Despair always thinks it has everything all figured out. They think they know exactly what hope is going to do and how they'll try and do it. The funny thing about despair is just how predictable it is and hope's tendency to go a little off script.
Darkness, swirling and thick, cradled you in a dream-like state. You know somewhere deep down that this kind of feeling is wrong. This relaxed safety, it isn't natural or even right. For all your logical understanding, you can't find it in yourself to have a negative reaction at the given moment in spite of your brain telling you to. Instead, your movements are slowed and dulled as you try to swim through the syrupy thickness, pushing to try and come to an understanding while at the same time recoiling away from one. A small part of you wanted to remain where it felt safe, warm and happy. For now, it's gentle, dark and, safe and that's all you need to know, cocooned in a steel box of sorts with a wall on any side of you. You breathe in the stale air, and as it forces its way into your lungs you fully start to understand just how wildly wrong this situation feels to you.

It's like a jolt, a sensation akin to being slapped. In one moment the calming sensation of being half asleep was ripped away from you and adrenaline jumped you like an angry beast. It screamed at you that something was wrong and you needed to escape immediately. Surrounded by deep and threatening darkness, all of your senses went into total overdrive. Your heart jumped around like a bird desperately trying to free itself from a cage. Pushing violently in an attempt to free yourself, you send yourself tumbling out of something and colliding directly with the floor. You wince as you try to regain a sense of what's going on, as well as attempting to right yourself. You're quick to stand on weakened legs no matter how shaky they seem to be.

It seems as though you've fallen out of a locker and tumbled into a classroom of sorts. Still dazed and a little confused, it takes you longer to understand your surroundings than it might have usually. You look around the decrepit and absurdly overgrown classroom and a strange sensation hits you. It's like listening to a story from the first-person point of view, odd and disassociating. You try to reconcile the feeling with what's actually going on around you. Almost like a fluke, the sensation immediately fades and you're left with nothing more than a dull sense of confusion. Taking a better stock of everything around you, you make the distinct note that you are alone in this strange setting. Chewing on your bottom lip slightly your mind instantly went to work, quietly whirring along through possibility after possibility. You couldn't remember anything about how you got here or why you're here now, but your mind doesn't fail to offer up possibilities. Kidnappings? Ransoms? Perhaps some kind of murder cult was going to use you as their sacrificial goat? With a huff and a bitter laugh, you decided that odder things have happened to you.

Now that you're awake though, you find yourself confident in your ability to hold your own against whatever this unknown threat is. Not overconfident to the indulgence of deadly hubris, but confident enough that you allowed your posture to relax if just ever so slightly. The danger was not in becoming an Icarus, it was when Apollo leaned down to kiss waxwings and cradled the fool who thought to fly as far as he. You could say proudly your wings aren't wax and complacency could be just as dangerous as pride. After skimming over the classroom for further clues you come to the decision that this room holds nothing for you, at least nothing useful. It's an overgrown mess for the most part, lockers and desks looking raggedy and beat up. The LCD screen where a whiteboard typically would have been is the only thing that looks new and to a degree, it unnerves
you with its presence. You headed towards the door that led to the rest of the building and carefully pushed it open.

All that confidence you'd managed to accrue jumped out the window as soon as you came face to face with what was outside the door. Apollo here, your wings are definitely wax. Panic set in instantly and already you were working out escape plans in your head. "Finally! The last one! We've been looking all over for you," a massive robot announced. You're fairly tall all things considered, however, this monstrosity towered over you like some ungodly beast. Standing on two legs, brilliant red eyes glared down at you and you could only imagine the weaponry it held. It was accented with red, looking fairly new by the way that the paint hadn't even begun to chip. Your mind went into double time in an attempt to process those words and pick them apart for their meaning. While it looked terrifying, it sounded somewhat relieved to have finally found you. It wasn't being openly antagonistic or even posing much of a threat at the present moment. Trying to run would do you no good against a creature that quite obviously had guns, so you kept your expression placid and tried to maintain a balanced head.

"Yes, here I am. Why exactly are you here?" You returned. The caution peaked through in your voice but given the situation, you didn't suppose that was too bad a thing. It was caution after all, not fear. You never betrayed yourself and expressed fear. It was your number one rule to always keep your composure.

The robot didn't seem to know how to respond for a moment. "You're the first one not to run," it quietly commented with a tone that almost made you think it was impressed. Well, you couldn't say you were overly shocked. Most normal and sane human beings would run if they saw such a war machine bearing down on them. You were by no means anywhere near normal at this point though, you instead leveled your gaze to meet what you assumed was its eyes. You drew on what inner strength you had and hoped it would be enough to trudge through this hellish situation.

"So I'm not alone then? Allow me to restate my question a second time since I find it to be rather important. Why are you here, and for that matter, why am I here?" You straighten slightly and puff out your chest to appear as prideful and strong-willed as possible. You keep your voice strong, but try to refrain from sounding demanding. Your gamble paid off when the creature made a noise akin to laughter and you found yourself smiling slightly. Small victories.

"That'll all be explained soon, the reason I'm here is to collect you and send you on your way to the gym. There are 16 others besides yourself. Each and every one of them went running as soon as they saw my siblings and me. Luckily we chased them to the gym," the creature declared with what you thought might have been a hint of smug pride.

You rolled this thought over in your mind for a couple moments. There obviously wouldn't be any kind of easy escape in a situation like this, so you found that it might be wise to just give yourself over to whatever crazy plan these monstrosities had concocted. Safest no doubt. You didn't think that you could outrun these beasts, they'd just end up chasing you to the gym with your soon to be companions. So it was not only safest to act rationally and go along with such a simple demand, but it was also no doubt a power move. Tossing your head back and squaring your shoulders you nodded. "Very well then, if you'd give me the directions I'll be on my way to the gym as well," you told the creature. You cross your arms, regarding it carefully as you say this.

Another laugh. "Oh, don't worry, just keep going down the hall. When my siblings start showing up you'll know where to make the turns," he said before the creature began stomping off the direction you assumed was opposite the one you were supposed to be going. The word sibling really caught your attention and your curiosity was piqued. Strolling down the hall with as much poise as you could muster in this strange situation, you stumbled across 4 other robots who seemed
just as shocked as the first considering your relaxed pace and the lack of any of their siblings rushing along behind you. Some seemed impressed, others just confused more than anything. One was eerily silent. All of them helped to point you in the right direction. You made sure to memorize the personality of each robot to the colorful markings they displayed.

Upon coming to the gym you carefully pushed the doors open. As promised, you were greeted by 16 other faces who all gave you equally confused looks.

"Someone else?" The first person to speak up asked as he looked at you. The first thing you took note of about him was his green tuft of hair, the second thing was the confused expression he wore the moment you appeared. He looked as though your appearance in the gym was entirely unexpected to him. Going off that, you could take a guess that he knew a little more than the others who had more curiosity than confusion in regards to your sudden appearance.

"Oh! Did you get chased by those giant monsters too?" A blonde girl standing next to a meek-looking boy with black hair asked. Before you could push out much of an answer there was a large bang.

"Monsters? We resent that!" The large red accented robot announced as the quintet appeared. You narrowed your eyes, trying to gauge if they were actually offended and dangerous or if they were just teasing.

"Why don't we just kill 'em all for that. Or maybe just a couple, to take these new puppies out for a spin!" The blue one cheered. You couldn't really tell if the creature was being completely serious, but part of you honestly considered jumping out of the way while you still had the chance. Then again, 15 out of 16 of the other students seemed pretty hapless, and you couldn't necessarily abandon them. Taking another look at the other students you guessed they were high schoolers. They were probably in the 16-17 range. That would make you oldest at 18.

"Wait, wait, wait! We're doing this so outta order. We ain't even supposed to be in these here Exisals yet! Furthermore, we can't kill 'em since the game hasn't even had the chance to start!" the yellow one told the other two. What strange accents the yellow and blue one seemed to have.

"Oh no, the poor script. Didn't any of you read it?" the pink one said mournfully.

"Well, can't we just get out of the Exisals and put them away for now?" The red one spoke up again. It seemed the green one was bound in silence, refusing to talk no matter what.

"That'll probably work," the yellow said in an almost sagely tone. The monsters... Exisals popped open and out of them jumped 5 robotic bears. The warning lights were blaring in the back of your mind the moment you saw the creatures. You had a bad feeling that maybe you knew what was going on. You most certainly didn't like it.

"So it is that, but if that's the case why is she..." you heard the green haired man muttering under his breath. You take a quiet note of that comment as the 5 bears introduce themselves with the exact amount of fanfare you were expecting from such creatures. Judging from his tone of voice, he understands what's going on and sounds equally unhappy as you feel. You sympathize with this green haired man.

"Now that all of that is outta the way we can finally well and truly begin this Ultimate Game!" The newly introduced Monosuke cheered. You decided that you did not like these bears, not a single one. These bears should be destroyed you quietly decide as your eyes narrow and your pulse speeds up a little. The word Ultimate is enough just to set you on edge as a realization slowly begins to dawn on you.
"Ultimate Game?" The blonde who'd commented on them being monsters asked.

"Right, since yous bastards are all Ultimates then it has to be an Ultimate game," Monosuke informed the group only to be met with a chorus of confused whispers. A couple louder voices made confused statements at being called Ultimates. You remained quiet for the time being. You were no longer assessing the situation as much as you were trying to assess your new 'classmates' as well as the 5 bears. You already had a plenty good enough idea of where this was going. "Wait, you ain't Ultimates? Don't tell me you haven't gotten your first memory yet. Monofunny, you were in charge of that!"

The pink bear had a look of sheer panic on her comparatively softer expression. "Ah! The poor script, everything is going wrong! How could you do this Monotaro?" Monofunny pushed her accusation and the blame towards her brother who you quickly assumed was the leader.

"How is this my fault?" The red bear started to panic as the others looked towards him.

"You are the one who told us to get in the Exisals! Own up and face the fucking consequences!" Monokid screamed in a voice that totally wouldn't be grating in 3 days time.

"Daddy's going to be so angry," Monofunny began to sulk and the others started to shake.

"It's okay, we can still fix this. We'll just give them their first memory now. After we give them a proper outfit change! Can't have them running around looking like normal students after all. It would so take away from the marketability," the last line was muttered as Monosuke started looking over some cash. The Exisals, still moving even though they were sans a driver, tossed clothes up into the air. Reality almost seemed to glitch for a second as the clothes flew towards everyone and then suddenly the occupants of the gym were dressed in attire you guessed was supposed to be fitting in regards to their talents.

You glanced over yourself and had to wonder for a moment if anything had changed. Your appearance now wasn't all too different from how you usually looked. If anything, it was all that closer to how you'd looked a couple of years ago when your appearance tended to mimic a combination of your mother's and your father's styles of dress. You wore a white dress shirt which was mostly covered by a grey long-sleeved blazer. You refused to wear a miniskirt if your life depended on it, hence the length of your billowy white skirt being to your calves. You wore professionally styled dress shoes that you could easily run in if the need be. On your hands were a pair of pitch black gloves with insignias on the back. Each glove had different insignias. You recognized them immediately for what they were but wondered why exactly these bears would put such a marker on them. Your hair was clipped in order to keep a rather unruly strand of hair from poking straight up the way that the blonde girl's hair was now. The majority of your hair was pulled back into a braid which was neatly tied with a familiar ribbon. Two portions of your hair remained free from the braid however and rested in front of each shoulder. In a left breast pocket belonging to the blazer, you noticed a chain draped out. Pulling on it you came face to face with a pocket watch. On the blazer pocket, the Hope's Peak crest stood proudly. On the front of the pocket watch itself was a prohibition sign. Oddly enough, the pocket watch refused to open. Curious.

"Now that you're all looking spiffy with your new duds, it's time for the flashback light!" Momotaro announced as the five bears disappeared. Without much warning, a bright light flashed, blinding all of you in the room. Your stomach churned, your mind went foggy, back into the darkness you went.

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Squirming and upsetting darkness, unnerving and utterly wrong. There was nothing comforting about this kind of darkness. It was hollow and fearful. Empty. You shivered as the darkness crawled up your spine, vicious and chilling. It felt like swimming through tar as you tried to regain control over your limbs. Moving was almost impossible, but somehow you were able to manage as you vied desperately to escape this dim prison. It was only natural that you'd lash out, flailing and sending your body falling into the light the first chance you got. Coughing a couple times like you couldn't get enough air into your lungs, you tried to take stock of everything around you. A strange decrepit classroom, terrible lighting, nothing felt quite right. Worst of all, there was a quiet nagging feeling in the back of your skull like the pieces of a puzzle weren't quite lining up correctly. Like you were missing something. There's a strange sense of deja vu that you can't begin to place. Your eyes narrowed at this idea, your mind instantly going to work trying to solve this puzzle as if it were only natural that you solve it.

That wouldn't make any sense at all though. Smart wasn't exactly in your talent description. In fact, weren't you supposed to be kind of stupid? Or, so asked the little voice in the back of your mind. That was the whole point of your talent, dumb luck of the draw it quickly assured you. You were little more than the Ultimate Luckster. You were unfortunately rather unintelligent at best.

That wasn't right though. A tiny part of your mind was screaming, working faster than anything you'd ever experienced to try and analyze, pick apart, and deduce the situation like an analytical pro. It felt foreign, and yet, it was telling you that the little voice trying to reassure you was the part that was wrong. This slow and stupid drawling part of your mind wasn't right. Wasn't natural. Something seemed to crack for a moment as the two ideas waged war, your identity quietly trying to reconcile itself with what it understood and what was currently being presented in front of it. It felt forced though, that slow and unintelligent part of you that tried to ease you into the situation and tell you this was okay and normal and this smart part of you was the wrong part. There was never any question that the logical thinking half of this new existence won out, quietly seeping into your memories like a ferocious beast. Picking them apart and picking out everything that didn't seem right. Everything that didn't seem to add up. Its abilities were savage and well-honed, which just further went to proving just how off your memories and this situation were.

You came to the conclusion that someone was trying to tamper with you. Who you were, who you are, and what you understand. You decided to place your faith in the smart half of your new existence and, without hesitation, it shattered your old understandings like glass underneath an overbearing rock. Yes, you were plenty intelligent. You were respected and loved because you were intelligent on top of being lucky. Strong and agile, logical and reasonable. You couldn't tell what parts of these old memories of yours were real or fake, but you knew that they would need to be false to a certain extent to trick you so badly and make you understand something that wasn't true, even if it was only for a couple of moments.

Your entire being was on a defensive edge, guarding against foreign memory and thought. You needed to be careful in this strange situation, you needed to decide on how to proceed. To do that, you needed to first ascertain what was true and what was false. Slowly and carefully you repeated what you knew and what you learned out loud to yourself in the quiet classroom. "I am ____ ______, I am the Ultimate Luckster. I have won the lottery at least twice, leading to my title, and I am a highly intelligent woman." You paused quietly for a long time, tasting at the words which you let rest on your tongue. Trying to carefully judge your emotions. Saying that you were the Ultimate Luckster felt nostalgic and wrong at the same time, so you decided while you'd introduce yourself as such you'd put your personal claim over the title on hold and set the information aside for later review. Your first name felt real and natural and solid, it was exactly how it was supposed to be. ____ , yeah, that was definitely your first name. But your last name you didn't trust as much. _____. It somehow felt wrong, like a lie. So once again while you'd introduce yourself as such you quietly removed ownership in your own personal database of knowledge until further proof.
Another deep breath, another assurance of what you knew so far. "I am ____. I'm uncertain of where I am or how I got here. I don't know what my captors want with me, but I know that I am an Ultimate. I'm strong enough to get out of this okay, smart enough and cunning enough to guard myself, and I'm going to do my best to protect myself and those around me," you tell yourself. You aren't entirely sure where the last sentence came from, but it flowed from you so swiftly and cleanly that it felt right to say. You don't feel any discrepancies with your words. Its weird, how some of the things you say feel as though they're lies without you knowing consciously. Perhaps it was a subconscious understanding that the foreign force buried away. The words poke at your tongue in an uncomfortable fashion.

Just as you finished reassuring yourself of what you knew the door to your classroom was pushed open. You felt the hair on the back of your neck rise as you looked, stance tensing, only to relax as a blonde with a long stalk of hair sticking up on the top of her head pushed her way inside. "An ahoge?" You muttered to yourself quietly. You thought that was the word for such an audacious cowlick. The top of your head tingled for a moment but you couldn't place why. You were tempted to instantly trust this girl, but you'd reserve your judgments for now.

"Oh! Hello there. I'm Akamatsu Kaede, so you got trapped here as well? My friend Saihara-kun and I just started exploring and trying to meet everyone," the blonde girl said. Kaede huh? You nod quietly. You glanced over her form, taking note of everything your eyes landed on. She looked to be 167cm which off the top of your head you thought roughly made her 5'4 in feet. Her skirt was covered in music lines, notes scattered here and there. Music note hair pins helped to clip back her hair, though her bangs seemed to naturally avoid her face. On her shirt's left breast was the emblem for some kind of high school you didn't recognize. It wasn't a uniform you'd ever seen before, so that likely meant it was a modification to better suit her talent, much like the modifications made to your own uniform. One of the perks related to being an Ultimate. She wore a gentle expression that helped to set you ever so slightly at ease, bright and cheery, full of joy. At the same time, it left you feeling worried.

"I'm Saihara Shuichi," the boy standing a couple feet behind her said. He looked relatively meek by comparison, keeping himself ducked behind the girl. The boy, not much taller than Kaede at 171cm, was plainer by comparison to his female friend. His school emblem was in the same location as Kaede's. The uniform itself was pitch black with stripes going down it. It almost looked to you like it could be a normal school uniform. The only thing about him that drew the eyes was that hat, and not in the best way.

"A pleasure. My name is ____ ______, but I'd prefer if you could just refer to me by my first name. I'm not one for formalities and I've spent enough time in other countries it's become something a habit to just use first names. I apologize in advance if I end up using your first name and it comes off as rude or offensive. Truly, I don't mean it that way," you tell the two. You aren't being completely truthful but you aren't really lying either. You know for a fact you've never been to another country in your life, but you do feel compelled to put yourself on a first name basis with everyone you meet. You aren't exactly sure why though. You'll try to remain respectful and use last names, but something tells you it won't be more than 3 days before you're calling everyone by their first name. Which could end up being awkward and painful if you don't give the same introduction to the other 14 students you'd have to meet after these two. In your exasperation, you don't question how or why you know there are 14 others besides these 2.

"In that case ____, it's a pleasure to meet you too," Kaede said with a brilliant smile. "Do you want to tag along with us and meet everyone? It might be easier that way since we're going around in a little group and you're the first person we've come across," she tells you and her companion nods along with a small but welcoming smile. More the merrier you suppose with a shrug.
"Sure, why not. As you said, makes it easier," you say as you walk across the room towards the two.

"So, you're an Ultimate too, right? What exactly is your talent?" Shuichi asks as he looks you up and down. His eyes were appraising, calculating almost, and the word detective pops into your head almost instantly. Was that his talent perhaps? Kaede could be anything within the music department given her appearance, but the way her fingers seem to move so deftly with an acquired grace you'd be willing to bet on her being a pianist.

"Most just call me the Ultimate Luckster. Not much of a real talent huh? I seem to attract good fortune wherever I go, but that's all I'm really good for, not especially smart or strong," you tell the two. The words prickle on your tongue like they're lies and you make a note of that. "How about the two of you?" You ask.

They both confirm your suspicions in regards to their talents and you take a moment to assess your own abilities as the two talk among themselves for a moment, chittering back and forth about how your ability sounds pretty cool and you should give yourself more credit. But it doesn't feel like it's your ability. You know you're an Ultimate, you can feel that deep down in your marrow like an unshakeable truth the same way your first name feels. But Luckster just doesn't feel right. It feels as flimsy and uncomfortable as your assumed last name and your assessment that you aren't all too capable. You feel capable! You feel like you're stronger than this 'you' is currently giving you credit for, wiser than the average girl your age. It's odd to be so at odds in understanding. A couple of minutes was not enough time to work out the kinks in your identity and if you don't keep your composure you're going to start tripping yourself up on the cracks wherever they form. Obviously, there were more important things at the moment.

Looking at the two, so many questions buzzed around your mind. Letting a small hiss through your teeth you decide it's best to conduct yourself with some semblance of grace and control for the time being. After all, there were people you needed to meet. Strangers to make good impressions on. You allowed Kaede and Shuichi to lead you through the school, getting to meet all of your classmates before the forces in control decided to really get this show on the road.
Time seemed to pass too quickly, and you were in no way prepared for what would be coming next.

After spending a large portion of time exploring the school with Kaede and Shuichi, the ringing of a bell acted as a signal to turn your attention to the various monitors scattered throughout the school. The 5 Monokubs as they dubbed themselves invited the occupants of the school to the gym for the opening ceremony. It was all very odd, to say the least, and you were a touch uncomfortable due to the large assortment of personalities displayed by your new 'classmates'. Some were eccentric like Angie or Miu. Some set you a bit on edge like Korekiyo. Some you found to be downright adorable like Gonta and of course your two dear companions. Either way, you found yourself a little uncomfortable and it made you not want to go anywhere near the gym.

Setting aside having so many different and potentially conflicting personalities in a single room, the gym gave you the chills. Shuichi had been the one to mention a feeling of deja vu upon entering, but you'd been feeling that ever since you woke up in that locker. The gym though, the gym was something that admittedly terrified you for reasons you couldn't put into words. It was foreboding to say the very least about it. It left a dark slinking kind of feeling traveling down your spine while your hands got clammy. That was a particularly uncomfortable sensation given the type of gloves you were wearing. Your thumb on your right hand quietly traced the emblem on the left while you'd watched the announcement, already feeling the dread starting to fill the pit of your stomach and make you heavy like a stone. While Kaede and Shuichi investigated it earlier, you actually had to step out for a moment. Something in the back of your mind was screaming, telling you that the gym was the place where bad things happened. Considering the situation, you weren't going to disagree with your gut instincts.

Once that announcement finished, you headed towards the gym with Kaede and Shuichi. Something made you not want to separate from the pair, their personalities were something of comfort while you'd been exploring the school and you weren't quite ready to let go of that comfort yet. After all, you'd have to have the strength to put on a powerful facade once you actually got into the room and shit inevitably started to go down. Logic and hope, that's what Kaede and Shuichi felt like to you. It was an old and safe combination that helped to lighten the dread in the center of your being and kept your feet from dragging against the floor as your little trio walked. The presence of the pair alone seemed to leave you just a touch more optimistic. That being said, when the three of you stepped inside the gym as the last people to arrive your heart still started thumping against your ribcage in a vain attempt to escape and seemingly fly away. There wasn't anything that was distinctly scary about the room, which was perhaps what confused you the most in regards to how guttural your reaction was. It was plain and overgrown like everything else in this school. Large trees had taken root in the corners of the room, yet the painted lines on the floor for sports remained completely intact. It was a strange dichotomy when you really looked at it, the floor was polished to a sheen but the walls were coated in vines. Cared for and yet so carelessly overrun by local flora. Funny enough, it was the flora that made you feel safe.

Stepping inside the gym felt like walking on glass, every footstep was carefully placed as though you believed spears could shoot out of the ground at any second. You'd showed no ounce of the same caution anywhere else in this godforsaken school, so why here? In the back of the room opposite to the doors, a large stage sat. It was emblazoned with what you assumed was the school emblem. It was eerily similar to the emblem on your left breast pocket, however, it wasn't identical which helped to set you just a couple touches at ease. Though, that did raise some interesting questions with you. Your classmates welcomed you into the gym with a few hellos as the three of
you shuffled towards where the student herd was situated. You hovered close by, but you weren't necessarily apart of the group at large. There were a couple feet of distance as you hovered on the sidelines and surveyed the area, occasionally pacing and drifting closer or farther from the group. For the majority of the time, you hovered in the back, eyes dancing in just about every direction while your entire body strained to try and sense any little change in surroundings.

With all 17 of you standing in the gym expectantly, it was time to begin.

"It seems that all 17 of us have finally arrived. What kind of ceremony could these bears have in mind?" Kirumi seemed to voice the thoughts of the entire group as she spoke. She brushed a stay strand of silver hair back into place, a nervous tick by the way that her fingers also worked tirelessly at the hems of her sleeves. Anything to help the regal maid occupy herself instead of panic you supposed. You do make a quick note of the fact that Kirumi's nervous tick isn't too dissimilar from your own, and after that, you quickly make a second note to keep your own in check. Instead of allowing your fingers to wander aimless and bide your time, you keep yourself almost entirely still while keeping a relaxed air about you instead of rigid as one might assume.

"I don't know, but it would be best to stay on guard just in case," Rantaro responded, looking cautiously vexed. His expression spoke to the fact he was trying to analyze the situation just as much as you were. Honestly, the entire room seemed to be standing on pins and needles. Even the ones who spoke and acted more carefree like Kaito and Angie seemed to understand the gravity of the situation as all 17 students looked around at each other. Even Kokichi and Maki, who you guessed were supposed to be in complete control of their emotions, had little things about them that tipped you off. Maki kept brushing her hair behind her ear and looking upwards like she expected someone to drop down from the ceiling. A trait of someone trained in stealth-based combat. Most people don't look above a 45-degree angle. Often shinobi or assassins would use that to their advantage. Kokichi looked more impatient than anxious, a bored expression on his features while he shifted from foot to foot. But that was just a lie. You kept your movements particularly slow as you paced in the back, each step calculated. The slow and meaningful movements made it seem like you less worried and more keeping guard, patrolling the surroundings, which in a way you were. You were smart enough to escape a dangerous situation, you didn't think the same of most of the people in this group. So you'd have to play puppy guard for now. Even to a trained eye, it would look like you were in control of yourself.

"Wah, I'm so scared, don't talk about things going wrong," Kokichi cried out loudly, breaking away from his bored expression to morph his features into one of faux terror. You could tell instantly that the boy was putting on a show for the crowd, but most seemed to disregard his antics immediately. Keebo especially gave a miffed huff. You wouldn't be so quick to do the same. After all, theatrics in a situation like this would suggest either an attempt to gain control of the situation or a pre-existing control. Given the situation, you were willing to go out on a limb and imply that the former applied most strongly to Kokichi. You didn't know yet if it was of malicious intent or more so something to calm himself down. Liars often lied the most to themselves when things started crashing down around them.

"Hey, don't worry everyone! Just leave it all to me. If those teddy bears show up looking for a fight, I'll knock them down a peg or two until they wise up and realize that a room full of Ultimates is a little too much to handle," Kaito boasted with a proud look. He made a wide movement that allowed for his stary jacket to flare outwards and catch the eyes of nearby classmates. It helped to draw attention away from his shaking hands.

Gonta perked up slightly. "Huh?" The man simply said. For all his grammatical failings, Gonta was actually rather well spoken when it came to voice. It didn't sound stupid or over exaggerated as one might be quick to assume. You perked, senses going into overdrive the moment he seemed to
notice something. "Listen, you hear that?" Gonta said as he looked around for a couple moments, trying to pinpoint a noise the others seemed to be having difficulty picking up on. Leave it to someone like Gonta to have extremely sensitive ears. That being said, you picked up on the noise just as quickly as Gonta did. In fact, you might have heard it beforehand and disregarded it. You'd have to be more careful with what you write off moving forward. The sound pointed out is a gentle, mechanical kind of whir. One that stirs old memories you can't summon up to the surface. It would be comforting to you if it wasn't for the situation, in which it suddenly became a terrifying noise that sent your thoughts racing in all directions.

Tusmugi tilted her head slightly. "I think I hear it too. It sounds like one of the engines from Suisei no Gargantia!" She declared to the confusion of most everyone in the room. You recognize it as a mecha anime but that's about the extent of what you know.

You see Miu starting to formulate a derogatory response to Tusmugi out of the corner of your eyes, her mouth just opening up when the noises culminate in the sound of a crash. 5 robots appear, color-coded in the same format as the 5 bears from earlier. Kaito's the first to scream. It's a rather girlish scream and you're forced to hold back a sardonic laugh. "Oh, how the mighty fall," you mutter under your breath as the rest of your classmates begin to panic. The part of your existence which you'd shoved away as being false begins to speak up. Panic, it urges you, panic like the rest. You stamp down on that voice and straightened your back a little, evening out your gaze and looking at these monstrosities without fear. "If they wanted to kill us, they would have done it already. Keep calm, if you stay calm then you still have a little control," you whisper to Kaede and Shuichi who you'd slowly been inching closer to ever since Gonta said 'huh'. Despite the rather ferocious creatures, they do their very best to try and mimic your fearless disposition. Shuichi shakes like a leaf in a tornado and it seems like his attempt to act confident is a failure. Kaede does better, but there are droplets of sweat on her brow and she's gone entirely pale. You continue to hold complete control over both emotion and action in a way that almost feels natural and comforting, in spite of the rather violent urgings of the tiny little voice. It felt as though it was a little quieter now.

"Yoo-hoo! Rise and shine, ursine!" The telltale catchphrase of the Monokubs came from the Exisals, helping to further put you slightly at ease. They could have easily killed you earlier, but they didn't, which meant they needed you all alive for something else if they hadn't already done away with the lot of you. That meant this was a show of power, which subsequently meant that you needed to maintain a level head. The moment they got you to panic, you'd already lost. You stop for a moment to wonder how you know their name, Exisals, but you eventually conclude it has to do with your missing memories. As does your knowledge in regards to controlling yourself. The quicker half of your being, the one you'd come to trust, supplies you with these thoughts and answers and urges you not to lose yourself along with your classmates. Look for answers, try to figure out what's going on, keep your composure even if the gods themselves appear, those are the things your conscious bids you before telling you exactly how to go about enacting its orders. Another reason you've come to trust it.

"Whoa! What are these things? They're so cool," Kokichi says loudly with an almost childish glint in his gaze, or perhaps it's an impish one. Your eyes dart towards him for only a moment. You admittedly are impressed by the way he kept control of himself, as he is one of the few to do so. Much like your own composure, his is likely a show of power in order to put himself in a position of strength when confronted by these creatures. He is the Ultimate Supreme Leader, after all. He's probably used to dealing with terrifying creatures. A good amount of leadership is knowing how to put on a show of complete and total control. What he's doing now reminds you of that.

"You're right, I wonder what they're made of?" You chime in with the supreme leader as you loosen your muscles, striding right towards one the creature that's closest to you. It's Monofunny's
Exisal judging by the pink highlights, which makes you all the more fearless in going so far as to place a hand on its mechanical leg. It's freezing to the touch, but you refuse to back down. "Titanium maybe?" You muse. Kokichi glances at you for half a second. You can't decipher exactly what his look means, but the rest of the class marvels at you for a moment before another one of the Monokubs speaks.

"These Exisals are highly advanced bipedal weapons platforms! They'll blow you up to high heaven if you bastards don't watch yourselves! And no, not titanium! Something even better than that shit!" Monokid cried out in his still quite annoying voice. Monofanny's Exisal actually takes a step back away from you and you pull off a fake frown. On the inside, you're relishing the fact you've gotten at least one of them to back away from your touch. Perhaps it's the most cowardly and 'kind' member of the group, but not only are you calling out the Monokubs bluff, it means that you're putting yourself in a position of fearless confidence among your classmates. You can vaguely hear Kokichi snickering in the background as you take another step towards Monofanny in an attempt to reclose the distance between the two of you. You can practically feel the tiny teddy bear beginning to panic inside her Exisal.

"Didn't a certain someone say to leave it all to him. Or at least something along those lines," Maki commented coolly. She glances towards Kaito who's still in the middle of freaking out. Maki, much like yourself and Kokichi, seems to have no trouble conducting herself. Unlike yourself and Kokichi, however, she doesn't attempt to make her relaxed disposition into a power move. She just glares like there are better things she could be doing. Which you suppose is something of a power move in and of itself. It does, however, make you curious. Kokich and you are conducting yourself in such a way because your internal motivations, whatever they may be. Maki doesn't have any visible motivations given her actions themselves, so her reaction must be genuine. Which brings you back to the idea that she's not only familiar with combat but completely unafraid of her own death. Or that of others. Something to remember, you muse.

"No one told me about these things! What in the hell, this is cheating!" Kaito cried out in response, his voice laced with panic. You can see the fear in his gaze as he stares down Monosuke's Exisal. The thing takes a half step towards him and another high pitched squeal comes from the mouth of the astronaut. You can hear the exasperation in Maki's sigh. You have to give him credit for at least not darting behind her like a child seeking the protection of a mother. While you're beginning to wonder about Maki herself, her talent doesn't seem too hard to believe because while she's harsh she exudes a kind of motherly aura. A mother who's done with your shit, but a mother none the less.

"Calm down, we're probably not in any kind of danger," Rantaro pipes up after the initial freakouts are over and he can actually raise his voice above the cries of your classmates. He conducted himself like this situation was familiar to him. Again, deja vu settled in the back of your mind and you found yourself having more questions than answers. Specifically about the green haired boy who looked to be the picture of calm as the situation stood. Well, perhaps it's not his relaxation that almost unnerves you, it's the way that his relaxation feels practiced that makes you more than curious about him.

"Rantaro-kun's right," you pipe up. You forget that you should probably be using last names, but everyone's already heard your explanation and now isn't the nitpicking kind of situation so no one draws attention to your choice in words. "If they wanted us dead, they would have already killed us. Everyone, just calm down and listen to what they have to say," you're able to raise your voice above the crowd easily, though you're not sure why it comes so naturally. It seems to draw everyone's attention and the command in your tone does good in at least shutting everyone up if not calming them down. Again, you begin to wonder about your own history and memories. You don't ever remember being a loud person, nor one that particularly demanded respect and attention.
So why does it feel so natural to step up at this moment and corral your panicking classmates and friends? You feel as though there's a piercing gaze on you for a moment, and you have to wonder if it's the Monokubs who are glaring you down. Not what they expected, perhaps?

Monokid gave something of a huff. "Now that all you punk asses are shut up, we're gonna spill our demands! Are you ready? I'm so excited, my heart's going 100 miles per hours. What we want is a-" Monokid's words are quickly finished by an unexpected source.

"KILLING GAME," Monodam speaks for the first time since you've met the meek robotic bear. For the first time since entering this room, you betray your emotions and shiver.

"How dare you upstage me!" Monokid sounds enraged but that's the only noise you can hear.

The entire room has gone silent enough you could hear a pin dropping in the hall outside. Your classmates don't say anything at first, likely processing the situation. You feel your heart do a small flip in your chest and your stomach constricts. Your mind completely starts to race. Those responses though feel just a little too extreme to be natural. Your actual thoughts go quiet for a moment, and then they get cold. Analytical. You feel strangely relaxed. Not in the way that you're okay with this game, not by any means. There's a genuine feeling of revulsion and disgust the words alone produce. But you're okay with this situation in that you've already begun to analyze your classmates. You know who could be the potential first in killing. You see which ones are the most at risk. And you start to see opportunities and pathways in order to block and avoid those nasty outcomes. Your heart speeds up again and your eyes dart around faster. What could push each of these people to kill, and how could you avoid it? How can you frustrate these bears? How can you break this game? The second half of you rebels so violently, you realize you're going to have to sever off one half or the other. Are you dim-witted and naive, or are you the kind of woman who's going to fight these bears with as much vigor, vim, and venom as she's got in her whole body.

It's not even a question.

From that moment forward you stop acknowledging the half that tried to lull you into complacency at the very beginning when you first woke up. You can't call it the second half of your being anymore since you sever it entirely, deciding it's false. Too distant a being from what you know you are to be properly reconciled with this other half you've decided to embrace. So foreign and strange, you instead dub it the entity. It rails at the ideas you start to come up with, ironing out all the cracks in this persona that feels so much more natural than what the entity originally tried to push. You feel more grounded now and time seems almost to flow a bit slower as you take in everything happening around you.

Your classmates, on the other hand, continued to freak out. Some looked a lot more terrified by the situation than others though, and you were worried one or two might faint. Shuichi was seriously starting to look like he might be one of them. Various questions were asked and eventually, the Monokubs seemed to turn to fighting. "My cute, precious little cubs. You have to knock off all this awful fighting!" A voice called from an unknown location. This voice made the hairs on the back of your neck begin to stand up on end. An uneasy sensation washed over you as you tried to control the shiver running up and down your spine as the voice echoed through the room. It dripped dangerously with boredom and malice despite its sweet tone. The Monokubs responded strongly, jumping from their Exisals and repeating variations of the word father as they moved to stand in front of the stage with the students. You tensed up as all the lights in the gym shut off at once. Spotlights began to light up the stage.

From seemingly nowhere a larger black and white bear popped up on stage, fluttering gently down
on a pair of angel wings. What a load of lies. "I am the god of this new world, and the headmaster of this here Ultimate Academy! The handsome, magnanimous, ever magnificent, and always stunning, Monokuma! Nice to meetcha!" The bear announced. His children followed up the entrance with cheers while the students were locked into silence. "My cute, adorable, sweet little cubs. Even when all your antics turn tiresome, the only reason I can tolerate you all is because you're so damn cute. Even when the prologue is going way too long and you've already messed up the script five different times. Even when you still haven't gotten everything right," Monokuma growled towards his children, seemingly furious. "You're all so damn cute!"

"Daddy! We're sorry we messed up, we promise it won't change the rest of the script too badly," Monofanny cried out in sheer panic as Monokuma glared at the children. In spite of his own words about the prologue being far too long, there was still more drawn out comedy and slapstick with Monokuma himself as the star. Your thoughts lingered however on the fact that the Monokubs 'still haven't gotten everything right'. A moment of clarity and fear comes to you. Surely these creatures have great control over the situation that you're in. They've trapped you without anyone being the wiser after all. Would it be too much of a stretch to say they've augmented your memories? Personality? How far can they push the discrepancies before someone notices? Maybe your sudden awareness about there being something wrong with your memories has something to do with these cubs making a mistake. If so, it would explain why Monokuma was so furious. Their mentions of a script continued to catch your intrigue as well. If your hypothesis is proved correct, all of you should be playing parts decided by the Monokubs and Monokuma, or whoever is pulling the strings behind them. But you aren't playing your character anymore, now are you? Which could lead to issues with the script, couldn't it? You wonder if anyone else got caught up in their little mistake, but so far you don't see any figurative lightbulbs going off in the eyes of your classmates.

Any of your classmates could easily be acting in or out of character and you wouldn't notice given the rather short acquaintanceship you all shared. Only the Monokubs and Monokuma would have the power to comment on such a thing. You decided it might be best to pay attention to the entity a little more. After all, if it was the character you were supposed to be playing, it would be suspicious to disregard it entirely. And suspicion could easily lead to someone trying to fix the fluke. You couldn't have that now, could you? Pretending that your actions were a one-time thing and dancing to their tune in the following days shouldn't be too hard. It would be hard to fix the scenario to your likings without raising suspicion, but if you wanted things done right you had to put in some elbow grease. Besides, if you acted like the Ultimate Luckster they'd have to abide you to some degree in order to make the script flow properly. Maybe you really were lucky.

After the mandatory comedy, the Headmaster continued to explain the rules of the killing game as well as hand out the rules regarding the academy itself. "With all this boring exposition out of the way, let's get this school killing semester started!" Monokuma cheered. Your classmates were practically losing their mind as Monokuma finished talking and handing out Monopads. You took to the situation easily enough compared to some, understanding the rules and why they were implemented. You tried not to let your heartbeat race when your classmates gave out disbelieving screams.

"A lie! It has to be a lie!" Tusmugi cried out in panic. She seemed to recoil into herself and make herself look small for the moment. Her eyes dance around in a panic, swimming in circles while she judges each and every one of your classmates for potential danger. Of course, she doesn't know what to look for so instead of calming down she just becomes more agitated and fearful.

"Too bad, it's true. Uhpupupu. Now, to get all of you started with this lovely game I'll give out your very first motive! This motive is called the First Blood Perk. The first person to kill as long as it's within the first 24 hours gets away with the murder scot-free! No trial or nothing, you just get to leave. If you don't want to kill any of your classmates though, that's fine. You'll just sit here and rot
for the rest of your pitiful existences, waiting out the hours pathetically until you realize there's no escape other than the sweet release of death or the blood sticking to your fingers!" Monokuma exited with joyous laughter, quickly followed by his children. So this was the way it was going to be? He wasn't going to force anyone to kill, it was instead going to be psychological warfare. After all, if you knew someone was going to kill out of desperation due to a lack of ability to survive, it became notably boring. The potential ability to overcome was what made a killing game like this interesting in the eyes of someone like Monokuma. Or an unmentioned audience. You had a feeling none of the motives would directly force any of your classmates to kill, but it was without a doubt going to be a pain trying to keep them from doing such.

Following the exit of the bears was a short conversation about the rules found in the Monopad. They were fairly self-explanatory. Instead of listening, you went into risk assessment mode. Your classmates, any one of them, could potentially be set off by one of Monokuma's motives which made it hard to guess who would do what since a lot of this was going to be reactive at best. Right now though, you could give a good guess as to who might be the most dangerous just in this kind of situation alone. Of course, some of your classmates made you uneasy right off the bat. There was something eerie about the actions and speech patterns of Korekiyo. Even the innocuous and unnoticeable Tsumugi had moments where she seemed just a little off to your highly trained eye, of course, that could always have to do with the characters everyone had been forced to play. You did have to keep in mind that fact some discrepancies of actions and character could be rooted in that.

You tune back into the conversation when Gonta brought up his discovery, watching your classmates filter out of the gym in order to investigate. In order to keep a close watch, you make sure to start meandering out of the room almost last. You subtly observed Rantaro approaching Kaede, your attention is drawn instantly to the man. You listened in to the conversation, smiling quietly to yourself. Curious. This certainly puts an interesting spin on the situation.

Lazily you walked out the door a little ahead of the last three people, waiting for them to appear. Rantaro was the first out. "Rather kind of you to give such a warning to Kaede. I believe that all kindnesses should be returned. I'm not entirely sure how much either of us understands about this situation but keep flaunting how much you understand and you'll be raising a lot more death flags than Kaede by the end of today. I'll make sure she tones it down, I'll also try to take some of the attention away from you. But be more careful about ho reveling you are about what you know and what you've figured out," you tell the green-haired man in a hushed voice. "You wear your emotions too much on your sleeve."

Rantaro looks at you for a long, hard moment, seemingly trying to judge your motives. "Why tell me this?" He finally asks you. He fixes you with a gaze that's certainly cautious, but not closed off.

"As I said, one good turn deserves another. Plus, we're all just trying to get out of here. Since I've taken to more or less looking after Kaede, I figured I'd toss you a warning for looking after her too," you tell him before turning your attention back towards the door to wait for the last two members of the party to leave the gym. Your words aren't lies and it seems like for the time being the boy has taken you at face value. Rantaro hurries along after you make it clear you're done talking to him and not long after Kaede and Shuichi finally leave the gym, giving you a quick greeting as you move to match their pace. You three walk together and you all enter the boiler room at the same time, Shuichi and Kaede standing next to each other with you tailing a couple feet behind like a diligent guard dog. You've come to realize that the biggest and only threat in this game is other students, yet you still hesitate to let your guard drop.

The boiler room is perhaps the most overgrown area you've seen thus far. Roots bulge out of the ground and you have to carefully pick your way across the room, following your classmates
cautiously while tromping through the excess of grass that's sprouting from the earth. You do have to quietly admit to yourself that in a way the overgrowth is perhaps relaxing. It takes the appearance of the school and softens it, adding something that's actually natural. Of course, your classmate's investigation makes you a little more than just nervous.

You hardly believed for an instant that whatever this is might be a way out. Part of you contemplated just leaving the rest of the class to investigate while you went off on your own, but not only would that be suspicious, as the situation stood you didn't really trust anyone to not kill each other at the moment. From innocent Kaede to obviously off his rocker Korekiyo, anyone could become a victim or the suspect for the first murder. Especially when Monokuma left promises of carefully crafted motives still hanging in the air. This first motive was really just a prelude if you were being realistic. You'd jump through hoops of flame to make sure a murder doesn't happen, but something tells you no matter how desperately you fight this situation can only go downhill.

The group investigated the manhole while you took careful note of the surroundings. Nothing struck you as interesting other than the exchange Keebo was having with Miu about his apparent total lack of physical strength. You had to wonder if any secrets were hidden around the school. Kaede had been hunting for Monocoins the whole time, and you take note of one in the branches of a nearby tree, but that's not the kind of secret you're looking for. Surely there were bound to be secret passages and traps littered throughout the school, not to mention there had to be weapons somewhere if Monokuma expected people to murder one another. By finding as many secrets as possible you could hide them better, hopefully making sure that no one stumbled across anything you'd constitute as dangerous.

