wish I could have reached out to the world, but the problem is people still fear me, even if they don't want to admit it. I don't know whether it's due to my appearance or my strength but I can often tell when people are intimidated. You and Chihiro on the other hand, you were different', she smiled softly, 'And I very much appreciate that'.

I smiled back, but at that moment I felt my stomach rumble, ‘I think I need to get something to eat. I will see if I can find some doughnuts in the kitchen. It won’t cheer me up, not after what happened tonight... but a full stomach can help me clear my head. I mean, a little night-time snack won’t hurt will it?’

‘Go ahead, I will probably wait until the morning though. Eating food during the dead of night tends to give me nightmares’.

‘Okie dokie! I will bring some back just in case you want a bite in the morning Sakura!’ I shrugged, ‘Considering we have been through literal hell three times, nothing is out of the ordinary now, not even having doughnuts for breakfast’!

‘Be careful’, Sakura told me as I pulled on a hoodie for warmth.

‘Don’t worry Sakura I will be fine!’ I reassured her as I opened the door, ‘Now the microchips have been deactivated I don’t think anyone is a threat right now’.

When I passed by the other rooms, I could hear that Toko’s cries had been reduced to whimpering. She had likely cried so much that no more tears could come out. I couldn’t help but feel sorry for her when I finally entered the dining room and turned on the kitchen light.

Stepping inside, I wondered how much food would end up being left over especially considering that there were now less mouths to feed than before. Finally, I approached the other side of the room where the large refrigerator towered over me.

Reaching for my favourite doughnuts and storing them in a box, I hoped that I would be able share a few with Sakura the next morning as I trudged back to my room.

On the way back however, I stopped in my tracks, spotting what seemed to be a glowing green light coming from the sauna room, the door of which was left ajar. I tended to associate bright green lights with old alien movies. Surely aliens couldn’t have landed in this academy? Was that the next motive? My curiosity got the better of me as I edged closer towards the source of the light. The green light
was intimidating but there was something warm and enticing about it too. Like a moth I was hypnotised by its bright aura.

Looking ahead I could see that it was coming from inside one of the lockers. I laid my box of doughnuts upon a chair before I nervously stepped forward and opened the door.

The moment I saw what was inside, I jumped back in fright. I couldn’t tell exactly who it belonged to as I darted out of the room, but one thing was certain, it was a face blinking up at me.
It was not long after Chihiro’s and Byakuya’s memorial service when we heard running in the hallway. I jumped out of bed and opened the door.

‘Aoi what the Hell is going on?’

‘Yeah, what are you waking us up for Aoi?’ Celestia yawned.

‘I think I saw…’ Aoi gulped, ‘a ghost!’

‘A ghost, seriously?’ I questioned, ‘Where?’

At that moment I also saw Kiyotaka, Sakura, Akira and Makoto poke their heads out, obviously overhearing the commotion.

‘What’s going on here?’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘Do you think it could be the ghost of one of our classmates?’ questioned Makoto.

‘Maybe one of them has come back to haunt us!’ Akira giggled.

‘Aoi! Are you alright?’ Sakura ran up to her.

‘Well, I was on my way to the kitchen to get some doughnuts and... when I made my way to my room, I saw this bright green light coming from the sauna. It was like something straight out of one of those old cheesy, sci-fi films! Anyway, I walked up to it, opened the locker where the light seemed to be emitting from... and it was right there, blinking up at me!’

‘We should go and investigate’, Kiyotaka nodded.

‘Come on! This way!’ Aoi pointed and we cautiously made our way to the large sauna locker room.

‘Where was it?’ asked Sakura.

‘Right there!’ Aoi pointed. As soon as she said it, a bright green glow flickered and everyone jumped back in fright, some of us screaming.

‘Oh, you are all such wusses’, sighed Akira who had turned on the light.

‘Stand back’, I said as I opened the locker and gasped at what I saw, ‘Holy shit… it cannot be!’ Indeed, as I adjusted my vision, I saw what was clearly Chihiro’s face upon a laptop screen.

‘Chihiro?’ cried Aoi, ‘Is that really you?’

‘It wasn’t a ghost after all?’ Celestia frowned as I held up the laptop to show everyone.

‘Oh my God! Chihiro’s soul is trapped in the computer!’ exclaimed Akira.

I sat on one of the chairs, the others gathering around me as I propped the device upon my lap. Looking closer I noticed there was a text box, like that in a chatroom.

‘Hello’, I typed into it.

‘Hello’, in Chihiro’s voice, the image spoke back to the gasps of my fellows.
‘Are you Chihiro Fujisaki?’

‘No, I am merely the alter ego of my mistress. How is she?’

I bowed my head as I typed, ‘Deceased, Byakuya killed her’.

Chihiro’s digital face fell, ‘Alas, my mistress predicted that possibility from the start. Now all I can do is honour her by providing my services to you’.

‘I will honour your mistress’s final wishes’.

The digital Chihiro beamed, ‘If it’s easier for you, you can refer to me as Alter Ego’.

‘Very well’, I pondered what to type next as the others still stared dumbfounded at what was before them, ‘Can you reveal some of the secrets about the university?’

‘I will try, but it may take me a while to gather the data. The university system is extremely well protected, and it will likely take me some time to get past the firewalls and other digital barriers’.

‘Please hurry’.

Alter Ego nodded, ‘Also, this is important, you must keep my existence a secret. If the cameras detect me, then the key to your escape may never be found’.

‘Good luck in your endeavour’.

‘Thank you, I will do what I can!’

As I placed the open laptop back in the locker, Kiyotaka cleared his throat.

‘Do you notice anything about this place?’ he asked me, as though he knew something I didn’t.

As I looked around, I almost jumped for joy at my discovery, ‘There are no cameras here!’

‘Mondo and I used this room to discuss strategies’, Kiyotaka gloomily turned his head away from us, ‘We didn’t want to take a chance with the cameras you see…’

‘I don’t think they just used this room for ‘strategy meetings’…’, Akira whispered in my ear before I gave him a kick.

‘We should keep Alter Ego in here’, Sakura told us, ‘It is the only place where she can be guaranteed safety. Although I think we should lock her up when nobody is around, just in case Monokuma’s cronies decide to come lurking’.

‘Good idea’, I nodded, ‘I think you should take care of the locker key Sakura. Out of all of us, you are the least likely one to be attacked’, I handed it to her, and she pocketed it.

‘Speaking of which, until Mondo has recovered I will be your leader from now on’, Kiyotaka told us, ‘as the ultimate moral compass it is my responsibility’, he spoke in a strangely quieter tone, ‘You had all better get off to bed, there is always time for more investigating in the morning’.

‘Thank God’, Celeste stretched, ‘I am so tired’.

‘Come on everyone, let’s go’, I said, ‘Alter Ego probably won’t come up with results until tomorrow’, As we all filed out, I noticed Aoi stayed a little longer, ‘What’s wrong?’ I asked her.
'Oh nothing…’ she sighed as she picked up the box of doughnuts she had left behind previously, ‘I was just optimistic that Chihiro was…’

‘This kind of software cannot replicate a real person entirely, even if it was designed by the Ultimate Programmer. Human beings are just too complex. Because of Chihiro’s Ultimate status however, I imagine this is the best software of this kind you can possibly get’.

Aoi smiled weakly, ‘Thanks Kyoko, I feel a little better now’, she had to hug me with one hand, seeing as the other was holding her large box, ‘Do you want a doughnut?’

‘Nah I’m good’, I politely declined as we shut the sauna door behind us and slowly proceeded back to our rooms. I opened the door to Celestia’s room and she was already snuggled under the duvet.

‘Let’s get some sleep already’, she groaned as I cuddled up next to her.

By morning we had a smoke before plodding slowly towards the dining room where Kiyotaka was waiting for us.

‘No luck coaxing Mondo out then?’ Celeste asked him.

Kiyotaka shook his head, ‘I tried knocking but he never answered. I really hope he isn’t trying to isolate himself from the rest of us. I haven’t gotten a word out of him since the trial’.

‘I just hope he is okay’, Makoto commented from a table nearby.

‘Monokuma sure knows how to break his victims’, I replied, ‘it must take extra effort to put someone like Mondo in a vulnerable position. Who knows what he has planned for the rest of us?’

‘In a way the punishment for accomplices is worse than those for murderers’, Sakura growled, ‘At least the executed don’t have to live with it’.

‘Even after what he did to Chihiro, it was sick watching him be tortured like that…’, Aoi clenched her fist.

‘I don’t disagree with you’, I poured myself some coffee, ‘but unfortunately, I don’t think there is much we can do before he does decide to emerge’.

At that moment I saw Toko enter the room, dark shadows under her eyes.

‘Hey Toko, how are you feeling?’

‘How do you think I’m feeling?’ she snapped, ‘You sent master to his death!’

‘I had no choice Toko’, I told her, ‘The evidence was overwhelming, and if I didn’t, then we all would have perished that night, most likely in a very brutal fashion…’

‘I would have taken a bullet for him’, Toko sniffed.

‘For goodness sake Toko! You only knew him for a few days, and he treated you like trash’, Aoi’s face was in her hands, ‘It’s kind of ridiculous you know…’

‘You don’t understand! He was the light of my life!’, she resumed sitting in her usual spot in the corner, far away from the rest of us.
‘Maybe there is a deep dark reason as to why she is so attracted to someone like Byakuya’, Celeste gazed over at her, ‘I wonder if something happened to her before she came to Hope’s Peak…’

‘Who knows…’ I uttered as Toko began to eat, her back turned to us.

After breakfast I whispered into Kiyotaka’s ear, ‘Should we go and check on you know who?’

Kiyotaka nodded before I approached Sakura, ‘Have you got it?’ I asked her.

Under the table I felt the cold feeling of metal be passed into my hand. Then, keeping my hands clenched, I beckoned Kiyotaka and Celestia to follow me back to the Sauna locker room. I closed the door after us, clicked the lock and once again Chihiro’s face appeared. Looking down at the text box I saw the following message.

‘Infiltrating Hope’s Peak system’.

‘Looks like she is still on it’, shrugged Celeste.

‘I hope we will get results soon’, Kiyotaka paced up and down as he stared up at the screen. After safely storing Alter Ego away again he exhaled, ‘I think all we can do is see what else the University has to offer. Monokuma has most likely opened up another floor overnight’.

‘We might as well’, I tapped my foot, ‘come on Celestia, we may find something worth noting down’.

‘Considering each new floor played some part in every murder so far, it’s probably worth checking out’, Celeste agreed, ‘Let’s not waste any more time!’

The journey to the fourth floor felt much more like a hike.

‘Seriously, has anyone in the so-called greatest university in Japan considered an easier way to get around?’, I wheezed as I looked up at the new corridor before me.

Thankfully the first room we found was a large seating area. We collapsed into the surprisingly comfy chairs and did not get up for some time.

‘Look they even have a TV’, Celestia gasped, ‘It’s not as good as the one in the lounge but still’, edging closer she had spotted a DVD.

‘I wonder if Akira brought this one over from America’, I was holding up a copy of the film, ‘Jaws’, ‘To be honest though, I would rather watch this repeatedly over one viewing of Monokuma’s shitty bootlegs!’

‘Hey there, you lazy bums!’, rather disgruntled, we looked up to see Akira.

‘Why don’t you go annoy somebody else?’ I grumbled, ‘Besides, what the hell are you doing here?’

‘I began exploring first thing this morning from my secret passage!’

‘Do you have access to all the floors?’ questioned Celestia, ‘Surely that will help us in our endeavours. We may even be able to track down the identity of Monokuma’s mistress quicker’.

‘Nope! I can only access the rooms that have been unlocked so far. When I tried to enter the restricted floors nothing happened, no matter how hard I tried. I swear I got a small electric shock trying to infiltrate my way through one time, it’s still stinging. Feel for yourself!’ he held out a hand.
Suspicious that this was a prank I declined, ‘Have you noticed anything peculiar on this floor Akira?’

‘It’s a game changer alright’, he winked, ‘I’m gonna let you figure out that one out on your own though Sherlock!’, he then darted out of the room.

‘Fine we will!’ Celestia huffed as we both got out of our seats and went to explore further.

‘Wow what’s this?’ I looked up and down at the opposite room simply labelled, ‘Lost Property’.

I pushed open the door and all around I saw piles of school supplies, clothes and oddities, ‘Why are we the only people here?’ I examined all the various items around me, surely belonging to people of hundreds of different occupations, including a pickaxe, a model skeleton, a half completed wedding dress and even, much to my surprise, a large pickled squid in a jar, ‘I have similar questions about all the recent school photos back in the archive. Surely there must have been more ultimates? Why did everyone just disappear?’

‘Do you reckon it could have had something to do with the ‘tragedy’ that Monokuma mentioned?’ Celestia pondered, ‘Do you think something may have happened?’

I murmured, ‘Hopefully ‘you know who’ will be able to provide us with answers…’

At that moment I also noticed a box, standing prominently in the middle of the desk. In very bold letters were the words, ‘Please feel free to borrow (just one please)!’ My curiosity got the better of me as I carefully opened the contents. Inside were about six handbooks and six room keys.

‘Is this what I think it is?’ frowned Celeste as I switched on one of the handbooks.

I nodded as the name, ‘Byakuya Togami’ appeared on the screen.

‘What does this mean then?’

‘It looks like we can all gain access to the rooms of the deceased now. Including any potential killer looking for a suitable murder weapon it seems’.

‘At least there are rules in place though’, Celestia shrugged, ‘Our deceased classmates could have been storing anything in their room for all we know’.

‘That’s true. We are going to have to keep our guard up more than ever. Especially considering how creative some of our previous killers got with their weapons’, I closed the box.

At that moment Celestia shrieked,

‘What’s up?’ I gasped when I noticed what she was holding.

‘It’s another photo, just like the one from the archive!’

Looking in both awe and confusion I noticed the happy faces of Chihiro and Leon, playfully chasing each other while a disgruntled looking Byakuya was studying in the background.

‘What the Hell is happening? The panels are gone in this one too!’

But then we heard that familiar demonic voice, ‘What have you got there, little cubs?’

‘Shit…’ I groaned as the bear appeared.

‘What was that?’ he snarled.
‘You probably shouldn’t leave your things lying around if you don’t want us picking them up. They are rather difficult to simply ignore after all’, Celestia commented.

‘What are they anyway?’ I asked.

‘Just give it to me!’ Monokuma growled before I begrudgingly handed it over and he disappeared.

‘You know what? I am not surprised by anything anymore’, I muttered as we both headed out towards the far end of the corridor.

‘This is getting stranger by the day’, Celestia agreed as I opened a door labelled ‘Menagerie’. As I stepped inside, I saw rows upon rows of fish tanks and terrariums. Real, breathing, reptiles, amphibians and fish were present too and were clearly well looked after. Looking closer I could see Aoi and Sakura examining the curious specimens.

‘Hey girls’, I waved as I noticed the two of them watching a large python curled up in a big scaly ball.

‘Wow, it’s like a miniature zoo!’ gasped Aoi, ‘All the animals seem to be in great shape too!’

‘I wonder who has been looking after them all this time?’ I stared at a tank filled with silvery piranhas, literally armed to the teeth.

‘We can only guess’, Sakura commented, observing some beautiful tropical fish dart back and forth. ‘I wonder if these creatures were looked after so some of them could be utilised as weapons later?’

Celeste was drawn to a terrarium filled with tiny, jewel-like poison dart frogs, ‘They may look cute, but just a little amount of venom from these things can kill a small group of grown men with ease’, she explained.

That was not the thing that interested me most however. I turned around to see a large steel door which read, ‘Restricted Area’. To the side of it, I noticed a password input system.

‘Do you reckon they are keeping something dangerous in here?’ Celestia walked over to examine the peculiar looking door, ‘Seems pretty fishy to me’.

‘Or it could be illegal whatever they are doing’, I frowned, ‘Either way, I imagine this door is labelled as restricted for a good reason. It’s probably best to let sleeping dogs lie’.

Celestia nodded in approval as the four of us exited the room when to our surprise we bumped into Makoto who was panting profusely, followed by an eager looking Akira.

‘What’s up?’ I asked him

‘It’s about ‘you know what’…’ he murmured.

‘Kiyotaka wants us all to gather in ‘you know where’, Akira followed up.

‘Oh, I see. Well what are you waiting for? Lead the way’, I said.

Seven of us gathered in the meeting room when we heard what seemed to be a jingle coming from one of the lockers.

‘I came in here and I heard noises coming from there’, Kiyotaka pointed at the locker, ‘I think Alter Ego has finally found something’, he told us.
‘Well what are we waiting for?!’ piped up Akira, ‘Let see, let’s see!’

Sakura opened the locker and handed the device over to me. As soon as she did so I propped the machine on my lap, typing rapidly.

‘Have you found anything?’

‘I fear this is just the tip of the iceberg, but I have found some information that I feel will help you in your investigation’.

‘What did you find?’

‘An event simply known as ‘The Tragedy’ occurred at this very university. Thousands of students dead, exact causes and motives for such devastation currently unknown’.

‘Did you discover anything else?’

‘Not much but it is known that the dean at the time was a man in his mid-thirties’.

‘That rings a bell’, Celestia commented, ‘Do you remember those photos in the archive Kyoko?’

‘I do’, I nodded, ‘Out of all of Hope’s Peak’s deans, one of them was blacked out. As though the one imprisoning us here didn’t want us finding out. The bloke that Alter Ego described was most likely the one’, It was then that some grim realisation came flowing over me.

‘Kyoko, what’s wrong?’ asked Makoto.

‘Oh, don’t worry. It’s nothing’, I gritted my teeth.

‘Kyoko, has something upset you?’ Aoi gave me a concerned look.

‘Seriously I’m fine!’ I snapped as I typed again.

‘Thank you. I hope you will be able to uncover further details’.

‘I will be more than happy to’, Alter Ego blinked up at me, ‘My mistress would have appreciated it’.

Once again, the words ‘Infiltrating Hope’s Peak System’ appeared in the chat box in brackets.

After locking Alter Ego away and closing the door behind us we all headed down to the dining room for dinner. We ate in relative silence before we all decided to settle in our rooms.

‘Kyoko my dear, please tell me what’s wrong’, Celeste cupped my chin in her hands, ‘I’m getting concerned here you know!’

I sighed, ‘Something clicked in my head back there, although I cannot figure out why. It’s frustrating’.

‘I am sure you will figure it out soon Kyoko’, she kissed me on the cheek, ‘You are good at that kind of stuff. I mean… your skills helped to save our skins three times. I am sure it will all start to make sense eventually’.

‘I have no idea why I am here in the first place, I mean… I still can’t figure out what my own talent is. I can’t even figure out these…’ at that moment I pulled off my gloves to reveal deeply scarred and blackened hands, ‘how did I even end up like this?’
'Could it be amnesia? Sometimes severe trauma can do that to a person'.

'That could be the case’, I frowned slipping my gloves back on, ‘but how does it all connect? There must be a reason, but I just don’t have the answers’, I banged my fist on the bedside table.

‘It’s okay Kyoko’, Celestia kissed me again on the lips, ‘You will figure it out one day, I know you will!'

‘I hope so Celeste, I really do’, my body relaxed as I took her hand.

At that moment however, we could suddenly hear a frantic knocking at the door. I quickly jumped up and opened it. Outside was a distraught and pale looking Makoto.

‘Makoto what’s wrong?’ I asked him, my stomach falling.

‘It’s Mondo’, he was trembling, ‘he’s not dead but… he’s hurt, badly. There was a lot of blood’.

‘Lead the way’, I instructed, Celestia and I then briskly followed him to Mondo’s room. I noticed that the door was hanging off the hinges. I soon realised the cause of the damage when Sakura came dashing out of the room, carrying the limp body of Mondo in her arms.

I noticed some material, turning red with blood, tied tightly around his stomach acting as a temporary tourniquet. He reminded me of the state Chihiro’s body was in when we found her. Kiyotaka was nearby, distraught, and his eyes brimming with tears at the state of his companion.

Together we all made our way to the first aid room where Sakura carefully laid Mondo on the ground. Kiyotaka dutifully sat by his side while Sakura rummaged through the medicine cabinets.

‘Keep him still’, Sakura ordered Kiyotaka, as she removed the material to reveal a deep gash upon Mondo’s stomach, again eerily reminiscent of Chihiro’s neck wound. Then to my surprise, she pulled out some surgical needle and thread and began to stitch it up, ‘Kyoko, Celeste fetch one of the blood packs and Aoi, see if you can find some penicillin’.

We obeyed her orders without question.

When we finally returned with the appropriate supplies, Sakura had nearly finished stitching up the wound. Mondo’s breathing however was getting weaker and soon stopped as he went into shock. Aoi clutched my hand tightly while we watched Kiyotaka perform CPR. In the moment we feared that death had claimed another one of our number, it was as though time itself had stopped.

Just as our hopes for his survival were about to fade however, we heard Mondo gasp for air. While Sakura began to attach the blood packet and injected the penicillin, Kiyotaka comforted him.

‘Taka…’ Mondo uttered in the faintest of voices.

‘It’s going to be okay bro. I’m here’.

Gently Sakura carried Mondo to the nearest bed and laid him there. Kiyotaka reached into the first aid kit on the floor and pulled out some bandages, before applying them to the now stitched up wound.

Sakura bent down to feel his forehead, ‘He has quite a fever. The following night will be most critical, especially as the blood transfusion procedure will take a few hours at least. Somebody will have to keep an eye on him’, her eyes immediately fixed towards Kiyotaka.
‘I will look after him’, he saluted, ‘I will protect him with my life’.

‘I patched him up best I can’, Sakura told him, ‘I just hope it will be enough’.

‘Thank you, Sakura’, Kiyotaka rubbed his eyes, ‘You did a good job’.

‘I am sure it will be enough’, I reassured her, ‘How did you do that?’

‘I have often stitched up my own wounds throughout my career’, she explained, ‘and I have occasionally performed minor surgery on injured animals I found’.

‘Wow Sakura’, Aoi hugged her, ‘There is so much more I have to learn from you’.

‘I did my best…’

‘How did he end up like this though?’ asked Celeste.

Aoi sighed, ‘From what we saw, it seems he attempted Seppuku… there was a note beside him…’

‘I see’, I bowed my head, ‘You should probably cut off access to his room Sakura. He shouldn’t go near any sharp objects for a while’.

‘Indeed’, Sakura nodded, ‘I currently have his keys’.

‘Good. When he has recovered, I am sure that he will be fine sharing Kiyotaka’s room. In the mean time however we should take turns watching over him. I really don’t think it will be a good idea to leave him alone in such a vulnerable state’.

‘He may not be happy with this decision, but I hope he will understand that we are doing this for his sake’.

‘Me too’, I looked over at the bed where Mondo lay, Kiyotaka holding his hand, ‘like you said though, now all we can do is wait’.
I was once again faced with a sleepless night as I legitimately feared that Mondo may not survive the long night ahead. I was so filled with anxiety in fact that when I heard my door bell go off early the next morning, I was still laying awake.

Shakily I opened it to see Makoto, who to my relief simply looked tired.

‘Hey Makoto! How is Mondo?’ I asked him.

‘He’s alive’, Makoto grinned, ‘but sleeping. Taka asked if you would be willing to watch over him’.

‘I can do that’, I nodded as I got myself changed and made my way to the first aid room. I saw Mondo, fast asleep and Kiyotaka loyally seated at his bedside.

‘Oh, Kyoko it’s you’, Kiyotaka spoke, there were bags under his eyes.

‘You have done a great job Taka’, I told him, ‘How is he?’

‘He still has a slight fever, but it’s gone down significantly, and he has a steady heartbeat too’.

‘That’s good to know. Did he wake up at all?’

‘Not much. Although he did speak a little. It was no more than gibberish, but I think he appreciated my company all the same!’

‘I am sure he did! Well, you had better get some rest Taka, you look exhausted’.

‘Sure, thing Kyoko!’ Kiyotaka saluted and left the room, leaving me alone with his patient.

While on duty I picked up a magazine from a nearby rack and began to read, although I would sometimes get up and check Mondo’s vitals too. I was watching him for about an hour until I heard a faint voice coming from the pillows.

‘Fancy seeing you here lass…’ Mondo slowly opened his eyes and stared at his hand which was still in a cast from the night before, ‘So this is my second visit huh?’

I looked down at him, ‘It’s alright Mondo, you can go back to sleep’.

‘Why did you all go out of your way for a lowlife like me?’ he uttered, ‘Why couldn’t you just let me die in peace?’

‘I know it sounds cliché, but the truth is simply that we care about you’, I bowed my head, ‘You do know that what you did will not bring Chihiro back, right?’

‘I know… but after everything that I have done, I felt like it was right in the moment’.

‘Believe me, I once felt that way before…’

‘Did you attempt it too?’

‘Yes… and when look back on it, I am glad I didn't succeed’.

‘What is worth saving about me though? I’m sick remember?’
'My mother was sick too you know’, I told him, ‘she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Yet even when she had just months to live, she always reminded me to treat each day as though it is your last. It doesn’t matter whether you have years, months or even weeks to live. Your life is valuable, and you should treasure it no matter what’.

‘At least you have a nice home to go back to’, Mondo grimaced, ‘all I have is a shithole. Even if I tried to make a living in the ‘normal world’, I have committed too much evil to be trusted. Let’s face it, I’m a dead man either way’.

‘No, you are not’, I held his hand, ‘Even if you do have HIV, the treatment is the best that it has ever been. People affected can live long fulfilling lives just like anyone else!’

‘But people within my society will be scared of me’, Mondo sat up, ‘I still will be an abomination to them regardless. My gang probably split up for that reason, they must have caught wind of it’.

‘Well that’s their problem isn’t it? You deserve better than this Mondo, we can help you’.

‘Yeah’, he growled, ‘and how can I assimilate back into society? Get thrown in prison, or get chucked in a nuthouse somewhere?’

‘You do realise you are speaking to someone who has actually been in the ‘nuthouse’ right?’

‘You of all people, really?’

I nodded, ‘It doesn’t have to be that way though. I didn’t get the support I needed in my case, and I was very much alone. But you are not alone, and I am sure we can help you’.

Mondo stared at the wall, ‘Thank you Kyoko. I suppose all we must do is get out of here huh?’ he smirked, ‘Taka is such a dork, but I think that’s why I like him. His dedication is admirable. If only I shared that characteristic too, then things might have turned out differently’.

‘Get some rest Mondo’, I laid him back down, ‘You need your strength’.

‘Thank you lass, I appreciate your wisdom’, he pulled the bed sheets over him and quickly fell asleep.

I stayed with him for a couple more hours before I heard footsteps making their way towards the dining room for breakfast.

Gently I nudged him awake, ‘Hey! Do you want some breakfast?’

‘Maybe a little’, he carefully sat up. At that moment Celestia opened the door and greeted me.

‘Hello nurse!’ she waved in my direction, ‘And I see Mondo is awake too!’

‘Yup, still here!’ Mondo grunted.

‘Would you be able to fetch him some breakfast Celeste?’ I asked her, ‘Nothing too rich though!’

‘Breakfast in bed, huh?’ Celeste sighed, ‘I’m actually quite envious!’ Within a few minutes she returned with a tray of food.

Mondo began to eat, albeit slowly as one of his hands was still in a cast. Within minutes, more people started to gather around his bedside, including Sakura, Aoi, Makoto and Kiyotaka who was crying happy tears.
‘Hey Taka, there’s no need to cry ya big dork!’ Mondo teased.

‘You could have died’, Kiyotaka bent down and held his hand, ‘We were all terrified that night’.

‘I don’t know why I did what I did last night, but one thing is certain... you guys helped to save my life and for that I am indebted to you’, he bowed his head.

‘You don’t have to see it that way’, Sakura told him, ‘We only did what we thought was right. You don’t owe us anything’.

‘I don’t think I could have taken it if you…’ Kiyotaka’s eyes watered, ‘We are all just glad you are alive, that’s all that matters’.

‘Did I miss anything since the trial?’ Mondo asked.

‘Quite a few things actually, but I cannot tell you just yet’, I indicated the camera in the corner of the room, ‘When you have recovered a bit, we will explain everything to you’.

‘Ah’.

‘Also’, I sighed, ‘For extra precaution, Sakura has your room keys’.

‘What?!’ Mondo protested as Kiyotaka laid him back down.

‘Hey don't shoot the messenger!’ Aoi raised a finger.

‘Mondo, relax’, I told him, ‘It’s just precautionary and a standard medical procedure. We just don’t want you hurting yourself again’.

‘I agree’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘You can share my room when you recover, I would be more than happy to! You can have my bed and I can make my own on the floor’.

‘Fine’, Mondo grumbled, ‘Whatever... You don’t have to sleep on the floor you know Taka. I could do with someone at my side while I rest…’, his face turned pink.

‘I would be most happy to oblige!’

‘Hey guys what’s up?’ we heard a certain voice come from a nearby bed. Akira was sitting upon it, pulling the lever up and down, causing the bed to do the same ‘Hospitals are quite fun really!’

‘No, they aren’t’, Aoi frowned, ‘my brother Yuta was hospitalised for a shark bite a year ago. Nothing too major but requiring surgery, nonetheless. And he said that having to stay at the hospital overnight meant that the bite was the least of his worries’.

‘A shark bite, really?’ gasped Celeste.

‘Well your brother must taste quite good if a shark was willing to take a nibble!’ Akira grinned.

Aoi frowned, ‘You do know sharks are not maneaters right?’

‘They aren’t? But Jaws says otherwise!’

‘Jaws helped to perpetuate that myth’, Aoi explained, ‘when sharks bite you it’s almost guaranteed to be a ‘test bite’ because they get curious, you see. Seeing as it’s a shark though, the only way they can really ‘test’ things is with their teeth. So, you should still avoid getting bitten regardless of whether the shark has murderous intentions or not’, she put her hands on her hips, ‘That’s why you should
always wear chainmail in shark populated areas’.

‘Don’t you mean shark infested areas?’

‘They aren’t infesting the ocean, they live there! That’s why you must treat them with respect, just like any other large animal. Yuta admitted that he made a mistake the day he was bitten’.

‘Have you really swum with sharks before?’ Makoto gasped, ‘Like great whites and everything?’

‘Yes’.

‘Holy shit that is actually so fucking cool…’ Mondo chuckled as he put his empty tray to the side and collapsed into his pillow, ‘perhaps I was wrong about what girls are capable of all along…’

Kiyotaka looked around at everyone, ‘We should get going, Mondo clearly wants some rest!’

‘Yeah we should give him some peace and quiet’, I agreed.

‘Mondo and peace and quiet don’t exactly go hand in hand…’, Celestia shook her head.

‘I will be happy to take over’, Sakura told Kiyotaka and I, ‘you get yourself something to eat Kyoko’.

‘Thank you, I will’, I bowed as I exited the room and went to get myself some late breakfast. After that, Celestia and I spent the rest of the day in the library.

‘Poor Toko’, I uttered as I saw her sitting alone in the library, ‘I would go and comfort her, but she hates my guts right now’.

‘Yeah, she might strangle you or something’, Celeste whispered.

At that moment I swear I noticed Toko look up at me with open eyes and a red face, before diving right back into her book in a disgruntled manner.

‘Did she just?’ Celestia frowned.

I just shrugged in confusion as we approached the reading room.

‘I’m glad Mondo is okay’, I said as I sat down in my favourite bean bag.

‘Me too, even though he is a little rough around the edges’, agreed Celeste, ‘I really think there is something going on between him and Taka you know’.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised if that was the case’.

‘I think we may be a thing too you know!’

‘Wasn’t that obvious?’ I blushed.

‘When you have finished studying and I have gained enough earnings from my gambling, we should move away to a gothic mansion in the countryside somewhere’, Celeste’s eyes had become dreamy, ‘We can both own all the cats we want and have vampires as servants!’

‘Don’t you mean cosplayers?’

‘Of course, silly!’ Celestia laughed, ‘And you will be provided with the library of your dreams!’
‘Seriously?!’, my insides were tingling with anticipation now.

‘We can both leave the troubles of the real world behind us! It will just be you and me!’

‘That doesn’t sound like a bad idea actually. Considering all the shit the real world has put me through. It would be ideal, but first we have to leave this place somehow’.

‘With you, I know we will! Then we can use Monokuma’s fur as a nice rug!’

I laughed before we dove into our books once again. As we were reading however, I noticed Toko walk past the door. Nervously she glanced up at me before darting away like a deer in fright, her eyes filling with tears.

‘What is up with that girl?’ Celeste muttered.

‘Who knows?’

When 6:30pm ticked closer, instead of heading straight to the dining room we gathered in the first aid room to check on Mondo, currently being watched over by Makoto. He was sitting upright, reading a motorcycling magazine and discussing the hobby with his rather nervous bodyguard.

Kiyotaka came through the door with a tray of food in hand. Mondo took it gladly, once again eating with one hand as we all gathered around.

‘How are you doing Mondo?’ I asked him.

‘Still painful’, he growled, ‘but I am on the mend. I even managed to walk to the bathroom a couple of times, no further than that though’.

‘That’s a good sign!’ Kiyotaka put a hand on his shoulder, ‘You will be better in no time bro!’

‘I hope so…’ Mondo sighed as he picked at his food, ‘My guilt and shame though… it’s possible that I will never fully recover’.

‘Chihiro is still with us in spirit Mondo’, Sakura said, ‘Just like the others. I am sure she is watching over us and cheering us on from the Great Beyond’.

‘I’m sorry, it’s just…’ his fork clattered out of his hand, ‘Even before the killing game I had blood on my hands and now my gang is gone, I will likely have nothing to go back to except for a prison cell. In the name of war, I took out my rage and frustration upon others, hurting them, sometimes doing irreparable damage. It’s little more than what I deserve for my crimes’.

‘Come on’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘You need to eat, you have lost quite a bit of weight’.

‘Of course’, Mondo nodded, and slowly but surely he polished off the rest of his plate. Just as he finished however we heard the dreaded tolling of funeral bells.

‘Sorry to disturb your cosy little meeting little cubs, but I have come up with your next motive! Believe me, you would be willing to DIE for this one! Well… you will if you get caught anyway! Come on, what are you waiting for?! Please gather in the gymnasium!’

Kiyotaka helped his companion into a dressing gown and began to accompany him to the gym. Looking closer I could tell that Mondo had become thinner, his hair more unkempt.

Somewhat resembling a funeral procession in order to allow Mondo to keep up, we finally gathered in the gymnasium where the bear sat beside a large steel vault.
'I thought tormenting you lot in the last three rounds was a little harsh, so I decided to give you something to gain for your efforts!'

We watched two of Monokuma’s cronies turn the giant dial and open the metal box to reveal…

‘Ten million yen!’ Monokuma announced in the manner of a carnival barker, ‘Ten million smackeroos! It’s all yours under one condition!’ he slid a claw across his throat.

‘Surely money is not worth killing someone over’, cried Makoto, ‘Right guys?’

‘Clearly you know nothing about the evils of capitalism’, Mondo growled.

‘Looks tempting’, Akira rubbed his hands together, ‘But still, this amount of money is ever so measly compared to my earnings. Despite the controversies the public is still hooked by my brand!’

‘That’s just cheating!’ scoffed Celestia, ‘My profession requires skill to win!’

‘You could buy anything with this!’ Monokuma said, ‘And I mean anything. You want a water park in your back yard?’ he glanced at Aoi, ‘Or your own BMX course?’

‘You do realise my style of biking is completely unrelated to the world of stunt sports, don’t you?’, Mondo huffed, ‘Fucking show offs…’

‘Well it’s all yours for one soul!’ Monokuma continued.

‘We shall not lower ourselves for something as simple as money!’ yelled Kiyotaka.

‘Indeed, I myself do not look to money for guidance’, Sakura nodded, ‘I believe the mind is less corrupted without it’.

I looked up at the vault. Even though the motive was not psychological torture, I suspected that someone would not pass up this opportunity. Mondo’s comment about the ‘evils of capitalism’ was no exaggeration and was embedded in my mind. The actual murder that ended up taking place however ended up having an even more sinister motive, one which even I would find difficult to comprehend.
Surely the motive this time wasn’t as bad as the three that preceded it? All the previous motives were so much more brutal, the last one involving psychological torment.

I picked up a photo frame from my bedside table. It showed two young men of high school age, arm in arm, standing in the middle of a stadium and being showered by streamers. Seeing mine and Leon’s faces beaming up at me reminded me of a time long gone. I had to fight back tears, even if I did escape from this Hell, life would never be the same again. Leon the light and love of my life, was dead.

Slowly, I got out of bed and made my way to the dining room. Most of my classmates were present. Even Mondo was there, smoking a cigarette. The last to arrive were Celestia and Kyoko who were looking more flustered than usual, Akira in close pursuit.

Kyoko and Celeste went to speak with Mondo and Kiyotaka while Akira sat to the side of me.

‘Hey Makoto!’ he propped his feet up on the table.

‘What’s up with those two?’ I asked him, gesturing towards the two girls.

‘They had an argument apparently’.

‘I see, don’t all close friends fight though?’

‘I think they are more than just friends’, Akira smirked, ‘but yes, arguments are sadly just another part of the package that comes with a close relationship’.

At that moment Kiyotaka got up, ‘In order to boost morale Mondo and I have agreed for a party to be held in the gymnasium tonight. It is crucial that you all attend!’

‘It’s not really a party if there are rules in place surely?!’ Akira rolled his eyes.

‘Besides aren’t there only like… nine of us right now?’, frowned Aoi.

‘Why does it matter how many attendees there are?’ Celestia commented, ‘It’s still a party isn’t it?’

‘Indeed’, nodded Kyoko, ‘It will be a good way to distract ourselves. I mean, friendship is more important than money, right?’

‘The party will take place at 6:30pm’, Kiyotaka announced, ‘Try not to be late!’

‘And try to refrain from murdering each other until then’, Mondo took a puff on his cigarette.

While he was now out of the first aid room, quite a lot had changed about the Ultimate Gang Leader since the third-class trial. His hair was down, he had not shaved, and looking into his eyes, he seemed more depressed than usual, which was not surprising given recent events.

Despite his close companionship with Kiyotaka I still felt sorry for him, nonetheless. I felt an urge to help in whatever way I could. I had helped Leon in the past and I was sure that he would have wanted me to lend out a hand to others, especially those who were desperate on the inside.

‘Hey Mondo’, I approached the two of them.
‘Hello I guess…’ Mondo growled.

‘Do you want to hang out with me while Taka prepares for the party? I can update you on everything too. You missed out on a lot after all…’

‘Sure whatever…’

‘Will that be alright with you Taka?’

Kiyotaka gave a nod of agreement before he requested the key from Sakura.

‘Take good care of him!’ Kiyotaka said as he waved Mondo and I off to prepare for the evening event.

‘I think it’s time, to show you ‘you know who’”, I whispered, ‘Follow me’.

‘This had better be good’, Mondo grunted, cigarette still in his mouth.

I led him to the Sauna Room and closed the door behind me. Just as I was about to unlock ‘her’ hiding place I told him, ‘Be careful not to get too excited, I don’t want you opening up your wound’.

Mondo was forced to contain himself as he saw Chihiro’s face appear on the screen, ‘Holy shit!’, he was shaking now, ‘Chihiro?’

I handed him the laptop. As he was still getting used to using his weaker hand, he typed rather slowly, trembling as he did so.

‘Chihiro, is it really you?’

‘My mistress as you knew her is deceased, I am merely her alter ego’.

‘Your mistress was a brave lass, and I wronged her. If it were not for my actions, she would probably still be alive. Because of my jealousy, I ended up doing something that I cannot take back’.

‘I am positive my mistress would have forgiven you had she lived. She was kind to everyone around her. After all the bullying she had dealt with, it inspired her to become the opposite of those who caused her harm. She sought to understand others, no matter their walk of life’.

‘So… you don’t hate me then?’

‘Of course not. I understand why you did what you did. The one who has you trapped here backed you into a corner. I feel such a thing wouldn’t have happened outside of this situation’.

‘Are you serious?’

‘Positive’.

‘Is there anything I can do though? I still did a terrible thing, regardless of my reasoning... There has to be something I can do surely? Otherwise I don’t think I will ever be able to forgive myself’.

‘There is one thing I suppose you could do… if you insist that is’.

‘What would that be?’

‘Find my mistress’s parents, tell them what has become of their daughter’.
‘I will do what I can. If I escape from this place, I will do it to honour Chihiro’s memory’.

‘Thank you, Mondo. I trust that you will carry out this deed’.

‘I will carry out those wishes, even if it kills me’, he bowed his head as he handed the device back to me, ‘I mean, it’s the least I can do, especially as I will likely be spending the rest of my days on the run’.

‘Mondo, I know you are scared…’

‘Pfff, me scared? Are you fucking with me?!’

‘I can tell, but that’s okay. After all you have been through, you have a right to be nervous’.

‘And of course, there is my ‘little problem’ too…’

‘Even if it is a part of you, it does not define you as a person’, I told him, ‘That’s what my uncle told me anyway, he had HIV too. Sadly it did develop into AIDS and he eventually succumbed. He contracted the disease when it was a new and frightening thing you see… Governments all over the world, instead of helping the people when they needed them most, stood aside and even ended up creating scapegoats or outright blaming the victims of the disease. My uncle told me that while the epidemic wasn’t as prominent in Japan as it was in other parts of the world, it was still devastating, and we felt like the establishment had failed us too’.

‘All throughout history, establishments have failed their people. They only reach out to the people when it benefits them, and that often means leaving the dispossessed of society, like me and your uncle, in the dust. If you ask me the only way to solve this problem is to just rid the world of it entirely and to form our own communities where money and status doesn’t determine your value as a human being. Of course, getting to that point is easier said than done…’, he cracked his knuckles in frustration.

‘Wow that’s deep…’ I gasped.

‘You think I am incapable of being ‘deep’ do you, huh?’ Mondo snorted.

‘No of course not!’ I laughed nervously, ‘I think you are capable of being quite brilliant really’.

‘Really? You are taking the piss surely?’ he smirked, ‘Then again I haven’t studied Marx as much as I probably should’, he lit up yet another cigarette, ‘So Makoto are you looking forward to the party later?’

‘I love hanging around and getting to know people, so it’s my kind of jam!’

‘I think I’m going to sit on the side-lines for the most part. Even though I am out of hospital, I still can’t do anything too drastic. I think I will probably just have a few drinks and if I didn’t have leadership responsibilities, I would call it quits there’.

‘Oh, that’s a shame, I would have loved to see you do a little dance’.

‘Dancing is for pansies’, Mondo looked at his watch, ‘We should probably get going, it’s coming up to 6:30pm and Kiyotaka would have nearly finished getting everything ready’.

We slowly walked to the gymnasium which was surprisingly well decked out for a simple school party.
‘Hey bro! How is everything going?’ Mondo asked Kiyotaka who was wearing a tuxedo and had a long checklist in his hand, ‘Holy shit Taka, you are looking quite dapper right now!’

‘Thanks bro!’ Kiyotaka walked over to him, ‘Makoto has taken good care of you I see!’

‘Yeah, it was pretty adorable really…’ Mondo ruffled my hair, even with just one working hand I feared he would accidentally crack my skull.

‘After all you have been through, I think it’s only appropriate to let you choose the music tonight!’

‘Fuck yeah!’ Mondo roared excitedly before whispering into his ear. Kiyotaka nodded and left the room, coming back about five minutes later with a CD in his hand.

When 6:30pm finally rolled around I saw Kyoko appear, wearing a royal purple tuxedo, her hair tied back in a ponytail and looking quite sophisticated in comparison to my hoodie.

‘Hello everyone’, she bowed, ‘how do I look?’

‘Oh, hey Kyoko! You look dazzling!’, I looked behind her, ‘Where is Celeste?’

‘She is getting ready. Not much really, she just takes things like this pretty seriously’.

‘She wants to be the Belle of the Ball I see!’

‘I suppose you can call it that’, she blushed, ‘Still I hope she turns up soon’.

‘Me too. Then again Toko, Aoi and Sakura haven’t turned up yet either’, I shrugged as Mondo who oversaw the stereo, put on some death metal music.

‘Are you sure that’s appropriate for this occasion Mondo?’ frowned Kyoko.

‘Oh lassie, what are you talking about? You clearly have no taste!’ he yelled.

‘Bro truly understands the beauty of music!’ Kiyotaka yelled over the song which I couldn’t quite decipher the lyrics of.

‘I have nothing against your tastes, I was just expecting some Mozart or something’, Kyoko shrugged.

About two minutes later, Aoi and Sakura arrived, slightly out of breath but looking quite stunning in their dresses. Aoi’s dress was a shimmery blue-green colour making it closely resemble the ocean and most of her jewellery was made from little seashells. She was wearing makeup too which was something she only seemed to do for special occasions. Sakura on the other hand wore a white dress with a pink flowery pattern and she had styled her hair into a neat bun.

‘You both look lovely!’ I told them with my thumb up.

‘Thank you, Makoto’, Sakura bowed, ‘I don’t often get the opportunity to dress up like this, but Aoi was very helpful especially with the hair’, she raised an eyebrow, ‘This is certainly an interesting music choice’.

‘Yeah’, I smiled feebly, ‘Mondo chose it himself!’

‘Sorry’, Aoi panted, ‘Sakura and I were making some finishing touches! At least we are here now though’, she sniffed the air, ‘So where is the buffet table? I’m starving over here!’
I pointed in the direction of the long table filled with bowls of nibbles, platters of sandwiches and in the middle of it all was a large punch bowl. Aoi soon began hovering over it, not sure where to start until she finally settled on some miniature donuts which she ended up taking half of. Mondo meanwhile was drinking a large tankard of the pink punch on the side.

‘Wow Taka, did you make this? It’s even better than beer!’

‘As a matter of fact, I did’, Kiyotaka told him proudly, ‘It’s not as good as Yasuhiro’s cooking but I think I did a decent job at least’, I saw him blush.

About twenty minutes later, just when Kiyotaka was planning on looking for her, Celestia had finally turned up. She was wearing a stunning jet black gothic ballgown with red lacing, most likely borrowed from the dressing room at the back of the theatre.

She certainly caused Kyoko’s head to turn, Sakura and Aoi looked on in awe too as she stepped towards her companion. Kyoko kissed her delicate hand before taking it. Celestia and Kyoko then began to dance, the latter looking as though as though she was being hypnotised. Aoi and Sakura followed suit, dancing a lively sort of jive. Even with the heavy metal music playing in the background, they still managed to keep up with the beat. I held out a hand to Taka as Mondo was still sitting on the side drinking punch.

‘Do you wish to dance?’

Kiyotaka’s jaw dropped as though nobody had ever asked him such a question, ‘Sure thing!’

The two of us danced a simple waltz compared to the other more energetic dancers in the room.

‘Did you add alcohol to the punch?’ I whispered.

‘No, but what he doesn’t know won’t hurt him right?’, he looked in Mondo’s direction, ‘I don’t want to risk anything you know…’

‘That’s understandable’, we continued to dance to the odd choice of music in the background.

‘You know Makoto, after all that we have been through I think it’s a good time that I open up…’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I thought this would be a good opportunity to finally come out of the closet’,

‘So, are you gay too then?’

Kiyotaka nodded, ‘I kept it a secret previously as I didn’t want the tabloids harassing me or my family, but now that is the least of my worries. Also, I just want to help Mondo feel more comfortable with himself after all he has been through’.

‘That’s very brave… and really kind of you too Taka!’

‘We cannot force him to do anything, that’s his choice alone, but I feel that if I am more open about my sexuality, then he will be at least more accepting with his. I hope he will understand one day that there are people who will accept and support him through the thick and thin, no matter what’.

I nodded, ‘Are you currently dating anyone if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Well…’ Kiyotaka put on a look to show that he was clearly thinking hard about how to describe his love, ‘He is an energetic fellow, and quite rowdy too but those traits make him a natural leader.
Despite all of that however he is quite a softy once you get to know him, even if he seems a little bit imposing at first!’, his face turned pink again.

I sighed, ‘I wonder if Leon would have enjoyed this’.

‘Leon meant a lot to you, didn’t he?’

‘Indeed…’ I sighed, ‘If I get out of here, I probably won’t be dating for a while, but still… there are a lot of fish in the sea. I am sure Leon would want me to be happy, so I feel I shouldn’t linger on my lonesome for too long’.

‘Give yourself as long as you need’, Kiyotaka told me as we continued to dance.

To the side of us Kyoko and Celestia would have surely stood out from the crowd as they performed a kind of salsa dance. I wasn’t usually one to assume things, but their dance seemed quite intimate especially as their bodies frequently touched and their eyes were fixed on each other.

‘Oh look, it seems Shadow the Hedgehog has decided to make a comeback!’ Mondo glared towards the door as everyone else froze in their spot.

‘Hello there, punks!’

‘Oh no…’ I heard Kyoko say.

‘What was that?!’

‘Oh nothing! Nothing! Why don’t you get some refreshments or something Syo?’ The moment that followed caused everyone in the room to stare with open mouths.

‘I am disappointed in you punk!’

‘What the Hell are you talking about?’

‘I told you to make Toko see sense! You said you would, but you abandoned her like an animal!’

‘I really didn’t know what to do. I mean… stepping between Toko and Byakuya would have been like getting between a hippo and the water surely?’

‘You told me you would help her but instead you left her in the dust! After helping you solve the mystery in the third class trial, it’s the least you can do for me punk!’

‘I’m sorry alright?!’ Kyoko backed off slightly, ‘Just don’t hurt me!’

Trying to ease the tension I asked, ‘Hang on… where is Akira? I mean, it’s been almost an hour!’

‘That’s true, you’d think he would surely want to attend something like this’, Celeste frowned.

‘Do you reckon we should start searching for him? He hasn’t turned up for a while’, I suggested.

‘Yes, we should split into groups and find him’, Kiyotaka nodded, ‘Sakura I think you should watch over Mondo’.

‘I will be fine on my own! Trust me, I feel a lot better now’, Mondo got up abruptly and winced in pain.

‘Mondo careful!’ Kyoko told him, ‘Your wound is still healing’.
'Fine…’ he grumbled, sitting back down.

‘Don’t worry’, Sakura put a hand on his shoulder in a rather motherly fashion, ‘we can search for Akira downstairs’, she looked up at us, ‘Stay safe’.

‘It’s good that Mondo is getting a taste of his own medicine’, Aoi looked back as Sakura waved us off, ‘I mean, even the strongest person in the world needs a little assistance sometimes, right?’

‘Okay then’, Taka turned to face us, ‘Since Mondo and Sakura are scouting the ground floor and the dormitories, Aoi, Syo and I will investigate the first and second floors. The rest of you, search the third and fourth floors. Come on let’s get going!’

Our search on the upper levels was long and our hope was fading as there was no sign of our friend. Did something happen to him while our backs were turned? Was this just a sick joke?

‘Come on Makoto, Akira is probably just dicking around in his secret room or whatever…’ Kyoko sighed as we had all but lost hope in this mission.

‘Yes, he may turn up in the morning’, agreed Celeste.

‘I find it strange though, he has attended all of our meetings so far, even if he is shady’, I scratched my head before something clicked in my mind, ‘The room!’

‘What room?’ Kyoko demanded.

‘That room in the menagerie, he may have figured out the passcode!’

‘Why the Hell would he be in there of all places?’

‘I dunno, but I feel we should investigate just in case. I mean, we have been looking for ages!’

‘If you insist, but I cannot imagine someone of his profession would be interested in seeing what is behind that door, unless he is searching for ‘inspiration’ of course…’

We returned to the menagerie and stood in front of the imposing steel door.

‘What is the password though?’ Celestia frowned, ‘It could be anything. If we try entering all the possible combinations we will be here for all eternity, surely?’

‘Or there may be dire consequences if you get it wrong…’, suggested Kyoko.

‘I have a hunch about what the answer may be…’ I pondered but I cannot be certain.

‘You had better get this one right Makoto’, Kyoko bowed her head, ‘are you absolutely sure?’

‘It’s worth trying, I am the ultimate lucky student after all. Maybe luck will be on my side in this instance too’, I gazed at the device, ‘It’s like the old saying goes, it’s do or die!’

Into the device, while Kyoko and Celestia watched with bated breath, I typed in the letters ‘JAWS’. At that moment I heard an alarm sound go off as the iron door began to slowly open.

‘Shit Makoto, how did you know?’

‘Why would a copy of the film Jaws just be placed randomly in one of the rooms?’ I questioned.

‘That’s a good point actually’, Kyoko looked confused as though she was conflicted between feeling
admiration or annoyance for me figuring out the clue before she did, ‘I had hope that we wouldn’t have to visit this place, but here we go’, she gulped before she and Celestia lead the way and I followed along behind them.

The two girls stopped in their tracks. Standing before them was what seemed to be a gigantic tank, reaching high up above us.

‘What are they keeping in here?’ I gasped as I stepped closer, ‘It must be pretty huge whatever it is!’

‘This is the biggest tank I have ever come across and I have visited a fair number of aquariums in my lifetime’, Kyoko remarked, ‘Why would they want to keep it secret though?’

As we walked around the edge of the large tank however I sensed that something was not right, and a feeling of dread began to creep through my body. Investigating further I noticed what looked like a small trace of red in the water.

My stomach lurched at what I saw next and I let out an unnatural shriek. On the other side of the glass, I saw Akira’s face, pale and his eyes staring blankly at me. He lay at the bottom of the tank, one of his arms only hanging on with a string of tissue. As Kyoko and Celeste ran in the direction of my scream, I wondered what would be capable of causing so much damage to a human.

That question was answered just seconds after the funeral bells tolled throughout the building. A large shadow emerged before I saw the animal… or monster, in its entirety.
Part 4 Swimming with the Fishes: Deadly Life

It was not long after we heard Makoto’s cry when I saw it for the first time. Ploughing its way through the water was a shark, not just any shark however. It was almost as long as a bus and had teeth the size of axe heads. It stared unblinking as it swam around its underwater home.

‘What the Hell is a thing like that doing in a University?!’ I cried out as I heard my classmates thunder upstairs, first Kiyotaka, Syo and Aoi appeared. They were shortly followed up by Sakura who was carrying Mondo on her back.

‘Is that a fucking shark I am seeing?!’ Mondo exclaimed as Sakura lowered him to the ground, ‘Holy shit! It really is a fucking shark!’

‘Humans have never successfully kept a great white shark in captivity without it dying after a few days, let alone something like this’, Aoi stared at the beast, ‘I mean it looks like a great white but something about it seems a lot more monstrous’.

‘Poor bugger’, Mondo stared down at Akira’s body.

‘That monster certainly took a chunk out of Akira’, Taka gasped in horror, ‘How did he end up here though?’

‘He became fish food alright!’, Syo observed.

‘If this creature truly killed Akira, we can find solace in the fact that his death was quick’, Sakura bowed her head, ‘But alas, I fear that the events surrounding the murder were more complex’.

At that moment Monokuma appeared in front of the tank, his eyes gleaming brightly.

‘The University of Ultimates holds many secrets does it not little cubs? She is beautiful is she not?! Thanks to the efforts of the Ultimate Marine Biologist and the Ultimate Breeder, this specimen became the first great white shark to survive in captivity. In order to accommodate her, a whole section of the building had to be cleared!’

‘Let me guess, did the Ultimate Marine Biologist and Ultimate Breeder die in the tragedy?’ I asked him coolly.

‘Most likely, but since their bodies were never found after the events of the tragedy, they have been listed as ‘missing’ as of now. Anyway, little cubs this is no ordinary great white! She shares DNA with that of the mighty Megalodon. The aim was to eventually create a lineage that would lead to the revival of the Megalodon species’.

‘So, it’s a mutant then?!’ Kiyotaka questioned.

‘What’s the point of bringing them back?’ Aoi snapped, ‘Most large shark species are on the red list, shouldn’t we focus on saving them first? Also, how the Hell will they survive in our current climate?’

‘She has a point’, Mondo growled, ‘They will surely all be killed off by big ass corporations, just so rich bastards can have their shitty shark fin soup!’

‘The details are fuzzy, but far as I know, the hope is to breed them for military related purposes’, Monokuma explained.
‘I don’t think the yanks will be too happy about that…’

‘Why do you think this project is top secret? Besides, that doesn’t matter now. Her only purpose now is to turn you into shark bait!’ he laughed then faltered, ‘Hang on a second…’ the bear looked at Mondo and then towards Akira’s body, ‘How are you still alive Mondo?’

‘Sorry’, he lit up a cigar, ‘Still here I’m afraid!’

‘How can this be? I practically gift-wrapped you for the next killer!’, The bear looked truly stumped, ‘Well… it seems our murderer must have gotten more ambitious this round! I was expecting the class trial to begin a lot earlier! But still, it was worth the wait’.

‘Wait a minute! Are you saying that suicide counts as murder in this game?’ asked Celeste but Monokuma ignored her.

‘Anyway, little cubs, you have some important investigating to do, and it seems you may have to go for a bit of a swim in order to get the full details!’

‘How can we get into the tank?’ Aoi stepped up to the bear.

‘There is a small elevator to the corner there, that will take you to the surface of the tank’.

‘Wait… are we really going to be diving in? With that thing?!” I clapped a hand to my mouth.

‘You will if you want to get out of here alive! Go on then! Open up your student handbook and let’s start this thing already! See you at the fourth class trial little cubs!’

As the bear vanished, I asked, ‘What are we going to do then?’

‘It’s simple isn’t it?’ Aoi replied as we all walked to the elevator, ‘We are going to have to get someone down there to retrieve Akira’s body’.

‘Who will be going down though?’

Mondo pointed at his cast then lifted his shirt slightly to reveal his scar, ‘I would go down, but I am kind of in a difficult predicament right now…’

‘Yes’, Aoi nodded, ‘It’s generally not recommended to go in shark territories if you are carrying a wound like that. Sharks are notorious for being able to detect blood from many miles away!’

‘Why did the shark not just eat Akira though?’ Kiyotaka brought up.

‘Don’t you remember what I told you all? Sharks are not maneaters, they test bite humans. While they may not eat you however, they can cause terrible trauma to the human body, as one did to my brother and as this girl did with Akira’.

The elevator finally reached its destination. We were standing on a platform overlooking the vast tank from which we could occasionally see a sail sized dorsal fin break the surface.

‘This is suicide surely?!’ Makoto jumped back at the sight.

‘Not if you know the nature of sharks’, Aoi explained before she took curiosity in some coat hangers, from which several wetsuits were hanging.

‘Look!’ Mondo pointed.
'What is it?'

'I think I have found what was used to transport the body. It was tucked in the corner but I could see blood', with his working hand he pulled out a trolley. On top of it was a bloody tarp, 'it must have been a dodder for the killer to get this up here with an elevator handy. I imagine they went exploring here before they carried out the deed. Like I always say, it is vital to know your surroundings!'

'Bro is very smart is he not?!' Kiyotaka patted him on the back and his face went pink.

'That's that out of the way', I nodded, 'but now there is the question of who has to swim with the super dangerous shark. How many people will we need for this task Aoi?'

'Three should do it, I think. Obviously, I will go down’, she replied.

'I too will accompany you’, Sakura bowed.

'I think you should go down too Kyoko’, Aoi told me, ‘Your skills are highly valuable’.

My face fell, ‘Are you sure I should go down, can’t I just observe his body from the glass?’

‘Is something wrong?’

‘I…’, I gulped before I told the group of my fear… and my reasons for it.

‘Oh, Kyoko I’m so sorry…’ she let out a deep breath, ‘but still, you are the only person here with good forensics skills and… we may miss some crucial evidence without you’.

‘Go on Kyoko’, Makoto tried to encourage me, ‘Aoi is one of the best swimmers in all of Japan, perhaps in the world. Michael Phelps has got nothing on her!’

‘And Sakura has been wrestling with giant salamanders since she was a child’, Aoi told me, ‘That old shark should be no problem for her!’

I bowed my head in defeat, ‘I guess I have no choice, do I?’

‘I know I may have talked trash about those two previously, but they are right lass’, Mondo nodded, ‘Besides I have not yet… had the opportunity to battle with such creatures myself”.

‘Or you are just a scaredy cat’, giggled Celestia.

‘Hey!’

‘Fine I will do it’, I stood up, ‘for the sake of solving this case’.

‘That’s the spirit!’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘Swimming alongside sharks is quite straightforward really. It’s important to get under the water as soon as possible and to not thrash about on the surface. Also don’t swim too quickly upwards, getting the bends can be pretty nasty! And finally…’ Aoi pulled out a large metal box, ‘You need to wear chainmail over your scuba gear’.

‘But I have never been scuba diving before, let alone with a big ass shark…’ I shrugged nervously.

‘I will help to get you set up and then all you have to do is stay calm. Sakura will help you to retrieve the body and I will keep ol’ sharky away!’
'How will you do that?'

She pulled out a smaller box, containing what looked like an underwater taser gun, ‘I really hope I don’t have to use this, but if she starts to show signs of aggression, then this should keep her away’, looking closer I saw that the voltage level was set to maximum.

‘Holy shit…’

‘Of course, seeing as this shark is a mutant, it will be difficult to predict her behaviour but hopefully if we all stay relaxed, she will leave us alone. She may get curious of course but try not to panic. Just treat her like any other large animal coming up to you’.

‘Well now I feel really reassured…’

‘Okay then!’, Aoi clapped, ‘Kiyotaka, you will stay on the platform to help us out of the water, then once we have retrieved the body you and Mondo can guard the crime scene. The rest of you, start searching elsewhere for evidence!’

‘Right on it’, Makoto bowed as he and the others entered the elevator.

‘I will go downstairs and get my gear’, I told them, ‘I will see you again shortly’.

‘Okay boys’, Aoi turned to face Mondo and Kiyotaka, ‘We would appreciate it if you looked away while we change’.

‘Yes ma’am’, Kiyotaka saluted before both he and Mondo turned to face the wall.

‘See you shortly Kiyoko!’ Aoi waved.

I descended the elevator to get the gear I needed from my room including my diving gear, Celestia accompanying me on the way.

‘Who do you think could have done it?’ I asked her as I rummaged through my box.

‘I don’t want to assume anything, but I have a feeling that Toko did it. I mean she was the last to arrive and it’s likely that she has developed a grudge against Akira since the third trial’.

‘That would make sense’, I nodded as I laid out my diving suit on the bed and felt the very bottom of the box before I pulled out what seemed to be a body bag.

‘This is certainly getting real!’ Celestia gasped.

‘You don’t say’, I frowned, ‘but still, it will be useful’. I placed it at my feet before I got changed into my suit, ‘Now all I have to do is try to evade a big ass shark…’

‘I know you can do it my dear’, she kissed me on the lips before hugging me tightly, resembling a soldier’s wife, ‘just don’t do anything too hasty alright?!”

I packed up the body bag and quickly made my way upstairs. When I returned to the forbidden room and ascended the elevator, I saw Aoi and Sakura had transformed from wearing their elaborate party dresses to looking like knights ready for battle.

‘Oh, Kyoko you are here, let me help you get your equipment on!’ Aoi strode up to me.

After Aoi fitted me with some scuba gear, an air tank, and of course chainmail, I felt very weighed down, ‘How do cope with all of this? This stuff weighs a ton!’
‘Don’t worry, it will feel much lighter in the water believe me!’, we slowly lowered ourselves into the tank.

‘Try not to become shark chow!’ Mondo told us as we descended into the water.

‘You got the body bag Kyoko?’ Sakura asked me.

I simply nodded, the feeling of being underwater made me feel strangely lighter. The oxygen tank on my back which had felt so heavy on land felt little more than nothing. I didn’t have too much time to dwell on that though as I heard Aoi speak in a hushed tone.

‘Keep calm, I can see her coming’.

I froze on the spot, only using my flippers slightly to keep me upright. The large animal came slowly cruising in our direction and I could see her blank eyes and jagged teeth up close. Even if I wanted to cry out, I couldn’t as I was frozen in fear when the shark approached. Just when I thought it would be all over however, she changed direction away from us.

‘I legit thought I was a goner there!’

‘You did well Kyoko’, Aoi told me, ‘it’s just like I said, respect the animal and it will respect you!’

‘I can see remnants of marine animals on the bottom. Somebody must have been feeding her', Sakura remarked.

‘Can you see the body anywhere?’

‘Look down there’, I pointed before the three of us dove down, gathering around Akira’s body, ‘Okay... let’s bag him up. Then we need to ascend back to the surface, quickly and calmly’.

I carefully took out the body bag and slowly, with the help of Sakura lifted Akira’s body inside and zipped it shut, thankfully with his arm still attached. Even though the previous murderers had been violent and brutal in nature, the state of Akira’s body had to be the most gruesome. The shark bite exposed much muscle and tissue, in some places we could even see bone jutting out. Aoi was circling the scene protecting us, taser in hand.

After much patience and effort, we finally zipped up the bag and began to slowly ascend back to the surface as Aoi had instructed. Just as we were halfway up, we had to stifle cries as we noticed a bloody mass drop into the tank. The shark which had previously been casually patrolling the tank, suddenly made a beeline towards it, snapping it up instantly and shaking it violently.

‘Uh oh…’ Aoi uttered as the animal was driven into a frenzy, ‘Sakura, you guide Kyoko up to the surface! I will fend her off!’

‘Come on Kyoko, hurry!’ Sakura urged me.

Quickly the shark pelted in our direction, her huge tail moving from side to side. Slowly she began to open her gaping maw, her rows of teeth resembling a buzz saw. Just as we thought we were about to become fish food however, Aoi approached the shark from the side. She raised her fist before landing a clean punch to the gills. Distracted, the animal turned in her direction.

‘Oh shit…’ Aoi said as the beast changed course to chase her.

The surface of the tank felt so near yet so far as we watched Aoi evade the shark with surprising speed and agility in the water, resembling a dolphin. Our hearts were in our throats as the beast
snapped in her direction.

We heard a splash upon the surface as a life ring was thrown in. Trying to stay calm Sakura and I slowly swam towards it, despite the chaos going on around me and the never-ending fear that the monster would come up at me from behind. Thankfully, I finally managed to reach out to it.

‘Grab on!’ I heard Kiyotaka yell as I broke the surface of the water. I clung on for dear life as Sakura pushed the life ring towards the edge. Kiyotaka with the help of Mondo pulled it towards them, ‘Take my hand!’ I did as I was told and with the body bag and all, he managed to pull me up to the surface. Sakura followed suit, although she had to kick the frenzied shark in the nose before she clambered up herself.

‘Aoi!’ she cried out.

Seconds passed with bated breath until we saw Aoi emerge on the surface, rapidly swimming away from the beast pursuing her. We all gasped as it grabbed the tip of her foot, attempting to drag her down. Aoi was faster however and pulled out the taser.

‘Let me go bitch!’ she yelled, pulling the trigger. Immediately the shark let go, shaking her head in pain and swiftly darting away as far as she could.

‘Oh my God, Aoi are you alright?!” Sakura bent down.

‘It’s fine’, Aoi told her, ‘she just got my toe a little bit’. Looking closer I could see that the chainmail had been dented and that there was a streak of blood.

‘Jesus Christ you almost gave me a heart attack!’ Mondo sat back down, ‘Fucking sharks seriously…’

‘Thanks, Aoi, Sakura’, I panted, laying down on the ground, ‘You saved my ass there! You too boys!’

‘Don’t mention it!’ Kiyotaka saluted before investigating the damage, ‘Sakura, you had better get Aoi down to the first aid room. It’s only a small wound but all predator bites are septic and carry the risk of infection, so make sure to treat it properly!’

‘Don’t worry Taka’, Sakura picked Aoi up gently, ‘we have been bitten by many wild animals before. It’s a rite of passage in our respective fields’.

‘Good luck with your investigation Kyoko’, Aoi winked in my direction as they too stepped into the elevator. At last, I could get into some dry clothes and finally begin my investigation proper.

‘Can we look now?’ Mondo asked a few minutes later as he and Kiyotaka were facing the wall again.

‘Yes’, I said, before I unzipped the body bag, ‘What the Hell happened back there?’

‘Somebody must have decided it was feeding time’, Mondo pointed at a small hatch in the ceiling.

‘Do you think it was intentional?’

‘Most likely’, he shrugged, ‘I mean, I don’t think Monokuma is exactly the type to pass up the opportunity to watch a bunch of teens get chomped on by sharks’.

I carefully spread out the body and the two young men stepped back in horror when they saw the
true extent of the horrific damage.

‘Are you sure we need to have a class trial in the first place? I think our killer has been more or less confirmed’, Kiyotaka jerked his head in the direction of the tank.

‘Why do you think I went down there to risk my life in the first place?’, I rolled my eyes as I began to examine the corpse, ‘Besides I have noticed other forms of trauma to the body’.

‘Like what?’ asked Mondo.

‘I have noticed several incisions clearly made by a weapon’, I carefully traced my finger along them, ‘an animal couldn’t have done this. None of them are particularly deep, but they are new which makes me wonder whether Akira was involved in a scuffle before he died’, I was about to bring my investigation of the body to a close before I noticed something, ‘Well what have we got here?’

‘What do you see lass?’ he looked closer, ‘Holy shit is that a bullet wound?’

‘It’s strange indeed’, I examined the wound upon his chest, ‘I don’t remember seeing any live guns around here, not even in the museum’.

‘Do you think Byakuya and Akira may have kept some in the secret room?’ questioned Kiyotaka.

‘I don’t think so but still, I remember someone mentioning a gun, I just can’t pinpoint who yet…’

When I had finished gathering the data I needed, I returned to the elevator and left the monster behind me, hopefully forever.

The first room I decided to check was the lounge. Something about it seemed wrong, much of the furniture had been moved around and some of it appeared damaged too.

‘Hey Kyoko’, I looked into the corner to see Makoto, ‘So you survived ol’ sharky then?’

I said nothing as I scanned the room more closely, ‘Makoto, do you think a scuffle could have taken place here? Everything just seems out of place, like the killer was trying to hide something’.

‘I didn’t pay much attention to it at first, but doesn’t it seem messier in here?’

‘It does’, I frowned, ‘I have noticed several scratches on the floor and furniture too. Makoto help me move this. I can smell something suspicious where I'm standing’.

The two of us moved a couch where underneath, a pool of red could be seen on the floor.

‘Our killer was clever’, Makoto panted as we put the couch down, ‘but not clever enough, especially with you on our side Kyoko!’

‘Hello again Kyoko’, I looked up to see Celestia, ‘I see you survived your shark encounter’. 

‘Indeed. The shark was actually quite calm at first but then ‘somebody’ decided to drop a fuck ton of chum into the water and she went completely berserk’.

‘Seriously, Monokuma keeps warning us against cheating and then doesn’t uphold his end of the bargain?’, Celestia tutted, ‘In the gambling world, cheaters get heavy repercussions’.

‘Then again those in charge in the real world don’t tend to apply their own rules to themselves. How is it any different here really? This game is no more Orwellian than the outside world if you ask me… apart from the fact that giant mutant sharks are involved of course…’ Makoto uttered.
'I think you have been spending too much time with Mondo’, Celestia told him

‘He has a point though, doesn’t he?’ I shrugged, 'Especially if life and death situations are involved!' At that moment Celeste excitedly turned to face me, ‘You won’t believe what I found Kyoko!’

‘What did you find?’ I asked.

‘Don’t you worry my dear, I will explain everything at the class trial’. ‘Is this one the ‘kicker’?’

‘I hope so’, we descended the stairs to the dorms. Just as I was about to unlock the door to my room however I saw Syo appear.

‘Hello punks!’

‘What the hell do you want?’ I groaned, 'Can't you see we are in the middle of an investigation here!'

'I only wanted to help!' she turned her back to us, 'I did find something but if you don't want to see it I won't bother!'

'Sorry Syo... I was just almost eaten by a shark you see... so please understand if my temper is a little frayed right now...'

‘Apology accepted’, Syo turned back to face us, her eyes looking wilder than ever, 'I don’t know if you noticed in the midst the chaos but one of the dorm rooms has been left ajar!'

‘Really?’

‘Yeah totally!’ Syo laughed, ‘Somebody must have gotten in after borrowing one of the handbooks’.

‘So, the room must belong to a deceased student huh?’

‘Well don’t just stand there punks! Follow me!’ Somewhat begrudgingly we followed her until we reached the location she was referring to.

‘But that’s Junko’s room’, Makoto's eyes narrowed, ‘what could possibly be of use to a murderer in here?’

‘Don’t you remember? The fashion industry is surprisingly cutthroat. Well… at least that’s what she told us’, Celestia pondered.

‘Surely that was just hyperbole though’, I shrugged.

‘You would be surprised!’, Syo gave us an evil grin as she pushed open the door.

‘What has happened here?’ Makoto gasped, ‘Was it a thief who did this?’

The room was a total wreck. All the cupboards had been opened, their contents, mostly consisting of clothes, were discarded all over the floor, the bed was torn in places and much of the furniture had been upturned.

‘If it was a thief, they must have been searching frantically for whatever they were looking for’, I scanned the room, ‘Look!’ I pointed as I noticed something large and silver in the corner.
'Is that a vault?' Makoto bent down. It was smaller than the one in the gym and it was open, ‘But what would Junko keep here? Surely her money will be safer in the bank?’

‘I don’t think it was money she was keeping in there’, I shook my head, ‘Don’t you remember the night of the first motive?’

‘Didn’t Junko go on about how she was going to shoot herself or something twisted like that?’

‘I do remember yes. I was hoping it was just her morbid sense of humour but looking back... I was probably wrong’.

‘Well considering two of our number had Yakuza links, do you honestly think they were the only ones among us harbouring dark secrets?!’ Syo laughed as we heard the sound of the bells tolling, ‘Well we had better get going! Come on punks! We have a mystery to solve!’

Together we all left Junko's room and closed the door behind us, walking towards the elevator.

‘This had better be worth it’, I saw Aoi emerge from the first aid room limping slightly, and Sakura helping her along.

‘How bad was it?’ I asked her.

‘Oh, I’ve been through worse!’ she laughed weakly, ‘It just needed a little patching up, nothing more!’

About a minute later, just as the doors clattered open, we saw Mondo and Kiyotaka emerge too, the latter slowly accompanying the former.

‘I’m glad to finally leave that monster behind us!’ Kiyotaka exclaimed as we all stepped inside.

‘Well hopefully all our efforts will be worth it in the end!’ Celestia winked in my direction as the doors slammed and the device begin to descend, marking our fourth trip to Hell.

When we entered the courtroom, Monokuma’s black robed figures surrounding us, we could see that Byakuya and Akira had joined the ranks of the damned.

‘Alas’, we looked up to see Monokuma himself, ‘It seems that the Togami bloodline is doomed to come to an end. Like many powerful families throughout history, nobody predicted that the Togamis would eventually reach their downfall. But not even the most influential and rich families can conquer despair’.

‘It’s a shame really’, Mondo yawned, ‘That means less rich estates for me to go and take a piss on. Me and the gang had this game you see, we used to take turns on such grounds, until security found out that is... Ah, those were good times indeed!’

‘I hate men’, Aoi rolled her eyes, ‘Why have you gotta be so gross all the time?’

‘You will never understand lassie...’

'What was the deal earlier in the body recovery operation Monokuma?’ I spoke through gritted teeth, ‘I bet you dropped the chum in to provoke the shark to try and get it to attack us!’

'What?! I would never do that! There must have been some mistake!' he spoke in a dramatic tone, ‘How could you go accusing me of something so horrible? I wouldn't want you adorable little cubs to be munched on by a mutant shark just for the thrill of it! I mean what kind of sick, twisted person
would do that?!

'Yeah... right...'

‘Anyway, little cubs! Please gather round so we can expose the fiend who killed the last Togami heir!’ Monokuma stood up.

At this point in time, we didn’t think the awful class trials could possibly get any worse, but the demonic bear made that possible. Indeed, as events revealed themselves in greater detail, I would be forced to go through a trial of my very own, one that I would regret terribly.
‘Okay everyone settle down, settle down! I know you are all just as excited as I am to get this show on the road!’ Monokuma announced before we all gave him a disgruntled look.

‘Shall we discuss the subject of the murder weapon?’ I asked.

‘Yeah sure whatever’, the bear grumbled.

‘Are you saying that something other than that monster killed Akira?’ Aoi gasped.

I nodded, ‘Somebody certainly did a fair amount of damage to his body before he was tossed into that tank. I saw numerous abrasions all over the corpse that were too complex to have been caused by a shark. That is only the tip of the iceberg’.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Akira had been shot in the chest’.

‘Mondo and I saw the gunshot wound too’, Kiyotaka explained, ‘I imagine he was bleeding out quickly which is why the killer required a tarp’.

‘Guns are for cowards’, Mondo clenched his teeth, ‘they are an easy solution for people who are too afraid to fight like proper men! It was one of the reasons why Daiya hated the Yakuza so much and why I feel so terrible about breaking the promise I made to him’.

‘That was a lot of blood in the sitting room’, Makoto brought up, ‘The killer clearly put in extra effort to hide it, but it was quite fresh so it wasn’t long before we could start to smell it’.

‘Indeed, the one who attacked Akira must have rearranged the furniture to cover up any major signs that a struggle had taken place there’, I explained, ‘then the killer wrapped the body in a tarp and used a trolley to wheel the body towards the menagerie’.

‘One thing is obvious, Akira was either dead or dying when the killer dumped his body into the water. They also visited the room previously to see how they could get his body up there’.

‘How did the killer manage to obtain a fucking gun though?’ frowned Mondo, ‘I cannot think of anyone in the academy who would own such a weapon’.

‘I think we have an answer to that theory, Junko’s room was completely ransacked!’

‘Somebody broke into the vault that was present in her room too’, Celestia commented, ‘that’s probably why the room was in such a state, because the thief was looking for the code’.

‘Do you reckon the gun was in there?’ gasped Aoi.

‘I find it unlikely that it was money the thief was looking for, seeing as it’s practically useless in our current situation’, I told her, ‘besides, I don’t think a university will be the first choice for a super-rich fashionista to keep her massive fortune’.

‘Also didn’t Junko talk about shooting herself on the night of the first motive?’ Sakura mentioned.

‘She did’, I nodded, ‘I thought she was exaggerating at first but looking back, I’m not so sure’.
'The rich almost never exaggerate their intentions Kyoko. I thought a smart lassie like you would have figured that out by now’, Mondo raised an eyebrow.

‘Okay so we know where the gun came from’, Kiyotaka barked, ‘But who was the thief?’

‘I can testify to that’, Celestia announced, ‘While you were diving, I decided to act as your assistant Kyoko, so I did a little bit of exploring myself!’

‘Where did you go?’

‘I decided to borrow Byakuya’s handbook and with it I managed to gain access to the secret passageway. During my investigation I found this’, she held out a note which read,

‘Greetings Akira! You will be swimming with the fishes tonight! (The sitting room, Floor 4, 6:30pm. See you then!)’. Drawn around the note I noticed crude doodles in the shape of fish swimming around.

‘That’s not the only thing I discovered’, Celeste held up a second piece of paper displaying a number.

‘That must be the code to the vault!’ Kiyotaka gasped.

‘What? So, Akira was the thief then?!’ Makoto gave a puzzled expression.

‘It seems he wanted to take matters into his own hands’, Sakura uttered.

‘That’s not surprising’, Mondo sighed, ‘It’s typical for businessmen. Once they start getting a fuck ton of money, they want ALL the money! I betcha he was more than willing to meet up with the killer and duel them to get the grand prize. With a gun in hand, he probably thought that he would come out on top!’

‘How very wrong he was…’ Sakura bowed her head.

‘If Akira was the one who took the gun, how did he end up getting himself shot though?’ Kiyotaka asked, ‘Unless his assailant managed to take the gun off him of course…’

‘Is that even possible?’ questioned Aoi, ‘I mean, our two strongest fighters have firm alibis. Sakura was with me for the whole evening and Mondo was with Makoto and still recovering from his injuries. In that kind of state, I doubt even he would have the physical capacity to wrestle a gun out of Akira’s grip’.

Mondo closed his eyes, ‘It is true that I have killed in my lifetime, but I would never resort to using a gun. I would rather die than sink to that level…’

‘I would say killing in any manner is pretty low myself, Mondo... but yes, there is something about guns that unnerves me’, I cleared my throat, ‘I think it is safe to rule you out this time, and Sakura. Makoto and Aoi have also have alibis so that makes them unlikely suspects’.

‘This is a peculiar situation is it not?!’, Celeste exclaimed.

‘Indeed’, I nodded, ‘Then there is the question of where Akira’s smaller wounds came from. Like I said previously, they were clearly made by a weapon of some kind. I saw various scratches on some of the furniture too, like a scuffle had taken place’.

‘I think it is safe to say that the marks made on Akira’s flesh and those on the furniture were made by
the same tool’, Sakura said.

At that moment Mondo rolled back his sleeve, revealing the numerous scars on his arm. While the wounds had long since faded, the shape of them looked eerily familiar to Akira’s fresh ones, ‘Injuries of this nature are all too common in knife fights’, he rolled back his sleeve, ‘it seems the poor bastard lacked a melee weapon of his own. Even at the height of the gang war, the Diamonds made an agreement not to do battle with anyone if the odds of winning were highly stacked in our favour’.

‘Didn’t Akira have a damn gun on him though?’ Aoi scratched her head.

‘Even so, it’s still pretty cowardly if you ask me’, Mondo growled, ‘while I have little sympathy for gun users, I pity them too in a way, since they tend to consist of those with little fighting capability. Akira never displayed any fighting skills, so he resorted to going the easy way out’.

‘It’s true’, Sakura nodded, ‘it is often those who lack the physical capacity to fight head on who rely on weapons capable of such horrific damage’.

‘It looks like we have two theories to go off on, either Akira’s killer had to be quick taking the weapon from him or he was just very incompetent handling the gun’, Celestia shrugged.

‘Whatever the case, Akira did put up a fight’, I said, ‘Also I remember Junko mentioning that there was only one bullet in that gun. I imagine Akira wanted to get a good aim on his opponent but was ultimately unable to’.

‘So, his attacker must have been quick and was most likely holding a bladed weapon’, Kiyotaka frowned.

‘Who could have possibly bested Akira with only a knife in hand though?’ Aoi questioned, ‘Our most experienced knife wielder has a strong alibi’.

‘Do you think there is another knife user here aside from Mondo?’

‘What did I tell ya!’ Syo laughed, ‘You will be surprised!’

‘Perhaps we could find out if we narrow down our suspects, which brings us to our next point. It would be a good idea to discuss the activities of everyone present’, I looked around at everyone.

‘Where were you then smartass?!’

‘For your information, I was helping out for the party. Then when there was about an hour to go, I was in my room getting ready’.

‘It’s true’, Kiyotaka nodded, ‘she spent the day assisting me with party planning’.

‘I see… It’s strange punk, I didn’t picture you as a party animal’, Syo raised an eyebrow, ‘Outside of Celestia’s company you always seemed quite elusive!’

‘I enjoy parties in moderation’, I shrugged, ‘You think introverts can’t have fun do you?!’

‘I’m just saying!’

‘What about you Celeste?’

‘I spent most of the day in the backstage room preparing my dress and makeup’, she smiled.

‘Jesus Christ! How long does it take for you ladies just to get ready?’, Mondo rolled his eyes, ‘Then
again back when I had the pomp it could take two hours to get it into proper shape’.

‘Have you ever considered bringing it back Mondo? I kind of miss it…’ Kiyotaka’s face went red.

‘I dunno, I think I prefer you with your hair down. It makes you look a bit like one of those heavy metal guys’, Syo shrugged, ‘I kinda dig it!’

‘Anyway…’ I asserted, ‘Syo where were you this whole time?’

‘I don’t remember much really, all I can remember is sitting in the archive. I imagine Toko sat there beforehand since it was where that Togami twat used to sit’, she raised her fists.

‘What time did you emerge Syo?’ I asked her.

‘Oh it was about 6:30pm!’

‘Are you sure?’, Celestia stood up, ‘How do we know you were there? Are you sure you weren’t… up to something?’, her eyes narrowed.

‘You trying to accuse me punk?’

‘Are you sure some water didn’t accidentally get on you when you dumped Akira’s body in the tank? That would explain your transformation into Syo. You all saw it at the third class trial! ‘Just add water’ remember? Isn’t it obvious by now?!’

‘I told ya! I was in the archive you vampire wannabe!’

‘What did you say?!’

‘You definitely have a point Celeste’, I nodded, I then turned to face Sakura and Aoi, ‘You two mentioned you were working out, did you see either Toko or Syo near or in the library?’

‘We did yes’, Aoi nodded, ‘but we don’t know if she stayed there or went elsewhere since we both left in good time to get ourselves ready for the night’.

‘Pretty suspicious I’d say huh?’, Celestia grinned in Syo’s direction.

‘I agree’, Mondo glared at her, ‘It was almost an hour into the damn thing by the time you turned up!’

‘Your point certainly sounds convincing Celeste’, Makoto pointed out, ‘but you were quite late attending too, weren’t you? I mean… obviously I have no idea about your dress routine, but still… didn’t you have all day to get ready? It couldn’t have taken that long surely?’

‘What do you know Makoto? I take special events very seriously and I like to put in that extra effort!’

‘He has a point’, Aoi said, ‘What the Hell were you doing that took you so long Celeste?’

‘Why are you not saying the same thing about Toko?’ I questioned, ‘She took longer to turn up after all and had transformed into Syo which can only be done with water’.

Kiyotaka coughed nervously, ‘I actually saw Celeste from the lost property room when I was looking for music to play for the party. I thought it was odd, but I never suspected suspicious behaviour’.
‘That was close to the time listed on the letter wasn’t it?’ Mondo looked dumbfounded.

‘That’s not enough to convict her alone’, I protested, ‘Just because she was there close to the time on the note, that doesn’t imply the murder took place at exactly that time’.

‘Lass, don’t you think she could have been heading to the sitting room to meet someone perhaps? I remember such ‘meetings’ taking place during the gang war. With my Kuzuryuu ties I was often ‘invited along’ too. Believe me, I know of such affairs’.

‘What if there are other ways to summon Syo though?’ Makoto suggested, ‘Maybe Toko has some other triggers that we do not know about yet’.

‘Should we put them to the test?’ asked Celeste.

‘No’, Makoto shook his head, ‘I think we should gently try to coax Toko into telling us instead. I didn’t feel comfortable with Akira spraying water onto her in the third trial and I think it’s quite cruel to force her to change quite frankly’.

‘That sounds like the best approach I suppose’, I looked over at Syo, ‘You wouldn’t mind bringing Toko back would you? She might be our key to solving this case’.

‘Whatever you say I guess’, sighed Syo, ‘but you punks had better treat her nice, otherwise I will come for you in your sleep when I return!’ she laughed before sneezing and once again, Toko switched personalities. Realising where she was, she cried out as she saw Byakuya’s crass ‘shrine’.

‘I cannot believe master is being commemorated in such an untasteful way!’ she looked up at Monokuma who only grinned nastily in her direction, ‘Do you have no shame?’

‘Nope!’ the bear shook his head, ‘Don’t you remember, book worm? In this game you are all equal, therefore you all get treated the same manner in death too’.

‘It’s alright Toko’, Makoto reassured her, ‘We just need you to answer a few questions’.

‘Like what exactly?’

‘Look Toko I know you have had a grudge against me ever since the third class trial but I need your help. Your words could help save us from a horrible fate’, I pleaded.

‘All but one of us at least….’ Mondo gritted his teeth.

‘Why should I help you? You all voted to send Byakuya to his death!’

‘We don’t have time for this’, Aoi sighed.

‘Yeah, just get to the fucking point already!’ Mondo hissed, ’You should be thankful I’m not holding a grudge against you right now Toko!

‘Mondo chill!’ I yelled.

‘She’s right bro’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘you don’t want to end up damaging your stitches!’

His words caused Mondo to take a deep breath and relax, ‘Of course, my bad…”

‘Anyway Toko, what do you remember last night?’ Makoto asked her.

‘I spent most of my time in the library’, Toko told him, ‘I remember seeing Aoi and Sakura working
out in the gym. With about two minutes to go before the party was due to start, I caught a glimpse of Akira heading to the secret room’.

‘Did he have a gun or any other kind of weapon on him?’

‘I don’t know… it looked like he was hiding something though and I certainly caught a glint of metal in his hand. He probably didn’t think I would believe he was being suspicious, especially as the secret passageway is well known by now’.

‘Do you remember when you transformed into Syo?’