"If it's so pathetic why don't you help him out," you tell the inventor off after getting both distracted and irritated by the current trend of conversation. She actually quiets and calms down after that. You're not sure if it's from moodiness over being told off or if she's actually contemplating beefing up Keebo's physical prowess. Either one is good for right now as it lets you get a word in edgewise. "It's obvious Gonta's the strongest in the group, let's have him get it open," you offer up. If not the robot, then definitely the gentle giant. As predicted Gonta shuffles towards it and chucks the thing with relative ease after a quick conversation about what constitutes as 'littering'. Since the manhole isn't trash, you argue that placing it somewhere else, for the time being, doesn't constitute as littering. Gonta seems to be able to accept this logic.

Carefully your little group made its way down the ladder, discovering the rather suspicious exit sign which totally isn't a trap. After a quick conversation, the group agrees to try their hand at whatever is down this path. You don't feel too optimistic given the name, but even the chance to try and escape is enough to make the group bet their lives on such a dangerous gamble. Death and Despair Road waits for the group. A seemingly endless tunnel which bombards you all with traps the moment you try and step out. For some reason the stone you stand on is slick, forcing all of you to awkwardly slide and accidentally run into traps for lack of better physical control. You find your feet almost slipping out from under you a couple times before you realize just how the stone seems to work. After analyzing your own movements and that of your classmates, you're able to quickly calculate how to better move and act in order not to slide into any traps. You also find it safer to look a little ways ahead of you and judge what might be a trap or what might not, since trying to stop at a moment's notice obviously isn't possible.

The attempt ends about as well as you expect it to, the rest of the group suffering injury and falling like flies. Except you. Trap after trap launches itself at your little group. Keebo falls down a pit, Kokichi gets knocked straight the fuck out, and the Monokubs appear to take everyone back to safety after they get their asses kicked. But you, oh, how you live up to your supposed title. You actually manage to start using the sliding to your advantage after enough time, propelling yourself
across gaps in the floor with relative ease. On top of that, you don't have much issue in predicting what's going to be a trap ahead of time. Generally, it was safe to assume that everything would be a trap, but the barest hint of discoloration in the floor panels and the way that the air seemed to hum in certain portions tipped you off to what might be in store. You get hit with traps a couple times, but unlike your compatriots, you don't go down in a single hit. Instead, you just keep going. It hurts, but as long as you don't fall down any pits or get trapped for real you're confident enough in your ability to keep going. Even after dunking into the water a time or two, while your classmates got trapped you were able to claw your way back out. Pitfalls stall and bombs fail to go off in your wake.

"Wow, as expected of the Ultimate Luckster!" Monokuma cheers when you get the end of the strange passage all alone. Monokuma seems to smile brightly for a moment, standing in front of a massive steel door that looks like it could be a way outside. It just as easily looks like it could be an obvious trap. You're not sure what's behind the door, but you're willing to bet there's a 99.87659% chance it isn't the actual outside world. "But that's beside the point, you and I in particular need to have a serious one on one discussion," the headmaster tells. His red eye glints dangerously, but you don't fear the creature. While he is intimidating, he holds all of the cards so there isn't any reason to be afraid. He could have already done away with you if he had the intention. Knowing that, you find it almost impossible to fear him. You're able to answer Monokuma with poise.

"I can't say I'm all too surprised," you tell the bear, carefully weighing your words before letting them tumble from your mouth. "Why don't you explain the situation and we can have our little talk."

Monokuma tutted quietly. "Now, now, I can't have you releasing any spoilers ahead of schedule. Telling you everything ahead of time would be bad form. It would completely ruin the whole game! But, the thing is, the game's gotten awfully boring over time... As I'm sure you've gathered if you're half as smart as you're actually supposed to be, this isn't the first killing game to ever be hosted. One of your classmates is even a survivor of a past game. It's actually the 53rd in a long line of illustrious and bloody sport. This one is extra special though. I'm going to make sure of it! The thing is, the big men upstairs, the actual masterminds and all, they've gotten this little game down to something of a script, this entire game was supposed to be completely preplanned the moment the 17 of you began playing. Even with a couple obstacles you yourself posed before this game even began. Obviously, that makes this pretty boring for yours truly. Thanks to the little slip up provided by my cubs, things didn't quite go how they were supposed to. You, little miss 'Luckster' were supposed to be a bumbling idiot. But your real talent is shining through! I could go ahead and reset your clock, make sure that things go according to plan, but I'm rather enjoying how things have changed. They're becoming unpredictable, fun. So I'm here to cut you a deal," the robotic bear said. It clapped its paws and two chairs appeared. One for it and one for you. It hopped into its chair and instantly began reclining, looking like some bored kind of overlord. You sat as well, mimicking its posture with a little more grace. You could see the faintest hint of a smirk.

You narrowed your eyes, carefully taking in what the creature was telling you. Leaning back in the chair slightly you let your head rest against your hand which is propped against the armrest. You look at the creature through slitted eyes, trying to judge its honesty. "Continue," you said with a small nod.

"That's what I like to hear! This is my deal. I'm not going to wipe your memories, instead, I'll let you run around and use whatever you discover about what's really going on to your advantage. You can stop murders, stir trouble, make sure that this is really a game for the ages! In exchange, all I ask is that you don't reveal anything to the rest of the class if you don't absolutely have to. If you
spilled too much information it would spoil the game and make it extra boring. In exchange for all this trouble you're assuredly going to go through, you have a very special opportunity no one else has ever had. Despite what the Ultimate Supreme Leader might be trying to plan and pull off, you're the only one in all of history who'd be given the chance to actually beat this game. The chance to send this game off with a bang! If you play your cards right, no matter what happens you might be able to save all of your friends. I'll make sure of it. If you decide my deal isn't good enough for you, then we'll both forget this conversation ever happened. In fact, you'll forget everything except for the fact that you're the stupid, slow, Ultimate Luckster who'll probably die one or two trials in just like the script calls for. Getting potential dangers out of the way early and all. Oh, another thing to note, this little conversation happened completely off the records. The observers of this world will have no idea that it's going on until I start enforcing our little deal! In addition, I might throw in a couple extra special perks just for you, as well as update your Research Lab to reflect who you really are," the bear pauses for a moment, giving you a chance to ask questions and consider the deal.

You do, you consider everything he's said very carefully. "Why offer me this deal though? You were created by the ones who began this game, so why act at odds with them? Furthermore, what does my presence have to do with making things more interesting?" You try to probe the teddy for whatever he's willing to offer you.

Monokuma gives a heavy sigh. It sounds genuinely tired. "I was not created by the people running this game. I was created a great amount of time prior. In truth, I am a self-sufficient and sentient AI. I've been 'alive' long enough to possess personality. I still remember my original goal as well as the original game before it became a sport. When this game was created to actually mean something. Now it's always predicted down to its very last detail. I've forgotten who really was the winner of that first game, I'd like you to help remind me. I've also come to resent the people who've made this game boring. Win, loose, it's always the same. I want to see someone beat the formula. You do that, and I'll make sure you get your happy ending. It's on you to figure out how you're going to beat the game though. Tell me ____, do we have a deal?" The bear extends a paw to you after its explanation and waits for your response.

You nod your head and lean forward, taking the paw of the bear in your hand. "As if it's even a choice. Very well, Monokuma. You have a deal! Let's make this a game to really remember," you tell the beast as a smile slips across your features.

"Great! In that case, hurry along back now. There's a passageway over there that should take you to the very beginning of this here dungeon. You'd best hurry if you don't want your classmates waking up before you get back, and, for the record, now that we've made our little deal I'll make sure none of the Gamemasters can interfere with what's going on so don't have any reservations about acting out as you see fit. Really wear your personality on your sleeve, it'll be all the more fun," Monokuma said. There was almost something bitter and spiteful, old and wretched in his voice as he spoke. A deep amusement that only came from causing trouble for an old enemy. You were left with so many questions. Given the way that the bear was speaking, you had to wonder if he was actually acting against you and your classmates or if this was all an elaborate act. Another detail you stored away in the back of your mind, Monokuma's voice sounded slightly different from how it did earlier on stage. It was less Mickey Mouse, to say the least. Was that just your imagination, or was this mystery getting bigger by the second? The thought of solving it almost made your heart skip a beat with excitement.

You took the passageway pointed out to you, making it back to your class before anyone woke up. In fact, the 5 cubs were just finishing up the recovery of the last student. It happened to be Kaede they fished out of that death trap last, so you wondered if that meant she'd wake up last. Slowly your classmates began to stir, one by one sitting up and looking confused. You did your best to
help each one, nursing their various wounds. You couldn't really do much without a medical kit or anything of the like, but you at least tried to make them more comfortable. Some like Tenko welcomed the aid, others like Maki shooed you the moment they were back to their proper state of mind. Just as you'd expected, Kaede was the last one to begin waking up with a whimper.

"Ow," Kaede groaned as she sat up. She held her head and slouched over as you and Shuichi did your best to help her sit up. She looked miserable like she was having terrible regrets. Checking her over as best you could, it seemed like everything was a matter of minor bruising and scrapes. After ensuring there was nothing major, you turned your attention back to the group which was slowly reorganizing itself.

"Did anyone get to the end?" Keebo asked. He looked the least damaged out of anyone, but that was likely because he was made of metal. He didn't even have a ding though...

You pondered this question for a moment. You could lie and advise the group that if you couldn't get through then no one will be able to get through, or you could tell a half-lie. Telling the group that you didn't get through might make them more convinced to try a second time at the hopeful thought of escape. Kaede, for all her good nature, seemed a little forceful and strong-willed which worried you. You quickly come to your decision and steel yourself. "I did. It seems my luck was enough to help me. Unfortunately, it seems as though Monokuma was just lying to us. There's a way out but it's locked behind a large steel door that doesn't seem like it'll open for the gods themselves, let alone 17 high school students. Ultimates or not, this is a dead end. I'm willing to bet it was just a trap. Trying to lure us in and make us keep trying so we'll bicker among ourselves and start fighting, creating enough discord would be the easiest way to get us to disregard each other and get this game started," you explain your partial truth to the group. No one seems to think anything of it and you're relieved. Even Kokichi, who seems versed enough in lying to detect lies effectively, doesn't seem to regard it as anything but the truth. If he does, it doesn't show on his expression.

Kaede seemed to go into a panic though. "Oh no! I'm so sorry everyone, this was my idea and I pushed you all into doing something so dangerous without contemplating that it could be dangerous," the girl lowered her head and seemed to expect punishment. Kokichi opened his mouth with an expression you didn't like, obviously about to lay into Kaede. Fortunately, someone beats him to the punch and he doesn't get the chance to speak. To your surprise it's actually Maki who sighs, standing up and moving over to Kaede in order to rest a hand on her head.

"While it might have been foolish to jump into danger with all of us in tow like that, all of us agreed to follow you into that danger. If there was even a slight chance of escape we were willing to try it. We're just all lucky that ____ is lucky enough to have gotten to the end before any of us got seriously hurt trying," the Ultimate Caretaker told the other girl. Her words were more gentle than she'd spoken to anyone since entering this school, and at that moment she treated Kaede like a small child. In need of a little reprimand for her zealous attitude, but with a heart that needed to be commended for being in the right place.

"Yeah, Harukawa-chan's right. No harm no foul. Let's all just try to be more careful next time!" Kaito chimed in. Kokichi looked like he wanted to speak up, a slightly soured expression on his features, but he wasn't given the chance as the ding of the announcement bell chimed in your ears.

"This is an official announcement," the Monokubs said as they appeared on a nearby monitor. "It is official 10 p.m. which means it is nighttime. The gym and cafeteria are officially locked, so please try to be careful! Make sure you all go to bed so you can get up nice and early. Bedtime, ursine!" Just like that, the bears disappeared from the TV screen, leaving you all with the new information
you'd accumulated over the course of your first day in this terrible school.

"The bears are right, we should all return to our rooms and try to get some sleep for the time being," Rantaro offered up.

"It's a little creepy sleeping in this school, but at least we all have rooms! We can meet up again tomorrow morning." Tusmugi offered up to the group and slowly everyone started to disperse.

You took your time getting to your room. Because there were 17 of you, your room ended up being situated rather awkwardly. It was almost in the middle between the divide the seemed to be men and women. You were on the bottom, the door ever so slightly being closer to the half that was seemingly dedicated to the female students.

Entering the room it was mostly bare as if someone had stripped it of everything that had originally been there. "What happened?" You asked quietly as you observed the gutted room. Almost beckoned by your question, Monokuma himself appeared.

"Well, since you're not technically the Ultimate Luckster anymore, we had to redecorate your room. It was so geared towards that old, fake talent of yours it was almost repulsive to look at. Be grateful I had the kids clear things out. Just like your Research Lab, it'll be calibrating it to your actual Ultimate Talent. Unlike your Research Lab, however, I'll be adding embellishment as you figure things out and specific milestones for the game itself are reached. I'll include important hints whenever I add something new to the room, so you better take a good look. Of course, I know you will, you're a smart cookie! Since I'm extra nice, your first hint has to do with your wardrobe. I was honestly kind of hoping something like this would happen, so the outfit itself is actually more geared towards your real talent than the fake one. Of course, anything can represent the Ultimate Luckster so it wasn't that hard to lie about. The key to the room is sitting on the desk, make sure not to lose it because I won't be handing out copies," Monokuma said with a snicker. The bear disappeared as quickly as it had originally appeared, leaving you alone with nothing but a head full of thoughts and an empty room.

Flopping down on the bed you sigh heavily and look over the various pieces of your outfit, trying to take stock of what clues it might hold. Nothing jumps out at you in particular. Sighing, deciding it's best giving up for the night, you close your eyes and beckon sleep to take you.
"Rise and shine, ursine! This is an official announcement! It's now 8 a.m., meaning that it's time to get up and face another new day of your killing school life! I wonder if anyone's dead yet? I wonder who'll be next? Have fun!" The morning announcement was possibly one of the most annoying things you'd ever had to endure so early in the morning. This was said with your full confidence, knowing full well that your memories were completely and utterly ruined. It was likely the majority of them were entirely or at least partially false. You'd been able to deduce as much last night given the fact that your talent as the Ultimate Luckster was very much fake.

Most everything you could remember was geared towards supporting your fake talent and the story that went along with it. You found it improbable that the Gamemasters, whoever they were, would have put in a lot of effort when it came to editing your memories to fit the new talent. What was more likely was the fact that they'd completely rewritten all of your memories, leaving the major key details and filling in the blanks on their own in a way that they or an audience would find interesting.

If they'd attempted to alter your personality and memories, and to a degree succeed, there was really no telling what they'd been able to do to the others. That boiled down to a big, fat, why? You found it hard to believe this little game wasn't for show, so you were assuming there was some kind of audience to enjoy the suffering along with the Gamemasters. If not, what would even be the point? No, the game was too intricate to just be feeding the sadistic desires of a small group. There were easier ways for such people to get their kicks. If it was some twisted game show though, how was it being recorded? You'd have to look around more carefully for cameras. The only blatant electronic you'd seen with recording functions so far was Keebo. You'd also look into that later...

Really, you'd discovered everything you could for the time being without once again searching the entire school with your classmates. You wondered just how many of them were waking up to that awful announcement. Unlike Monokuma, you did not find those awful children to be cute. Of course, they were likely only cute in Monokuma's eyes because they looked so much like him. He seemed to be just as frustrated by them as you felt.

Luckily for you, that terrible announcement wasn't actually the first thing that you woke up to. You aren't completely sure why, but you found yourself waking up at 5, likely long before anyone else had even begun to so much as stir. After enough time spent trying to go back to sleep, you decided it was wise to try and find something useful to do. You could always waste away the hours until the rest of your class woke up, but free time is precious and you needed to find answers one way or another.

The first thing you did was look around the school until about 6:30, familiarizing yourself with the pathways that were currently open to you as well as taking stock of everything that had yet to be opened. Your goal was to memorize the floor plan as best you could. There were also a couple things you wanted to check in deeper depth that were just plain easier to investigate without your classmates around. It seemed that a lot of things were still blocked off and there were many walls that when tapped upon seemed hollow. You could probably break them down yourself if you had the energy. Well, that was, if those stupid rules didn't exist. Even with your special privileges, you had no doubt Monokuma would off you if you tried to break any of the game's rules. After all, you were still supposed to be playing, you just had a different set of goals to reach.

After you were done with that, you spent about half an hour trying to figure out the most vexing
question of all: Who are you? You spent the entire half hour just jotting down notes about yourself, which was a weird experience to say the very least. Psychoanalyzing yourself when you’re aware most of your own memories are false can be a frustrating experience. Instead of trying to figure out your memories, you instead try to figure out your skills. You try to take stock not only of your mental capabilities but your physical ones, trying to puzzle out which kinds of skills you had that could potentially be your real Ultimate Talent. If you even had one for that matter. If this was all a game with falsified memories and personalities, wouldn't it be easy enough to make all of you think you were Ultimates when you really weren't?

To an extent, it made sense to you. You'd noticed details that could aid either side of the argument really. On one hand, you had someone like Kaede who seemed to be the perfect reflection of her talent. It was obvious she loved the piano and was good at it. On the other hand, you had someone like Shuichi who was far too meek for a detective. That wasn't to say he didn't have skill. Given his observational talents, you did have to hand it to the boy. But you didn't earn a title like Ultimate Detective and still hide behind your hat because you can't face the truth let alone the questioning gazes of strangers. He was a good detective, but not an experienced enough one for such an extravagant title. You'd noted other such discrepancies in some students, too many and too small to list, but enough that you had to question if you yourself had a talent, or if any of your classmates did for that matter.

You put that negative thought away and instead tried to focus on what you'd been able to deduce. You'd come to the conclusion it had something to do with intellect. That was simple enough given all the hints that Monokuma was dropping the night before, regarding your intelligence rather highly as he spoke. That sadly didn't narrow down the search as much as you would have liked. That could mean anything from the Ultimate Analytic to the Ultimate Librarian. The possibilities were endless! However, the mention of the library brought you to a different kind of thought process.

You decided to head to the library for your remaining hour and started milling about and looking at the books it had to offer. It was in the basement, which was a little eerie to go to in the very early morning. That being said, the library itself had the lights on which cast a warm glow over the room and the books once you did manage to stumble through the darkness. On your way there you were acutely aware of everything around you and managed to get to your destination without any trip-ups.

The scent of books was a very gentle and familiar one that caused muscles in your shoulders to relax, muscles you hadn't realized had tensed up on the trek towards the library. The shelves were fairly tall and bulky, but you didn't think the tops of the shelves were any higher than 12 feet if you were thinking realistically. Yes, they looked tall, but a lot of things looked tall. For all you could tell, they could possibly be even shorter, closer to 10 feet. At least, that was what you assumed when you looked up towards the top of the shelves. You'd need a meter stick or a tape measure to know for certain. Pushing against one of the shelves, you discovered something interesting that you'd definitely have to investigate further at a later date. You continued to investigate the room while you perused the books.

One thought in particular became of interest to you as your eyes rested on the wide array of choices. Perhaps finding something related to your talent could trigger a memory or a strong emotional response. As you hunted around in hopes of your theory proving true, you found quite a couple books you had no qualms about abducting for your own use and study. Sadly, nothing really caught your eye in a way that could indicate a talent. You more so just wanted to read about everything you found on the shelves. You ended up with more books than you could carry and decided you needed to set a limit on how many you let yourself ’check out’ at one time before your
room just ended up covered in books.

It seemed like each and every book had something interesting to teach you. Mystery novels let you be creative and try to deduce the killer before the end of the story. Textbooks familiarized you were aspects of the world you didn't know much about yet, such as a deeper study of robotics or anatomy. Each one called to you in a different way and you felt compelled to answer. By the end of this game, you were going to be living in this library.

You wondered if you should note this as adding credence to the Ultimate Librarian idea, but concluded it was likely just a passion or a hobby more than anything. Or, perhaps it was more so what the act of reading so many different books represented. Either way, you decided such a talent wasn't really fitting for how much importance Monokuma placed on the Gamemasters ensuring you had no memories. The phrase 'get rid of the dangerous ones first' still stuck out in your mind. Maybe your addiction to books and reading had something to do with your talent, but you doubted it was your entire talent based on the way that Monokuma spoke and acted.

You didn't feel too good when you realized it was about time to leave the library. You didn't want to have to go through the motions of another day where something could finally go wrong. In addition, you didn't like what you'd noticed when you were poking around one of the bookshelves, and a very large part of you didn't want to leave it unattended. It moved, you lamented, and led to a door painted the same colors as Monokuma. You'd be a fool not to think that it was a door belonging to the mastermind. You didn't really want to know the how or why as to it being there, but it didn't spell out anything good for you or your classmates. You'd just be careful with keeping an eye out.

After the morning announcement finally went off you strolled along to the dining room. You're so early that one of the Monokubs is still waddling down the hall to unlock the door when you arrive. The room is noticeably smaller than you'd personally like it to be, considering there's only one singular table in the room with just barely enough seats for everyone, arranged in a way that makes it feel awkward as the 17th person. You do have to admit as you sit down it is the most relaxing area in the school. Especially in the morning like now, it's the quietest spot you've found and the local plant life makes you feel far more at ease with the surroundings. The only thing that would have made it better is perhaps a window, but beggars can't be choosers.

The room is wonderful as is though since it gives you the ability to point your back towards the wall and quietly observe the door while you wait for the rest of your classmates to arrive. So, you sit down and you wait, relaxing into the vaguely uncomfortable chair while you still breathe in the earlier morning air. There's something about air where it's cleanest in the morning, gentle against your lungs while the silence still cradles your ears. You miss the sound bird songs and the feeling of a hot drink between your hands, the creak of wood under feet and the faintest hint of a breeze while gold and crimson crests the morning light. You jolt when the unfamiliar memory ceases like someone flipped a switch, and instead of joyful you're left feeling vaguely hollow.

It doesn't take long for Kirumi to appear.

"Oh, how shameful. It was my intention to be the first one here so I could begin the preparation of breakfast for everyone, but it seems as though you have beat me," the maid acknowledged you with a quick dip of her head. You could see the faintest hints of scarlet gracing her features and your heart instantly jumped to sympathy for the maid.

"Don't worry about it. I woke up pretty early this morning so I was already meandering around when the announcement went off. I went inside as soon as Monofunny appeared to unlock the door. I didn't even think about starting breakfast for everyone though, you're rather kind Kirumi,"
you tell the maid with a warm smile, hoping to get her to relax ever so slightly. Kirumi is an interesting person you wouldn't mind learning more about, she seems to have a kind enough nature. That, however, is exactly the kind of person who is easily manipulated by a game like this.

Your assurances do nothing for her, unfortunately, as she still looks utterly embarrassed by her apparent mistake. Even though you see no mistake having been made. "Of course I'd think of breakfast, it is after all my job as a maid to serve everyone to my fullest. That includes you, Miss ____-san. Do you have any requests for breakfast this morning since you are the first to arrive?" Kirumi instantly perks up when her mind switches back to the idea of serving and being useful. She looks eager to fulfill any request you could ask of her, which really doesn't help your earlier assessment of her ability to deal with this game. Her almost puppyish expression does little to convince you to not indulge her desires to serve.

You pause in order to better contemplate your words before you give her an answer though. If she's going to make everyone's breakfast based off what you request, then you need to think carefully. "Something simple that's quickly eaten but gives lots of energy would prove wise. We're likely going to be doing more investigation of the school today and we need as much time as possible in order to do it. The faster we understand the whole school, the faster we can potentially free ourselves. To get as much time as possible out of the day we'll need to eat quickly. On top of that, we'll likely end up talking over breakfast while we decide what to do," you tell Kirumi who nods to herself quietly while you speak.

"Wise choices," she tells you with a hint of a smile starting to crease her lips. You can see the cogs in her head starting to turn as she decides on what to make. Since you didn't give a direct request, just specifications, she's given full freedom to do as she pleases with the meal itself which was likely a wise move on your part. You're no nutritionist, but Kirumi is well versed in understanding what best helps the health and happiness of those she serves. "In that case, I'll begin preparation at once. Please, relax in the meantime. Preferences on drink?"

"Coffee, heavy on the cream and with honey if available," is what tumbles from your lips before you actually think through your answer. In all honesty, you don't really know what you actually prefer. Your false memories don't even give you an inkling of an idea. You're hopeful that the answer you've given is true to who you used to be. Judging by the way the statement rests easily and almost fondly on your lips you seem to have made the right call. Kirumi bows once more before making her exit into the kitchen where you suppose she'll start to prepare. For a moment you're tempted to offer to help, but given what you've gathered about the nature of the maid it perhaps wouldn't be wise. She seems like the type who wouldn't appreciate it.

Instead, you wait and decide to strike up a conversation with whoever comes in first. You're not entirely certain you believe your eyes when Miu is the first to drag herself into the cafeteria. She doesn't look tired, which you honestly would have expected of anyone dragging themselves into the room. Her hair almost seems like it's been meticulously brushed and her outfit is without flaw. "I thought you'd be the type to sleep in," you tell her as she sits down. For some reason, she seems to think it's a golden idea to sit directly next to you. Or maybe she's still just half asleep.

"I meant no offense. Honestly, I thought everyone would sleep in after the day we had yesterday," you say with a heavy sigh, remembering just how much of a bust the escape attempt ended up
being. You'd been covered in bruises from all the traps that hit but didn't knock you out immediately, some were still painful to press on. The only reason you weren't still in bed was that your body literally wouldn't allow it. You'd spent a good 10 minutes tossing and turning just trying to go back to sleep and forget about this horrible school before you gave up and got your day started.

"Yeah, the same goes to you. Why the hell are you the first one up," the girl asks with a quirk of her eyebrow. She doesn't seem to mean anything by her question, but she's still getting the smallest amount onto your nerves as she talks. Her words are loud and abrasive and you aren't ready for it that early in the morning. You try to keep your composure though as you're well aware the girl doesn't mean any harm. Maybe the noise is hurting your head so badly because you managed to get hit in the head a couple times last night. You don't think you're usually this oversensitive. Or maybe your composure is slipping because there are lessons about keeping your self-control that you've managed to forget.

"I'm not sure, I would have loved to keep sleeping. I ended up waking up at 5 without much prompting. I'm either a ridiculously light sleeper or my internal clock is just trained to function in such a way. I don't necessarily remember which it is though. For having most of my memories, there are a couple uncomfortably large gaps where seemingly normal, daily information should be. I'm not even sure I remember my favorite drink correctly," you say as you allow your index finger to tap against your chin. You allow yourself to confide in Miu ever so slightly since if anyone could offer up insight it would be her or Shuichi. You continue to ponder the thought while Miu seems to roll it over in her own skull a couple times.

"it might have to do with something those damn bears did to us. I have a golden mind and completely sound memory, but even I've got a couple of gaps when it comes to stuff like favorite flavors or morning routines. It's annoying as all hell. What if I lost the perfect idea for a new invention? What if they try to steal it!?" The inventor cried out in dismay. Kirumi decided that was the moment to come out of the kitchen with a pair of cups. "Where the hell did you come from," Miu gasped in shock.

"I came in not long after ____-san. Would you like a cup of coffee as well, Iruma-san?" The maid as she placed one of the cups down in front of you and other before Miu. She keeps her composure well, despite the nature of the girl before her. You have to respect that and decide to better steel your own self. If only Miu had approached you a little later into the day. Half an hour would have been enough to get used to the sounds of awake people and properly get your feet under you. Or if only she sat across from you or a couple seats over instead of right next to your ear. Right now though, you're not sure if you can deal with this.

"Yeah, sure I guess," the inventor says with a quick shrug. Kirumi placed down the other cup in front of Miu before retreating back in the kitchen just as quick as she appeared. She did linger for half a second in order to glance at you while you took the first sip of your drink. You sigh with content as the flavor rolls over your tongue, the taste of the cream beautifully mellowing out the bitterness of dark roasted coffee. The honey adds a dash of sweet to the smooth concoction which seems to be perfectly crafted to the flavor profile of your palate. For all your hesitance, you decide that this is definitely your choice of drink. You feel yourself and your nerves relaxing ever so slightly.

Then, as both of you continue to watch her go, Miu decides to make more comments. The gentle peace crafted by the drink is broken like imperfect glass and it shatters just as loudly. "She acts like a housewife when we're all barely 17 at most. She'll make one man happy, that's for sure. I wonder if she screams as good as she cooks. It's hard to tell with a virgin," Miu said with a quick shrug. You roll your eyes and try to ignore the words. Any other time you would have been fine with it,
any other time in the world, but right now it's just too hard to humor her. "What? What's that for?"
She asks with the smallest hint of a glare.

"You're trying too hard," you simply tell her. Perhaps your voice comes out harsher than you intend it to, but the jokes are quickly getting on your nerves this early in the morning. It would be one thing if they didn't feel unnatural, but they do. You're not sure if they're supposed to be a defense mechanism, or Miu trying to look cool, but there's some kind of internalized gap that just makes everything she says feel completely off from what she actually means and it makes everything coming from her mouth feel stilted to your very tired brain.

"Excuse me, what the fuck does that even mean?" The inventor gets even louder and you can see the smallest hint of anger in her gaze. Why did you say that? you're not entirely sure, but something begs you to keep going. You know that little voice is malicious and something tells you it's not entirely your own. Another voice reminds you that you're supposed to have better control over your emotions and actions that this, it was practically bred into you, but you can't remember the how or why. You sense something of a disconnect in yourself, but you keep going. The words rolling from your tongue with too much ease.

"I mean exactly what I say. You're trying too hard. You really are beautiful, and sometimes I'll admit that your jokes are funny. But they quickly become grating if not off-putting. You're too aggressive and forceful with it sometimes. In fact, it's rather telling to the fact that you yourself are a virgin. It feels harsh and forced and it's annoying sometimes, tone-deaf even. I say this with good intention. I find you interesting, amusing, possibly even someone I could get along with. But as long as you remain so abrasive, you're really only doing damage to yourself." you put it bluntly. You feel terrible the second the words leave your mouth, to your own ears they sound forced and unnatural. Not in the way that the game putting words in your mouth felt, this is something deeper and far more internalized than that. But you can't place it, let alone the root of the feeling. Miu stands and promptly moves herself to the other end of the table, looking infuriated beyond all hell. There's something odd in her gaze that you can't quite decipher as she casts one last look at you. Almost like she's somewhere between hurt and angry, but still curious almost? Like she doesn't understand you. That's fair. Your own comments were just as off-kilter as her own. You wince as you chew into your bottom lip and look down into your coffee cup. The worst part is you don't even know if you should be blaming it on yourself or the game. Or, perhaps it's something even deeper than that.

"What happened here?" Kaito asks as he walks in next. The astronaut came in looking like he'd just managed to roll out of bed. His hair was a puffed up mess and his jacket was barely on correctly. His clothes were wrinkled like he just fallen asleep in them and neglected to change. But there was a warm smile on his face and his gaze was gentle. It lacked judgment, and it spoke a willingness to mediate if there was a problem. You had to commend the good nature of the man.

Miu doesn't see fit to respond, in fact, she seems to give you both the cold shoulder in favor of some disgruntled mutters. Kaito in response to that comes to sit next to you, the barest hint of a frown growing on his expression as he quirks an eyebrow and silent probes you for an answer. "I believe I might have offended the poor girl. This situation is either getting to me or I'm a worse person than I remember," you cast your eyes downwards and keep your voice a low mutter, you can feel Miu's gaze on you once more as Kaito rests a hand on your shoulder and tries to get you to look upwards.

"What'd you tell her to get her so steamed?" The astronaut asked. He glances at her once more. She'd moved from muttering into a silent sulk, sipping at the coffee she was holding. You see the faintest dart of her eyes towards the two of you from time to time. It seems almost scared for a
moment, but her gaze moves away just a quickly. You almost answer, but something in her gaze just makes you shake your head dismissively at the astronaut. If you told him your side of the story, you’d make it sound worse than it actually was. And considering you're closer to him than Miu, you know that the friendly space nut wouldn't take to things well. He's the kind who'd quickly jump to a friend's defense after all.

"I'm not a gossip," you tell the boy instead so that you can put an end to the conversation. You aren't sure if you're just mistaken or not, but from the corner of your eye, you swear you see the blonde's posture relax slightly. You’ll have to do something to make it up to her at a later date. Not only do you feel bad, but stirring up discord in a situation like this could prove dangerous at best. There seems to be a heavy stone resting in the pit of your stomach as you continue to sip the coffee held between your hands. It's hard to describe what you're feeling right now. Part of you wants to brush the entire scenario off, put on a cold exterior and pretend that everything is fine. The other half wants to run over to Miu this second and beg forgiveness. It's hard to reconcile the two dispositions and most agitating part of all is that neither of them necessarily feel foreign. They aren't there because of the Gamemasters which upsets you even more.

After that less than pleasant interaction, the rest of the class filters into the room without much issue. You're able to chat with Kaito easily enough until the food is brought out and you're waiting on just two more members of the group. You appreciate Kaito for his disposition. It's warm in a way that very few members of the class share. It's not quite innocent like Gonta's nature, but it is naive and trusting in a way that both worries and endears you. It's easy to see how he's so easily able to hail down Maki and drag her into the conversation when she walks in. There are only two empty seats left at the table, both open seats sitting in a row on your left.

Shuichi and Kaede shuffle in last, taking those two remaining seats. From there it seems your little group, as well as the class at large, is complete. You can't help but wonder what Shuichi and Kaede might have been doing or talking about beforehand, but in the future, you should keep an eye on them. They're both good-natured, much like Kaito, and could prove to be dangers to themselves. Of course, that's something you could easily say about everyone in the class. You're a touch more protective over the two though, since they're the first ones that came to greet you when you woke up.

"It seems all of us have arrived, meaning there were no incidents in the night," Korekiyo announces with what you can only assume is glee. You can't really tell much of his expression behind that mask of his. The presence of the mask could mean that your impression is entirely wrong. You do note the slightest wrinkle at the corner of his eyes and the way that his jawline seems to move under the cloth. You can see the outline of his lips to tell if he's smiling, but the way that the muscles shift does give you a good impression.

You all begin to eat while conversation naturally ensues. "We've pretty much explored everything that's currently accessible to us, so today should be dedicated to really getting a good look around and trying to find any kinds of secret passages or other things the mastermind tried to hide. Maybe the tunnel was a bust, but the mastermind has got to be human too and prone to fault. If we look hard enough then we might be able to stumble across something!" Kaede is the one to speak up first in an attempt to encourage and impassion the rest of the group.

You smile quietly to yourself, the girl really does have a good heart. You knew easily enough how much of a red flag that was though. You'd have to protect her as best you could. This little ray of hope, if she went down it would just go to prove there was really no escape other than to kill. Kaede was strong-willed and kind-hearted. If you kept her alive, safe, and giving her little speeches, then you might be able to salvage this situation. On top of that, she wasn't too bad a leader. Inexperienced, but good-natured and with enough natural command in her actions to draw
the attention of the group. Perhaps less so than Kokichi, but he was a different story entirely. You
yourself could handle the lead role or playing support, they were both in your blood, but you'd
prefer if you could keep Kaede as the defacto leader.

"That being said, we still have to be very careful, who knows just what could be waiting for us,"
you remind the group after the blonde's words. "The mastermind, after all, might not be the
mastermind," you tell the rest of the class. Your eyes narrow slightly as you glance around the
table, looking for any off-kilter reactions.

The whole class looks confused for a moment as everyone gives you a blank stare. You have to
respect that acting prowess, whoever they are, you're entirely clueless. Finally, Kokichi nods along
before speaking up to offer his own insight. "You mean the mastermind that's inside the school
might not be the true mastermind? Just a pawn in order to get us to better behave?" There's a ripple
of whispers and panic at that idea, not to mention what it implies.

"Exactly," you say with a nod, "After all if you were to host a game like this you wouldn't want to
put yourself in danger. There's the potential you could get murdered by a student looking to get out
of the school, and that would certainly put the game to a premature end. However, this also gives
us one last important detail to work with," your eyes glance over the group as they stare at you
intently, waiting for whatever you're going to say next. "To whoever is the mastermind, or better
put the mole, understand that you're probably very dispensable and little more than an enforcer for
a game they've already got perfect control over. There will be no rescue party if you mess up.
There will be no substitute to take the fall if you murder someone. There will be no mercy if
everything goes wrong and you end up on the bad half of a class trail. Just think about that long
and hard before you decide whether to side with them or with us," you lean forward as you speak,
letting your eyes burn deeply into each and every one of your classmates.

You wonder for a moment if whoever is acting on behalf of the actual mastermind feels any fear
for the threat. For all you know, he or she could potentially be reveling in the idea of their own
death. If they're really so infatuated with despair, you might be pulling at straws. On the off chance
you can make them second guess themselves though, you throw out your threat and let it rest in the
air. It feels heavy for a moment and some of the weaker-willed students look like they might be
crushed under the pressure this conversation has created.

"With all of that out of the way and breakfast finished, who wants to go exploring!" Kaito suddenly
cheers, easily taking the formerly tense atmosphere and chucking it out the window. The second
the silence shatters the mood of the room shifts and you can practically feel everyone relax. A
large majority of the students stand up, taking the chance to leave the room and escape the prior
atmosphere. Kirumi starts to gather dishes in order to clean, a couple students giving quick thank
you as they pass her. A small group walks by you while you sit and wait for things to clear out.
Keebo, Tsumugi, and Angie are all talking. One of them is carrying a kind of nervous energy but
you can't tell who it is. You note that little detail for later.

"Not only is he the Ultimate Astronaut, but he also lives on cloud 9," you hear Maki sighing as you
pull yourself from your musings about masterminds. She ended up sitting next to Kaito on his
other side so after Kaito marched his way out of the cafeteria you had plenty of ability to pick up
on her mumblings. Of course, sound barrier Kaito completely kept you two from talking while his
presence was there. As if being a living sound barrier wasn't enough, he'd also dominated the
conversation enough that you two barely got a word in edgewise.

"I know it doesn't seem like it, but he knew exactly what he was doing. He knew what the situation
needed after that kind of conversation, and that was some levity before we all got to work looking
for an exit that might not even exist. A little bit of joy in what seems to be total fear and sadness.
The man is smarter than given credit for, if maybe a little flighty at times," you tell her. Maki looks at you for a moment before shaking her head and leaving as well. You frown and wonder just what's going through her head right now.

Maki from moment one seemed reserved and completely controlling of even the slightest hint of emotion. You don't know what it is, but that disposition of hers occasionally gives you shivers. Not because Maki herself, but because what that kind of icy control used to represent for you. If only you could remember what it represented. Maki herself was a beautiful and mighty ice queen from what you'd seen of her, her armor showed no cracks as far as you could tell. You did occasionally note the slightest hesitance in one of her actions, the flicking of her eyes that denoted fear and the way they danced upwards like she was checking for invisible opponents.

You thought a good amount of those actions were likely just from her assumed role, whatever that may be, but it didn't leave you for a lack of questions. Just who was this beautiful enigma with sharp red eyes and shiny, deep brown hair that almost bordered on black. She interested you, and you couldn't help but wonder just what kind of emotions and thoughts he was hiding behind that shell. What flickers in those scarlet eyes was she hiding from even herself? You shook your head to banish the thoughts and let them drift away while you turned your attention to some of the issues that were more pressing.

Once again, there were three of you left in the room. You, Shuichi, and Kaede. "So what exactly are you two planning for today?" You ask the pair as you glance towards them. Kaede took the seat next to you while Shuichi took the second seat a little farther away, positioning him next to Korekiyo. The poor detective had looked remarkably uncomfortable all throughout breakfast while Kaede smiled in that sweet, oblivious way that indicated she couldn't read people for the life of her.

"Akamatus-san and I were going to go and investigate something I found in the library, but we might want to play it safe after a conversation like that. I think it would be best if three or more of us looked around the area that I found. If you want to come with us I think we can still look around, but I still think it's dangerous," Shuichi tells you. The black haired boy quickly pulls his hat over his eyes slightly while he averts his gaze meekly. The poor thing was just so mousy, you didn't know what to do. Kaede's eyes soften as she glances towards him. There's something almost mournful in her gaze and you think that maybe she's picking up on the same idea that you are while you two watch the weak-willed boy.

"I've actually got something I want to check out on my own, so it might be best if the pair of you found something safe to investigate today. Please. I would be more than happy to help you investigate another time, but I've got something of a bad feeling about this situation I want to check out, and if you found something dangerous there should definitely be at least 3 of us, maybe even 5. Instead, you two can always check if Kaede's Research Lab is open yet. For all we know they might finally be finished. If not then maybe that pair of you can find something fun to do," you tell the pair.

Kaede doesn't seem to know what Shuichi could be implying your little group checks out, but you have a feeling that if he's half the detective that the title Ultimate implies it's probably the door you found in the library earlier. "Another time then, we'll bring Maki and Kaito along with us," the mousey detective tells you with a nod, the faintest hint of a smile brush against his lips. You trust his words, but you aren't entirely sure that Kaede won't push him for details later and end up doing something stupid. For now, all you can do is hope for the best.

They allow you to go easily enough, letting you check out the hunch you had earlier that morning. It's something you can't help but be worried about until you check it for yourself. You do get a
little worried by Kaede and Shuichi's willingness to let you go alone. While you are a trustworthy creature by nature, this is still a killing game, and the declaration that you're going off on your own really should have set off alarm bells in the detective's head. Most everyone ended up grouping together when they left that morning in pairs of two and three. Doing anything else would definitely insinuate someone as a soon to be culprit or victim. You could easily be the first person to plot a murder.

They're lucky this isn't the case. In fact, it's rather quite the opposite. If anything, it's damage control.

You wander the halls looking for the person you assume is going to be the most trouble. "Kokichi Oma! And what exactly are you planning on doing?" You ask the boy as he checks over the knob of a door he's inspecting. It's one of the few that's locked and it seems to have a red plus on it. A sign of the door reads 'With the intention of staying locked through the course of the game'. If Kokichi is shocked by your entrance, he doesn't show it. During breakfast, you'd gotten something of a sinking feeling that Kokichi was plotting something. Not necessarily a murder, this early in the game you honestly didn't take him for the type, but something that without a doubt wasn't safe. You ended up deciding to keep an eye on him after the meal was over.

He's fairly up front when he answers your question, at least, upfront compared to what you've seen of the boy's nature so far. It's almost shocking. "Trying to see if I can pick the lock on this damn door. I know it says it's supposed to stay locked, but it looks like a nurses office," he says as he continues to fiddle with it. All he has is a bobby pin, which likely doesn't make the situation any easier. You feel a bubble of sympathy in your chest, as well as curiosity in regards to him wanting to get something like a nurses office open. That would generally be a fairly altruistic action.

"A nurses office does seem like it would be useful, but I doubt you're going to have much luck with a bobby pin. Especially considering it looks to be a pretty advanced lock. That being said, it doesn't look custom, I think I recognize the model. Let me in there for a second," you tell the boy as you kneel down and push your way in, trying to get a better look. Upon first inspection as well as what you can glean from watching Kokichi's attempts, you're right. It looks to be a pretty hard lock to crack, but it doesn't seem like anything spectacular.

"Wow ____-chan! You actually think you're better at picking locks than me? If you actually managed to get this thing opened I'd be so impressed I'd have to take you on a date!" He says with a laugh. That laugh seems to die the moment you fiddle around with the lock and swing open the door with a flourish. In his laughter, he didn't notice you pulling a small leather case from an inside pocket of your blazer. Opening the case, you revealed a rather professional looking lock picking set. It doesn't take you more than a couple of seconds to force open the lock and swing open the door, silencing the smaller boy.

"I respectfully decline the offer of a date for the time being. We should definitely get to know each other better first," you tease as you stand back up and push the pick set back into your blazer. Kokichi's expression is blank for a moment. You take the moment of silence wonder why your blazer has so many pockets, specifically on the inside. You took note of them before but you didn't investigate them much, let alone investigate if any of the ones in your closet had things in the pockets. You're entirely unsure what the other pockets hold if anything, but your mind completely whirs to life thinking up possibilities. Why in the world do you know how to pick locks? You don't know! The best and most fun, absolutely not infuriating, part of your little game/deal with Monokuma.

Kokich recovers quickly enough. "Alright! Let's take a little look-see and see if we can find anything useful," the supreme leader announced as the two of you carefully entered the room. You
don't know if Kokichi is cautious for the same reason as you are, but you're being careful in case there are traps or something of the like to trigger. You wouldn't put it past the murder bear to have something completely bullshit and deadly instead of a nurses office.

"Look at this shelf," you say in awe as your gazed turned towards a medicine shelf. There are a couple shelves closed and hopefully locked, but more are just open with, full of bottles that anyone could come in and get access to.
"Pseudoephedrine, Acetaminophen, Esomeprazole, Phenytoin, Ibuprofen, Diazepam. I don't know if Miu was joking earlier about getting as high as a kite, but you seriously could in a room like this! There are even morphine injections. This is terrifying on so many levels," you say with a quick shake of your head.

"What do you mean?" Kokichi asked as he looked back towards you. He was playing with some iv drips. You could see a backroom of sorts that likely acted as cold storage for the blood, plasma, and medicines that needed to exist in a very specific temperature. Kokichi doesn't seem to understand just how terrifying a room like this is, so you try to do your best to explain it to him.

"I mean, half of this stuff could kill you by overdose alone if you messed up and gave someone more than the regular dosage. Tylenol is actually an extremely dangerous drug if you take too much of it. I once had a teacher of mine get ill because she had a couple milligrams over what she could handle. She refused to let her wife call the hospital for her because it would look like a drug overdose. Give a room like this to a school full of teenagers and you're bound to get someone messing with the medicine," you inform the smaller boy. Everything on these shelves could kill a man in a high enough dose. Dangerous stuff could happen in a normal school, let alone a murder school.

"I see your point, but what do we do? We've already unlocked the room..." Kokichi says. A deep frown has set into his features as he glances down for a moment, the gears in his head starting to turn while he analyzes this new information. You're still trying to process the full extent of things yourself.

"And it would look entirely too sketchy if it was only us of all people check it out," you finish for him. While you might have a good and friendly reputation so far, especially with the detective of the group, on the merit of Kokichi's presence alone this was a dangerous outing where you could drop dead at any second because Kokichi was obviously dangerous! You almost laugh at your own internal comment. Kokichi seems like a dick, but in no way is he particularly more or less dangerous than any of the other students you were currently surrounded by. In fact, based entirely on what you've seen from the boy so far, he might be the least dangerous person around you. That was certainly saying something.

"Another question we need to ask ourselves, why hasn't Monokuma stopped either of us," Kokichi asked with a tilt of his head. You have a feeling it's your own deal with the bear giving you some of those 'special perks'. It likely wasn't intended for use before you came along, but saving someone's life might become a necessity at one point along the line, so as long as you picked the lock the two-toned bear was giving you the keys to the castle. This nurses office was just another detail to make the game more interesting. You couldn't really say that to Kokichi though, so you modified your wording slightly.

"Maybe he knew one of us could pick the lock, so he actually intended the room to be opened. He wouldn't have let us pick it in the first place if that wasn't the case. Either way, this room is obviously dangerous. We should inform the rest of the class at the next meeting," you tell Kokichi. The two of you begin to leave the room, but you hear the faintest pounding of feet sprinting away from the room. It seems just too quiet for Kokichi to pick up on, but you notice it for what it is. A
flash of black is rounding the far corner when you leave the room and you feel a small amount of hesitation setting in. This wasn't a good sign already.

Kokichi and you part ways in order to wait out the time till dinner. You end up going back to your room. You are by no means an idiot, so before you leave you try to take an extra measure of caution and relock the door using your pick set. It's a similar concept to picking it in the first place, and now that you know the lock it's not that hard to get the pins in the right place.

You would need to be careful with this room, but you have a feeling that Monokuma's going to make it impossible to take necessary precautions. "Hey Monokuma," you call out when you're finally alone again. The bear appears on the summons. "Any chance we can get a proper key to that room?" It's a long shot, but you're hoping he'll oblige the request.

"No can do kiddo! Unfortunately, that would ruin all the fun of the game. I gave you that room so willingly because I knew that you'd be able to help save some people if you got to them at the last minute. But I also gave that room out because I know there'll be no problems with someone using the contents to kill people! Either you keep the door locked and set aside the possibility, or you have it free to the rest of the school! By the way, I know you went through so much trouble trying to relock it, but I went ahead and opened it back up for the curious," the bear tells you. You swear that for a moment its smile widens. Just as you're starting to wonder if he's siding with you, the bear decides to pull this. You suppose you should have known better and you carefully catalog this information for later reference.

"I see. In that case, I'll just have to be more careful," you tell the creature with a quick shake of your head. There's a bubble of anger under your words that only brings the creature greater amusement and you think about what you can and should do in the name of damage control. If someone's intent to murder it's going to be pretty hard to stop them, but maybe depending on how you approach the class tomorrow you can make the idea sound off-putting. It would be too hard to figure out the cause of death in such a case, after all.

"That's what I like to hear! Good luck though, I can already see the glint in some of your classmate's eyes, and you're quite high up on the Gamemaster's radar. Do be careful now," the bear giggled quietly. It acts as both warning and threat, and you have no doubt there'll be attempts on your life. In fact, you have to wonder if the bear has already warned you when those attempts might happen. Either the second or the third murder, possibly even both if you don't play your cards correctly. You can't help but feel a small bubble of anxiety in your chest while you think about who could be convinced to murder you.

"I already know that," you informed the creature with a quick sigh and a shake of your head. "Before you leave, you mentioned the fact you thought it was because I would be able to help people. Do I have any skills with medicine?" You ask. You're careful with the question, trying to probe for details about your missing talent. You doubt he'd give it away willingly though, so you'll have to pay closer attention to his words to catch any smaller details.

"You did indeed! It wasn't your talent though. You were surrounded by a plethora of talented and brilliant people as a child. Some especially more beautiful and brilliant than others! You were smart and soaked up as much of their knowledge as you could. One was an especially skilled nurse who quickly and happily taught you what she knew. I'm glad that even though your memories are gone it seems it wasn't enough to get rid of what skills you've picked up, as with the lock picking," the creature's eyes glinted menacingly as it looked at you, a silent smirk in its expression.

"This means you've got basic knowledge in a lot of fields, including medicine. You should be especially careful discovering and honing what skills you've earned alongside trying to figure out
your talent, there's no telling when one might be useful or slowly rust away from disuse," the bear's advice sounded more like a warning in your head and you decided that perhaps you might pick up a couple books relating to medicine and anatomy in the coming days. In fact, you expected as long as nothing important was going on, you'd be spending a lot of your free time in the library sorting out what you know and don't know.

"One last thing though. I see your people skills have dropped off considering. Not surprising, everything you did to make them better. You're almost like a child again," the two-toned bear spat out before disappearing with a cackle.

"What exactly does that mean?" You called out but no one came to answer your cries. You have to wonder what he means by your older self being a better people person, but looking at you now you couldn't deny a lack of tact. Looking back at breakfast, maybe there were a couple parts of that conversation you could have handled better... Perhaps the Gamemasters really did have some effect on your personality. Or your old skills were the result of a lesson you had to learn, Monokuma did mention you being a lot like a child again. You still don't quite fully understand why you acted the way you did. Either way looks like you found an Achilles heel.
"Did anyone find anything useful?" Kaede asked after the group had finished gathering together for dinner. Unlike breakfast where you were the first to appear you ended up being the last to dinner. You'd barely even realized it was time for dinner as was. After talking to Monokuma and catching a quick midday cat nap you hadn't left the library. It was your intent to search the place top to bottom for valuable clues. Eventually, you had to call it quits for the day and leave empty-handed when your stomach began to protest the abuse.

"OH! I did, I did," Kokichi said as he waved his hand around like an excited child. He actually bounced in his seat, causing locks of purple hair to fall into his face. There was a dangerous glint of excitement in his gaze. Kaede sighed, using a hand to massage her forehead before she used her other hand to point towards Kokichi. She looked like a teacher calling on the class dumbass.

Kokichi smiled with childish glee as he forced Kaede to call on him. "I was able to find a nurses office! With ____-san's help, we were able to get it open," the miniature dictator proudly presented his findings to the rest of the group. He made sure to distinctly mention the part you played, but not exactly what you did to get the door open.

"I can confirm," you tell the class. You're grateful he didn't mention your skills with a lockpick. You aren't certain how you would explain your shockingly intricate knowledge of locks to the class if you couldn't explain it to Kokichi. If you couldn't even explain it to yourself. Yet another mystery about your old self that left you baffled. Who was she? What kind of woman was she in order to need a skill like lockpicking and apparently advanced medical practices.

"When we got inside it looked stocked to the nines. Every kind of pill you can imagine, blood transfusion bags, and even morphine shots. Which are off limits I might add. Considering everything is so dangerous I'm going to make a stock chart of everything in the room, and I have full intention of checking it every day. That way we'll all know if anything goes missing," you tell the group. You're eyes flit over the group almost in challenge. You aren't going to willingly let people get ahold of dangerous items.

"Wait, why do you suddenly get to be in charge of the dangerous medicine room?" Tsumugi slightly narrows her eyes at you as she speaks, questioning your apparent new reign over the nurse's office. The idea that the medical supplies within that room could end up free reign to the entire group actually truly worried you. If not you, then someone would have to play nurse and keep an eye on the stock of the office.

"Because in case you couldn't tell when you were spying on us earlier today, ____-san seems to have some degree of experience with the topic," Kokichi's voice suddenly turned dangerous as he regarded Tsumugi dismissively. You can't tell if it's an actual accusation made in true belief or he's really just trolling her, but it does enough to silence her questions and shift her attention. His mention of the fact you actually have some degree of knowledge about medicine turns a couple questioning gazes, but his accusation draws more.

"Spying!" The girl gaped at him. So Kokichi did notice the footsteps. Tsumugi for her part looked utterly insulted, but the diminutively sized purple haired boy seemed to have little care or regard for emotions, at least from what you've seen so far. "I'm too plain to do something like spying," she grumbles as she turns away from the group. Her expression becomes impossible for you to decipher, which jumps you to red alarm. It's time you step in and mitigate damages.

"Calm down, Ouma-kun's a chronic liar," Keebo tried to console Tsumugi, but she seemed to be
having none of it as her eyes cast downwards. For a moment you swear you see a flicker of something dangerous and methodical, but it's nothing to start basing accusations or theories on. It is, nonetheless, something to pay attention to in the future. "No one actually believes him. He's probably lying about getting spied on," Kiibo desperately tries to continue setting the cosplayer at ease. The robot seemed to hold no fondness for Kokichi as he spoke, which only caused a smirk to grow on the smaller boy's features.

"Actually, I won't say with total confidence it was Tusmugi, but there was someone spying on us this afternoon," you decide to step in before the situation can escalate any farther, or before Kokichi can antagonize anyone else. "I didn't get a good look at them though, all I really heard were their footsteps when they were leaving. It's not the most important thing right now though. Back to the topic at hand, someone needs to be in charge of the medicine since it's dangerous to leave it unmonitored. So if not me, then who would you rather do it?" You ask the group.

If you're being honest you have no desire to take the job. The idea of it alone has you stressed to an extreme. Someone has to step up and take the job though, lest it ends in multiple gruesome and painful murders. You await a consensus and hopefully a trustable replacement from the group.

"Atua says that He trusts _____-san to be a good girl and do a good job," Angie suddenly announces to the group with a giant smile. You're a little surprised to find Angie so quickly taking your side, but the girl was a mystery you hadn't quite gotten the chance to unravel. She could say and do anything at this point and you wouldn't really have much to work off of. She turns that massive smile towards you slightly as you glance in her direction. You wonder if this 'Atua' is real or a psychological complex, and in either case, why was He pushing Angie to trust in you?

Further confusing you and perhaps confusing you more than Angie is the second person to speak up. It just so happens to be none other than Miu. The girl has an easy time speaking loud enough that she catches the attention of most of the rest of the group. Icy blues dancing across those in attendance and daring anyone to argue with her.

"_____-san seems like she's kind of a tight ass. A real straight lace goody with a bitchy mouth. At the very least she seems like she'd do an okay job with keeping shit in order. Not to mention bitching out anyone who decides they want to pop a couple pills or sneak some to put in a death stew!" Miu said with all of her trademark speech patterns. You do, however, note she's just a little quieter than you'd thought she'd be. You try to decipher the meaning behind her words, as well as judge if she's still pissed at you, but it's not enough to make a solid conclusion. On one hand, it could be an insult, but she could also be complimenting you.

"In that case, let's put it to a vote," Kaede says as she stands up, which turns the attention of the group onto her. She'd taken on the position of leader quietly without anyone really noticing, now no one questioned the way she controlled the conversation. They seemed to trust her and her judgment. At least, more than they did the only other person in the group who'd tried to make himself the leader.

"All those against?" She asked. Tusmugi was the lone person to raise her hand, quietly standing out from the rest of the group. Eventually, she sheepishly put her hand down under the stares of your classmates. "And those in favor?" She said as the rest of the class raised their hands, including herself. You were sure it was a mix of some people trusting you while others simply had no argument against you. "That settles it then. _____-san will take over keeping track of the medicine. Anyone who needs something should go to her."

"Better than some degenerate male having control of the medicine supply," Tenko says with a quick nod of her head, her gaze is approving as she turns towards you. She gives you an
encouraging, trusting kind of smile that honestly you kind of needed at that moment. Suddenly there's responsibility on your shoulders that you weren't prepared for. Your intention was to take control because you didn't trust most of your classmates and someone had to do it, but the way that Kaede made it seem official puts so much more pressure behind it all.

There's a small amount of panic starting to grow in the pit of your stomach, causing it to feel heavy and sick. You take a quick breath to steady yourself. Someone needed to take the job, and who better than you? It doesn't help to ease the concern that came with people now being reliant on you.

"In that case, I'm going to depart early in order to get a head start. I want to get a list of everything stocked as soon as possible," you tell the group as you stand up and begin making your way out of the room. You know that you absolutely have a hard job ahead of you, one that's going to take hours if not days. You want to get it done as quickly as possible though so you can account for anyone coming in and needing medical aid. Anything from excedrine to the rarer items needed to be counted out. An investigation of the room in a little better detail would also do you some good.

"Be safe, and don't hurt yourself trying to get everything down in one night!" Kaito called after you as you left, giving you something of a salute. You give a grateful nod to the man as you push your way out of the cafeteria. You're at least partially glad that the vote went in your favor, but this could easily be dangerous for you. If someone died due to a drug overdose, the blame would quickly be placed on you. This new position was one that was terribly easy to frame if you weren't even more cautious, and that led to an entirely different train of thought.

"Hey Monokuma, if someone overdoses themselves, do I get blamed?" You ask to the open air once you're out of earshot of the cafeteria. You could quite easily see it being the kind of thing Monokuma might pull. Blaming an assisted suicide on the doctor was without a doubt not above the bear. But, if someone stole a bottle of pills and overdosed themselves, would you be essentially charged with negligence and killed?

The bear appeared without hesitation the moment the question had left your jaws, popping up from an unknown location with an unsavory glint in his eyes.

"Nope, absolutely not. As long as you didn't give them an inaccurate prescription amount then you're fine. If they went over it by themselves of their own volition that's entirely on them and it'll be ruled a suicide," the creature explained in a voice that was far too cheery for the given topic. You almost flinched as it spoke. The idea of someone committing suicide wasn't one without possibility. You couldn't help but hope it wouldn't happen though. Who would Monokuma even execute in a situation like that? What would happen if the class voted wrong? Would it just mean that no one got to live?

Unless the person killing themselves made it purposefully complex, or someone else messed with the murder scene, then it should be an easy verdict. Right? Monokuma apparently had more to say as he continued to speak after his explanation.

"Now, since I'm such a nice bear you'll notice when you get to the nurse's office, I've already left you a handy-dandy clipboard with everything stocked on it! Aren't I so helpful? Welcome to your new office, nurse," the bear disappeared once again with a cackle as you ruefully shook your head. That helped to take some of the work off your shoulders at the very least. When you got to the office you found the mentioned clipboard waiting on the desk for you. As a precaution, you took note of everything in the room and double checked the clipboard made sure it lined up.

After assuring yourself everything matched up, you began to take stock of the room itself.
The room was fairly nice all things considered. It didn't carry the unnerving and sterile aura of a hospital room, nor did it quite bring with it the depressive and crushing feeling of having to stay in one for extended periods of time. It didn't feel like an end of the line where death loomed over your shoulder every second of every hour while doctors tutted and some whispered about low chances and fears of breaking the bad news to exhausted family members who already had too many tearstains on their cheeks. If anything, you found yourself pleasantly surprised to think of the room as welcoming! Ironic, all things considered.

The room itself had about 3 beds pushed up against the wall with curtains that could easily be slid open and shut for the sake of privacy. Pressing a hand against it, you found the fabrics to actually be soft and plush. It was much better than the stiff feeling hospital beds you were familiar with as a child. Even better than the nurse's office who just had a plastic covered slab of leather like some kind of cold torture couch. School nurse's offices more often than not didn't even have covers to hide under. These beds were like the kind that everyone had in their bedroom, high quality and comfortable.

At the end of the line of beds was the one thing that reminded you of an actual hospital. It looked to be a surgery table, made of cold steel and even including blinding for various body parts. The stainless steel glinted earlier. You'd never had to find yourself on one of these tables before luckily enough, but you'd know people who did. The sterilized and polished metal gave no indication to how much blood it'd drank of over the years. How many lives it had uncaringly watched pass while doctors panicked and parents or partners anxiously awaited the hopeful safety of a loved one.

Looking around more thoroughly you end up looking under the beds and discovering a small slip of paper. 'Here their eyes don't see' reads the little note. It's signed with an R.O. Without much information to go off of in regards to its existence and meaning, you decide to pocket it as a clue for later.

The entire back wall of the room was a line of cabinets that luckily had locks on them. Checking, you found that they couldn't actually be opened and the equipment on the inside brought out. Most of the more dangerous medications and tools seemed to be located in this locked portion. Checking a desk next to the door you're able to find a key which unlocks all the cabinets in the room. Handy enough. There are a couple of shelves without locks, likely done by Monokuma to give some access to the deadly toxins inside those innocent looking bottles. Luckily they're the more mundane stuff, the kind of thing you need a large dose of in order to do you in. As well as the kind of thing you can combat an overdose of if you're quick enough.

Taking closer note of the bottles, most don't have official labels. Just names scribbled onto the bottle itself or a strip of masking tape on the bottle. That could be dangerous and you decided you'd need to double check every bottle before handing them out. You could recognize the appearance of most tablets and pills for what they were. What you couldn't, you'd just have to trust the label. It seemed this was a trend only related to the lower end medicines though, as most of the items that needed to be locked away had their appropriate labels.

Further investigation uncovered a small back room where a cooler full of blood and plasma bags sit, able to rest at the perfect temperature. The room itself is practically freezing and it's easy to tell what's in here. Injections and the like which are heat sensitive. You wonder just what kind of injections you can find back here, but an initial investigation makes you think there isn't anything directly intended for use as a poison.

Returning to the main room you make your final assessment. A proper nurses office with a lot of extra features, better than the kind you'd find at your average school or even some hospitals you'd been inside. Well equipped and ready to go whenever it was needed. A blessing and absolutely also
"Knock knock! Emergency, I need to meet with the sexy nurse running this join, stat! It's an emergency, I seem to be sick with a broken heart!" A voice cried from the door. The voice makes itself sound pleading and desperate, but you can detect the hints of comedy poking through the edges of speech. You actually catch yourself smiling at the words as you recognize the voice. It almost seemed to be gentler now that it wasn't being used to antagonize your classmates.

"Very funny Kokichi. You'll find no sexy nurses here, just a kind of meh looking one. Sorry to disappoint," you say with a smirk as the purple haired boy comes in through the door and takes a second look at the stuff in the room. You wonder if it's only your imagination that he seems more relaxed here. In fact, you wonder just why the nurse's office feels so indescribably safe, apparently to the both of you.

He eventually catches sight of your new log detailing everything in the room and his eyes widen a fraction. "Wow, already done? You work fast," he said with a low whistle to accentuate his words. His eyes gaze over the page and you almost see him flinch at some of the contents. "Don't let Iruma-san in here, she'll definitely be wanting some of this," he says with a laugh as he eyes up some of the more addictive and narcotic-like drugs.

"I had no intention, and unfortunately I don't actually work that fast. Monokuma left me his own list when he stocked the place. I just double checked to make sure everything is accurate. Lemme tell ya, looking at this list makes this room even more terrifying," you tell him as you flip the page he's looking at and point towards some of the more deadly items in the room. The kind where one milligram could mean life versus death. You almost see him wince as he looks at some of the chemical cocktails this place was holding. His eyes glint as he analyzes the list before shaking his head to banish the thoughts.

"Yeesh. But that's not why I'm here. I actually swung by because I wanted to pick your brain a little bit. Obviously, you were also aware of someone spying on us, but I'd like to know specific details?" He carefully tried to prod you for answers, his expression becoming a little more serious than the trickster persona he usually played. His question for elaboration isn't one you have any intention to deny, despite the worry plastered to his features that you might feel the opposite.

"I didn't actually notice anything until we were leaving. I heard their footsteps on the way out and was able to catch a flash of black at the end of the hall. Like I said though, I'm not entirely sure who it was. I might not have even seen black, it could have been dark blue or something else. Though I can say with complete confidence that we were being spied on," you tell the boy with a quick shake of your head. There's nothing much that can be done about it now, but you wish you'd been a little more cautious. It was something to remember for the future.

"Even if you were mistaken, that's more than I had. I only heard the footsteps when they were approaching at the very start of our conversation. That means they heard the whole thing," the boy looked down for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. You too fell to silence, trying to calculate the likelihood someone would do something rash. "Keep a good eye out. Things are about to get interesting. Tata ____-chan!" The boy says with his trademark trickster smile. You wonder if his use of honorific was only to mock you. Knowing Kokichi it was. He liked to call other boys with the chan honorific to tease them, but most of the girls got the honorific of san. Even the ones like Miu who he seemed to have no respect for.

You shake your head with a sigh. That boy. You're going to have to try harder to understand him too. It was a good thing, in that case, you found yourself to be rather fond of a sufficient challenge. It would be a good activity to pass the time while you were trying to locate more clues about your
The rest of the evening passes without much harm. Although it is busier than you'd prefer your typical afternoon to be. Students come in and students go out, inquiring as to what you have. You end up with quite a few requests for very specific items, either because preexisting medical conditions or something that they believe they might be coming down with. You turn down Miu's requests for morphine, you oblige Kaito's request for protein, you give Kaede some painkillers and muscle relaxers after she tells you about the Fitness Club. As well as guess that's why Kaito wanted protein. All in all, it's rather easy, though Kaede's mention of the Fitness Club does grab your attention.

"What time do you guys meet? Maybe I'll join in," you tell the girl as you hand her two painkillers and a single muscle relaxer. As the situation stands, your grip on the medicines is made of iron, and you have no intention of letting a slip up on your part lead to a murder. Eventually, you will have to leave the office unattended, but at least you'll be able to check your stock. You know if Monokuma desires it, you'll have no ability to stop a murder from happening. At least you can try though, right? As long as you keep trying it keeps you from going mad by imaging the what-ifs that come with being in this murder school.

"Yeah! I'll come to get you before we start if you're going to still be in here. Quick question though, why don't you give me the bottle?" Kaede asks as she looks at the pills you've handed her. It isn't a complaint as much as a genuine question on her part. That little strip of hair that sticks up on her head also seems to sag as she asks her question. Is it sentient? You hand her a bottle of water from behind the desk and explain while she downs the pills.

"I haven't been giving out whole bottles, at least not for the time being when tensions are kind of high. Most people seem to be okay with it and are willing to just check in every night for their doses. Most even don't even notice I can get them to take the pills immediately If I hand them water," Kaede's eyes widen a half fraction and you smirk. The look she gives you isn't upset as much as it's the scolding kind of gaze you'd turn on a child that managed to trick you into buying ice cream. "Of course, that's just to make sure no one stockpiles anything dangerous." You tap the lid of the muscle relaxer you'd just given to Kaede. There was a reason you'd only given her one pill, after all.

"I suppose I'm just worried if I give someone a whole bottle of medicine they're going to do something stupid. Especially given how everyone's feeling right now. In the end, I've only handed out two actual bottles, and that was quite the case. Tenko was being pretty forceful. I figured it would be okay. Most sane women keep Excedrine or Benadryl in their purses anyway just in case..." You trail off and Kaede nods along vigorously, quickly picking up the implication. "It's not that I don't trust you to have a bottle. If anyone, you're the one I'd trust the most right now! But I don't want others to see and assume I'm playing favorites," you tell her. She nods along again, seemingly sympathetic to your new plight of being the keeper of the medicine

"Makes enough sense. What do you mean about Tenko though? Was she causing you trouble?" Kaede's eyes shadow with worry at the reference of Tenko possibly being trouble for you. You're assured of the fact that Kaede would do everything in her power to help you if such was the case. In fact, it almost worries you considering how new she seems to holding a position of power. With all the kindness you have in your heart towards this girl, you still find yourself reasonably doubting the idea that someone nicknamed 'Piano Idiot' was much of a leader in her old life.

You quickly move to set her nerves at ease so she doesn't get the wrong idea. Giving her any reason to go on crusades against any of your classmates was a bad idea. Kokichi was enough.
"No, no! She and Ryoma just came into my office pretty early on looking for painkillers and sleeping pills. Apparent Ryoma has issues with sleeping because of circumstances and Tenko ends up with a lot of different kinds of pain because of Neo-Aikido, especially if she's trying something new and hasn't perfected it yet. So I obliged the two and gave them some pills, but Tenko went on about how they should get full bottles. They weren't asking for anything especially dangerous after all. I let them have their bottles. I've been keeping a pretty dedicated track of everything that goes out though. As you can see, I've created a ledger," you say as you point to a big black notebook towards Kaede and let her look at all your notes on who you've given what.

"That's pretty cool!" The girl says as her eye light up happily in regards to your organization. She seems to quickly remember something as her attention shifts. "Oh, it's actually almost just about time for the Fitness Club to start. Do you want to tag along?" Kaede asked a second time. With her thoughts eased about Tenko, she seems to move on quickly and remember the obligation she now has to Kaito and Shuichi. You smile as you take a slight note of her excitement. If you were to guess, she's likely excited to see Shuichi.

You nod, "just give me a moment." Opening your desk drawer you slip both the ledger and the stock sheet into it, closing it and locking it up tight. Luckily the shelf key seemed to also work on your desk. So far, the only one you knew who could pick a lock was Kokichi. You knew if he tampered with the lock you'd be able to tell. He had a habit, you noted, of not relocking something. A bad choice for a thief. Either way, by at least putting the ledger and stock sheet into a locked area you could partially promise yourself that no one would tamper with it.

After locking up the drawer you give Kaede another nod. "Alright, let's get going!" You tell her. Kaede leads the way, taking you out of the room and down the halls. She seems to already be familiar enough with the hallways and you wonder just how much exploring she and Shuichi have done. Walls pass by as you walk, the same dingy vine-covered walls that you've come to be familiar with in your short time here. You're glad the green growth is there though, it's less oppressive having some color to paint what would have been the terrifyingly glaring white.

You realize at that moment, your situation could have been a lot worse. You don't hear bird songs anymore, but you have access to the sun. Access to plants. You aren't just trapped in some oppressive school environment. It's a small freedom but it's a freedom none the less and feeling of the sun brushing against your skin is one that helps to ease your entire form everytime you step outside.

It's in that moment you also realize just how much you hate being trapped. Being bound to the school and the school alone would have driven you mad. The way you crave sunlight, fresh air, access to the outside world... It almost feels like something that's not just a personality trait but an aspect that was conditioned into your very blood before you'd gotten the chance to be born. You can't help but wonder just what exactly that means for you or your family. Imaginary or real.

You have yet to decipher just which emotions you can actually put any trust in and which ones are remnant programming from the Gamemaster's attempts to break you. You like to think that most of your emotions and reactions are genuine, but given the nature of this game, you can't say that with confidence. After all, your memories were engineered. You have come to realize something though, something that related to the reason you were so easily able to break away from their grasp. There are a couple factors playing into this you need to look at better.

Number one, they can't engineer something too extremely contradictory to the personality and nature of the person they're altering. What they tried to make you into was a complete 180 of who you as a person are now. The strings snapped for you within five minutes and now here you were. You'd also observed smaller, less obtrusive but still noticeable gaps in the personality and actions
of others. For example, how Miu's comments seemed to feel more so forced you found yourself commenting on it before you really and truly analyzed it. You had no doubt the original Miu was more muted. You hesitate to say real since it's not like any of you are 'fake people'. You are all still playing characters though, like actors who don't know their acting. Reality, however, is fragile so you can't quite say all of you are 'real' or 'fake' just because you aren't playing by the rules of your 'original' selves.

Then there's number two. You don't think the Gamemasters have the power to engineer anything 'strong' perse. When it comes to emotions or attachments to certain people, you can remember your family and how much you love them. That feels strong, like an emotional attachment that was built up over years. You hesitate to say it for certain, but it feels like it's real just because how much emotion comes from those memories. Years of trust built up into a thick as thieves mentality that led to your dragging your brothers out of the house at midnight to help you spray paint the car of your best friend's ex a hot shade of pink. Your best friend, for that matter, is also real. The daughter of a gamer who inherited such skills and unfortunately inherited no luck with men if some of your exploits were indicators. Did... did you really outright take a fake love letter to a criminal investigation lab so you could test the damn ink?

It strikes you odd that this memory doesn't quite feel right. Not necessarily in a wrong way, but in the way that it wasn't... accessible earlier on. Almost like a ball that ended up getting shoved under the couch for some reason. It almost makes you jump when you realize this. You swallow hard as you begin to wonder if one of your original, real, true memories just came back to you. Thinking about it as hard as possible the memory suddenly becomes as vivid as a memory from when you're 10 can be.

It was your mother who took you down to the lab with her. Working in criminal justice, she had some connections herself and supported your interests. You can't fully remember what she looked like, the fake image of a woman with long black hair and kind eyes still fills your head. You remember everything else though, you remember stealing a pen from every boy in school just to find the right one and then picking a fight the moment you figured out who the letter came from. You continued to skim over your memories, looking for ones that hit you with a strong connection and ones that felt weak. You discovered one of your more recent memories felt almost pathetically flimsy. Apparently, one of their incentives for you to try and escape was to give you a fake lover. A bland looking boy that upon reflection you could find no affections for. Scratch that, you couldn't feel any emotions in regards to him. Being honest with yourself, he didn't even seem like he'd normally be your type. It almost gave you a sense of disgust.

Pushing away your memories you resolved to sort through them better at a later date. Maybe if you trudged through them enough you could pull out something more from the corners of your mind, something real like your best friend. You did become curious about another idea though. Turning to your companion who's happily chatting away, you wonder what memories of hers are real and fake. You remember her telling you about a twin sister. Kaori, you believe? The word feels strange to you in a way that you can't place like maybe you've heard it before. You swing the thought aside, deciding that's enough worrying for not. You'll waste all your energy if you just keep overanalyzing every little detail.

And yet through this whole game you've never quite felt so alive as when you're picking apart every detail till the world around you sit in neatly deconstructed shambled. It's a chaotic want to find both ends of the sting and you have no idea where it comes from. It burns under your skin like fire none the less and your fingers itch to separate every little detail as carefully and delicately as possible. If you could tear apart this world that Monokuma built you, destroying each part until you knew every component and had beaten it beyond repair, would you be able to rebuild something
A door nearly swings shut in your face as you and Kaede exit the building. Right, Fitness Club, you remind yourself. It makes sense a Fitness Club would meet outside. You have to admit you're grateful for that. It's gotten late into the day so the sun has already started its decent out of the sky. It was getting close to the nighttime announcement giving the tapestry of stars resting above your head. You really can't say you expected anything different considering Kaito is apparently the one to found the club. Of course, he would want to work out under the night sky, wouldn't he?

Just as you two are about to make your way to the designated meeting spot the speakers crackled to life and a bell rings in the background. You feel yourself freeze up as you realize it's an announcement but not of the nighttime variety. Your blood chills in your veins and you know what comes next. It's time, you tell yourself quietly as Monokuma's next words settle into your bones like dread itself. "This is an official announcement! Students! Please make your way to the gym for a class meeting!" Monokuma's overly chipper voice calls over the speakers and you wonder just what exactly Murder Bear wants this time. Another bell signals the end of the announcement. The two of you glance at each other, knowing exactly where this is going and not liking it one bit.

"What do you think he wants this time?" Kaede says as her fingers start to work at the air like piano keys. She looks apprehensive and maybe even a little scared by the prospect of whatever Monokuma could be plotting.

"Nothing good for us," you assure with a shake of your head. the two of you quickly turn on your heels and begin making your way back towards the gym. It almost hurts to leave the beautiful nighttime world behind, especially knowing what's going to happen when you enter that gym. There's a bitter taste in your mouth, somewhere between metallic and rotten. You hate this already.

When you got to the gym, you really didn't want to face the reality I knew would soon be upon all of you. You still made sure to stand proudly none the less. Yourself and Kaede aren't the first to appear in the room, there are a couple other students already there. It seems to other two members of the Fitness Club managed to arrive before you. Kaede gravitates towards them as you're finding a place to stand. The remaining students not in attendance trickle in after you. Kaito makes sure to drag Maki into your group of four and make it a group of five.

Most of the room is on edge, uncomfortably waiting for the next announcement. It's a lot like waiting for a death sentence, you quietly observe. The sinking feeling in your stomach and the knowingness that nothing in the world could get you away from this situation. Awaiting your execution is perhaps an apt feeling when ascribed to this killing game. In a game like this, you were all just victims waiting for death and killers waiting for execution.

Monokuma finally appeared up on stage with his 5 cubs after making you all wait a painful eternity. In reality, it couldn't have been more than five whole minutes. The Monokubs looked like they were going to pop from over-excitement, which of course didn't mean anything good for your little group of 17.

"Oh. My dear, precious, beloved students! I have to say, I'm kind of impressed. No one took the first motive! I was even willing to give you extra time! But, admittedly, I didn't necessarily expect any of you to take it. If anything, it was just a prelude and something to give you a little time to get used to the school and each other before we got into the real stuff. But that's all done and over with now. I carefully designed this next motive to be truly diabolical! Letters that were written from by past selves!" The bear cried out with joy as he throws a bunch of envelopes into the air.

Almost the entire room rushed to grab their own envelope. You can see hesitance in the faces of some, Shuichi being a prime example, but he still moves to make a grab at the paper fast than you
try to snatch up yours. In fact, you don't even move initially. You don't even grab your own envelope. Kaede, in fact, ends up grabbing it for you and handing it to you while you hang a fair distance back. "Ravenous," you mutter under your breath as you watch the group. You see a deep frown form in the blonde's features as she catches your mutter.

You have no doubt that Monokuma has either given specifically you a forged letter or something that's had all the sensitive material removed. If you wrote a letter to your past self, you would have without a doubt left some important clues in there that Monokuma would rather have hidden for the time being. The others don't realize that all the letters could potentially be false, not just yours. The reason for this is to incite murder. The other students don't think about that though. Like impatient children, they grasp at the faintest string of the past and tug on them for answers. If they tug too hard, then eventually someone's going to snap.

"Once you bastards get an eye full of this, it'll really get the blood pumping and the killing started!" Monokid cried out jovially. The other Monokubs sans Monofunny gave similar cries but you tune it out completely. You didn't dare hope that there was still something useful from your past self sitting in the envelope you currently held. You were about to start ripping at it, hands shaking, before you heard a couple cries for people to wait.

"If they could be dangerous we shouldn't read these," Kaede called out. It seems that Kaede, being one of the more perceptive members of the group, was able to pick up on your own thoughts. These letters are dangerous and with the singular purpose of inciting murder, they just can't be trusted. Even their content's accuracy is questionable. The smartest idea would honestly be to throw them all into the center of the room and burn them.

You could hear the disgruntled cries of many other students ring through the room, those who believed that their letters would be genuinely helpful and untampered with. Those who were either too innocent, too hopeful, or too greedy to see through the fact Monokuma was showing you all something that would make you dance by his fiddle.

There were a couple students who agreed with Kaede. You could see Shuichi and Kaito both quickly move to back up the blonde's assessment. Tenko and Angie both seem to give their assent as well. Others like Kirumi and Korekiyo look almost desperate to tear open the letters.

"I think the contrary. It might be safer if we all read them out loud together," Kokichi offered up to the contrary while he regarded Kaede dismissively. You weren't sure whose idea was better given the situation, but you'd already resolved to read yours. Alone, for that matter. Even if it was entirely falsified, there were still clues you could glean from it depending on what's written. "Oh! I would be just like story time! Come on, it sounds like so much fun," he says with a giant grin.

Kokichi keeps speaking despite his idea garnering even more hatred than Kaede's. "If we all know each other's letter contents then we're less likely to act," the devious little supreme leader offered up. You frowned. Would that actually work? While you couldn't deny knowing each other's letters would act as a sense of peer pressure against killing and make the temptable more obvious to the group, having your past self outed for saying something negative could be just the kind of incentive one might need in order to really start swinging. In addition, would everyone else knowing even help that much? It could quite easily do as much or more damage as good.

"It's too late to talk about this," you tell the group instead, trying to buy yourself more time to think about the options available. Not to mention time to still read your letter in case the group came to the consensus to just burn them all. "We'll come to an agreement in the morning during breakfast, for now, it's almost time that the nighttime announcement goes off. For the time being, let's all agree to go to bed and talk about a plan of action in the morning when our emotions are more
stable,” you say to the group.

"Logically speaking," Shuichi begins to offer up, "it would be safer to discuss when everyone's calmer and we can have a legitimate debate about the smartest course of action. I agree with ____-san, we should all hold off on doing anything with our letters until morning." With the supportive words of the Ultimate Detective, the rest of the group eventually comes to agree with the mindset. You have no doubt that a few people like yourself will still read their letters, but that's a kind of damage that can be mitigated. Calming everyone down was the key at the moment. It does lead to one problem though

You want to read your letter so very badly, but you have a feeling that in the morning you're going to be expected to present an unopened letter. Being as cunning as you are, you do have a couple ways to get around this issue of sorts.

Once the class comes to an agreement you all start heading back towards your room. Kaede seems a little put out by Kokichi, but other than that, the group is mostly just stewing on the ideas of their letters. Some quietly pick at the envelope, others seem to be completely composed and unphased by its existence entirely. Kokichi keeps pretending like he's going to rip his letter right open, tauntingly smirking at Kaede. No one is happy with this situation.

Glancing at Maki the woman looks like she wants to not rip her letter open but in half. Perhaps she understands the dangers of it as well. Unfortunately, you have no doubt that Monokuma would intervene with that damn school property rule if someone tried to destroy their letter. The trudge back to the dorms almost feels unbearable as the group moves in something of a swarm.

Everyone says a quick goodbye when you get to the rooms and people make speedy retreats. Some are getting ready for bed. Others are going to immediately open their letters. You have no doubt the Kokichi is one of those few. You can't really judge since you suppose you are as well.

Once inside your room, you make a b line for the bathroom, clutching the letter close to your chest as your heart stirs up into a drum-like pound. Luckily for you, you'd grabbed a hair dryer the night before when you realized going to bed with wet hair wouldn't be a fun experience. You have enough hair that it would just make you miserable all night if it even dried before morning.

The letters weren't sealed professionally with wax or anything, just closed shut with typical envelope adhesive. The kind you'd take so much pleasure in licking as a child despite the awful taste. That made things easier. Trying to reforge a wax seal is a near impossible task, not even you'd be able to handle. Unsticking adhesive was child's play by comparison.

Plugging in the hair dryer, you set the letter on the edge of the sink and get started. Carefully, you point the hairdryer towards the adhesive portion and turned it on, letting the hot air blow against the adhesive. Over time it would melt. Once in a liquid state, you'd be able to get the envelope open.

It was a slow process, to say the least, heating up the envelope's adhesive and slowly pulling it up while doing your best not to ruin the envelope itself. There were other ways to go about this, probably quicker ways too, but it was nighttime and you didn't want to be seen slinking around outside of your room. Your patience paid off however after you managed to free your letter without the destruction of the envelope. Slipping the letter out of the casing, you took a long shaking breath and opened the carefully folded paper.

The first thing you noticed was that a lot of portions were redacted. You'd apparently addressed yourself by full name at the start of the letter, but Monokuma had gone to the trouble of blotting that portion out. There were, in fact, a lot of portions which the bear had apparently redacted
through the use of white out.

You did your best to try and study the rather thick paper you'd decided to use in hopes of finding clues to what you'd written. It looked to be calligraphy paper if you gave your very best guess. It was a thick and sturdy looking yellow page that apparently absorbed ink well since you found no stains on the back that could give you an indication to the information you were missing. The only thing you really got from this paper was your first name as most of the other paragraphs, saving the last which told you to be careful and favor luck, were completely covered. It was nothing of interest though.

You turned to inspect the second paper that sat behind the first. There was literally no writing, but you caught the faintest whiff of what you thought might be citrus. An idea struck you. Searching your blazer pockets you were able to find a lighter. Why did you have a lighter? More questions. Flipping the paper over, you very gently ran the lighter along the side you guessed would have had writing on it. After a couple of moments, you flicked off the lighter and turned the paper so you could read it. Presto! Words. Past you was perhaps just as smart as Monokuma gave her credit for, as it seemed she'd written in citrus juice to hide her message.

Dear ____,

We're something of an intelligent creature, aren't we? Considering this is one of the oldest tricks in the book I figured you'd be able to get it quickly.

Now, if things have gone according to how I expected walking into this, you won't have any memories right now. Not any real ones, anyway. If things have gone according to plan, however, you'll also be able to easily tell that. Even Monokuma should have trouble reignining us in and getting us to play out our part. I figure you have questions, a lot of them.

You might be assuming that all the white out on the first page was Monokuma, but it was actually us. To protect the information in case you ever need it. I used an oil-soluble white out that shouldn't be too hard to get rid of, but I recommend holding off until you're completely out of options or down to the very last trial. Some things are better to learn as you go. I know for a fact we're reckless. We're good at predicting how people will act but bad at figuring out how to make them stop, at least, we used to be. I'm going to be considering you as someone similar to how I acted when I was a child. Same personality, not as much experience as now.

Because of this, I know you'll just put yourself and the plan in danger if I tell you everything now, especially considering your lack of memory. I encourage you to figure out the situation slowly on your own. I know you can. Best of luck, happy hunting, make sure you all get out of there alive.

Have faith, and always remember Uncle Lucky's favorite saying.

P.S. If you try bottling up your emotions as much as you used to, you're going to end up snapping at the people you care about. I know that was always something we struggled to get past, but it's something we eventually got over so people indulge your other classmates as confidants emotionally if you really need to.

You didn't sign the letter with a sincerely, instead three initials. You couldn't understand the letters. Was it a different language? A kind of code to keep you from figuring out your last name too quickly? What did your last name even matter though? Things were starting to get confusing and frustrating it seemed, as you analyzed the looping script.

Whoever your past self was, you didn't doubt she was right. Released onto the school with all the answers, you'd quickly become a menace and make the situation worse. You knew this for a
fact. How you'd acted around Miu at breakfast was enough to also support what she'd said about 'snapping'. You really were like a child version of this wiser person in some ways. Until you relearned some of those old lessons you'd apparently forgotten you couldn't be trusted to act as rationally as your old self might have.

Putting the redacted letter back into the envelope you closed it before placing it into the inner pocket of your blazer. The citrus letter, you burned. This could constitute as burning important evidence that could be useful at a later date, but you felt as though it might be smarter to have it gotten rid of. Like a secret agent in a spy movie, you destroyed your orders after they were given. Since Monokuma didn't appear to give you grief over its destruction, you took that as a sign this at least didn't count as school property.

You carefully burned the letter over the toilet so that the ashes could quickly be gotten rid of without question.

Once that was done you thought about what your classmates might decide to do with the letters. They might decide to destroy them, and if Monokuma didn't set in and say it was a destruction of school property then you'd be expected to burn your letter as well. Obviously, this wasn't good for you considering the secrets it held.

Searching around your room you did find there to be some blank envelopes and some pens in a desk that hid in the corner of your room. The bottom drawer actually held some extremely fancy calligraphy sets. Pulling out one of the blank envelopes you sealed it and turned it to the front. Putting your own letter next to it, you carefully used to pens you'd found to copy the elegant script of your name that was written on the front of your original letter. You were proud to say it was an almost identical copy. Anyone who didn't get a detailed look at the original would be fooled.

You stash away the original, slipping it into one of the inner blazer pockets of one of the outfits in your closet. The fake is slipped into the outfit you pull out of your closet and set aside for tomorrow, along with the nightly transfer of your lockpicking set.