‘It was soon after 6:30pm I think… the details were blurry…’

‘Thank you Toko’, Makoto bowed his head, ‘now if you don’t mind telling us, are there any other ways outside of water to summon her?’

‘Well there is one other way, but why should I tell you? Haven’t I been tormented enough already?’

‘We won’t do anything to you Toko’, Makoto reassured her, ‘I promise, we just need to know. Your life is on the line here too you know’.

‘What’s the point?’ Toko snapped, ‘Master is dead, and I have nothing to go back to if I do get out of here’, she began to sob on the spot, ‘You killed the last essence of hope I had’!

‘Byakuya brought it on himself!’ Mondo spat.

‘How can you talk you dog? You started it!’ she was shaking uncontrollably.

‘Toko, please don’t cry’, I told her as I shot Mondo an angry glance, ‘we wouldn’t have sent Byakuya to die if we had the choice’.

‘Why should I help you? You ruined my life! You all did!’

‘We won’t get anywhere if we carry on like this…’ Sakura glared around at us all.

‘Please Toko’, Makoto begged her, ‘Just tell us. We will find out who Monokuma’s mistress is and then you will have the opportunity to avenge Byakuya. But right now, we need to get to the bottom of this. So please, for your sake… for our sake, tell us anything you need to’.

Toko swallowed before she spoke in a barely audible tone, ‘At 6:30pm, I heard the sound of a gunshot above me, after that, I don’t remember much…’

‘Is that another one of your triggers Toko?’ Makoto asked her in a softer tone of voice.

No words came out, Toko merely nodded slowly before looking away from the rest of us.

‘Thank you for your words, that’s all I need to know’, Makoto gazed in Celestia’s direction, ‘I’m sorry but I think we have narrowed it down to one culprit. I cannot imagine it being any other way’.

‘How can you be so sure?’ Celestia’s lip curled into a snarl, ‘My primary weapon is wit, I wouldn’t stand a chance in a physical fight and I don’t think I have the capability to disarm someone like that’.

‘Indeed’, I nodded, ‘I am pretty sure she is not a knife enthusiast either’.

‘I’m pretty sure you don’t have to be an enthusiast to know how to use one Kyoko’, Makoto said.
‘I have spent most of my time with Celestia, I think I would know by now if she had a weapon of her own. Besides, it requires a great deal of effort to be able to wrestle a fucking gun off of someone!’

‘What she said’, Celeste agreed, ‘Poor little Makoto, it looks like you have nowhere to turn to’.

‘Thank you Celeste...’ I sighed, 'but yes. Syo, Toko whoever she is... she could could have been lying. For all we know, she could have transformed inside room where the murder took place’ .

‘I think it will be a good time to get on with the voting. After all, if Toko and Byakuya share one thing, it’s that they are both shady as hell!’ Celeste looked more frantic than ever and started trembling, ‘Come on Monokuma, let’s get on with it already!’

‘Wait no!’ Aoi brought up.

‘Oh, what is it?!’ Celestia turned sharply towards her.

‘It’s just that… I think my gut is telling me something again!’

‘What would that be exactly?’ Kiyotaka barked, ‘Surely we have all the evidence we need?!’

‘Girls, do you remember the night of the sleepover?’

‘What about it?’ I asked, my heart beginning to plummet.

‘Celestia had a knife on her, a silver one if I guess correctly’, Aoi pondered, ‘She and Junko held a competition that night, poor Chihiro nearly fainted’.

‘I...’ I gulped, ‘I see…’

‘That’s just a pocket knife’, Celeste protested, she pulled it out and it brightly lit room caused it to shimmer, ‘I couldn’t have overpowered Akira with this thing!’

‘Anything can be a weapon if you put your mind to it’, Mondo spoke.

‘It’s true’, agreed Sakura.

‘We still don’t know where the gun is though!’ Celestia pointed out.

'Yes, where is the gun Makoto? Explain that one to me'. At that moment a small essence of hope appeared like a leaf falling from a tree. As quickly as it came however, a gust of wind blew that leaf away and I felt my body turn cold.

‘Didn’t you gain access to the secret passageway using Byakuya’s old handbook Celeste?’ Makoto frowned.

‘Yeah, so?!’

‘It seems like a good place to hide something like a gun doesn’t it?’

‘I only used it for the investigation. I was acting as Kyoko’s assistant as I had always done! I wanted to still be of use when she was occupied with that monster and I did find these vital clues didn’t I?’ she held up the two pieces of paper.

‘You did help us, but I fear you only did so to frame another’.
'Why would I do that? There is no game when blood money is involved. Even in games like Russian Roulette, there are rules in place to make sure the game is fair'.

'I would believe you, but there is one tiny problem’, Makoto pulled a handbook with a cracked screen out of his bag. He switched it on, looking closer I saw that it read, ‘Akira Oshiro’, ‘I found it in the sitting room under one of the chairs, he must have dropped it during the scuffle. I thought it was broken at first, and so did the killer apparently but I tested it and it is working just fine!’

‘Indeed’, Monokuma grinned, ‘My mistress designed them, so they don’t break easily. They can be pummeled, crushed, thrown from a window and it will still work! Technology is amazing is it not?’

‘By leaving this crucial piece of evidence, the killer had made a mistake and I was able to use it to gain access to the secret passage’, Makoto let out a deep breath, ‘and in the secret room I found this’. Out of his bag, he pulled out a gun.

‘Jesus fuck!’, Mondo gasped.

‘No…’ I cried out, ‘Please, it cannot be…’

‘Don’t worry it won’t harm anyone, for the only bullet it contained was used on our victim. And that’s not all, I found this on the floor nearby’, he pulled out a small glass container, looking closer I noticed that it contained one long ebony black hair, ‘During a scuffle you are bound to get a few loose hairs, isn’t that right Celestia?’

‘Okay fine, you win’, Celeste spoke in a somber tone, ‘Yes it was me who killed Akira’.

‘You really had to do it didn’t you?’ my eyes were welling with tears, ‘You didn’t listen to me’.

‘You knew about this plot Kyoko?’ asked Aoi.

I nodded, ‘That’s why we were arguing. I didn’t believe or didn’t want to believe... that this would actually happen’, I brushed my eyes as Aoi, who was seated nearby comforted me, ‘I guess I was in denial all along after all. That’s why I brought up the idea of a party to Mondo and Taka, in the hope that we could all forget about the stupid motive. But alas, I couldn’t stop you’.

‘How could you do this to her Celeste?’ Aoi snapped, ‘She loved you! She trusted you!’

‘Don’t worry’, Celestia sighed, ‘I will explain after the verdict’.

‘Come on Kyoko!’ Monokuma grinned, ‘We don’t have all day you know!’

‘Okay then’, I cleared my throat, ‘Let’s get this over with. Here is what happened in this case…

Akira was found at the bottom of the shark tank. At first it was believed that he died of blood loss from the bite or drowning, but it was later revealed that he was already dead or dying. The animal had ‘test-bitten’ him. Instead his real cause of death was by a gunshot wound.

When we explored the secret passage, we noticed that the killer had left Akira a threatening note so the latter took matters into his own hands. After ‘borrowing’ the room key of the late Junko Enoshima from the ‘lost property’ room, Akira managed to gain access to her room. He ransacked the place looking for the code to her gun vault which he successfully opened. Meanwhile Kiyotaka was on the fourth floor and on the way, he ran into the killer who was making their way upstairs.

After taking the gun Akira met the killer in the upstairs lounge who was armed with a knife. A scuffle broke out between the two and somehow before he could aim and fire the weapon the killer
injured Akira and disarmed him, taking the gun for themselves and killing him with a shot to the chest. From the library located just one floor below, Toko was able to hear the gunshot wound, causing her to transform into Syo. To cover up the blood the killer moved a nearby couch on top of it. However, several of us caught the scent blood and we eventually found the source of the smell. Akira’s handbook was also discovered at the scene by Makoto which looked broken but was still working.

As discovered by Mondo, the killer used a trolley and tarp to transport the body which they wheeled towards the menagerie. Using a small elevator, they transported the body to the opening of the tank before tossing him in. Instantly smelling the blood from his previous wounds, the beast attacked and took a bite out of Akira before his body fell to the bottom. The killer then used Byakuya’s old handbook to access the secret passage and left the now empty gun there. Unfortunately for the killer they also left some of their hairs in the room.

All I can ask you Celestia Ludenberg, is... why?’
After I gave my summary, I felt like I had slipped into the void. I didn’t want to believe that this was real, I couldn’t believe it. But deep down, I knew that Celestia had committed the unthinkable and now she would have to pay the price for it.

‘You can get on with the voting Monokuma’, Celestia shrugged, ‘I lost and now I have to suffer the repercussions, just like a game of Russian Roulette I suppose’.

‘Well you are eager to play along by the rules, aren’t you?’ Monokuma stood up, ‘Even though you are the Ultimate Gambler, you accept your defeat with grace? Still no matter, for it is time for the voting to commence!’

At that moment we witnessed the all too familiar plinths rise from the floor. When I wrote down Celestia’s name in my blood I had to fight with my urge to stop. I knew however, that if my classmates and I were to survive this round, I had no choice.

When our votes were cast Monokuma did the usual routine, but as the verdict got closer every step for me felt like a knife to the gut. I looked up hopelessly as the beast conjured a large fireball and caused it to float to the centre of the room.

When the fiery form of Celestia Ludenberg emerged from the flames, I felt as though this hellish form of the woman I had loved was taunting me. The real Celestia seemed to feel this way too. While her face remained calm, she too seemed quite intimidated at the sight before her.

‘So little cubs, is this the scoundrel who killed Akira?’ Monokuma sat down and eyed us, none of us at this point could say anything, ‘I will take that as a yes!’, he clapped his paws together and the fiery version of Celestia crumbled away into ash.

The bear leapt down and instead of prowling around us like he did previously, he rolled on his back, ‘You little cubs are getting good at this!’ he purred, ‘Yes, it was indeed Celestia Ludenberg who is the murderer in this case’, he grinned nastily at me, ‘What are you going to do now that you know that your girlfriend is a heartless killer Kyoko?’

‘Celestia, why did you do it?’, I felt my knees buckle slightly.

‘I think you know why Kyoko’, she bowed her head, ‘this was my opportunity and if you helped me, it would have been yours too. I helped you throughout our stay here, so I was hoping that you would be my assistant for a change’.

‘I would have been willing to help you out Celeste, but not like this’, I rubbed my eyes, ‘I thought... or rather hoped that we would stick together right to the bitter end. Isn’t that how relationships are supposed to work?’

‘Yes, and leave with nothing?’

‘You would have had me. I would have been at your side no matter what. You can find money any time, but there is only one of me, and there was only one of ‘her’ too’.

‘This would have been our opportunity to leave the real world behind Kyoko. As ‘she’ and I experienced, it is a truly a cruel and unforgiving place. Imagine being able to escape from all that!’

‘You can run from the real world… but you can never truly escape it. Even if we had the world at
our fingertips there will still be death, disease and injustice’.

‘Won’t we be away from it all though? We would have been able to live in peace!’

‘It’s not fair that she died, and it’s not fair that we are trapped in this situation. But committing the act of murder will not solve either of these things. And even if we did get ourselves a fancy house, we would have brought it with blood money’.

‘I would have given you everything Kyoko’.

‘That doesn’t matter. The knowledge that I had blood on my hands would never be able to escape me. I am one who believes in justice and I don’t how know how long I would be able to live with such a feeling’, I told her.

‘Oh, so kind of like Macbeth then?’ Toko pointed out.

‘I have blood on my hands’, Mondo stared up at the ceiling, ‘While you can wash it off, the guilt that comes with it will never go away’.

‘You would have had me Kyoko! You have made me the happiest I have been since ‘she’ died. Even with my ultimate status, I was alone, lost and confused. But you changed everything’, Celestia cried, ‘Besides, in my world death is sometimes necessary if you wish to go down the path of success. In Russian Roulette it is traditional that one must die while the other goes on to live a life of prosperity. Unless of course... you wish to try your luck again!’, she smiled weakly.

‘This isn’t the gambling world though, Celestia’, I asserted, ‘You had a choice, as the other murderers did in the previous rounds. You didn’t have to resort to this!’

‘Despite the prospect of death, Russian roulette still has rules in place and the same applies in this game. I was only playing along with the rules, just like my gambling matches and so was Akira. In the end we both competed for the same prize’.

‘After I sent Junko, Sayaka and Byakuya to their deaths it was the guiltiest I have ever felt. I don’t care if there were ‘rules’ in place. This is not a normal situation we are in, even compared to your underground lifestyle. This is fucked!’

‘Ah, there is nothing quite like a little relationship drama is there little cubs? It’s about to get juicer though!’, Monokuma snapped his claws together. Like the third trial a large screen descended.

At first there was nothing but static before it cut to none other than my room. As the camera was looking down at Celestia and I, eavesdropping in this highly personal moment between us, it felt especially unnerving and uncomfortable.

‘This is our opportunity to escape and leave the real world behind us once for all Kyoko! Join me and I can guarantee that! I always win, I was declared an Ultimate for a reason!’ Celestia begged me.

‘I won’t do it’, I gritted my teeth, ‘Even if I could I wouldn’t. Did all this time with me mean nothing to you? You should know by now that I strongly believe in justice. Unless it is in self-defence, killing quite clearly violates that’.

‘Yes, there is a price Kyoko, but that is nothing compared to the outcome! And if we do it together, we will both emerge as winners! It will be like the days when I was back with ‘her’.

‘I’m pretty sure that ‘she’ would have not wanted you to resort to cold blooded murder though’. 
‘But there are rules in place to make it fair. It isn’t much different to Russian Roulette’.

‘Players of Russian Roulette are at least willing participants, we are not. Look at yourself, would you be willing to kill someone outside of this prison? There is nothing normal about this. I mean, there is a literal portal to hell in this building for f**k’s sake!’

‘It will only cost one soul though; will it really be that much of a loss?’

‘Even if the two of us get out of here, that means everyone else will die. We will be committing a massacre Celeste. I don’t think I would be able to live with that, no matter what I gained from it. Blood money completely goes against my principles and I thought it would go against yours too’.

‘Think about it Kyoko, who among us would really be missed? What does this class consist of? We have a grandson of a disgraced leader, a gang leader in league with the Yakuza, and a shady businessman who created a whole market selling dangerous toys to children. As for Toko, she has been nothing but mean and horrible to everyone who wasn’t that rich bastard…’

‘What about the others who don’t have a dark past? And even those with a more sordid history, do you not think they are capable of change?’

‘What potential do the others have though? We have everything ahead of us!’

‘No life, whether they are an ultimate or not is worthless Celeste’, I growled.

‘All you must do is help me and then we will both be free from this hell we are in, and from the real world too. We can leave all of that behind once and for all!’

‘Yes, the real world is shit, believe me I know. There is good in the world too however, even if it is hard to find sometimes’.

‘You can help me happy again Kyoko, it will be just like the good old days!’

‘You can reminisce all you want about the past’, I sighed, ‘but the truth is you can only go forward in life. Even with all the money in the world, you cannot guarantee happiness. Unlike money, hope cannot be simply won’.

‘Fine! Have it your way then Kyoko!’, Celestia snapped, ‘I suppose everything that I did for you meant nothing in the end…’

‘No’, I pleaded, ‘It meant the world to me! That’s why I don’t want you to become a killer’.

‘It’s fine Kyoko’, she turned away from me, ‘I can do this all by myself. But know that when I evade getting caught, you will perish alongside your lesser peers. I always win you see…’

‘Celestia please, it doesn’t have to be this way!’

‘You could have spent the remainder of your days with me, in great prosperity, but instead you decide to side with criminals and bullies. It’s fine… I understand…’

‘Please don’t do this, I thought we were going to stick together as a team. I know we have our differences but surely, we should both agree that murder is f**ked up’.

‘You don’t understand Kyoko’, Celestia bowed her head, ‘I like to play along, and as long as I follow the rules, I don’t see what the big deal is’.

‘Even if we don’t have all the wealth in the world upon escaping, don’t you think simply being in
each other’s company would be better? You are a winner after all Celeste, we may not be able to earn enough for a mansion, but we will have enough to live at least a comfortable life surely?'

‘You don’t get it do you Kyoko? My society is not like yours, I didn’t risk my life to rise through the ranks for nothing. Winning is my purpose. After growing up in the slums I wanted to prove to the world that I was not a loser, and I found that path through gambling. I didn’t gain my status through working for a company like most sheep on this pathetic earth, I obtained it through skill, concentration and luck. If I try to assimilate into society to live a ‘normal’ life, I will be merely joining those sheep and submitting to those who made my childhood miserable’.

‘No, it doesn’t work like that’, I put a hand on her shoulder, ‘If enough of us work together, we can help to change society and the ‘real world’ for the better. Our generation has been taken advantage of by previous ones but instead of wallowing in misery about it, we should use that experience to make the world a better place. We can give the next generation the things that were robbed from us. Trying to escape from it however, especially through murder will accomplish nothing’.

‘Fine have it your way then’, Celeste murmured, ‘You can try to stop me Kyoko but, in the end, I always win, remember that’, she left the room quietly, shutting the door behind her.

For the last few seconds of footage, I watched myself on the screen lying on the bed, eyes open wide in a state of denial before the film finally cut out.

‘Celeste…’ I was still shaking where I stood, ‘You can never truly hide from the brutality of the real world, even in your underground society. Didn’t ‘her’ early demise prove that to you? Still, it is not hopeless, with enough people, and hope, the world can change for the better. That’s what my mother told me’.

‘What’s the point?’ Celestia’s eyes filled with tears, ‘Leaders never hear our cries, even when people are literally dropping dead in front of them, as the TB epidemic proved…’

‘I understand Celestia I really do. I used to think the same way too, but hiding from it won’t help either. Instead of working to change the world for the better, you decided to flee from it and resorted to a cowardly way out. How can that achieve anything?’

‘I cannot imagine what it must be like to lose a loved one Celeste, especially at such a young age’, Aoi teared up too, ‘but murder isn’t the way to go about it’.

‘You can find money any time’, Sakura glared at the bear, complete and utter malice in her eyes, ‘Every person is unique however, and once they are gone there is no chance of bringing them back. It is why my family and I are cut off from the outside world, because too much of it relies on profit over human life and happiness. Still… if the lives of the innocent are at stake, I will not sit back and watch, no matter how badly the outside world has treated me sometimes’.

‘You see Celeste?’ Mondo gestured towards Sakura, ‘Even the hermit gets it! I know I have no room to talk since I was a big fucking coward, even more so than you, lassie, but trying to find the ‘easy’ way out to escape your problems can fuck you up until you feel like you have nothing to live for…’, Once again he showed the large, still healing, scar upon his abdomen.

Kiyotaka nodded, ‘I could have hidden away after my grandfather shattered the Ishimaru family’s reputation, but instead I vowed to carry out good deeds and to help society when they needed it. If the government failed to intervene, I would step in and help the best way I could’.

‘And no matter what people will love and support you, even if it seems the whole world is against you. That is something that money cannot do’, Makoto told her.
Celestia fell upon her knees and stared down at the ground, ‘I’m sorry Kyoko’, she was shaking, ‘I should have listened to you, and now I have to suffer the consequences for my folly’, she gave a twisted smile, ‘It’s kind of like what happened to old Marie Antionette, I had everything going for me but in an instant, that all crumbled away’.

‘Celeste!’ I ran up to her and knelt by her side.

‘Hey’, she slowly sat up and blinked up at me, resembling a sad Victorian child, ‘I guess you will have to carry on without me then huh?’

‘No!’ I cried out, ‘I really didn’t want it to end like this! You helped to change my life too. I don’t know how I am going to carry on without you’.

‘You don’t need me’, she laughed feebly, ‘not after everything I have done, not after betraying you…’

‘I still love you Celestia, even after what you did. I hope you understand that’.

‘You are still as cute as ever’, she put a hand onto my cheek, ‘that hasn’t changed for sure!’

Monokuma purred, ‘I really do hate to break you both up but alas, the game must continue! That’s right little cubs it’s the moment you have been waiting for, it’s punishment time’.

Without having to be reminded, Celestia stood up and slowly walked towards the panel in the centre of the room. As the spikes shot up around her, I spoke shakily,

‘I will never forget you’.

‘It was a pleasure working as your assistant Kyoko’, she smiled as the panel slowly descended into the floor, ‘but it is all up to you now!’

‘Come along little cubs! This is the best execution I have cooked up yet!’ Monokuma beckoned us towards the elevator as I looked back one last time. By the time I did however, Celestia had disappeared into the floor, ‘Come on Kyoko! Let’s not wait around now!’

I stepped into the elevator alongside the others, trembling as the device descended. I hoped that Celestia’s punishment would not be too brutal when we walked into the next execution chamber.

The fourth chamber was different, instead of seeing the execution for real we walked into what looked like a 1930’s cinema. Behind us, one of Monokuma’s cronies turned the projection reel.

Instead of a neon sign coming down this time, words appeared on the black and white screen, resembling the title sequence of an old timey cartoon.

‘Execution for the Ultimate Gambler Celestia Ludenberg: Suffer You Sinners!’

The film cut to a dark forest, for a few seconds there was nothing but then we all gasped as Celestia appeared in the picture. She was not bound by ropes or chains like the others who were condemned, but it was as though she was forcibly shoved into the scene.

We watched as she ran in terror towards an iron wrought gate. When she discovered where she was the gate descended into the floor and was replaced by a brick wall. She was in a graveyard, not just any graveyard, however. We were stunned into silence as we noticed the gravestones begin to move and sway as though they were made of rubber. Celestia was frozen on the spot as the graves grew facial features and began jeering at her. Soon they were joined by skeletons and ghosts emerging
from some of them, even some of the trees joined in.

When she finally bolted, everything present in the graveyard was mercilessly mocking her and reminding her of her past sins and what a ‘awful’ person she was for living a life of gambling and trickery. As she continued to run, some of the demonic entities scratched her, ripped her clothes, pelted rocks and hurled mud in her direction. At one point she tripped and fell face first onto the floor, before getting onto her knees and desperately pleading for forgiveness. The entities were merciless however and merely laughed with glee at her torment.

The mob chased her into a crooked barn. Just as she thought she was safe however, the objects in the barn started to come to life and taunt her too until none other than the form of Akira emerged. At first he was an uncanny resemblance, until his body and limbs stretched and contorted that is. Soon he became monstrous as he condemned Celestia for his untimely murder. She ran back out the door as the demonic Akira got closer and closer.

When she was forced to come face to face with the murderous mob again, I noticed that many of the demons were now brandishing weapons. She pelted away again at an almost unnatural pace as the monstrous entities chased her.

Finally, she ran into a cave, not noticing the large neon sign above the entrance reading ‘Hell right this way!’

At first, we were expecting to see fire but instead there was nothing but a deep dark hole in front of her. Obviously choosing a quick death over being ripped apart by the mob behind her, she jumped.

It happened almost instantly but for me it felt like an eternity as the girl who I loved fell into the void. Inevitably the noise of a sickening crunch echoed throughout the theatre.

Celestia was killed instantly, her body crumpled. Although we couldn’t see it due to the film being black and white, there was a scarlet pool forming below her on impact. The last thing I saw on the screen were her blank eyes staring upwards, before the end title sequence displayed text simply reading ‘The End (Brought to you by Monokuma productions)’.

‘Was that not beautiful little cubs?’ Monokuma brushed away a tear, 'Also you got to see some of my friends from the demon realm! They kindly decided to participate and this execution wouldn't have been possible without them'.

‘I will bring justice to Celestia, and the others too’, I stood up, ‘I will do it for her!’

‘You are alone Kyoko’, the bear unsheathed his claws, ‘What are you going to do now?’

‘I…’ I bowed my head.

‘You can’t achieve much without your girlfriend can you my dear?’ the bear grinned.

As I looked around, I saw that the others were more confused and more terrified than ever. Only Sakura seemed calm, even though the burning fire in her eyes was still present. She did not say anything this time, instead her look of disgust said it all.

Monokuma snickered, ‘Well little cubs, once again the deed is done! You can all get some well needed sleep. Trust me, you are going to need it, round five is gonna to be the kicker!’

Without saying a word, we all stepped into the elevator and began the trip back up to the real world. This time however I could not tell the difference between the human and demon realms. They might as well be the same, Celestia was dead and I felt as though I was partly to blame.
The others had somewhat regained their senses when we returned but I had not. Once again, I got that feeling of walking through a dark tunnel with no end in sight, as I made my way slowly past the numerous classrooms and to the dormitories.

‘Kyoko, I am so sorry about Celestia’, Makoto sighed, ‘We will love and support you in whatever way we can, in her memory’.

‘I know what it is like losing someone close to you’, Aoi put a hand on my shoulder, ‘Remember if you ever need to talk to us about anything, we are here’.

‘Celeste was a fine lass’, Mondo told me, ‘we will make sure that she didn’t die in vain’.

‘I think I just need to go to bed…’ I stared blankly forwards at my bedroom door.

‘Kyoko please, I want to help’, Makoto pleaded.

‘It’s fine’, I told him, ‘I just want to be left alone for now’.

‘Come on’, Kiyotaka told the others, ‘We should abide by her wishes’.

Kiyotaka led the others away and I shut the door. I curled up upon my bed, not bothering to get changed into my bedclothes, and wept into the night especially after seeing the empty pillow at my side. It was still dented from where Celestia Ludenberg used to sleep by my side.
When I got up the following day it was 11am. Looking in the mirror I saw there were shadows under my eyes, my hair was sticking out in various places and I was wearing the same clothes that I had worn to the class trial. As I took my morning shower I wanted to curl up and cry under the water.

I slowly got changed and trudged to the dining room, cigar in my mouth. There was only one person present. Makoto, book in hand, looked wide eyed in my direction.

‘It’s good to see you up Kyoko! You had a hard night I see?’, I nodded as I sat down unable to eat anything. I could feel my stomach rumbling but I did not care; ‘Wow, I didn’t know that you smoked’.

‘You gotta problem with that?’ I murmured.

‘No, I just didn’t think that you were the type to do so’, Makoto shrugged before he sighed, ‘I am very sorry about Celestia Kyoko, you both were pretty close huh? Like Leon and I’.

‘Yeah’, I looked in his direction, ‘It’s fine Makoto, it really is…’

‘No, it isn’t, you know it isn’t…’

‘How is everybody else?’

‘They were worried about you of course! When you have gotten something to eat you should tell Mondo and Kiyotaka that you are okay’.

‘I’m not hungry’, I stared up at the ceiling, ‘I think I will go and find them now’.

‘Whatever you say’, Makoto put a hand on my shoulder, ‘still if you need to talk, just let me know’.

‘Thank you, Makoto’, I bowed as I got up slowly and left. As I left the room, I remembered that Monokuma had opened up the fifth floor.

With nobody around me I plodded up the stairs for what seemed like an eternity.

‘Hey Kyoko’, I saw Aoi at the top, ‘Oh, I am so glad you are okay. We were all so worried about you. I understand why you needed some time alone though…’ she rubbed her eyes.

‘I’m fine…’ I uttered, I looked up at her, ‘Have you seen Mondo and Taka around lately?’

‘Yeah they are on this floor’.

‘Have you discovered anything interesting here?’

‘Not much really. Sakura took some interest in the chemistry lab though, there are quite a lot of protein solutions in there’.

‘Isn’t there a lot of dangerous chemicals too?’

‘Yep’, she laughed weakly, ‘Let’s hope that nobody mixes up the two, right?’

‘Indeed…’ I looked down at the ground before I followed her into the lab. Glass cases hosting numerous chemicals and concoctions stood all around the room. As expected, Sakura was staring up
at the cupboard containing many fitness related beverages.

‘Hey Sakura, look who just turned up!’ Aoi gestured towards me.

‘Ah’, she gently patted me on the head, ‘I am glad you are okay Kyoko’.

‘How did the memorial service go?’ I asked.

‘Oh, it went by smoothly. Still, it was strange. Now there are more memorials than occupants in the dormitories it seems’, that fire burned in her eyes again, ‘Now there are less than half of us left, I am frustrated that we are still nowhere near finding our jailor’.

‘I am starting to feel the same way to be honest’, Aoi stared glumly at the blackboard, ‘All this hope we had previously about getting through this thing... it turned out to mean nothing in the end’.

‘It reminds me of a Tolkien quote’, I said, ‘there was never much hope, just a fool’s hope’.

Aoi nodded, ‘When Mondo and Kiyotaka led the morning meeting, they couldn’t bring up anything and nobody stuck around for long. These gatherings are becoming more pointless by the day, nothing can be solved. The bear just wants us to kill and kill again until there is only one left’.

‘I will not let that happen’, Sakura spoke, ‘No matter how long the beast has us trapped here’.

As I waved them off, I passed by a red door which had taken Mondo and Kiyotaka’s curiosity.

‘Kyoko’, Mondo turned to face me looking concerned, ‘are you alright lassie?’

‘Yeah I suppose’, I told him, ‘rough night though…’

‘I suppose Celestia is with ‘her’ now, whoever she was…’

I slowly nodded before I looked up at the door. Upon it was a plaque labelled, ‘Dean’s Office’.

‘Do you think our captor is in here?’ Kiyotaka asked me.

‘I don’t think so’, I shook my head, ‘I have a feeling it’s not as simple as that’.

‘Either way it’s locked’, Mondo grunted, ‘I tried picking at it but one of Monokuma’s cronies came right behind us. I think it was the one who overpowered me on the night of the third motive’.

‘Still, it’s annoying that we can’t get in. I imagine there is a lot of crucial information in there…’, I kicked the door in frustration, knowing that our answer may only be one wall away.

‘Shit! It really is hopeless right now isn’t it? That fucking bear doesn’t need to rub it in by taunting us like this!’ Mondo paced up and down, ‘I am going to die here, aren’t I?!’

‘If that happens, I will make sure that we will both go together’, Kiyotaka squeezed his hand.

‘Thanks bro’, Mondo gave a weak smile, ‘I can count on you for anything’.

I continued to explore when I came across a small cinema. As I entered, I noticed that there was even a lobby with a large booth present. Toko was sitting on one of the comfy chairs, reading through some of the magazines taken from the rack behind her. I also spotted shelves hosting numerous DVDs and some film reels, some of the latter looking very old.

As I examined all countless movie titles from around the world, I heard a shaky voice.
‘I know how it must feel to lose a loved one like that Kyoko’, I looked down at Toko whose face turned red, causing her to turn away.

‘Hey Toko, it’s okay’, I sat down besides her, ‘Byakuya’s death is still taking a toll on you I imagine’.

She stammered, ‘I think you should know that I am sorry, I didn’t really mean the things I said to you…’

‘Don’t worry about it, after witnessing his execution I imagine that could mess with your head a little. Celestia’s execution certainly did with mine even though it may not appear so’.

‘But you always appear so confident and calm, it takes a lot of pressure to get you to break down’.

‘Once you get to know me properly, you will know that I am actually quite an emotional baggage!’

‘You’re an emotional wreck too?’ Toko perked up.

‘Well, if you wanna put it that way I suppose, then yeah’, I chuckled before I noticed something sticking out from the bottom of the sofa, ‘Wait a minute, what’s this?’

‘What an earth are you talking about?’ she frowned as I held up the photo.

This time it was depicting Akira and Celestia playing a game of cards at a table, daylight streaming into the classroom. Seeing her face caused a pang of guilt to surge through my body. As haunting as this all was however, something about this particular picture overshadowed everything.

‘Who is that chick?’ Toko pointed, ‘I have never met anyone like her!’

This new, unknown person was wearing a combat uniform and seemed to be giving an a thousand-mile stare into the distance.

‘Yeah I don’t recognise her either’, I scratched my head, ‘This makes no sense whatsoever. From what I can see her talent seems to be military related. Either way this is all very weird’.

‘Are you sure this isn’t photoshopped?’

‘If it is they certainly did a very good job that’s for sure…’

‘Shame we didn’t get to see her though! I kind of have a thing for uniforms…’

‘What did I tell you about touching my things?’ For the third time the angry bear appeared, pacing up and down and baring his massive teeth.

‘Monokuma before you snatch this off me, could you give an explanation on who this girl is?’

‘What about that girl?’ Monokuma tilted his head.

‘The military chick, do you have any ideas who she is?’, I shoved the photo in front of him.

‘And why should I tell you that?’

‘Just interested…’ I shrugged.

‘Gimme that!’ Rolling my eyes, I thrust the picture out to him.
'Fine take your stupid photo then, Toko and I have seen everything anyway!'

'I don’t think you should go prying into things so much Kyoko, you might end up like your dead girlfriend otherwise!’ he smiled before he vanished on the spot.

‘Kyoko!’ Toko knelt besides me as I was on all fours.

‘It’s fine really…’ I quickly got up and composed myself, ‘Come on let’s explore the rest of this place’, I held out a hand to her which I swear caused her to almost faint.

‘You are holding out a hand… to me?’ Toko took it, trembling profusely and breathing quickly as she did so, ‘Nobody has ever done that to me before!’

‘It’s the least I can do’, I told her as we walked hand in hand to the screening room.

‘Don’t take this as a romantic gesture Kyoko, I still don’t like you or anything…’, she turned her face away from me, ‘but it’s quite flattering all the same…’

The cinema was old fashioned, making it look somewhat like Celestia’s execution chamber.

‘Are you okay Kyoko?’ Toko asked as I broke into a cold sweat.

‘It’s fine’, I took a deep breath, although the hairs on the back of my neck were still standing up.

‘This is pretty impressive huh?’ Toko took a seat in the middle and I joined her.

‘I wonder if any of your books will get adapted into films?’ I told her.

‘I hope not’, she shook her head, ‘I don’t think the movie industry will do them justice. They will probably have to cut out a lot of key details, robbing my works of their intended messages’.

Questioning how there could possibly be anything ‘deep’ or ‘complex’ about cheesy romance novels I saw Makoto dash into the room.

‘Kyoko, Toko! Thank God you are here!’

‘Makoto what is it?’ I asked as he whispered in my ear.

‘I think you know who has found something again’.

‘Come on’, I told Toko, she gave a firm nod as I felt a small spark of hope. The three of us walked out of the lobby to see the others standing outside who were also looking cautiously optimistic. The seven of us descended downstairs before we finally reached the locker room. Indeed, from her hiding place, we could hear Alter Ego playing that loud jingle.

‘Holy shit she’s going haywire!’ Mondo exclaimed as Sakura took out the key and passed the device to me. I propped her on my lap as usual and began to type.

‘What have you discovered?’

‘There were fifteen of you competing in the killing game, but something doesn’t sit right’.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘I managed to uncover the details of your class. There were supposed to be sixteen of you’.
'Do you think the sixteenth student is somewhere in this building?'

'It is certainly possible. Just because there were fifteen of you gathered in the entrance hall, that doesn’t mean that a sixteenth student isn’t hiding in the university somewhere. Hope’s Peak has many secrets after all, they could be in an area currently locked off by physical and digital barriers’.

'Is it possible to find out where this student is located?'

'I don’t think so, but if I can further infiltrate the university’s system, I may be able to uncover the details of the missing student in question. There is one little problem however…'

'Can you tell me?'

'I will, but it will be difficult without getting discovered’, the digital Chihiro bowed her head before explaining, ‘there is a secret room in the girls’ bathroom on the third floor. Go through the door leading to a storage cupboard, at the back of the cupboard is a metal panel that will need to be removed. That way you should find what you are looking for’.

'What is so significant about that area though?’

'If Hope’s Peak’s system was ever subject to a devastating hack, this room would be protected from harm. It was built in the 1990’s in case of emergency. It was regularly inspected, especially with the rise of the digital age, so everything should be functioning just fine!’

'Thank you, I shall see what I can do’.

'Good luck!’ the digital Chihiro beamed as we placed Alter Ego back in the locker.

‘There’s a sixteenth student in our class?!’ gasped Kiyotaka.

‘It appears so’, I nodded as I locked the device safely away, ‘That reminds me…’

‘The photo!’ Toko pointed out.

‘Of course,’ I turned around to face the others, ‘Toko and I came across another one of the strange photographs, but this one was quite different’.

‘How was it different Kyoko? I can’t see anything weirder that seeing photographic scenes of moments that nobody remembers’, Aoi tapped her foot on the ground.

‘There was another girl present’, I tried to picture the image in my head, ‘All the other photographs depicted students that were deceased. In the latest picture I found however, there was a student who I did not recognise’.

‘Do you think that person could be the sixteenth student?’ asked Makoto.

‘Possibly. It doesn’t make sense though, all the other students in the photos had died. Who knows, though? Monokuma is a demon and considering that he can create big ass fireballs out of his paws, it makes sense that he can project realistic images too, probably to mess with us’.

‘What did they look like?’ Aoi questioned.

‘They appeared to be female’, I was racking my head around the peculiar picture, ‘she was leaning with her back against the wall and was wearing some kind of combat uniform. If she is an ultimate, I think her talent is most likely military related. Whatever the case, none of it makes any sense, Monokuma could have made her up for all we know!’, I sighed, ‘There is most definitely a sixteenth
student, but I cannot be certain if she is ‘the one’.

‘Do you really think a mere student like us could really put us through that much suffering?’ Kiyotaka asked, ‘How is that even possible?’

‘Even compared to the fucked-up things I did, I find it hard to believe that some random teenager could connect Hope’s Peak to the very depths of Hell itself’, Mondo growled.

‘I dunno’, shrugged Aoi, ‘this is a university of ultimates. Young prodigies have accomplished the seemingly impossible throughout history. I wouldn’t find it surprising for Monokuma’s mistress to be a Hope’s Peak student or at least a former student of the university’.

‘Do you think that military chick in the picture could be our captor?’ Toko gulped.

‘We need to treat this as a case’, I explained, ‘she is a suspect most definitely but right now we don’t have enough evidence to prove that. Once we have Alter Ego installed on the third floor, all we can do is wait and see what she is able to come up with. It will be risky, but I don’t think we have any other option here. I think we should transport her tonight, the sooner the better. I am a little scared though’, I admitted, ‘Monokuma has been aware that we have been trying to expose his mistress for some time now, he just doesn’t know our means to that end. He is already highly suspicious of me. If he sees me entering a random place with a strange package for seemingly no reason, that will only confirm his suspicions… I think you should be the one to connect Alter Ego up instead Makoto’, I looked in his direction.

‘Me, seriously? How could an average guy like me be tasked with something so important?’

‘That’s precisely the reason I am asking you to do this. I am not trying to say that you are not important as a person or anything, because everyone is valuable in their own unique way. By the university’s standards however you are not seen as anything particularly special which is why I want you to do this. Do you accept this task?’

‘I’m scared but I will do it for all of you and… I am sure Leon would have wanted me to’.

‘You can hide her in that big ass hoodie of yours!’ Mondo suggested.

‘That’s what I was thinking’, I agreed, ‘You could fit just about anything in there! So long as you act normal, murder bear and his cronies hopefully shouldn’t catch on’.

‘Here you are’, Sakura gave me the key, ‘I wish you the very best of luck my dear’.

We decided to carry out the mission during the time of the evening meeting when everybody else would have been eating dinner.

‘Are you ready to do this?’ I typed into the laptop, ‘You should probably go into sleep mode while Makoto transports you to the secret room. I will make a distraction’.

‘Sure! I wish to be of help in whatever way I can, just as my mistress would have done!’ the digital Chihiro smiled softly, ‘I am going to miss you though, it was really nice getting to know you all’.

‘Makoto and I will come by occasionally to check on your progress but trying to cram everyone in the same room would be too dangerous. I am going to miss our gatherings here, you have become a dear friend to us, and I am sure Chihiro would have been proud of your efforts too’.

‘A friend really?’
‘Why not?’

‘Thank you! I am more determined than ever to assist my friends!’

‘Good luck!’

At that moment the screen went dark and the green light on the side of the device turned yellow. I nodded towards Makoto who stuffed the laptop into his hoodie with relative ease.

‘Go on Makoto’, I told him just before we left the locker room, 'Have you got your toolbox? A screwdriver might come in handy for removing the panel’.

‘Yup’, Makoto trembled slightly, ‘Well I guess this is it then! And I have to go into the girls bathroom too… I feel so dreadful now…’

‘Don’t worry, just act normal’, I opened the door and we ascended the stairs to the third floor.

‘I really feel like I shouldn’t be doing this’, he whispered as we approached the bathroom.

‘Go!’, I elbowed him the ribs and he quickly headed inside while I walked to the fourth floor and approached the Dean’s room.

Rolling up my sleeves, I used my own body to lunge at the door before quickly bouncing off, nobody was breaking into that room easily for sure. I fell, sprawled on the ground.

When I looked up, I saw two of the black robed figures hovering over me as though they had materialised out of nowhere.

‘What do you think you are doing?’ one of them spoke in a raspy muffled voice.

‘You can talk?’ I tilted my head to the side.

‘Of course we can talk!’ the other one hissed through their clothing, ‘But that’s not the point. I am sure you know of the rules in place within this institution’, the two figures prowled around me.

‘Yeah you don’t want to fuck with us’, agreed the first figure, ‘Badly behaved students deserve to be punished after all! After sending four people to die in a most gruesome fashion, we thought you would understand that Kyoko Kirigiri!’

‘Fine’, I snapped, ‘I won’t go trying to smash doors down again. I will find a way out of here though, no matter what. Tell your mistress this next time you see her’.

‘You are a cheeky one aren’t you, Kyoko?’ smirked the second figure, ‘But yes we will gladly tell her!’

‘Now get going’, growled the first figure, ‘Otherwise we may not be so forgiving next time!’

‘Whatever you say!’, I pulled out a cigarette and made my way back to the third floor where I began to smoke just outside the library. By the time my cigarette went out however I began to worry for Makoto since he had not turned up.

Just as I was about to get up, I saw him stumble out of the girls bathroom, clutching his head in pain.

We both walked back downstairs to the locker room before I asked him, ‘What on earth happened to you? Did you manage to get Alter Ego connected?’
'I did', he nodded, ‘something weird happened before that though’.

‘What?!’

‘When I first stepped in, at least from what I remember, I noticed many piles of what appeared to be documents of some description. They must have been important because the next thing I knew, this horrible masked figure appeared before it hit me on the head with something. When I regained consciousness all the documents had disappeared, like poof! Gone!’

‘Can you give me a description of the figure?’

‘I don’t remember much, it all happened so quickly! They were wearing a white lab coat beneath, weird combination I know!’

‘It is…’ I frowned in concentration, trying to remember when I had heard of such a thing previously, ‘I remember seeing a familiar figure on Akira’s jitterbug cam shortly before Yasuhiro’s murder’.

‘Me too’, Makoto shivered, ‘It was like some horrid clown or something…’

‘I will see if I can get Akira’s jitterbugs back into motion’, I told him, ‘then we shall hopefully be able to get some decent footage of your attacker if they are lurking around still. Right now though we should probably get something to eat, I haven’t eaten all day especially after…’

‘I know Kyoko. Still, a late-night snack always helps me when I’m feeling down, and I’m pretty sure Celestia wouldn’t want you to starve yourself either’.

I gave a feeble smile, ‘You’re right… thanks Makoto…’, and together we both made our way into the now empty dining room.
'I know Kyoko has got everything under control but still…’ I heard Aoi speak sadly as she got changed for bed, ‘I know to trust my gut and I have a feeling that something will come in and destroy the little hope we had. Ever since Chihiro died I have been especially on edge. Even when we try to accomplish something, like the party, something bad always ends up happening’.

‘I am also troubled’, I told her, ‘but I am hopeful that Kyoko will be successful. The least we can do is support her in her task. After all, there is always a dawn after the night, no matter how long it lasts’.

‘You are right Sakura’, Aoi snuggled up next to me, her head on my chest, ‘you are the reason that I am still able to carry on, I don’t know what I will do without you’.

I kissed her on the cheek and stroked her hair, ‘And you have kept me going Aoi. Ever since I saw the video in the second motive, I was filled with more fear than ever. My dojo is the foundation of the Oogami family and knowing that it was in Monokuma’s clutches almost broke me’.

‘I never got that impression of you Sakura’.

‘I must confess, I am not the best at expressing myself’, I laughed, but deep down, that guilt I felt was still ever present, ‘when you have been through such an intense lifestyle it hardens you. I am envious, however. Before Chihiro died, I hadn’t cried since I was thirteen. I missed that feeling of being able to release all the devils in your head within minutes’.

‘Seriously?’

‘My lifestyle is a rough one and not for the faint of heart. When I was a child, I was not sure if I could manage the psychological and physical intensity of it. My father was doubtful too. One day however, I spoke to my grandmother and her words helped shape me to what I am today’.

‘What did she tell you?’

‘She told me that the smallest nut could turn into a strong and beautiful tree, with enough love, care and effort. She died later that same year, but her words never left me’.

‘Did you see yourself as the ‘nut’ at the time?’

I nodded, ‘I decided I wanted to be as strong as my father. He thought this was crazy at first until I became a match for him. When I killed the man-eating bear, my name became well known in the area. My father meanwhile was so impressed with my skills that he entered me in various martial arts contests throughout the country and later across all of Asia’.

‘You specialise in pretty much every martial arts type, don’t you?’

‘Every martial arts skill has their fair share history and importance in their respective countries of origin. For me at least, karate will always hold a special place in my heart. It is what I and countless members of the Oogami household grew up with for hundreds of years, and what inspired me to explore the world of martial arts further’.

‘You should be more proud of yourself Sakura! I did some judo when I was younger, but by the time I reached High School I put most of my hobbies aside for my swimming’.
‘I didn’t stick around for the award ceremonies. In the Oogami household we believed that too much pride can invite demons into your home and can lead one down a path of darkness and toil’.

‘I hope the demons don’t come for me then’, Aoi giggled, ‘every time I won a major swimming championship my family would take me to Disneyland!’

‘For the honour of my family, I try to keep away from the public eye outside of my talent and… those costumes always kind of freaked me out a little…’

‘Come on Sakura, it’s loads of fun! I really don’t think those demons will come for you just because you spent a day with Mickey Mouse!’

I laughed, ‘I understand where you are coming from… I just don’t want the public getting out their pitchforks and torches upon seeing me. A group of teenage boys did just that one time when they thought I was a cryptid who had descended down from the mountains’.

‘They were probably just some guys dicking around’, Aoi tried to reassure me, ‘Besides most people at Disneyland are only focused on being the first on the rides… unless they are urban explorers in which they just want to explore the abandoned areas in the parks, to look ‘cool’ in front of their mates I guess’.

‘I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to try it out…’

‘Obviously we will need some time to recover from this whole thing’, Aoi’s eyes watered, ‘but when it feels right, perhaps we should both take a trip to Tokyo Disney together’.

‘I think you know why I love you Aoi’, I smiled before I kissed her tenderly on the lips.

‘Well I had better get some shuteye and I think you should too, I hope Kyoko is able to come up with something soon!’ she yawned before kissing me in return, ‘Anyway, good night Sakura’.

‘May the night bring you warmth and comfort’, I told her as she quickly drifted off. While she fell asleep however, I was only pretending to.

I waited for a while to make sure that Aoi was fully asleep before I carefully managed to roll her off of me. Feeling extremely guilty, I quickly proceeded to cover her with an extra blanket. If she did discover what I had done however, I hoped deep down that she would understand.

As quiet as a mouse, I crept out of Aoi’s room and slowly slid the door shut behind me. I then tip toed to my own room, in which I had tried to replicate my dojo back in the mountains. I reached into a wooden box, pulled on my gauntlets and headed back outside.

I made my way to the gymnasium. Upon reaching it I looked upwards, the ceiling looked almost non-existent above. It was as though an ever-present darkness was hovering over me as I called out his name.

‘Monokuma!’ Nothing. ‘Show yourself!’

‘What could you possibly want? I am trying to sleep here!’ The room lit up as the bright red aura from the beast’s evil eye glowed ominously.

‘Stop messing around!’

‘What’s the matter my dear Sakura?’, the bear’s dagger like teeth looked especially intimidating in the dark as he revealed them, ‘It must be pretty important if you wish to summon me at this time of
night!

‘I quit!’

‘Wha… wha… whaaat?!’ Monokuma stood on his hind legs, ‘Did I hear that correctly?’

‘You heard me! I cannot do it anymore’, I glared face to face with the creature, ‘I cannot allow myself to bring suffering and misery to my friends any longer. In order to appease for my sins, I am willing to sacrifice myself by taking a stand against you’.

‘You must have a death’s wish surely?!’ the bear’s grin turned into a snarl.

I raised my fists, ‘Oh I’m serious!’

The bear pounced in my direction before I rolled out of the way, ‘Wow! You have certainly improved since our last encounter’, he growled, lunging at me a second time..

‘Being trapped in this hell has made me more determined than ever’, I dodged his next attack before I charged at the beast and managed to land a punch to the jaw, causing black blood to drip from it.

‘Fine!’ Monokuma spat out a tooth before he swiped at me, just managing to catch my arm, ‘I promised the return of your beloved dojo, and yet you choose to defend some foolish mortals?!’

‘When I first came into Hope’s Peak, I was a mere hermit and never considered the true value of human company. Being around my classmates however taught me the meaning of friendship. It is something I had neglected for most of my life but now I consider it one of my most important life lessons during my brief time on earth’.

‘So, let me get this straight’, the bear circled around me, inky blood still oozing from his lips, ‘You are willing to sacrifice the honour of the Oogami family to defend the scum of society? Are the lives of murderers, traitors, drunkards, thieves and addicts more important to you than all the work that your family has put in over the centuries? Does this all mean nothing to you?’

‘You promised that you would return my dojo’, I tackled the bear and the claws raking my skin felt like nothing in the heat of the moment, ‘but my folly got the better of me and instead I have brought shame to my family. They would never allow me to sit back and watch this amount of suffering, and now I wish to do what I can in order to restore my honour’. I managed to get myself onto the bear’s back and I grappled his neck, causing him to snap up at me.

‘Hope’s Peak wanted to bring out the best in society by recruiting young prodigies but instead, the university and your ‘friends’ represent everything wrong with society’, With great effort the bear managed to shake me off and I skidded on the floor, but I remained on my feet.

Wiping blood from my face I laughed, ‘And where do you and your mistress stand Monokuma?’

‘You wish to stand up for the likes of Mondo, a man who cuddled up to the Yakuza and killed others to hide his own troubles? For Celestia who was willing to let everyone die so she could live out her fantasy? Even your beloved Aoi is not untainted, surely you know that!’

‘Yes, I am aware of that’, I gritted my teeth, ‘it was an accident. She was only a child when that incident occurred’, I eyed the bear angrily.

‘Love is blind as they say’, Monokuma sat down and began to lick his wounds, ‘Still, you are willing to choose crooks and villains over your family’s very foundation Sakura?’
‘Some of my classmates may have committed evil acts but even those with the most tainted souls generally admonish the idea of killing and torturing for mere pleasure. You are really not one to talk’.

‘I offered you the safe return of your precious dojo, but instead you decided to make things much harder for yourself…’ the bear sighed deeply before licking his chops, still flecked with his own blood.

‘Whatever you decide to do with me, I hope that you and your mistress get what you deserve in the end, even if I may not be present to witness it myself’.

‘Have it your way then!’ the bear grinned nastily, ‘But be warned, this act of betrayal cannot go unpunished somehow, and you will be sorry that you ever tried to defy me’, he laughed his horrible laugh before he vanished and I was left alone in the gymnasium, the darkness closing in around me.
I woke up the next morning. For a few milliseconds I hallucinated Celestia Ludenberg waking up beside me. When I realised I was alone, I choked back tears as I begrudgingly got ready for the day.

Upon exiting my room, I got out a cigarette and sat down at one of the long tables. Mondo and Kiyotaka were already present and Toko arrived soon after. To my surprise however, she did not sit in the corner, but on the opposite side of me.

‘Hi Toko’, my eyes widened, ‘it’s nice to see you somewhere other than the corner for a change!’

‘Well… you know…’ Toko blushed, ‘After Celestia died I thought you could do with some company, especially after I too lost my beloved. We can be like the broken hearts club or something’.

‘Like our own little support group?’

‘I suppose you could put it that way… We can both be losers together!’

‘I wouldn’t take it that far Toko’, I took a puff on my cigarette, ‘Everyone experiences death at some point, it’s just another part of life. I’d say we are more cursed than ‘losers’, having to watch them both die like that right before our eyes’.

Toko exhaled, ‘I admit, I wish to get Byakuya out of my head… but I can’t, I just can’t…’

‘What did you see in him anyway?’

‘Ah’, Toko stared dreamy eyed up at the ceiling, ‘When I was a weak, lonely, little girl he first appeared in my dreams, beckoning towards me. He was the only one to tell me I wasn’t useless and that I was worthy despite what my family told me. After all the hardships throughout my dismal childhood he seemed like my last hope for happiness, and what I wanted to aim for’.

‘Did the young man in your dreams look like Byakuya?’

‘When I first saw his face upon waking up here, I felt as though my dream was real and that it would come true at last, that all my torment would finally end’, she brushed away a tear, ‘All the handsome men in my novels were based on ‘the man’ to some degree’.

‘Really?’

Toko nodded, ‘But alas, seeing things in your head and experiencing them in reality, are different things entirely. I understand Celestia’s motive, the real world is cruel and sometimes you just want to escape it, no matter how unachievable that is’.

‘The real world is a bitch’, I replied, ‘but all you can do is try to navigate your way around it. You only live once after all and no matter all the suffering you go through, you have to make the most of it’.

‘Some things are too good to be true and I suppose you just have to accept that, huh?’

‘Hey everyone!’ Makoto entered the room, ‘How are you all?’

‘Okay I suppose’, I told him as he sat down near Toko and I.

‘Hey where are Aoi and Sakura?’ Makoto looked around in a puzzled manner, ‘They are usually
among the first to arrive, do you think something has happened to them?’

‘I hope not’, I started to worry until I saw Aoi appear about five minutes later.

‘Hello lassie’, Mondo greeted her from his table, ‘Where’s Sakura?’

‘Oh, she’s fine’, Aoi laughed feebly as she sat down, ‘She is just a little under the weather, she won’t be coming to breakfast’.

‘I see’, Kiyotaka bowed, ‘It’s a shame. We have an announcement to make. Mondo and I agreed to it last night. We couldn’t think of anything else to say. It’s likely that we will be dying here anyway so what do we have to lose?’

‘I don’t want to make it into a big deal’, Mondo brought up, ‘I just thought it would help me come to terms with myself. Even if I am destined for a life in prison, I will feel more at ease if I put it to rest…’

‘What do you have to tell us?’ Makoto asked.

‘If you guessed that Taka and I are a thing… then you are correct’.

‘You mean… you are a couple?’ Aoi tilted her head.

‘Yeah… it’s no big deal though…’

‘How long have you been together for then?’

‘A while’, Kiyotaka said, ‘It wasn’t just strategy meetings we were holding in the locker room…’

‘I knew it!’ Toko clapped her hands, ‘It’s about time you told us!’

‘I suspected something had changed between you both after your showdown in the Sauna’, I said.

‘I wish I told you earlier’, Mondo sighed, ‘Then maybe I would have saved myself further suffering…’

‘No Mondo’, Makoto shook his head, ‘You should come out when you feel it is safe and right for you to do so. Monokuma robbed you of that right but on the other hand you are very brave, especially after everything you have been through’.

‘I killed to keep my true self hidden’, Mondo explained, ‘that is something I cannot take back and there is nothing brave about it. But last night I remembered how Chihiro wanted to change and feel more confident with herself. I don’t know if I will be able to ever redeem myself for my crimes, but I hope that coming to terms with my true self will help me find some solace. I am sure she would have appreciated that’.

‘You’d think our talents would make us both incompatible, but our talents don’t define us! There are more important things in the world after all!’ Kiyotaka put an arm around Mondo’s shoulders.

‘It’s true then, opposites do attract!’, Aoi cried.

While we were all happy for Mondo and Kiyotaka, I was determined to carry on my investigation of the university and ultimately finding the identity of our captor, the mastermind behind all of this. Upon leaving I whispered into Makoto’s ear. Just as I passed through door however, Aoi grabbed my arm.
‘Kyoko, can I talk to you about something?’

‘Why, what is it?’

She led me towards the locker room. After shutting it, her eyes began to water, ‘Kyoko…’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘I’m just worried about Sakura that’s all. She isn’t simply under the weather…’

‘Did something happen to her?’

‘Kyoko…’ she gulped, ‘when I woke up to see her this morning… she did her best to hide it… I only saw them for a few seconds but…’ she swallowed again, ‘there were cuts…’

‘Is she self-harming? If she is, we will need to get her help as soon as possible’.

‘That’s very considerate of you Kyoko but I don’t think it’s self-harm. Sakura is a very honest woman and I think she would have told me if she had such a history’, she sighed, ‘What’s more, from what I saw of them, they didn’t look like self-inflicted wounds…’

‘What do you think caused them then?’

‘It’s hard to describe them exactly but they seemed to come from an animal, claws to be precise’.

‘I see… I don’t think any animal in the menagerie could inflict wounds on that kind of scale, they were all too small. Are you sure it wasn’t a shark bite?’

‘No, it most definitely wasn’t a shark bite’, she glared at me, ‘just because Sakura is brave, that doesn’t mean she seeks to deliberately put herself in unnecessary danger. And what reason would she have for wanting to go back in with that thing?’

‘That’s not what I was assuming, I just wanted to rule out the possibilities that’s all’.

‘You really need to get out of this Sherlock mindset sometimes Kyoko. This isn’t a murder case. This is my girlfriend we are talking about, and I am worried sick about her’, she broke down in tears.

‘I’m sorry Aoi... I was being careless, I…’

‘It’s alright’, she sniffed, ‘I’m confused though, I can’t think of anything in the building could have attacked her in that manner… unless…’

‘Do you reckon Monokuma could have attacked her?’

‘Or she could have had a fight with him’, Aoi told me, ‘Sakura does like to take things head on, or perhaps she just wants to take on our captor herself’.

‘Maybe. She has the mindset of a Samurai and is constantly bound by duty’.

‘I’m scared though, I just don’t want her getting hurt. I know she is one of the strongest women in the world, but that bear is capable of much more than just bodily harm. You saw what he did to Mondo, and I bet he wouldn’t hesitate to torture Sakura too if he got the opportunity. Seeing as she has a very tough mindset, I imagine Monokuma would hit harder in order to ’break’ her.

‘If you cannot get a word out of her, I think we should just wait and see what happens for the time being. If anything happens to her however, I will make sure to step in’.
‘Thank you, Kyoko’, Aoi hugged me, ‘I knew I could count on you!’

‘Don’t mention it’, my face turned pink as she released me, ‘look after her’.

‘I will!’, Aoi saluted before she left the room.

I borrowed a laptop from the IT room and set it up in the locker room. While it was still reasonably new, it was obvious that it had been used a lot previously and was nowhere near as high tech or speedy as Chihiro’s invention still working away upstairs.

‘Hey Kyoko’, Makoto waved in my direction.

‘Did you check Alter Ego this morning?’

‘I did but she hasn’t come up with any results yet’.

‘I see… you didn’t run into clownface again by any chance?’

‘Thankfully no. I kept looking over my shoulder the whole time though’.

‘Look what I found’, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a robotic jitterbug, ‘I sent this girl out to capture some footage last night and the information she has picked up is being transferred right now. Hopefully something will pop up that will help me pinpoint the mastermind’s location at least. Of course, I am doubtful that anything significant will appear, but here’s hoping’.

‘Do you think the Joker wannabe could be the mastermind?’

‘Very likely’, I nodded, ‘especially as they were so quick to remove those documents you mentioned. They must have given us clues about our situation and whatever attacked you didn’t want us knowing the answer. It may be starting to come together, although we do have a long way to go’.

‘Remember the frame Akira showed us? They must have come out from that trapdoor. You know? The one next to the incinerator’.

‘That’s probably just one of the places where they have access to the main building’, I paced up and down in thought, ‘Our captor could have a secret passageway of their own’.

‘Like the Togami one’, Makoto jumped in the air, ‘I mean if they can create a passage to Hell, then creating one within the school’s interior is not out of their league’.

‘That’s true. It may also explain why Monokuma’s minions are able to appear so quickly after we do something which they don’t like’, I shuddered, ‘I still can’t believe they can talk…’

‘They can talk?!’

‘Yes, I encountered two of them during my distraction’.

‘Did they sound demonic and terrifying?’

‘Not particularly’, I shrugged, ‘They sounded human at least’.

‘Well that’s one less thing to be concerned about! Still though… they were unusually strong’.

‘I don’t think we are anywhere near catching the mastermind, but we are on their tail and with the help of Alter Ego we have come the furthest we have ever gotten in solving this mystery. I just hope
we can uncover them before anyone else is killed'.

‘Me too’, Makoto twiddled his thumbs anxiously, ‘Well, good luck in your endeavour Kyoko!’

‘Thanks Makoto’, I nodded, leaving the laptop in one of the lockers as the film processed.

I decided to trudge back upstairs to the cinema, I needed some time out and I thought a movie would be ideal. Upon entering however, it appeared that the screening room was already occupied as I heard gunshots and orchestral music playing.

I was about to push open the doors which had a large, rather tacky golden star painted over it, when I noticed some peculiar ornaments had been placed upon the shelves. They appeared to be figurine versions of that horrible chibi Monokuma, each holding a different chess piece and placed in glass bottles.

Trying to brush off the strange decorations I entered the room to see what looked like an old Yakuza film playing. In the middle of the theatre sat Mondo and Kiyotaka.

‘Do the Yakuza really have full body tattoos like that?’ I heard Kiyotaka question.

‘It’s mostly the older members, but some younger members are willing to go through the procedure if they have the balls to handle it’, Mondo grinned, ‘I still remember the pain just from receiving my gang tattoo. The Kuzuryuus are one of the few Yakuza families in which the younger generation are still willing to go through the intense procedure’.

‘Have you actually seen them?’

‘Only very occasionally. They don’t show them off to just anyone…’

‘Oh, hello there Kyoko!’ Kiyotaka noticed me as I sat down a row behind them.

‘You into gangster films lass?’

‘They are fun romps I suppose’, I shrugged as the film cut to a gunfight taking place in a cocktail bar.

‘The real Yakuza lifestyle is not nearly as glamorous as the film industry makes it out to be’, Mondo stretched, ‘still, there is nothing wrong with a little wish fulfillment I suppose. In a sense I wish it was like the movies, life would be much more straightforward that way’.

‘I think we all feel that way sometimes. I mean... most mystery stories for instance get solved in one episode. In reality, a lot of cases take years to solve or just end up becoming cold’.

‘Indeed, I hope we can figure out our situation before we all drop dead at least’.

‘Me too…’

‘Um… hello?’ I looked up to see Toko.

‘Hey, would you like to join us?’

‘Sure… why the Hell not?’ she shakily sat next to me.

‘You looking for inspiration for your books lass?’ Mondo asked her.

‘I suppose you can say that…’
‘Maybe you could try a gangster theme for your next book Toko’, I suggested.

‘Perhaps…’ Toko’s lips curled into a smile, ‘A young recruit in the police force falls in love with a notorious yet super-hot gangster! Which reminds me… Hey Taka! Have you and Mondo tried acting out such a scenario if you know what I mean?’

Kiyotaka’s eyes became wide, he turned towards the wall as his face turned pink.

‘We are working towards it…’ Mondo grunted, he too blushing.

‘But it will be between us’, Kiyotaka asserted.

‘I see…’ Toko giggled.

‘Only between us’, Mondo raised an eyebrow.

‘Oh that’s fine too I guess’, Toko looked a little disappointed, ‘whatever makes you feel comfortable I suppose’.

As I watched the intense action unfold on screen, I felt something rather soft upon my hand. Instinctively, I looked down. I only saw Toko, her head turned away and murmuring to herself.

‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry…’

‘Toko, it’s okay’, I whispered to her.

Still trembling and very red in the face, she reached out her hand and this time I clasped it, my pulse quickening as I did so. I kept it there until the film ended.

When the film was over, I made a beeline towards the locker room. I checked the laptop to see that it had just finished downloading the data. Even though I wasn’t expecting anything worthwhile to pop up, I was still somewhat excited as I began to fast forward the footage.

My hope began to drift away until I spotted something peculiar on the screen. I rewinded before I spotted what seemed to be Monokuma and Sakura circling each other in the gymnasium. Eyes fixated upon one another, I watched as the two of them lunged in the other’s direction, causing numerous injuries and causing blood, black and red, to splatter upon the floor.

Sakura’s wounds were not overly severe and the footage confirmed my suspicion that she was taking matters into her own hands. Nevertheless I feared for her and knew I had to tell Aoi.

I dashed out of the room and ran towards Aoi’s room. Just as I was about to ring the doorbell however, I heard the funeral bells first.

‘Shit!’ I stamped my foot on the ground as Aoi, with Sakura by her side stepped out. Indeed, the latter was wearing a long-sleeved top, even though she was previously indifferent or even proud showing off her scars.

‘Hey Kyoko’, Aoi raised an eyebrow, ‘do you have something to tell me?’

‘It will probably be best to tell you after murder bear has given us his next motive’, I looked up, ‘Are you alright Sakura? You look… tired’.

‘Don’t worry about it my dear’, Sakura spoke gently, ‘it is all part of being a warrior’.

‘I see…’
'Is something wrong?'

‘No, not particularly’, I lied as we made our way to the gymnasium.

Indeed, as we all gathered around, I was shocked to see how little there were of us left compared to the day when we all first met each other.

Monokuma appeared once again, looking more gleeful than ever as he sniffed the air around him.

‘Well, it seems we have all done a good job at thinning out this herd’, the bear laughed before his evil eye flashed, ‘I am still not satisfied however, my thirst for despair has still not been quenched’.

‘What could you possibly have planned for us Monokuma?’ I cried out, ‘Were all those previous deaths not enough for you?’

Monokuma just snickered and paced up and down, ‘Don’t worry little cubs I’m going to make things nice and simple for you this round! You can trust me!’

‘What do have planned this time? Go on and tell us, we haven’t got all day!’

‘Whatever you decide to throw at us, we will not resort to killing our friends!’ Makoto spoke.

‘You may want to when I give you the next motive. As I explained before, your classmates are not quite as they seem. For that reason, I am going to send you all on a witch hunt! It's kind of of like an Easter egg hunt but a lot more messy!’

‘A witch hunt? What are you even going on about?’ Toko hissed.

‘As it turns out, one of you is a filthy traitor who chose to serve me to fulfil their own needs. If there is one thing society hates more than murderers, it is those who commit the act of treason’.

‘No, that’s bullshit!’ Mondo hissed.

‘The seven of us have been loyal to each other right to the very end. They would never resort to serving a lowlife like you!’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘Why are you announcing who your spy is Monokuma?’ I asked, ‘Even if this is actually the truth. Isn’t that a thing you would want to keep secret?’

‘Oh, my spy was very helpful indeed!’, but then the bear’s lips turned into a snarl, ‘At least until they decided to stab me in the back! And for that they must be punished!’

‘Who is this spy then?’

‘Why little cubs, it’s Sakura Oogami of course!’
For a few seconds we were all stunned into silence, not sure how to react at first. Inevitably however most of the students turned towards Sakura in the moment looking, either angry or fearful.

‘No, it can’t be!’ I heard Makoto cry out.

‘How could you do this?!’ Kiyotaka snapped, it was unusual and somewhat terrifying seeing him this furious.

‘You really are a witch, aren’t you?’ Toko hissed.

Despite the terrible news, Aoi still stood by Sakura’s side, putting herself between her and the others. She looked ready to defend her girlfriend to the death.

‘No, it’s all a lie!’ Aoi’s eyes filled with angry tears, ‘It has to be!’

‘No, it’s the truth alright!’ Monokuma beamed, ‘Sakura may have defected from my service, but the damage of her treachery has already been done’.

‘Master could still be alive if it wasn’t for you!’ Toko glared at Sakura.

‘You put us all through so much unnecessary suffering, especially Mondo’, Kiyotaka approached her, ‘Don’t you have any shame?’

‘Taka, stop!’, Mondo tried to tell him but to no avail. I was expecting him to have the most extreme reaction to the news. Even though I could tell he was internally furious however, I was surprised to see that the gang leader managed to contain it.

‘Can you live with yourself knowing that you sat back and watched, while the rest of us went through so much pain and misery?’ Kiyotaka spoke out.

‘No, Sakura would never allow anyone to get hurt like that!’ Aoi protested before turning to face Monokuma, ‘You backed her into a corner, didn’t you? She would never do such a thing for her own personal gain!’

‘Oh Aoi, why would I do something so heartless? Regardless of the situation though, she still betrayed you’, he smirked in Sakura’s direction who in return gave him a most intimidating glance, ‘She’s a prodigy in her field, what makes you think she wouldn’t want to uphold that?’

I was amazed at how calm Sakura was in the moment. I thought that she would leap out to attack the bear as she has done in the video footage. Instead, she resembled an old and tired warrior.

‘She’s not a traitor, not willingly’, Aoi desperately tried to explain, ‘Pride is the ultimate sin in the Oogami household, isn’t that right Sakura?’; Sakura still said nothing however. She just stared up at the bear, as though they were the only two in the room.

‘Well let’s start this thing, shall we’; Monokuma stood on his hind legs, ‘The hunt is up!’ and with those words he vanished, leaving just us to comprehend the horrible situation.

Kiyotaka and Toko were circling Sakura now as Aoi continued to stand her ground.

‘Get away from her!’ Aoi told them, as the ultimate martial artist still stood unflinching.
'You will pay for this!' Toko snarled, ‘And I will make sure that you will, hag!'

‘Leave her alone I’m warning you!’

‘So, you choose to defend a traitor Aoi?’ Kiyotaka looked livid, ‘And you thought I was making the wrong choice of friends?’

‘How could the Ultimate Moral Compass treat someone like this?’

‘She was passing information to the bear. I am only doing my duty here!’

‘All witches must burn in one way or another’, Toko shrieked, ‘For our sake!’

‘That’s enough!’ I yelled, ‘We won’t get anywhere if we carry on like this’.

‘I thought you were one to believe in justice Kyoko’, Toko rounded on me, ‘yet you are willing to let a traitor walk free like this?’

‘It’s not as simple as that!’ I tried to tell her, ‘I can explain’.

‘Thanks to her treason, we may never get out of here’, she wept shakily.

‘Our efforts were for all for nothing!’, Kiyotaka fumed.

‘Sakura wanted to help us’, Aoi’s eyes streamed, ‘she always did!’

‘I do believe that Sakura and the mastermind had a connection’, I looked up at her, ‘however there is a reason to everything, as cowardly as treason is’.

‘Kyoko is right’, Mondo growled, ‘there may be an explanation for this fucked up situation’.

‘Why are you not angrier, dog?’ Toko asked him, ‘Monokuma tortured you did he not?’

‘Oh, I’m angry alright, in fact I’m pissed, but I don’t want to get involved purely because it would be hypocritical of me to do so. I mean, I sold out my brother’s gang to the fucking Yakuza for Christ’s sake! Not that I’m condoning it, but don’t you consider that Sakura could have been desperate as I was?’

‘She was helping the one who outed you Mondo’, Kiyotaka told him, ‘Don’t forget that!’

‘She helped to save my life Taka. Even if she was working for the mastermind, I am still indebted to her as I am to you. It’s a promise I intend to keep’.

‘Traitor or not, she is still one of us, right?’ Makoto asked nervously, ‘Besides, didn’t Monokuma say that she defected? We still don’t know the circumstances behind all of this’.

‘Come on Taka’, Mondo pulled gently at his arm.

Kiyotaka gave Sakura one last seething glare as the two of them left the room.

‘Once a traitor, always a traitor’, Toko hissed as she turned on her heel and walked briskly away too.

‘Does it matter?’, Sakura clenched her fists, ‘I was selfish, cowardly, a monster…’

‘No Sakura’, Aoi tugged on her clothes, ‘we can figure this out!’
‘Yes’, Makoto pleaded, ‘If you tell us what was going on, we can help you’.

‘It doesn’t matter anymore’, Sakura turned her back to us, ‘I let you down and I let my family down. I understand if you are angry about my actions’.

I let out a deep sigh, ‘I understand your reasons must have been very important to you personally. Nevertheless, you still betrayed us and have more than likely hindered our progress’.

‘I know. You were working so hard to grant us our freedom Kyoko, and I ruined that for the sake of my own selfish needs’, at that moment Sakura walked solemnly out of the room.

‘Sakura!’ Aoi cried out, as she did so she turned to face me, ‘Now look what you’ve done!’ she then desperately trailed behind Sakura as she left.

‘Why is this happening?’ said Makoto, ‘She must have done this out of desperation surely?’

‘Indeed’, I frowned, ‘I have a feeling it was something to do with the second motive’.

‘Was that the motive in which all our friends and families were being held hostage?’

‘Correct’, I nodded, ‘Monokuma must been holding something valuable to her ransom. She is the strongest among us so it makes sense the bear would consider her a major threat’.

‘Didn’t Monokuma defeat her on our first day though?’

‘That’s true, but I think Sakura must have caught onto the bear’s fighting techniques. On the jitterbug cam I saw them fighting each other right where we are standing, and they seemed evenly matched’.

‘Seriously?’

‘Yep. She defected alright, so it makes me suspect that she was either working as a double agent or she just couldn’t take it anymore. I suspect the latter. Sakura seems to be a kind woman at heart. Hell, she was willing to dive into a shark tank with me, I have to give her credit for that at least’.

‘Do you think Monokuma could have been psychologically torturing her, like he did with Mondo?’

‘I don’t think so, if she was affected that badly I don’t think she would be able to fight him head on effectively as she did. Still... I was closer than ever to finding our ticket out of here, but thanks to Sakura’s treachery, that hope is all but dashed. Who knows what she could have told him?’

‘Try not to be too mad Kyoko’, Makoto told me, ‘She clearly feels terrible about the whole thing’.

I said nothing as we both travelled back to our respective rooms. I waved Makoto off before I saw Aoi pass me by looking more distraught than ever.

‘Where’s Sakura?’ I asked her.

‘In her room’, she frowned, ‘You need to stop acting as though Sakura is to blame for all of our problems. Isn’t friendship more important than your damn mystery solving?’

‘That’s not what I’m trying to say’, I tried to explain, ‘We just have to consider all the possibilities. Don’t you want to be free from this shithole?’

‘Will it be worth leaving here if we are all divided like this? Because of you, Taka and Toko, I cannot get her to speak to me now’.
‘Aoi, I don’t think she’s a monster okay? I don’t want to be a part of this witch hunt, I only want to get to the bottom of this, that’s all. To do that you have to consider all possibilities’.

‘You and your devil’s advocacy!’ Aoi snapped, ‘Do you not know anything outside of your little mystery solving games? Is that seriously more important to you than friends?’

‘Aoi please…’ but she stormed off before I could get another word out of her.

As I lay on my bed staring up at the ceiling, I pondered why Sakura would do something so terrible despite all we had been through. Yes, she had her reasons of course, but at the same time, that feeling of being stabbed in the back by a close friend cut deep. Did she tell Monokuma’s mistress about Alter Ego? It seemed possible, she was in charge of the key to her hiding place after all.

I heard my doorbell ring just before 6pm. I opened the it to see Makoto who was standing there looking panicked and frantic.

‘What the hell is going on this time Makoto?’ I asked him.

‘There’s a fight going on in the dining room’, he pointed, ‘I think it’s about Sakura’.

‘Let’s go’, we both ran to see Aoi and Kiyotaka confronting each other.

‘That traitor should be locked away’, Kiyotaka shouted, ‘to restore honour to the Ishimaru family, I wish to do what is right and protect you all whatever the cost!’

‘Where is the honour in shunning someone for making a mistake?’ Aoi protested.

‘For fuck’s sake you two, just knock it off already!’, Mondo yelled. Since he was still recovering from his wounds, he could not do much but stand to the side.

‘Oh, it was much more than just a simple mistake’, Kiyotaka asserted, ‘she has foiled our escape plans. Because of her, we will most likely all be dying here!’

‘You aren’t much better. How will your family react when they find their little angel has been cosying up to a killer? Answer me that one!’

‘Oi! Keep me out of this will ya?!’ Mondo snapped.

‘Stop!’ I put my foot down, ‘Please, I can’t take it anymore! How are we supposed to resolve anything if we are all at each other’s throats?’

‘She’s right’, Makoto agreed, ‘I don’t want anyone else to die for something like this. It’s what the beast wants. Sakura wouldn’t want us to go through another one of those horrible class trials, and I am sure your family would not want this either Taka’.

‘Let’s get the fuck out of here’, Mondo told him, ‘It’s not worth it’.

‘You are right Mondo’, Kiyotaka sighed, although rage was still present in his eyes, ‘it really isn’t’.

‘Aoi are you alright?’ I asked her, ‘Sorry about last night by the way… I’m worried about Sakura too’.

‘It’s okay’, Aoi brushed the tears from her eyes, ‘I’m sorry too, I overreacted. I was just so shocked and scared’, she began to cry into my chest, ‘I can’t convince Sakura to come out of her room, no matter how hard I try. You don’t think she’s…? I mean, when Mondo did what he did we could hear it. It’s a sound you cannot miss…’.
‘No, I don’t think so. Still, I hope she will come out, then maybe she can tell us what’s going on’.

‘Me too’, Aoi sighed, as she sat down on one of the tables.

I went to the kitchen, joining Makoto to get some breakfast or at least what we could stomach. Just as I finished preparing some toast however I could hear a shriek coming from the dining room.

The two of us ran out to see Aoi and Toko wrestling each other on the floor, Aoi aiming punches while Toko was scratching at all the places she could reach. Quickly Makoto and I with difficulty managed to break the two girls apart.

‘That was for master you bitch!’ Toko cried out.

‘Let go of me! Sakura was not responsible for his death, not in the slightest!’

‘How can you continue to kiss her ass after everything she did?’

‘I’m not. I love her, and I am sick of people like you demonising her like this’.

‘Fine! Have it your way then! You stick with your traitor girlfriend!’ she ran out of the room before Makoto and I went to comfort her a second time.

‘It’s okay’, Aoi got up shakily, ‘I think I just need some time alone’.

‘I think that’s a good idea’, I told her.

‘Look after yourself’, Makoto said, ‘don’t listen to what the others say’.

‘Thanks guys’, Aoi bowed before she left the room with her head down, ‘I just want Sakura to be okay, that’s all’.

When I ate, my only company was Makoto. We said little as we ate what we could handle.

‘I’m going to head up to bed I think’, Makoto wiped the sweat off his brow, ‘I cannot stand all of this fighting. I just hope going to sleep will clear our heads a bit’.

‘Me too’, I put a hand on his shoulder before whispering in his ear, ‘and you know who may have come up with something’.

‘I hope so’, he whispered back before we both walked to bed, hoping that nothing would go horribly wrong during the night. But to our dismay, that hope would be dashed the next morning.

When I woke up, I was expecting to hear arguing but instead the atmosphere was unusually quiet as I got ready for the day ahead. I stepped out smoking my cigarette and sat down at one of the tables to have a swig of coffee. Just as I finished, I noticed Makoto enter the room, looking wearier and sadder than usual but forcing a smile.

‘Hey Makoto, what is it?’

‘You have gotta see this!’

‘See what?’ I asked before Makoto pointed at the camera in the corner.

‘Ah’, I nodded before I followed him upstairs to the third floor.

Makoto stood outside the girls’ bathroom as I went in. With some difficulty I squeezed myself
through the passage into the secret room. Looking around I could see that it was built like a military compound. There were many shelves, all barren, as though they had been completely swept clean. Thankfully Alter Ego was still there. As I looked down at the screen however, I only noticed two words.

‘Mukuro Ikusaba’.

My inner detective cried out ‘eureka!’ at my new discovery. Was this the person we were looking for all this time?

I stepped out feeling unusually giddy but a few seconds after stepping out and meeting Makoto outside the door, that happiness was quickly snuffed out as I saw Aoi run over to us, closely pursued by the others. I noticed that she greatly resembled Sayaka on the night of the second motive.

‘Aoi what’s going on?’ I asked her.

‘It’s Sakura’, she whimpered, ‘she’s upstairs in the cinema lobby. Just sitting there, still as a statue. I tried banging on the door, but she didn’t respond. The door was locked too. Please… I’m really worried that something truly awful has happened to her’.

‘Lead the way’, I nodded curtly as we all ran upstairs towards the cinema room. Indeed, looking through the circular widow I could see Sakura. She was sitting slightly lop sided in a chair, deathly still but at the same time, her expression carried a certain calmness and peacefulness about it. ‘Oh my God’, I murmured, ‘do you really think it is locked?’

'I don’t give a shit if we are ‘breaking the rules’, I want to see if the poor lass is okay’, Mondo growled as Kiyotaka who stood behind him, carried an immense look of guilt upon his face.

‘I think I should go in first, because if she’s…’ I couldn’t form words, ‘then we mustn’t risk destroying any potential evidence if she is to receive justice’.

‘Come on, you have to help us get inside. No matter what’, Aoi pleaded.

‘Stand back!’, I looked around at the others who all nodded. I rolled back my sleeves and threw my whole weight at the door causing it to slide open.

As I got up, I noticed that the door had not been locked but barricaded. I then carefully made my way to the still form of Sakura. Looking closer I could make out a patches of blood upon her scalp, as well as some trickling down from her lips. My hope ebbing away, I tried calling her name and prodding her to no response.

My heart racing and dread filling my body like a rising sea I bent over to check if there was a pulse. The moment I tried to feel it, the dreaded funeral bells sounded.

She was dead.
‘Sakura!’ I heard Aoi cry as she tried in vain to shake her awake, ‘No…’ her eyes began to fill with tears, ‘Why did it have to be you? Why couldn’t it have been me?’

‘Aoi…’ Makoto tried to comfort her, but he could not pry her off Sakura’s body.

‘Oh my God…’ Kiyotaka got on his knees and even Toko couldn’t believe what she was seeing.

‘Poor lassie’, Mondo bowed his head, ‘at least she went peacefully from what I can tell’.

‘Aoi, we will find out who did this. Trust me’, I put a hand on her shoulder. Reluctantly she stepped back from Sakura’s lifeless form but still wept profusely.

‘Well it seems the witch has been caught at last!’ Monokuma announced with glee, ‘I do have a bounty ready for her captor, if they get past the class trial that is! As for the rest of you, you had better get out the Monokuma file if you don’t want to get burned at the stake yourself!’

We got out our student handbooks and selected the Monokuma file app. As I opened it, I had never expected Sakura’s face to be staring back at me on the screen. Out of all of us, we had expected that she would survive given her physical and internal strength. Knowing that she was now among the dead filled us with more dread than ever.

‘You had better get a move on!’ the bear chuckled, ‘Otherwise you will suffer the same fate as those poor fellows in Salem. Sayonara!’ After the beast disappeared I turned to face Aoi.

‘Aoi… would you like to stand guard? I think Sakura would have appreciated it’.

‘Okay’, she clenched her fists, ‘but I don’t want Taka and Toko in the same room’.

‘I…’ Taka gulped, ‘I didn’t consider that this would happen, not to her…’

‘Just go’, Aoi spoke firmly, ‘I cannot look at you or Toko right now, not after how you treated her’.

‘I’m… sorry, I was just doing my duty. I didn’t think it would end up like this…’

‘Go!’ Aoi snapped.

‘Let’s go Taka, we can investigate elsewhere’, Mondo said, trying to ease the tension. Kiyotaka nodded and followed him out of the lobby.

‘Not that I wish to stick around here anyway’, Toko turned her nose upwards and strode out after them.

‘Well as with our previous investigations, we should start by examining the body’, I explained, ‘Two things are obvious. It appears that the victim suffered blunt force trauma to the head. The weapon responsible seems to be made from glass’.

‘What makes you think that?’ asked Aoi.

‘If you look closely, you can see tiny little shards of glass in the victim’s hair’, I sighed, ‘That’s only scraping the surface I’m afraid, there is blood trickling down from her lips implying that she vomited up blood at some point, either due to her trauma or… other reasons’.
‘I was with her when blood was pouring down from her head, but I don’t remember her coughing up blood or the like when I saw her. She just asked me to make her a protein shake. When I returned to the lobby to deliver it she was…’ Aoi gulped before burying her face in her hands again.

‘Over here!’ Makoto yelled, I stepped over to where he was pointing to see a pool of blood near the magazine rack. All around me there were shards of glass, some of which were flecked with red.

‘It appears that she vomited blood here. If she was poisoned, she had just enough time to reach the chair. I imagine whatever it was took effect quickly’.

‘Where did all the glass come from though?’

‘The Monokuma bottles. Can you see? Two of them are clearly missing. When I passed by them by yesterday all the major chess pieces were present but now the knight and queen are missing’.

‘Do you think the bottle containing those particular pieces could have been the weapons?’

‘Positive, although I’m not sure if they were enough to kill her. She could have vomited blood after the first strike and the second strike could have been the fatal blow, but I even find that debatable. I examined her head wounds and even though they certainly would have caused some degree of trauma, I don’t think they were deep enough to be fatal’.

‘We can’t take it off the cards though surely?’ cried Aoi.

‘Certainly not’, I reassured her, ‘at least for the time being’.

I stepped behind the booth to check if there was anything suspicious. I didn’t see anything strange even though it seemed like a good hiding place. Something about the large movie poster behind me however, advertising an old Samurai epic seemed to ring a bell in my mind.

That was not the most interesting thing however, I opened up the large cupboard behind the counter to see clear footprints. They looked relatively small and delicate but I wondered why somebody would need to go in here in the first place, for cover perhaps?

‘I found something else’, Makoto beckoned me forwards, indicating what seemed to be an empty protein shake flask on the floor, ‘what is that doing here?’

‘Oh that’, Aoi stepped forward, ‘Sakura must have had that with her when she died, I rarely saw her without one after all’.

My eyes scanned the room before I spotted a bowl of sweets in a spotted wrapping paper, ‘Do you think Sakura tried to conduct a meeting in here?’

‘I do remember her talking about it. I suggested she handed out sweets to everyone she invited to try to ease the tension a bit, so I gave her these. It seems that didn’t work either though…’

‘Thanks for telling me Aoi’, I nodded, ‘your account will be critical for this case’.

‘Where should we investigate next then?’ questioned Makoto tagging along beside me.

‘I think we should explore the chemistry lab. It was a place Sakura visited frequently wasn’t it?’

As we made our way over, we came across Toko.

‘Have you got anything to contribute to this case?’ I asked her, ‘Don’t worry, you can take your time’.
‘Not particularly’, Toko shrugged, ‘I know Sakura wanted to conduct a meeting last night, but I didn’t attend. After the truth was revealed about her, I couldn’t bear to look her in the face’.

‘Toko!’ Makoto protested, ‘She didn’t have any malicious intent, she didn’t want it to be this way’.

‘You are completely oblivious to what people are capable of Makoto’, Toko snapped, ‘Humanity isn’t an ideal world where everyone goes on picnics together you know. It is much crueller than that…’

‘I’m almost certain that Sakura would have been on our side if she had the choice and in her heart, I know she was. She clearly loved Aoi too’.

‘As much as I agree with you Makoto, we don’t have time for arguments here’, I asserted, ‘We need to focus on uncovering Sakura’s killer right now’.

‘You are right Kyoko, I’m sorry…’

I pushed open the door to see Mondo and Kiyotaka standing to the side of some yellow powder which had been spilled onto the floor.

‘What’s this? Sulfur or something?’ Mondo scratched his head.

‘I don’t think so’, I bent down to investigate the strange mixture, ‘it’s just protein powder, I think. I’m more curious about these’, I pointed at the footprints in the powder.

‘That’s what I was thinking! Those prints dwarf even my shoe size, believe me I tested it’

‘Me too!’ Kiyotaka barked, ‘Somebody must have been searching through here and accidently spilt this yellow substance all over the floor’.

‘Something else bugs me too’, Mondo frowned, ‘the poisonous mixtures and the protein powders are in an awfully close proximity to each other, aren’t they?’

‘Either Monokuma arranged them that way or Hope’s Peak truly was terrible when it came to health and safety standards. I want to believe it’s the former but considering that the university has allowed criminals into the place since it’s opening, I’m suspecting the latter’, I shook my head.

‘They have a fucking shark here, what do you expect?!’

‘I guess… Don’t get me wrong, poisonous substances like belladonna are used in medicine, albeit in tiny doses, but still… Hope’s Peak was pretty reckless placing it merely a shelf away from protein solutions’.