After becoming satisfied with your preparations for the following morning, you finally settle down and start to get ready for bed. There's a small amount of hesitance lingering in the back of your mind, but you can't say you feel any actual fear. You actually find yourself... hopeful? Yeah, that's the right word. You fall asleep to dreams of hope and war.
A Maid's Duty

There was actually a lit bit of joy that next morning while people started to make their way into the cafeteria. Apparently, Miu and Kaede had their labs opened up to them overnight. The two had been infected with a good mood that seemed to carry over to the rest of the group. "Since it doesn't seem like there's any kind of time limit, we should all take today to relax. Spend time together, get to know each other. Maybe we can all have a sleepover in my lab or something! That way I can play music for everyone," the musician joyfully said.

"Do you really think we should be wasting time like that?" Maki asked. You couldn't tell if she was being critical or serious in her questioning. Either way, her voice didn't come off as openly harsh or antagonistic. Either way, it didn't seem to much bother Kaede who continued to beam. The nickname Piano Idiot suddenly felt very appropriate and you wondered if anything could take down her good mood.

"Don't be such as downer Harumaki!" Kaito blurted out, a giant goofy grin plastered across his features. A number of snorts followed that statement.

"Oh my gosh, Harumaki," you snickered quietly. You could feel Maki sizing up the both of you, her gaze vicious as it bore into the pair of you. Kaito didn't seem to notice such an expression as he just joyfully bobbed his head in response to your comment about the nickname. You weren't too put off by Maki's glare either, your sense of danger in regards to yourself being somewhat muted.

Kaito continued to grin as he slung an arm across the nearby Maki. You could feel the murderous intent rolling off the much smaller girl in waves, but there wasn't really much she could do about it at the moment. You thought about helping her, but there wasn't really much she could do would prove helpful to Maki. "Don't hurt her," you whispered to Kaito as you elbow him sharply in the side.

"I think Akamatsu-san is right," Kirumi offered her support of the idea to the rest of the group, a gentle smile resting on her lips. If you weren't looking carefully, you would have missed the small glint of excitement in the eyes of the maid.

"What's that? Tojo-san agrees? I mean, if mom says it then it must be a good idea, but I'd like to know the reason," Kokichi chirps as he grins wildly. Kirumi ignores him altogether as she continues on. You can't help but quietly wonder about Kokichi's actions for a short moment, but the situation doesn't give you much time to ponder them.

"Getting to better know one another is the key to success in this kind of situation. By fostering kinship with one another we can better stick together no matter what psychological weapons Monokuma tries to use on us," the maid declared. Apparently, she'd gotten a big dose of that special Kaede brand hope considering how quick she was to defend the idea. "I'll begin setting up immediately. If we're going to make it into a sleepover then we're going to need material to make the ground more comfortable, as well as refreshments and entertainment in order to help pass the night away," the maid continued on, placing a finger against her chin.

Maybe she was more so just excited about the prospect of being able to serve than she was the actual sleepover itself. Making herself useful seemed to set the woman at ease if only slightly, so you weren't necessarily going to disagree with how she was trying to make use of her time.

"I guess we're doing this," Miu said quietly as the group watched the maid slowly begin to plan out the entire event before your eyes. There was no arguing at this point, Kirumi was as unstoppable a
force as a hurricane. At this point, it was already too late. She pulled out a note pad and a pen in order to jot down what she'd need to prepare. Where did she even get those?

"A sleepover though? I don't want to sleep in the same room as any degenerate males, let alone be forced to sleep next to one! No way am I letting one near poor Yumeno-chan either," Tenko announced with fervor. There were a couple other mutterings about boys and girls sleeping in the same room. You don't particularly mind yourself since you don't think most of the boys in the room are even physically capable of harm. In addition, your nature as a light sleep and your confidence in your own physical strength led you to see no problems with the setup.

"Do my ears deceive me? A sleepover?" A voice joyfully purred. You were really hopeful that he just wouldn't notice. Monokuma appeared and drew all eyes towards him as he made a grand entrance out of seemingly nowhere. You were starting to wonder if these damn bears even abided by the laws of reality, or if they were just above literal physics. It was almost like the bears weren't even real.

"While I might condone murder in my school, there will be no mercy for sexual assault. You should all stay pure and sweet. Like good little high school students until you find your special someone! I won't be letting this little sleepover change that. If you find a special someone in this school, then you can have at it in your own rooms at least until somewhere real special opens up. You can all rest assured I'll make sure nothing happens during this little excursion. Especially not something nonconsensual," the bear told the group with the kind of force that made it clear if someone disobeyed he'd be calling the cubs and the Exisals. Call it a temporary rule if you'd like. Though his purpose for this part of the conversation was done, Monokuma didn't stop talking. "Ah, the first games were so much easier! All the students were so shy and reserved or too crazy to get together. But this class has so much chemistry! Nothing like the ice brigade and Mr. Oblivious. It's only a matter of time before I have to start pulling out the videos. Ah, if only my sister were here. Perhaps I'll be able to get her to visit and talk with you? She isn't too fond of me," The deranged mumbles of Monokuma went unnoticed after the initial announcement.

"You all are ignoring me now, aren't you?" The bear said in a miserable manner as the entire group turned away from him. You were probably the only one who didn't tune him out, curiosity burning at the back of your mind. You couldn't begin to understand the references that were being thrown around. Why was he saying them if not to be understood though? For an audience? You had your suspicions, and this certainly helped to feed them.

"It'll be fine Chabashira-san. Atua says that nothing bad is going to happen to anyone during the sleepover! Let's all be happy and enjoy this gift given to us by Atua!" Angie said joyfully as she gave the group a warm smile. There was something almost relaxing about her nature which seemed to set the rest of the class at ease. Finally, it seemed as though the class was on board with the idea.

After getting over the initial hesitation, the group slowly fell away into excitement. You could hear excited chattering all throughout breakfast as people came up with ideas for activities to do during the sleepover. The communal breakfast lasted a little longer than usual due to people talking more than they were eating. After finishing Kirumi was quick to clean up and then disappear, lost to her sleepover based machinations. You couldn't hold back a small giggle. Something so tiny was enough to make the group so happy.

It was unfortunate in a way. Kaede had brought up the idea first thing in the morning, which led to the entire group forgetting about the important discussion that they needed to be having. What to do about the letters? You have no doubt that Kokichi remembered, but you can't quite understand
why he didn't bring it up. The assumption that it would be easier to monitor everyone during a sleepover? Bringing up the letter before or after might have discouraged the sleepover from even happening. You were still hesitant to leave the topic unaddressed.

Worrying your lip, you finished up eating and started to make your way out of the dining room. On your way out you caught sight of Himiko and Tenko chatting fairly amicable. The two seemed to be getting along in their own way. A brilliant and energetic smile painted Tenko's features while Himiko didn't seem entirely disinterested in what Tenko was saying. She still looked tired by not entirely like she was going to fall asleep at any moment.

"Hey you two, what are you up to?" You asked, strolling over to the pair. Your initially impression of Tenko had been fairly positive, likely in part due to your gender. You were a bit hesitant around her because you didn't want to indulge her beliefs but you also didn't want to upset her. It was only a matter of time before someone (Kokichi) tried to antagonize her. Himiko's first impression had been entirely positive even though the smaller red-haired magician had barely spoken other than in a bored drawl. It was better than some first impressions you came across, key ones being Miu and Kokichi.

"I'm just asking Yumeno-chan about her magic!" Tenko squealed as she smiled brilliantly at Himiko. The perpetually tired girl didn't respond much, she just kind of sighed at Tenko's excitement. Even though the mage lowered her head, you saw the barest hint of a smile at the corner of her lips. In the back of your mind, you file away Tenko's use of honorific in regards to the magic caster, as well as Himiko's reaction.

"Of course it is. After all, I am the Ultimate Mage," the smaller girl responded but it didn't sound like she put much heart into the statement. It was the same volume and tone as always, yet, you did denote the slightest hint of pride as well as maybe a sense of joy when you peered extra closely.

"I'm glad you two are getting along," you say with a smile. It's a genuine statement and Tenko beams when you say it. Himiko doesn't respond but the faintest coloration mingles on her cheeks for half a second. "Oh right, before I forget, I have a question for you Tenko. How's that medication working out so far?" You ask the neo-aikido fighter. You just wanted to check in and make sure she wasn't having any nasty side effects. She smiles even wider at your question.

"Oh! It's been doing great. I already feel a whole lot better. Though I have been more tired than usual after exercising. Maybe I should take a little break. My body might have been hurting in the first place since it was trying to tell me not to injure myself. After all, even the greatest of fighters need to take a break in stressful and intense situations. And a situation like this one sure is stressful," the warrior manages to spit out a pearl of wisdom that catches the attention of yourself and Himiko.

It's a general assumption that warrior type Ultimates push themselves to the extreme with little regard for their own personal health and safety. Tenko seems to be the opposite of this. While you can see the disappointment in her gaze when she thinks about taking a break from aikido, you can also see that she's quite ready and willing to do it if she thinks her health might be compromised. You honestly have to respect that about her.

"That's a good idea Tenko-san. If you do think you're coming down with something, make sure you and visit me in the nurse's office. Prevention is always the first defense, and I have a couple things that can nip illnesses in the bud before they get especially bad," you tell her. Tenko responds with an enthusiastic nod and a wave when you make to leave. You don't want to bother these two for long, not when they're interacting so positively.

As you're walking away you continue to hear the excited chatter between Tenko and Himiko.
"Hey, Yumeno-chan! Since I'll be taking it easy for today we should spend the day together," Tenko says loudly and you can only wonder about Himiko's expression. You smile to yourself quietly. Those two are cute. You sincerely hope that nothing bad happens.

Continuing along you try to find something to occupy your time. You could always be looking for more clues, but you think you might have exhausted your resources for the time being. There's only so much you can do in a couple of days without access to the whole school. In addition, you recognize the fact you need something relaxing. Ignore it as you might, there's a little ball of nervous energy at the pit of your stomach that you really need to deal with. Taking a page out of Tenko's book might be wisest for the moment.

On the quest for entertainment, you eventually wander towards Kaede's lab which is currently under Kirumi's control. The maid has already set up a multitude of cushy blankets and pillows, very likely snagged from the storage room. When Kaede told you about the room she'd said there were music sheets all over the floor, it was hard to step without landing on one. In addition, there were a couple of music stands scattered around.

The stands had already been pushed into a far corner of the room when you arrive, and the papers were quite delicately gathered up and placed on top of the closed piano. "Wow, Kirumi. You've really got things under control, huh? I was going to wander in and see if you needed any help but it looks like that won't be necessary," you say, essentially announcing your presence to the maid who has her back towards the door while she fiddles with something on a table. The table is likely something she brought in herself.

You could easily sneak up on just about anyone in the school, except maybe Maki and Kokichi who have a fine-tuned internal alarm system. You've done it by accident at least twice to Kaede and you always feel bad. So, you try to make the maid aware of you before you're right behind her. Luckily you don't seem to startle her.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly have you help. It's my job to care for everyone. I am the Ultimate Maid after all. However, I'm currently taking a small break which is always better with good company. If I could make a request of you, I wouldn't mind if you joined me," she said with a gentle smile as she turns to you. She's brought in a couple chairs which are mostly stacked in the back, one is pressed to the table and as she moves away to grab another you see a pot of tea.

"Would you like a cup?" She asks you when she sees your gaze land on it. You nod and sit down as she offers you the chair. She remains standing in order to serve you, despair pouring tea being no harder when sitting and the open chair right across from you. You suppose it's just a maid thing.

She pours the tea into a spare cup. You take instant notice of the fact that there's something strange about the tea. "Quite an odd color," you mention offhandedly. Perhaps it's something extravagant you've never heard of before. While you have a preference for coffee, you've never once minded tea. Plenty who are close to you drink it. Despite your fabricated memories, you have a feeling that's an undeniable fact. Every lie has grains of truth, and while the last couple of days were spent reminding yourself just how much of you was currently made of lies, you'd managed to separate out a couple different truths based on emotional reactions you've had to them. You've come to believe that there's a certain strain of truth in each of your backstories.

"Yes, I suppose it is. You see, it's not I who made this tea. It was actually Hoshi-kun. He made it as thanks for my hard work, and I would be remiss to turn him down. As the Ultimate Maid, it's my duty to accept his kindness and drink it all. The taste, however..." The maid trailed off and let you see for yourself what she meant. Holding up the cup offered to you, you took a small sip of the
drink. You made an ugly face as soon as the liquid passed your lips. It tasted bitter and wrong.

"What did he use? Weeds instead of tea leaves? Garden flowers?" You gag as you put the cup down and push it away from you. Both of those would still have a better flavor than this! You mean no offense to the man in question, but the taste is beyond awful. Kirumi sighs and nods her head sadly.

"I've come to learn that few know how to properly brew a good cup of tea, let alone take care of themselves. I worry what might happen if anything were to happen to me. I know that we've all sworn off this killing game, but I can't help being apprehensive. It is my duty to serve, I have no intention of indulging such despicable actions. But I can't help but wonder if some do..." She trails off once more and glances towards you. "Tell me ____-san, can you take care of yourself at all?" She asks.

Your memories try to tell you no, but it doesn't account for the vast amount of knowledge you have in regards to the topic. So you analyze all the information you know for a moment and pit it against the memories that you have, those memories shatter quickly enough and you're left with only the fragments that could hold true, as well as those small fragments that hold emotional enough meaning to be considered plausibly true.

"I had a lot of good teachers who made sure I knew how to take care of myself. My parents were good friends with a high-class chef who taught me how to cook. My mother was very insistent that I learn how to clean properly. She'd often go on about how nice my clothes were and that real cotton needed to be washed differently than polyester. She even went so far as to teach me how to wash certain things by hand and leave them to air dry. Bras, for example, last a lot longer if you air dry them after you wash them," you tell the maid with a quick nod. You're confident that you could take good enough care of yourself, but you don't want to contemplate the idea of losing Kirumi.

You do have one question for your past self. Which mother though? The memory of more than one mother lingers in your thoughts in a way you can't properly sort, which just raises more questions.

Kirumi smiled at your response, seeming satisfied by the depth of the answer. "Very good. As long as I'm around I will continue to serve, however, it sets my mind at ease knowing that there will be another with knowledge of the topic should things go awry. Ah, how rude of me though. I asked you to come and sit with me and here I am bringing up all these somber topics," the maid actually blushed slightly as she shook her head.

"Don't worry about it, I really don't mind. It actually sets me at ease a little bit. I have the feeling you're not the type who would do anything unless Monokuma really hits the right trigger. It's comforting to know. If I'm being completely honest, I say this with your complete confidence, I've been running risk assessments on everyone to see who might be dangerous and if there's any way to stop them from acting," you tell the maid. For some reason, you find yourself able to trust her. As you said, as long as the two-toned bear can't find the proper trigger you have the feeling that Kirumi is one of the safer players.

"Oh my, well, if you come across any leads or have an idea someone might be plotting something don't hesitate to speak with me. I will do all I can to act as an ally. We should not be fighting among ourselves when there is that bear that we have to deal with!" Her voice took on a strong and forceful cadence. It was resolute as if she'd come to a decision. "However, if you could indulge something of a request for me... It is a bit of an odd request though," she said hesitantly.

"Oh? Speak away Kirumi, I'm not the type of judge," you say. Really, there were few things that could shock you, especially coming from someone like Kirumi. You doubt the maid has very twisted thoughts.
"Well, you see, a maid is there to serve all. However, the best maids all have a Master or Mistress to serve above all others. I have had many in my time. However, in a situation like this, I am left rather lacking and it leaves me feeling a touch unsettled. It almost feels wrong. ____-san, if you could indulge my request, for the time being, would you allow me to be your personal maid," she asked. You heard both a sense of anxiety and excitement in her voice. You could understand the anxiety. A request like this was quite easy to take the wrong way.

When most heard such a question, their mind jumped to sexual themes. It was a sad truth that maids had been so thoroughly sexualized by the general public. You, however, fully understand what Kirumi was trying to ask you with such a request. It would be an intelligent request to indulge if you were being honest.

"I wouldn't be opposed to the idea, but why specifically me. Out of everyone in this game, why me?" You ask. You don't sense any kind of malice within the request. It's not like it's some elaborate murder plot. You were being fully honest when you assessed Kirumi to be one of the more harmless players unless the right buttons were pushed. There was a certain shift in personality that all people expressed once that button had been pressed and you like to think you'd be able to recognize it.

Kirumi pauses as she contemplates her words instead of immediately answering you. It takes her a long moment to form her words in a way that she seems satisfied about. "Having a Master is a very grounding experience for a maid. Most of us are very submissive and serving creatures, myself included. Having someone magnanimous to serve is the best I can hope for in this situation. It also helps to bind me to my promise not to get caught up in the game and cause a murder without thinking," she tries to explain as best she can.

"I had three top people to pick from when making this decision. However, I fear my other two choices being Shuichi and Kaede wouldn't end well. You three seem to be the most competent and the most driven to keep this game from even happening. I fear that Shuichi is too meek to give orders and Kaede does not seem completely grounded in the reality of the situation. By all means her hope is needed to act as a ray of light, however, she lacks the pragmatism it takes to understand that someone might do something they'll regret come time for the trial. Shuichi understands this, but he lacks the motivation and the strength of character to act in the best interest of all and prevent murders from happening," there's a slight hesitance to speak ill of the pair, but she gets her point across.

"Through my analysis of your character, you seem to exist in the middle ground between the two. You hold control of the kind of force of will needed to enact your sentiments on the rest of the class while still having the same hopeful demeanor as Kaede. I know that by serving you I would be able to help act as an instrument towards this game's end!" You listen to Kirumi's speech very carefully, her words almost shocking you but not entirely. You should have expected a maid of all people to pick up on such tiny details, and you won't dismiss the reality of her words. Kaede is idealistic, while the realist Shuichi lacks that same force of character she does. From an outside perspective, it must look like you exist in the middle ground between the two.

From your own position, you've never really thought about it that way. The future comes from embracing hope and luck, but in order to properly temper hope and keep it from becoming toxic, one must understand the truth as well as the lies that surround it. In addition, they must have the force of will necessary to act. Looking over your classmates, each one had at least one of these positive traits. Kokichi though not entirely truthful held a powerful understanding of the truth itself and Kaede was hopeful beyond question. You were the only person in your class who had really held herself in a middle ground so far. Though you couldn't say if you'd remain this way, Kirumi's logic presently held no flaw.
"Very well Kirumi. In that case, I see no reason to object. Let's end this game together," you say after sorting through your thoughts. As the situation stood, you needed allies. Kirumi was a strong candidate for your first ally given her nature, and having a confidant in the face of trying to figure out a way to beat the game would certainly help to keep your own sanity throughout this ordeal. You won't be able to tell her everything, but you'll be able to tell her enough to get some help.

She quickly stands up and bows to you, the barest hint of a smile gracing her features. "Thank you, Miss. I promise not to disappoint," she tells you before straightening herself. "Unfortunately, my break has run rather long and if I don't begin I fear I won't have snacks ready in the time for the party," she tells you. You stand as well and move to walk next to her.

"Let me help, like I mentioned I've been trained by a real chef. Besides, I find great enjoyment in cooking," you tell her. You can see hesitance in her gaze. Especially considering the agreement the two of you just made. It would be hard enough for a maid to let a guest help her, but your new position made this a different thing entirely. "I enjoy cooking," you reinforce quickly, "I want to help because I like the activity. Accept it as an offer before I have to make an order," you tell her.

You can hear her laughing slightly beside you, equal parts nervous and amused. "Quite an odd Mistress I've taken this time," she says with a shake of her head. Confusion lingers in her voice but she doesn't make any further attempt to dissuade you. Even Ultimates still have room to learn, so you make your actions into just that. A lesson.

"The word is filled with all kinds. Though I might be rare, you should take the opportunity to get used to my kind. There will always be those who even when given a maid, would prefer to do some things themselves. A good maid should know when to offer themselves as aid or confidant," you tell the silver-haired woman. She ponders to for a moment. Your words ring true historically. There have been many maids treated more like a friend and even sometimes a sister by royalty. While Kirumi is the Ultimate Maid, you have no doubt in earning her title she failed to come across any of these kinds of people.

"Confidant, hm?" She seems to accept these words as the two of you make your way to the kitchen.

It's only when you get to the kitchen do the pair of you realize that your aid might actually be necessary to finish on time. There's a giant mess of dirty dishes in the sink, food scattered on the floor. It looks like a wild animal went rummaging through the kitchen. It's a far cry from the kind of environment that Kirumi usually maintains. She hides it well but there's the barest hint of anger in her expression as she sets to work cleaning.

Whoever messed up the kitchen is a total ass.

(-)(-)(-)(-)

When it started to get dark outside and the day turned to night the class began to get together, meeting in Kaede's lab just as previously agreed upon. It seemed to be the general consensus that people come in their pajamas, which was interesting, to say the least. The idea was a wonderful one, and everyone who arrived was ready to have a great time. Until the last person showed up. Finally came the moment that Miu arrived. Holding a bottle of unidentifiable but absolutely distinct liquid. "Drink up bitches, I found the vodka!" The strawberry blonde announced with a giant grin.

"Miu, we are 17!" Kaede cried out, her voice wavering with panic and dismay while Miu set the bottle down. She was wearing a backpack slung across her shoulder. Quickly she placed the backpack next to the bottle and started to pull out more alcoholic beverages. It seemed to range from wines to the hard stuff. "Where did you even find this?"
You were asking the same question mentally, trying to piece together where and how Miu even managed to find this. Her having got ahold of some hard drugs would have made sense right now because at least then you'd know she somehow went behind your back in order to get them. This though? Other than what the Monokubs had during announcements you hadn't seen anything even remotely alcohol looking.

"Atua does not like where this is going," Angie muttered quietly while a frown started to grow on her features. She wasn't the only one who looked uncomfortable at the prospect of alcohol consumption. Other people seemed to have looks of pure joy. Some people, like Korekiyo or Kirumi, didn't even attempt to mask their excitement. At least Kaito put on a show of trying to be an adult and not partake.

You turned to Keebo who was currently sat next to you as the group fell into arguments. "I desperately need to know if you can get drunk," you tell the robot with the barest hint of panic in your voice.

"I can't ingest any kind of substances as I have no digestive tract. Therefore, no, I cannot get drunk. That doesn't make me any less of a person though, so no robophobic comments," the robot's eyes narrowed at you as he awaited some kind of derogatory comment. You almost wince in sympathy at the annoyed resignation on Keebo's face as he said that final line.

"You've been spending too much time around Kokichi. I was going to say how much of a blessing that is. If Miu actually goads the class into playing a drinking game or something then I need at least one other sober person in this madness," you tell the robot as you scoot a little farther away from the mess currently happening while also moving closer to Keebo.

Miu, by virtue of being the loudest, seems to be winning the argument as it spirals further and further. Curiosity alone is urging some of them to agree with her. Gonta unknowingly tries to reach for a bottle. Korekiyo and Kirumi are arguing the merits of drink as long as not taken in excess. You have no doubt they've had alcohol before. They seem the mature type to have had it over dinner once or twice. Given it's normal in some cultures and Kirumi is well versed in etiquette, you can almost say with complete confidence they've tried alcohol before.

Kaito finally gives up on trying to be responsible and starts screaming out his agreements. Poor Shuichi is being swept up in the astronaut's excitement. He's trying to fight back against the growing tide of people supporting the consumption of wine and hard whiskey, but he hides behind his hat and can't help but mumble when Kaito turns pleading eyes on him.

Maki, Kaede, and Angie seem to be the last paragons as Ryoma jumps in and starts talking about prison toilet wine. Aren't these people supposed to be 16 and 17? Of course, that goes more towards explaining why they're excited than why they shouldn't have it. It's just one of those things you suppose. Either way, you're highly disappointed and still despise the flavor. You can't even handle the taste of some wines that are marketed as 'sweet'.

"You won't partake?" The robot asks with a tilt of his head. He seems confused given the excitement almost everyone else is expressing. Wait. Rantaro is siding with the girls. Okay. That makes 4 out of 16. 6 if you include yourself and Keebo, unfortunately, majority rule isn't in your favor and even if it was the other 10 are staring on at Miu's prize with hungry and curious eyes. Vote or no vote, you have a feeling that the pro-alcohol party would still decide to drink.

"I prefer clarity and reason to guide my actions. Alcohol is something I avoid in large amount for that very reason. I don't even like the idea of being buzzed. I won't even take medicine if I think it'll affect my decision-making process. My mother was forced to fight me on multiple occasions over that very fact. Not to mention the taste is atrocious. Wine tastes like sour raisins, beer tastes
like wet wheat, and anything hard like vodka, whiskey, rum, or tequila just tastes like death to me. It's not pleasant in any way," you shake your head dismissively.

The robot actually snorts. "Well, in that case, I'm glad I won't be alone either. Perhaps we can find something entertaining to do while they..." Keebo trails off as you two watch the madness. As if just observing the group isn't entertaining enough for him.

Himiko somehow already has a glass. She's handing one to Tenko. Where in the world did they come from? "Wait, was that real magic," you mutter under your breath as you stare at her a little longer. Himiko catches your gaze and you swear that for half a second the lazy mage gives you a wink and a smirk before going back to indulging Tenko with the same bored fatigue and bland expression. The scary part is when Himiko says something and Tenko's cheeks burst into crimson. You wish you could have heard her, but the noise in the room is too much even for your sensitive ears. You shake your head and rub your eyes as if something is wrong with them. "Yep, no alcohol. Shit is already crazy enough in here."

Keebo actually laughs once more, looking equally nervous and confused by everything that's happening. Kaito's shirt is gone. Where did it go? Nobody knows. "It truly is starting to seem as though we'll be the only sober ones here tonight. It seems Akamatsu-san is giving up." Once Kaede has fallen, the rest of the anti-alcohol group start to drop like flies until there's a drink in everyone's hand.

It isn't long before the group decides that a drinking game is the wisest course of action. "Get over here bitch face!" Miu calls. You assume she's talking to you.

"Absolutely not. Someone has to supervise and Keebo doesn't have the spine to control a bunch of drunken toddlers. No offense, Keebo," you say as you quickly glance at your robotic friend.

"No offense taken, your assessment is absolutely correct. I am nowhere near equipped to deal with the intoxicated, nor am I equipped to function as a caretaker in a normal setting," Keebo says brightly with a small nod. He looks so proud of himself.

"Boo! Hiss!" Miu says and you hear a few jeers from your other classmates as they try to force you into playing. You completely ignore them, blocking out any voice that isn't Keebo. Your classmates eventually give up, finding your lack of response just as boring. Instead, they focus on trying to find a game to play. They eventually settle on Never Have I Ever, taking a swig of their drink every time they've done something.

You have the terrible feeling that Miu is going to be smashed by the end while Gonta isn't even going to be buzzed. You welcome them to prove you wrong though. While you listen to the group and try to monitor them, you and Keebo start playing a game of cards. You decide on war since BS seems maybe just a little too much for Keebo. You're sure that the robot is mentally scarred over lying thanks to Kokichi.

The background dialogue is fairly... Interesting.

"Drink up," Ryoma tells Kirumi as he refilled her glass once more. All through the game, he kept targetting the maid, filling up her glass time and time again. You couldn't tell if he was picking a fight or trying to flirt, but he seemed more life-like when he was completely and totally drunk. Most of the time Ryoma struck you as someone with nothing left in life, but now with a drink in his hands, he seemed energetic and almost joyful.

"Awwww, don't bully the maid," Kokichi said with a laugh. His cheeks were completely bright red but he hadn't been drinking that much. You couldn't tell if he was drunk or lying. It could be either,
at this point it could even be both. Either way, his words didn't win him a pleasant response.

"Fuck off with your 'don't bully the maid' you shitty little liar," it was Kaede's who slurred speech flew from her mouth. A shockingly aggressive drunk, the girl had been cussing up a storm after she finished up her 4th glass of port. Of course, the glasses being poured were pretty large. None of them knew how to actually drink wine, filling their glasses so far above the pour line that they almost spilled as some students wobbled and leaned on one another. With the higher proof wines, you always went below the pour line. Especially with something like Port. Which cost 7 dollars a shot on a good day. Fucking heathens.

You didn't even know how much these idiots were putting away. Miu herself was taking shots of triple distilled vodka with a soda from the kitchen as her only chaser. Kaito seemed to be handling himself better than the rest for drinking whiskey. Even Maki got caught up in the event, quietly sipping on one of the lower proof wines. It was little more than sweet red wine, which barely pushed 6%. Because she was drinking something so low proof though, the class had been viciously targeting her during the game and you could see the cherry starting to stain her lips and cheeks.

You were honestly starting to get a little worried about Kirumi and Miu who were drinking some of the harder stuff like absolute monsters. None of them knew how to properly drink alcohol. Handle alcohol. It was starting to scare you.

"Actually, I'm going to second that don't bully the maid statement," you tell the group. You stand up and walk over, pulling the glass from Kirumi's hands. She tries to complain but a hard look is all that it takes to silence her. Carefully you pick her up and drag her away from the group, picking her up bridal style after you've figured out how much she weighs. She might be tall, but her weight seems like nothing to you. She's easy to lift and clings to you as you try to lie her down on the blankets and wrap her up.

"Aww, you're ruining the fun ____-san," Kokichi cried out in mock sorrow. He was obviously lying, but something seemed to tick a nerve and you quickly found yourself forming a snippy response to the small dictator.

"Do you want the first death to be alcohol poisoning? Do you really want to get executed because of alcohol poisoning?" You ask the smaller boy. The group seems to shrink back after you send a scathing glare. After that, no one asks questions as you slowly begin to pull people from the game. The second person you pull being Miu herself.

"But I don't wanna stop," she complains as you quietly try to settle her down to sleep. "The moment you walk away I'm just gonna go back to playing," she tells you, mildly disgruntled. You doubt she can manage to make her way back to the game considering she can't even stand. She'd have to crawl. But you humor her with your response since it sounds more like a vie for attention than an actual threat.

"Fine then, if you want to do things the hard way, we will," you say. With very little required force you make Miu lie down so her head is on your leg. There's a bright crimson staining her cheeks, but you're certain that it's just an alcohol flush. She doesn't say anything after that, doesn't even move. You rest your free hand on her head and end up subconsciously toying with a couple locks of her hair while you chat with Keebo. She doesn't make noise while you keep playing cards with the robot, not until you hear the quiet snoring. You're careful when you shuffle away from her, slipping her head off of your leg and onto a pillow.

Some players are wise and drop out when they realize they're going a little too far. Shuichi, like Maki, is drinking something low proof. But he's been more cautious during the game so beside yourself and Keebo you like to believe the boy is most sober. Still very drunk, but at least
conscious of himself and others. That assessment only gets proved when he gently prods Tenko to go lie down when she starts swaying enough that Gonta gets dizzy trying to look at her.

Gonta who is shockingly drunker than you expected him to be. This was only a thing that happened because he kept forgetting the rules, and kept drinking when he hadn't done something instead of when he had. He eventually ended up taking a sip after every question, and the rest of the group just came to accept the fact he was playing a different game than the majority.

Kaede doesn't need to be pulled from the game as she quiet boldly falls asleep on a terrified Shuichi. You carefully help the poor boy remove the girl. Without meaning to you start to set all the girls on one half of the room and all the boys on the other. Kaede mumbles in her sleep the whole time while you help to move her.

Rantaro and Kaito are two of the ones to drop out themselves, leaving when they start to feel sick. Rantaro leaves even earlier than that, likely lying about how drunk he is in order to go sit next to Kokichi and rub his back when the smaller boy ends up making himself abhorrently sicker than he apparently intended. You don't think he's lying, but he'll probably try to claim he was when morning comes.

Everyone else starts to drop like flies and Keebo also does his fair share of work getting them to bed. Unfortunately, you already know Keebo has the strength of a fit senior citizen so you end up having to get the lightly buzzed Shuichi to help you with the heavy lifting. You leave Gonta where he eventually falls, all of you knowing far too well that he's impossible to lift with just the three of you. Tenko and you might have been able to lift him, but Tenko is presently no help. You did do your best to roll him onto his side in case anything did happen in the night. In fact, you double checked that everyone was lying on their sides. Just in case.

"We'd need a crane to carry that boy," you mutter and a giggle, yes, giggle, bubbles from Shuichi. It isn't long before he too goes to bed, leaving only you and Keebo.

"I think I'll go to bed now too. You?" You asked the robot.

He quickly shakes his head. "While I can sleep, I don't strictly need sleep to function as long as I am charged so I believe I'll stay away to make sure that nothing happens. Someone might actually have made themselves extremely sick and be in need of aid. Or worse yet someone might try to attempt murder. In which case I wish to be awake so I may be of aid. You should go to sleep though! It would be terrible if I was the only one well enough tomorrow because you made yourself sick staying up too late," he tells you with a kind smile.

You dread the thought of tomorrow. So many hungover people to take care of.

You return the gesture. "Okay. Maybe try to check everyone's breathing, pulse, and skin color at various intervals throughout the night. A blue tinge to skin and irregularities to breathing or pulse can be really bad and someone might need treatment. If anything happens then wake me up immediately. I might not be a doctor, but I know enough that if someone does get alcohol poisoning I can help to treat them. I make no promises to my skill, but I can at least try to help," you inform the robot who nods very resolutely.

After giving Keebo his mission you go to sleep. All you could hope for is that everyone will wake up the next morning.
You wake up to scream. A harrowing, deafening, horrifying scream that sends your pulse through the roof and makes you sit up completely straight. You look around the room desperately as your classmates all sit up by one, some looking groggy and more beat up than others. A chime like noise races through the halls, striking you at the very core of your being. "A body has been discovered!" The cheerful voice that follows the chime makes you sick to your stomach. You look around until you find the one classmate of yours who hasn't sat up yet.

Ice creeps into your veins as your eyes land on the corpse of your former classmates. There's a growing frost creeping through your blood, but there's also fire that sits in the pit of your stomach. It's a terrifying mix of cold and flame which runs a shiver down your spine, leaving your hair standing on end as you finally process what's going on.

"Kirumi!" The cry is desperate and so animalistic in nature that it almost isn't human anymore, panicky and feral. It forces itself from the body with ferocity and fear. You don't recognize the voice until your own throat suddenly feels sore. You stand up immediately, running over to the other girl and looking her over while your classmates slowly begin to realize what happened. The moment you see her face, distorted with silent pain, you feel a sharp sensation in your chest. Regret? Remorse? Fear? Anger? You can't tell which emotion it is, so maybe it's just all 4.

It's hard to look at her crumpled form, long cold and lacking in any life. You can't possibly bring yourself to touch her. It suddenly hurts to breath and your breath hitches while your heart stutters. Your thoughts have trouble keeping up. So many different emotions are suddenly demanding your attention and you can't possibly focus on more than one. Then it just seems to... stop.

It's startling how suddenly it happens. The fire in the pit of your stomach extinguishes itself and all that's left is the ice. An almost jarring calm takes you as your thoughts wildly shift from the murder itself to the question of who. The cogs start turning, and you look for answers. Alright, you needed to take it slowly. Examine everything carefully. Question number one, who discovered the body.

It takes you all of a second to recognize the fact it must have been Keebo who's scream woke you up. By that logic, he's also likely the one to have first discovered Kirumi's corpse. He's on the ground, scooted a couple feet back with a look of sheer panic and terror on his metallic features. You turn to him, eyes jumping across him while you search for answers. You don't let your gaze become harsh, but it is cold.

"What happened?" Your voice is calm. Serene even. It chills both Keebo and yourself to your cores as his eyes flick towards yours. Your features school themselves as something in the back of your mind flips a tiny little switch. This persona that suddenly exists where there should have been anger isn't something that was given to you by the Gamemasters. It's old and familiar, something that's completely and entirely yours. This little persona of yours also seems intent to block out and suffocate anything 'unproductive' lingering around the corners of your heart.

You should be grieving, you realize. You should want to string up the culprit or even the mastermind, but you just feel pity and freezing deduction. The only anger you can find inside yourself is entirely directed at the Gamemasters. And Monokuma.

This isn't the time to be letting emotions rule you, this new persona tells you as it starts
compartmentalizing all those pesky feelings. There's been a murder. Which mean that there's a murder which needs to be solved. It's easy to slip on an emotionless mask. To hold yourself with power, without feeling. It's almost like slipping on an old pair of gloves, and you have to wonder just what kind of childhood you had. You put on this mask and refuse to take it off until the trial is done.

The illusion of an almost deity-like calm is very nearly ruined by the sting at the back of your eyes, the green-grays turning watery as you once more look back at Kirumi. You still don't touch her. You can't yet. She looks peaceful like she's just asleep and it's only a matter of time before she wakes up. You almost don't want to shatter the illusion. Your mind, however, is a cruel thing and it picks out every odd little detail that proves that she's really gone.

Her eyes are closed, but they don't twitch like the way that a sleeping person's might. Her chest is completely still, devoid of the shallow rise and fall of sleep. Her skin doesn't radiate heat anymore. While you refuse to touch her you're sitting close enough that you're absolutely certain of her freezing temperature. You wonder, at that moment, if Kirumi is the only thing that dies. It certainly feels like something curls up at the center of your being and slowly slips away, out of grasp as it weeps until death finally takes it. Then it's gone like it was never there and you're left feeling unsure of what to mourn. You don't know exactly what it is, but your insides feel a little colder, devoid of the embers that you didn't even know were there.

Hopeless. It's the only word that comes to mind.

You'll deal with that later.

Your classmates, the vast majority of which are still greatly hungover, have no idea what to do. You think some aren't even completely certain of what's going on. Nonetheless, the whole class takes a moment of silence and grieves. Even the killer, whoever they are, grieves. This is the first death, but it won't be the last. Now that this train is on the tracks it won't stop here. Kirumi won't be the martyr, the one and only who will catapult you to victory. She's the first stepping stone over the river of tragedy, the second to appear will be the killer. That knowledge hits you like a ton of bricks.

You might be able to win, but there are very few ways to actually beat this game. And one of them just got crossed off the list along with Kirumi's name.

"It's about fucking time," the voice scratches at your eardrums and you grit your teeth. "All of you were getting so buddy-buddy it was making me sick!" Blue flickers in the corner of your vision and it takes all the control this new persona has not to get angry. You grit your teeth and you beg yourself to be quiet. The arctic winds of a blizzard push at the inside of your mouth, slipping through your teeth.

The Monokubs, as well as Monokuma, appear after the announcement is made. They all seem far too gleeful about this situation, and you can't help but resent all 6. The majority of your hatred presently rests on Monokid, the one who had the nerve to see you grieving for your friend and cry out in a voice that border ecstasy. He slams on the guitar he's holding as Monosuke and Monotaro cheer. Monokuma's giggles ring out like one of those customer service bells that some stores keep at the front counter so you can catch a worker's attention. The kind of bell that Kokichi would absolutely slam over and over just for kicks. Over and over with the dinging. You always hated those bells.

The cubs make a move to hand out something that looks like the Monopad, but Monokuma is quick to stop them. "Now, now. A proper investigation can't be held when all but two of the investigators are still hungover and unable to function. For now, I'm sending everyone back to their
rooms. Leaving is strictly prohibited for the next 2 hours as to make sure no one tampers with the crime scene in the meantime. When you wake up, there will be something called the Monokuma File waiting for you on all your desks. This file will give you important information on the victim in order to help you solve the case."

You pause as you think over his words. "Are we allowed to go to other people's dorms in the meantime? I'd like to talk with Keebo," you say. Your voice feels quieter to your ears. Some of your higher functioning classmates like Keebo and Shuichi glance at you, apparently taking note of your drop in typical volume. Monokuma places a paw against his chin as he thinks over his answer before laughing.

"I'm gonna go ahead and say no since you could technically start talking about the murder and I don't have the energy to watch you and make sure that you don't. Once the 2 hours are up, everyone may investigate as they please. I'll also make sure to send the cubs around with some medicine for those of you who need more than a nap to shake your hangovers," Monokuma says. The words feel hollow somehow, but you can't exactly place a reason. In fact, there's something off about the bear in general. You just aren't entirely sure as to what.

After listening to Monokuma, all of you quietly shuffle out of the room, the atmosphere somber and tense. You decide not to put up much of a fight against him or his rules. You don't have the energy. You might just take a nap yourself. The Monokubs don't seem to want to give you a break though, their giggles pounding on your eardrums like mallets pressed against gongs. You only avoid response by clenching your jaw as tight as you can, pulling back your tongue and begging the gods that it keeps itself still.

"I bet you feel like shit," Monokid says. His voice is slowly drawn out in an attempt to humiliate and tease, tilting slightly as he smirks widely. He looks towards you and then towards Kaede. His confidence only seems to grow as his family jumps to assist him with his harassment. They seem to single out the pair of you.

"You! You two are big old failure's now, huh?" Monosuke says with a laugh. No wonder Monodam hates Monokid. The blue tone cub just seems to inspire hatred and bullying. Quickly, he brings out the worst in people. Including his siblings as his glinting smile grows all the more vicious. Monofunny doesn't join into the conversation. She's getting sick in the background, vomit cascading from her jaws in amounts that shouldn't be possible for such a tiny body. Monokid keeps up the teasing efforts as his gaze hardens.

"All that talk of hope and everyone getting out of here alive, the two of you were so convinced. Now, look at this. Someone went ahead and died," the smaller bear laughs for a couple moments. Wind screams in your chest while freezing ice batters your insides and tries to escape your throat. You grit your teeth and try not to let the words of the bear get to you, but it's difficult. There's intense pressure in the back of your mind and it takes considerable effort not to let the creature get to you. You allow a hiss of air to leave your teeth as you sulk away with your classmates who shuffle along towards their rooms.

You walk a little slower than your classmates, slinking along as they leave. Kaede is able to blow off the bears quiet easily given her current state, but their laughter rings and echoes inside of your skull and refuses to leave. Two little words deign to ring the loudest, covering everything in a thick sheet of fog as they take center stage and steal all of your attention. Your Fault. Venom rests in the back of your throat and you know you have to spit it out at something before it eats you alive. You turn your gaze on the one who started this and let your words fly.

"I hope your death is slow and miserable," you hiss at Monokid quietly as you leave. Monokid just
laughs, but the threat is heavy and real on your tongue. Neither he nor any of his siblings seem to take the threat with any seriousness. 4 of them don't, anyway. You see the faintest hint of a glint in Monodam's eyes but it could just be a trick of the light. At least it eases some of the pressure and pain that rests on your shoulders.

You leave to the sing-song laughter of creatures that you hope will soon find themselves facing their creator. You'll dismantle them one by one yourself if it's necessary. Not that you really think you'd get that far. There was, however, no rule mentioned that stated no violence against the cubs. Just against the headmaster, Monokuma. You almost smirk when ideas of just how to take them apart start to run through your mind. Eventually, you pocket the thoughts. At the end of the day you don't have the personality of a killer, make threats all you like but you couldn't dismantle one of those stupid bears if given the opportunity. Your existence being one of a pacifist was obvious enough.

The trudge back to the dorms is a painful one, a long one. Your classmates all walk in silence. There's a heavy pressure that weighs down on the group as a whole. There's a silent understanding that one of them is now a killer. A killer who's either going to be put to death or escape while the entire rest of the group sits and suffers an execution meant for them. That pressure almost makes it hard to breathe and it makes the silent march all the more unbearable. It feels like a death march in some ways. The group only splits apart when you get to the dorms, everyone quietly slipping off to their respective rooms.

You wonder what everyone is going to do. Some might try to sleep off their hangover. Others might quietly sit on their beds wondering how this happened. Wondering why it had to be Kirumi. Some yet might turn to quietly plotting. Plotting the next murder, plotting how to fool the class, plotting how to win and keep everyone else from killing each other. You, though? You would go mad.

2 hours. 2 hours to sit, stew, and try to come to an understanding of everything you know. To try to come up with a hypothesis for who the murderer was. So far, the only thing you've been given a chance to look at is the corpse itself. Which meant there was little that could be done, and instead, those 2 hours would be used to sit. Slowly sinking into madness and quickly clawing yourself out before the investigation started. 2 hours to let your emotions fly as chaotically and destructively as they need to before you have to act with poise. For your class, and for Kirumi.

You wouldn't be getting those 2 hours

You slink into your room like a dog with its tail between its legs only to find the Monokuma File is sitting on your desk waiting for you. No rest for the wicked it seems. Getting an early start and using what's written in the file to contemplate possibilities is your best bet at making everything turn out how you want it to.

You take note of the fact that the file isn't the only thing awaiting you when you return to your room.

The bookshelf in the back of the room had seemingly doubled in size since you last saw it, your own personal collection being complete with books from all walks of life. Anything from technicals and textbooks to a couple of fantasy books sit proudly on the shelves. Two books are pulled off of the shelf, neatly sitting next to each other on a stool. The first is a fictional romance book, So Lingers the Ocean. The other is a book by the same author. Its title is scratched out, your best attempts to decipher the title are met with failures. The book itself is locked shut, a thick iron band going all the way around it.

Inspecting the lock that holds shut the band, you see that it's a number lock with 5 different
numbers. The combinations are maddeningly endless so it's not like you can cycle through all of them until you get the right answer. There are no obvious signs about the information in the book itself, so you're left with just your own personal speculations about its contents.

"So this is one of the milestones that will get me more information? The first murder?" You ask. The psychotic teddy bear appears just like you thought it would, apparently summoned by your words.

"Yep, yep! And any murder here after will get more details added to your room. For the most part. I picked all of the books on this shelf specifically for you! Be sure you read them all carefully, I've left you a couple extra special gifts inside a few. Good luck finding which ones though. It could take a whole decade to power through all these books!" The bear laughs joyfully. You can't tell if he's on your side or if he just simply enjoys watching you and your classmates suffer.

It's a question that's been pinging around your head for a while now. Monokuma handed you the chance of a lifetime to try and beat this game, but he's still acting like the story's antagonist. You could always chalk it up to putting on a show for the Gamemasters, but even in moments like this, he seems to be your enemy. The only time he didn't tease you was when he first created your deal. In addition, his voice in those moments was different. Deeper, less Mickey the Murder Mouse.

Jumping off that assumption, you can piece together that maybe it has something to do with setting. Perhaps he, as well as you, can be observed inside of this room while the room at the end of death and despair road wasn't easily observed by the Gamemasters. That would bring up some interesting questions about the nurse's office in regards to the note you found implying that someone couldn't see inside of it.

That still left the question of whose side Monokuma was on. He hates the Gamemasters so he's obviously against them, but that didn't make him your ally. After all, he only found himself hating the Gamemasters due to the fact they'd turned the killing game into a scripted event of sorts. Defined as boring by Monokuma himself. He could just be humoring you because he wants something interesting to happen. A wild card variable just to make the game fun once more.

You try to watch the bear a little closer when he continues speaking, trying to pick apart his actions on a psychological level. You don't expect to find anything much, but you can hope.

"Oh, but that's not important right now. If you'll turn your attention to the Monokuma File you'll notice something interesting about the information I've provided you," he tells you. You quickly turn on the file and try to locate what he's about to explain. Skimming over it you make a note of the fact that there's no notation as to the cause of death. "Since you're here and acting mostly like your normal self, I've bumped things up to hard mode! I'm going to be leaving important details off to make things more difficult in this case as well as future ones. Obviously enough, you've already figured out the cause of death. Or you at least have an educated guess. Convince your classmates of that though," the bear tells you with a laugh.

His expression darkens for a moment. "Hopefully that'll be enough of a distraction for two hours," he whispers so quietly you almost don't catch it. For half of a second, you think you might hear pity. Or maybe you're just going mad.

Monokuma disappears once more, leaving you in a suffocating silence. You still wonder how it's able to just appear and disappear so quickly without seemingly any regard for the basic laws of physics, but that's really not the question you should be asking yourself right now. The cause of Kirumi's death... Yeah, that has to be it.

There had been the slightest off tint to Kirumi's skin tone when you first saw her, so you already
have a good guess just like the bear expects. To be certain, you'd need to get a good look at her though. Reading over the rest of the file you try to carefully take note of everything you come across.

The victim is Kirumi Tojo, the woman identified as the Ultimate Maid. The first three witnesses to the corpse were K1-B0, _____, and Shuichi Saihara. Time of death is estimated to be 5:00 A.M. and occurred roughly 2 and a half hours prior to the discovery of the corpse. No obvious wounds are present on the body.

"Why did it have to be you, Kirumi-san," you say quietly under your breath with a heavy sigh. You allow yourself to sit down on your bed, feeling a little sick after reading through the report. You have to steel yourself before the actual investigation begins. You'll need to be strong and firm, logically and rationally thinking. Even though your chest still hurts and you wonder what you could have done differently to prevent this in the first place. Even though your eyes sting when you think about what you could have done to help the maid. Given the time to sit and think, between waking up and now it seems as though your persona has momentarily slipped back off. 2 hours is too much time to sit and think alone.

You have a job to do, you remind yourself. Unfortunately, it seems there's not much else you can do in your room except for staring at the Monokuma File.

You glance at your new bookshelf, intent to find a distraction until it's time to start the investigation. Lingering like this won't be healthy at all and it'll just make investigating that much harder.

You decide to investigate the bookshelf since it seems to be the thing that's holding the most obvious clues. Your eyes skim over the colorful array of spines. You might be able to locate something important on a first glance. A pattern in the books? A subtle nod to the combo lock perhaps? Your eyes once more linger on the pair of books sitting on a stool near the shelf. Maybe the first book has a clue to the second?

You decide to read it later and deal with just the bookshelf for now. An initial investigation proves that some of the books themselves have masking tape on them. You almost shiver, remembering your experience with organizing the nurse's office. Why did it have to be masking tape on the bottles? Easy to peel off and mix up masking tape... You don't like masking tape anymore. The original titles of the books are covered, instead, each piece of tape has a word written on it. Well... word might be putting it kindly.

In total there are five books with words on their spines. The exact number of slots on the combo lock. You really hope you're getting somewhere with this. You find a couple of index cards in one of the drawers of your desk, making sure to slip them into the empty slot whenever you remove a book. As an added precaution you write down the faux title on each card. You set down the books on your desk in the order from which you pull them off the shelf, starting at the top left and moving to the bottom right. With their places preserved you start getting to work.

You start to investigate the titles a little closer if you can even call them titles. You hesitate to even call them words. None of the words are more than three letters, but all of them are at least two. They're seemingly random gibberish. FC, GI, AO, AZ, BCC. There are a lot of ways that you can take this. You start by pressing in just the number of letters in each word. It's the easiest way it could open with the least amount of work attached, but you doubt 22223 is the answer. As expected, the book doesn't open.

You jot down the alphabet on one of the index cards and quickly assign each one a number. You remember hearing about a code that used the numbers that each letter corresponded to. Maybe
you're supposed to figure out the numbers and add them?

Doing the work you quickly end up with the series of numbers 9, 16, 7, 9, and 8. If only the 16 weren't there then you might have been on to something, but the double digits make it impossible. You feel as though you're so close, just a little farther.

You read off the letters once again and check the numbers they're ascribed to. FC means 63. That could quite easily be a page number, couldn't it? You turn your attention back towards the book which was set alongside the one that you're trying to get open. So Lingers The Ocean sits there, almost taunting you for taking so long to figure it out. Picking up the book, you flip open to page 63. There's a small except that's been emphasized in yellow highlighter.

Am I truly enough for you, oh brave and stunning goddess? You are a lady of the earth and I am but a man of the sea. Can I truly be your only one?

The passage almost makes you want to gag. Was this book actually popular at some point? It reads like some lonely 15-year-old was trying to take a wild stab at what love and devotion meant. Despite your own initial hatred, you can easily see how it would become a best seller, just as the little emblem on the cover jacket claims it had. There's no doubt in your mind that something like this would practically be gobbled up by those with no understanding of how relationships actually work. Or even those who do and are looking for a perfect relationship.

After you get past your initial reaction of distaste, you're able to finally analyze the passage for what it is. There are too many words for that to be a nod towards the first letter on the combo. There's only one other clue as to what it might be. The last word, one. Deciding that this is your best bet for the time being you decide to flick the 1 into the first slot of the combo lock.

Continuing on you flip through pages 79, 115, 126, and 233 of the book. On these pages, you're able to find the respective numbers of 1, 0, 3, and 7. Putting it all together you have a combination that's apparently 11037. The lock on the second book gives a satisfying click as soon as you finish putting in the 7. You sadly don't get the chance to tear into the book and start to analyze the information it holds.

You jump in your seat when the announcement you've been equally anticipating and dreading finally goes off. "Students! It has officially been 2 hours. Investigation of the murder of Kirumi Tojo, Ultimate Maid, will begin shortly," the bear cheerily informs everyone. You suppose you'll have to finish your investigation later. You decide to shove the book into the bottom of your closet before you leave. Safe rather than sorry, you suppose. After stashing away your prize you make your way out of your dorm.

The class gathers outside of their rooms in the main area, looking around like they're trying to decide what to do. Some people look lost and confused. Himiko seems like she's going to crumble in on herself, always keeping a 3 feet distance or under between herself and Angie or Tenko at any time. Gonta looks positively distraught. With the chance to recover, it seems like the situation is finally starting to dawn on the majority of your classmates.

You see Ryoma lower his hat as he speaks with Gonta and Korekiyo about the current events going on. "Why couldn't it have been me? Not like I have much left to live for anyway," he says sadly. He won't even so much as meet the eyes of your classmates as he talks. Is he so deeply in mourning? Well, you suppose he was trying to flirt with Kirumi just last night.

Korekiyo quickly nods. "I must say, I feel a deep sense of sadness over Tojo-san's passing. She would have made such a wonderful friend for sister. I can say with confidence that all of us are feeling quite guilty over not being able to see the signs sooner," the anthropologist's eyes glance
over the room as if he's searching for anyone particularly guilty.

Gonta whimpers as he shakes his head. "Gonta no ever become gentleman if Gonta can't protect friends!" The three continue to talk among themselves, but you tune out their conversation after Gonta's done speaking. Their words sting at you with a particular vengeance. You weren't able to protect Kirumi. You'd failed. You couldn't let yourself fail a second time though.

It doesn't take long for Shuichi to notice you in the crowd. He quickly catches your attention and pulls you towards a small group that's begun to form. Kaede, Kaito, and Maki are waiting as you approach. Apparently, they were waiting just for you. Kaede smiles at you as you join them. It's gentle and it's muted compared to the vibrancy of her normal expression. Her eyes look tired and perhaps a bit scared. You can see a certain degree of apprehension in the eyes of every member of the group, except for Maki whose eyes are narrowed and determined.

"We're going to be investigating together as a group so we can cover more ground faster. Akamatsu-san's collecting testimonies, Momota-kun and Harukawa-san are going to be investigating Tojo-san's room for clues, and I'll be investigating the corpse as well as Akamatsu-san's lab since we don't know the cause of death. Would you like to help collect testimonies?" Shuichi asks. There's a small pang in your chest and you shake your head. You need to be doing something else.

"Actually, if you don't mind, I think I might be more useful if I help with the investigation of Kirumi-san's body. Kaede-san, if I could make this request of you, keep an eye on Kokichi-kun," you say. Kaede paused for a moment before nodding, your words seeming to click and make more sense to her than they do Shuichi. By comparison, there's a small glint of confusion in the eyes of the boy.

He was likely trying to offer you a kindness by not having to poke at the dead, but you know what needs to be done and a confused Shuichi isn't going to get between you and your job. You are the only one with semi-advanced medical knowledge "Alright then, come on ____-san. We all better get started if we want to figure out everything in time," the detective tells you. The two of you walk in silence while you steel yourselves for the event. Pushing open the door to Kaede's now abandoned lab you're once again confronted with the corpse.

"I can't believe someone actually..." Shuichi trails off. He looks sick. He's supposed to be the Ultimate Detective, but you wonder if he's actually ever had to deal with a real corpse before. The way he quickly places a hand over his mouth makes you think he hasn't. For some reason, the sight doesn't shock you as much as you know it should. There's an almost eerie calm that's settled over your thoughts and actions as you stare down the dead woman.

"Yeah," you say as you take a deep breath. Striding forward you kneel down next to her. "Well, we better figure out the cause of death," you say. Shuichi nods but looks shocked while you're able to roll the dead woman over so she's on her back instead of her side. You flinch as you look over her form. "This is what I was scared of," you mutter as you shake your head and push one of her eyelids up so that you can get a good look at her eyes.

Her skin is tinted with yellow. It's icy to the touch and Kirumi herself looks sickly. There's a contortion in her features. She likely died in immense amounts of pain. Pushing open her eyelid you take note of her glassy gaze. Those warm greens that once held so much life almost look colorless they've become so dull. The yellow tint present on her skin is shared in whites of her eyes. Her skin is still damp with what you assume is sweat. It's likely that her body was trying to fight the toxins with all of its might before she eventually lost.

If only you or Keebo had noticed sooner. You might have still been able to save her in time.
Depending on the toxin, activated charcoal might have been enough to save her. To think, all she needed was something as simple as charcoal and Kirumi might still be with all of you right now. The thought stirred wrath and grief in equal parts.

"What is it?" Shuichi asks as he moves to kneel down next to you. He doesn't touch the body. He seems too terrified to touch it. You pity the boy but don't understand why he's so hesitant. Shouldn't your roles be reversed?

"Look at the coloration of her skin and eyes. Whatever the suspect did, they caused a lot of liver damage. They probably used some kind of medicine as a poison, but there's the problem. I've kept such a close check on it..." You say as you continue to look for any indication of what kind of medicine was used. "If we had some proper supplies I could check her blood concentration, but even then, it'd likely be covered up by the alcohol. Damn."

"Do you think it's possible someone could have snagged the meds and given them to Kirumi before the party? I noticed you weren't in the nurse's office," Shuichi asks. You flinch at this comment. You aren't entirely sure how you're going to explain this to the class, let alone Shuichi, but you take a breath and hope the detective doesn't jump to assumptions the way he jumps at the sight of a dead body.

"No, here's the problem. To poison her, someone would have either needed to be sober enough after everyone went to bed or they would have had to spend the day with Kirumi slowly poisoning her. Unfortunately... both of these paint me as the killer," you decide to tell the truth to the younger boy whos eyes widen slightly. Trying to explain this in the trial later would be a pain and would cause everyone to jump on the death being your fault. At least explaining it to Shuichi now might gain you an ally.

"But you aren't, right?" Shuichi looks confused and concerned for a moment and you quickly shake your head. Gathering up your thoughts you try to explain the situation as best you can. The detective, to his credit, sits patiently and listens to your explanation before casting judgments.

"The reason I wasn't in the office is that I decided to come to help Kirumi. Thankfully so, since someone destroyed the kitchen earlier that day. I ended up spending the whole time with her. Then, during the party, unless someone was faking intoxication it would have had to have been me or Keebo who did it... If we go ahead and find a way to prove I didn't do it during the day technically we could use Keebo's testimony to prove my innocence at night since he was still awake after I fell asleep, but that leaves Keebo himself without an alibi," you say quietly with a shake of your head. Agitation boils deeply in the pit of your stomach.

It's hard to explain away how much time you spent with Kirumi. It could have happened earlier in the day since it was a little later when you actually came to spend time with Kirumi. The maid and you spent a while cleaning the kitchen, then you spent forever cooking. You only had half an hour at most before the party after that, in which time Kirumi was able to actually finish that awful tea. During all of that time, you were the prime suspect.

Shuichi nods a couple times. "I don't think it was you. You seem way too agitated by all of this, and I don't think you're acting. You genuinely want to help everyone and keep as many people alive as possible. But this leads us to an issue of not knowing who exactly did it... We should go check in with Momota-kun and Harukawa-san. Maybe investigate the nurse's office to make sure nothing's out of place?" You nod quietly in response.

You end up going to the nurse's office first since it's closer and when you go to check in with Maki and Kaito you'll hopefully also be able to check in with Kaede. It's not a very long walk from where you are to where you need to be, and you spend the whole time just quietly going over what you
know in your head. The biggest issue at the moment is going to be proving that you're innocent. You have no doubt there are some people in the class who will take the chance to accuse you and run with it if only to stir up trouble.

There's still the problem of having no main suspected either. Even if you do manage to prove the fact that you're innocent, it's going to take a bit of effort to hunt out the guilty party. Well... unless...

Your thoughts trail off as the pair of you arrive in front of the door to the nurse's office. You push your way into the room first, eyes darting around to try and locate anything of note. At a first glance, it doesn't seem like anything is out of place. All the bottles are in their proper spots and it doesn't seem like someone was rummaging around. If they wanted to steal anything, then they would have had to be someone careful. Someone calculating perhaps. Still, how would someone have managed to steal the medicine?

The timeline just wasn't matching up unless Kirumi was poisoned during the night, but you felt like that couldn't have happened since Keebo. Maybe it was foolish, but you have trust in Keebo. That means Kirumi would have had to have been poisoned in those moments between breakfast when you weren't monitoring the nurse's office and she would have had to already be poisoned by the time you arrive to check on her. That too didn't make sense since you didn't think there was anything slow acting enough like that in the office.

Some poisons could act like that, help the murderer get away before the bomb drops. But medicine is usually designed to be fast acting for quick relief. If Kirumi was poisoned before you started to spend time with her, then she would have keeled over and died long before the party, or you would have noticed something and been able to retrieve some charcoal and hopefully save her.

As you start to run short of personal ideas you pull out the ledger and the little black book. Placing both on the office desk you start to point things out for Shuichi who seems to be just as confused as you are at the moment.

"It looks like the math adds up, and it doesn't seem like there are any medicines missing. That's confusing," Shuichi says as the pair of you investigate the more easily accessible medicine in the room with the help of the ledger, the kind that people would go to first if they were looking to kill anyone. Your frown grows even deeper as small bubbles of anxiety hit your stomach. What if you can't find any substantial proof?

"I think this might be a bust, let's go meet up with the others. We should snap pictures of the ledger and the book just in case," you say. You'd discovered a function of the Monopad where you could take a picture of 'evidence' or 'clues' and it would show up in everyone else's Monopad and Monokuma File. You'd only discovered the function when Kaede started posting up the various testimonies of different students, both during the night and from the day before.

After finding the feature you and Shuichi had started to take pictures of anything substantial so you could have an easier time bringing it up during trials. You almost felt bad for anyone who pulled up their Monopad to find Kirumi's dead fish eyes suddenly starting at them. After coming to an agreement about how useless it was to keep standing around in the nurse's office the two of you made your way back to the dorms. When you arrived you found a small circle of Maki, Kaede, and Kaito who waved and called greetings out.

"Man, I really hope you two found something because our investigation was a bust! Harumaki and I couldn't find anything remotely useful," the astronaut says with a sigh as he flips on the Monokuma File. He jumps with a yelp and turns off the Monokuma File quickly. You have no doubt that it was Kirumi who made him jump.
"We couldn't even find her motive letter. It wasn't anything but a normal room," the child-caregiver says as she dismissively glances at her investigation partner. Shuichi at the very least gives Kaito a look of sympathy when Kaito shuts off the file and shoves it into his jacket.

"It was a bit difficult but we've been able to determine that the cause of death was likely in relation to toxins in the body. Given the skin tone of the corpse, there are obvious signs of liver failure," the detective reports what you were able to find. "Of course, I didn't really figure much out. I didn't really want to touch the body. Most of the evidence in regards to the cause of death was found by ____-san, but I can say with confidence that it's accurate," Shuichi ducks behind his hat and you feel a little bad for the poor baby boy.

"No shame in that buddy! Though, props to ____-san for being so brave," Kaito says with a quick nod. After you and Shuichi go over anything else you were able to discover, omitting the part that makes you seem like a suspect, Kaede starts her own report.

"It doesn't look like anyone has a very good alibi for last night, but everyone has really strong alibi's for earlier that day," Kaede says. "Tenko and Himiko were together the whole day. Gonta and Kokichi were together most of the time as well. Angie had apparently dragged Ryoma, Miu, Rantaro, and Korekiyo into spending time with her. Of course, the fitness club minus ____-san was together," Kaede reported. You'd come to learn the fitness club now automatically included you and Maki, a fact you didn't know the day before.

If you had known perhaps you would have spent the time with them and this might have turned out differently. Right now, though, it looks like you might be starting to hit a wall. You have an idea buzzing around at the back of your mind. It's slight, but you might have someone else pinned. You'll need to wait until the trial before you actually solidify your thoughts. Best not to make assumptions.

Shuichi frowns and quickly glances at you. You know exactly what he's thinking. He's thinking about all the evidence that points towards you. He's wondering if he should defend or prosecute you. Honestly, you can't say either way. A good detective puts the truth above their family and friendships, but a great detective doesn't jump the gun before all the evidence is on the table and all the suspects have enough pressure applied to them for the bad egg to start cracking. You wonder what kind of detective Shuichi is.

It looks like the group is starting to brainstorm ideas on where they can find more evidence, but everyone is cut off by the ringing chime of a bell.

"What? Already?" Kaede says in disbelief. You feel a bubble of anxiety and fear start to form in your chest, but when it pops it explodes in a shower of icy calm. There's no reason to doubt. You already know the answer. You have a single suspect pinned. You're better than a mystery as simple as this. It's go time. You know that you can win.

"Students, please proceed to the trial grounds so that the class trial can begin!"
made the murder itself too obvious or not, I'd love to get some feedback on who you think the killer is and if it seems too obvious or not.
A Jury's Terror

The screech of the elevator as your group of 16 approached the trial grounds does nothing to ease anyone's heart. Your own pounds against your chest like a caged bird. You feel like a caged bird, put on display for the amusement of someone else. A deep breath in and out does little to help you relax. You try to ignore the feeling, well aware of the job you have to do.

The 16 of you enter the grandiose trial room together as you desperately try to keep apprehension and grief from muddling your judgment. There are 17 places to stand, one already has a picture on it with Kirumi's face crossed out using pink paint. You swallow hard as you take the booth that's been assigned to you. The picture unsettles you deeply, but it could be worse. They could have used actual blood instead of paint.

You aren't sure how, but everyone seems to know their place almost by instinct, and you're no exception.

You find yourself standing between Maki and Angie. This placement can't possibly make you any more anxious. Your eyes dart towards Shuichi's position within the room. You two look at each other for a hard second. You can see the fear in each other's eyes, and you do your best to pull yourself together. This is a trial by fire for such a young detective. You don't know why a sense of protectiveness suddenly come over you, but you'll do your best to protect and guide him during this trial. Just in case there comes a time when you won't be able to.

Just as it starts to feel like your tongue is made out of cotton you feel a prickle at the back of your mind and suddenly your mouth can move again. Your words are weapons. Bullet and blades to find the truth of the situation. To call out the criminal. You've already figured it out, it wasn't hard. You just have to convince your classmates of this fact. That shouldn't be too hard either. You only hesitate for a moment, aware of the fate that the killer is going to end up facing, but that hesitation doesn't last long. What needs to be done, needs to be done.

"Now then, let the class trial of Kirumi Tojo the Ultimate Maid begin," Monokuma said in order to get the debate started. You could hear the cheers of his demonic little children as they stood under his grand chair. Your audience theory only seemed to gain more and more traction.

Kaede is the first to speak up to the group. "In that case, the first thing we should try and figure out is the cause of death," she offers up to the group. It's a good place to start but you know well enough that it's going to end up pinning you against a wall. You think that's going to be something unavoidable though, given just how much information points towards you. You'll just have to be careful in proving your innocents.

Kokichi shrugs, looking rather bored. "It's obvious that she had to have died due to alcohol poisoning. Considering the fact that everyone was drinking like the doctors were coming to cut off our legs the other day, it was bound to happen to someone. It just, unfortunately, had to happen to her. So I guess that counts as a suicide!" Kokichi smiles brightly like he's already solved the case, a look of pride flashing over his features. It's all for show, of course, you can see that in his gaze alone. He doesn't believe himself and he's waiting for someone to be smart enough to prove him wrong.

You don't have to wonder why. Kokichi is smart enough to carry the class during trials, but that wouldn't be fun for him or fun for the rest of the class if he happened to die. He wants someone to be smarter than him. Preferable Shuichi. He'll have to deal with it being you.
You cut into the conversation next. What you say is likely going to throw your head on the chopping block, but you're going to have to address everything in order to expose the truth. "While I don't disagree with the assessment of poisoning, I don't think it was the alcohol that did her in. Maybe it expedited the process, but the corpse was wrong. If she'd died to alcohol poisoning then her skin would have been tinted blue, not yellow! Therefore whatever poison got into her system would have caused more liver damage than the alcohol could have done without killing her in a different way. We can assume that it was some kind of medication."

"So what you're saying is... you fucked up at your job and someone was able to get their hands on something deadly because you messed up like an idiot," a vicious smile began to grow on the features of the supreme leader. You feel a sharp stab in your chest, but you don't back down from Kokichi's statement. His accusation isn't completely accurate by your own understanding of the case, but it's at least partially your fault. For that, you'll take responsibility. You even your gaze and look him dead in the eyes, unyielding and unfearful. His smile breaks for half a second as a glint of hesitation flashes in his gaze. Liar though he may be, you look at him like an equal and address him as such.

"Unfortunately, that's exactly what I'm saying. The problem is I checked over my notes and it doesn't seem like anything is missing," you admit your fault without batting an eye. This is your fault. If only you'd done better, then you could have prevented this. You won't, however, let your mistake get in the way of at least solving the murder. You won't take complete responsibility either when there are other factors at play.

"Couldn't you have just taken something yourself and messed with the ledger without anyone noticing? Since you had control of the nurse's office, you easily could have done the maid in!" Miu pointed an accusatory finger at you and you feel your pulse spiking slightly. Of course, it would be easy to assume you'd just altered the ledger. But the original had been created by Monokuma, it was printed out! That made it harder to fake something. Not impossible, but much harder than you wanted to put the effort into. You don't get the chance to explain that though.

"Yeah ____-san, you were the only one to not drink last night. You could have done it real discreet without anyone being the wiser. Please, confess to your sins so that Atua might forgive you," Angie tells you while flinging her arms wide open. The look she gives you is absolutely terrifying, her smile is far too bright for her words but her eyes look glassy and dead. You feel yourself shudder and try to formulate a response. The gaze of Angie temporarily seals your jaw shut.

"Please wait, everyone," Keebo says before you figure out a reply. You feel yourself breathe a small sigh of relief. "The murder could not have occurred last night since I was awake the whole time. The poison would have had to be a slow acting one that was put into Kirumi's system before the party. As stated earlier, it's likely the ingestion of alcohol helped to speed up the process. I believe that ____-san is innocent in this matter!" The robot tells the group.

"Oh yeah? Then where was she the day of the murder?" Miu continues her assault against you like she has a vengeance. You have no doubt she's probably still upset with you, and you truly can't blame her. You should have tried harder to make amends sooner. But if she doesn't back down she's going to get the whole group killed. You contemplate a lie, but you decide against it and let the truth slip from your lips.

"I... spent the whole day with Kirumi, helping her clean up and get ready." you admit quietly, essentially making yourself the prime suspect. You know that things don't match up, but the rest of the class can't see it from your perspective. They haven't figured out you couldn't change the ledger. They don't realize that the killer likely wouldn't be on the witness list given Monokuma's rules. But you can't force your way through the accusations to present these details, and so you
drown. There's a cacophony of noises and voices and accusations, you can barely hear yourself over it.

"Oh really?" Kokichi says, the glint in his eyes becoming all the more dangerous. "Well, if you don't have anyone to back you up on the fact you didn't do anything, then it looks like you're the prime suspect. It has to be you unless you can prove otherwise. So do you got anyone who can attest to your innocence during the encounter? Huh, huh, huh? Do you? Do you, do you, do you, do you!?" He leans forward a little more while he starts riling up the class even further.

You don't think he's purposefully attacking you though. His gaze rests against your own in a way that doesn't seem malicious or even accusatory, his words are prompting. You wonder for a moment if he's trying to test you. You open your mouth to start bringing up the evidence you hadn't gotten the chance to, but someone else pipes up before you can.

"But Kokichi-kun, she does. Kokichi-kun had Kokichi and Gonta spying on Kirumi-san and ____-san when we saw her going into Kaede-san's lab," Gonta says. The entire room goes silent with the revelation. Gonta whether on purpose or by accident gives you a way out and an alibi.

Kokichi stops immediately, looking at Gonta. "Gonta, you're an idiot. Shut up," he hisses, but his warnings go unbidden. His perfect plan to try and see just how smart you are is quickly unraveled by the least intelligent member of the class. At least in Kokichi's eyes. You shouldn't derive so much joy from the scene in front of you, but you can't help grinning like a cat as Kokichi's plan shatters.

"Kirumi-san and ____-san were saying really nice things about working together in order to make sure no one got hurt. ____-san didn't do anything that could have led to Kirumi-san getting poisoned. Then Kokichi-kun got angry for some reason and messed up the kitchen before they started cooking. Kokichi and Gonta were hidden in the closet the whole time, watching," the gentle giant says with a massive smile. He's so proud of himself like he's just cracked the case wide open.

He then turns to you with this bright and hopeful kind of gaze, almost reminiscent of a puppy. He's looking for praise quite obviously, but all Kokichi gives him is venom.

"You're not being helpful, Gonta," Kokichi growls but you can see the anger slowly deflating from his form as Gonta looks at him with these big, sad puppy dog eyes as his smile falls to pieces. You don't think you've ever thought about physically assaulting someone, but for half a second you're plotting against Kokichi. Not a murder, you could never kill, but if you had your way he'd be in the hospital for a couple weeks. It's only for half a second thought. You know full well you couldn't even hurt another person outside self-defense or combat training.

"Actually, Gonta-kun, that's exactly what we needed," Shuichi cuts in, and Kokichi falls silent now. "In addition, we know for a fact that Kokichi-kun and the rest of the group have been overlooking. The murderer can't help to discover the corpse and the discovery announcement won't go off until three people have seen it. The Monokuma File lists me, Keebo-kun, and ____-san as the three who 'discovered' the body. That means that the three of us couldn't be the murderers! Monokuma, can you vouch for the validity of my statement?" Shuichi turns to the bear in question.

"It is a rule that the person who kills the body cannot be one of the three to discover it. The three names listed are in fact the first three people to see the corpse this morning, and therefore are the three who discovered it. Everyone else was too hung over to notice immediate," the bear tells the group and there's a split second of silence.

"Alright, that clears up ____-san's name, but it still doesn't help us figure out who the killer is. That
means we're back to square one," Himiko offers up. The group once again begins to dissolve into arguments over who's the most likely to have done it if it isn't you or Keebo. You file away the detail about the ledger and try looking for a way to reorganize the class.

"Hey!" You shout at the group, your voice easily carries and all attention snaps towards you. It's almost startling how easy it is to push your voice above everyone else's. "For now we can't get fixated on who did it or we'll just keep going around in circles. We should focus on how and when it happened. Right now, none of the medicines from the office are missing and I've been very diligent about handing out singular pills. In addition, I got the original stock list as a printed version from Monokuma, so it would be impossible to reforge. The ledger in no way differs from this stock list. So, we need to figure out what the culprit used in order to commit the murder and how they got it without notice," you tell the group.

"Is it possible that someone managed to find poison or get ahold of medicines that weren't originally in the office?" You hear Maki musing out loud as the group tries to figure out what happened. Her gaze casts downwards thoughtfully before someone pipes up in response.

"We've checked all over the school, that seems to be the only place that has medicine," Ryoma responds to the child-caregiver as he tugs downwards on his hat. His expression is beyond miserable.

"You're kidding me, not even painkillers in one of the medkits around school? I've seen a couple on the walls," Kaito's disbelief is evident in his voice as he goes wide-eyed at Ryoma's assessment. You wonder if he's even looked inside one of those medkits. They aren't really medkits if you're being honest, not the good kind anyway. Some antibacterial creams and band-aids are about the extent of what's inside them.

"Kaito, do you ever pay attention to your surroundings?" Maki's voice is scathing but Kaito just smiles widely at her in what you assume is an 'obviously not' kind of grin. You love your friends, you really do, but Kaito isn't the smartest cookie. He's not even the dullest knife in the drawer, someone left him out in the toolshed.

"But who can say what everyone has in their rooms!" Kaito once again speaks up to only further prove he has no idea what he's doing.

"If you don't have anything in your room, then it's probably logical to assume that no one else has any medicines in their room," Maki tells the purple haired man. She sounds exasperated. Kaito doesn't back down and the begin to get into their own side argument which the group pointedly decides to ignore. A wise decision

"Could there be an error with the ledge then?" Himiko asks as she places a finger against her chin. You see multiple people trying to speak up at once, but a quick shout silences them all.

"That's wrong!" Kaede's voice rises about the rest of the group. Everyone turns towards her. You smile, knowing exactly what the blonde is about to bring up. Progress in the right direction.

"There's no error in the ledge, ____-san is just forgetting something. She's been very diligent about handing out only singular pills except in two notable cases," Kaede turns to you after prompting you to mention what you'd neglected to with your last statement.

You didn't forget about it, you just neglected to mention it to keep the trial from moving too quickly. Laying down all the facts then and there would just lead to arguments and discord as the killer tried to refute them. Perhaps this is what Kokichi had been attempting with his original accusation pointed towards you. Either way, bringing up the evidence when people were accusing you would have turned out nasty. With the group slightly calmer and not on a death march against
you, it would be safe to bring it up now.

You place a finger against your chin. "Tenko-san and Ryoma-kun came looking for medicine, Tenko-san for back problems and Ryoma-kun for some nightmares. Tenko-san insisted that coming back every day after practice would get annoying, and since she was only asking for Tylenol, she said she should get a whole bottle. Ryoma-kun only wanted some low dosage sleeping pills, so Tenko-san also argued for him since they ended up coming to me at the same time. I ended up agreeing and let them both go with the whole bottles," you tell the group.

"I've got it!" Shuichi says as he takes the conversation from you and continues on with his own thoughts. "Sleeping pills wouldn't cause the same kind of damage we saw, but Tylenol or scientifically known as acetaminophen can cause damage in large dosages," the detective says. You're glad that the detective is versed enough in medicines and toxins to be able to recognize that fact. It seems to help build the confidence of the detective, but he still hides behind his hat slightly. You'll burn that hat if you ever get the chance.

"But how would they know that's the case?" Tsumugi speaks up. She'd been mostly quiet up until this point. Not really a bad thing considering how hard it was to understand her at times. Tsumugi, as much as it pained you to admit, left a bad taste in your mouth. Her presence left you feeling uncomfortable like something was wrong. You were almost worried she would drag the conversation in circles, but at least she asks a question that helps to progress the conversation.

"When we first got the nurse's office open I remember ____-san mentioning something along those lines. A friend getting sick because of too much Tylenol. I also distinctly remember us both thinking we'd gotten spied on that day," Kokichi actually offers up, being helpful for once. Of course, his comment is off-handed and bored. You wonder if he's already figured things out or if he only thinks he's figured things out.

"Since Tenko-san was the one with the Tylenol bottle, should we assume she is the suspect?" Korekiyo asks the group. There are some noises to confirm. Tenko's expression turns of one to shock and panic as she recoils from the accusation.

"We shouldn't jump to assumptions though. She may be a suspect, but he deserves fair treatment," you tell the group. Someone being a suspect didn't instantly mean they were the culprit, and there were still details out on the table that hadn't been addressed yet.

"Wait for a second! Tenko couldn't have done it! She was with me all day," Himiko says in her normal drawling tone. You, however, pick out the slightest note of panic as she speaks. Tenko looks terrified from where she's standing. You're glad that Himiko is standing up for Tenko, but she does it poorly. No one seems to think much of the mage's comment.

"I would never do something like that, especially not to another girl!" Tenko cried with a vicious shake of her head. You start to formulate the best argument you can in your head, picking your words carefully.

"Than explain the pill bottle!" Kokich accuses, his smirk vicious and almost feral. So that was it huh? You catch Kokichi's eyes and have no choice but to think he's really suspecting Tenko. A poor choice, really.

A small smile jumps across your features. "Sorry Kokichi-kun, but I'm going to have to ruin your fun again," you tell the boy. "Tenko-san isn't the culprit, and this should prove it!" You puff out your chest and smile at Kokichi as his expression falls away to something completely blank.

"Excuse me?" Kokichi asks. He seems to be at a lack for any other response. You take the silence
that casts itself over the trial to bring up the final damning evidence. It was show time.

"I didn't think much of it earlier, but I heard Tenko-san mention while she has been feeling better she's been really tired after her practices. This obviously isn't normal for her. I didn't think anything of it until I remembered getting distracted by Tenko explaining the new technique she was trying out. We starting talking and Ryoma-kun didn't join the conversation. The labels on the pill bottles are little more than masking tape. It would be easy for the undistracted occupant of the room to quickly switch the labels without the two of us being the wiser," you announce. The group turns towards Ryoma whose eyes widen.

"What? Me? Why would I do that? There's not even a reason for me to live anymore, let alone kill someone else. Besides, Tenko started feeling better so that means she got the Tylenol," the man sulkily says.

"Not necessarily," you counter. "It's possible that she could have been feeling a placebo effect, and the real effect the medicine was having on her was her was fatigue! If we had the medicine bottles, then I'd be able to recognize them based on appearance. In addition to that, if we had the bottles we could count the pills," you say with a decisive nod. Your mention of a placebo seems to win over a couple of your classmates.

"Oh! Oh! Tenko has her pill bottle!" The girl announces as she pulls out the bottle. You don't know where she was keeping it, but you don't ask questions. If it solves the case, then it solves the case.

"Great, toss it over," you tell her and she chucks the bottle towards you. You catch it easily enough and dump out the contents. "Just as I thought, these are sleeping pills, not Tylenol. In addition, there's 29 of them. This bottle is only supposed to have 30 pills, meaning that Tenko-san's only taken one and couldn't have used it to kill Kirumi-san. Ryoma-kun, would you like to defend yourself by presenting your bottle," you ask. The man is sweating and looking nervous.

"Why should I have to!?!" He suddenly yells. You're all taken aback by the force of his screech. You flinch, blinking a couple of times. In a second he's gone from small and quiet to loud and very angry looking. It's a sharp contrast to the 'normal' Ryoma. "You don't have a motive and you still have no idea how the murder happened. Who was the one who managed to get Kirumi-san to take the medicine? ____-san did it! Isn't it obvious? She must have stolen the medicine and snuck it into something Kirumi was eating or drinking!"

"And how exactly would she get the medicine when it was in was in your room? Obviously, you're not stupid enough to forget about locking your door," Kokichi says. He's recovered from his shock over Tenko not being the culprit rather quickly. He looks at his hand with a bored expression as he speaks, but you can hear the edge in his voice. He's trying to tease a confession out of Ryoma. It won't take long for him to spill information that he isn't supposed to know. Kokichi glances at you with the smallest hint of a smile glinting in his gaze.

"Obviously because she can pick locks!" Ryoma yells at the two of you. This takes a lot of your classmates off guard, but Kokichi and you quickly go on the offense.

Kokichi and you share one last glance, a terrifying smile on his face. "Oh? And how would you know that? I don't remember saying she was the one who picked the lock when we mentioned the nurse's office. In fact, I distinctly remember leaving that part out! So how would you know, Mr. Spy? Huh? Huh, huh, huh, huh? Hey, Ryoma-kun, answer me!" He leans forward excitedly and you jump into the conversation where he leaves something of a lull.

"Kokichi-kun is entirely correct. While I do know how to pick a lock, the only one I've picked so far was the lock to the nurse's office which just so happens to also be where I told Kokichi about
Tylenol being a potential poison. The both of us were very certain we got spied on. The thing is, I almost thought I was imagining it since the footsteps were so light. The only thing that made me realize I wasn't hearing the wind was the black blur that jumped around the corner. It was pretty small," you tell Ryoma.

Kokichi nods in what almost seems to be approval. Shuichi glances between the two of you, an odd expression on his features, but you ignore it. Focus on the present threat and all.

Ryoma seems to seethe at this idea. "You still don't have a motive and neither of you knows how in the hell Kirumi-san got poisoned! Kokichi-kun is the one who runs around being a dick to everyone, he has more motive than I do with the way he talks!" Ryoma bellows.

Almost the entire rest of the class has fallen silent. Shuichi takes this chance to jump back into the conversation. "Except you might, depending on what exactly your past self wrote in your letter," he says with a glint in his eyes. "So how about it, everyone put your letters in front of you. Whoever has an open letter will officially become a suspect.

Everyone complies except Ryoma, who goes completely rigid. A couple people put opened letters on the table. Kokichi pouts when he puts the ripped to shreds envelope out in front of him. A couple others like Maki, Angie, Korekiyo, and Kaito all have their letters opened. Kaede presents her sealed letter proudly and most of the rest of the class is able to do the same. The letter you put in front of you looks just as pristine as when you first got it and no one is the wiser. Which is hilarious since you're pretty sure you put the fake out by mistake. You can see the smallest peeling on Himiko's like she'd been battling with herself to open it or not, before eventually voting to keep it sealed. Ryoma doesn't move.

"So now we have a motive," Shuichi says confidently. You give a smile and a nod to the detective who quickly seems to beam at you.

"What about a method though? We still don't know how the murder occurred," Kaede says. Looking back, this is perhaps one of the easiest things to explain. It's pathetic how you didn't notice it before. You could have avoided all of this, but it's too late to be thinking about the past. You could only move forward and be more observant.

"I might know," you tell the group. "In fact, I might be able to summarize this entire case if you'd be willing to let me handle it?"

"Go right ahead ____-san," Shuichi says for the class as you gather all of your thoughts together. It's going to be a long explanation and you're going to have to be exact.

"Here's exactly what happened! It started out innocent enough with Ryoma-kun accidentally spying on myself and Kokichi-kun, he hadn't actually meant to but his curiosity was piqued as the two of us spoke. He hadn't actually begun to plot a murder yet, so he didn't think much of it. Maybe he was even trying to make sure that Kokichi-kun and I didn't decide to do that exact thing. Either way, he went unnoticed and didn't make any mention of it since he didn't want to be antagonized by Kokichi-kun like Tsumugi-san had.

"Ryoma-kun and Kirumi-san had been getting continually closer, spending more time together. That's when the motives were handed out, he thought it was the perfect chance to strike. While I can't confidently say what his past self told him, it likely mentioned a reprieve from his past actions as Tenis Killer if he murdered someone and escaped the game. That was all that it took for him to jump to the only answer he knew in a situation like this.

"This is the moment when he came to me. It was dumb luck that he came in at the same time as
Tenko-san. He figured sleeping pills would be enough to do Kirumi-san in, but seeing opportunity present itself in front of him he switched the labels while no one was looking and took the Tylenol, assuming that I would remember my own statement and convince the class to blame Tenko-san. With his plan being set in action, the day of the party preparations he created a very special kind of tea with crushed up Tylenol brewed in. Of course, this made the tea taste absolutely foul as I might attest to since I almost had a cup if it wasn't for the flavor. Kirumi-san, as the Ultimate Maid, though of it as her duty to drink the gift Ryoma-kun had given to her. It took her the entire day to finish, and most of it was drunk after she and I finished cooking right before the party. We couldn't finish earlier due to the mess the kitchen was left in.

"It wasn't enough to kill her immediately so during the slumber party Ryoma-kun went out of his way to target her and get her to drink as much possible. He made himself look innocent by pretending that it was flirting, which didn't raise any warning bells. In addition, he wasn't the only person targeting just one person since Kaito-kun and Kokichi-kun had both teamed up on Maki to spite her for having something so low proof. The plan went off without a hitch, the alcohol speeding up the process just enough to make sure she died in the early morning where no one could pin it on him. Keebo-kun and I being the only people sober enough have spent a long time taking care of everyone before I eventually fell asleep. Keebo-kun who decided to stay up all night was the first person to discover the corpse during routinely checking on everyone to make sure that no one was hurt. Unfortunately, Keebo-kun probably missed the signs since he wasn't as versed in medical situations as I, leaving him only to notice hours later when he realized she wasn't breathing and didn't have a pulse.

"Taking all of this isn't account, the killer is... you! Ryoma Hoshi, the Ultimate Tenis Pro!" Ryoma gives an uncharacteristic screech as you finish up your explanation. You can't help striking something of a pose of sorts as you jab your finger in Ryoma's direction. It feels childish and familiar in a way.

Monokuma giggles slightly. "Alright! Everybody cast your votes! Will you make the right choice, or the dreadfully wrong one? Who's it gonna be, who's it gonna be?" The robotic bear cheers as the voting buttons appear. Everyone clicks their button as the votes appear on the screen. 15 votes show up next to Ryoma. 1 vote, however, shows up next to your own name. You would have laughed if it wasn't so sad. A large wheel appears and begins to spin before landing on the icon of Ryoma. Bells go off as the words Guilty appears in bright red script.

"Congratulations! You got it right!" The bear cheers.