‘I spotted something else’, Kiyotaka told me, ‘somebody has been into the storage cupboard’.

‘What could be so important in there? Most of the potentially deadly shit is in the cabinets isn’t it?’

‘There is nothing too important, mostly empty bottles and flasks. Still though, why was someone snooping around here in the first place?’

‘I dunno, looking for some hidden crack maybe?’, Mondo snickered as Kiyotaka raised an eyebrow.

‘Well, you never quite know with this place, do you?’ I shrugged, ‘I suspect the snooper had some kind of motive, I just cannot figure it out yet…’

‘I think we have done all the investigation we need to do here’, Kiyotaka shrugged. As him and
Mondo walked out however I heard Makoto cry out.

‘Hey, I think you dropped something!’

‘Oh! My bad!’ Kiyotaka took the sweet wrapper from Makoto’s hand.

‘What were you saying about not littering?’ Mondo smirked.

‘Hey! We all make mistakes you know Mondo!’ Kiyotaka’s face went red as we left the room and the sound of the funeral bells echoed throughout the building.

As we descended to the elevator I thought of the term ‘strength in numbers’. When there were fifteen of us, a part of myself wanted to believe that we were unstoppable, even in face of an unearthly foe. Now only six of us stood and our most powerful friend was gone. We felt like a bunch of sitting ducks, feeling more vulnerable and hopeless than ever.

‘Who could have killed someone so powerful as Sakura, even with all the hostilities going on?’ Mondo questioned, ‘None of it makes any sense!’

‘I hope that everything will be pieced together at the next trial’, I said.

‘It had better be’, Aoi spoke with angry tears in her eyes, ‘Sakura didn’t deserve this! Not at all!’

‘She could have just refused to serve the damn bear you know?’ Toko frowned.

‘Shut up!’ Aoi hissed, ‘You have no idea about the situation she was in’.

‘C’mon ladies’, Mondo sighed, ‘We won’t get through this thing if we all keep bickering’.

‘I wish I could have done more in my position as leader and as the Ultimate Moral Compass’, Kiyotaka told us when the elevator doors opened.

‘Have you got something you wish to explain Taka?’ Aoi eyed him suspiciously as we all stepped into the device which had far more floor space than it did previously.

Indeed, when the six of us were all gathered inside, it seemed much more barren. It was like our other classmates had been wiped off the face of the earth as we descended into the demon realm.

‘I will bring you justice Sakura’, Aoi cried as we felt the breeze wash over us, ‘I will make sure of it!’

‘Don’t worry Aoi’, Makoto tried to reassure her, ‘we have more evidence on our side than ever before. If we can get through four class trials, then we can get through this one too’.

‘I hope so’, Aoi bowed her head, ‘I really do’.

The lift grinded to a halt and clattered open to reveal the elaborate courtroom. It was the first time we realised we were truly outnumbered as Monokuma’s minions stood around us. We felt like baby zebras lost in the desert being surrounded by ravenous hyenas.

‘Well little cubs hurry along!’ Monokuma emerged, ‘A witch hunt isn’t complete without a trial is it?’

‘Sakura wasn’t a witch!’ Aoi yelled, ‘She was a brave and noble woman’!

‘Yeah, yeah… enough chitchat and get yourselves seated already!’
We got into our assigned places. Since Sakura used to sit next to me, I was mortified to see one of Monokuma’s crude shrines erected in her place. Seeing the large red ‘X’ over her image made me feel ill inside.

Looking around I also saw a shrine made for Celestia. Seeing her image staring back at me like this caused my heart to shatter into pieces. I tried to compose myself, realising that my hope of us both escaping together was long gone.

‘Are you okay lassie?’ Mondo asked, standing on the other side of me. In the light of the room I could see he was still bedraggled and unusually thin.

‘Yes… I’m fine…’ I murmured as I pried my eyes away from Celestia's unblinking ones and the fifth trial commenced.
‘Well now we are all gathered together, I think we should discuss the subject of the murder weapon’, Monokuma stood on his hind legs, ‘In the past, holy water was said to be effective against witches but I’m assuming such weapons have evolved since then’.

‘I told you! Sakura wasn’t a witch!’ Aoi fumed.

‘That’s a complicated matter…’ I explained, ‘But right now, I am suspecting either blunt force trauma or poisoning given the state of the body’.

‘Ooooo the great Kyoko Kirigiri is stuck, is she?’ the bear smirked.

‘No’, I shook my head, ‘I am bound to have answers after we go through everything’.

‘So… what’s so complicated about it?’ asked Kiyotaka.

‘At first I thought blunt force trauma was the cause of her death. It appears obvious given all the blood on her scalp. What’s more, there were glass shards all over the crime scene and even some around the head wounds. Given the evidence, I think it’s obvious that she was struck with something made from glass’.

‘Like a bottle!’ Makoto pointed out.

‘Yes, and I have a feeling she was struck twice. I noticed two distinctive wounds and that two of the Monokuma bottles were missing. Either her assailant struck twice, or it was two different people using the same weapon’.

‘Who dares disrespect my adorable image?’ Monokuma roared.

‘Who do you think did it?’ Aoi asked.

‘I have a hunch’, I frowned at Kiyotaka.

‘What are you accusing me for? I’m the Ultimate Moral Compass, I would never…’

‘Yes, I find it hard to believe too’, Mondo came to his defence, ‘I find it hard to believe that Taka would attack anyone, let alone with a weapon…’

‘Aoi, you mentioned that Sakura wanted to lead a meeting, right?’ I asked her.

‘Yes’, Aoi nodded solemnly, ‘She invited those who… didn’t react so well when Monokuma announced the fifth motive. It didn’t exactly go to plan though, otherwise I wouldn’t have found Sakura in the state she was in’.

‘I don’t remember going to such a meeting’, Kiyotaka spoke again, ‘I got an invite, but I didn’t feel like coming along. I was still quite… shocked after hearing the news’.

‘Makoto frowned, ‘I would say the contents of your pocket would suggest otherwise’.

‘What are you talking about?’ Mondo began to shake, ‘Taka wouldn’t…’

‘I would beg to differ…’
‘Taka…’ I sighed, ‘Would you mind turning out your pockets?’

‘But… but…’ Taka stuttered.

‘Just do it already’.

Somewhat reluctantly, Kiyotaka pulled out a spotted sweet wrapper.

‘You should probably be more careful about leaving things laying around Taka’.

‘What’s so significant about a fucking sweet wrapper?’ Mondo cried out.

‘Aoi would you care to explain?’ Makoto asked her.

‘Oh yes, I recommended that Sakura take some sweets upstairs to help her with her reconciliation efforts. It was a quite a distinctive brand. I’ve never seen anything like them in stores and they were the only ones of their kind in storage’.

‘Taka…’ I had never seen what Mondo looked like in a disappointed state but observing it for the first time was soul crushing, ‘What have you done?’

‘You turned your back on her the moment you were given the fifth motive. I thought the Ultimate Moral Compass would lend support, not contempt!’

‘Mondo, Aoi… I wasn’t thinking straight. I was terrified, especially after all we had been through…’ Kiyotaka pleaded, ‘You have to understand!’

‘If I was a ‘normal’ person I would have dumped you right here and now. However, I will let you off the hook for the same reason I did with Sakura. With my history I’d say we are both ‘even’ at this point’, Mondo uttered.

‘Mondo’, Kiyotaka relaxed slightly, ‘you don’t have to forgive me for this…’

‘You are on very thin ice. I mean… hitting someone who meant no harm, even if they are the strongest person in existence, is a pretty shitty thing to do. But alas, I have made that same mistake too in my past, numerous times’, Mondo nodded towards Makoto.

‘Been working on your gender-neutral language have you Mondo?’ smirked Toko.

‘Not really. I just realise that unless the individual is willing to fight you or is a goddamn fascist, then it’s pretty despicable to hit someone just because you can… It’s one of the main reasons why I despise the police as much as I do’.

‘I know… I am truly ashamed with myself. My actions go against everything I was taught’, Kiyotaka looked up, ‘You can begin with the voting process if you want Monokuma’.

‘Dude! What the Hell are you doing?’ Mondo yelled.

‘I killed her, didn’t I?!’

‘I agree with Mondo’, I said, ‘we still don’t have the full story yet. While Kiyotaka certainly wounded Sakura I am doubtful that he actually killed her’.

‘You mean somebody else is responsible?’

‘Possibly’, I frowned, ‘that poster behind the booth, I feel like it’s something I have seen before’.
‘How is that relevant to finding Sakura’s killer?’ Aoi commented irritably.

‘It seemed to be attached to a large panel, making it resemble an entrance to something, to a secret hideout or…’

‘The Togami passageway!’ Makoto exclaimed, ‘Are you saying that is the way in on the fifth floor’.

‘I didn’t see anything else like it on that floor’, I shrugged, ‘it must be!’

‘How do you know anyone got through that way though?’, Toko cried.

‘I also saw footprints in one of the booth cupboards. They seemed to belong to somebody with a smaller shoe size than the rest of us. Now I wonder why somebody would need to hide in there?’

‘What are you accusing me for? I already told you! I didn’t want to see Sakura’s face again!’

‘I would beg to differ…’ Mondo grunted.

‘What are you talking about, dog?’

‘What were you doing sneaking into the gymnasium storage cupboard? I can’t think of any other reason why you of all people would want to visit such a place…”

‘I… I was just exploring master’s passageway! It’s a fascinating place is it not? Besides, what the hell were you doing in the gymnasium that late at night Mondo?’

‘Kiyotaka demonstrated to me some simple post abdominal surgery exercises. I couldn’t get to sleep so I thought doing a night time exercise routine would help me relax a little you know’.

‘How do we know it wasn’t you who attacked Sakura?’ Toko questioned.

‘Well… the footprints seem a little too small for a start’, I narrowed my eyes, ‘And I imagine you would be in good hearing distance to the commotion in that cupboard too’.

Slowly and shakily, Toko pulled out a handbook from her bag and turned it on. The name read, ‘Byakuya Togami’, ‘Yes, I used Byakuya’s handbook to get up here, now what?’

‘Why am I not surprised?’ Aoi growled, ‘Toko’s attitude towards Sakura was even worse than Taka’s. I would describe it as bloodlust myself’.

‘I seriously thought she was going to kill me. There she was, lying there. When I stepped over she woke up all of a sudden, startling me. Seeing as I’m a delicate little flower and she’s a giant who could have crushed me with her bare hands, I wanted to make the first move before she came to her senses. I then struck her with one of the bottles and floored it!’ Toko dramatically recounted the events.

‘You knew Sakura for a while. She would never do that, and you know it. Not to anyone!’

‘When Taka left, we were alone together in the same room. Who knows what she could have done to me? Especially as she serves the mastermind!’

‘I know one thing’, Aoi snarled, ‘and it’s that your excuses are piss poor!’

‘That’s enough!’ Mondo shouted, ‘We will get nowhere if we all keep on bitching like this!’

‘Whatever the case, we know that Sakura faced two assailants, Kiyotaka and Toko. She was
definitely wounded by each blow, but I examined the head wounds myself and unless she had some kind of blood condition, I highly doubt they alone caused her demise’, I explained.

‘What could have caused her death then?’ Kiyotaka questioned.

‘Not all of the blood was coming from Sakura’s head’, Makoto told us, ‘Kyoko and I could clearly make out some coming from her lips too. What’s more, there was a large pool of it in the room which Sakura most likely vomited up at the scene’.

‘What does that imply?’ Mondo gave a puzzled expression.

‘Well, either she vomited due to the trauma she received or… it was for another reason entirely’.

‘Like I mentioned earlier’, Aoi commented, ‘when I saw Sakura just before she died. She wasn’t coughing up blood or anything like that, but those head wounds looked nasty…’

‘Do you think she could have been poisoned?’ Kiyotaka brought up, ‘When I was taking part in first aid training, I learned that the vomiting of blood is a prominent sign of poisoning’.

‘It seems possible’, Makoto nodded, ‘it looked like somebody had been messing around in there’.

‘Yeah’, Mondo agreed, ‘somebody had obviously been rummaging in the cupboard. They were probably looking for a flask to mix themselves a nice poison’.

‘That’s possible’, I frowned, ‘there was also that peculiar yellow powder on the floor’.

‘I remember that too. Someone obviously meant business, but they left behind a messy trail’.

‘Then there was the flask in the lobby’, Makoto pointed out.

‘Do you think somebody could have spiked her protein drink then?’ gasped Toko.

‘That’s likely’, I said, ‘besides the protein solutions and poisonous ones were placed dangerously close together when we saw them on the shelves. In theory it would be very easy to do’.

‘Indeed’, Makoto looked confused however, ‘who could have done it?’

‘Well, my first theory is that Kiyotaka or Toko decided to finish Sakura off in such a fashion’, I pondered, ‘on the other hand, we do have one other suspect’.

‘Really, who?’ Mondo asked.

‘What about the one who was last with her?’ Makoto frowned in Aoi’s direction, ‘You were quite distraught by Sakura’s treatment, weren’t you? Have you heard of the concept of the greater good?’

‘What the hell do you mean?!’ snapped Aoi.

‘I mean, did you want to put her out of her misery?’ Makoto said. He seemed quite convinced and so did I at first. However, something did not sit right, not with any of the suspects.

Aoi sighed, ‘Yes it was me, I killed her’.

‘What?’ Mondo was startled before saying, ‘Aoi, you really need to lay off the drugs’.

Indeed, I too was stunned at how quickly Aoi had ‘confessed’ to doing such a thing.
‘I’m serious’, Aoi began to sob, ‘the amount of misery she was going through from everyone was just too much for me to bear. Because of this I decided to take matters into my own hands’.

‘If you were really her girlfriend, you should have provided her with support, not go the coward’s way out. Your motive may have been understandable but it’s still murder, nonetheless’, I looked up at her.

‘I heard… poisoning was a quick way to die. She sent me off to make her a protein shake but when I reached the chemistry lab, I brewed a poison. It was very easy to do after all…’

‘I see… While your account sounds convincing, there is one piece of evidence that doesn’t match up’.

‘I’m telling you’, Aoi’s knees buckled, her eyes still watering, ‘I killed her!’

‘Mondo, what did you say about the footprints in the powder?’

‘Footprints? So, what about them?’

‘They were fucking huge’, Mondo tried to describe the scene, ‘The sasquatch has competition that’s for sure… Look I even tested them’, he got out his student handbook which displayed a photo. It showed one of his boots placed inside the print, the latter of which was about twice the size.

‘Wow Mondo did something smart for once?!’ Toko exclaimed.

‘Bro has always been smart! Isn’t that right?’ Kiyotaka barked.

Mondo merely let out a small grunt in response, still clearly unimpressed with him.

‘Those prints are big alright’, Makoto said, ‘if they are bigger than even Mondo’s shoe size, then I doubt that none of ours will fit, let alone Aoi’s’.

‘That’s correct’, I glared at Aoi, ‘look Aoi, I don’t know what you’ve been smoking but the evidence clearly doesn’t point to you as Sakura’s killer’.

‘I’m serious!’ Aoi protested, ‘I was the one who gave her the poison! I watched her die. If you want to get out of here alive then you have to believe me!’

‘Aoi…’ I sighed, ‘what will you gain from all of this? What are you trying to achieve? Please tell me…’

‘I have a feeling you are hiding something from us…’ Makoto uttered.

‘I’m telling you I…’

‘Turn out your pockets… Aoi…’ I demanded.

‘But…’

‘Now!’ I yelled.

Shaking, she pulled out a note.

‘Is that…’ Makoto gulped, ‘a suicide note?’

Aoi nodded.
‘Why did you try to pin the blame on yourself then?’

Aoi swallowed before she spoke, ‘According to her note Sakura was very upset with all the fighting going on and she just couldn’t take it anymore’.

‘So, let me get this straight, you tried to pin the blame on yourself so you would get us all killed?’ Mondo yelled, ‘What the Hell?!’

‘How could you do this?’ Makoto cried, ‘I am pretty sure it’s not what Sakura would have wanted’.

‘Sakura was a kind woman Aoi, she wouldn’t have allowed this. Not from you, or anyone. I doubt she would have wanted her girlfriend to become a murderer’, I gritted my teeth, ‘Why did you put us all in the firing line like that?’

‘I thought it was what we all deserved. I mean, what’s the point of carrying on if all our interactions are only going to tear us apart?’, Aoi began to weep again, ‘The amount of fighting amongst ourselves completely devastated her, that’s likely what pushed her over the edge. She was a good friend to all of us and we should have stuck together but instead we ended up stabbing her in the back’, she sniffed, ‘That is why I resorted to such actions’.

I heard the bear laugh in response, ‘What is it?’ I glared up at Monokuma with utter contempt.

‘It seems we have our second accomplice!’

‘What are you talking about?’ Makoto cried.

‘Well since she attempted to commit a massacre in Sakura's name, I think it’s safe to count her as such. Don’t you agree, my little cubs?’ the bear’s eyes seemed to spin wildly at his own revelation.

In the eerie silence Aoi finally spoke up, ‘That’s fair enough…’ her face had become blank, ‘Do whatever you see fit Monokuma’.

‘Very well! Kyoko my dear, are you ready to give your summary?’

‘I suppose I have no choice, do I?’ I composed myself, ‘Here is what happened in this case!

Sakura Oogami perished in the early hours of the morning due to poisoning, as indicted by the blood on her lips and the pool of vomited blood on the floor. Two of the Monokuma bottles were found shattered at the scene and were found to be the cause of Sakura’s head wounds. Shards of glass were discovered upon her scalp and on the floor. Examination of the body indicated blunt force trauma to the head, though not to a fatal degree despite being struck twice. Considering two of the Monokuma bottles were also missing, it became likely that Sakura had two assailants.

Kiyotaka was the first attacker. We could tell this as had a sweet wrapper in his pocket belonging to a unique brand that was found in the same room as the body. Sakura brought the sweets upstairs to encourage everyone to meet up and ease the tension. This did not work however, and Taka ended up striking her with one of the Monokuma bottles, likely dazing her. Her second attacker was Toko, who was hiding behind the lobby booth when Taka attacked Sakura. She had gained access to via the Togami secret passage, which Mondo saw her head to. We also discovered her footprints inside of one of the large cupboards. After Sakura came to her senses, Toko got startled and proceeded to strike her with a second bottle.

Aoi entered the room after hearing the commotion and Sakura instructed her to get her a protein shake. Unknown to her however, Sakura had grabbed herself some poison and drunk it while the former was distracted in her task. This was evident with the shape and size of the footprints in some
yellow powder which had been spilled as Sakura searched the cupboards earlier. The storage
cupboard was also messy as Sakura looked for a flask to mix a potent and deadly solution. Shortly
before her death she wrote a suicide note which had been swiftly taken while we were distracted
examining the state of the body.

Aoi Asahina I think you have some explaining to do’.

Aoi stared at her shoes, ‘I’m sorry, I really am. You are right Kyoko, my emotions got the better of
me and for that I was selfish. I don’t know what Sakura will think of me now…’

‘Disappointed, I imagine…’

‘Well’, Makoto sighed, ‘Despite what Aoi has done I don’t think it will be fair to vote for her as the
killer. Sakura was the one who concocted the poison at the end of the day’.

I nodded, ‘It wouldn’t make sense to vote for Aoi, even after all the trouble she put us through’.

‘But… but…’ Aoi stuttered.

‘So…’ Monokuma yawned, looking rather bored, ‘are you ready to begin with the voting process?’

‘I guess so…’ I replied, ‘let’s get this over with’.

For the fifth time, the stone plinths rose up from the ground and we were forced to write the ‘killer’s’
name in our own blood. When the plinths descended Monokuma groaned.

‘Well little cubs I am sure you know the drill by now. Did you find out who killed that traitor?’

Nobody said anything. The only thing we could hear was Aoi whimpering as Monokuma once again
in a rather bored fashion, conjured up a ball of fire. Before our eyes it morphed into Sakura. It was
probably the most impressive imitation so far, with flaming wild hair flowing behind her and intense,
bright glowing eyes, almost dazzling us.

With much less grandiose than usual the bear gave a simple clap and the intimidating, but somewhat
beautiful image of Sakura suddenly disappeared right before us.

‘Well you guessed correctly again little cubs. Sakura Oogami was her own killer’.

‘You can call it suicide’, Mondo growled, ‘So by your up logic... was my attempt on my life an
attempted murder in your eyes?’

‘That’s correct!’ Monokuma smiled nastily, ‘Suicide does indeed count as murder in this game. And
that’s not the only thing I have to show you today!’

Our mouths were all wide open as one of the bear’s cronies held out a sheet of paper which had
writing eerily similar to Sakura’s style in the suicide note.

‘What are you playing at?’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘You forged a fake suicide note?’ I gasped.

‘Correct again little cubs!’ the beast’s evil eye twinkled, ‘One of my cronies happens to be
particularly good at imitating others, handwriting included!’

‘So, you tricked us?’, my fists clenched, ‘You knew that Aoi would take the bait’.
‘I won’t forgive you for this Monokuma’, Aoi spoke, ‘Not ever. Can you at least hand us the real thing? It won’t hurt you now I assume… you utterly miserable creature’.

‘You’re right’, the bear stretched, ‘You might as well, the class trial is over after all’.

The figure holding the real note scrunched it up in a ball and threw it in Aoi’s direction. She unraveled it and began to read aloud.

‘If you are reading this, I have taken my life. After Monokuma took my Dojo, centuries of work from the Oogami family, I felt like I had no choice but to pay the ransom this devil offered me. I now know that this was cowardly, and I realised that doing deals with a demonic entity does one no good, no matter what they promise. After serving the bear for some time and watching my friends die, my emotions got the better of me and now I must pay the price. I hope reading this will help the rest of you learn from my mistake. Loyalty is crucial in these dark times. Even if conflict brews among your numbers, take time to remember how far you have gotten and the memories you have made together. I betrayed your trust through my treachery, but I hope that you will continue to put your trust in each other even in the darkest of times. That is all that I ask of you as I lay here.

I want to say how happy I am with the companionship I made during my stay at Hope’s Peak, despite our differences. You were all very dear to me and I want you to hang on and escape if you can. You can only do that if you trust one another however and I hope you will all be able to do what I failed at. In the name of the Oogami family, I am sorry. All you can do now is cling on so the deaths of those who have fallen will not be in vain and you can truly honour their memory.

My final note I address to you Aoi. Thanks to you and Chihiro, you made me see that there is good in the outside world, and I cannot be more gratified. All I can do now, Aoi is wish you the very best and I hope you can teach what you have learned from me to the others. It is what they need during these troubled times. I love you Aoi and it greatly saddens me that our relationship was cut short.

I do not want you or the others to take the blame for my death, I brought it on myself and I hope my family will be able to forgive me for my actions. All I ask is that you keep on fighting and remember our time together with happiness, not despair. Remember my words and continue to have hope in yourselves and in each other.

Sakura Oogami’.

After Aoi had finished reading the note we all stared guiltily at each other, deeply ashamed of ourselves. At the same time, we felt hot anger burn up inside us knowing what the bear had done. We knew however, that all we could do was respect Sakura’s final wishes by fighting and sticking together, no matter how vastly different our lives, talents and personalities were.

‘Oh Sakura…’ Aoi sniffed, ‘Why did I betray you like this?’

‘Well, that doesn’t really matter now since I’m going to punish you anyway. Not through execution mind you, but I feel that this punishment I have planned will sink even deeper. With enough psychological pressure, you may even choose to join your ogre of a girlfriend!’ Monokuma jeered.

I thought Aoi would lash out at him but instead she looked up at the beast, ‘Just get on with it, I feel it’s what I deserve for the way I dishonoured her and my classmates’.

‘Ah…’ the bear paused, ‘I would, but we haven’t had punishment time yet!’

‘What?’ Toko spluttered, ‘But if she isn’t being executed, who is?’
‘Yeah that seems a little unfair doesn’t it?’ Kiyotaka frowned.

‘If you want to execute anyone then choose me’, Mondo bowed his head, ‘The rest of you have a potential future ahead and I don’t really…’

‘You are all so naive aren’t you little cubs?’ Monokuma giggled.

‘What do you mean?’ Aoi questioned.

‘I think it will make more sense if you see it for yourself!’, he gestured towards his cronies, ‘Roll the footage!’, the bear then roared with glee as the large screen descended.

The first thing we saw on the screen was that familiar green, alien like glow. We all let out a collective gasp as we recognised Chihiro’s face blinking up the camera. The device was being held up by two more of the black robed figures over a swimming pool.

‘They’re not?!’ Kiyotaka called out.

When Alter Ego hit the water, it was instantaneous. The sound of popping, sizzling and hissing echoed throughout the courtroom. The machine burned up and died before sinking to the bottom.

When the ‘execution’ was over, Mondo let out a terrible, agonising roar as the bear stood there and watched.

‘I was planning on something much more exquisite’, the bear sighed, ‘but we have a tight budget and as a result we have to cut some costs! It wasn’t really worth spending so much money on anyway, she was only a mere machine after all!’

‘She wasn’t just a machine, she was our friend!’ Makoto yelled.

‘Alright David Cage calm down!’

‘How did you know about Alter Ego anyway?’ I asked.

‘Thanks to Sakura’s generosity, I knew right from the very beginning!’

‘Of course,’ I stamped my foot on the ground, ‘whatever the case you are too late. Thanks to Alter Ego’s help, we now know more about the university than we did before!’

‘There is still a lot you don’t know though, isn’t there? You are so near yet so far from escaping! Besides you may want to commit murder if Aoi’s attempt at initiating a massacre wasn’t enough for you’.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘You see my dears’, the bear composed himself, ‘Aoi killed her little brother!’

‘What?!’ Kiyotaka gasped.

‘Monokuma please…’ Aoi begged him, ‘it was an accident. Yuta and I were only kids when it happened, we didn’t know any better…’

‘You and your brothers got a little reckless, didn’t you? You wanted to place yourselves in danger just for the sake of proving yourselves’, Monokuma’s eyes bore into hers. While she was not as affected by his words as Mondo had been, I saw Aoi grip the sides of her seat tightly, her shaking arms causing it to rattle.
‘No, it wasn’t that… we were young and stupid but that was not our intention. We didn’t want him to die, Yuta and I wanted him to become a strong swimmer like us’.

‘You see little cubs’, Monokuma gestured towards her, ‘regardless of her intention, she was not untainted before the game and both times she did it out of pride. When she killed her brother, she wanted to be a swimming champion and when Sakura died, she wanted to bring you all down with her so she could become a martyr’.

‘Just stop!’ Makoto jumped in Aoi’s defence.

‘I get it Monokuma, I really do…’ Aoi sighed, ‘I’m selfish. I always have been. All the trophies I have won throughout my life are just further proof of that. My little brother perished just because I wanted my family’s name etched on everything. That’s it’.

‘Aoi… do you not remember Sakura’s note? You helped prove to her that humans are capable of being good’.

‘She deserved better than me’, she turned away from the rest of us, ‘you all did’.

‘We will get through this together, and you will too. Kyoko and I will make sure of it!’

‘I think we should go’, I told the bear, ‘don’t you think Aoi has been through enough already?’

‘I think it has sunken in enough, although some of your classmates may want to take things one step further if they see fit!’ Monokuma grinned.

‘Aoi’s not going anywhere’, Mondo asserted, ‘even after all the shit she has done’.

‘That’s right’, I nodded, ‘besides, the ‘shit’ she caused is nothing compared to what you have done throughout our time here. Because of you, nine great and talented people are dead’.

‘Whatever’, Monokuma yawned, ‘Anyway little cubs why don’t you head on upstairs? Things are really heating up now! You had better be extra, mega, ultra, prepared for the sixth round, for I have something truly unique coming up! Fare thee well little cubs! Goodnight, sleep tight and please let the bed bugs bite’.

‘Let’s go’, I nodded towards the others and they followed.

Aoi gulped as the lift ascended, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me’.

‘Tell you what lassie, we will just pretend you were on crack and try to forget about this whole shitshow, yeah?’ Mondo put his hands on his hips.

‘We shouldn’t forget Sakura’s final words though’, Makoto said, ‘we must continue to fight, otherwise what will she have died for?’

‘That too, I guess…’

‘What should we do now though?’ Kiyotaka questioned as the lift reached its destination.

‘I think we should all spend some time alone to clear our heads. It’s what we need if we are to survive’, I stated, ‘sometimes part of being in group is spending some time alone. I am sure Sakura would agree if she were here’.

‘Like meditation?’ Toko asked.
‘Anything really’, I replied, ‘just so long as we are alone. Not that we can’t interact with each other of course but spending the majority of your time alone for a while could be beneficial’.

‘What about Sakura’s memorial service?’ Aoi rubbed her eyes.

‘I think we should have it tomorrow night’, answered Kiyotaka, ‘once our minds are more clear, we will be able to honour her properly’.

‘Good plan’, grunted Mondo.

‘You still forgive me, right?’ Kiyotaka desperately looked up at him.

‘Yes’, Mondo said, ‘but I think we should have a ‘break’’.

‘For how long?’

‘Like Kyoko said, until are minds are less full of shit…’

‘That’s not how I worded it exactly’, I frowned, ‘but yes, I think we all need a ‘break’ from each other for the time being. Unless we happen to bump into one another of course’.

‘Okay!’ Kiyotaka announced, ‘From this moment until tomorrow night. No major social interactions!’

We all nodded before we went to bed. Just before Aoi opened her door however I tried to comfort her.

‘You are not a bad person Aoi. Sakura didn’t think you are, and neither should you’.

‘But…’ I felt her tremble as I put a hand on her shoulder.

‘Get some rest and make sure to come to memorial service tomorrow, even if it’s just for a little while. You were very important to her’.

‘Okay Kyoko. I will be there, for her’, Aoi bowed to me before she closed her door and I in turn made my way to my own room.
Part 6 The She-Wolf: Day 1 Normal Campus Life

It was difficult to comprehend all the events that just happened as I curled under the duvet cover. Obviously, I was deeply saddened by Sakura’s death and I understood how much internal pain Aoi was in. At the same time however it was difficult to piece everything together, even for someone of my ability.

After going over the timeline of that dreadful day in my head however, one thing stuck out to me. The last thing that Alter Ego showed me was a name, Mukuro Ikusaba. Was she really the mysterious 16th student and the mastermind behind all of this?

With my socialising obligations out of the way I hoped that I could spend my next day investigating further, although I did not know how much I would be able to accomplish on my own without Alter Ego’s help.

I decided to set my alarm early so I could carry out my search with little disturbance. Five minutes after it rung, I got dressed and exited my room taking the long trail upstairs, hoping that the next floor Monokuma opened up would answer some of my questions.

When I reached the fifth floor, I discovered something which I had previously missed amidst the chaos of the last investigation. At first, I thought it was a trick of the light but looking closer, I noticed that the door to the Dean’s office was ajar. I looked down at the floor to see various scratches, indicating that a scuffle had taken place here. I wondered if Sakura as a last-ditch effort had managed to force it open while battling and besting the henchperson that tried to stop her. Perhaps this was her final move against the mastermind before her death and sacrifice to save the rest of us.

Nevertheless, I exercised caution as I squeezed through the door. Just as I expected hands to grab me from behind however, there was nothing. Sakura’s last act of heroism seemed have paid off as I began exploring. The place seemed like an ordinary office, but I was not prepared for what I would discover within it.

As I began searching through the files, I realised to my dismay that some of them had been tampered with, many words inked out. I did notice Mukuro Ikusaba’s name appear several times but there were no prominent details present like her occupation or personal details. It mostly appeared in documents listing all the class members or notes concerning her past grades and achievements.

While I didn’t uncover many explicit details, the clues I had so far concerning the mysterious sixteenth student seemed to lead me in the right direction. I wanted to check one more thing however, I eyed the large desk in the corner which had several chests of drawers.

Opening them one by one, I saw nothing and began to give up hope until I spotted a simple photograph. In it, a man in his mid thirties had his arms over the shoulders of a pale girl with white hair and a rather pudgy looking body type. What I noticed faster than anything else however was the
great contrast of each expression. The man seemed proud while the girl, his daughter, looked quite indifferent to the whole thing.

I flipped the picture over to reveal some notes, in writing that very much resembled mine.

‘My one and only daughter Kyoko Kirigiri, Ultimate Detective and future Hope’s Peak graduate’.

After reading it I was overcome with a tidal wave of emotions. Within seconds, memories came flooding back to me like a vast river breaking through a large dam.

He had the nerve to be proud of his daughter’s title after he left her like that? While she toiled night and day learning under the stoic instructions of her grandfather, enduring much emotional and physical pain, he ran off to Hope’s Peak at the first chance he got. She would jump off a bridge due to the pressure she was faced with in order live up to the Kirigiri family name. He meanwhile, would bask in the glory of his position, shaking the hands of young prodigies as they graduated, while his own daughter was left in the dust.

I removed my gloves to reveal scarred and blackened hands. I remembered the only time when my father came to see me, when I was lying in hospital, lucky that my hands hadn’t become stumps after handling a terrible substance. Occasionally I would still feel the pain beneath my gloves, but that was nothing compared to the mental turmoil. I was reminded of being left behind to go through things that no child, or person for that matter should be forced to go through.

I fell on my knees, my eyes watering, shaking violently as I remembered the young me handling toxic substances, standing next to horrific crime scenes, prodding and poking mangled bodies, all under the watch of my eagle-eyed grandfather who had no time for imperfection or mistakes. I was going to be the next great detective of my family and like my descendants beforehand, I would have to go through trials, tribulations and trauma to reach that goal.

Not being able to contain my emotions anymore, I let out a cry. I cried for my dead mother to come back, for warmth and affection. She was someone who cared, who saw me as human. I had come to this university hoping, even if it meant facing my father, I could get some of that comfort from my peers. Instead without realising it, I was in Hell, albeit a different one to my childhood and teenage years. Ever since the day my mother died, I had been stuck in a perpetual Hell and it looked like I was never going to get out of it, even if I did escape from the university of despair.

Now I could truly understand Mondo’s fear of leaving this place. Having no kind of joy, inner security or companionship in your life was a truly horrifying prospect. I wondered why I had participated in this game at all. I wondered why I didn’t lie during the class trials, and mislead the others into voting wrongly? Why didn’t I take Death’s sweet hand while I had the opportunity? But then I remembered the fifth trial and Aoi’s deception.

Despite my burden we had to keep together and abide by Sakura’s last words. It was the least we could do, for her and for the others who had died. I was sure that Celestia would have wanted me to escape, to win, even if the odds were stacked against me. I wondered what the circumstances would have been if I had regained these terrible memories before the fourth-class trial. Would I have joined Celeste in murdering Akira that night, just so I could get an opportunity to escape my torment once and for all? Hell, even if we ended up broke, at least I would have been with her and not bottling samples of someone who just had their brains blown out.

But that was in the past. After Sakura’s suicide I wanted to do the best I could to save the others and use my talent for good. I pocketed the photo and exited the room, shutting the door behind me to make it appear locked. For the time being, I wanted my troubled memories to remain trapped in that room so I could focus on the future.
As I still felt shaken up and slightly sick however I decided to head back downstairs, not to the
dining room or even my bedroom but to the game’s room on the first floor. I remembered how long it
had been since I last visited as I walked up to the bar which Leon used to frequent. I popped open a
cold one from the fridge and sat down. Drinking down my sorrows I was reminded of the games
Celestia and I used to play in here before getting bored. In that moment my heart ached, regretting
that I could now never join her in her global casino hopping ventures. Just as I was about to finish
downing the bottle however I heard someone call out to me.

‘Hey Kyoko’, Makoto had emerged.

‘I thought we weren’t having any social interactions…’ I frowned.

‘I thought it was just major social stuff. I don’t think a short conversation will muddy our minds’, he
looked at the bar, ‘Kyoko have you been drinking?’

‘I don’t know what you are talking about!’, I shuffled to hide the bottle before I let out a hiccup.

‘Have you explored the sixth floor yet?’

‘Nope’.

‘Shall we head up together… I mean we might as well if we are heading in the same direction,
right?’

‘Fine’, I sighed, ‘just don’t blame me if I come off as standoffish’.

The two of us headed upstairs and I realised that there were no more stairways after that, Makoto
seemed to notice this too as we headed down the corridor.

‘It seems this is as big as it gets huh?’ he commented.

‘Indeed’, I nodded as we parted ways next to a large wooden door.

Stepping inside I was greeted with what seemed to be blossoming cherry trees. Although the
prospect of it being outside was too good to be true, it's tranquil atmosphere calmed my nerves.
When I saw the kendo gear on the walls, I realised that I was in a surprisingly authentic makeshift
Dojo.

Among the fake Sakura trees, I saw Aoi sitting on the floor, hunched with her legs crossed and
hands on her knees, somewhat resembling a monk.

‘Sakura would have loved it here’, she said, ‘I can just imagine the look on her face right now’.

‘I wonder if she would have felt more at home knowing this room existed, even if it isn’t exactly like
her own dojo in the mountains’, I replied.

‘This room would have been ideal for training don’t you think?’

I looked to the side to see a suit of armour, ‘Yeah, this place has everything you could possibly need
when it comes to martial arts’.

‘But alas, it seems I will be the only one using this place’, she looked up at me, ‘do you still not think
I’m selfish after everything that happened last night?’

‘Aoi, we’ve been through this…’ I groaned, ‘you aren’t more selfish than anyone else in here… I
have played devil’s advocate ever since the first class trial. I mean, I sent four people to their deaths,
including my own girlfriend for fuck’s sake!’

‘Yeah…’ Aoi laughed feebly, ‘You didn’t cause the death of your own sibling though, did you?’

‘It was an accident, you said so yourself’.

‘Still, if it wasn’t for my recklessness Asahi might still be alive’.

‘The sea is a bastard Aoi, surely you know that by now? It is unforgiving to everyone, even children just having some innocent fun’.

She looked up at me with a weak smile, ‘You sound quite a lot like Sakura you know…’

‘Speaking of which, don’t forget to come to Sakura’s memorial service yeah?’

‘Of course, Kyoko, she probably wouldn’t want me to mope around too much huh?’

‘No definitely not’, I shook my head, ‘She would want you to be by her side, even if it is only in spirit’.

‘You are right’, her eyes watered, ‘I’m sorry, it is all still too much for me to take in’.

‘I know... just try to hang on until this evening okay?’

‘Okay, you too Kyoko’.

‘Thanks’, I bowed in her direction before I left the room.

As I continued my journey, I spotted what looked like locker rooms. I went through the girls’ one before I opened the door to reveal a vast pool. It was almost Olympic sized and I also spotted a diving board that almost reached the ceiling. Seeing as it was no longer in use for educational purposes, I imagined that it would have made for a decent pool party session had there been more of us, even if I preferred to stand on the sidelines.

Staring down at the water I jumped as I saw Kiyotaka emerge through the boys’ locker room. Looking closer, I could see that the colour was drained from his face.

‘Hey Kiyotaka, what’s up?’

‘I’m glad I found you Kyoko… there’s something I have to show you. There was this terrible smell coming from one of the classrooms, I looked inside and…’ he gulped.

‘Lead the way’.

We both passed through our respective locker rooms before Taka led me towards a classroom. As he described, there was a rather putrid smell, as though something was decaying inside. I opened the door to see a room splattered with blood. I could tell right away that it wasn’t fresh. The darker colour indicated that it was spilled a long time ago, perhaps months or years ago, even though that possibility seemed odd. We had just arrived in the university, surely the staff at Hope’s Peak would close off such a place off to avoid traumatising its students?

‘Do you think the tragedy was the cause of this?’ Kiyotaka questioned.

‘I cannot think of any other explanation’, I paced around, ‘this blood is quite old. Still, it’s the only piece of convincing enough evidence we have to go off of right now’.
‘It’s strange. The rest of the university seemed untouched when we first arrived, it was like such a terrible event never even happened here’.

‘If genocide really did occur within these walls, the mastermind did a good job cleaning up the carnage afterwards. Perhaps this room was left as a… ‘reminder’ of sorts’.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Deliberately leaving the place in this state seems like a warning, especially now that we know more about our situation than we did previously…’

‘I wonder if the mastermind is getting scared? This classroom could have been left in this manner to act as a deterrent for those who have gotten this far’.

‘It’s very possible’, I nodded.

‘I think we should leave. The smell here is about to make me throw up…’

After we closed the door to the terrible room, I asked him, ‘Has anyone else seen this place?’

‘Makoto nearly threw up upon seeing it for the first time and I certainly won’t be visiting it again unless I absolutely must. Even Mondo was unnerved’.

‘You’d think he’d be used to it, particularly as he must have seen a lot of blood during the gang war. Hell, not even I would want to visit again if I can avoid it. All the bodies I handled during the killing game so far were fresh. Even if some of them were in a terrible condition, that post mortem stench was not present as it was in there’.

‘I think I should make it out of bounds, don’t you?’

‘Unless we have to go in there again for some reason, then yes’.

‘Okay, well take care of yourself Kyoko. Remember to keep your nose clean, especially now’.

‘I guess…’ I uttered before I approached the next significant door.

I thought I had walked into a jungle before realising that it was an indoor biome. I was surrounded by many exotic plants which like the animals in the menagerie, looked very well cared for. Even though it was just a simulation, it was the closest the university had come to looking like the outside world and in that moment, I felt my sadness briefly fade away.

As I walked along the gravel path, I could hear something moving. Stepping closer to the source of the noise I saw that strangely enough, it was coming from a chicken coop. Inside, I saw a total of four chickens, pecking and scratching at the ground.

‘Hello lassie’, I looked up to see Mondo sitting on a nearby bench, ‘You like chickens huh?’

‘They are cute I suppose’, I shrugged.

‘Meh, I prefer dogs’.

‘Really? What breeds do you like? Shiba Inus have to be my favourite, although I love Akitas too since my family used to own one. I’m more of a cat person though…’

‘It would be Akitas but when I was a kid, I had a Maltese named Chuck’.
'Aren’t they those dogs that look just like toys?'

'Yeah those ones! He was very cute, and very smart too! He would often fetch the paper for us in the morning, wagging his little tail every time. He helped me get through some rough times too, especially when my mother was sent to rehab. I miss him so much,’ he rubbed his eyes.

'I feel like that with my cat, she was my only real friend after my mother died. Do you like cats?'

'They are okay I guess…’, he turned away again, ‘I mean I like picking them up sometimes and…’ his ears turned pink.

'Have you been here for long?'

'A while. I like the feeling of being outdoors again, even if I can’t ride here’.

'I see what you mean’, I looked around, ‘it's quite beautiful really’.

'Yeah’, Mondo looked down at his knees, ‘I was thinking about something’.

'What was that?'

'When Aoi received her ‘punishment’ I could relate to her a lot'.

'Do you feel responsible for Daiya’s death?’

'Well, I was the one who led the attack in the scuffle where he was killed’, he told me, ‘At the time I was still overcome with a great feeling of weakness after my diagnosis. I was always in my brother’s shadow but the news made me become more desperate than ever before. I wanted to prove myself and my manhood by leading the pack, that kind of shit ya know? I was a fool however, he died defending me, leaving me ultimately responsible for his death'.

'You didn’t kill him’, I asserted, ‘you were definitely reckless but having someone take a bullet for you isn’t the same as actively killing someone’.

'I know, but still he taught me everything… so I cannot help but feel that way. However, ever since my stay here I learned a lot from you guys too, especially Chihiro’.

'Really?’

'Like her, I realised that I want to change and be my own person… I have spent my entire life trying to be like my brother but doing that made me trigger a whole fucking war! It didn’t involve machine guns and shit, but a lot of people on all sides ended up dying, some of them by my own hands. I’m pretty sure that counts as a war…’

'Yeah…’ I uttered, ‘Still, I’m glad you have treated this experience as an opportunity to learn’.

'Whatever you do, don’t let Taka hear you say that!’, Mondo chuckled before I laughed too.

I spent a little while longer in the biome before heading back to the corridor. There wasn’t much left to explore, in fact the last thing of interest was a set of large metal doors. There was a threatening aura about it however and I wasn’t sure if I wanted to see what was behind it, especially due to the large letters written in blood spelling out, ‘RAW’. Nevertheless, I rattled the door handle out of morbid curiosity but to no avail.

'What the hell is this?’ I saw Toko appear behind me, ‘Are they keeping something in there?’
‘I want to believe it’s just another giant shark behind that door, but something tells me it’s much worse. The sign reads ‘Bio Lab’ but it looks like this place leads to a giant freezer’.

‘This certainly looks like something out of a science fiction novel. Do you reckon the mastermind is keeping aliens in here? Kind of like Area 51!’

‘I’m pretty sure Area 51 is just another generic air base. Besides, I don’t think the mastermind would need giant, monstrous aliens even if they did exist. They have fucking demons at their command!’

‘Perhaps it’s a demon summoning room’, Toko smirked, ‘or another Hell portal’.

‘I don’t think so. I definitely have a very bad feeling about what is behind those doors, but the aura isn’t… a 'Hellish' one so to speak’, I looked down at the ground, ‘Still, I really want to know, even though I’m not sure if I want to know the answer’.

‘Neither do I really…’, we both made our way back downstairs and towards the dorms, ‘By the way Kyoko, have you heard about the new novel I am drafting?’

‘What is it?’

‘It’s going to be another romance novel but trust me! This one will be different from the others!’

‘How exactly?’

‘It’s about a poor, lost girl who finds a strong, intelligent and jaw droppingly handsome woman! They then go on to solve many mysteries together while romantic tension brews between them’.

‘I’m not usually a fan of romance but I might have to give this one a shot…’

‘Wow really? Well… I wanted to try something a bit different you know?’, her face turned bright red.

‘It sounds original at least’.

‘Kyoko are you blushing?’

‘No…’ I frowned, ‘Besides you can't talk!’ I waved her off before we both went into our respective dorm rooms.

I spent the rest of the day alone. Even when I went to the dining room and came across the others there, we spoke to each other only in greeting. I wondered during that time whether I should disclose my talent. I was satisfied having clarification at last but looking back at all the events of the killing game, finding out the true nature of my skills wasn’t a huge surprise. At the same time however, I wasn’t sure if I wanted such a title, especially after the suffering I had to go through to achieve it. Was that something to be proud of?

When 8pm drew near I heard a knock at the door, opening it again to see Makoto.

‘Are you ready to head up to the art room Kyoko? Mondo and Taka told us to all meet up there’.

I nodded and we headed upstairs together where we worked together to create another memorial. We used pink tissue paper to make little Sakura flowers all around it before we returned to the dorms to place it at Sakura’s bedroom door. After our one-minute silence, Aoi bowed towards the door one last time.

‘Goodbye Sakura. Thank you for everything. We hope that you will be able to forgive us all and that
your spirit will give us the courage we need to face the evil threatening us’.

The others all bowed too before heading to bed. Mondo and Kiyotaka were back together, holding hands, while the others went to bed alone but with raised spirits. I wasn’t so sure how to feel however, the place now looked more like a cemetery than a bunch of student dorm rooms.

Nevertheless, I went to bed hoping for a sleep free from any disturbance. As expected however, that was too good a wish to be true in this miserable place.
Part 6 The She-Wolf: Day 2 Normal Campus Life

I woke up abruptly. At first, I thought it was just a dream, but listening closer I could clearly make out scuffling. I slid out of bed and put on my dressing gown to investigate the source of the noise. I peered through my door looking into the dark corridor. At first I saw nothing but then my eyes narrowed as I thought I saw what looked like coattails vanishing into one of the rooms.

I wanted to believe I was just seeing things, but stepping closer, I could see that the door to Makoto’s room was ajar. I crept forwards into the dark room hoping that he just forgot to lock his door, until I saw a flash of silver in the dark.

I ran towards the figure hovering over a terrified Makoto’s bed and attempted to tackle them, but they were surprisingly quick to dodge as I swung a punch in their direction. Within seconds they darted out of the room and I was just able to catch a glimpse of the assailant’s white lab coat.

‘Kyoko? Oh my God did you see it? Clownface came back, holding a machete… I… I don’t know whether they were aiming to stab me in my sleep or had some other sinister purpose in mind…’

I opened the bedside cabinet to see a glistening machete, ‘It seems they planted their weapon here’, I picked up the serrated object, ‘Although why they would do it, I do not know… ‘

‘All I can remember is seeing that ghastly smile, and of course that thing you are holding… I mean, how could I not miss it?’ he trembled as I placed it back in the cabinet.

‘It’s probably best if you hold onto this Makoto’, I bowed, ‘You have proven yourself to be one of the most trustworthy students here so I don’t see why I cannot lend you this responsibility’.

‘Won’t it be better in your hands Kyoko?’

‘You are pure of heart. Well… compared to the rest of us anyway’.

‘But you have proven yourself to be so strong and intelligent, wouldn't it be safer with you?’

‘That’s the problem’, I bowed my head, ‘All that inner strength and brainpower… it’s making me, tired. I need an assistant Makoto, to share burdens and responsibilities. You have proven yourself worthy in the latest class trials we had, and I feel I could use your skills to help me here too’.

‘Seriously?’ he gasped.

‘You underestimate yourself. All of us still here have committed ‘crimes’ if you can call them that, whether it was here or before our university life. Even Kiyotaka who sold his soul for the purpose of being a beacon of goodness attacked Sakura in the name of being ‘dutiful’.

‘What did you do though?’

‘My answers helped us to get through five class trials, but they also cost us dearly too. During each execution I knew deep down that there would be another one after that, yet I did not show resistance to the beast. All I did was play along in this sick game’.

‘We all did to some extent Kyoko’, Makoto told me, ‘Besides, if you didn’t take part, we all would have become bear chow at this point. It’s thanks to your skills that I am still here and that we are close as we have gotten to discovering the mastermind’s identity. Speaking of which, have you managed to find out more about this Mukuro Ikusaba person?’
‘Yes’, I nodded, ‘I hope to explain my findings to everyone in the locker room tomorrow, not that our meeting place matters much of course. Anyway, Makoto can I trust you?’

‘Sure thing, what if Clownface comes back though?’

‘I would recommend barricading the door before you go back to sleep, then if they come back, we will be able to hear them pounding on the door. If all else fails, well… they just armed you, didn’t they? Although whether this is a trick of sorts I cannot tell’.

‘Knowing who is imprisoning us, it probably is’.

‘Thanks. Well I don’t think I can do much now but wait until the morning. Stay safe now’.

‘I will’, Makoto pulled his blanket over himself, ‘Thank you too!’

I exited his room and trudged back to mine wondering if all that I just experienced was merely an acid trip. This clearly wasn’t the case however as Makoto emerged the following morning looking more cautious than ever, turning his head side to side like a nervous pigeon.

‘Are you okay?’ I asked him.

‘Yeah, never felt better!’, he laughed nervously as the others appeared too.

‘You look very pale Makoto’, Aoi commented.

‘Yeah you look like you’ve seen some shit laddie’, Mondo yawned, ‘from my experience in the gang war I know that look all too well’.

‘You should get some breakfast at once!’ Kiyotaka barked, ‘It will make you feel better!’

‘What the Hell happened anyway?’ Toko questioned.

‘We will explain everything after breakfast’, I told them.

After we ate, we all gathered in the locker room where I declared what I had found, except for the things about me of course.

‘Before Alter Ego’s ‘execution’ she revealed a name’, I cleared my throat, ‘Mukuro Ikusaba. I have a feeling that this is the mysterious sixteenth student in the university and is also the girl in the photo’.

‘Where did you find this stuff?’ Aoi asked.

Rather reluctantly I answered, ‘Sakura managed to pry open the Headmaster’s office just before her suicide’, the others instantly perked their heads up, ‘There wasn’t much. A lot of the information was blotted out, either by the mastermind or the last dean that resided here’.

‘Did you find anything that could help us at least?’ Kiyotaka frowned.

‘I don’t know’, I sighed, ‘I did find more evidence of what her talent could have been. From the photo I suspected that her talent was most likely military related. I found her high school achievements too and the subjects she specialised in also point to such a career’.

‘The mastermind must be Mukuro then surely?!’ Toko gasped, ‘I don’t remember any of us having a military related talent. Unless… Mondo, you fought in a war once, right?’

‘I was part of a war, but no complex or heavy weaponry was involved. Unless you were a high-
ranking Yakuza member, most of us had to make do with melee weapons’, Mondo said, ‘No uniforms either, you only need to look at a gang’s memorabilia to tell if they are friend or foe. This lass sounds like a professional and worked for one of those fancy ass government military institutions. I mean, I don’t know about logistics or any of that shit…’

‘And the only language you speak is potty mouth!’, Aoi brought up.

Mondo grunted in response before I spoke again, ‘It’s annoying though. Much of the university is still locked off’.

‘I think the odds are deliberately stacked against us. In every story and urban legend involving them, the monster has the upper hand and usually wins too. What do you expect?’

‘We cannot give up hope’, Makoto cried out, ‘not now…’

‘I think we all know deep down that the bear intends to kill us until only one remains, unless old Monokuma has a different trick up his sleeve of course’, Mondo growled.

‘Frankly I hope neither comes to pass’, frowned Aoi, ‘but I don’t want to remain stuck here either. Even though this place does have a pretty decent pool I must admit. Nobody else wants to go swimming though… It looks like I’m alone again huh?’

‘Sorry lassie’, Mondo held up his cast, ‘even just trying to shower with this thing on is a bitch!’

‘Obviously you know why I can’t go in there’, Toko grimaced.

‘Anyway, until a miracle happens it looks like there isn’t much hope’, I said, ‘Although, I wonder what's behind those steel doors on the sixth floor? And why the bloody lettering?’

‘It must mean something surely’, Kiyotaka pointed out, ‘It cannot be there for no reason!’

‘I think we should try breaking through… although I’m not sure how we are going to do that’.

‘But that’s suicide!’ Toko cried out, ‘Monokuma’s goons will be upon us in no time!’

‘Sakura tackled one to open the dean’s office’, I stood up, ‘we may not be as strong as she was, at least in a physical sense. If we all do this together however, we may stand a chance’.

Mondo shrugged, ‘I’m up for it. There isn’t much for me to lose, except Taka of course... If Monokuma really wants to have us killed on sight for trespassing, then at least it will be quick’.

‘I think we should give a try at least’, Aoi nodded, ‘If Sakura would have done it, then so will I!’

‘I believe in you Kyoko!’ Makoto looked up at me, ‘Even if we all perish, at least we will end this terrible game once and for all!’

‘A lot of the best stories from around the world have the hero die at the end’, Kiyotaka bowed his head, ‘Maybe this one will end in a similar fashion’.

‘Well lass?’ Mondo looked in my direction, ‘What do you think?’

‘We will gather around the place at 5pm this evening’, I told them, ‘We will open this thing or die trying, yes?’ The others nodded except for Toko who merely swallowed nervously in response.

‘Okay… but if we all die then you are to blame! Got it?’
'Fair enough’, I shrugged, ‘5pm then!’

The others got up and left to do their own thing while Toko remained, her hands in lap and rapidly tapping her foot anxiously, ‘What’s the point anyway….’, she put her face in her hands, ‘a mere author like me won’t be able to make enough money to live self-sufficiently in the outside world’.

‘Come on Toko’, I held out my hand, ‘let’s go for a walk’.

‘Fine…’ nevertheless she once again held out a trembling hand and I took it.

‘You are such a tsundere Toko’, I rolled my eyes as I took her to the sixth floor and into the indoor biome where we began to admire the exotic plant life. Eventually we sat down on the bench near the chicken coop where the four birds were still pecking away.

‘I don’t know what I’m going to do if I leave here. My book earnings won’t be enough to keep up with rapidly rising rent costs, so it seems I will be living on the streets. I would rather do that than go back ‘there’’.

‘I see…’

‘I would rather die than have my head constantly dunked in the bathtub in the name of ‘discipline’’.

‘Is that why you ‘transform’ whenever you come into contact with a certain amount of water?’

‘That was the first time I remember ‘her’ appearing yes’. It was my parents’ way of putting me in my place whenever I daydreamed too much. My teacher at primary school wasn’t not much better. If this cow caught me in ‘my own little world’ she would hit my desk hard with a ruler. It was so loud it sounded like a gunshot. ‘She’ began to appear at that point too and my teacher would get even more angry. Then…’ her face was in her hands, ‘… my parents would find out and I was under the mercy of the bathtub once again’.

‘That sucks Toko, I’m so sorry’, I put my arm around her and begrudgingly she took it.

‘My only friend was a pet stinkbug I owned called Kameko. Nobody else wanted to be friends with me you see... and the boys especially gave me funny looks. Every day I would go out to see Kameko at his home in the skip. I would click my fingers and he would come running!’

‘An interesting choice of pet indeed… kind of reminds me of Akira’s jitterbugs’, I chuckled, ‘I remember wanting a tarantula when I was a little girl, but my mother always said no. She said she was perfectly fine with furry four-legged creatures in the house but not eight legged ones’.

Toko laughed too before she took a deep breath, ‘Nevertheless I still made several attempts on my life during my childhood. Whenever I was about to go through with it however… ‘she’ would stop me’.

‘Syo you mean?’

‘Yeah… she was kind of like the sister I never had really. She helped to get me out of a lot of trouble’.

‘Indeed’, I stood up, ‘Can you not get help?’

‘It’s complicated… Not a lot of therapists are trained to deal with split personality stuff you know. It doesn’t help that most the world sees us as violent serial killers…’
‘Yeah I’ve noticed that too. Not that I am against the media as a concept. It can do a lot of good when it’s utilised well. It can change human perceptions and educate. But that’s also part of the problem. Films and video games seem to have an especially skewed view on mental illness. It provides cheap shock value and the audiences just lap it up’.

‘That’s why I am afraid of escaping here’, Toko stood up too, ‘People don’t understand, and I am not sure if they are willing to’, we walked along the gravel path until I put a hand on her shoulder.

‘Look!’ I pointed. Hidden in the foliage was a small shed, ‘Hey Toko, do you fancy assisting me in an investigation?’ I smiled in her direction.

Toko’s face turned a fiery red once again, ‘Sure thing Kyoko… whatever you say…’

‘Come on let’s do some snooping’, I opened the small wooden door to see various gardening supplies and tools, ‘Hey what’s this?’ Something in the corner caught my eye, a large shiny pickaxe. ‘What is something like that doing in here?’

‘I think I know the answer to that’, I paid attention to the golden writing on the handle reading ‘Crazy Diamonds’. Looking closer I could see that the axe head also had silver etching upon it. I recognised the crest was the same as Mondo’s tattoo, ‘It must have been confiscated from him upon arrival. You can smuggle knives quite easily, but not this’.

‘Do you think we should tell Mondo that we found this?’

‘I don’t know. He’s still on suicide watch, I took his room keys from Sakura’s room after she died. On the other hand, if you look closely the blade has been previously used and hasn’t been sharpened in a long time’.

‘Yeah I don’t think he will be able to slit his stomach open with that thing’.

‘I think we should leave it here unless we need it for some reason. And if Mondo does come across it in the meantime… I don’t think he will be able to use it for… that purpose…’

The two of us walked out and made our way to the library and the archive, ‘Why are we hanging out here of all places?’ Toko raised an eyebrow.

‘I want to see if I can see any mentions of ‘you know who’, I told her as I once again started to pull out many old newspapers and documents, ‘I’m not expecting to find anything significant, but I am hoping that something will pop up’.

We browsed the various papers. Once again I noticed familiar names pop up and some photos too. Chihiro was standing with her parents, holding up a trophy after winning a technology competition, a similar picture appeared of Kiyotaka accepting a reward for outstanding community service. Adverts for Toko’s latest novels appeared several times as well as ones promoting Junko Enoshima’s fashion line, she modeled for most of them too, albeit with much photo shopping.

‘Look!’ Toko pointed out. I bent over to see a group photo of heavily armed soldiers. The only woman had her hair in a buzzcut and while her facial features would have been naturally delicate, they had hardened, ‘Wow, if she’s the mastermind it looks like we are gonna have a hard time! It’s a shame though. She seems pretty cute under all that heavy clothing’.

‘It appears she’s the first and only female member of a military group called ‘Fenrir’. Not much is known about them but from what I can read it seems they have quite a fearsome reputation’.
‘That’s not surprising, considering they are named after a monstrous wolf from Norse mythology’.

‘They seem to be a mercenary group although the article doesn’t mention who they served. Then again why would they? They look shady and elusive as ever, like other such groups throughout history’.

‘It’s true then! Her talent was military related. Well... if she is part of such a group, I think we are pretty much screwed, especially with all the skills she has’.

‘Yeah. It’s all coming together, but with Sakura gone and Mondo crippled, I don’t think we will stand a chance against a professionally trained soldier. That’s assuming she is the ‘big bad’ here’.

‘Who else do you think could be the mastermind then?’

‘A student we previously thought was dead perhaps? Someone’s execution could have been faked, kind of like one of those magic shows you know? Or they could have just used a lookalike in their place, either using a captive or getting one of his demon lackeys to take the form of one of us. I imagine Monokuma is perfectly capable of creating visual illusions too’.

‘That sounds totally crazy!’

‘I know. It’s just a theory I have’.

I bagged the newspaper clipping and by the time we left the library, 5pm was drawing near. For ten minutes, the two of us sat at the base of the metal doors until the other four students turned up.

‘Let’s do this shit!’ Mondo exclaimed.

‘How are we going to get past this thing though?’ Aoi questioned.

‘Stand back!’ Kiyotaka rolled up his sleeves, ‘I’ve got this!’

Just as he was about to charge at the doors however Toko spoke up, ‘What about that big pickaxe in the shed? That would be ideal’!

‘Hey... what was that about a pickaxe?’ Mondo’s eyes widened.

‘Don’t worry, I will fetch it’, Toko assured us, ‘Then we will solve this thing in no time!’

‘Are you sure you don’t want help? I mean, a pickaxe is pretty hefty thing isn’t it?’ Makoto offered.

‘Nah I’m good’, she made her way to the indoor biome, ‘See you in a minute!’

‘Well... I guess this is it then’, Aoi smiled feebly.

‘Yeah’, Makoto grinned sheepishly, ‘Here goes nothing I guess!’

By the time five minutes had passed however we began to grow concerned.

‘Do you think Toko is okay?’ I asked, ‘Is the pickaxe really that heavy?’

‘Maybe she got eaten by a carnivorous plant’, Makoto trembled.

‘Shall we go and see if she is okay?’ Aoi suggested.

‘No need’, Mondo growled, ‘Oh no... it’s her!’
'Hey punks, long time no see!'

'Um… hi!' Makoto stepped back nervously as Syo, sopping wet stepped closer to us.

'What on earth is going on?' Kiyotaka questioned.

'When I woke up, it was raining all around me!'

'What? Were the sprinklers turned on?' I frowned, 'And where is the pickaxe?'

'What are you even talking about? Anyway you won’t believe what I saw in there!'

'What exactly?'

'There was something concealed under a tarp, I cannot be certain what it was exactly, but it appeared human sized that’s for sure! Oh yes, and it smelled pretty nasty too. Whatever it was had clearly seen better days!'

'Was it another body?'

'It can’t be!' Mondo cried out, ‘The six of us are right here!’

'We had better investigate either way’, I nodded, ‘Lead the way Syo!’

'Sure thing punk!', Syo curtsied before skipping ahead in front of us.

When we opened the door to the indoor biome the sprinklers were now turned off but water was dripping from every leaf and flower as though a small monsoon had just occurred.

‘Jesus Christ! What is that smell?’ Mondo covered his nose.

‘I smell it too’, Aoi did the same as we crept forward, ‘I can't breathe!’

I remained undeterred as the others tried to conceal the stench before us. Peering over the bushes we looked to see… a body. The corpse’s face was covered by an all too familiar looking mask.

‘Clownface?’ Makoto clapped a hand to his mouth approaching the corpse which was indeed wearing a white lab coat. A machete was lodged in the victim’s chest.

I bent down over the corpse, ‘I have a bad feeling about this. The mask also seems to be fused to the face too for some reason’.

‘Yeah this seems suspicious as fuck’, Mondo grunted.

'It’s a trap!’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘Oh, you punks are such cowards! Look it’s easy!’, Syo bent down to remove the mask.

‘No!’ the rest of us cried out but it was too late.

When Syo touched the mask yelling 'Gotcha!', we could immediately hear a loud beeping being emitted from the grinning face.

‘Oh shit! Run!’ I yelled.

We all scattered and leaped into the foliage around us for cover as a loud explosion echoed throughout the room. Within those few seconds the terrible stench only worsened as the smell of
burning flesh made its way to our nostrils.

Kiyotaka was the first to emerge, hose in hand. He managed to douse the flames but not that ever-present stink of death. It continued to linger on as the funeral bells began to toll.
We emerged from our hiding places, leaves and twigs in our hair and clothes as we stepped forward to observe the scene before us. Kiyotaka was standing there, the hose in his hands dripping.

‘I think I got rid of the worst of it’, he panted, ‘I tried my best to not destroy the evidence, not as if there is much of it left of course’. He looked down where the face would have been, which was now little more than a puddle of black goop.

‘Oh dear’, we thought another fire had erupted before realising that the black smoke signalled Monokuma’s arrival, ‘Well… it looks like you will just have to work with what you’ve got doesn’t it?’

‘Are you fucking with us?’ Mondo snapped, ‘That corpse has clearly been dead for some time!’

‘Yeah’, frowned Aoi, ‘None of us recognise this individual. For all we know, you could have stolen a random corpse from a hospital or funeral home’.

‘Oh, don’t worry! You know this person alright, even if it doesn’t jump right at you straight away’.

‘How are we supposed to know who they are though if you planted a bomb in the mask?’ I rounded on the beast, ‘Surely that’s cheating!?"

‘Life isn’t fair Kyoko, I thought you lot would have learned that by now! After all, the generations before you plunged the world into a terrible recession. You are the ones that must pay for their folly and clean up their mess! I’m sure you are all more than aware of that, especially you Taka!’

Kiyotaka simply looked up coldly at the bear before I spoke, ‘Fine we will do it…’

‘That’s the spirit little cubs! This poor soul did not die a natural death. In fact one of the students here was responsible for their brutal demise!’

‘How can that be?’ questioned Makoto, ‘All the other known murderers in the university were caught and executed. Judging by the smell, this person has surely been dead for a while now?’

‘Anyway, chop, chop! The sixth class trial is right around the corner!’

‘What the Hell??’ Mondo scratched his head.

‘Come on’, I told everyone, ‘It’s not like we have a choice in the matter…’

‘Yeah, we had better crack on with this thing!’ Syo announced.

‘I will stand guard!’ Kiyotaka nodded firmly.

The others were not so enthusiastic however, probably because they wanted to get away from the smell as soon as possible. Instead they opted to explore other parts of the biome, covering their mouths and noses with scarves or surgical masks as they did so. Only Makoto, Kiyotaka and I remained, although the two boys also ended up covering their faces as I started to examine the body.

Looking closer I realised that the lab coat was placed on top of the corpse in a rather bad attempt to make it seem like they were wearing it. Underneath I could also tell that the body itself, naked, pale and with rigor mortis clearly setting in, was female. Alongside the knife wound in the chest I could make out several bluish blotches underneath the skin, indicating heavy blunt force trauma.
addition, I noticed many scars, although most of them had obviously healed when the victim was alive.

‘Poor girl’, Makoto sighed seeing the state of the corpse.

‘Only a sick individual could do that amount of damage to a person’, Kiyotaka stated.

‘Look at this…’ I held up one of the delicate hands. Her nails still had remnants of chipped bright red nail polish upon them. What interested me most however was on the back of the hand, covered in patchy foundation. Once I wiped the makeup away, a strange tattoo in the shape of a wolf’s head was revealed.

Kiyotaka looked with intrigue at the design, ‘Father always told me that only members of the Yakuza and other gangs tend to wear such things in the open. Even progressive youngsters fighting against that negative stigma tend to have their tattoos inked in places that can easily be covered up’.

‘It looks like this tattoo was concealed too though, our victim likely used foundation to keep it hidden’, Makoto pointed out, ‘Also if this is who I think it is, I imagine it wouldn’t matter too much to them if they are wearing protective gloves most of the time. I bet holding those metal weapons in the desert with your bare hands is the equivalent of holding a hot potato’.

‘I have a hunch too. Toko and I were conducting some research in the library and I came across this’, I held out the newspaper clipping I discovered earlier to Makoto and Taka.

‘Fenrir…’ Kiyotaka uttered, ‘Like the wolf from Norse mythology, right?’

‘If she really was in a group like that, it would make sense for her to have such a tattoo right?’ Makoto tilted his head.

‘Apart from Mondo obviously, I cannot think of anyone else here who would wear such a thing’, I said, ‘So I think I can quite confidentially say that our victim here is indeed Mukuro Ikusaba’.

‘Isn’t Mukuro the mastermind though?!’ Kiyotaka gasped.

‘It was a possibility, not something set in stone…’ I told him, ‘What’s with the heavy foundation and nail polish though… that I don’t quite understand, unless she was off duty or something…’ I proceeded to examine the knife wound and I became stumped.

‘Kyoko is something wrong?’

‘The blood around this wound is quite fresh but…’ I took out a syringe from my bag and extracted some of it, ‘Something about it seems off’.

‘Sounds like the time when Byakuya tried to frame Mondo for Chihiro’s death by creating a trail of animal blood. The wound also resembles Chihiro’s post mortem wounds due to a lack of bleeding’, Makoto pointed out.

‘Yes, I recognised that too… very strange. Those bruises look much more convincing. Nevertheless, I will get this sample tested’, I pocketed it before going on to explore the rest of the biome.

‘I realised… I need to check something!’ Makoto waved me off looking strangely anxious before dashing off in the opposite direction.

I walked over to where Aoi was standing, looking over the chicken coop.
‘That’s weird…’ her eyes narrowed, ‘I could have sworn there were four chickens in here but now
there are only three. I wonder where the fourth one could be’.

‘I think I know’, I took out the blood sample.

‘Are you saying the one who dumped the body here stole one of the chickens, killed it and then used
it’s blood to make it resemble human blood?’

‘I cannot be certain yet. This sample still needs to be tested but that theory certainly sounds plausible.
It’s not the first time someone here has used animal blood to cover their tracks’.

‘True… I mean the blood looked fresh, but the corpse just looked too old for the blood to appear that
new’.

‘Rigor mortis had set in too which makes the whole situation even more fucked’.

‘Indeed’, Aoi bowed her head, ‘Mondo is exploring the shed, he found some weird crap in there’.

‘I’d better go and check out this ‘weird crap’ for myself’, I nodded as I found the shed hidden in the
bushes, Mondo standing by the small wooden door.

‘Oh, hello lassie! I know what you are gonna ask’, he directed me into the shed, ‘I was so excited
upon finding the Skull Cleaver that I didn’t recognise it at first!’

‘Skull Cleaver?’ I looked apprehensively towards the pickaxe before Mondo showed me his
discovery, a very wet tarp dripping upon a work bench. Examining it closer I could see traces of red
upon it.

‘I think this must have had something to do with Toko turning full edgelord on us earlier!’

‘Yeah, Syo did say it was ‘raining’ upon her ‘awakening’. The corpse was pretty dry when I
examined it too, so I imagine the body was wrapped up in this for manoeuvring purposes. The one
who placed the body here must have spotted Toko from a distance when she went to get the… ‘Skull
Cleaver’ and turned on the sprinklers to throw her off the scent. Then when Syo was talking to us the
killer removed the tarp and placed it in here’.

‘That would make sense. She emerged from the biome dripping like a fucking swamp monster!’

‘Yeah... that too…’ I frowned, 'Well thanks for showing me Mondo. As absurd as this situation is, I
think I have it cracked... at least some of it anyway’.

‘I’m looking forward to what you have to say at the trial Kyoko, then again where have you gone
wrong so far? The mastermind is no match for an intelligent lassie like you’.

‘I dunno… I have my theories… but I fear the next trial could very well become my breaking
point…’

I left the shed, exited the biome and made my way downstairs. I wanted to test the blood sample I
had obtained to finally confirm my suspicions.

‘Kyoko wait up!’ As I reached the dorms, I saw Makoto run up to me looking very pale.

‘What’s up? Did something just spook you?’

‘The knife! It’s gone… I locked my door I swear… This must be why they planted it in the first
place, to frame me for Mukuro’s death’.
‘That’s plausible. Alas… I am not sure if I am able to come up with a definitive culprit but I will do the best I can to defend you’, I smiled feebly, ‘On paper it doesn’t seem there is much of a point for me to defend you… this trial is going to be my undoing and I know it…’

‘Kyoko, that’s not true! There has to be another way!’

‘You are so naïve Makoto’, I chuckled, ‘That’s one of the reasons why I’m defending you, but more importantly you have helped me significantly throughout this thing’.

‘I haven’t done that much’, he scratched the back of his head, ‘I was mostly doing it for Leon’s sake. I want to help find out the one who has us trapped here to avenge his death’.

‘That’s very noble of you. Yes, it seems Monokuma has gotten us into an impossible situation. I feel he has deliberately skewed the trial in his favour by having us investigate a corpse of somebody who we never even met personally. Nevertheless, I believe in justice and it’s my job to make sure the truth prevails. I will fight for it or I will die trying’.

‘Please don’t die if you can avoid it’, Makoto held out his hands, ‘We have kind of depended on you for our survival!’ As I walked to my room he asked, ‘Do you think Mukuro was Clownface?’

‘Considering how deteriorated her corpse was… I don’t honestly think so’.

Just as I was about to open the door however, the funeral bells rang.

‘Oh, come on!’ cried Makoto, ‘I swear we had a lot more time in the previous investigations!’

‘No use getting angry about it’, I sighed, ‘We will have to make do with what we’ve got’.

When I arrived at the elevator, I saw the others looking equally peeved.

‘This whole investigation has been a fucking joke!’ Mondo punched the wall with his working hand.

‘We never even met this person!’ Aoi protested, ‘How are we supposed to know who killed her?’

‘I have a feeling I won’t be able to save Toko, or even myself this time around’, Syo looked up at the ceiling, ‘Alas… it looks like I will be turned into bear chow alongside you punks’.

‘This is probably Monokuma’s punishment for our trespassing attempt’, Kiyotaka gritted his teeth.

‘I don’t know what’s going on, I really don’t…’, I told them, ‘We just have to do it’.

‘Well…’ Mondo relaxed as the elevator doors opened, ‘It looks like this may be our last trip down here. If we are going to die, we will die like the 300 at Thermopylae. Like us, the Spartans were fighting against impossible odds and became immortalised for their bravery in the face of death’.

‘That’s very inspiring’, Aoi said as we stepped inside, ‘Although I’m not sure if the achievements of six university students, ultimate or not, will be quite so well enshrined…’

‘I really hope we don’t end up becoming martyrs’, Kiyotaka nodded as the device began to descend, ‘but if that outcome is written in the stars, then I hope my sacrifice will help the Ishimaru clan regain its reputation’.

‘Yes. There is no use complaining any more’, I uttered as we felt the draft, ‘let’s just get this over with’.

‘No use crying over spilled milk!’ nodded Syo.
‘I feared that this would happen soon enough. I feel that Monokuma in the previous trials was just toying with us in preparation for this moment’.

‘When an orca catches a seal, it plays with it first by tossing it high in the air with its tail repeatedly, tormenting it… before finally killing and eating it. Are you saying it’s like that?’ Aoi asked me.

‘It’s kind of like that yes’, I answered as we stepped out.

As Monokuma’s cronies stared in our direction, we felt as though we were standing on a sandbank in the middle of the ocean, getting increasingly smaller as the tide was coming in.

‘Oh, little cubs it’s so good to see you again!’ Monokuma called out as we took our places.

‘We know you are fucking with us Monokuma’ I clenched my fists, ‘First, you made us find the killer for an individual we have never even met and planted a bomb on her face so it would erase the victim’s identity. Then you cut the investigation time short so I couldn’t test the blood sample I had. Still... in the name of justice, we are willing to go through this no matter what’.

‘I told you before, you have met this unfortunate individual during your stay here, she just appeared to you in a way none of you expected’, he grinned, ‘Anyway let’s not dally little cubs! On with the case!’
‘So’, Monokuma clapped his paws, ‘I think we should first determine the identity of the victim’.

‘I could be wrong of course but I think I can narrow it down to one individual’, I said.

‘And how are you going to do that my dear?’

‘I came across various papers documenting this class and saw the name of a sixteenth student, Mukuro Ikusaba. Her talent was not listed but she seems to have been involved in military affairs’.

‘Oh, you know about Mukuro do you?’, the bear’s grin widened, ‘Tell me more!’

‘She was part of a mercenary group called Fenrir which is named after a wolf from Norse mythology. When I examined the body, I found a tattoo depicting such an animal on the back of the hand. The victim covered it up with foundation and I only saw it properly after wiping it off’.

‘She must have been pretty serious to wear such a thing. In Japan tattoos tend to be looked down upon since they are still associated with the Yakuza, despite the practice being less common in their circles. Still nine times out of ten, body art signifies something. If you are part of an elusive or criminal organisation, their respective tattoos act as a binding contract in a sense…’, Mondo explained, ‘I didn’t go through all the pain to get mine just to ‘look radical’ or whatever…’

‘That makes sense’, I nodded, ‘Fenrir certainly seems to be elusive but from what little information has been gathered about them, they are also quite notorious. I imagine Mukuro would want to keep such a symbol hidden because of that, whether it’s under military gloves, or using excessive amounts of foundation’.

‘Anyone can wear a tattoo ya know!’ Monokuma yawned, ‘Even in Japan if you are particularly daring. You said it so yourself Kiyotaka!’

‘I did yes’, he uttered, ‘but that brings us to our second point. It has to be Mukuro, all the other students are either sitting in this room or are deceased. We know because we watched them die. Combine us along with the victims and executed that makes fifteen, add Mukuro and that makes a total of sixteen. I can’t see how it can be any other way’.

‘I think it would be appropriate to give a rundown of those who died, just so we are sure it’s accurate’, Makoto pondered, ‘Yasuhiro died first from the neck of a noose’.

‘Junko was second’, Aoi reminded us, ‘We all watched her get crushed to death’.

Makoto bowed his head solemnly, ‘Leon was the third to die, I sat by his side after his body was pierced by three arrows’.

‘Sayaka was fourth. She was executed in a most barbaric fashion…’ A surge of anger ran through me as I was reminded of the bronze contraption’s ‘roars’ made by her desperate screams.

‘Chihiro was the fifth victim, her throat cut because of my failure to protect her’, Mondo lamented.

‘Byakuya was sixth, executed by molten gold’, Kiyotaka spoke.

‘Akira was the seventh to be killed, I discovered his body at the bottom of a large tank’, Makoto said.

My heart ached, ‘Celestia was then sentenced to death, making her the eighth to die. She was
mercilessly tormented by demons before she fell…’ I faltered.

Aoi’s eyes watered, ‘Sakura was ninth. She took her own life to save the rest of us… and that’s why the six of us are still standing here at present’.

‘Oh, how very touching’, the bear laughed, ‘please excuse me while I go and get my handkerchief!’

‘You see what we are trying to say though, right?’ I told him, ’There were fifteen people in the game in total and we have never met Mukuro Ikusaba… unless of course she was wearing a very convincing disguise…’

‘Okay little cubs, time is of the essence’, Monokuma rather unusually cut us off, ‘The victim’s identity may appear important, but our focus should be on the killer here!’

‘What’s with the abrupt subject change?’ Aoi frowned.

‘Yeah Monokuma, are you trying hide something from us punk?’ Syo hissed.

‘You are really starting to piss me off!’ Mondo growled, ‘You can’t just leave us in limbo here! Surely the identity of the victim can point us in the direction of the killer?’

‘Do you want to be torn to pieces?’ Monokuma unsheathed his claws.

‘Let’s just get on with this…’ I sighed, ‘We knew this would not be a fair trial…’

‘Of course, lass…’ Mondo relented.

‘Okay then! Let’s start from the very beginning!’ the bear announced.

‘Syo’, I looked towards her, ‘Are you able to give your account?’

‘Why I certainly can’, she turned away from us, ‘It all began when I was standing on my lonesome in the biome, or so I thought… Anyway, I looked around and there was something lying on the path, covered up with a tarp. I wanted to investigate but then the most terrible smell emitted from it and I had to leave. That’s when I ran into the others!’

‘Yeah you really freaked us out back there!’ Mondo exclaimed.

‘When the rest of us entered the biome there was no sheet covering the body. Despite the sprinklers being on minutes before, the corpse was in relatively dry state too, even when I was forced to douse the flames after Syo unknowingly activated a bomb which had been strapped to its face’, Kiyotaka explained.

‘You certainly have a good aim Taka… with the hose’, Mondo cleared his throat, ‘Otherwise the entire body would have been drenched! Your efforts still didn’t get rid of the stink though… I swear I can still smell it…’ he winced.

‘Me too…’ Aoi shuddered, ‘I think the body was starting to decompose…’

‘The smell became too unbearable for me, so I decided to do something productive for once and I explored the shed. Inside I spotted a tarp laid out over a work bench, sopping wet and with traces of blood upon it’.

‘I think that was deliberate’, I said, ‘whoever placed the body in the biome must have spotted Toko from a distance and took action. I imagine they turned on the sprinklers to throw her off the scent and used the tarp to cover the body in order to keep it dry’.
We came across the body which had a white lab coat draped over it and it was wearing a strange mask. This was especially odd as someone or something wearing that same attire attacked me last night. Yet the corpse was too old for it and my attacker to be the same individual. Rigor mortis was clearly setting in’, Makoto told us.

‘I too think they were separate people. I was there last night when it happened, and Makoto’s assailant was dressed in the same clothing. Even in the darkness I remember that horrible clownish grin all too well. Makoto was scared shitless even after I drove them away!’

‘If they wanted to kill someone, why were they going after him and not you Kyoko?’ Aoi questioned.

‘Probably because you were a riskier target for them!’, Makoto laughed feebly.

‘The mastermind most likely does consider me a threat by this point’, I looked up at him, ‘that’s probably why they didn’t want to draw so much attention, so they targeted you instead. The attacker wasn’t planning on killing Makoto though, rather I saw them plant a machete in his bedside drawers, the same one we found lodged in the body’.

‘Are you suggesting that the attacker was planning on framing Makoto?’ asked Kiyotaka.

‘Positive. I caught the attacker in their tracks, but I have a feeling that was planned. Still, I could understand why it would look so suspicious to some, Makoto is the only one without a definitive talent after all and it’s not the first time he was a prime suspect either’.

‘He still could have stabbed the victim between the time he was attacked and when we first discovered the body. Wouldn’t that make perfect sense?’ Syo pointed out.

‘It would if this was any normal investigation… but like we stated earlier, the body was clearly in the rigor mortis stage’, I asserted.

‘The blood looked so fresh though…’.

‘Which is why I find it so odd… a corpse that old doesn’t usually have bright red blood like that. As the corpse starts to decompose, the blood gets darker’.

‘I thought it was strange too’, Makoto commented, ‘the blood looked fresh, but the wound didn’t, it was clearly inflicted post mortem. On the other hand, we did notice a lot of bruising upon her body. This makes me think that the victim’s true cause of death was blunt force trauma’.

‘Where is the proof?’ Monokuma asked, ‘You have a knife and a lot of blood as evidence, what else could you possibly want?’

‘There is one problem with that’, I glared up at the beast, ‘Nothing has been confirmed to prove that the blood belongs to the body… or is even human for that matter…’

‘Do you reckon this killer used animal blood too?’ Mondo tilted his head.

‘It would make sense. One of the four chickens in the coop was gone, like it had just disappeared. Poof! Gone! Does that not seem weird at all to you Monokuma?’ Aoi spoke.

‘It could have just escaped you know!’ the bear said, ‘Chickens sometimes get out right?’

‘You are really taking the piss, aren’t you?’ I snapped, ‘You deliberately stopped the investigation early so I couldn’t test the blood sample I collected on the scene’.
‘So, what if I did? You don’t have any evidence to show that she died of blunt force trauma either!’

‘You have a point but we never knew Mukuro. How do you know your mistress didn’t kill her then dumped her body just so you could pin the blame on one of us and trick us into voting wrongly?’

‘Yeah that’s fucking obvious if you ask me!’, Mondo snorted, ‘You don’t want to play this fairly do you, furball? You and your mistress only want to jack off to our misery, don’t you?! This is what this whole thing has been about!’

‘Let’s just vote and be done’, I clenched the sides of my chair, ‘We came in knowing this was never going to be a fair trial. So much of the university was gated off to prevent us from obtaining proper evidence’.

‘Vote for me’, Mondo pleaded, ‘After everything I have done, nobody in the outside world will miss me now’.

‘If anyone deserves to be voted for it’s me!’ Aoi stepped forward, ‘I tried to get everyone killed for my own selfish ends in the previous trial. I feel that me being given the burden of responsibility is necessary for me to atone for my little brother’s death’.

‘No vote for me!’ Makoto cried out, ‘You don’t need to do this to yourselves. I’m the biggest failure at the end of the day. I’m supposed to be the Ultimate Lucky Student but if luck was on my side Leon wouldn’t have died… nobody would have died… I’m nothing but a fraud and I let you all down. Luck is nothing but a mere coincidence’.

‘Maybe we should just all vote for ourselves… it won’t make any difference either way’, Aoi sighed.

‘Whatever we decide to do, we will die knowing that we did it together’, Kiyotaka spoke.

‘It’s probably best I stay like this’, Syo crossed her arms, ‘I don’t know if Toko could handle it…’

‘Quiet everyone!’ I shouted before the others turned to face me, ‘Are we just going to give up hope like this? I thought you all knew better, particularly you Makoto’.

‘I’m sorry’, Makoto bowed his head, ‘When the game began, I wanted to encourage everyone so we could all get along, but now I know it was all just false hope’.

‘Well, well, well!’ Monokuma laughed, ‘It seems the beacon of hope has finally burned out! I was right all along, no matter how much hope tries to put up a fight, despair always wins!’

I couldn’t think of any way around it. We were well and truly fucked.

Just as my last spark of hope was about to die out however, I heard a voice in my head which I thought I would never hear again, judging me. That was when the question popped into my head.

What would Celestia Ludenberg do in this situation?

When I first arrived, I vowed to put my faith in Celestia in order to survive. Even if we didn’t always agree on things, she was a natural winner. Could she be the key to the six of us getting out of here, even in death? Was there really a method in the madness?

‘Look Monokuma, I don’t know why you want Makoto dead so much, but it sounds a bit anticlimactic and predictable just offing him like that don’t you think? Don’t you want something a little more exciting? Won’t it be much more interesting to end this thing with a bang?’ I stared unblinking at Celestia’s shrine, as though she was observing me back.
‘What are you talking about exactly? You had better not be taking the piss with me!’

‘No... I just want to up the stakes a bit you know!’

‘And how are you going to do that?’ The bear leapt from his platform and eyed my face as though it was a particularly tasty seal, but the hunger in his stare was also mixed with wild intrigue.

‘Well I just thought it would be a nice idea to play a little game of my own…’

‘Ooo you mean like Fortfight? I heard that is what all the kids are into these days!’

‘Fortnite don’t you mean?’ I heard Makoto grumble.

‘Not exactly… I mean demons are more into gambling and all that jazz, right?’ I grinned.

‘Why yes we are!’ Monokuma sat down, his expression relaxing a little, ‘The only problem is, nobody has ever dared challenge me to a bet for a thousand years. It gets quite lonely because of that. You see, if you decide to play with me as your opponent, there is no turning back. At least if you play a game with Satan and lose, he is willing to get you out of your dire predicament… with a price of course!’, he laughed, ‘But he is ever so generous in comparison. If you lose against me on the other hand, nothing will be able to save you. You can cry, you can beg, but none of that will be of any use against me!'

‘Ah, so it’s a bit like Russian Roulette then…’

‘Kind of’, the bear smiled, ‘it’s a little more complicated than that though. You see, if you lose, I don’t want to simply kill you… I want your soul!’

‘And… what will happen if you get hold of our souls?’

‘You will serve me forever, becoming empty husks filled only with the bitterest despair. Your torment will make you want to take it out on the world around you. Thus, you will be used as my personal instruments to infect the human population with as much despair as possible!’

‘I see… very well then Monokuma’, I gestured towards everybody else, ‘If we lose, you get to claim each of our souls. Six entire souls up for grabs doesn’t sound like a bad deal, right?’

With the noticeable exception of Makoto, the others let out cries of protest at this proposal as Monokuma replied, ‘This sounds like a dream come true!’