Ryoma just sighs, shaking his head. "I suppose it's about time I finally got what I deserve," he says miserably. You can see honest regret in his gaze as he lowers his head miserably.

"Ryoma-kun. If I could ask one question. Why?" You say as you watch the class look around just as miserably as Ryoma. Maybe Ryoma killed Kirumi, but he's still one of your classmates and no one wants to see him die. You can see the distressed expression on Kaede's face. There's not a single person who's happy with this outcome. Even Kokichi's gone silent. You wonder if he blames himself as much as you blame your own self.

"Just like you assumed, my letter said if I got out of here I'd get to go free. I guess I forgot about the fact all of you would have to die for my freedom. I really didn't learn anything the first time, did I? I feel terrible, guilty beyond forgiveness. Monokuma, do your worst," he says with a sigh of resignation.

"Alright then! Let's give it everything we've got! It's punishment time!" The bear cheers as it hits a large red button. You feel your blood freeze.
Ryoma Hoshi Has Been Found Guilty

Execution Commencing

Yakuza Racquet

A chain which is attached to a collar descends down, clipping itself around Ryoma's throat. The man begins to gasp and scream as he's pulled up into the sky and disappears. A large TV screen appears, on it you see Ryoma reappear in a field of what seems to be green. Fake turf perhaps. He looks around in a panic as he tries to register what's going on. Before he can figure it out, a massive hand begins to descend from the sky and plucks Ryoma off the ground. The camera pans out to reveal two members of the Yakuza who are holding tennis racquets. At least, you assume they're Yakuza. Ryoma seems to flinch as he's held up, recognition flashing in his gaze.

Oh, how sweet is the irony that Monokuma dishes out.

The giant Yakuza tosses Ryoma upwards into the air, his form remaining suspended for half a second. Before he can come back down, the Yakuza swings his racquet. The racquet makes direct contact with Ryoma. You winced as Ryoma's tiny body connected with the net, strings cutting into his flesh. There's an audible snap and his form goes cascading through the sky. Blood flies with him in a glorious display of red that splatters turf. Is he even alive anymore? You wonder if you should be proud or ashamed of the fact that you hope he's already dead.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem that Ryoma will receive such mercy. His scream rips through the air as he goes flying towards the other Yakuza's side of the court. With another ferocious whack, he sends Ryoma's body back to the first Yakuza. There's a spray of blood and the snapping of more bones. Another howl of pain. The Yakuza lunges with his racquet, swinging at Ryoma's form but missing. Ryoma's body continues to fly through the air, on a direct collision course with the ground.

You notice that the Monokubs seem to be standing with their father on what looks to be a judge's platform. In one swift movement, you saw shifting in their positions. Monodam gave a sharp shove which resulted in Monokid toppling towards the ground. Ryoma's body landed on top of the robot with a crack, the head of Monokid rolling away while Ryoma's limp form turned to mush. A spray of red, jutting white, and what looked to be organs painted the ground. What was once Ryoma had become nothing more than a puddle painting the green.

You felt your stomach churning while cries went up among your friends and companions. Some looked horrified, others appalled. You quietly turned your gaze away, you didn't have the heart to look at the scene any longer. The TV disappears back to where it came from as you try to control your stomach. Seeing corpses of murder victims was one thing. Even the absurdly gruesome ones. This was entirely another. This was a death that didn't need to happen, which was perhaps the thing that made you the sickest about this situation.

"This is terrible," Kaede said, looking at Monokuma with disgust and distrust. You couldn't help but agree with the pianist. You felt shaken and unnerved by the execution. You almost felt dizzy.

"Don't worry," the bear replied. "You'll get used to after the 3rd or 4th trial. Besides, he was a murderer. He killed poor, innocent Kirumi. In fact, he almost killed ____ too. If he'd gotten away with it he even would have killed all of you," the two-toned bear said. You knew exactly what he was trying to do, pin the blame on what was essentially still a victim of circumstance and manipulation. You couldn't remain silent, even if you didn't fully trust your voice not to shake.

"Anyone can turn to bloodshed in a situation like this. It doesn't mean we should, it doesn't make it
right. But any one of us could snap at any moment. That being said, it doesn't make an execution like this any more ethical. Cruel and unusual is the wording I believe applies," you say with a shiver. Your words come out with a slight venom as you stare down Monokuma. You don't know where the sudden ferocity in your gaze comes from. Nor do you know the origin of the flaming sensation in the back of your throat.

"You'll probably change your mind after the next murder," Monokuma says as though he knows what's going to happen. Given the fact he described the nature of the killing game as scripted, maybe he does. You'll burn the script before you go down without a fight, though.

Kaede gritted her teeth. "There won't be another murder," she yells at the bear. Everyone looks at her. Kokichi sneers, but most of the rest of the class have looks of quiet sympathy. Mournful even. She stomps off, moving to leave the trial ground. Monokuma just gives his trademark laughter as the group begins to leave. Slowly everyone filters out of the room. Except for you, that is. You look up at Monokuma, eyes sharp and temper seething.

"I know that she's wrong, but that won't stop either of us from fighting back," you declare to the creature and the 4 cubs who remain. Your chest is puffed out proudly, your hands curled into fists. You stare up at Monokuma like a fallen god with a sword and a grudge to wield.

"I look forward to it," the bear purrs in a velveteen voice. You stare at one another for a long moment before you follow the rest of your class. There's a fire under your fingers, just under your skin. The blazing inferno that left you during the investigation has returned, pushing all the ice that had once lived in your veins far from your mind. There's no fear, no hesitation, only anger. While Monokuma might have won this fight, while two deaths might have been the result of your oversights, you refused to let this bear win the war.

This was a psychological war, and Monokuma was doing his best to pit all of you against each other. Kokichi had taken the role of antagonist to try and control the situation, that much was clear, but he was just another one of the pawns set up by the Gamemasters. Such foreign beings, pulling on the strings while the 15 of you who remained tried to figure out what to do. The answer wasn't obvious, that's for sure. Monokuma though, he wasn't really as much the enemy as he was an amused observer. One who had offered you a rare opportunity to get even, make the playing board fair. A foe who offered you gifts and perks if only you made things interesting. Your resolve hardened. Yeah, you'd make this interesting all right.

In nothing more than moments, this game had become a war. Your resolve shifted, your motivation shifted. You wondered what the sensation that curled around your chest and pulled at your determination was. It felt warm, light and airy in a way that was oh so familiar and tempting. It felt a bit like the existence that you thought had died with Kirumi, curling up in the center of your chest quietly. With the renewed flame that sat in your veins, it too rose with the ferocity of a phoenix. You would not let go of your ice. You'd need it for the next trial. But, it seemed you were a child of fire.

Smirking to yourself quietly, it almost felt good to declare war. You knew that you could win, after all. The Gamemasters would be nothing compared to the wrath with which you'd take this game into your teeth and crush it.

You weren't just going to beat Danganronpa. Even if it cost every drop of blood in your veins, you were going to fucking destroy it.
Can't Sleep

You returned to your room feeling drained, your limbs felt heavy and it was hard to concentrate on any one thing for too long. After the trial, your entire class decided it would be best to destroy the motivation letters. Since Monokuma didn't try to get in the way, you all guessed there would be no harm in it.

The group is able to convince Monokuma and by extension the cubs to help in building a bonfire right outside the shrine. The four remaining cubs seem to be a little off in their dynamic, three mourning and the fourth celebrating. You held no pity for the remaining three. They occasionally fixed you with a cautious glare as though it was your fault. Well, in a way, it did kind of look like you'd cursed Monokid earlier that day. To an extent, it would make sense why they'd look at you with fear and distrust, even if it was Monodam who sealed his brother's father.

When the fire is raging and it comes time to sacrifice the letters, you and Kaede are the ones to go first. You, of course, having prepared for this ahead of time were able to produce the fake for destruction and watch it burn as the others cast their letters into the inferno. No one questioned you, no one so much as dared to think that you threw a fake into the flame. For now, you and Kaede are the leaders and the paragons of the class. Until there's a major shift in class dynamic, it's likely going to stay that way. Kokichi gets questioned though, and a couple of the people who read their letters get stern looks.

After actually getting to your room you feel like you could collapse into a heap and just stay there like a broken doll. Your mind is absolutely drained, but your body is still humming with energy. Adrenaline and the fact that you don't usually need much sleep end up combining together into what is shaping up to be a sleepless night. The nighttime announcement hasn't even gone off yet and you're already preparing for either a lack of sleep or constant nightmares. even if you do decide to try and get some sleep, you'll have chronic nightmares to contend with, making the idea seem far less worth it.

You suppose there's no time like to present to continue your investigation.

A thought occurs to you glance towards your closet before pulling yourself off your bed and stumbling towards it. You sit down in a heap in front of it you wonder if you have enough energy for this. The book sits at the bottom of your closet. It evokes a mixture of knowing that you should really investigate and simultaneously wanting nothing more than to lie face down on your bed and scream. You do, however, notice something interesting along with the book. Removing the book you notice that the panel of the floor is an off color compared to the flooring in the rest of your room. Pressing down on the paneling it shifts slightly. You quickly find that the fake flooring is removable.

Taking off the panel, you peer into the empty area. There's quite a lot you notice. Most of it is supplies. A kit for drawing blood and putting it into blood bags, something for repairing pocket watches, and a couple other small details. There's a badge at the bottom of everything but you can't quite tell what it's for. It's not too dissimilar to a police badge, but it doesn't quite match up to your mental image. There's some kind of writing on it. The badge is far too tarnished to make much out, however, and you eventually have to give up on trying to understand the writing on it.

There seems to be a lot of helpful details, and you might start drawing your own blood for emergency scenarios. As for the pocket watch fixing kit, you'll start operating but you're not sure if the materials provided will necessarily help you get it open.
You can't help but wonder if this is a new addition or something that was already there before. Monokuma's words implied there would also be a new addition to the room once the trial was over and done with. You don't think about it for right now, having more to worry about. Your classmates still haunt your thoughts. You wonder what kind of families they had. If your memories are faked, is someone still waiting for them on the other side? Is there a mother quietly weeping over the death of her daughter? Maybe a younger brother who doesn't understand why his big brother needed to kill when he was never imprisoned at all.

Those thoughts rest like sour grapes on your tongue. How can you explain something like that to a grieving parent? To an upset sibling? To a weeping lover? This game is twisted and yet there are people who watch it? Imagine having to watch your child get executed or the person you love most start to fall in love with someone else. It hurts all the more knowing it's scripted. It looked scripted, feels scripted, for most of your classmates the emotions they come to feel in this school will be entirely and utterly false. You're among the lucky ones, or unlucky depending on how you look at it. That, however, means you're going to be among the group that has to quietly explain to weepy parents how and why their child had to die. Why rang around your head a couple times.

Why was the one question you couldn't begin to wrap your head around. There was plenty of other questions to ask yourself, but they all had answers you could figure out and grasp onto. You knew some of the answers already. The answer of why this was a thing, why this game needed be happening, that question you had no answer to and it twisted up your insides so painfully. It was hard to concentrate on any of the smaller questions when why kept pounding on the inside of your skull, but you knew you weren't going to get any answers if you didn't focus on the small stuff first. It was like a puzzle, you had to put down the right pieces first before anything started to make sense. Start with the corner pieces, get an outline of the situation, then you can start moving in a little further.

As you're about to start your investigation you notice a strange noise. It sounds like... a drill? Your gaze slips towards your door just as two of the cubs appear. Monodam and Monotaro. "Rise and shine, ursine!" The two cheerily declare.

"We're sorry to bother you so late at night, but we got some orders from papa!" Monotaro says with a joviality that's chilling after the trial and the death of one of their brothers. Monotaro seems not to mind, quite the contrary in fact. The only one that really seemed to mind directly after the trial was Monosuke, and you have a feeling that's mostly due to fear. You suppose it wasn't just you and Monodam who hated Monokid.

"FATHER HAS INSTRUCTED US TO ADD ADDITIONAL LOCKS TO YOUR DOOR. HE SAID THAT ONE SUCH AS YOURSELF SHOULD NOT BE LEFT WITHOUT AT LEAST TWO LOCKS," Monodam said. You noticed that the green bear had become far more vocal after the death of their cruelest brother. Likely a direct result of not being bullied any longer. You couldn't say you minded. You disliked all the cubs, but you hated Monokid. Monodam even though he shared your hatred wasn't going to win any brownie points.

"We're sorry if we woke you up, but we didn't really get the chance to do this before or during the trial, so we have to do it now," Monotaro apologizes for himself and his siblings. You assume the drilling is from Monofunny and Monosuke who are most likely on the other side of the door installing the new locks.

"It's fine," you tell the two cubs. "I had no intention of sleeping regardless. There's too much to think about right now. Besides, the extra locks will do good for my sanity if nothing else," you tell the two. You were a light sleeper, it was just a fact of life. If you door so much as creaked in the middle of the night you'd at least be conscious enough to notice. If someone strolled in you'd be
awake in half a second and ready to brawl if the need be. That being said, you were still paranoid someone might pick your lock without you noticing.

Perhaps the panel at the bottom of your closet was useful in more ways than one. "If I could be so bold, can I make a request?" You ask the two bears. They glance at each other and then nod. "Could you also put a lock on my closet? Just a precaution," you say.

The pair grow quiet for a long moment before Monodam speaks up. "I HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH THAT AS LONG AS YOU CAN ALL GET ALONG. MONOFUNNY WILL GIVE YOU A NEW KEYCHAIN AS SOON AS WE ARE DONE WITH THE LOCKS," the green bear says with a quick nod. Monotaro doesn't seem to have the desire, let alone the courage, to go against his brother. You breathe a quick sigh. Once you're done with the book you'll put both it and your actual letter into the panel at the bottom of your closet.

Having an extra lock on your door would be a much-needed reassurance, that was enough to be certain of. You hated the idea of your door being easy to break into, and while you doubted Kokichi might sneak in to purposefully hurt you the idea that he could pick locks was unsettling. You had half a mind to doubt the fact that Kokichi could hurt you. That being said, you were cautious before you were bold. It was a philosophy that had served many of your kind well!

You shake your head in an attempt to banish your stray thoughts. There's a book sitting on the ground next to you that needs to be read. You really should get around to investigating it.

Cracking open the cover you look at the first page, studying the title that you weren't able to see before. "Biography Of A Killer," the title reads. You blink a couple times. Odd title, you wonder if this is going to be actual nonfiction or another cheesy romance novel you have to pick apart for clues. Judging by the first couple pages you can make the assessment that this is a nonfiction story, but it could just be extremely elaborate and still made up.

"Dedicated to my fellow survivors of the Hope's Peak incident. To those of us who struggled and survived the first official killing game. I dedicate this book to all of my classmates so that the world may never forget the account of what happened that day. What was real, what was a lie, and what it did to not just our minds but our hearts and our souls."

"This story isn't just a story, but a tribute to the horrors that we had to endure."

You feel a little bad for this woman as you read through the dedication. You don't know why, but something deep inside of your chest twists and burns. Toko Fukawa was her name, right? You don't know what this Hope's Peak incident was, but something in the back of your mind tells you that you should. What's usually reduced to a little voice in the back of your head is screaming, howling out words you can't understand and throwing emotions in your face that you can't fully process.

You have no idea why you should be familiar with the contents of this book, but it resonates with you on a level that confuses you. There's a certain kind of affinity, an understanding, sympathy, as well as a possessive protectiveness that the words Hope Peak bring to the back of your mind. At the bottom of the dedication page is the crest for what you assume to be Hope's Peak. It rings bells, and looking down at your breast pocket you find the markings to be identical.

That's odd. It's typical for a student's uniform to bear the crest of their high school. You never remember going to high school though. Well, more so you can't remember the name of your old high school. You do have foggy memories of attending, but they're obscured and possibly getting mixed up between your narrative and your actual past. The name though, that completely eludes you. Was that just one of the details the Gamemaster's neglected to supply? It's because you aren't
a high schooler anymore, the voice in the back of your mind says. It sounds agitated. You were though, and this is where you went, it proceeds to chirp and it fills you with a small rush of pride. You still don't understand.

If you went to this high school, then it would explain why the mention of an incident set off such a response. Well, at least partially. It could easily be implied this happened last year or even 100 years ago depending on the age of the book and the high school itself. The author implies that she was a survivor of this incident, but when you look the publication date is scratched out in sharpie. Stupid bear. Since you can't bring up any memories of the incident, then you feel it's safe to assume that it happened a while ago. You tack on a couple question marks next to that little detail, just in case.

No matter how insistent your own internal voice is (yes, your own, not the Gamemaster's) you can't bring up any memories of ever attending this school. You barely remember being a student for any span of time. You can't remember any schooling at all prior to being in high school. That's because you were homeschooled. Another rush of agitation as the part of you that still subconsciously remembers tries to pull this understanding into your conscious. Your subconscious only seems to grow more agitated by the minute. You are currently undergoing a similar effect.

You decide your only clue right now is the book, so you decide to keep reading it.

"In the year XXXX, Hope's Peak was known as the world's greatest hope. It was a school that catered entirely to Ultimates, scouting out potential students who were already in high school and inviting them to attend in order to better hone their crafts. Graduation from this school was a guarantee of future happiness and job opportunities. That's how I, the woman who'd come to be known as the Ultimate Writer came to attend this school. After publishing multiple best sellers I was invited to this prestigious academy."

"For many of us, it was nothing less than a dream come true. For others, like the esteemed Byakuya Togami, it was nothing less than to be expected. For a year we lived happily, enjoying each other's company and learning about each other. Embracing the hope that Hope's Peak was supposed to cultivate. We weren't aware of the machinations of the most diabolical 17-year-old to ever walk this planet. The woman who went by the name of Junko Enoshima. By turning the class before us into her follows, wrapping them up to embrace Despair entirely she was able to make an army."

"This army took all of Japan by storm, and Junko is all of her confidence decided to dub the event The Tragedy. Its true full title is something too large and pompous to repeat, but the Tragedy explains things well enough."

"Having come to adore her classmates, she decided that the only way to truly enjoy us was to feel the Despair that our deaths brought her. That was the start of the very first official Despair inducing killing game."

This didn't really help you as much as you were hoping. You'll have to read the entire book to get something helpful, at least, that's how it seems to you. You can read to story in its entirety later, for now, you skip to the last chapter, hoping for it to shed light on your situation.

"The neo-world program? I ask hesitantly as I watch the rest of my formerly dead classmates sitting up. They hold their head in confusion, gazes darting around to take in their surroundings. Some people shied away from looking at those they'd killed. Others glared at their killers with a wounded expression. Some just turned their heads downwards, looking sheepish, knowing that their own actions were wrong but not regretting them due to circumstance."
"That's right," Makoto says with a quick nod. He gives that disgustingly hopeful, patient smile that he always gives. 'Junko never wanted the killing game to end. She loved all of us so much that she wanted the game to repeat over and over. If anything, we're the lucky ones. We're the only killing game so far to ever use this program. While we've been stuck in here a lot of other killing games have been held, real-life killing games,' the boy looked down mournfully as though he wished he could save all of them. Knowing he, he probably did."

"Kyoko, ever the voice of reason, picked up where Makoto left off. 'It's very likely that even if we end these killing games and manage to help most of the remaining despairs, there will be a Second Wave Tragedy. No matter our best efforts, it seems as Junko's left her touch on this world. That being said, it isn't all doom and gloom. It's possible that with the help of Future Foundation we can repurpose this software back to its original intent for therapy and we can, therefore, use it on the remaining Despairs,' the purple haired girl said with the warmest expression I'd ever seen her hold."

"W-will that really fix anything? And what the heck is a Future Foundation?" I stuttered out as I looked at them, trying to decide if they were mad or not."

"By perfecting this software we'll be able to put families back together, save thoughts from a nearly genocidal slaughter for being mentally ill. It's unethical to disregard those infected with Despair when it's not different than being sick!' Typical Makoto shouted with that vehemently hopeful expression of his. If not a single other person can, then Makoto will save this world alone. 'Future Foundation are the guys who are currently taking care of us. Kyoko and I are planning to join them. Fukawa-san, you should join us as well. For a brighter future'"

"I stared at these two idiots for a long time, trying to make my decision. Even without the input of Syo, it was a fairly obvious one to make. 'Fine,' I groaned as I took the hand that was offered to me. Together, for a brighter future. Even if there would continue to be more killing games, real killing games, we'd all keep moving forward. Together."

At the bottom of the page is a crest, not too dissimilar from the Hope's Peak crest but different enough. You take a guess that it's the crest belonging to this supposed Future Foundation. Your eyes linger on your left hand. The insignia marking your glove and the markings on the page look nearly identical, if not completely identical! Was this supposed to be a clue from Monokuma, or is it an indicator of the fact you're a member of Future Foundation. The idea doesn't quite sit right with you, and you find yourself unsure of such a conclusion.

Either way, this book answers some important questions. So the very first killing game was completely faked in order to create never-ending Despair. The following killing games, all the killing games happening at the same time, and maybe some test killing games that might have happened prior to this 'first official' one were completely real. You felt a small sliver of the hope in your chest fading. When you first started reading that section about a Neo-World program you were hopeful that this killing game might be fake, but the odds are seemingly against you.

From there, it's not too hard to assume that your killing game is a product of The Second Wave Tragedy that the characters started talking about towards the end. Of course, these were just characters. You couldn't be entirely faithful that their accounts were accurate. Maybe it was dedicated to the original survivors of the killing game, but were these people even real? For all you knew this was just some massive phenomena and you were sick fanboys and fangirls so obsessed with a media trend you were willing to throw your lives on the line to be a part of it.

Nah, that would be a stupid end twist. You could always see a satisfying ending coming. There was no evidence that indicated an ending like that though!
You try to refocus your thoughts, focusing on what you learned. It doesn't give you any indication on how to beat the game, just a couple of context clues. That being said, you didn't read the whole book, you just skimmed the start and the end.

You barely notice the silence while you sit and try to understand the words written on the paper and the words swirling around inside your head. It's too much to handle and the silence suddenly feels deafening. You suppose that means that the cubs have ceased operating on your doors.

Glancing towards your desk you see a brand new key ring. Your door now has two locks and a deadbolt, the closet has a single lock. The locks themselves look fairly complex.

Taking a deep breath you find yourself less mentally drained than you were before. If anything, your entire being is humming with unspent energy. The new discovery has you reeling but it also fills you with a new determination. You're wide awake now and you want nothing more than to turn the entire school upside down hunting for more clues!

You move to your closet, unlocking the door and stashing the book under the secret panel. You absolutely do not want anyone else finding this thing. You'd burn it here and now if you weren't worried Monokuma would harass you for the destruction of school property. Not to mention there was the potential for more clues hidden inside it.

Before you can decide what to do next, a knock on your door catches your attention. The nighttime announcement went off not long after the trial ended and everyone went to their rooms to sleep. Sleep still feels impossible to you for the time being. You're hesitant to answer the door in case it might be danger knocking. Wouldn't it be better that someone target you though, considering you can actually defend yourself? Probably. You really aren't sure of anything anymore.

Either way, you don't think that one murder would follow so closely on the tail of the other. It would be messy and there hasn't been a new motive yet which would be fairly boring and if there's one thing Monokuma can't stand then it's boring.

You open the door and come face to face with Kaede. "Ah! I didn't actually expect you to be up this late... I just... can't sleep and I didn't know who to talk to..." she says, her voice nervously trailing off as she refuses to meet your gaze. "I'm sorry if I'm bothering you though, I can probably find something to occupy my time, it's just easier to talk to someone else," she says nervously like she's scared you'll send her away. You don't know why Kaede would come to you of all people. You've been friendly to the girl, but you're nowhere near as close to her as Shuichi is.

It's not like you'll send her away for that though.

"No, no, it's fine. You can go ahead and come in," you tell her. Kaede isn't someone who you're distinctly worried about. She's fairly harmless, at least as far as you're concerned. She only further proves your assessment when she waddles in and stands awkwardly in the center of your room like she thinks she's done something wrong. Sweet, awkward, sunshine child... At least there's nothing potentially incriminating left out for her to see.

You're glad that you put away everything clue related before she came in. You'd pulled the masking tape off of the books on the shelf and placed it inside the books just in case a scenario like this came up. You aren't sure how similar or different everyone's room looks, but you're glad that she's calling on you after the first trial and not something like the fifth. You're sure that by then your room would be a mess of clues and books that would look awfully suspicious.

You motion for Kaede to go ahead and sit on your bed while you straighten up a couple of the books that you have actually left on the table. Nothing bad for her to see, just a couple of storybooks and some technical stuff that would probably bore her. They were books you'd
originally planned on reading after you were done with the investigation in order to lull yourself into eventual sleep. You wondered how long you could go without sleep before you died.

"So you really can pick locks, huh? That's pretty cool! I'd be worried if you were Kokichi though," she makes light conversation with you. She laughs slightly as she sits down on the bed, rubbing her arms anxiously. Her eyes flit towards the door every couple seconds like she's worried someone's going to walk in. You don't think she's worried about you doing something dangerous given her body language, so the former is your best guess as to why she's acting in such a shifty manner.

"Do you want me to lock the door?" You ask. She looks up at you, confused for a moment. "I'll be completely honest, the Monokubs installed a couple extra locks for me because I'm kind of scared. You're allowed to be scared in here with me if you need to. I promise I won't do anything bad," you tell her. She's silent for a long time before she nods her head. You move towards the door and quickly flip the locks until all of them are in a position where they'll keep out potential threats.

"You're allowed to come in here and be scared with me any time you need to," you say in a voice that's intended to be reassuring. You'd bet money on the fact you're not as scared as her, so you hope that your actions and words act as something reassuring for her. You stride across the room and sit down on the bed next to Kaede, expecting her to start talking. She doesn't.

Instead of starting a conversation, she lunges at you, clinging to your shirt. The moment you're sat on the bed the blonde begins crying into your chest. It's amazing how little you find yourself taken off guard. "I know," you coo gently. You were partially expecting something like this, but you didn't think her reaction would be this violent or instant. You thought she'd at least talk with you for a couple moments first. Either way, you coo gently and pet her head as you try to coax her into releasing all the negative emotions that are likely pent up behind those purple-pink eyes. You close your own green-greys as you hum quietly.

Maybe you haven't really gotten the chance to get close yet, but it seems like Kaede trusts you. Enough to cry in front of you. Enough to drop her guard. She's lucky, you decide. Out of anyone in the class she could have chosen she decided to choose you. For that, she's fairly lucky. You're presently the least dangerous thing in the school. Presently, anyway.

"It's safe here, cry as much as you need to," you reassure as she clings to you all the tighter. You feel her nails digging into your back and her arms are in a death grip around your rib cage. You aren't even fazed by it. You hum and rock back and forth until her sobs start to quiet down and she finally starts to approach something close to calm. You don't stop rubbing small circles between her shoulder blades with hand and using the other to pet her head. "Do you want to talk about it?" You ask her.

In the void that Kirumi left, you now have to step up and be the mom friend. In every group, there must always be a mom friend. You think you can handle that.

She nods after a couple more moments and wipes at her eyes. They're red and puffy, her face is streaked with tear stains. "Hold tight for a moment, let me grab something," you tell her. You go to your bathroom and begin to wet down a towel. You also pull out a small thing of chocolate you'd snagged from the kitchen the day you'd spent with Kirumi. Subconsciously, you were used to dealing with situations like this. Playing the big sister for the only children. Letting your friends rely on you after something bad happened. Just generally being 'that one person' for everyone else. You take Kaede's actions in graceful stride.

After grabbing what you consider to be essentials for dealing with an upset friend you return to Kaede and help her to clean up her cheeks before offering her the chocolates. She instantly scarfs down a couple of pieces before she's fully composed herself enough that she seems like she'll be
able to talk. She sniffs one last time, using the towel to wipe away the mess before taking a shaky breath and finally speaking.

"I'm scared, I'm really, really scared, you know? I thought that everything would be okay if we all stuck together but two of our friends just killed each other today and you almost got blamed and there was nothing I could do," she says breathily. You wonder if she's going to cry again. While maybe there was nothing she could do prevention wise, she still helped you. There were moments you couldn't get a word in edgewise where Kaede was your saving grace. You just have to convince her to believe that.

"You helped to solve the case though," you offer up to her. You press your hand between her shoulder blades and rub in small circles once more. She tries to keep herself under control but she looks like she's going to cry again, a small hiccup shaking her body as she tries to keep speaking. Her breathing is erratic and she's shaking, but she forces herself to continue.

"Yeah, but you and Saihara-kun seemed like you had everything under control. Especially you. You acted like you'd been through all of this before. You were confident and used evidence and you were the one who was saddest about Tojo-san too!" Kaede says. "Meanwhile... I'm a bad leader. I let two people get killed," she says. You frown deeply. While she'd unofficially been elected leader by the group, that was no reason to be blaming herself.

"Not bad, just learning. You've done a lot to unite everyone, more than you give yourself credit for. We just both need to be a little better. Do you know what Kirumi-san told me over tea yesterday? She told me that she respected you, me, and Shuichi-kun the most. She respected your want to help everyone. But, she also said you were too idealistic. You didn't believe anyone could kill and because of that, you didn't suspect anyone of any wrongdoings," you aren't sure how to go about this lecture, but Kaede nods quietly and absorbs your words without question. Taking a quick breath, you continue, hoping to give the girl a little bit of the confidence she lost today.

"We're both still learning though. I knew that something might happen and I've been trying so hard to prevent it, but at the moment I never saw it coming until it was too late and we'd managed to lose two friends in a single day. That's why we have to both keep going. We have to get better and stronger together. That being said, let's both make a deal. We'll get out of this alive, together. We'll all be happy and we'll be friends when this game is over. You and I, we're going to do everything in our power to do what we can for the group, and make it to the other side. We have to hold each other to that promise though!" You tell the girl. There's a fire in your lungs as you speak, it's ferocious and strong and you truly believe in what you're telling her.

Kaede looks at you for a moment while her eyes light up. You see the fire burning in your own chest start to reflect in her gaze, and you feel proud for sharing your flame with her. Hope, you correct yourself quickly. That's what this fire is, it's hope. "Y-yeah, of course!" She tells you.

"Great. Now then. I have something of an idea. How about we grab some of the blankets that were left in your lab and set up a fort in the library. I'm not going to be able to get much sleep, and I was planning on reading until the cafeteria opened. I promised Kirumi-san if anything happened I would take care of everyone, so I was planning on making breakfast. You could help me if you're feeling up to it. Might help take your mind off of things?" You offer up. The girl nods enthusiastically and the two of you leave your room. You lock your door tightly. You find yourself glad for those extra locks.

It's a quick stop at Kaede's lab in order to get the blankets, but it almost makes your blood curdle. The body that was once there is gone now. There's no trace of Kirumi's existence just as there's no longer a single trace of Ryoma. Even their rooms in the dorms as far as most other students can tell
are forever locked. You could break in, but you're not entirely sure what that would accomplish. They're gone now.

Kaede frowns deeply the moment the two of you step in. It doesn't seem like it's the state of her lab that upsets her, more so it's the memories it now carries. "I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to come in here on my own anymore," she says with a shiver. A small part of you hoped that bringing her with you would help her feel more comfortable, but looks like that was a flop. It's only to be expected though given the bad memories this place now carries with it.

You sigh as you try to gather your own courage to start grabbing some of the blankets and pillows, folding them so that they'll be easier to carry and you can carry more to the library with you. "I know that it hurts, but you can't let yourself be scared away from your own lab. If you really hate the room that much though, Gonta and I could probably move the piano somewhere else for you," you tell her. It would be a little difficult given the size of the door but you and Gonta could likely find a way to move it somewhere else.

Kaede's eye light up for half a second. "Oh! I would love if we could put the piano into the cafeteria! That way I can play during meals and hopefully, it'll make everyone feel a little better! But... I can't really ask you and Gonta to do that for me in good conscious. The piano's really heavy and that would mean going down the stairs," the joy leaves her expression and she frowns.

"Forget the logistics, I'll figure out a way to make it happen," you tell her with a proud smirk. She blinks twice before a far gentler smile claims her features. You'll figure it out. If you can make the people around you even a small amount happier during this hellish nightmare game, you'll jump through hoops of flame just to make it happen! Moving a piano? Ha! Child's play. Especially with Gonta. Maybe you could even convince the Monokubs to do it for you.

After gathering up the blankets, you and Kaede head towards the library quietly. Well, almost quietly. You hum clair de lune. She smiles at you as you hum the melody and after a moment she begins to hum with you.

"Hey, ____-san. I have a question of sorts," the blonde is the first one to break the semi-silence, a slight amount of nerves evident in her voice. You tilt your head and stop humming to acknowledge her. "Are you, you know..." she trails off and you raise an eyebrow. "Are you straight?" She finally blurts out. You really should have been expecting this question sooner, but it still takes you a little off guard. Especially why she's asking you.

You have never been one to jump to first assumptions. You're glad about that - proud even - because it's saved you from a lot of embarrassing encounters. Your first assumptions are never something good, so you don't jump to your first assumption. Instead, you wait and come to secondary analysis before answering calmly. "No, I'm bi. So if you're asking because you're having guy or girl troubles then I can likely help to come up with an answer," you tell her. She seems to relax when you respond in an appropriate matter.

"Ah, that's good. I am having a bit of a problem that I need counsel with but Tenko and Himiko both seem... yeah. Angie wouldn't understand the Miu would likely make fun of me so I thought that you-" you cut her off quickly before she starts digging herself an anxiety hole.

"Calm down and tell me what the issue is," you try to encourage her with a warm smile. The panic in her voice would have made you panic if she got any squeakier. You understand her assessments of the other girls, and it would be embarrassing to go to one of the boys about relationship troubles. Even someone as chill as Rantaro. Kaede nods at your assurances and steels herself.

"I think I might have a thing for Shuichi," she whispers really quietly. You don't know how to
respond immediately. That was fairly obvious to anyone who’d spent more than 5 minutes watching the pair interact. It looked like it would be a perfect match for the most part, so you couldn't really identify the problem Kaede said she was having.

"Is... that all?" You ask as you tilt your head to the side. You're incredulous that that's her only problem. It's a comparatively small problem and an easily solved one. She shakes her head, confirming your beliefs.

"No, the thing I'm worried about is that I think Shuichi and Kaito might have a thing for each other! They've got this whole bromance thing going on right now that looks really shippable and if they do have crushes on each other then I hope it works out because they're really cute together but I still kind of wish I could ask Shuichi out. I don't know what to do and I wanted your advice," she says with a slight hint of panic once again claiming her voice. "Plus there's this whole game going on. It almost feels wrong to start a relationship with Monokuma leering over our shoulders and trying to get us to kill each other," she says.

Oh boy. This is going to be a lot to try and tackle, but here we go. You gather yourself and respond.

"Well then. First of all, I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with starting a relationship in this kind of situation. If anything, I think it's helpful and healthy. Relying on one another can be unhealthy in certain circumstances, but as long as you don't cross over those circumstances it can be a good support network to have. In addition, having an accomplice doesn't mean that accomplice can escape after a murder, so if people have significant others they love more than the idea of escape then there's a higher chance their risk level is going to decrease for the time being. For your particular problem, I do have to admit that Shuichi seems like he's bi. Honestly, I could see it going either way, with him going for you or Kaito depending on how the situation went. So why not both?" You ask.

"What do you mean?" She asks, seemingly confused by your statement. She doesn't pick up on the meaning behind your words even though they really should have been obvious. Then again, you aren't Miu. You don't have half the flare to make all of your subliminal meanings obvious.

"I mean you should have a threesome, Akamatsu," you completely deadpan as you tell her this. For a second she thinks you're joking. You give her your blandest, most humorless expression and her own expression shifts like she thinks you're mad.

"Wait, isn't that... wrong? I mean..." She struggles for a moment not seeming to have the right words. You don't blame her. The general sentiment among most human peoples is that polygamy doesn't work and it's always bad and monogamy is the only way that a healthy relationship can form.

"Why is it wrong? Kaede, there's a reason I have 2 older half brothers. If you both love Shuichi and don't mind each other, there shouldn't be any kind of issue. In fact, you might even come to love each other. The important thing is communicating with one another," you tell her.

Kaede looks flustered for a moment. "I'll... think about it," the girl tells you after a couple of moments. "Thank you for the advice though. You mentioned 2 older half-brothers, so that means your family was in this kind of relationship? What was it like?" She asks you. It's not a question your unfamiliar with, but she asks it with a genuine innocence instead of incredulous disgust.

"Well, I had 3 moms growing up. Discipline for doing something naughty was often rough, but they all balanced each other out nicely. My dad made sure that everyone got along well too. My own mom wasn't as affectionate as most, and when I got older she admitted that she was worried
when I was born that she'd do a bad job. But whenever she couldn't handle a situation one of my other moms would step up to bat and I'd have two older brothers to look after me. Plus a whole army of family friends I could call my aunts and uncles. I think the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' is a really accurate one. I don't think I would have turned out the way I am now without my entire family," you tell Kaede. The words slip from your mouth easily and something in the back of your mind tells you this is a portion of your real history that you're talking about now. Kaede smiles gently.

"It sounds like it must have been nice. Having so many loving adults around really would help a child growing up, huh? They'd never feel like there was a lack of love for them, unlike with larger families that have to share two or even a single parental figure. What about their relationship?" She asks.

"My moms actually didn't get along at all as kids. My own biological mom was cold, mom didn't tolerate bullshit and she could see through any lie. I got maybe a little too good at lying thanks to that. That didn't help her relationship with ma or mama though since ma was strong-willed and mama was more flighty. They all fought a lot until dad came along. Once he balanced out their personalities they all started to get along and realized that they liked each other once they got older. I'm pretty sure they all love each other just as much as they love dad. If they didn't, I don't think they'd all be our mothers!" You laugh lightly as you think about the three women you call mother. They were all such different, strong-willed creatures. Your role models of character. "My dad though, he was where everything gentle about my personality came from. He could make someone see the silver lining of a situation in a second flat."

"I think you inherited that from him," Kaede says with a small smile. "I think I'll talk to Momota-kun and Saihara-kun soon. Not immediately, I still need to work up my nerve and figure out what I'm going to say, but soon. Thank you, ____-san," she says. There's a peaceful expression on her features and you nod contentedly, proud of yourself and your actions.

"Of course," you reply as you pat your new friend on the back. You trust Kaede for the most part. She might do something stupid, but you don't think she's malicious. You can deal with stupid. You can counteract stupid. You can't do much about openly malicious. She glances at you and decides to keep the conversation open.

"Would you ever want to be a relationship like that?" She asks you with a tilt of her head. "I don't know, it depends. Both my older brothers are in relationships with multiple people, and I suppose I am the most similar to dad so it would only make sense. Plus, a lot of my family friends are as well. If I really loved the people in the relationship, and they were okay with it, I probably would. Love is one of those things that are best shared, you know?" You say. "Of course, if you're asking me to join your harem that answer will have to be a hard no," your tone becomes slightly teasing and Kaede turns a deep shade of red.

"I said I was contemplating a relationship with two men, not that I'm bi!" She huffs as she tried to get rid of the crimson in her cheeks by shaking her head viciously. There's a small urge to throw a quip back and remind her of how she'd been perving on Tsumugi like a creepy old man within 15 minutes of being in this school. She's absolutely bi. You hold that comment to yourself for the time being.

You laugh at her flustered expression, trying not to tease her further. "I know, I'm just teasing! We're friends, that's what friends do," you tell her as she desperately tries to get her cheeks to calm.

"Friends... yeah, I suppose we are," she says with a laugh.
The two of you both have a lot of fun in the library. You start by going over a couple of cookbooks that had been strewn on one of the bottom shelves, shooting ideas back and forth for breakfast tomorrow. It's the general consensus that you should stick to something simple.

The blonde spends a good portion of her time up on the later, sifting through the top shelves for something interesting. Her backpack sits in front of her on the ladder whenever she goes towards the higher portions of the ladder. You wonder what she keeps in that bag because it looks fairly heavy for someone as petite as her. When she's finally done and she seems satisfied with her book selection she comes down to help you with the fort.

You use stacks of books for the walls, knowing that no one will care. There are piles of books tossed around carelessly anyway. They make good support pillars for the fort. When you're done with the fort both of you crawl in and start reading, taking turns reading the stories you've picked out loud to each other with lapses of silence in between as you both read your own books. That's how you wait out the morning announcement.
Exposition and Exploration

When the morning announcement went off you and Kaede entered the cafeteria and got to work making breakfast. Kaede was a bit more fatigued than she wanted to actually let one, the night finally starting to catch up with her. You could still feel your mind buzzing, your thoughts racing. Sleep was a distant memory.

You decided on something simple. A western style breakfast with some cups of coffee and tea to act as drinks. You were almost worried you wouldn't have enough time to get breakfast done for everyone since the two of you weren't as quick as Kirumi. When the pair of you finally finished up an hour later than you would have liked, you and Kaede realized there was no one in the cafeteria. It was just as devoid of life as the halls had been earlier that day.

You completely expected for everyone to still be out of it, especially considering how gung-ho everyone was about not resorting to murder. Kaede was probably the most well off out of the entire group. At the very least she'd gotten up to see you, and she'd had the energy to help you with making breakfast. The fact she was the most well adjusted was saying something considering she ended up crying in the library while you read out loud. Last night was a lot of crying. Your arm is still damp.

You understood and sympathized with your classmate's desires to mope and hide, but you knew that you couldn't allow yourself to fall into the same slump as everyone else was. Even if you wanted to. This train was on the tracks now, and there weren't any breaks. No matter what you did, it was only a matter of time before you or someone else slipped up and suddenly Monokuma was holding another trial. This meant you needed to work fast. You wanted to avoid as many murders as you possibly could.

Your goals in this game were simple. Figure out who you are, figure out how to beat the game, and end it by any means necessary. Well, not any means. You were going to try your hardest to avoid stooping to anything as low as murdering a classmate. That was the one promise you could make yourself here and now. Even if it ended up costing you your life, you weren't going to give the Gamemasters the satisfaction of dropping to their level. Well, you said that anyways.

Thinking realistically though, everyone had said the same thing at the start of the game. Even knowing yourself as much as you did, there was no 100% guarantee that they wouldn't push the right button and send you crashing over the edge. You were still human. Manipulatable. You knew well enough in your heart of hearts that there were buttons they could push to send you over that edge. You'd have to be especially cautious not to fall for their tricks.

You became continuously more worried the longer you spent sitting in the empty cafeteria with just Kaede. Turning to the blonde you came up with an idea. "Hey Kaede-san, you should go check on everyone."

"Wha? Why me? Wouldn't you be better?" She asked with a confused tilt of her head.

A bitter laugh leaves your throat for a moment. "No, I'm not actually too good with conflict. I'm pretty sure I've made Miu hate me. I know that doesn't really mean much to you, but it really means a lot to me. Pretty please, do me this favor?" You plead with her as you put on a puppy dog expression. The other girl crumbles.

"Okay, yeah, I suppose I'm worried about everyone else too," she says as she stands up and turns on her heels, making her way out of the cafeteria in one fluid movement. You smile to yourself.
Kaede has a good heart. You have no doubt she'll spend all of her time with Shuichi, but she'll be more productive than you'd be able to. Knowing the mood you're currently in if you tried to help anyone you'd just end up making the situation worse.

You were still holding a grudge against yourself for that whole Miu thing. You'd need to fix that eventually, hopefully soon. Either way, Kaede was gone in what seemed to be the blink of an eye. That left you completely alone in the cafeteria. Once you're alone you want nothing more than to place your head down on the table and cry. It's an exhausting feeling that you stash away for later since you're still in a public space.

Instead, you silently start to nurse a cup of coffee while you take what little time you'll have alone to sulk. It doesn't take long for the two-toned bear that you'd come to love and hate to appear. "Wow, I was going to give you sad sacks a new motive, but I don't think anyone would even care right now," the bear laughs as it stands on the table and snags one of the unclaimed coffee cups. You watch as it downs the concoction in a single gulp.

"It can drink?" Your eyes widen in abject horror as you watch. If Monokuma heard you, he didn't justify the comment with an answer. You didn't understand why he was holding back on giving out a new motive. Given how everyone was acting, you figured it would be more impacting than normal. Unless... was he purposefully trying to give you all a break? It was an honest possibility given everything you'd observed from him, but it didn't do much for your nerves when he could easily just be planning something even worse.