‘Are you outta your goddamn mind lass?!’ Mondo yelled.

‘Yeah Kyoko, gambling our souls like that seems a bit risky does it not?’ Aoi gasped.

‘It’s not as simple as that however, for I have a few conditions to play. First, you must unlock the rest of the university so we can gather all the evidence we need. I don’t want any interference from you either’, I frowned, ‘I’m sure you know what I mean by that!’

‘Anything else my dear?’ Monokuma grinned.

‘Secondly, if we win, you must reveal the truth behind the university, our entire situation, and…’ I paused, ‘Your mistress must show herself in the flesh’.

‘Holy guacamole! You are asking quite a lot from me aren’t ya?’

‘I personally think that sounds like a fair bet’, I crossed my arms, ‘especially considering the
alternative is you claiming our very souls for all eternity!’

‘Okay then!’, the bear held out a paw, ‘I will abide by your request Kyoko, the entire university is now yours for the taking! Do we have a deal?’

‘Don’t do it Kyoko!’ Kiyotaka cried out.

‘Jeez... it would have been nice telling us before putting our souls on the line like that!’ Syo put her hands on her hips.

‘I agree with Kyoko’, Makoto sighed, ‘Besides what other choice do we have here?’

‘Fine!’ Mondo growled, ‘But if we lose this thing it’s all on you, lassie!’

‘Don’t worry, I’m perfectly aware of that’, I said as I shook the bear’s paw. At first, I was worried that Monokuma’s handshake would cause my shoulder to dislocate but he was surprisingly courteous.

‘Okie dokie then!’ Monokuma clapped his paws, ‘Y’all had better get started investigating then! After you have finished gathering everything you need, we will have one final class trial! Hope VS Despair! Have fun in your search little cubs!'

‘I really hope you know what you are doing lass’, Mondo told me as the six of us hopped into the elevator.

‘Don’t worry’, I reassured him and the others standing around me, ‘I’m more confident than ever, you know… being the Ultimate Detective and all...’
‘Kyoko is that really true?’ gasped Aoi as the elevator ascended back to the real world.

‘When did you find out?’ questioned Kiyotaka.

‘Why are you acting all surprised?’ Syo laughed, ‘I always knew you had it in ya!’

Makoto cried tears of joy, ‘Deep down I always knew what your talent was since the first class trial!’

‘Alright! Settle down!’ Mondo interrupted us, ‘We can gush about how wonderful this all is later. Right now, we have a mystery to solve and God knows what will happen if we lose!’

‘Mondo is right’, I told them, ‘Right now we just need to focus on uncovering the mastermind once and for all. But where do we begin?’

‘Well we have a whole university to explore… it’s hard to tell where to start’, Makoto frowned.

‘I think we should start from the top and work our way down’.

‘You mean we should investigate the Bio Lab first?’

‘That’s the idea. Besides isn’t that the room we were trying to break into?’

‘I just hope there isn’t anything too fucked up in there’, Mondo growled, ‘Considering there was a classroom covered in blood on the same floor though, I wouldn’t be surprised’.

‘I hope so too’, Aoi sighed, ‘But yes, my stay here taught me to expect the very worst’.

The six of us made a beeline towards the stairs before we stood gathered and panting around the familiar metal doors. The letters, ‘RAW’ were still written in blood, glistening.

‘Are you guys ready?’ I asked the others nervously as I reached out for the door handle.

Apprehensively the others nodded, before I cautiously entered the room. Almost the moment the door opened we were met with an icy blast causing Syo to sneeze.

‘Wha… what happened?’ Toko looked around fearfully.

‘It’s alright’, I reassured her, ‘We are just in the middle of trying to uncover the mastermind’.

‘What did I miss?’ she tilted her head looking confused.

‘We will explain later, right now we need to figure out why we even ended up in this situation’.

‘Sure thing, Kyoko! Whatever you say! I want to help you the best way I can’, her face turned pink again. She leaned gently against my body while I stood there, not knowing how to react.

‘Let’s go already!’, Makoto cried out. Slowly the six of us stepped inside.

At first, I thought we had stepped into a walk-in freezer. Ice was forming on the walls and ceiling and we huddled up together just to stay warm.

‘I hope we don’t have to stay in here for long…’ I could hear Kiyotaka’s teeth chattering as he spoke.
‘Yeah, I’d rather not lose my only working hand to frostbite if I can avoid it’, Mondo uttered.

‘Look’, Aoi pointed with a shivering finger at a metal table with several tools upon it.

‘It seems to be a dissection table’, I looked down at it, ‘I wonder if the medical students used this room before the tragedy took place’.

‘That would make sense’, Makoto stared at some cold chambers at the back of the room, ‘What do you reckon they are keeping in here?’, I stepped over and counted a total of sixteen of them

My heart froze as I realised what was most likely in there, ‘Don’t open them, any of you’, I turned around, ‘Makoto, check the biome to see if the body is still in there’, Makoto gave a confused expression but nevertheless bowed and complied to my wishes as he darted out of the room.

We all stood there in a chilling silence before Makoto returned, clutching at his chest.

‘The body is completely gone’, he tried to catch his breath, ‘Even the smell and all signs of an explosion taking place have disappeared entirely’.

‘What does that have to do with this?’ Toko swallowed.

‘Everything’, I said as I took out a notepad from my bag and began to sketch a rough diagram of the scene before me.

As I drew, tongue out in my concentration, I also paid attention to the lights on each chamber. Out of the sixteen chambers, nine of them had their respective lights switched on, indicating that something was currently lying in there while the other seven were switched off.

‘What do you think is in there?’ Kiyotaka looked in horror.

‘Well…’ Toko’s lips quivered, ‘They have to put the deceased somewhere, don’t they?’

‘So, this is a morgue?’

Aoi recoiled, ‘Does that mean… oh God! I’m sorry, I’m sorry…’ she bolted out, tears in her eyes.

‘Oh my God… Chihiro…’ Mondo fell on all fours trembling violently. Kiyotaka helped him get back onto his feet but not before he let out a pained howl which echoed across the room.

‘Mondo and I will investigate elsewhere’, Kiyotaka said calmly as he escorted his companion outside.

As the other three left Toko desperately pressed herself against the cold metal.

‘Master are you in there?!’ she cried out, clawing against one of the doors.

‘Toko no!’ Makoto ran up to her but by the time he got there she had already opened the chamber.

Indeed, there was a body parcelled in a white sheet, only its bluish feet were sticking out. Looking closer I could see that underneath; the corpse was female and headless. Peeling back the sheet I saw that the neck ended in some black inky tar-like substance, causing me to quickly cover it up again.

‘That’s the body from the biome isn’t it? That’s Mukuro!’ Makoto clapped a hand to his mouth.

‘Yup’, I nodded before I gently pushed the body back into its chamber, ‘Hang on a second…’, I checked my diagram then looked back up at the sixteen cold chambers, ‘That’s very odd, ten
students allegedly died here yet only nine of the lights are active… suspicious…’

‘Are you implying that the mastermind is a student we previously thought was dead?’ Makoto frowned, ‘If that’s the case, either one of the executions was faked or one of the deceased students was not who we thought they were…’

‘Yeah, I’m getting a feeling that the Mastermind is someone who is supposed to be deceased. When I first brought up the theory I was merely joking, like it was a wacky conspiracy theory or something. Now that we know Mukuro is dead, this diagram I have drawn pretty much confirms it’.

‘Can I just get a glimpse of master’s eyes one more time?’ Toko pleaded.

‘No’, I told her, ‘Since he was executed by molten gold, I imagine he is still stuck in the position he died in. Are you sure you want to really see that?’

‘Come on Toko’, Makoto tried in vain to reassure her as she once again scratched at the metal.

‘We are done here. Let’s go already before we all freeze to death!’ I uttered irritably as Makoto and I had to drag her out. By the time I closed the metal doors she gave up at last.

‘Fine, fine’, she turned her nose up to the ceiling, ‘But you had better avenge him Kyoko!’

‘I will don’t worry, you can trust me. Besides, don’t you want to be my assistant?’

‘Of course, senpai… I mean Kyoko’, she turned to face the wall, ‘I still don’t like you, but I will do whatever I can to help solve this case. On the second floor there is a control room, it was locked previously but now it should be accessible right?’

‘Lead the way’, I told her before the three of us headed downstairs to the door she mentioned.

‘So, this is the control room?’ I narrowed my eyes, ‘This must be where the university’s security camera system is located. I just hope they haven’t been filming our more personal moments’.

‘Me too’, Toko bit her nails again as we entered, ‘They better not have!’

‘Jesus Christ!’ gasped Makoto looking at the room before us filled with many TV screens.

‘Oh shit… I don’t think they have just been recording us for ‘safety reasons…’, I looked at the screens to notice the logos of several prominent channels across Japan and the World.

‘Has this killing game been broadcast to the world this whole time?’

‘Looks like it. I think this has been filmed live during our entire stay here…’

‘Crap…’ Makoto’s face fell.

‘Why?!’ Toko fell on her knees rather dramatically, clutching at her pigtails, ‘What kind of sicko would want to watch a bunch of university students getting tortured?’

‘The same kind of people who frequent the deep web I imagine’, my eyes darted around the various screens, ‘Sadly there are sick people in this world who enjoy wanking off to the torment of others’.

‘You know… I’m not sure if I want to go back to the outside world now’, Makoto gulped.

‘I think I’m going to investigate elsewhere, otherwise I will actually throw up’, Toko trembled.
‘Okay’, I told her, ‘Just promise me you won’t go into the Bio Lab again’.

‘Fine…’ she grumbled as she walked out of the room, ‘Is there anything else I can do to help?’

I handed her the blood sample I still had in my bag, and my room key, ‘Will you be able to get this sample tested for me. I have a blood testing kit in my room’.

‘I’m no forensics expert though, I am only a mere writer’, Toko looked surprised as I gave her this responsibility, ‘What if I mess it all up?’

‘You won’t’, I placed a hand on her cheek, ‘I trust you. Also, even if you are not science savvy the instructions are surprisingly easy to read. Just treat it as a rather macabre recipe book’.

‘Thanks Kyoko I will do what I can!’

Seconds after Toko left, I noticed something peculiar in the corner.

‘Where does this lead?’ I was staring at a smaller wooden door. It was blood red and it had a large silver knocker upon it, in the shape of a roaring bear. Its eyes were a pair of two glistening rubies, making them look alive when the light hit them. ‘This is very confusing. The university was built just after the Second World War, but this door looks a lot more ancient than that’.

‘Oh, hello there’, we jumped as Aoi emerged from the strange door. She was smiling feebly, her eyes still red and puffy, ‘Sorry for scaring you like that…’

‘It’s fine, I’m just glad you are okay Aoi’, Makoto put a hand on her shoulder, ‘Did you find anything?’

‘Yeah, this room is… well, you will see it for yourself. It was locked at first but when the two guys came down here, Mondo helped me to open it by picking the lock. I suppose even doors from Hell can be picked open with enough skill’.

‘Did any of Monokuma’s cronies appear?’

‘We were able to get in no problem but part of me wishes I didn’t see what was in there…’

‘It’s not another bloody classroom is it?’ I asked.

‘No… I’ve just never seen anything like it. I’m not even sure if it’s part of the building. It gives off an aura like it’s from another dimension, kind of like the courtroom’.

As I stepped through the door, I felt a familiar draft sweep over us as we entered. The room was as ancient as the door, lit only by candlelight. Upon the walls I noticed many symbols but what was most prominent was a circle neatly carved into the floor.

‘Is this a fucking demon summoning room?’ I cried out as I began to look around. On a shelf I spotted several large heavy books, little clay bowls and what looked like a sacrificial knife.

‘Oh my God!’ Makoto gasped, ‘Is this where the mastermind communicates with Monokuma?’

‘I think so’, answered Aoi, ‘Although I have no idea how his mistress would do that. By the looks of things though it seems to involve a complex ritual’, she opened up one of the leather-bound books which despite looking very old, was completely free from dust, ‘The language in this mostly consists of runes and I’m not sure it is even from this world’.

‘Our captor is obsessed with the occult that’s for sure’, I continued to look around and when my
eyesight adjusted, I noticed some small blood splotches. The amount wasn’t as excessive as that in the classroom, but it appeared to be fresher, ‘Specifically they were involved in blood rituals’.

‘Yeah. During the voting session in each class trial, Monokuma often talked about how your blood binds you to the procedure. We were essentially taking part in a blood rituals too! Although I have a feeling that the rituals involved here were… messier. That would explain the need for those bowls’.

Aoi carefully lifted the curved knife which glinted menacingly in the candlelight. It was a very elaborate weapon, perhaps even beautiful in a sense. I thought things so detailed were only found in RPG games. When I looked closer however, the runes etched into the hilt seemed to be of the same language found in the strange books making me guess that its purpose was ‘ceremonial’.

‘Do you reckon the blood in here came from willing participants?’ Makoto twiddled his thumbs nervously.

‘I have a feeling it was a bit of both’, I looked down at the rug under his feet, ‘Makoto just step back a second’, I noticed that the floor let out a loud creak as he stepped upon it.

After he stepped off the rug, I looked under it to notice a trap door. Upon it was a hand print dipped in red paint as well as the words, ‘Blood of the summoner required to enter’.

‘Well damn…’ Aoi shrugged, ‘What do we do? Shall we try using our own blood?’

I placed my hand over the print, ‘No, I don’t think we should risk it. Even if there weren’t any repercussions. I think we would be cutting our palms for no reason’.

‘Yeah, it’s not worth the effort. I’m certain there are other ways to find the mastermind’s identity’, Makoto shook his head, ‘Besides there is much more of the university to explore’.

‘I agree. As intriguing as this place is, time is not on our side’, I stood up and faced the other two, ‘We should get going. I would like to see if there are any more dorm rooms, I don’t think a big ass prominent university will only have fifteen rooms…’

‘Why the dorms exactly?’ Aoi questioned when the draft blasted over us for the second time.

I closed the door, ‘I feel it will be a good opportunity to explore Hope’s Peak’s history before the tragedy. That may bring us some answers to our situation and who Monokuma’s mistress really is. Often a little bit of history research can help uncover the truth behind current affairs’.

‘You had better be confident about this Kyoko, otherwise we are totally screwed’.

‘Remember how you used to talk about how you trusted your gut Aoi? Well… that’s kind of what I’m doing right now’, I smiled, ‘Don’t worry, I trust my gut and I won’t let Monokuma screw us over’.

‘Okay Kyoko, I trust you’, before she walked away to investigate elsewhere, she bowed as she told me, ‘I am sure Celestia would have been proud of you had she been here’.

‘Come on’, I beckoned Makoto forward and we both made our way back to the dorms.

‘Kyoko look!’ he pointed towards a large door that had opened up, leading up to another staircase.

‘Well what are we waiting for? Let’s go!’

The moment we reached the top of the stairs we could see a lot of debris scattered around. The walls
were cracked and most of the doors which I presumed led to the rooms of other students, were completely caved in by rubble from floor to ceiling.

From one of the rooms, I could hear two male voices. Makoto and I went to the source of the noise, a door. For some reason, a cartoon giraffe was painted upon it

‘Do you reckon that was the University’s mascot?’ Makoto questioned curiously.

‘Probably’, I shrugged, ‘Most places with giraffe mascots tend to get fucked over…’ I opened the door to see Mondo and Kiyotaka standing in an old locker room. Most of the lockers had been tipped over or crushed although some were still open, their contents visible.

‘I swear Taka I don’t remember writing these’, Mondo had a look of confusion on his face.

Kiyotaka was holding some notes which looked like they had been scrunched up and thrown previously, ‘Your handwriting looks so uncanny though. Then again, I don’t remember writing all these either’, he pointed towards some still neatly stacked lecture notes in one of the lockers.

Makoto and I read the note Kiyotaka held, written in a scrawly style. After deciphering the message through the frequent spelling errors, I realised that it was a note of admiration.

‘Taka,

I am finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with the other Ultimates and I fear that the lecturers here are beginning to doubt me again. The pressure is becoming too hard for me to bear and I feel like my head is going to explode at any moment. I don't know what to do. This is my final opportunity to have a chance in this world yet despite how hard I try, the system is stacked against me.

You should know however that despite me feeling like a prisoner again, I have absolutely no regrets meeting you. You are so brave, smart and the one thing keeping me from leaving this dump. I wish a nervous wreck like me was as confident as you are. You are the only one who truly understands the pain I am in right now and I still cling onto hope through your company. For those reasons, I am madly in love with you.

Meet me in my room at 8pm tonight. I need your wisdom and affection again, especially at this time.

Yours truly, Mondo.

P.S. DO NOT let (-) see this. She has been acting increasingly weird lately around me and I fear that she will rat me out if she knows of our interactions’.

There were several similar notes in the locker which looked very out of place compared to the spotless papers that dominated most of it.

‘Those notes must have meant something to you huh?’ I said.

‘I don’t remember receiving such notes though, and Mondo doesn’t remember giving them’, Kiyotaka sighed, ‘Still... the writing looks just like ours’.

‘Do you think these could be from our future selves or something like that?’ Mondo frowned.

‘I don’t think so’, I replied, ‘And I don’t think they are from an alternative dimension either’.

‘More importantly, whose name is blanked out there?’ Makoto questioned.
‘Our gal most likely…’ Mondo grunted.

I bent down to investigate another locker. Inside were several star charts, tarot cards packs and even a small crystal ball. I picked up a small book listing the name ‘Yasuhiro Hagakure’.

‘We found some letters too, apparently from his mother’, Kiyotaka grabbed one and held it out to me.

‘Dear Hiro,

I hope you are enjoying your stay at the university. I can’t believe you have been studying at Hope’s Peak for a whole year! You really are on the way to becoming the Ultimate Clairvoyant!

I understand you have expressed concern about some strange goings on in the university. Try not to worry about it too much. Sadly, campus grounds are hot spots for such groups (just look at all the hate preachers and antivaxxer groups in America if you know what I mean). I know it’s scary, but you know better than them and you deserve the right to be your own person. It’s what has made you so wonderful and successful throughout the years and I trust you are wise enough do to the same now.

If it really worries you, don’t hesitate to tell the dean. I’m sure he will know what to do if things get too out of hand. Keep in mind however that there are good people in the world, and you should continue to make friends whenever it’s possible.

Remember Hiro, whatever happens and even though we are far away, we are still a team just like we always were, and you will get through this, I know you will!

Don’t forget to keep writing!

Mum’.

After I read the letter, my guts felt like they had twisted into knots. With the knowledge that the killing game was broadcast live, I wondered if Yasuhiro’s poor mother had to watch her son die so horribly on camera and my body filled with a red-hot anger again.

‘We will avenge you Yasuhiro, no matter what!’ Makoto looked up to the ceiling.

‘I only want to get out so we can tell the parents of the deceased what happened to their children. I just hope to God they didn’t see them… you know…’ I placed the letter gently back in the locker carefully.

‘If this really is Yasuhiro’s mother then I was right about him being a mamma’s boy… not that there is anything wrong with that of course… She loved him dearly and my heart aches knowing that the university which was supposed to bring out the best in Japan, ended up robbing a mother of her child’, Mondo clenched his fists and began to tremble, ‘I wish I died instead. Hiro was a good companion to us and I’m sure he would have made things a little brighter in the world… I’m… well I’m a pile of human garbage, aren’t I!!’

‘Mondo don’t say that!’ Kiyotaka told him as I continued to examine the lockers.

Most of the lockers I tried to open were jammed shut or were caved in but with an immense amount of strength I was able to force open one of the doors. At first, I thought its contents looked rather generic, consisting of just a bunch of books and papers. Looking closer however I was shocked to realise that the writing looked just like mine.
I picked up the smallest book in the pile titled ‘Diary’. As I turned the pages I saw that the dates on each page were blacked out for some unknown reason. At first the entries seemed pretty standard, but as I turned each page, they got increasingly strange, documenting cult-like activity that apparently occurred throughout the campus. The final entry particularly stood out to me.

‘Today the ‘cultists’ were acting especially weird. Celestia, Sayaka and I were hanging out in the grotto outside when we heard chanting in a language none of us could understand. The others in my class noticed it too, even Mondo and Taka were clearly freaked out by it (even though they would never admit it). Nobody could translate what they were saying but Chihiro pointed out that the word… or name, perhaps… Monokuma was spoken several times. Is this a deity they came up with?

I didn’t recognise most of the students participating in these strange activities at first but now that I think about it, they appear to be from the Hope’s Peak reserve student body, located in the school next to the main building. None of us know why that was the case but Sakura said they were probably envious of our privileges as Ultimates and wanted to join in with something they could all participate in together, unnerving as their common interest seemed. The all seemed to wear black and white with hints of red as their ‘uniform’, like demonic pandas or some shit.

We noticed too that (-) distanced herself from the rest of us, even more so than Byakuya and Toko (I always felt sorry for the latter of the two). This was especially odd since while she was often standoffish, she tended to mix with people if she could to (-). She instead spent most of her time in conversation with one of the student bodies above our year. They seemed friendly enough but so many terrible rumours were spread about them that they were dubbed ‘the class of the damned’ by the other students. Obviously, I thought these rumours were complete nonsense, so at first, I thought it was nice that (-) was giving them some company from outside but it got weird when she spent far more time with them than her (-) who was growing increasingly worried by the day.

Dad has known about these activities for some time and has gotten members of staff to observe those participating. He insists however that so long as nobody is being physically or verbally harmed, he cannot do much about the odd rituals taking place, as freakish as it all seemed.

A blood moon has been forecast to appear in the sky tonight which is odd since the next one was not expected to appear until next year. Nevertheless, my classmates and I are all excited as we are going to gather around to observe it. Aoi will be bringing some doughnuts in of course. No matter how bizarre this all is, when an opportunity arises to gorge ourselves silly with doughnuts, we will take it! I will try not to eat too many however, especially as I have planned the date of a lifetime for my dear Celestia tomorrow and I would rather not spend that important day groaning in bed!

I only hope that we enjoy the night ahead and that things get less weird’.

As I closed the book, tears started to well up in my eyes.

‘Kyoko’, Makoto ran up and tried to comfort me, ‘We don’t even know if this is all real or just a slimy trick by the mastermind. Monokuma is a demon remember? He can manipulate things!’

‘No, it’s real…’, I clenched with shaking hands at the book, ‘It just seems so similar now that I look at it. I don’t know why but I have a feeling this isn’t just some sick joke by the bear’.

‘Kyoko, that furry fuck is just tricking us’, Mondo’s voice shook, ‘It’s the only explanation to all this… It has to be… right Taka?’

‘I… I don’t know’, Kiyotaka bowed his head, ‘This could be real… this could all be real. Maybe the answer will be revealed to us as we continue to gather evidence’.
'Come on Kyoko’, Makoto told me, ‘Don’t we have an investigation to solve?’ he held out a hand.

I took it, ‘Of course… how could have I forgotten…’

‘Don’t worry, with your talent I know you will solve this one too!’

‘Stop, you are making me blush!’ I was able to muster a small smile. Makoto and I traveled further down the rubble strewn dorm corridor, leaving Mondo and Kiyotaka to continue their investigation in the locker room.

At the end of the almost completely demolished corridor, we spotted a door labelled ‘Dean’s Room’. The two of us stepped inside to see a comfortable looking seating area. There was even a television and refrigerator in the room.

‘Wow the Dean must have had everything!’ Makoto gasped.

Only a CD case which was sitting upon the coffee table caught my eye, however. Written upon the disk itself in a black marker was the simply word, ‘Interviews’.

‘This is peculiar. It might be worth analysing back in the IT room’, I pocketed it.

‘Kyoko are you okay? You don’t look so good’, Makoto asked in a concerned tone, as I pushed open the door leading to the bedroom, noticing the various photo frames.

‘Ah… I see…’

‘Yes, Jin Kirigiri the Dean of Hope’s Peak is also my father…’ Upon seeing the pictures, I finally succumbed to my urge to have a smoke.

‘You don’t seem too thrilled about it…’

‘Not really’, I uttered as I took a puff, ‘I had a few… daddy issues. He said he loved me as a daughter and I think he did but he often didn’t show it, especially when I needed his help most. After my mother’s death, I was put under the mentorship of my grandfather, whom my father cut ties with after not allowing the family to observe my mother’s funeral. The Kirigiri family always took its detective work very seriously you see, and as a result it was prioritised over emotional ties’.

‘What did you have against your dad though… if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘The thing is… shortly after my detective training began; my father was offered the career of a lifetime. He was always the ‘black sheep’ of the family, he wasn’t a huge fan of my family’s more stoic traditions. He instead took up various educational jobs and he actually became the principal of several prominent high schools throughout the country. One day however he was given a golden opportunity and that’s what you are seeing now. Only problem is, while he was occupied with this ‘job of a lifetime’, I always felt like he prioritised that position more than his daughter. I mean he kept in contact… but he barely spent time with me, even when the pressure from my grandfather’s regime was getting to my head and my mind almost broke…’

‘Oh my God… I didn’t realise…’

‘It got to a point where I tried to take my own life and ended up getting sectioned for six months. He didn’t even visit me then. Yet while I was being secluded in an observation room, he was handing out prizes to young prodigies and trying to impress the government. The government at the time was going through troubles of its own after the recession so my father naturally wanted to show off his achievements under his leadership to restore hope across Japan. I don’t know how successful he was
when it came to that, but my grandfather suspected my dad was also doing these things to spite him. To be honest I wouldn’t be surprised if that was the case too’.

‘If he was willing to stay in contact with you and let you into this university, I’m sure he did love you. At the same time however he was kind of a dick for just leaving you in the dust like that…’ Makoto frowned, ‘Especially with all of that pressure you were under’.

‘Yeah…’ I sighed, ‘I think it would have helped my situation more if he had been around to help me get through it all. My mother often provided me comfort whenever I was distressed, I wish my father could have taken a leaf out of her book from time to time. Still…’ I picked up one of the photo frames depicting a young dark-haired man with his little white-haired daughter laughing cheerfully upon his shoulders, ‘… I hope nothing bad has happened to him…’

Makoto and I checked one last room which appeared to be the Dean’s personal study. A large neatly wrapped gift book was sitting upon the table, causing my stomach to lurch. What’s worse, a terrible smell seemed to be emitting from it. It certainly gave off serial killer vibes.

‘Do you really think we should open it Kyoko?’

‘I think I know what this is’, I bowed my head, ‘But I have feared it ever since the first day I arrived’.

‘What do you mean?’

I opened the lid, Makoto recoiled in horror as I peered inside.

At the bottom of the box was what seemed to be the charred body of a man. Legs tucked into his chest, resembling a frightened child. His mouth was twisted and wide open as though he had been in agony when he died and black bones jutted out where the flesh had peeled away. Looking closer I saw how much he resembled Sayaka when she died. It was then that I realised…

‘Kyoko…’ Makoto stammered as I gripped the corners of the table tightly. For a minute I could only stare into the box’s contents, at what was left of my father.

‘I know it’s sounds like I’m a mad psychic or something Makoto, but I saw him die, first in my dream and then on the night of the second motive. Monokuma executed him by use of a Wicker Man’.

‘Oh my God…’

‘I know he made some questionable decisions concerning me, but still… he’s my dad… and the bitch in charge of this whole thing did this to him…’

‘Don’t worry Kyoko, we will catch the one responsible. I will make sure we do for your sake!’

‘All I want to ask though is… why? He wasn’t part of the game… he didn’t deserve this surely? And to treat his body like this…’ I turned to the corner, my eyes watering, before I managed to pull myself together, ‘Come on Makoto’, I spoke with a still shaky voice, ‘We should take a look at that CD I found. I don’t think it’s that long until the class trial is going to start. I can’t do much to help my father now’.

‘That sounds like a good idea, we had better get to the IT room’.

‘Yeah let’s go’, with one look back at the package, I closed the door and left the room.
After stepping over rubble and debris the two of us made our way to the IT room.

Almost as soon as I placed the disk into the system a video began playing, to my relief it was not a snuff film. Instead the camera was pointing to none other than Sayaka, her hands in her lap. I recognised the room in the background as the Dean’s Office.

‘Sayaka Maizono’, a voice brought up, ‘Are you willing to spend the rest of your life here’.

‘Is that your dad Kyoko?’ Makoto gasped.

I nodded before Sayaka replied, ‘I dunno… I cannot forgive myself for leaving the girls like this, I mean our bond has always been unbreakable. But… considering what has happened lately, I feel like I have no other choice on the matter. So yes, I will agree to stay here’.

‘Whatever happens Sayaka, I will make sure to the best of my ability that your needs are taken into account’, my father replied, ‘If you ever have concerns, do not be afraid to inform me’.

‘Thank you’, Sayaka bowed before the film cut. One by one, each student was shown. The reactions in each interview were different.

As expected, most of the interviewees agreed reluctantly. Some like Chihiro, Yasuhiro and Aoi were distraught by the mere thought of being separated from their families while others like Akira and Byakuya lamented abandoning their careers. In the end however, they ultimately acknowledged whatever situation was causing them to make shelter in the university.

‘It greatly pains me to know that I have to abandon centuries of my family’s work to fate’, Sakura spoke with her eyes closed, ‘Leaving it like this seems like betrayal. Understanding the severity of events, I can only hope that my Dojo will prevail against this rising evil. The Oogami household has stood firmly standing throughout much of history’s darkest events and I am optimistic it will remain standing still, even without me to protect it’.

Others were more enthusiastic about staying.

‘Perhaps this is the calling the Ishimaru family has been waiting for’, Kiyotaka saluted, ‘For the sake of duty, I will take this opportunity to take care of everyone and bring honour to my family’.

Leon meanwhile seemed over the moon, ‘If it means I get to spend more time with Makoto and live a normal life, then count me in!’

Of course, there were also those on the opposite end of the spectrum, who took an extra amount of convincing to push.

‘I can’t do it’, Mondo was pacing around the office, ‘If I stayed here then all the work my brother did will be for nothing! And how do you expect someone like me to stay cooped up indoors forever? It’s fucking torture! This will be like prison all over again’!

‘Trust me Mondo’, my father tried to reassure him, ‘I will do my best to ensure this is nothing like prison. Besides, it’s not safe in the outside world for anyone, not even you’.

Celestia similarly was not happy about the proposal.

‘I am a free bird sir… you know that! I’m not the sort of person who can stand being in the same place for too long. It’s the sort of thing that makes me go mad. It would be a great insult to ‘her’ too… ‘She’ wanted me to continue to win no matter how high the stakes, yet I have to spend the rest of my days trapped here? Where is the quality of life without a little danger? And more importantly,
who will feed my Cheri? I can’t bear the thought of him all alone…”

‘Celestia, I wish it wasn’t this way, I really do. I am a huge advocate for youngsters going out and getting to know the world. But things have changed, the world isn’t the same as it used to be. It’s too dangerous out there for a grown man to linger, let alone a student’.

‘Oh my God that’s me!’ Makoto pointed at the screen when his interview appeared.

‘Makoto are you willing to spend the rest of your life here?’ the voice of my father repeated.

‘If it is necessary, then yes’, the Makoto on the screen stared at his shoes, ‘Are you sure there is no way for me to contact my family?’

‘I’m afraid not. The communications here have been cut off from the outside world for your own safety to prevent infiltration. If you agree, your classmates will become your new family. You all get along well, right? Kyoko has talked about how hopeful and optimistic you are, even in the worst of times. The other students could do with someone like you to support them’.

‘Really? Well, if the others need support… then I feel it will be right to remain here. They must be feeling as scared and alone as I am. Because of this, I want to help them… I want to stay’.

‘Kyoko, it’s Mukuro!’ Makoto almost jumped out of his seat in his excitement, ‘Maybe she will reveal something important about what went down here!’

She had clearly grown out her hair since her mercenary days, but it was her nonetheless and even I felt a small rush of excitement. Like her photo, she would have had a pretty and delicate face, but due to her career, a shadow had been cast over those features. She sat even more stiffly than Kiyotaka did, almost uncannily so, and her eyes were rather intense, similar to a hawk.

We hoped that she would say something but to our disappointment, when she was asked the question, she only gave a curt nod in response.

‘Dammit!’ sighed Makoto, ‘I spoke too soon…’ He perked up again when he noticed who was being interviewed next, ‘Hey look Kyoko, it’s you!’

I always found it embarrassing seeing myself on camera, but this moment was particularly awkward for me. Even the Kyoko in the footage looked uncomfortable, knowing she was being filmed in the same room with the man she had a rocky relationship with.

‘Well… I don’t think I need to ask you if you are going to stay Kyoko, but I’m kind of required to in my position as Dean. I hope you understand’, my father looked up at me.

‘I don’t have really choice, do I?’, I murmured, ‘So yeah I guess… it could be worse…’

‘Kyoko, I know I got carried away with my job but now that it has all backfired, I cannot forgive myself for abandoning you the way I did. I hope I can use this opportunity to become a better father, especially now that I have sixteen of you to look after!’ he laughed feebly, ‘But of course you will always be the dearest out of all of them to me, even if I didn’t show it all that well previously…’

‘You are only saying this because we are now stuck in the same building for all eternity…’

‘Are you not going to give your dad a chance?’

‘I will stay, but I’m only doing it because my friends need me’.
My father sighed, ‘It’s still a yes then?’ I watched myself on screen turning to leave before my father pleaded, ‘Please at least think about what I have said… I feel terrible for what I did, I really do…’ but I only let out a small grunt before taking out a cigarette from my pocket and walked out the door.

When the sixteenth review was about to come on however the computer crashed. I tried to get it working again but the system seemed completely dead.

‘What the Hell?’ cried Makoto.

‘No! Come on, you stupid piece of junk!’ I jammed the power button several times but to no avail, ‘Shit!’

It was at that moment when we heard the funeral bells.

‘Attention everyone! The main investigation is now over but I thought it would only be fair for me to do some participation myself. I decided to be generous and leave out several hints of my own for you to use. Be warned though, they may make you lose your mind!’ the bear roared with laughter,

‘Please head on down to the gymnasium to get your clue then proceed to wait outside the usual spot so we can have our final showdown once and for all!’

‘I wonder what clues Monokuma has in store for us?’ Makoto pondered as we left the IT room.

‘I dunno, but I feel he has a trick up his sleeve so let’s not lose our heads here!’

We entered the trophy room and it appeared the others had already received their clues. All four of them eyed each other with suspicion and apprehension.

‘Guys what’s going on?’ Makoto scratched his head.

‘Oh… hi Makoto!’ Aoi gave him a feeble wave before dashing out of the room.

‘What the Hell are you playing at?’ Toko pointed in our direction before she too left quickly.

‘What on earth is going on here?’ I asked Kiyotaka and Mondo as they passed by.

‘I’m not going insane… I’m not going insane…’ Mondo anxiously kept repeating to himself.

‘Stay back!’ Kiyotaka held out his hands before he and Mondo bolted through the double doors.

‘Why is everyone running around like headless chickens right now?’ I frowned.

‘I dunno, but we had better pick up the clues the bear has given to us’, Makoto opened the double doors and we both stepped inside to see the beast sitting there.

‘You have arrived to pick up your clues I see! I know I have the upper advantage being a demonic eternity and all, but I thought it would be a nice idea to even things out just slightly!’ he snickered,

‘Anyway Makoto, how about you get yours first?’

Monokuma picked up an envelope in his jaws and walked up to Makoto who seemed to fear that the bear would bite his arm clean off as he reached out to take it. He opened the envelope and jumped back in fright, ‘What’s going on?!

‘Makoto pull yourself together’, I rolled my eyes before Monokuma gave me my envelope too.

‘Sorry Kyoko…’ he gulped, ‘I don’t know how to say it, but I think I’m cursed!’
‘I will open mine at the class trial’, I said as we walked out of the gymnasium.

‘See you in Hell little cubs, literally!’ the bear winked before he disappeared and we walked to the usual meeting place. Upon arriving we said nothing as the elevator doors clattered open.

There was still eerie silence when the lift descended. Instead the other five looked at each other, like cowboys in an old Western film preparing for a shoot up. When we felt the gush of wind washing over us, I decided to break the silence and stood in the middle.

‘I don’t know what the Hell is going on here but right now our souls are on the line. We will lose the little chance we have against this demon if we all decide to lose our heads!’

‘But… it’s so real’, Aoi stammered, ‘I don’t think this just a trick’.

‘Whatever it is, we will discuss it at the trial, preferably first. Even if it is real as you put it, Monokuma is probably trying to distract us again. So right now, we all need to take a breather so we can calmly discuss and figure out the meaning behind it all. Who knows? It may even give us some answers, I mean… the bear has to play along fairly too, right?’

‘I dunno Kyoko, when you open the contents of that envelope you will see for yourself…’

‘You really think that's bad? I saw my dead father in a box’, I told the others as I gritted my teeth.

After seconds of more deathly silence, Makoto backed me up, ‘Kyoko is right’, he sighed, ‘We have no room for messing this up, otherwise we are as good as dead’.

I took a deep breath as we descended, my heart racing like it had never done before, 'Toko did you manage to test that sample?'

'Yes...' her whole body was shaking, 'although I'm not sure what good it will do now...'

The lift once again came to a stop and the six of us walked out, ready for the final battle between Hope and Despair.
‘I see you have been investigating very hard!’ Monokuma smirked as the six of us took our places, ‘But have you gathered enough information to retain your souls I wonder?’

‘Just get on with it’, I brushed him off.

‘Yeah get on with it!’ Mondo bared his teeth.

‘It’s the final battle!’ Monokuma stood on his hind legs, ‘Which will prevail, hope or despair?!’

‘Get on with it!’ the others yelled.

‘Okay jeez…’ the bear sat down upon his platform, ‘You really are a determined bunch, aren’t you? So…’ he purred, ‘first off, what did you make of my little clues?’

‘Well it caused the others to make complete jackasses of themselves that’s for sure…’ I looked around at everyone, ‘Why don’t we all see what you have got, then we can have this shit figured out, hm?!’

One by one, the others carefully pulled the contents out of their envelopes, each revealing a photograph. As they held their photos up, something rang a bell. They all depicted… us going about our regular school life, natural light shining over our faces.

I opened my one to reveal what appeared to be our class all participating in a Halloween party wearing various ghoulish costumes. Celestia was a vampire seductress, Chihiro was a little witch and Yasuhiro had draped himself in toilet paper making a pretty convincing looking mummy. Something was wrong though; everyone was present except for me.

‘That’s funny’, I scratched my head, ‘I have a photograph of an event that never apparently existed, yet everyone else is present except me’, I turned to face the others, ‘Is that why you have all been freaking out? I’m unnerved too, but mostly because I don’t remember any of these things happening at all’.

‘I had the same problem’, Makoto held out his picture revealing a standard class photo, everyone was present but him, ‘I seriously thought Monokuma put a curse on me when he gave me this’.

‘Yeah I thought I was losing my fucking mind!’ Mondo’s picture displayed a class camping trip. Students were gathered around a fire, roasting marshmallows or telling scary stories. Mondo was nowhere to be seen, however.

The photos all followed similar patterns, depicting things that none of us had any memory of. Kiyotaka’s picture showed us participating in a P.E. class, in Aoi’s we were taking part in an art class and in Toko’s photo we were all splashing around in the swimming pool. In each of them however, the student holding the photo they were given were not present in the image.

‘So, it was all just a trick then?!’ Toko hissed.

‘Not entirely’, I answered, ‘it’s obvious Monokuma was deliberately trying to waste our precious time here by making us think we were cursed but I also feel that these pictures could be important for figuring out our situation. Regardless of the bear’s intention they look very real. In fact, I encountered three such pictures during my stay here, one of which you saw for yourself Toko’.
‘Was that the image of Mukuro?’

‘Yes. What makes them especially convincing for me, is whenever I tried to pocket them, this furball would always take them from me, hinting that they contained something he didn’t want us to know’.

‘Why is that? Why has he decided to give us these now?’

‘Because deep down… he most likely did want us to see those previous photos to gradually pepper the truth. He knew I wanted to discover the secrets of this place, so he decided to toy with me’.

‘And it was so entertaining!’ Monokuma grinned, ‘I mean… the look on your face Kyoko!’

‘Now that is out of the way, it would be a good idea to discuss how we came to be in this situation in the first place, then we can find out the identity of the Mastermind and Mukuro’s killer’.

‘It wasn’t just photos we came across. We found several items across the University referring to events that none of us remember taking place’, Makoto brought up.

‘When we were given access to the other student dorms, Mondo and I came across many lockers containing things which apparently belonged to us’, Kiyotaka explained, ‘For example I found what appeared to be lecture notes in my locker and the writing was identical to mine!’

‘I spotted things written in my handwriting too’, Mondo nodded, ‘I have terrible dyslexia, so my abysmal writing style sticks out like a sore thumb…’

‘We also found Yasuhiro’s school things’, Makoto sighed, ‘as well as letters from his mother…’

‘And I found my diary, not only was it in my handwriting but the dates were also blacked out’, I said, ‘and let’s not forget the interview video we came across’.

‘There were fifteen interview films on the disk… at least before the whole system crashed…’

‘What are you talking about?’ Aoi asked.

‘The Dean of Hope’s Peak… my father, was interviewing each of us. Apparently… something terrible had happened in the outside world because my dad asked us whether we were willing to spend the rest of our lives in the school forever’.

‘What?!’ Mondo protested, ‘But that’s impossible surely? You have known me long enough to know that I would never consent to such a thing!’

‘Yeah… you were pretty reluctant in the film Mondo…’

‘Do you think the outside disaster in question was the tragedy?’ Aoi questioned.

‘Positive. I don’t think the things we found were from an alternative dimension, or a trick by the bear for that matter. The dates in my diary were obscured for a reason, because they were real and were written in the past. There is only one thing I can come up with as to why we don’t remember it all…’

‘What are you implying?’ Toko cried out.

‘Amnesia’, I uttered.

‘Are you fucking serious?’ Mondo snorted, ‘Are you implying that someone wiped away our memories?’
'That’s exactly what I think’.

‘So, we lived a whole life in the university before all this, without even knowing it?!’ Aoi gasped.

‘How could our minds be so precisely wiped like that? I mean my last memory I have of the outside world is me walking through the entrance hall of the university!’ Makoto exclaimed.

‘Demon, enough said’, I pointed at the bear, ‘I think you have been busted Monokuma’!

The bear laughed, ‘You may have won this round, little cubs, but my mistress will not show herself so willingly. If you wish for her to reveal herself to you, you must first speak her name loud and clear!’

‘Ah! So, it’s a bit like the story of Rumpelstiltskin!’ Toko jumped in the air, ‘So in order to defeat you, we need to just say the Mastermind’s name?’

‘That’s the idea! It’s easier said than done however! My mistress did a good job covering her tracks!’

‘She did indeed, otherwise we won’t be in this situation and perhaps there may even be more of us standing here’, I looked around at all the crude makeshift shrines of the deceased, ‘but considering the information we found, she should be trembling in her boots right about now’.

‘How are we going to find out who the mastermind really is though?’ Kiyotaka asked, ‘If it’s not Mukuro then who could it possibly be?’

‘I think the mastermind is someone who we previously thought was dead…’

‘What makes you think that?’ Monokuma tilted his head.

‘It seems at first that ten students died here. However, when I investigated the morgue, only nine of the sixteen cold chamber lights were switched on. Thanks to Toko’s interference we discovered that one of the corpses was the one that had been dumped in the biome earlier’.

‘How can we determine which student is the mastermind though?’ Aoi questioned, ‘Also are you implying that Mukuro was impersonating someone else?’

‘I am almost certain that is the case. I don’t know what purpose she would have in doing so, but it’s important to remember that she was part of a secretive military organisation. What I’m saying is, I don’t think spy work was outside her range of talents…’

‘Who was she impersonating though?’ Makoto said in deep thought, ‘That is the question!’

‘Well it’s quite straightforward really’, I shrugged, ‘We need to re-examine the state of Mukuro’s body and compare it to the mortal wounds of the others who perished’.

‘Well obviously Yasuhiro, Leon, Byakuya and Akira are ruled out!’ Toko proclaimed.

‘Yes’, I nodded, ‘And none of their injuries matched those from Mukuro’s corpse either, so I think it’s safe to say that none of those four are behind this…’

‘Now we only have the five unfortunate lassies to narrow down’, Mondo sighed.