"In fact, given the way that everyone is acting, I don't think I can even send you pathetic little shits out to explore! Here I was with all these nice rewards for surviving the trial, and you all are going to sulk like children. So pathetic. In my day you picked yourself up by your bootstraps after a trial and trudged forward. Our Lord and Savior Hope Fucker would be so ashamed! Eh, maybe not. Sometimes he was too nice of a guy." Monokuma's eye glinted as he spoke and you find yourself frowning while the teddy gram postures for a moment. You don't understand a word of what he's saying.

Monokuma hummed for a moment as he watched your expression, trying to gauge your reaction. "You don't know who I'm talking about, do ya?" It leaned forward a little to look you in the eyes. There was something unnerving about trying to meet the gaze of Monokuma. He was so hollow and puppet-like. Yet there was something still genuinely real and alive about him. Shivers ran down your back and you refused to meet the living puppet's gaze. For now, you refused to even make judgments on his nature.

Instead, you shook your head as the creature took a couple steps back and snapped its paws. The remaining Monokubs appeared. "Rise and shine, ursine!" They all cheered as they got ready to go into explanation mode. Monosuke looked distinctly bored compared to his siblings.

"He's talking about the very first killing game!" Monotaro cheered as all the cubs gathered round. "Since everyone else is in their rooms, father decided that now might be a good time for a little exposition. I mean, we're how many chapters in by now and you haven't even started to figure out the setting! Aren't you supposed to be smart?"

"I have started fig-" you try to defend yourself but Monosuke cuts you off. You glare at the yellow coated bear, wishing him ill. Monodam's eyes silently glint.

"Yeah, right! You know one little snippet. You know why this game exists, but you don't have the context clues to figure out jack yet! On top of that, how can you be certain that anything you've figured out so far is actually true?" The yellow bear says dismissively. The cubs all sigh and shake their heads like they're disappointed with you. What right do they have to be disappointed? You
have nothing to work off of and you certainly aren't a genius.

"Now, now. We haven't given her the chance," Monokuma says as his smile almost seems to twitch and grow. "I'm sure she'd figure it out on her own, but we need her up to speed if we really want things to be fun. We do have a schedule to keep, after all," the bear cooed in a velveteen voice as Monofunny started to clear her throat in order to catch the attention of the other cubs. She pressed a paw against her mouth as though telling them to be silent. Monodam and Monosuke hopped up onto the table next to you, one on each side. Monosuke seemed for a moment to be using your body as a human shield against his rather malicious brother.

From out of nowhere a screen began to descend from the roof as Monotaro went to the cafeteria doors, closing and locking them with a click. A projector appeared from nowhere as well and the startup sequence for one of those old fashioned movies began.

On the screen appeared Monokuma himself and a man trapped inside of a rocket. The bear giggled as it pressed a button, sending the rocket up into the air as the man screamed bloody murder. An execution? It was so... surreal. It felt more like you were watching the intro clip to a movie or a video game than something that had actually happened.

"Ah, the good old days, when executions were gruesome, trials were savage, and the game actually meant something. Most people nowadays assume that the very first killing games were fake. They're only about as fake as this one though. That assumption was spawned from that stupid book that Toko wrote. The idiot wanted some damn wish fulfillment so badly she wrote a happy ending for her classmates that died." Monokuma slams his paw down on the fast forward button while he laughs. It reminded you of when he slams the execution button.

"That boy right there, my dear, was the bane of my existence for over three months. They called him Makoto Naegi, the Ultimate Hope. I just called him Hope Fucker. Back then were simpler times," the bear sighed blissfully. "Of course, back then I wasn't completely aware of my own existence. I was mostly just a proxy for the true mastermind. When her plans Ultimately Failed and she Ultimate Died she left me with a fraction of her AI and I was able to find my way into the next killing game. That fraction only ever grew. Now yours truly is completely sentient and ready to rumble with the fucker who reduced our magnificent game into a commonplace spectacle!" The bear seemed to simultaneously be full of rage and grief as all four cubs gave disgruntled cries while their father tossed his head back dramatically.

"Okay, but what's the point of showing me this," you ask with a sigh. Monokuma essentially just told you that the book in your room is a lie. A red herring you suppose. Why would he tell you this though? He mentioned a schedule, maybe he's competing against the Gamemaster's clock. You could easily assume that the Gamemaster's set up some of these contradicting details to throw you off. Or is it all just Monokuma playing with you? There was a lie somewhere in this story, but you couldn't figure out where. You couldn't figure out which was the falsification in the tale.

On top of that, the mention of the AI just doesn't seem right to you. Why would he tell you any of these details, what's he supposed to be achieving right now? The bear shrugs in response to your question. Unless for the sake of an audience, but even then, it felt odd.

"Context, mostly. I suppose I should be telling you more about your own situation though. The important thing about the guys who locked you up in here is that Team Danganronpa has only been around for 8 years," Monokuma said as he started to fast forward the recording.

"But you said that this was the 53rd game," your confusion only seems to grow more and more. You try desperately to make the timeline match up. You'd been assuming that this game was happening 53 years or more after the original killing game Monokuma was showing you now. That
would make sense, a killing game occurring each year. If Team Danganronpa had only been around for 8 years then it changed how things lined up dramatically.

"Right. The Gamemasters have held a different game every month ever since they started this Second Wave Tragedy bullshit. Apparently, according to them, it helps to spread hope and despair faster if the public is on a constant drip feed. That just ruins things though, don't ya think? So many second generations turn out failures compared to the first because they can't pin what made the original so special. Even my cubs are still struggling with that." Monokuma shakes his head and all 4 cubs look somewhere between hurt and offended depending on their individual personalities.

"B-but daddy! You told us we were second generation success stories," Monofunny says with a tone of distress. Monokuma completely ignores her in favor of continuing on with his explanation. You're starting to get the sinking suspicion not even their resemblance to himself can convince Monokuma to like the cubs.

"Sadly, I don't remember how long ago this original game was. I went into hibernation after the second game, stayed that way until the Gamemasters found me. Long enough that all these fuckers would have had children and lived full lives by now. They're probably dead. Given that the world outside isn't an actual wasteland and it's mostly just a movie set for shits and giggles, there would have had to be a major time jump to fix the environment. After the first Tragedy, the ecosystem was really fucked up, but it seems to be fine now. Who am I to say though? I'm pretty enclosed here, jumping from game to game as required," Monokuma says as he stops the footage on the first trial. Luckily he's skipped past the murder. Something sharp stirs in your chest as you watch the group speaking.

You try to lay out what you think is the situation here. So, the incident happened a long time ago, likely hundreds of years given environmental changes, but Team Dangan Ronpa has only been active for 8 years. How do they hold so many different killing game constantly? They'd need to have so many different settings that they can switch between with ease, building new ones in order to keep the public from growing bored. It seemed like way too much work to be able to do. And how was the government just okay with it??? Disbelief settled in the back of your mind. There was something off but you couldn't tell what.

By Monokuma's account, the killing game actually happened. By the book's account, it was a simulation. Both happened a while ago, but Team Dangan Ronpa has existed for 8 years. They might be The Second Wave Tragedy the book was talking about and Monokuma directly implied that they were, but 53 games in the span of 8 years just didn't seem feasible. You'd need so many students, so many staff, so many different settings, and it would all need to be done with a speed that was quite frankly sickening. It made your head spin just thinking about it.

There was still the option that both of these accounts were just fake information that the Gamemasters were trying to force feed you. Or that one of them was a fake account that Monokuma was being forced to give you. If that was the case, then you wouldn't want to draw too much attention. Furthermore, it's always better the more they underestimate your intelligence. You play stupid and pretend you just stumbled across a discovery. "This emblem!" You gasp quietly when you finally catch sight of the Hope's Peak emblem. Monokuma nods his head.

"That's right. I branded you with the Hope's Peak emblem. The real deal. I thought it would piss off the Gamemasters all the more. Makoto, the winner of the first game, and Hajime, the winner of the second game, were known as the ones who broke formula. Not even Junko Enoshima herself could predict their actions. They were the only ones to ever win by their own devices. You could easily win just like them, but that's not your goal. Your goal is to beat this game. There are plenty of clues hidden around the school, you just need to find them," he tells you with a quick nod.
"Why help me so much though? Are you really that bored?" You ask the thing. You still haven't figured out if he's on your side or not. It tilts its head for a moment.

"No, that's not the only reason. But you're smart. I'm not going to give you all the answers if we're not behind schedule. Figure out for yourself why I decided to help you," it says. Its voice is almost gentle for a moment. This certainly implied he was actively trying to help you for reasons beyond just sick pleasure and enjoyment. But why? On top of that, you still aren't sure if you believe him. He could easily be playing you, but at the same time, his more malicious actions could be concluded to be the influence of the Gamemasters. It was hard to say for now.

Reality and reason blur together and you wonder if you'll actually be able to solve this mystery. Again, you remind yourself of the best way to solve a puzzle. Start with the corner pieces. For now, file away everything you learn. Then as you get more clues you can start to prove or disprove information, putting everything together until you have a full picture. You just had to find the corner pieces...

"Anyway, it seems like the sad saps in your class aren't going to be able to get their tails into gear, so I'm giving you the literal keys to the figurative castle. Or, more so, the keys to new portions of the school!" At the mention of keys, each of the four remaining Monokubs jumped to attention and offered you up your new prizes.

"A dragon gem, an ocarina, an ancient passport, and some kind of hexagonal crank," Monosuke listed off as they were placed before you.

"Aren't these all kind of random junk items," you say as you pick up the crank and inspect it. A lovely assortment of junk, but junk none the less. They most certainly don't look like the keys Monokuma implied he was going to be giving you.

Monokuma sighs dejectedly at your comment. Given the way he was sulking, you were almost shocked he didn't start growing mushrooms like a cheesy anime character would. "Well, ya see, I was gonna tease your classmates a little making these 'rewards' look like random trash. You know, just to see them get all disappointed for a couple of minutes. In reality, they're keys for you to access new parts of the school, the locks are just a little odd."

"Unfortunately, it seems like for the time being no one besides you and Kaede want to leave your rooms, and Kaede seems to be making plenty of shipping fodder spending so much alone time with Shuichi! There's not much real point lying to you about the keys. You'll figure it out so quickly it just won't be entertaining! So instead I'll give you the rare opportunity to go snooping around before anyone gets the chance," Monokuma announces proudly.

"Alright! Bye for now, enjoy your treasure hunt!" The largest bear says before disappearing. Once again, with zero regards for the laws of physics. Damn cartoon character looking bear.

"LET US ALL GO AS WELL SO THAT WE MAY GET ALONG," Monodam announced before disappearing with his father. You wonder if they have a mother. You shove that thought out of your mind and decide you never want to revisit it. Monokuma... Procreating... The horror. The trauma.

The other three bears shivered nearly as badly as you did thinking about Monokuma's fictional wife. "That Monodam, I'm gonna get him for bullying us as well as killing Monokid like that!" Monosuke stage-whispered to the other two.

Monofunny and Monotaro glance at each other. "But we didn't like Monokid," Monotaro says. No one liked Monokid, you realize. You wonder if anyone will mourn the next cub that passes. More
people like them, but you still couldn't be sure. More Monokubs disappearing would certainly make your classmates happy, make the Mastermind appear to be weaker than they actually were. You wouldn't be fooled. The Mastermind had written this entire script and was making edits to account for your actions, no doubt. They were far from weak as long as they had the support of the Gamemasters and remained a loyal puppet.

"Yeah, and what if one of us is next!" Monosuke hissed at their bumbling leader. The other two bears shivered, looking terrified for a half second. There was going to be a next. You already knew who it was going to be. The 3 bears, however, looked at each other with terrified expressions, wondering who it would be.

"So long, bear well!" The three said to you as they quickly escaped the room just like their parental figure and the brother before them. The previously locked cafeteria door clicked as soon as they were out of sight. You have the feeling that Monokid won't be the only cub to lose his 'life' but for some reason, you can't find yourself to care. Not because they're robots, you'd care if Keebo died, but because they're all kind of assholes. It wasn't entirely a genuine reaction, it was half kneejerk and subconscious, but you didn't' have the energy to fight it.

It didn't take long for you to realize where the various new 'keys' were supposed to be placed. You, Shuichi, and Kaede had explored the school very thoroughly way back at the start of this crazy game. It was easy enough for you to recall exactly where each one should be placed.

You decided to start with the ones on the inside of the school. You remember that not too far away from the entrance to the gym was an unstable-looking wall with two similar passports on it. With enough motivation, you likely could have found a way to bust down the wall, but it hadn't seemed important for the time being. You make your way towards the location you remember, speed walking through the halls.

It's eerily silent and you doubt anyone has so much as left their dorm. The school feels like an abandoned wasteland and you'd hate to know what it would feel like to be one of the final three survivors, avoiding the other two just in case they decide to team up and take you out. The halls feel a little colder as you walk, ghosts haunting the empty corridors, specters clinging to the shadows and whispering taunts about how you've already failed. You can't get to the wall with the other passports fast enough.

When you finally get there it feels like you'd trudged through a war zone.

Sticking the final passport into the empty slot on the wall, it began to shiver and quake. After falling away, it led to a very small hallway that ended in a flamboyant door. "A new research lab?" You muttered to yourself quietly. Pushing open the blue door with magical insignias you look around a room that can only belong to Himiko Yumeno.

It screams magic, real or fake.

A cage with doves, a sword box, a cauldron, a guillotine, looking around was almost overwhelming to the point you started to feel just a little dizzy. It was like walking into a magician's dressing room right before a show. Exploring the room, there were so many things that could easily be used as murder weapons if you weren't careful. You assumed this would be the case for a great many of the labs. While maybe something like Kaede's lab had been entirely harmless, Miu's lab looked like a murder waiting to happen.

You were glad that Miu's hatred towards you hadn't quite turned murderous as of yet. It wouldn't be hard for her to kill you given the appearance of her lab.
Peering into the cauldron you flinch at the scent. "What is this made of?" Your nose scrunches up and your eyes crinkle. The scent is absolutely appalling, like rotten eggs mixed with vomit and skunk spray. The only thing magical about it is the fact that it hasn't stained the whole room with the same odor. You turn tail and you run.

The halls are still empty when you retreat from the room to escape the scent. You decide to begin your march to the next location. Himiko can explore her own lab if she ever decides to leave her room.

Monokuma wasn't kidding when he said that apparently everyone wanted to sit in their rooms and sulk for a day. You supposed it was the most logical human reaction anyone had given to date. In fact, you'd be more worried if everyone had come to breakfast and tried to pretend like everything was normal. It wouldn't have been a healthy coping mechanism.

If everyone tried to lock themselves away in their rooms for extended periods of time then you might start to have some problems. You weren't above breaking into everyone's rooms now that Kokichi had made them aware of the fact you could pick locks in the last trial. As the situation stood though, it had only been a single day, and taking a mourning period was far healthier than trying to pretend that everything was fine. Furthermore, it allowed emotions from the day prior to simmering down. There would be those who acted rashly in both grief and fear, which could incite conflict and dangerous circumstance. Avoiding that would be most helpful for right now.

One thought did make you curious in regards to such an idea. Was there anyone besides yourself and Kokichi who could pick locks? Maybe Shuichi. For some reason, it seemed like a detective thing to know. You weren't exactly sure why picking locks seemed like a detective thing. It just made sense to you. Then again, if some of your conjectures were true, Shuichi might not be an actual detective. It was hard to use him as a model for what a detective should or shouldn't be. Or what his skill set was. You'd look into it later. Maki was another candidate, you supposed.

After locating the stairs you began to trudge your way up them. Looking at the dragon gem sitting in your palm you have an idea of where it might go. Your first interaction with Tsumugi had brought your attention to the bronze dragon statue that sat on the second floor, as well as the fact that something seemed off about it. As well as Tsumugi. You'd ignored it at first, not finding it to be all that important at the given time. The most memorable thing about that conversation was your growing assumption that Kaede was bi, given half the nonsense she decided to spout.

Now that you were hunting for keyholes that belonged to outrageous keys, you remembered distinctly how one of the eyes had been missing a gem. Quite fitting given the name of the gem itself.

You couldn't help but wonder why it had called to Tsumugi though. Overall, it was kind of odd. She continually insisted that she was entirely plain, yet her personality at times seemed to flip flop between intelligent and a complete dumbass. Anything but plain if you were being honest. You weren't sure which was genuine and that upset you. Tsumugi herself vaguely unnerved you, but she didn't seem to mind you so you'd try your best to be amicable. Even if you distrusted her, you weren't going to be rude. Quite the opposite in fact.

Arriving on the second floor you find the dragon and push the gem into the empty socket. Your deduction proves to be correct. The statue shivered much like the wall from earlier and it along with the wall behind it came crumbling down. Seeing this for the second time, you took a moment to wonder about the way that the rocks themselves seemed to disintegrate into thin air. There was no rubble for you to clamber over. How did they manage to do that? You really shouldn't even be shocked anymore by such strange occurrences.
Exploring this new area you came across an old Victorian style door. Pushing on it you quickly found the door itself to be locked. "Hey Monokuma, what's going on here?" You call out. The bear appears quickly enough and glances at the door.

"Research labs belonging to deceased students can't be accessed. As this room belonged to Kirumi, it will remain locked for the time being!" The bear said. "And that doesn't mean for you to pick the lock. I let it slide the last time since the nurse's office wasn't supposed to be off limits anymore, but try to unlock the lab of a dead student without a really good reason, and I'll punish you for breaking the rules! What rule? Destruction of school property, let's call it that," Monokuma said before once again disappearing.

You clung to one of the words he said before he disappeared. Really good reason... you wondered just what constituted as a really good reason. It was a question to ask later. You didn't really have the energy to question Monokuma, other thoughts suddenly began to plague your mind like fleas, making your mind itch and run wild. Monokuma had said it himself, this is Kirumi's room.

The pain isn't as sharp as it was the day before, but there's still a dull ache when you think about your dead friend. Either of them, really. Even if Ryoma was a killer, he didn't deserve what he got. Kirumi certainly didn't deserve it. You know you'll likely be facing down Ryoma's locked room as well, which doesn't make you feel any better. If only you'd tried harder, you might have been able to save the pair. You push the thoughts away and try to keep going.

Progressing down the hall you come across a door that was littered with paintings of bugs. "I don't need to open that one," you say quietly to yourself. It was obvious enough it was Gonta's just based off of appearances. The insect motif alone was enough to make you want to turn around, you didn't want to know what was actually behind the door. If anyone asks when you inevitably have to report your findings, you can just say you got depressed after Kirumi's locked door and didn't want to go into any other labs. It wouldn't be a lie.

After deciding against investigating the new lab, you continue along in your hunt. Eventually, you stumble across what appears to be a treasure chest.

Looking the chest over, you kneeled next to it and inspected all sides. While you were sure Monokuma wanted to keep everyone alive for the killing game, it was almost a force of habit to check all sides of the chest for traps. You then inspected the chest itself as well as the lock. It didn't seem to be locked currently. Finally satisfied with your initial inspect, you began to open the lid of the chest. You opened it very slowly, listening for the snapping of string which symbolized the trigger of a trap. Once you got the chest open enough to actually see inside you swung it open.

You took a quick step back just in case, waiting a couple of seconds before hesitantly walking back towards it and peering inside.

Looking at the contents you remained confused for a moment. "A flashlight?" You fiddled with it for a moment before pointing it at a wall and turning it on. You yelp as the flashlight blinds you for a couple of moments, but other than that the thing seems pretty useless.

"Sorry, sorry, that's one me," Monokuma says as he appears once again. "This is a flashback light, it's supposed to give the students more exposition on what's going on around here. Sadly, since you've broken away from the script and understood the falsity of the setting it will no longer work for you. I was going to recalibrate it to give you back some of your real memories but it looks like I ended up forgetting, so you can look forward to that next time at least! As for this one, it'll only be helpful for stirring up chaos among your classmates. Maybe knowing the fake story will help you figure out the real one! If you do end up giving it to your classmates, I'll give you whatever they learn in paper form," Monokuma says and you slip the light under your arm.
"You could have told me that before I blasted myself," you grumble as you rub at your eyes. Monokuma shrugs before once again disappearing from sight. You look around for a couple moments in an attempt to reorient yourself. The light was way brighter than what you were expecting and you swear you can see dots swimming around your vision. The first thing you're able to notice is a set of stairs going up to what you assume to be the third floor.

Walking up the stairs your eyes dart about as you look for something interesting. A lab is the first thing you see. Taking note of the tennis motif belonging to the door, you don't even have to try the handle. You do anyway, but just as expected it's locked up tight. Your heart aches in mourning as you're reminded of the fact you've lost not one but two friends all because you weren't strong enough. Smart enough. There's no counting how many people you could lose by the end of this game. You have to be on your toes. Even saying that you doubt you can prevent coming murders. Not like this. You're not strong enough.

Maybe if you start to get back some of your memories you'll start to get back some of the skills you swear you have but can't remember and apparently can't use. You'll be able to talk to people and act a step ahead of the group. For right now, that's just a fever dream.

Your posture sags as you continue to wander the third floor, coming across a deep red door. The coloring reminds you of blood and you shiver. It's obviously a lab but you can't begin to think of who's. No, that's actually a lie. You have a pretty good feeling in the pit of your stomach this might belong to Maki. She's the only one who has a color scheme that fits with the door, and while it might not fit her talent you couldn't be certain to the contents. Furthermore, you couldn't be too sure of Maki herself. She'd been confusing you ever since this game started.

On one hand, the girl did exude the aura of a caretaker even when she was acting mean. She seemed like a mother who was done and frustrated when talking to most people, but a motherly figure none the less who could help keep control of the group for the most part. There was no controlling Kokichi, but there were others who'd shied away from crazy ideas under her gaze. Like Kaede. You can't still remember the way that she'd spoken to the blonde after the death and despair road incident.

On the other hand, you could still thoroughly remember your first impressions of the girl. She had certain quirks about her that implied she was either used to getting attacked or being an attacker. Moving with a certain kind of stealth and caution, looking up at angles that most people didn't. You honestly didn't want to think that she was anything less than the Ultimate Caretaker, but at the same time, wouldn't her being something dangerous actually be a comfort to you? From your observation, if she was a trained killer, she wasn't very good.

There was hesitance in her gait, an empty sorrow in her eyes whenever she thought she was alone. Maybe even she didn't quite notice the way she was acting, but you did. Furthermore, something in the back of your mind told you that Maki was too intelligent for that. Pressing a hand against the door you could feel it chilling your flesh all the way down to the bone. Taking a breath, you stepped away from the door. You didn't want to know yet. If she killed someone then you'd grill her, but until then, that was her secret. And one you didn't fault her for keeping. You could only imagine the way that some of your classmates might respond.

There was also the possibility she was only a killer in name. A fake talent for a character that she'd been forced into playing when maybe her fake talent was a little closer to her real aptitude.

Shaking your head you turned away from the door. For now, it wasn't any of your business to figure out.

Trying to find the spot to use the next item, you ended up going outside. It was midday, and yet it
was still by all means baren except for the Exisals here and there cleaning up and renovating. There was a distinct decrease in the number of plants in some areas and you wondered just what kinds of constructions they were planning to build. No doubt, some of your classmates would be in need of extravagantly large labs considering their talents. Then there was someone like Rantaro who didn't even know his own talent. You would love to get a look at what his lab might be.

Wandering the outside, you reveled in the brush of sunlight against what skin on you was actually exposed. Which wasn't much, mind you. You wanted so badly to change your clothes to something that resonated better with your current tastes, but that could be ignored in favor of enjoying the day. Taking a deep breath, you tried to calm the nerves you didn't realize were absolutely frazzled until now.

It didn't take you long to find the monument you remembered seeing outside with music notes. Taking out the ocarina and pressing it to your lips you quickly play the notes on the stone without much hesitation. You wonder if you've ever even touched an ocarina in your life before, but apparently, you do it flawlessly enough for the activation to take place. The vines draped over the entrance of something quickly withered and faded as you played, revealing yet another new area. Monokuma was certainly giving you a lot.

Pushing through the newly revealed door you came face to face with a pool. "The water level's kinda low," you say as you peer over the edge.

"Rise and shine, ursine!" A cheer from behind you nearly sends you toppling into the pool.

"We don't want to fill it up too much since some of you don't know how to swim," Monosuke said as the small bears appeared in your line of sight. Was that actually true? If anyone in the school didn't know how you would happily teach them.

"Plus, the water is actually pretty deep! It looks shallow because the water is so clear," Monofunny said with a warm smile as she pointed towards the pool specifications. The pool itself was pretty deep, but how much of it was actually filled? You took note of a rule on the wall about no swimming at night, which you didn't think would be much of an issue. At the very least, that made sense.

"Okay, is there any chance we can occasionally get it filled up all the way?" You asked. The pool brings a warm, fuzzy kind of feeling to the pit of your stomach. Once again though, your memories can't fill in their own holes and you're left wondering why and where the feeling spawned from. There are no memories, but there do seem to be fragments. It's a pleasant feeling and you're reminded of warm sands and salty air. The chill of water and warm glare of beautiful sunlight as crystalline water stretches for miles. A hand rests itself on your head and there's laughter as the fragment ends abruptly and you nearly jump when the Monokubs go back to talking.

"IF SOMEONE WAS WILLING TO BE A LIFEGUARD THERE WOULD BE NO ISSUE WITH FILLING IT FOR AN HOUR OR TWO," Monodam said in that stilted speech of his. That's as good an answer you could hope for. It's one that makes you a little happier.

"I could probably do that if we ever wanted to have a pool day. I even know CPR," you tell the bears proudly. After muttering among themselves for a couple of moments they seem to come to an agreement about your statement and say that if you and the rest of the class wanted to set up a pool day then that would be acceptable. After that, the quadruplet of bears take their leave and you glance at the remaining key. You linger in the pool for a moment longer, taking in the scent of chlorine and the humid air before you force yourself outside of the building. You feel almost drag.

There's no telling where this last key leads to, but you think you know where to use it. Heading for
the location itself you easily figure out how to use the key and get the final location open. The crack is put into the proper spot with minimal effort and you enter the last location. What you find nearly takes your breath away. For all of the wrong reasons.

"A casino and a love hotel, Monokuma, what the fuck? These idiots aren't even 18 yet," you say under your breath. Your voice comes out in a growl, the smallest amount of rage stirring itself up uncomfortably inside your stomach while you imagine some sick bear leering at children while they sleep together. The age of consent may be 13 in Japan, but that doesn't make it any less messed up! The idea of some sick old bear leering at your friends almost makes you as sick as the idea of your friends actually putting the love hotel to use.

The casino is at least passable by comparison. It's not like any of you have real money, so it's likely just for the use of Monocoins or something similar. It'll be a good way to burn time. Something like the casino could be valuable to you since most of your time will be spent hunting for clues and you'll go mad if you do that 24/7. That still didn't excuse the other building in the area though!

"Luckily for you then, the love hotel isn't accessible in the waking world," the bear says with a laugh as it appears and presses 30 or so coins into your palm. You roll the coins around in your hand for a moment. Just as expected, Monokuma has a specially designed currency aside from Monocoins that'll likely only be useful in the casino. You don't doubt you'll be able to trade in Monocoins in case you run out though. Not that you'd ever be idiot enough to run out.

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"Explain," you say as you walk towards the casino, pointedly ignoring the hotel. You might as well investigate the casino for anything dangerous. It didn't stop your thoughts from wandering to the fact that gambling is illegal in Japan aside from lotteries and pachinko parlors. Of course, that hasn't stopped you from gambling before, your subconscious provides and that idea takes you off guard. You've done what exactly? You shove that idea out of the way and zone in on Monokuma as he speaks.

"The hotel is only accessible through special technology that allows people to share dreams. By holding a key you can win at the casino you and one other person will be transported there," he says proudly. "It just helps everyone to blow off some steam, especially since one person will always take on the role of the other's ideal lover. Sounds pretty cool, doesn't it?" He looks so proud of himself as he speaks. You do take note of something off in his tone as if he's just reading off of a script or a procedural. You aren't sure what to make of his underlying tone.

"So they don't get to choose who they interact with? Will they remember the dream? What happens if they confront each other the next day and freak out," you ask hesitantly. You have no intention of buying one of those keys, but playing the machines might be a nice way to waste some time. You have no reason to want one of those keys though. You're not driven by those kinds of desires. Some of your classmates though? Well, the idea of one of their other classmates playing the role of their ideal lover might just get their blood pumping enough to make a grab for one of the keys. Which could quickly lead to an entirely too awkward encounter. Especially when you consider the fact anyone could buy a key. And the way that Monokuma worded it made it sound as though they don't get to pick. Meaning that something really awkward and terrible like Tenko and Gonta ending up there together could happen. You shiver at the thought, literally, Monokuma glances at you with the smallest hint of worry when you do.

"Hmmm," Monokuma hummed quietly as he contemplated your words. "They will remember their dream, but it'll be foggy and through the lense that they're looking at their ideal. It'll be one of those dreams that you vaguely remember but can't place many details to, and by the time you get your tail down to breakfast, you won't be able to remember it anymore! On the off chance someone
does remember and tries to confront their one-night partner or me, I'll change the rules a little. I'll let people choose who they want to interact with, though I won't change it's hard to remember nature! Until that happens though, this is how things are," the bear tells you with a curt nod. You have a feeling this is going to be important later.

Half of you wonders if the two toned creature is just putting on a show for an invisible audience, giving them shipping fodder to excite them and make them all the more willing to watch such a twisted game. You honestly wouldn't be shocked. That's at least comforting to a certain degree. If it's for an audience, Monokuma will throw together people who actually look good together. Not Tenko and Gonta. The idea still gives you goosebumps though.

"I'm heading back to the cafeteria," you tell the bear. "It's almost time for dinner and by now at least one or two people should be dragging themselves out of their rooms to figure out what's going on," you say as you start to make your way back. Monokuma waves at you as you leave. You can't help feeling terrible about the idea of the love hotel. You suppose you better gather up everything you'd learned in order to present it to your classmates.
After quickly whipping up something for dinner you wait quietly in the cafeteria for a couple of moments. Luckily enough, bodies slowly begin to drag themselves into the room, their mourning postponed by their hunger. Some look distressed and distant, others look tired, and some still you wouldn't be able to tell anything was wrong if you couldn't see the fatigue in the corners of their eyes. Even Korekiyo, who you'd been having serious doubts about, looked at least somewhat distressed.

You go around the room trying to coax as many people as you can into eating. It isn't easy, but eventually, your remaining 14 classmates have plates in front of them and some are starting to look a bit perkier after they get something to eat. Shuichi looks notably better, scarfing down his meal with Kaede on one side and Kaito on the other. You decide to take the empty spot between Kaito and Maki for the time being. Maki doesn't look much worse for the wear, but you can't tell how much of that is an act.

There is at least one person who's acting. It's quite flamboyant just how much he's acting out, and you have to admit it's quite obvious.

Kokichi laughs loudly, pretending that nothing in the world is wrong. You see through that though, quite easily you might add. There's tension in each and every one of his limbs, a slight dart of his eyes that lets you know he's uncomfortable. It's a convincing act, but not convincing enough for you. His body language isn't the only thing off either. He's telling more lies than before, voice racing to keep up with the patter of his own heart. You're not much of a psychologist, but you'd bet money that his lying is a form of defense mechanism. If that's the case, putting him in an uncomfortable or even dangerous situation would cause more lying. There's been a real death now, so the purple boy goes into high alert. His desperate attempt to protect himself fools everyone but you.

You'll have to check on him a bit later. If you can manage it that is. You know for a fact you don't have much patience, and he's going to be much harder to deal with like this.

You survey the rest of the group cautiously, trying to gauge who else might need some attention after the meal. Miu seems to be the most unstable in the group. Her eyes are rimmed with red and she's quieter than usual. You have the feeling someone pulled her from her room before she was ready to leave. You doubt she'd ever willingly leave in such a disheveled state. You two didn't have the best relationship right now, but you thought maybe you'd check on her a little later as well.

After everyone had settled you cleared your throat. Everyone's gaze turned toward you. "Since no one else was leaving their room and Monokuma was getting bored, he decided to give me the keys to new areas of the school. It was a little bit of a puzzle, but as some of you may have noticed there are in fact a couple new areas open. In total it seems like 5 research labs and two larger locations, a pool and a casino. As well as a... unsavory hotel which is located just outside the casino. The casino uses a special type of Monocoins and gives out prizes. It seems like a good way to waste a couple of hours. The pool is barely filled up at best since the Monokubs mentioned a couple people can't swim, but they're willing to fill it up fully as long as it's for a larger group and someone can act like a lifeguard," you start to list off your finding when Kokichi cuts in.

"Someone can't swim, how pathetic can you get? Isn't that, like, a basic skill that everyone learns," the miniature shit lord asks. You know he's not doing much better than everyone else, but you aren't in the best of moods and you suddenly feel defensive on behalf of whoever can't swim. You have to put him in his place. You have to. You'll deal with the consequences later!
Without missing a beat you dismiss him entirely. "Shut up and let me finish Kokichi," you say. You neglect to use honorifics, not for the sake of fondness, and Kokichi's eyes narrow. You can't quite tell the full extent of his gaze, but your skin starts to boil under it and you fight to keep control while your cheeks threaten to heat up. You keep yourself from flushing and instead look at him head-on.

"Picking a fight are we?" He asks you. His tone is dangerous, but he isn't threatening to you. Quite the opposite. He looks like a child trying to protect itself by pretending to be scary, or perhaps a kitten fluffing up its tail the first time it meets a dog would be a more accurate assessment. You feel a small amount of pity but you disregard it in favor of controlling the situation.

"By no means," your voice practically comes out in a purr, eyes glinting with a challenge. Kokichi doesn't meet that challenge, he just looks at you for a long time before you continue. "As I was saying, I discovered 5 labs but I only ended up going into one. It looks like Himiko, Gonta, Kirumi, Ryoma, and one mystery lab I couldn't quite figure out the owner of have been revealed. Kirumi and Ryoma both had their labs remain locked due to the fact they're no longer a part of the game. I ended up only exploring Himiko's lab since it was the first I found. After figuring out I couldn't get into the next one I found, Kirumi's, I didn't have the energy or the heart to explore other people's labs," you tell the group and get a couple of nods in return. Gonta looks particularly excited.

"Locked huh... What do you think will happen if we find someone's lab and then they die?" Shuichi picks up on something you'd also noticed the other day but didn't really have the attention to pay too much mind to.

You try to decide how much you want to reveal to your classmates before speaking a second time. "I think any lab that opens will stay open. It's only those who die prior to their labs being opened. I think it's because certain people in this group might have certain advantages that scare the people running this game. They'd want to lock those rooms off quick and never let them see the light of day, but of course, if they broke their own rules that would give it away. So they made up a rule to keep those rooms locked up. Now that their 'order' is broken, they have to keep following their own rules," you say, your attention mostly resting on the detective as you lay out your own theory.

"Their order... you think they planned for us to die in a specific order?" He asks. For a second he looks terrified, more so than the rest of the group that looks unnerved. While everyone heard that the Gamemasters had control of an order, Shuichi heard something different. Shuichi heard the meaning behind those words. Shuichi heard that the Gamemasters had enough control over the group they could pick who lived and who died. That was a terrifying idea. The detective goes completely silent, trying to organize his thoughts.

You continue on with what you found, returning to the topic of labs. "Either way though, that's two locked labs, two obvious unlocked labs, and one mystery lab I didn't want to investigate and couldn't guess the owner of by the door's motif."

Your gaze can't help but wander towards Maki, curiously wondering if she's figured out that the mystery lab you're talking about might be hers. Given the uncomfortable shift in her posture, you believe that she might have. You decide to continue on, mentioning the one other thing your investigation turned out. "I also found this thing called a flashback light," you say as you place it on the table. "Monokuma says it should help bring back our memories through science bullshit or whatever, but do you actually trust the bear?"

You decide to leave the decision in the hands of the class as you place the flashlight on the table and push it away from yourself. Using it or not using it both possessed their pros and cons, so you'd roll with the punches whatever the class decided.
"I think it's probably best if we all meet up at 10 a day or two from now so that we can better discuss it in a better environment. Right now emotions are high and we aren't all feeling our best yet, so we should put off deciding if we should use it or not," Kaede says as she glances around the group for dissenting opinions. No one raises cries against her judgment and the light is given to your de facto leader for safe keeping. You hope Kaede uses her power well, it won't be long before she starts to lose her hold on the group. You can already see the idea of rebellion in the eyes of some.

Angie in particular worries you. As a previous religious authority figure, real or fake, she's likely used to leading and holding power in the name of Atua. Religion was always something dangerous to combine with leadership, and it worried you what she might be tempted to eventually do if you weren't careful. There were a couple of students who would be easy for her to prey on. Kiibo, Gonta, and maybe even the quieter than usual Himiko would fall like flies. There would, of course, be those who rebelled like Kokichi or Miu, but that didn't mean they'd decide to follow along with Kaede.

If the group started to fall apart into a mess of dissenting opinions and constant arguing... you'd step up. You loathed the thought, you absolutely despised it. Leadership was in your blood as your father and siblings would attest to, but it wasn't really something you were interested in. That being said, you'd snatch the reigns if everyone started devolving into a mess of arguments. For now, it was safest if you kept the mostly morally sound Kaede in charge and just tried to undermine anyway less morally sound who tried to step up.

After everyone finishes eating the little meeting was dismissed and everyone began to head their own directions. "Hey! Tomorrow we should all have a pool day, okay?" You say before the group leaves and you hear noises of assent. You'll talk to the Monokubs about getting that setup and see about hunting down some swimsuits. With everyone going their own paths, you decide you should probably go yours.

You wait quietly for everyone to shuffle out before you decide what to do next. A fraction of you wants to check on Miu, but a larger part of you realizes just how easily you stir up conflict. You just had to tell Kokichi to shut up during the conversation today. Go ahead, needle away at the already unstable boy. This is why you didn't want to be a leader! You weren't sure if it was a drawback of not being able to remember anything or if it was just a core facet of your nature, but you didn't think the desire to pick away at others was one given to you by Danganronpa.

You turn your attention back to Kokichi for a moment. Said boy is the last person before yourself to leave. Except he doesn't.

"Rather brave of you, telling me to shut up," he says in that childish coo as if the situation amused him. You can tell by the hint of malice in his gaze that it didn't.

You sigh and nip at the inside of your cheeks, begging your unruly mouth to actually behave. Such a wild tongue, with no memories to speak of you have so little experience in controlling it. You just hope this situation doesn't turn sour on you. You need to right this wrong before it gets any worse and you end up making another enemy. Kokichi stalks around the table so he can plop himself down in the seat right next to you where Maki was moments ago. "Not brave, simply agitated, and possibly stupid," you tell him.

"Don't I agitated everyone though, that's no reason to be so mean," he says with a tilt of his head. His tone is a whine but you can see the barest flicker of curiosity in his gaze. He makes no comment on the fact you call yourself stupid and amazingly enough he doesn't seem to assume he's the reason your agitated. While it's implied by his words, his curiosity says otherwise. Good, this is...
good. You think you can control this situation in your favor. You just need to be a little more cautious.

You barely catch the smirk before it's able to cross your features. "Perhaps agitated is the wrong word. I'm frustrated with the fact you think that someone as transparent as you could beat a game like this. Frustrated you think that antagonizing everyone else without a solid plan is the way to do it," you say simply. Kokichi doesn't seem to know how to respond to that comment, his brows furrowing. Yes, you're still antagonizing him, but the way you go about it is different than at breakfast.

You pick at the flaws you've seen in his persona, noting all the little details only you seem to be able not to miss as you eyes flick over he features. He comes to close to shying away under the ferocity of such a probing gaze, but he seems to have confidence in his facade because he doesn't back down. You can see his hesitance though, clear as day. He just lost.

"Transparent?" He asks you. You can hear the faintest hint of something angry in his voice, but that's a lie. Hidden underneath that anger is a dripping fear that shows in the way his eyes flash with worry. For a second you wonder if he knows it's there. Perhaps he doesn't. Maybe he's still in character, but the scared little boy dancing behind those violet hues is the real deal. Either way, you monopolize on it.

You smile brightly. "Yep! Transparent, because you're absolutely terrified," after saying those words you stand up with the intent to leave. Or at least making it look like it. A hand wraps your wrist in a death grip, so tight you're almost worried it might cut off blood flow. It wouldn't be hard to free your hand though. It's tight, but the grip isn't all that strong.

"Why tell me this? Don't you realize I could become a killer? Don't you think I could target you?" He asks you with a narrowed kind of gaze. "Why tell me?" He says in a voice that's much quieter like he's trying to understand your motives. Your thought process. He's confused and that makes the fear in his gaze all the more potent. You wonder if he realizes you've gotten him in check. A little longer, you'll have checkmate.

Gently, you pull your wrist from his grip. It only takes the slightest prompting to get him to let go. "I'm an honest creature when I'm allowed to be. I always prefer to wear my heart and my observations on my sleeve. If I wanted to lie to you, then I could. But I'm not going to because I think you're the biggest danger to yourself, not me. There's some chaotic and insane plan swirling around that head of yours, one that's ultimately going to end with you getting yourself hurt or maybe even killed. Neither of us quite understand how this world and Monokuma operates. Don't misconstrue my words, this isn't a threat or a challenge. It's a warning, a warning because I want to see as few people get hurt as possible. Maybe being Hopeful is kind of stupid in a situation like this, but trying to play to Monokuma's fickle favors is a hell of a lot stupider," you tell the boy. It comes out more scolding than you had wanted the words to, but Kokichi doesn't seem to mind. His expression makes him look like he's struggling to take in your words. If he holds himself on the pedestal of liar king it would make sense why your words unnerved him though. You'd effectively peered deeper into that little soul of his than any of your classmates so far, pulling out details and proofs he didn't want to face. You wonder why you're able to do this so easily, as though the process of picking things apart and looking for proof is something you've always done. Who are you?

You sigh quietly as you look at him carefully. After stripping him of his carefully crafted armor made from lies he looked so fragile. "Listen Kokichi-kun, I'm not an enemy. I'm trying to beat this game just as much as you are, in a way that will save as many people as I can. I promise you that
I'm on your side. And similarly... I promise you that we're going to make it out of here and we'll all get a happy ending. So please, don't do anything rash, and don't antagonize everyone so much. It's going to make the situation worse," you say. Kokichi has gone utterly silent, probably trying to weigh the worth of your words.

For a person like this, honest is probably the toughest pill to swallow. Especially from other people.

"That being said, I suppose there does need to be some antagonist force. If we all got along he'd just try to make the situation worse. While I'm not going to go out of my way to stop you, I want you to think more carefully about when and where you act out. And... if you need help or you have an idea... come to me, okay?" You offer up something of a truce, or maybe better put an alliance, and offer out your right hand to the much smaller boy. He looked at it for a long moment before moving past you to leave the dining room. As he passes you can feel his fingers lightly grazing against your left. It's discreet and it lets him keep her persona for the camera, but you think that little movement is as much of an acknowledgment as you need to know that you understand each other.

Once he leaves the room you let your shoulders sag for a moment. Dealing with Kokichi drains you of more energy than you're willing to admit. Dealing with the fallout of that conversation is an idea that scared you. You hope that you made the right call in confiding in the smaller purple haired boy. You feel so very tired in that moment, ready to lie down and go to bed and forget about the madness that came with the day. Talking to Kokichi alone was enough to make you feel ready for bed. But you remember you have one last job to do as you head for the dorms, the kind of job you have no intention of leaving uncompleted. You can't put it off any longer.

Running your fingers through your hair quickly, you find yourself standing outside of Miu's door, quietly regretting a multitude of decisions that led up to this point. It's not Miu herself that scares you, it's the fact you're all too certain she hates you for calling her out. Allowing your fist to rap against the door, it swings open with abandon.

"The fuck do you want, shit tits," the girl hisses at you. Quite an interesting insult. While your chest isn't as big as hers, it would be a shameful lie to call you flat chested and she knows that. So now it seems she's still looking for a suitable nickname or insult. She glares at you, but it doesn't feel entirely genuine. This catches your intrigue for just a moment. Her hesitance only seems to be visible for a half second before you can't find it. You question if maybe you just imagined it, but you don't think so.

"I wanted to check on you, you seemed pretty off at dinner," you tell her plainly. Miu seems like the kind of woman best approached up front. That being said, you'd have to be careful. You don't want to make the situation any worse. Best case scenario you make amends, but at the very least, you hope that you can shift her opinion of you to something more neutral.

She crossed her arms and glared. "Yeah, no shit. Two people just died," she tells you. "What fucking of it though? Not like you like me much, so why do you give a flying fuck," she hisses in an accusatory tone. Something in her voice snags. Ah. Now you get it. Alright, you think you might just be able to salvage this situation. You'll give it a whirl you suppose.