‘It certainly wasn’t Sakura, or Chihiro for that matter!’ Aoi stood up, ‘Sakura only received blunt force trauma to the head whereas Mukuro’s body had such signs all over it... and while Chihiro and Mukuro both received post mortem stab wounds, Chihiro was far too small for Mukuro to pull off a convincing disguise’.
‘So that leaves Sayaka, Celestia and Junko’, Makoto tapped his foot on the ground.

‘Wasn’t Sayaka’s body completely burned to a crisp though?’ Aoi looked down at the floor.

‘Yes...’ I bowed my head

‘Do you reckon it could have been Celestia?’ Kiyotaka questioned, ‘I know you both got along swimmingly Kyoko, but she always came off as rather shady to me’.

‘Also considering the way she died, I suspect her body displayed signs of bodily trauma too’, Aoi said.

‘If it was not for the fourth motive’, I explained, 'I don’t think she would have resorted to killing, it was out of desperation rather than malice. That’s why she wanted to convince me to assist her with Akira’s murder, so I would be spared. The Mastermind has been messing with my head since I arrived and even though she was a little bit scheming, I don’t think Celestia would have put me through all of that, or would even have the capability to'.

‘You are just saying that because you had feelings for her’, Toko placed her hands on her hips, ‘I mean, when you fall in love it’s all too common to have all sense of logic overpowered by emotion. As I know all too well…’ she buried her face in her hands.

‘I see where you are getting at Toko, especially after all that shit Byakuya put you through. But there are other reasons why I don’t think Celestia was the one who tamed the Hell bear to carry out her wishes’.

‘What are they then?’ Mondo frowned.

‘As you may have suspected we were both rather… intimate with each other and Celestia’s skin wasn’t covered with so many scars like the ones we saw on the body. Only Sakura and Mondo have that many scars and they have already been ruled out!’

‘If not Celestia though...then who?’ Kiyotaka clapped his hands to his mouth, ‘Not Junko surely?!’

‘Wait though… wasn’t the body still covered in foundation? Also, there were still traces of bright red nail polish present. Why would a woman working such a dangerous job need to wear so much makeup in the first place? Even if we assume that Mukuro was off duty, in the photos we have, she really doesn’t seem like the type you know…’ Makoto commented.

‘Yeah she has this constant shadow across her face’, Aoi held up her photo, ‘I don’t think such a thing would be visible under so much makeup’.

‘This lassie has the look of someone who has seen some shit, that’s for sure’, Mondo agreed.

‘Also don’t you find it at least a little suspicious that Junko’s face happens to be covered in each picture?’ I brought up. Indeed, in my picture only one of the Halloween party goers had their face completely covered, in this instance wearing a demon mask.

‘Yeah I noticed that too’, in Mondo’s picture, Junko’s face was covered by a large tree branch.

‘Is it just me or does this Junko have a different body type to the one that we knew?’ in Toko’s photo Junko’s face was obscured with water that Leon had splashed over her, ‘I wish I could be as ‘thicc’ as her though…’

‘I dunno Toko, being thicker comes with its own set of societal stigmas…’ Aoi sighed.
‘Also didn’t Junko go on about her magazine pictures being photoshopped?’ Kiyotaka pointed out.

‘Yes, she did’, I nodded, ‘so if my assumptions are correct, it seems that the Junko we knew and the one we saw in the newspaper are different people altogether’.

‘And of course, let’s not forget the interview footage we saw’, I looked Makoto’s direction.

‘Oh yes’, Makoto gasped, ‘I remember Mukuro’s interview but can’t recall seeing Junko’s, the film cut out and crashed the whole system before we could view it’.

‘It’s odd for a computer system to just crash like that, isn’t it Monokuma?’

‘I don’t know what you are implying, but I really don’t like the direction you are headed’, the bear’s face turned to anger, ‘We both agreed to a fair match, I would never…’

‘I upheld my end of the bargain, I suggest that you follow through with yours too, otherwise where is all the fun and tension in this whole thing?’ my lips curled into a smile.

‘Fine, fine!’ Monokuma spat, ‘I just freaked out that’s all! My mistress was very generous to let me escape into the real world from the bowels of Hell so in my panic I intervened!’

‘Yeah… right…’, I uttered.

‘Oh my God…’ Toko murmured, ‘So who we thought was Junko was really Mukuro this whole time?’

‘It appears so’, Makoto nodded, ‘She always had some military prowess about her when she was alive…’

‘Yeah, I remember her speaking more like a high-ranking military officer than someone who specialises in fashion’, Aoi brought up, ‘She certainly had a lot of charisma’.

‘Then there is the matter of the wounds of course. When the Junko we met was executed, she was killed by numerous falling objects, caving her in’, I reminded the others.

‘Wait a minute, wait a minute!’ Monokuma stood up, ‘You still haven’t proven to me whether Makoto is innocent or not. Perhaps he was not in fact the cinnamon roll we all thought he was!’

‘I can disprove that’, Toko raised her hand, holding up the sample, ‘Kyoko sent me to test this sample and it was revealed to be animal blood, specifically belonging to a bird’.

‘It must have been chicken blood!’, Kiyotaka stated, ‘That’s the only possible explanation!’

‘Damn I should have mentioned it!’ It was as though a light bulb had clicked on in my head, ‘The machete! Do you remember Aoi? It looked exactly like the one we saw at the sleepover during our first night here when ‘Junko’ challenged Celeste in the ‘party game’’.

‘Oh yes I remember’, Aoi nodded enthusiastically, ‘As cutthroat as the fashion industry may be, why would the Ultimate fashionista need a damn machete of all things?’

‘I dunno’, Mondo shrugged, ‘I’m sure corporate pigs can murder without any consequences, I mean… they bypass the law with every other horrible crime, right?’

‘I understand where you are coming from Mondo, I really do’, I sighed, ‘but from what we have gathered so far, our results so far match up with the state of the body’. 
‘So… are you able to prove my innocence Kyoko?’ Makoto asked.

‘I sure can!’ I clapped my hands, ‘Your flimsy attempt at framing Makoto for murder didn’t go to plan it seems! And I bet you framed Mukuro for Yasuhiro’s murder too! Your mistress must have had something personal going on with her if she was so desperate to have her killed like that’.

‘And what evidence have you got for that missy?’ the bear growled.

‘How about Akira’s jitterbug cam footage?’ I mentioned, ‘After going through the footage we saw a figure in the incinerator room who emerged from the trapdoor which was noticeably unbolted. The figure was wearing the same attire as what was draped over the body’.

‘Yeah!’ Makoto exclaimed, ‘and some time after that, Clownface was standing over my bed. I thought they were going to stab me with the machete but instead they planted it in my room in order to frame me for a murder, just like how you got us to vote for Mukuro without us realising it’.

‘Aw fiddlesticks! It seems I might not get my precious souls after all then…’ he sulked.

‘May I give my summary Monokuma?’

‘Sure… whatever…’

‘Okay then, let’s not wait any longer. Here is what happened in this case!

Upon arriving at Hope’s Peak University, we thought there were fifteen of us in total. After further investigation however, it was discovered that sixteen of us were in the building. Shortly before Yasuhiro was murdered by hanging, a strange figure wearing a white lab coat and a mask was seen emerging from a trapdoor in the incinerator room, thanks to Akira’s jitterbug cam footage. Soon after during the first class trial, after we mistook Mukuro Ikusaba for somebody else, we ended up sending her to her death.

Later in the killing game the mastermind wanted to frame another for a murder by planting a machete in Makoto’s room, dressed in the same attire as what we saw in the camera footage earlier. The mastermind took Mukuro’s body from the morgue and draped the strange clothing over it. They also planted a bomb in the mask so we could not easily figure out the corpse’s identity. Finally, they took the machete from Makoto’s room in order to frame him for Mukuro’s murder by planting it in the corpse and used blood in an attempt to make the murder look fresh.

As we discovered however, the victim had been dead for some time and the blood in question belonged to that of a chicken. The wounds also indicated that the victim died from extreme blunt force trauma, leading us to suspect that the body belonged to the same person who perished in the first execution by crushing. We also noticed that the body was still covered in foundation, and the back of the hands still had nail polish upon them.

That, along with numerous other pieces of evidence including photos, papers and films taken from the past helped us to decipher the true identity of the one behind all of the atrocities committed here. Now with the proof we have, we know that Mukuro Ikusaba was among us, without us even knowing, and that the mastermind is actually someone who we originally suspected was dead.

I win, Junko Enoshima!’

The bear’s hackles were raised now, and his eyes were spinning, ‘You… how could you beat me like this? You and your little friends are such annoying little parasites, you know that right?’

‘Sorry Monokuma, you lost’, I raised my fist up at him, ‘Now get your mistress off the iron throne so
she can speak to us in the flesh why don’t you? For someone who claims to be the big bad, she sure is a coward hiding herself away like that and relying on you to be her loyal lapdog’.

‘How dare you!’ the bear roared.

‘You can throw a temper tantrum all you like, but a deal is a deal. Now hurry up and get your mistress to show her ass already! Who knows? We might even end up having a very worthwhile conversation!’

‘Okay fine!’, the beast backed down, ‘I guess I have no choice in the matter, do I?’

Disgruntled he slowly clapped his paws together. Two of his henchpeople saluted and strode towards a large blood red wooden door. Above the door there was a large statue of a bear’s upper head and jaw. Upon opening it a long red carpet rolled out, making it resemble a tongue.

Monokuma’s cronies stood to the side as a beautiful young woman with large blonde pigtails and wide hips, stepped into the room. She a queenly aura about her and we watched as the figures in black bowed and the large bear lay down on his belly in submission.

She was draped in a large fur coat which dramatically contrasted with her small dress, long ruby red boots and oversized sunglasses. Her hairpins were shaped in the face of that horrible chibi version of Monokuma we had grown all too familiar with.

Stunned into silence we stared at the woman who stood out from everything else in the moment. She slowly lowered her sunglasses to reveal large blue eyes. At first we thought she would be annoyed being forced to leave her comfort zone, but on the contrary, she seemed delighted to see us. A wide grin spread across her face which was covered in even bolder makeup than Mukuro’s had been, and she spoke.

‘Why hello there my dear friends! Yes, it’s me, the mastermind behind all of this despair… it’s Junko Enoshima bitches!’
‘What’s wrong my dears? Are you not pleased to finally see my glorious image?’ Junko strode towards the platform where Monokuma usually sat. I noticed more of Monokuma's cronies lifting a heavy gold and red velvet throne which she sat in gleefully. The bear padded up to her like a loyal lapdog and rested his head on her lap.

‘We aren’t bowing to you if that’s what you want’, Aoi gritted her teeth.

‘Aw come on! I’m happy to see you all again, why aren’t you happy to see me?’, Junko gloated as she scratched behind the bear’s ears, ‘Oh wait! I wiped your memories away, didn’t I? How could I forget something significant as that? Silly me!’

‘So…’ Kiyotaka brought up, ‘How much time has passed since you erased our memories?’

‘It must have been at least a year considering the number of entries in my journal’, I said.

‘Nah’, Junko shook her head, ‘It was two’.

‘Two whole goddamn years?!’ exclaimed Mondo, ‘Is that really true?’

‘We’ve gotten older and we didn’t even know it?!’ Kiyotaka looked at his hands.

‘The records claim that you all had a wonderful time at Hope’s Peak, but looking back, it was really all an illusion. It proved to me that hope was indeed weak and that was the straw that broke the camel’s back!’ Junko explained.

‘Why did you do this?’ I stood up, ‘How can you live with yourself after causing so much suffering?’

‘Yeah, what is the meaning of this you skank?’ Mondo hissed.

‘I see that none of you have changed!’ Junko giggled, ‘Especially you Mondo! I always knew deep down you were into men. I remember when the two of us dated, we were the University’s golden couple! It soon became clear to me however that I was merely another one of your prop girls, when you started to host regular ‘meetings’ with certain good looking male students. You gushed about them constantly, especially the so-called Ultimate Moral Compass. We eventually split up of course but I made sure to never forget!'

'So those letters were real then!' Kiyotaka barked, 'No wonder Mondo became so suspicious, he must have seen right through you!'

‘Is that why you used my sexuality and illness as a weapon against me? Well you failed at that one! Ever since Chihiro died, I have decided in her memory to accept myself as she did with herself’, Mondo declared.

‘And Kyoko, you were always snooping around’, Junko spoke in an irritated tone of voice, ‘You were always observing my activities like a hawk so I knew when I began the killing game that I would have to keep an extra eye on you particularly’. 

‘Sorry, it’s my job…’ I said, ‘Then again most of us caught wind of strange occult activities going on, as I found out in my diaries. So, you were the one behind the Monokuma cult all along? That’s why your followers wore black and white isn’t it?’
‘That is correct, it’s no wonder you were such an annoying little pest during your stay here! Japan was already in a crappy state at the time with disease epidemics, unemployment, homelessness, gang wars and all of that junk, so I saw that as my ideal opportunity to pounce!’

I stood up, ‘So what was your deal with Mukuro exactly? Did you see her as a threat?’

‘A threat?! What are you talking about? Ha! You amuse me Kyoko, as irritating as you are…’ she brushed a tear from her eye, ‘She was only my goddamn sister!’

‘Your sister?!”

‘Why would you kill your own sister in such a horrible way, then desecrate her body?!” Aoi snapped.

‘Oh, it’s quite simple, I just got rid of her because I became bored of her…’ Junko shrugged.

‘You killed Mukuro just because you got tired of her?’ Kiyotaka yelled.

‘Pretty much! We started off as the Sisters of Despair. I would use my fashion brand to influence the masses, and my sister, the Ultimate Soldier would spread suffering around the world through the atrocities and war crimes she committed during her military campaigns. Despite Mukuro’s military prowess however, I was always the top dog, and my followers all knew this! Originally, I was planning to have Mukuro at my side during the killing game but her emotions towards you all revealed how weak she truly was, so I thought I would just take all that glorious despair for myself!’

‘That’s so fucked up…’ Mondo gasped, ‘Even with your sister’s past actions…’

‘With her out of the way I was able to begin the fun properly! Getting you to start killing each other however, was very difficult so I decided to drop in a few motives to get the pot boiling! I wanted to make sure so I could squeeze every single last drop of hope out of you’.

‘Why are you so obsessed with despair anyway? Is it like a sexual thing?’ I asked.

‘It is more complicated than that my dear Kyoko. You see, the concept of hope is mere wish fulfillment. It is something made up to make you think that you have it easy in this world. That is why I hate it so much! Despair however, seeps into every corner of humanity. For thousands of years it has influenced societies and cultures all over the world. Where would the world we know today be without it? Humans have used it as a weapon against each other for centuries. Even if one society prevailed, it came at the cost of another’s hope’.

‘It’s good to feel sadness, grief and anger sometimes. It’s necessary to get through life’, Makoto frowned, ‘but to deliberately bring suffering and toil to others is nothing but pure sadism’.

‘Now what then?’ I glared into those ice-blue eyes, ‘I think you owe us all something Junko Enoshima. Thanks to you, nine brave, talented and amazing students are doomed to have their skeletons reside here while the six of us standing had to endure torture and trauma after you robbed us of our friends and autonomy. Surely there is a prize for me winning my game and exposing you?’

Junko snickered, ‘I will provide you the option to escape, but after you have seen the true state of the outside world, you may want to reconsider’.

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Roll the footage!’ she called out. The large screen descended from the ceiling.
Our jaws dropped open in horror at what we saw on the screen. The film depicted clips from various major cities across the world, except it was all hellish. The sky was red, the air was thick, and people were rioting in the streets using whatever weapons they could come across.

Then there were the demons which came in all sizes, some with wings some without, spitting poison or fire. They were terrorising the cities of Tokyo, Paris, London, New York, Shanghai, Cairo, New Delhi and many others, causing much destruction and chaos in their wake.

‘Is this all real?’ Kiyotaka gasped, ‘Is this the tragedy?’

‘That is correct!’ Junko clapped her hands.

‘Did you cause the tragedy?’ Makoto gulped.

‘Correct again! I spent much of my life studying the occult when I discovered the Despair Demon, Monokuma, who even Satan apparently can’t stand to be around! After years of trial and error I was finally able to contact the deepest depths of the Demon Realm, where Monokuma resides after his demon overlords banished him there. In occultist circles it is said to be the most dangerous part of the realm for the mortal world to contact. Not only was it risky, it was very difficult to even reach it. Hell, the Spirit World, the Demon World… whatever you wish to call it, is just like earth, in the sense that it contains a variety of different languages’.

‘Does that explain the strange ritual room and those books with the runes?’ questioned Aoi.

‘Indeed! Until now, nobody had summoned the Despair Demon for a thousand years, at least not successfully. But thanks to my position as the Ultimate Despair I had an advantage that nobody else had. With the help of my loyal followers, some of which were willing to sacrifice themselves or their loved ones to the cause, I was finally able to open up the very worst parts of the Demon Realm to bring despair to every corner of the globe!’

‘How did you manage to get so many people to follow you? Even with your celebrity status I imagine it would have been very difficult to get large swathes of people to believe in something so absurd?!’

‘That was the hardest part most definitely, but you see after ditching that two-timing cad’, she grinned wickedly in Mondo’s direction, ‘I soon started dating a guy called Matsuda who was the Ultimate Neurologist here. He had a good heart and he wanted to use his talent for the benefit of humankind. With the rise of depression and anxiety he wanted to help find a cure or at least something that would help sufferers feel better’, she laughed, ‘But he was so naive too! He told me so much about human psychology, what drives people into cults, pseudoscience and hate groups, etc. Little did he know that he was playing right into my hands!’

‘Hang on, wasn’t he the one who died in the tragedy?’ Kiyotaka brought up.

‘He was among the first to die. You see I was able to get him to trust me to the point where he was wrapped around my little finger. Ultimately I was able to use him as a sacrificial vessel for the final summoning ritual with little resistance’.

‘I’m glad I got the fuck away from you Junko’, Mondo looked into Junko’s eyes with great loathing, ‘So you did all this by taking advantage over someone who showed you nothing but kindness? I did the same to Chihiro and others throughout my life and I still cannot forgive myself. How can you just let something like this slide? Do you jack off to it every morning?’

‘Well she did kind of start the apocalypse so what do you expect?’ I reminded him.
'Wait, how do we know this isn’t all faked?!’ Toko cried out, ‘Why should we take any of her words seriously? She is completely delusional clearly!’

‘Maybe Syo knows what went down’, Makoto brought up, ‘Toko might not remember what happened but Syo might, considering they both have different mindsets’.

‘Do I have to do this?’ Toko trembled.

‘Please Toko’, I begged, ‘just this once, we promise. Do you trust me?’

Toko hesitated for a moment, before murmuring, ‘Fine I will do it… for you… senpai…’

I raised my eyebrows before Toko took out a water bottle and drenched it over her face, causing her expression to change drastically.

‘I’m here! What do you punks need from me? And why is Junko still alive?’

‘It’s complicated…’ I told her, ‘But right now I am afraid I need to ask you some more questions…’

‘Of course… at this point, can I expect any more from you punks?’

‘Syo’, Makoto asked her, ‘Do you remember the events of the Tragedy?’

‘The tragedy? Oh yes! I remember it as clear as day! I remember all the destruction, the screaming, the chaos, etc! The sky was illuminated by a blood red moon. Much of the University stayed up just to watch this natural phenomenon, not knowing that it would become a harbinger of doom!’

‘Do you remember what happened to us?’

‘I recall that Kyoko’s dad concealed us inside the University. Then we all set about turning the place into a fallout shelter. Together we placed metal panels on the walls to prevent us from seeing the horrors going on outside and sealed all of the exits to ensure no one could get inside or out!’

‘It was my plan along!’ Junko beamed, ‘You created this prison, trapping yourselves within it’s walls. Jin Kirigiri thought you would all be safe, even though he was unknowingly sealing your fate!’ she clapped her hands again, ‘And that’s not the only thing! I have my own evidence too, for there are other survivors of the tragedy right here in this room!’

All of Junko’s cronies looked up in her direction before proceeding to stand in the middle of the circle, now they were all together I could tell there were fourteen of them. One by one they each began to remove their hoods and what we saw terrified us.

‘They are…’ Makoto gulped, ‘Students, just like us. And you brainwashed them, didn’t you Junko?’

‘Why yes Makoto, they are students… other ultimates in fact… just like you!’

Now we could see their faces we saw that they were expressionless and rather sickly looking as they stood there. I couldn’t help but feel an immense amount of pity for them as they pulled their hoods over their heads again and walked back to their respective corners of the room. I wondered if they were the ‘Class of the Damned’ I had mentioned in my diary.

‘I know you probably won’t hear me’, Makoto cried out to the other Ultimates who were now brainwashed puppets of this twisted regime, their strings being pulled by a sadistic puppet master, ‘but I will set you free one day, we can help you!’

‘That’s cute!’ Junko purred, ‘But alas… they are beyond repair now. What they once were, is long
gone now. Don’t worry though, while they don’t have a future ahead, I am going to be generous and
give you a second option. If you don’t want to die horribly in the outside world, I am leaving you the
option to live a peaceful communal life here for the rest of your days’.

‘I’d rather kill myself to be honest…’ Mondo grunted.

‘Are you sure?’ Junko tilted her head, ‘Your first attempt was pretty botched was it not? You might
want to try working on it, if you know what I’m saying…’

‘Don’t listen to her!’ Kiyotaka cried, although he too looked greatly unnerved at Junko’s proposal.

‘I’d think I’d rather take the demon infested outdoors than stay here’, I said.

‘Come on! I will take good care of you all! Now your antics have been documented to the world,
nobody will want to love you now. The dark side of Hope’s Peak and humanity itself has been
exposed all thanks to you lot!’ Junko pointed at us.

‘Only because you pushed us into a corner!’ Aoi snapped, ‘And I am sure those who did commit
murder here wouldn’t have done so in any other situation!’

‘I dunno’, Junko shrugged, ‘Mondo stood atop a pile of corpses before he passed through the gates
of Hope’s Peak and you were partially responsible for your little brother’s death were you not?’

‘It was an accident…’ Aoi wiped her eyes, ‘I never intended it to happen’.

‘You all had it coming! You all committed a crime at some point, even Kiyotaka could not escape it.
Makoto doesn’t count because he doesn’t matter, he is nothing special’.

‘So why were you so keen to frame Makoto for Mukuro’s death?’ I asked.

‘Because he is insignificant! You are known as the Ultimate lucky student Makoto. You have always
been so annoyingly optimistic throughout the whole thing, yet nothing but bad luck has come your
way. You couldn’t even save your dear boyfriend!’

‘I may not be particularly brilliant…’ Makoto spoke coolly, ‘But at least I’m not a piece of shit!’

‘You have some nerve boy! But that doesn’t matter because I’ve got you and the rest of you
meddling kids right where I want you! The choice is simple, either live a life of comfort and security
here or die cold and alone in the wasteland that is now the outside world’.

‘Even if we die, we will still have each other! Right guys?’

‘Are you so sure about that my dear, sweet, naïve, Makoto? Are you sure the outside world will
simply allow them back into society after everything they have done? And what makes you think
that they will remain loyal and not abandon you to serve their own needs and desires?’

‘They are my friends they would never…’

‘They claim to be friends, but instead they have shown themselves to be nothing but filthy traitors.
Even Kyoko was willing to send her girlfriend to the slaughter! It’s human nature Makoto, so called
‘friends’ will only have your back so long as it can benefit them in return. Let’s face it, your
classmates are selfish creatures and the only way they will be able to receive any love now is if they
spend the rest of their life shut away from the lynch mobs surely waiting outside as we speak!’

‘She’s right’, Aoi’s eyes began to brim with tears again, ‘How can I go back into the outside world if
there is nothing left? Even if there was something, I don’t deserve it. Now that Sakura is gone, what’s the point in anything anymore? I came here to be the very best at my talent, but in reality, my time here only exposed how selfish I really am…’

‘There is nothing left in the outside world for me anymore, not after all the atrocities I have committed’, Mondo turned away from us, ‘I might as well just end it all here… the world will be a better place without me…’ he smiled feebly but I could tell he was fighting back tears too.

‘I have dishonoured the Ishimaru name’, Kiyotaka bowed his head, ‘I was supposed to keep you safe, but I allowed nine people to die on my watch. I let everyone down as a leader and a friend. Even if my family is still alive, I don’t think I will be able to face them after failing you all. The only thing I can do to redeem myself is to stay here and protect you’.

‘For the past decade, I have been going through Hell. My stay at Hope’s Peak was only the tip of the iceberg. If I go back out there, what will really change? Even with the world burning, it will all be the same to me. From my early teens, I have seen the terrible things that human beings are capable of, right with my very own eyes. It’s hopeless’, I sighed, ‘From all the years of my training, I learned that humans are unwilling to change and as a result, it’s led the world to the fucking apocalypse. Even if we escape, what can we do to change society if nobody will listen? Celestia was right…’

‘No guys!’ Makoto pleaded, ‘You have a place in this world and there are people who love you. She’s trying to get into your head, don’t listen to her!’ None of us could bring ourselves to say anything as Junko glared hungrily around at us, similarly to the mannerisms of the bear.

‘You see Makoto!’ Junko yelled, ‘Hope is just wish fulfilment, despair on the other hand has shaped humanity itself. Even your friends cannot escape it. Despair always wins, that’s just the way it is! Now why don’t you stand down and join my community. Hell! With Monokuma’s help, I may even be able to resurrect your dead classmates!’

The heads of the others perked up, ‘You will be able to bring Leon back?’ Makoto gasped.

‘Of course! We can bring him back! We can bring them all back!’

‘So, I will be able to speak to Sakura again?’ Aoi cried, ‘Life won’t be so bad here if she is around’.

‘I want nothing more than Chihiro to have another chance at life after I wronged her’, Mondo said.

‘Yes my dears! I can bring them all back to life, just the way they were! You won’t have to feel so bad about sending your girlfriend to die Kyoko, not after I resurrect her!’ Junko gave a gentle smile in my direction, ‘It might be worth considering don’t you think?’

‘Umm…’ I gulped, ‘Let me think about it…’

The prospect of having Celestia alive and breathing again tempted me more than ever. Anything to have the girl that made me smile again, laying by my side, was a siren song to me. My logic was only just clinging onto reason, like it was hanging off the side of a cliff with only an unstable tree branch to hold. My emotions were the rough winds struggling with all it’s might to cast logic into the certain doom of the ravenous waves below, snapping up at it like a hungry bear.

When Junko gave us this alluring offer however, none of us heard Toko sneeze.

‘Have any of you heard the story of the Monkey’s Paw?’, she spoke nervously, ‘Wasn’t there a moral about being careful what you wish for, or something like that?’

Something about Toko’s words resonated with me. Slowly but surely, my mind became less fuzzy
and reality was setting in like camera coming back into focus.

‘Makoto, stop! She’s lying, she is only doing this to manipulate you!’

‘Kyoko we might be able to see our friends again, you can see Celestia again!’ Makoto cried.

‘Seriously snap out of it! She’s just trying to play with your emotions! She only wants to get us to join her cult, just like how she brainwashed her followers’.

‘Things won’t be so bad when our friends have returned though right?’

‘She won’t bring the others back, not in the way that we knew them… Even if she does manage to reanimate them, who knows what kind of demented form they will take! Makoto… this is basic cult indoctrination right here; can you not see that? It’s desperate people like us who she wants to manipulate…’

‘You will not be part of a cult, here you will be loved and valued’, Junko spoke in a motherly tone.

Makoto however seemed have some sense knocked into him as he looked around, ‘You have a point Kyoko. Now that I think about it, this seems shady as Hell! Reawakening the dead without something going horribly wrong is impossible, all we can do is cherish the memories we had with them’.

‘What! Do you not want to see them again?’

‘Makoto is right’, I nodded, ‘As much as we may want them to come back, they can’t and we have to accept that, as difficult as it may be. Eventually we all must find a way to move on, while remembering to keep in mind all the good times we had with the loved ones we have sadly lost’.

‘If Sakura can’t be brought back though, then what’s the point of anything?’ Aoi stared at her shoes.

‘Because Sakura would have wanted you to carry on!’ Makoto told her, ‘You should leave this place alongside us Aoi. Whatever happens… we will be together, and Sakura will be watching over us. You are so always full of determination and because of that you have so much potential. As well as that, you are so full of kindness which is what we will need if we are going to get through this’.

I had never seen this super passionate side of Makoto before but something about it was very elating and I felt considerably warmer hearing it.

‘I was supposed to lead, but I made many fatal mistakes during my stay. I feel if I had been a better example, then many more deaths could have been prevented…’ I heard Kiyotaka murmur.

‘Taka, it’s not your fault!’ Makoto spoke again, ‘Nobody is perfect, it is what makes us all human! You have been a great leader however, and I am sure your family would be proud if they could see you now. We have been in a chaotic situation but thanks to you, we were able to have order and balance. I don’t know how we would have been able to remain unified without you to guide us’.

‘What’s in it for me though?’, Mondo sighed, ‘I’m vermin. There is nothing left for me now, not in this place, or out there. Hope’s Peak was my last opportunity for me to have a chance in the world and it failed me. What’s the point in living if your last hope of having a future is snuffed out?’

‘Don’t give up Mondo, you have come so far. I understand all the pain and toil you have been through, but you still have a long life ahead of you. Do really want all that to go to waste? The future is full of opportunities. We can help you, but in the end only you can reach them. I know you are capable! Please Mondo, escape this place with us!’ Makoto begged.
‘Let’s face it Makoto, your friends are too consumed by despair to stand by your side! If you are a beacon of hope, it is one of false hope!’ Junko laughed.

‘No!’ Aoi exclaimed much to our surprise, ‘I’m leaving this place to fight for hope and freedom! I will do it to cherish Sakura’s memory! To remain here to is to dishonour her final wishes’.

‘What are you doing? You are making a big mistake!’ Junko protested, ‘You will surely die out there!’

‘If you are leaving then I will too!’, Kiyotaka yelled, ‘The outside world is full of chaos and I feel it is right to bring some order into it! The Ishimaru name will be restored!’

‘Stop! You don’t know what you are getting yourselves into!’

‘You are right laddie’, Mondo spoke feebly, ‘Other opportunities will come around one day. I won’t get to experience them if I stay here, so I too am leaving this shithole!’

‘But the world hates you! I have everything I can possibly provide for you!’

‘I will go with you too Makoto!’ Toko proclaimed, ‘I won’t be able to help myself if I just stay here and mope. Besides… I need more inspiration for my next bestseller and…’, she giggled, before winking in my direction, causing me to blush, ‘…there are other reasons too!’

‘You may not officially be an Ultimate Makoto’, I smiled up at him, ‘but if Junko is the Ultimate Despair then you must be…’

‘…the Ultimate Hope!’ everyone else gasped in unison.

‘What is this? It can’t be…’ Junko’s contorted into a pure rage, ‘I offered you a life of peace and comfort and yet you choose death? Do you know what you are getting yourself into?’

‘Sorry Junko’, Makoto said, ‘unlike you, we understand the true value of hope and friendship’.

‘Sure, shit still happens’, I shrugged, ‘but the only way to get through it is hope. It doesn’t matter how feeble it is or how high the odds are stacked against you. Hope will always remain a stronger force than despair. It is how the six of us are still clinging on and why we are leaving this place’.

‘You are wrong, you all are!’ Junko cried out hysterically.

‘Even if the whole world is against us, I can find solace in the fact that we will be able to do things our own way, because we still see value in ourselves. We can still make a positive impact on the world, even if it is small. I would certainly prefer that to rotting away here!’ Makoto asserted.

‘At the end of the day you did give us the option to escape, and well… we agreed to it’, I told her, ‘I think that sounds like a fair deal. Now let us go. We are all aware of the dangers outside. Even if we die the moment we step out of that building, we be unified in hope and I cannot think of anything more powerful than that. It’s over Junko! We are going into the perilous wasteland outside and you cannot change our minds! You lose!’

The bear at Junko’s feet growled, looking ready to pounce and rip us all to pieces but his mistress gently pushed his nose and he sat back down, disgruntled and defeated.

‘Fine!’ Junko huffed as she strode down to stand in the centre of the room, ‘Have it your way then! I will turn off the air conditioning here. You will have to navigate the Hell I have created on this earth all by yourselves. If you die weak and alone, then you will only have yourselves to blame!’
‘So can we really leave then?’ Mondo asked.

‘Yes’, Junko spoke in a quieter tone, ‘Yasuhiro’s prophecy turned out to be true after all…’

His words came back to me as clear as day, ‘Only hope can conquer despair’.

‘Is that why you had him killed first, because he could really predict the future?’ Aoi gaped.

‘Kind of’, Junko explained, ‘he was an ultimate in his field after all. I remember him coming up with several prophecies which turned out to have some truth to them throughout our life at Hope’s Peak. He could never remember such predictions after telling them, however. Nevertheless, I didn’t want to take any chances, so I decided to take matters into my own hands’, she smiled nastily, ‘In the outside world he and his mother were regarded as nothing more than a bunch of worthless benefit scroungers, so where is the loss really?’

At that moment Mondo charged up to Junko and was able to clasp his working hand around her throat, holding her suspended in the air. Her cronies prepared to charge but she was just able to hold up a hand to stop them intervening.

‘No’, she spluttered, a grin still etched upon her face, ‘I’ve got this!’

‘You bitch!’ Mondo fumed, ‘I have been waiting for this moment!’

‘Mondo stop!’ I yelled as choking sounds emitted from Junko, ‘Think about what you are doing!’

‘Kyoko, she killed our friends, ruined lives and now she has fucked up the world too!’ Mondo snarled, ‘Tell me why I shouldn’t kill her once and for all!’

‘Let her go’, Makoto cried, ‘you don’t have to do this. Even after everything she did, what will killing her say about you? It’s what she wants, she wants to make you look like the villain here. Please just put her down already!’

Mondo still looked livid and at that moment I thought he would snap her neck on the spot, but he let out a deep breath and his grip slackened.

I walked over to Junko as she coughed and spluttered on the floor, ‘Can you get any worse?’ I shook my head, ‘The bar is so low for you now that it has long disappeared into the ground’.

‘I am all too aware of that!’ she croaked as she composed herself.

‘You really tried to stack all the odds against us, but you failed. Even in the darkest of times, hope will find a way to triumph over despair!’ Makoto told her.

‘So… can we pack up and leave now?’ Toko pointed towards the elevator door.

‘Yes, though you will have to make haste. I’m turning off all air conditioning systems here, just to ensure that you do not change your mind upon leaving’, Junko grinned.

‘Seems fair enough’, I uttered.

‘Since I have been exposed and shamed however, there is one thing I have left to do…’

‘What is that?’ Kiyotaka asked, ‘It’s over isn’t it?’

‘Not exactly, we haven’t had punishment time yet! This trial wouldn’t be complete without one!’
‘What?! But we won! Who is being executed?’

‘Well I lost, didn’t I? And for that I need to pay the price!’

‘You are executing yourself?!’ Makoto gasped.

‘That’s the idea! If the killing game is going to end here, then we need to finish off with a big climax surely? Besides, there is nothing like the feeling of despair when it is accompanied by the sweet clutches of death!’ Junko’s eyes began to spin wildly.

‘Junko, you don’t have to do this! There has to be another way surely?’

‘Rules are rules, my friends, and even I must abide by them. As I made them myself it is only fair that I follow along’, she threw her large fur coat to the side before looking up at the disheartened bear, ‘Monokuma, if you please…’

As the bear let out a sad roar before I spoke, ‘There has to be mistake surely? After everything you have done, including releasing literal Hell upon the world, you are just ending it like this?’

‘Yep! It sure was nice seeing you all face to face again, but now I must uphold my end of the bargain!’

‘Junko, please don’t do this’, but she brushed me off. The bear leapt down from his platform, and gently nuzzled his mistress. As she stepped onto the panel she handed me what looked like a remote control with a big red button upon it.

‘Why so long my dears!’ Junko waved, ‘It sure was nice while it lasted wasn’t it?’ she then began to stroke the bear’s head looking deep into his eyes, ‘And as for you my dear pet. You have been so loyal to me. Sadly, you won’t be able to feast on these pests today, but maybe you will one day, when you find a new master or mistress. Anyway, sayonara my friends!’ she let out a terrible laugh.

‘No stop!’ Makoto ran up as though to push her out of the way.

Before he could get there the steel spikes rose up from the floor, trapping her in an iron prison. In the manner of a small child she continued to laugh and wave as she descended into the floor. Realising our efforts to talk her out of this insanity were now futile, we could only head down to the elevator to see the madness unfold. As it descended we heard the anguished roars of the bear above us.

The last execution chamber we stepped into was rather simple but in the middle of the room was none other than a guillotine. Instead of being dragged in by the black robed figures Junkp simply skipped towards the device and placed her neck under the blade. I noticed however that her cronies were edging closer towards her like a pack of hungry dogs.

A large neon sign came down reading, ‘Execution for the Ultimate Fashionista & Ultimate Despair, Junko Enoshima: Vive La Reine!’

Junko pulled the rope herself causing the blade to drop but not before her haunting, girlish laughter was forever embedded in our brains. Even when her head rolled on the ground, her face was locked in a permanent wide grin, and her eyes still seemed to be spinning.

For a few seconds we stared into Junko’s large bloodshot, blank eyes before the figures moved in closer. They really did resemble vultures as they surrounded her corpse and pounced on it.

‘Are they eating her?’ Makoto cried out, his face turning green.
‘No… I think it’s worse…’ I too began to feel queasy, ‘They’re… harvesting her’.

Indeed, the figures in black had pulled out surgical tools and were hacking the corpse to pieces. As if it couldn’t get any worse, they were also amputating parts of themselves and attaching in their place, parts from Junko’s body.

Most of us really did vomit as they chopped off and ripped out their own limbs and organs, replacing them with those of the corpse. Two of them even gouged out one of their own eyes before plucking out Junko’s and placing them in their own sockets.

The lift slowly ascended but rather than escape being on our minds, it was the horrific scene that unfolded before us. When the device reached the real world and clattered open, the six of us stumbled out and keeled over.

‘We should destroy this thing and trap those monsters down below!’ Mondo was the first to stand up albeit with much difficulty as he was trembling so much.

‘No’, Makoto shakily stood up, ‘Won’t we be committing mass murder if we do that? Besides, weren’t they brainwashed?’

‘Why not?’ graoned Aoi who also managed to heave herself up, ‘If we let them escape, who knows what they will do in the outside world?’

‘Makoto is right’, I said, ‘I think we have had enough deaths here and it would do us no good if we were responsible for any more. I think for the time being at least, we should leave them alone’.

‘Let’s just get out of here already!’ Toko uttered.

The others simply nodded before we all got up to pack for the long and difficult journey ahead.
Epilogue

The six of us packed in relative silence, making sure to take only what was necessary for the hostile world outside, scavenging extra clothes, food, first aid and other vital supplies from around the University. After much deliberation I returned Mondo’s room keys to him and in a gesture of thanks, he ended up distributing some of his weapons to us for self defence purposes.

We felt like fledglings about to take flight from the safety of the nest as we were soon to experience this cruel new world. After walking past the memorials of my fallen classmates one last time, I headed to the entrance hall holding the device that Junko gave me before her demise.

‘So where do we go from here?’ Makoto asked as the six of us stared up at the large metal doors, the place where we had first met.

‘Good question’, Aoi scratched her head, ‘What can we do?’

‘Finding shelter would probably be a good idea’, Mondo growled, ‘I know Tokyo from top to bottom so I am sure we will be able to find somewhere to make camp’.

‘I always knew you were a genius Mondo!’ Kiyotaka barked.

‘And we will have to make sure to stick together, at least until I can find somewhere you can settle’.

‘You aren’t implying we will be splitting up, are you?’ Makoto gasped.

‘I will stay with you until my wounds have fully healed, then I will leave and take my own path’.

‘What are you talking about?!’

‘The truth is, I don’t belong in your world. You have your way of life and I have mine. I also feel it will be safer for all of you, especially given my history…’

‘Let me join you!’ Kiyotaka cried, ‘We made a promise between men remember?’

‘The others will need your leadership and wisdom Taka’, Mondo told him, ‘And I am sure our paths will collide again at some point. Back in the outside world, I am always on the move so you are bound to come across me eventually’.

‘Please be careful’, Taka begged as Mondo kissed him on the lips, ‘I don’t want you getting hurt again...’

‘Don’t worry, I will try not to do anything stupid this time’, Mondo smiled gently before they hugged, Kiyotaka’s head on his chest.

‘You will be staying right Kyoko?’ Makoto questioned.

‘Oh… I will be yes’, I nodded, ‘You were the first true friends I have had in a long time and for that, I owe you my allegiance. It is unfortunate that our first memories of each other were in such barbaric circumstances... but the friendships we had during our stay here will always remain as one of my most important memories, and I cannot thank you enough for that’.

‘Seriously?’ Makoto beamed.

‘Of course, although it pains me to know that some of us are now gone. Still, all we can do is fight
for hope and freedom to ensure that their deaths were not in vain'.

‘Celestia truly would have been very proud of you Kyoko’, Aoi said, ‘Especially after today, you really played your cards right!’

'I sure hope so, considering how rubbish I am at cards…'

‘Are you staying with us too Aoi?’ Makoto asked.

‘Sure!’ she grinned, ‘I hope we can settle on the outside of the city so we can build ourselves a farm'.

‘A farm, really?’ Taka raised an eyebrow, ‘What for?’

‘Doughnuts of course!’ Aoi proclaimed, ‘I mean they require wheat and stuff, right?’

‘Yeah… But we can’t just survive on doughnuts you know…’

‘Don’t worry, if you have the right supplies, you will be able to grow anything! It will be just like Harvest Moon or Stardew valley’, she sniffs, ‘Chihiro used to love those games so much…’

‘You will help us fight too though, right?’

‘Of course! I will do it to honour Sakura. I will become a Samurai Farmer!’

‘Samurai Farmer eh?’ Mondo raised an eyebrow.

‘Oh, I almost forgot!’, Aoi rummaged in her pocket and pulled out a memory stick, ‘Sakura left me this in my room the night before she died’.

‘What’s on it?’ Makoto gasped, ‘It can’t be ‘you know who’, can it?’

‘Memory sticks solve everything!’ Aoi nodded as she placed it back her pocket, ‘I didn’t want to risk her being caught by the mastermind again, so I kept her hidden from view!’

‘Aoi that is amazing!’ Mondo smiled, ‘Chihiro’s legacy lives on!’

‘What about you Toko?’ Makoto turned to face her, ‘Will you be joining us?’

‘I will probably go my own way too, at least for the time being’, she said, ‘I want to find some inspiration for my books’.

‘Just be careful alright?’ I pointed a finger.

‘Don’t worry I will!’ Toko grinned, ‘I’m pretty street savvy too so I should be fine. And even if I do get into trouble, Syo will be there to have my back!’

‘I’m sure she will’, I said before Toko hugged me and I gave her a gentle squeeze in return, ‘Well… I suppose that’s everything cleared up. We can’t hang around here all day, can we?’

‘Of course not!’ Kiyotaka shouted, ‘We don’t have time to waste!’

‘We should probably say some goodbyes first though, before we set out’, Makoto stated.

‘Yeah I suppose we should do that before leaving this place for good’, I agreed.

Makoto looked back, 'Goodbye Yasuhiro. Goodbye Leon and Sayaka. Goodbye Chihiro. Goodbye Byakuya and Akira. Goodbye Celestia and of course goodbye Sakura. You will be greatly missed
and because of this we shall cherish the memories we had together. We can only hope that you will rest in everlasting peace’, he paused, ‘Also... even though I wish you had made better choices in life, goodbye Mukuro and Junko, I hope that you will inspire others not to go down the wrong path’.

We held one last minute of silence for our fallen friends before I took out the device from my pocket, Toko embracing me again as I did so.

‘Come on everyone’, I gave a firm nod, ‘Let’s go’.

As I pushed the button, Toko’s lips met with mine. The outside air and light engulfed the room around us. After the steel door had finished opening, the six of us walked out without looking back at the university where all hopes and dreams were supposed to come true, but instead had died.

Rather it was friendship that brought the survivors of the killing game hope in this world of despair and toil. While we didn’t know what laid beyond, or what possible enemies lurked in the shadows, our hope had made us stronger than ever before. We were optimistic that it would help the six of us to survive the unknown and dangerous path that lay before us.

We were free at last.

The End.

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