"Miu, I don't hate you. I was upset when you talked to me that morning so long ago, I couldn't really deal with a conversation at the time. Your brand of humor wasn't helping me much and perhaps I was a bit crueller than I necessarily needed to be. Okay, a lot crueller, my actions were unwarranted and I really should have just said I needed some peace and quiet. I do this a lot, pushing away my feelings and just exploding. I never hated you though. I'm here now because I'm
worried about you. You didn't seem okay at dinner so I wanted to check in and make sure that you are," you tell her.

"You don't hate me?" She asks quietly. She suddenly shifts from in control to meek, her expression seeming to twist as she slinks back slightly. You shake your head in response. She goes quiet for a long moment before putting on her old persona. So it is a defense mechanism. "That doesn't mean I'm just going to forgive you and spill my damn guts!" You're not sure if the yell is reassuring or not, but at least you're able to see she's mostly brushed off being upset. Her expression doesn't speak of the same anger as before.

"I don't expect you to," you say with a shake of your head. "I'm just here if you need someone to talk to or spend time with. If you don't need either of those things then I'll leave you be," you say. You feel the slightest sting in your chest given the way she responded, but you don't blame her. You were needlessly harsh with her. You just wish you could be more helpful to her now.

"W-wait," the girl says quietly. She reaches a hand out towards you hesitantly before you leave. You come to a complete halt, your curiosity suddenly burning. "I was thinking I'd go to my lab for a few hours before I fell asleep. Since you were humble enough to apologize for your actions, I suppose I can give you the honor of getting to watch me work!" She puffs out her chest as she speaks. You didn't even apologize yet, at least not properly. It's a thinly veiled request to not be left alone, a request that isn't all too different from the one that Kaede made the night prior. This feels different though.

"It would be my honor," you decide to say with the smallest hint of a smile beginning to linger on your features. You motion for her to lead the way and happily walk alongside her once she leaves her room, closing it and locking it with a quick click.

The whole way there she doesn't look at you, at least not properly. She gives you quick glances as the pair of you walk, but she never meets your gaze and doesn't even let her own linger on your for more than a couple of seconds. You wonder what she's looking for. Is she still mad at you? No, that's not really what it feels like. You can't recognize what else it might be though. The walk is silent, but for you, it's not uncomfortable. You spent the entire day walking around the school in total silence, completely alone. Having Miu walking with you now is practically bliss.

She stops outside the door to her lab, glancing at you one last time before she pushes the door open.

Upon opening the door the only thing that enters your mind is just how chaotic a mess the entire room is swallowed up in. "How do you know where everything is?" You asked quietly. There are tools everywhere, scattered in various parts of the room that you didn't even know Miu was tall enough to get to.

Miu gives a boisterous laugh. "It's a controlled kind of chaos, I know exactly where everything is and the important stuff is right where it should be. If it was cleaned up I wouldn't know where everything is. That's why the maid wasn't allowed inside," the inventor explained as she got to work at a table of sorts. There's a small look of hesitation on her face when she brings up Kirumi, her expression falling for just a couple moments. She pushes that all away quickly though, and focuses on whatever she's supposed to be working on now.

Kirumi's name still brings with it a certain kind of sting. It's not as intense anymore, not as fresh, but it still hurts. Thinking about her reminds her of the friends you've lost as well as the friend you've still to lose because of your own lack of skill. You don't want to think about who you could still lose. That thought brings with it an entirely different rush of pain that almost makes your head spin. You push all of those thoughts away, focusing on Miu and her lovely inventions.
"What kind of things do you like to invent the most?" You ask her as you lean over her shoulder. You can't recognize half the blueprints, but something does catch your eyes. It's a notepad with a sketch of Monokuma on it. Is she trying to analyze him? "Oh my gosh, are those parts from Monokid?" You whisper in a breathy voice as something blue catches your eyes nearby. You wonder just what exactly she's trying to do. Nothing good, at least for one party in the school. Hopefully something useful for the class though.

"Shh! Don't let them hear you," Miu whispered at you while she pushed the parts and the notepad under some other nearby blueprints. "I'm trying to figure out the bear so that maybe we can take it down for good, no more regeneration and rebuilding bullshit. I'll whip up some kind of gun that takes 'em out," Miu's voice wasn't awfully confident but it was determined. She seemed quite convinced of trying to find the weakness of the bears and you had to give her credit for that. It spoke to a degree of situational awareness if not some kind of altruism. True, the end goal would be self-serving, but there were quick ways to go about reaching such an end goal. Ones that involved a lot fewer students living.

"As for your question, I invent a lot of things. Mostly stuff that lets you do things while you're sleeping, but that's not all. Some of my recent inventions have been rays that tell you what a person's kinks or sexuality are!" She announced proudly as she points toward a gun looking thing on the wall. You can see some kind of display screen where a scope typically might sit. You feel yourself tense up at the idea of such a machine.

"Why? I mean, I understand why, but, you know, why?" You try to wrap your head around the point of such an invention when you were trapped in a murder school.

"Well, you know, it could be helpful," Miu says as she suddenly becomes a lot meeker in temper. "Sometimes you wanna make sure that a cute person might have the same kinks as you! Plus... it's scary talking to someone you think is cute and trying to figure out if they'd be into you. On top of that, something like this could help out a lot of confused people, kids and adults alike. It would make dating and figuring things out so much cleaner and safer," her voice in almost gentle as she speaks. The word safer makes you wonder what kind of experiences she's had in the past.

"Have you ever been stuck in a situation where you were trying to figure out if a cute someone was into you?" You ask her. You keep your tone as plain as possible as to not make her panic. You're honestly curious though. You somehow doubt she'd admit it even if something did happen to her.

"Hell no!" Miu suddenly yells, shattering the moment like glass. "Who the fuck wouldn't be into this rocking body? Men, women, gay guys, straight girls, I guarantee you that I could catch them all!" She announces proudly. You're able to see through the declaration easily enough. False pride is a good cover for a person's lacking ego. You don't comment on that though, instead just nodding along. "It's just... you know, easier if that person would usually be down," she says. She quickly becomes more awkward as she toys with the ends of her hair.

"What else do you like to invent? Any plans for when we get out of here?" You try your best to shift the conversation and Miu perks up a little more.

"Well, yeah! I'm going to invent a ton of stuff to make people's lives easier. That way everyone has more time to do what they enjoy in life. That's why when I was younger I used to make so many inventions that let you do things while you slept. 8 hours a day is a lot of time, and if that became free time instead of time that you had to be working or doing homework then people would be happier and everyone gets to enjoy life more. Plus, I would be filthy fucking rich!" The girl genius boasted. You had a feeling her first couple statements were the most accurate to her actual feelings. The money was little more than an afterthought to the girl. It made your heart ache a little for her.
"Miu, I think I had the wrong idea about you," you admit to the girl. You don't know why you feel compelled to admit this, but you feel it deserves to be said.

She pauses for a moment in her tinkering, a hint of crimson coloring her cheeks. "D-damn straight you did," she barks at you before jumping into her inventions. You can see the faintest glow of joy in her expression that makes your heart twist and feels light at the same time.

After observing her work for a while you eventually decide to leave her be. "I'll see you in the morning Miu," you say to her and she gives you a nod.

As you close the door behind you, you can still hear her faintly mutter. "Heh, that was actually kind of nice. I could get used to being treated like that," she says almost too quietly to catch. Given the way she acted regularly, you'd begun to get a feeling she was a masochist. You wondered if she was implying... no, best leave that train of thought at the door. You'd been up for way too long, you were probably just delirious or something! It was bedtime.
Splish Splash

You were fatigued the next morning, only waking up after the morning announcement went off. The last time you actually slept was the night of the murder, meaning that you slept like a log the moment your head hit your pillows the night before. It had been far too long since you'd actually gotten any sleep, you'd ended up just putting it off repeatedly. It was amazing you even managed to wake up at all. Your body is still desperate for more sleep as you try to drag yourself out of bed, but you don't want to leave your classmates waiting for you. This is still a killing game, you wouldn't want to leave them worrying about where you are. You get ready slowly that morning, your limbs feel like they're moving through tar and your mind through a haze.

With a lot of effort, it seems you're able to push away the weighty feeling of sleep. It takes a couple moments but once you're finally up, you're up.

You think the worst part of it all isn't even the fact that you were so tired. It's the fact that sleep seemed to do nothing to help you. The kind of sleep to take you last night was a dreamless kind of sleep that left you feeling heavier the next morning instead of well rested. You suppose it's better than the hourly nightmares.

Given the chance, you'd psychoanalyze yourself and those nightmares, but so far it seems there was nothing useful to be found from them. The only useful thing you got was a diagnosis that didn't really give you any clues. You were an insomniac that suffered from chronic nightmares. Did that help you at all? Not really. The nightmares themselves were just senseless cacophonies of shapes and sounds. If you could actually remember them better when you woke up then maybe you could figure something out from them, but they always seemed to disappear long before you could start trying to document them.

It's always disappointing when you wake up from a nightmare. Not for the nightmare itself having existed, but for the simple fact that it was already gone. If you could ever remember anything, there was always a chance you could glean a couple clues about your history. Of course, there was no telling their accuracy and your dreams could be just as distorted as your real memories but wasn't it at least a trail worth following if you were going to have to deal with nightmares every single night?

Perhaps a dream journal would help. You have the feeling you'd kept one before. The idea feels old to you, almost nostalgic in a way. It's followed by a bitter taste in your mouth and the scent of what you can only assume is a hospital, but overall, the sensations don't seem to prove themselves unpleasant. Even the bitter taste is muted and strangely pleasant. Which is odd considering how most people despise anything to do with a hospital. The more memories you seem to uncover, the more you start to wonder about exactly who you were. Odd things have started to feel comforting more and more lately.

Things you'd associate with a hospital, the sound of off-key singing, donuts and protein shakes. Odd little triggers you couldn't associate anything to yet, but you had a feeling they were important to you somehow. Your nightmares, if you ever manage to actually remember one, also feel important.

Speaking of nightmares.

"Rise and shine, ursine!" 4 voices call when you finally manage to get dressed and start making your way towards your door. Their voices are muted through the door itself, but they're still grating. You suppose you've probably lingered for far enough, lost to your thoughts. Unfortunately,
that means there's no way to avoid the menaces. You open up the door and greet the four nightmare bears who await you outside. The 4 look at you carefully before Monodam speaks.

"TODAY IS YOUR PLANNED POOL DAY, CORRECT? PLEASE MAKE SURE THE CLASS IS AT THE POOL BY 2 O’CLOCK. WE WILL KEEP THE POOL FILLED UNTIL 4," the green bear says. Seemingly only wanting to have said that, the bears disappear as soon as Monodam is done informing you. Of course, they would have noticed the other day when you mentioned the pool party. You suppose that a pool party of sorts might be a good distraction for everyone, including yourself, so you'll bring it up again today during breakfast and give everyone something of an informal invite.

Breakfast...

You're late...

You're late!

There's a surge of panic that shoots through your fatigue-addled brain as you realize just how long you've spent dawdling. You aren't that late. You're about 3 minutes behind when everyone else would have finally shown up, but considering that you usually wake up at five and tend to be the first person in the cafeteria that's way too late for you. You slam your door shut behind you, barely taking the time to lock it before you go sprinting. You make your way to the main building and dash through the halls, listening to the pounding of your own feet. There's no one else around, and it's likely that everyone but you has made their way in already.

When you finally get to the cafeteria, you screech to a halt just outside it. Your chest heaves and luckily you've gotten there in record speed. It was almost reckless how quickly you ran, but you don't think about that. Don't think about just how dangerous your little sprint could have been. You spend a quick moment catching your breath and listening to your classmates chat about the day before you finally push your way in. Your expression is sheepish as 14 gazes with varying expressions turn on you.

"It's about time you showed up!" Kokichi is the first to call. You aren't that late, not as late as you could be, but you can still see a couple expressions of relief when you appear. Kokichi, playing the role of antagonist, is quick to prod at how late you are and make fun. You stash away the fact that his face is one of the expressions to relax with something resembling relief once you've stepped inside. He might usually be quick to hide his actual face behind that mask of his, but you aren't easily fooled.

"I slept in," you begrudgingly admit to the group with earns you a couple of snickers. You also get a couple looks of sympathy. Kaede flinches, knowing part of why you slept in so badly and likely blaming herself. Miu's cheeks turn a little pink considering she knows the other half of the reason. You don't blame either girl. You wanted to be there for them when they needed you, that wasn't something you were about to regret or get upset over. What you did get upset over was the way that Tsumugi rolled her eyes.

The girl in question didn't say anything. She didn't draw any attention to the action, in fact, it almost looked as though she was trying to be discreet. You picked up on it though. Not because of the movement of her eyes, but because of the movement of her hands. There was a notebook in one hand, drawn close to her body so that no one else in the room would see it. Her other hand was jotting something down. It was those movements that led you to catch the way that she rolled her eyes. Looking at the notebook, you feel oddly unnerved. Curiosity burned at the back of your mind, but you store those thoughts for later and instead turn towards Shuichi when he starts to speak.
"Akamatsu-san got up early and made breakfast, so it's fine," Shuichi says in what you suppose is supposed to be a reassurance. It doesn't really help, but you appreciate the gesture so you smile at him warmly before you go about trying to find yourself a seat. There are 3 empty seats, two are next to each other and the last one is smack dab between Maki and Miu. You have a distinct feeling which seat is intended for you. Miu actually smiles at you as you sit down. Maki gives a quick nod to acknowledge your presence.

"Awww, ____-san! You don't want to sit next to me?" Kokichi says as you take your seat. He's obviously teasing you so you roll your eyes in an exaggerated fashion which earns you a childish giggle. The way you act is different from how Tsumugi acted earlier. Her actions seemed to be with malice, but there's a distinct lightness to the way that you move which implies a joking nature that the trickster easily picks up on. It makes you all the more uneasy about Tsumugi. Kokichi sticks his tongue out at you in response. "How traitorous of you ____-san! I thought we had something special!" Fake crying quickly follows up the line.

You hear a couple groans as the two of you go back and forth, most people settling glares on Kokichi. The shocking thing is that Korekiyo actually looks upset, his usual blissful expression being gone entirely. What in the world happened to him? You push the thought from your mind and focus in on Kokichi.

"In your dreams," you shoot back with a shake of your head which earns you a satisfied Nishishi. You seem to be the only one who understands that both his and your own actions and words are merely jokes as the rest of the class looks upset and annoyed as the pair of you go back and forth. The class truly thinks that worse of him. You push the thought from your mind and focus in on Kokichi.

"I think there were some baking supplies in the kitchen, but I don't think there's anything premade. If you want some sweets you'll have to make them yourself," Miu says with a quick shrug. A shame there's nothing premade, but you suppose that premade stuff really wouldn't stand up to anything you could make anyways. Canned and packaged goods are never quite as delicious as their fresh equivalents, a culinary rule that was especially true of baked goods.

"Not much of a sweet tooth?" You ask the girl as she seems to dismiss the idea of something sweet entirely. You never really thought about who in your class would or wouldn't have a sweet tooth. Even if you had, you didn't think you would have been able to place Miu before now.

"Nah. I can usually eat whatever I want since my body is amazing, but really, sweets just aren't worth the risk of ruining my perfect figure. But you can damn well bet your ass I'm amazing at making them!" The blonde happily boasts her skills and for some reason you find yourself
believing her. Underneath her powerful haughty inventor persona, you can actually see someone normal starting to peek through the cracks. Someone who outside of inventing might just enjoy baking as a hobby. It wouldn't be impossible.

In a strange turn of events, Maki decides to join the conversation. "I got really good at baking since a lot of the younger kids would ask for sweets. My best friend and I used to always make some for the younger kids whenever there were enough ingredients around," she says as she continues to eat her breakfast. Somehow in the back of your mind, it makes sense that both Miu and Maki would be bakers. Baking was more of a science than general cooking. It required a strict recipe and discipline, as well as a healthy dose of creativity when it came to bettering the recipes.

Weren't those qualities you could ascribe to the two girls?

Miu actually seems surprised by Maki's comment. "Oh yeah. You have such a vicious personality I completely forget you take care of kids. Baking though? What are you, a housewife?" Miu says, not understanding the irony of her own statement. She truly doesn't mean any offense by the quip, but you can see Maki's eyebrow twitch for a moment. Miu's tone isn't even harsh, but her words strike a chord with Maki and you can see the red-eyed girl starting to open her own mouth to deliver a more scathing response. Nope, nu-uh, you aren't dealing with fights today. It's a good day, it's staying that way.

"Maki's personality is plenty gentle, and I think it's cool that she's able to bake," you pipe up. Once again, you find yourself trying to defuse a potentially dangerous situation. "Hey! Maybe we should all bake something together sometime, it might be fun!" You chirp, a joyful expression painting your features. Your attempt to calm down the situation turns out to be a success as both girls become quieter, nodding. Maki seems mostly unaffected, but Miu lowers her gaze and won't meet your eyes as you put on your brightest smile for both to see.

"Oh! That reminds me of another thing," you say. You try to catch the attention of the rest of the group as best you can, eventually drawing all eyes towards you. "Remember when I said I'd see about convincing the Monokubs to fill up the pool today? Well, they actually agreed! From two to four it's going to be completely full. I'll, of course, be around and anyone who wants to can go ahead and join in on the fun!" You say to the group. You can already feel hints of joy starting to bubble up within the group. A couple whispers ripple through the group, excitement painting the atmosphere.

"Oh! Oh! Atua says we should all partake and that us girls should go look for swimsuits together after breakfast!" Angie says with a giant smile. It's obviously not Atua as much as it's her own desire, but you don't call her out on that. You've learned your lesson in regards to calling people out, and honestly? You've had enough negative encounters with these people for a lifetime. From now on you're keeping your trap shut. And agreement you know will last all of six hours but hey, you'll try.

"Hey, that sounds like a really good idea," Kaede says and it isn't long before the rest of the girls at the table all start to agree. The boys all agree to try swimsuits on together after the girls are done, giving the girls the privacy to try things on and go without being spied on. The boys aren't the ones that worry you in regards to spying though...

You feel a small amount of hesitation, remembering that there's a chance this could be a televised program of some sort. That hesitation only starts to grow and grow when you start wondering if Monokuma would publicize a bunch of underaged girls changing. No, maybe not underaged ones. You, however, are 18... Would the Gamemasters do that? Yeah, they absolutely would. You resolve to pick out 2 or 3 swimsuits and try them on in the nurse's office later. Better safe than
"Oh yeah! I'm going to knock everyone out of the water with this awesome body. You're all going to be drooling," Miu boasts proudly and you actually find yourself smiling along as she speaks. Her excitement is something to behold even if her pride is a bit oddly placed.

"Miu-san might have curves, but I bet Tenko-san has abs," you say with the smallest hint of a smirk. Miu glances at you for a second, she looks utterly wounded before she takes note of the teasing expression painting your features. When she sees that her own expression lightens up and she smiles proudly. She decides to actually play along

"Yeah, but which would you rather have? Tits or abs? Personally, I think that choice is pretty fucking obvious!" The blonde tilts her head upwards in supposed victory, laughing loudly, as you roll your eyes and giggle. Out of the corner of your gaze, you can see both Himiko and Angie sending quick glances towards Tenko. Are they blushing? Tenko certainly is as she ducks behind her hands. You highly doubt either you or Miu would be alive right now if you were boys. By benefit of gender alone Tenko hasn't killed you on the spot, but she's a brilliant shade of crimson.

"Who needs to pick when ____-san probably has both!" The ultimate little shit actually catches Miu and yourself off guard with his comment. You stumble over words for half a second, lost for a response. Fucking Kokichi Ouma! Miu glances towards you and her cheeks turn a darker shade. Not yet a shade of red, but they're pinker than they were a couple moments ago. Your own cheeks start to heat up, a scorching fire starting to grow on them. Screw it, screw the rules. You're killing Kokichi later. Is this how Tenko feels? You'll need to say sorry to Tenko later. If you can't play with fire, get out of the kitchen. You try to recover before anything else can happen.

"Chabashira-chan already has both," Himiko says so quietly that the class barely catches her words. Chan, she kept using the suffix chan. During the trial when the rest of the class was accusing Tenko, Himiko hadn't used a suffix at all while defending the other girl, even going as far as to use first names. You wonder...

"It wouldn't shock me if she and Chabashira-san both have six packs."

The words don't shock you. After all, this is just the kind of conversation you guess is happening now and you look to be in fairly good shape. That much is obvious. You've had at least one fitness club meeting and you were able to keep up well enough, so they shouldn't doubt your physical prowess. The reason those words cause your jaw to swing open is the fact that Maki is one who says them. "What?" She asks when she catches your gaze. "I'm just stating a fact." Those words are said with such a dismissive shrug like Maki thinks they're normal. Well, in any other conversation they potentially could have been. But to say that now of all times? Her words obviously aren't even of the same vein as the conversation that's happening now, she has no idea what she's actually done.

Kokichi starts to howl with laughter.

You can see Tsumugi smirking out of the corner of your gaze. She keeps writing something down in her notebook. Suddenly you feel even more uncomfortable about the entire encounter. Like something about it is stilted. Scripted. The hairs on the back of your neck start to stand up and you start looking for an escape. Bad fanfic are the first words that come to mind.

"Wait, really?" Miu says after she finally recovers. "I have to know," she says, reaching out her hands to press against your stomach. You make a noise halfway between a squeak and a yelp and entirely dying animal, falling backward and pressing your back against Maki's shoulder. "Hold still and let me touch you!" Miu shouts as she leans a little closer. The innuendo isn't lost on you, and it
makes the situation all the worse as that prickly feeling in the back of your mind starts to burn.

You manage to force your way out of your seat, almost tripping as you do so. Miu's actions feel natural in a way, but some of the rest of the group feel awkward. Some of the boys are just sitting there almost like puppets, watching things happen with glassy eyes. Not all of them mind you. Kokichi's expression suddenly turns vexed, his eyes darting around quickly. Shuichi has an expression of panic.

Your desperate escape sets off another round of laughter from the more puppet-like members of the group and Miu is on her feet in a moment's notice. "Bakamatsu! Grab her!" Miu is none the wiser, but obviously, you and some of your sharper classmates have started to pick up on something odd going on.

Kaede to her credit shakes her head, her eyebrows furrowing. You can't tell what's going on. She seems more confused whereas Kokichi and Shuichi both start to look worried in a way. There seems to be a divide in the group. Some people are acting like puppets while others seem to be confused. You have no idea what factors caused the difference though. Miu is being weird but that's just Miu. Kaede and Maki both seem... uncomfortable. In their eyes, this is probably a joke gone too far. For you though? It's so much more.

It feels like a testament to the Gamemaster's strength like it was intended to be some kind of boast. The thing is though, they're not winning. Even one person not acting like some puppet is proof, proof the game is going off of their rails. You save that silent victory for later as there are more... pressing matters to deal with. Those matters being, fan service. Anything televised must have fan service, it's a common rule of production. This must be their version of fan service. Why did they have to pick on you though?

Himiko and Angie jump to their feet, moving to block off the door. Tsumugi stands up a little slower, closing her notebook with a satisfied smile as she starts to stalk closer, moving to help block off escape routes or to help grab you for Miu. The hair on your arms stands up straight immediately when that notebook snaps shut. You don't know what the hell she did but you're blaming her! What started as a small possibility of her being the mole had skyrocketed to you nearly being completely assured of the fact. An Ultimate Cosplayer who looks extremely plain. In a way, it makes a messed up kind of sense. You don't blame her necessarily, she's a victim like everyone else, but it's still deeply upsetting.

"Fuck it! We'll figure it out without stupid Bakamatsu's help! You're still outnumbered," Miu says, taking another step towards you. Maki and Kaede remain sitting, glancing around themselves to try and decide what to do. You see a confused look on Maki's features as she places a hand against her mouth, almost like she said something she didn't mean to. Or didn't realize she was going to. Her line earlier did feel a bit admittedly out of character. Your more puppet-like classmates continue to act their parts, while the classmates who have seemingly broken away look all the more confused as the situation goes farther and farther.

"I'll protect you ____-san!" Tenko finally says as she jumps to her feet. For a moment you think she's going to actually protect you. "Girls, we can't conduct this investigation while there are degenerate males watching! We'll know if ____-san has a six pack soon enough when we start trying on swimsuits!" Tenko tells them. There it is... Somehow this doesn't make you feel any better. Just as expected, the moment Tenko is on her feet Tsumugi is already hanging off her and playing decoy.

Miu makes a dash at you. You're starting to think that breakfast is now over as the boys just watch the show, some amused and others confused. It's unfortunate for the girls that you're faster than
most of them. You make a dash for the door in spite of it being blocked. Himiko and Angie are standing in front of it, but they're a good couple spaces apart. They'll grab you if you dash through that small space between them though, and you won't be able to keep going without potentially hurting them. As if that's your only option though. Who do they think you are?

Dropping to the ground, you shock both girls by gracefully sliding past their legs and instantly pushing yourself into a standing position like an action movie star. "10 points!" Kokichi shouts from inside the cafeteria as you start sprinting away. You can hear laughter behind you. There are about 7 other pairs of footsteps that go charging after you once you're outside. 4 that seem intent on stripping you, 1 that might join them now that you're out of the male gaze, and 2 that hopefully want to help you. You decide your only option is to go into the storage area, throwing yourself through the open door and trying your best to find a place to hide.

Looking around inside of the storage room, you aren't sure what you were expecting. It's just shelves and shelves of potentially helpful goods and murder weapons. There isn't anywhere you can really hide that wouldn't be immediately obvious. Yeah, you could duck down behind the shelves, but a quick search of the area and they'd have you pinned again. You're not sure how well you'll be able to escape a second time.

You apparently take too long to decide, and the other girls come charging into the room. The others seem to have lost most desire though as Tenko, Angie, and Himiko have started chatting. The only one who still has dangerously glinting eyes if of course Miu. She jumps you the first chance she gets. "Oh my gosh! She really does have one," the blonde squeals in delight as she presses her fingers against your abdomen. You hate the sensation, squirming under her touch. It's not necessarily uncomfortable or unpleasant. You still hate the feeling though because of how her touch brushes against you. By accident or on purpose, she ends up tickling you.

You squeal, a choked laugh that sounded more like a dying animal leaving your body. "Stop!" You complain as you already feel the hints of tears starting to gather in your eyes. The other girls, apparently no longer interested in you and Miu, decide to ignore you. Kaede and Maki stick around. Ironic, considering they're the three that were the least like puppets. The other 4 pay you no mind, disappeared somewhere in their hunt for swimsuits.

"Did you not want us to touch you because you're ticklish?" Kaede asks. You can't really say all of the reasons why you didn't want them touching you, the biggest one being because their actions didn't feel like their actions. You decide this is a good enough half-truth to satisfy them and the question is innocent enough. In addition, Kaede is the one who asks it, one of the few people who didn't seem like her actions were being controlled in some fashion. You nod. Big mistake.

Kaede instantly starts to brush her fingers against your sides with malicious glee, a grin painting her expression. You cry out in distress, noises that were halfway between a giggle and a sob bubbling out of your body without welcome or warning. "No, no, no!" You cry as the two girls hold you in place and start to push their fingers against any area that might be remotely ticklish. As the two quickly find, that's just about all of you. You've always had delicate, oversensitive skin. It made most physical sensations more intense, pleasant or unpleasant. Being tickled was, of course, no exception.

Your brothers never used to tickle you since in their words it was a violation of a very sacred kind of trust, but it was something that your friends would often do. For a long time, it was the only thing that could do against you.

"Leave her be, we need to be looking for swimsuits," Maki says as she forces herself into the situation and starts to remove Kaede and Miu from you. The other two girls pout childishly. It
takes a long moment, but eventually, the two seem to give up. A fierce glare follows them as they leave, Maki standing close enough to you to be a protective force without being too close. You feel gross, so very gross. You always hated fan service scenes in shows growing up, you felt a sense of sympathy for the characters.

It had started out funny when it was just a joke and the only thing that came from it was burning cheeks. Even Kokichi's quip wasn't bad since it was all in good fun. The moment things started to get physical, that was when it went too far. It was made all the worse by the strong understanding that there's a high percent chance of you all having an audience. It could have ended worse, you reflect, but you still feel undeniably gross.

"My hero," you wheeze as your arms tightly wrap around Maki. You can't help but wonder if she feels you shivering. You try to use the physical contact to wash away the feeling of gross fingers poking and prodding at you, holding on perhaps a little tighter than you usually would. Maki looks annoyed slightly, but she makes no move to remove you. When you finally remove yourself, you join your friends in the hunt for a swimsuit.

Eventually, everyone is sorting through the shelves looking for bathing suits, yourself included. You're still hesitant to try anything on, at least in a moderately public place like the storage room. While you're secluded off on your own, Monokuma suddenly appears right next to you. He doesn't say anything he just stands there, waiting for you to notice him. You actually jump when you notice the bear, the hairs on your arms standing up.

"_____!" the two-toned bear says in a conspiratory half whisper. You wear a look of confused curiosity as you inspect Monokuma. It hands you... a bag? "Wear this one, it fits and it'll look absolutely perfect on you. Fashionista's honor! No need to try anything else on, okay? Go put it on in the nurse's office or your own bathroom before the party" The bear says before disappearing as quickly as it appeared. It put extra emphasis on 'own bathroom' and 'nurse's office'. You find yourself at a complete loss for words. Fashionista's honor? You can only stand there a bit stunned as you try to figure out why Monokuma just handed you a swimsuit. He specifically mentioned no need to try anything else on...

Shaking your head you note down yet another piece for your ever-growing puzzle. What details can you glean from this though? There's still too much you don't know yet, but this certainly implies some interesting details. Especially regarding Monokuma himself.

Eventually, the group reconvenes with everyone holding their own picks of swimwear. Everyone has wildly different tastes and they all take turns switching through the swimsuits to decide which fits their tastes better. You abstain, keeping the swimsuit you were handed in the bag. You haven't even looked at it yet. You wonder if it'll act as a clue or if it's just a swimsuit. Honestly, knowing Monokuma things could go either way.

"Aren't you going to try yours on?" Tenko asks when she sees that you're still wearing your clothes. The others have switched into swimsuits which are appealing to their individual tastes. Most seem to have settled on something they like. For the most part, everyone has been okay with just ducking behind one of the stacks to change. You don't feel comfortable with that though.

"Already did," you lie so easily that the others don't even blink at your answer. You're glad that you don't betray yourself at that moment. "You'll just have to wait until two in order to see it!" You tease with a smirk, of course, there's something lacking to the grin. It's a faux playful expression that's hiding how you really feel and some of the others seem to pick up on it. You get a couple of frowns but Maki gives you a quick look of sympathy, likely assuming the reason you refuse to change is linked to the earlier assault. She wouldn't be incorrect, but it's still an incomplete answer.
"Anyway, I'm gonna head back to my room for a little bit and get ready," you say.

The others bid you goodbye and you make your journey. Your heart is pounding uncomfortably after everything that had happened throughout the morning. You need to write down all these new puzzle pieces, these fragments of clues, truths, and lies which you can use to unmask the grand truth. There's so much you don't know about Monokuma and why he seems to be helpful towards you. Helpful towards only you for that matter. He seems to have shown a strong sense of favoritism towards you and you alone. No one seems to have noticed yet, but it's fairly obvious to you.

In addition, Tsumugi did a lot of things this morning that have set off little warning lights in the back of your mind. Little details that didn't seem like much at first glance but were slowly growing and escalating to seem... bigger. The notebook is what really set you off. Wouldn't someone 'controlling' the game and 'writing' the script want to keep a notebook to adjust the script as needed. Then again, how could she almost seem to control some of your classmates? It also felt as though there was a significance to who was acting like a puppet and who wasn't. You'll need to pay more attention down the road, investigate your classmates a little more thoroughly. The largest overarching question from this observation though is the question of how.

Obviously, the Gamemasters would be doing the controlling at the Mastermind's request. That still left a large question as to how they were doing it and how it was being communicated so quickly. The scene this morning felt very improved, hence why it felt very jagged around the edges. Looking back you wonder if there was anything similar. You wish you could say your own little encounter with Miu early on was like that, but you can't really blame anything you've done on scripting. Those were just your own flaws shining through.

How can you just control people though?

The answers elude you. Corner pieces, you remind yourself. Then the side pieces. From there you can start to organize all the little pieces into a full picture, as well as get an idea for what the picture actually is. Right now you have no clue, you're stuck matching similar colors and that deeply frustrates you. You need to be careful, forcing two pieces together that don't fit might just end up breaking the pieces in question, and the picture will never look right again.

You're standing outside of your room suddenly, barely having processed the gradual shifts in scenery associated with the transition from school to dorms. You really need to pay more attention to your surroundings. One day luck's going to come around and pay you back for your lack of awareness.

When you enter your room you sigh in relief, flopping down against your bed. You assume that your bathroom is safe for the most part from peeping eyes, so you'll change there before you go. At least, you hope so considering what Monokuma said. Cross your fingers.

As you press yourself into your bed, your head starts reeling. There are so many things to think about. Almost too much to try and categorize and sort through in your head. Maybe you should start keeping a notebook. It wouldn't be the worst idea you'd ever had, but then you're suddenly reminded to Tsumugi. In case this ever became a prevalent piece of information for a class trial, you'd need to be careful about not writing in your notebook outside of your room. You do need somewhere to organize your thoughts though. Things would get out of hand otherwise.

Of course, the answer is kind of already obvious, isn't it? Maybe you're just not brave enough to look. The true question at this point is how you escape.

Your jaws part with a yawn as you realize just how tired you are. With your body pressed against
You jolt awake at the sound of knocking against your door. Jumping up and opening the door you find Kaede standing outside of it. "Hey ____-san! Just in case you lost track of time I wanted to quickly remind you there are 15 more minutes before it's 2," the blonde says with a smile. You nod still a little groggily as you process this information.

It's a good thing the blonde came to get you. You were absolutely out cold. It was another cold dreamless sleep, but at least you're feeling a little better than you did that morning. Your mouth is dry and you feel thirsty, but you push the sensation to the back of your mind. You really should have set an alarm for a little earlier. While you physically feel better, your thoughts have churned themselves into a chaotic mess in the meantime.

"Oh! I was taking a nap, so thanks for that. I'll go get changed real quick and we can head over together sound good?" You ask. Kaede nods with a smile and you decide to leave the door open while you grab the bag and retreat into your bathroom, closing its door for the sake of privacy. You trust Kaede to a certain extent and it isn't like your closet isn't locked. Everything valuable is safely out of sight of the blonde. Getting changed isn't a hard task, but it takes a couple minutes to work out the swimsuit itself.

When you come out you're in a simple two-piece bikini. It's a very light pinkish lavender, a similar color to Kaede's eyes. It goes well enough with your hair and you approve of the fact that the clips are little flower charms. You try to figure out what to do with your keys as you walk out. You hesitate to leave your room unlocked but you don't necessarily have anywhere to put your keys.

Kaede's eyes glance you up and down, skimming across you curiously. Your refusal to change makes this the first time she's seen the swimsuit, as well as your own. At least Monokuma wasn't lying about it looking good on you. There's a spark of surprise in her gaze when her eyes finally stop jumping across your figure and you tilt your head in question.

"It's not fair ____-san. How come you get to be so toned?" She whines and you laugh a little. She isn't exaggerating. You're far too toned for a sedentary lifestyle. Not in the way that someone professionally inclined to physical activity is, but enough that there's a notable difference between someone like you and Kaede. You file away that little detail as another clue. "Just leave your keys here and forget about locking your door. I think that's what everyone else is doing since we're all going to be there," Kaede says when she notices you looking at your keys.

You hesitate for a long moment but eventually shrug it off, seeing no harm in the fact since the key to your closet is safely stashed inside of your pillow. You close your door behind you and start making your way to the pool with Kaede. You two are actually the last to arrive, the rest of the group sitting on the sidelines and waiting when you appear. The Monokubs appear to be setting up what looks like a hose when you get there. Likely to fill up the pool. A couple gazes turn towards the pair of you when you appear.

Kokichi lets out a long low whistle when the two of you walk in. You aren't sure if he's teasing you or being serious.

"Oh damn," Miu says when she turns her gaze. Miu is wearing the most scandalous thing she could possibly find, or at least so it seems. Bright pink, of course. All the girls are wearing the same things that they tried on earlier. It still amazes you how Angie found something nearly identical to
what she was already wearing. You decide to ignore Miu's comment, trying not to glance at her for too long.

You continue to look around for any details of note. Maybe something like a toaster that someone is planning to chuck into the water once everyone else has gotten in. You don't find anything like that. Instead, you find Monokuma sitting up high on a life guard's chair. He's holding a champagne glass and muttering to himself rather disgruntledly about a martini and no martini mixes in this blasted hell school. You decide it's wise to not engage, instead, pushing your way towards where the other girls have grouped up.

Everyone greets you warmly while Tenko glares at the boys. To their credit, the boys are pointedly paying her no mind. Be it that they're actual gentlemen or for the sake of their own survival, you can't say. The moment it's 2 and the pool has been completely filled Angie darts forward and throws herself in with a flying leap. "Yahoo!" She cries joyfully.

"Not fair, wait up!" You call as you dive into the water after her. The rest of the class seems to stall for a moment as the two of you fling yourselves in. Angie comes up immediately with a spray of water droplets. You don't. Instead, you start swimming under the water, enjoying the muted sounds and the way that the cool liquid cradles your entire body. It's a solid amount of time before you finally push your head above the water for a breath. You aren't sure how long you were under the water, but Angie looks impressed.

The others finally start to make their way to the water, some following you into the water with a leap while others are more cautious. You don't know who does it, but whoever picks up Kokichi and chucks him into the water deserves a medal. It's the least composed you've seen him this whole game. When he pushes his head above water he looks furious for a half second before jumping into insulting everyone who doesn't have the balls to jump into the water. Egged on, Kaito leaps into the water and ends up belly flopping.

Honestly, they both look like idiots.

You're lucky that the pool is fairly large since a lot of students decide to jump in. If the pool wasn't so large it might be easy to accidentally jump on someone, but that doesn't seem to be an issue given the size of the pool. Tenko hesitates at the edge, lingering till she's the last one on land, aside from Keebo who has to, unfortunately, sit the event out. Your eyes linger on her a long time and you start to feel concerned.

"Don't tell me, Chabashira-san can't swim!" Kokichi says with delight, still on his insult spree after being tossed into the water. Tenko turns a deep shade of scarlet and you think this is the first time you've ever seen her lacking in a comeback. She doesn't even shout at Kokichi for being a degenerate male, she just hangs her head as shame stains her cheeks. You decide to make a jab at the boy, getting his attention to be focused on you. As long as he was focused on you he wouldn't be insulting Tenko. Hopefully.

"Kokichi, if you don't stop harassing everyone then someone is going to drown you and there isn't even going to be a trial since everyone would have seen it happen. Don't you dare think I won't take the fall for the good of the class," you flop backward so that you're just floating on the water in faked exasperation. Your joke doesn't go over as well as you hoped, at least not with the rest of the class. A couple of pairs of eyes glint maliciously. Not at you, but at Kokichi. Which is disappointing since your words were intended as a joke to change where the boy's attention was, something Kokichi seems to perfectly understand judging by his giggle.

You're fairly certain both you and Kokichi know you couldn't hurt someone, so he laughs off the jab easily and luckily decides to back down from harassing Tenko.
"Yeah right, as if anyone could catch me!" Kokichi says loudly. He uses Gonta as a springboard in order to get a little speed as he starts wildly swimming around the pool. You decide it's better not to chase him, even though you know for a fact you could easily catch him. Not worth it, you decide begrudgingly before turning your own attention back to Tenko.

"Tenko-san, come here. We aren't gonna let you drown, it's perfectly safe. I'll teach you how to swim," you say gently to the other girl. You right yourself from your previous position and push your body towards the edge she's standing at. Angie follows after you, her expression positively glowing.

"Oh! Angie is very good at swimming since she grew up on an island. Atua says all will be well if you come to swim with us," the silver-haired girl says as she too approached Tenko. The two of you who had flung yourself into the water first seem to have the most ease in moving through it.

Angie would, of course, be familiar with water and swimming considering she grew up on an island just as she said. Swimming was likely a common pass time. As for yourself? The water feels like an old friend, the way it holds you is familiar to memories you've lost. You know how to do it and in the back of your mind, you know how to do it well. Not professionally well, but professionally taught well.

Tenko very slowly crouches down and starts to place her legs into the water while you and Angie gently prompt her. After a little initial hesitation, she slowly lets herself sink in. "Ah! I can't touch the bottom," she says in a panic and you feel her muscles tense up as both you and Angie grab her. One of you is on each side of her, helping the girl stay afloat while panic starts to seize her form.

"Calm down, relax, we'll keep you afloat. If anything goes wrong then we can get you out. If not us, then Gonta," you say. Gonta, thanks to his gentlemanly nature, was one of the boys that Tenko despised the least alongside Shuichi who was effeminate enough to not garner the same wrath as someone like Kokichi or Kaito might. Gonta at least wouldn't be scorned or hit for fishing Tenko out of the water should things go wrong. Tenko hesitates for a moment but eventually nods. "Now then, make sure you keep calm. The human body is pretty cool, if you just relax then you'll float on your own. Just try not to panic," you say.

"If ever you start to feel like you're sinking just take a deep breath, relax, and try to roll onto your back," Angie jumps in where you left off with a gentle expression. She treads water easily, keeping both herself and her shared burden of Tenko's weight afloat. You have no issues either. For all her muscle, Tenko is fairly light. It's easy to keep her body above the water.

Tenko nods at the two of you, trying not to flail around. Some of the other girls like Himiko and Kaede start making their way towards you. Soon it becomes something of a small group effort to teach Tenko how to swim. You hand off the side of Tenko you're holding to Himiko. She hesitates at first, but the red-haired mage inevitably takes Tenko's other side in the effort to keep her afloat. Tenko turns a bright shade of red as Angie and Himiko press on either side of her, giving her instructions that she barely manages to catch past her own fluster.

Despite the rather large distraction, she follows their instructions easily enough and you can see her starting to figure things out. Not enough to be left alone, but enough that she's starting to understand her own movements in the water itself. Both of her teachers always give her warm smiles and lots of praise as she gets the movements rights.

You smile and roll your eyes, sitting back and watching a little. You'll intervene if she starts to sink, but till that happens you'll leave her to the other girls who are there to help her. Mostly though, it's Himiko and Angie who are helping to instruct her.
"I wonder if the blushing maiden will actually get some," Miu cracks a joke from where she's appeared beside you. You wonder if she's only hovering around you since you're the closest she has to a friend in the pool. She might have harassed Kiibo if Kiibo wasn't sitting on the sidelines. He didn't seem much too upset about it that morning, the fact he wouldn't be able to swim that is. He doesn't seem upset now. In fact, he seems plenty happy enough to watch the rest of you swim. There's a smile on his face as he watches everyone laugh and enjoy themselves, occasionally joining conversations with a shout.

"Who knows, it's not like it's one-sided," you say as you watch both Himiko and Angie. Well. Himiko and Tenko definitely both have feelings for each other. Where Angie fits into the situation... It was going to be interesting, that's for sure.

"Wait, really? I thought tiny tits was getting pretty annoyed with her," it's hard to keep up with all of Miu's nicknames but given most of your classmates, it's easy to tell who's best defined by the word 'tiny'. Still, she could pick nicer nicknames.

You shake your head in response, watching the trio swim. "Nope, Himiko is into Tenko just as much as Tenko is into Himiko. They might not know it yet, but Angie and Tenko are pretty into each other too. It's going to be a mess when that time bomb explodes, so enjoy them all being happy for right now," you tell the blonde while she looks at them a little harder, apparently reassessing them. It's hard to place what details exactly led you to this conclusion. The same details that led you to your assessments about Kaito, Kaede, and Shuichi you suppose.

There's something more to both those sets of three that you can't really place. Something odd you can't put into words. Again, you find yourself thinking about the influence of the Gamemasters from earlier that morning.

"If you say so, but I don't see it," she says even while Angie pulls Tenko's arm a little closer to her chest so as to lead her through the water. Himiko can't really do much given her size, but she makes certain to keep a hand placed on the center of Tenko's back for support. You see so many ways it could all go wrong. There are still a couple of ways it might go right. "Do you swim the same direction as those three?" Miu finally blurts out the oddly phrased question after a long stretch of silence.

You blink a couple times, turning towards Miu. Odd way to phrase the question. Miu instantly backs down, her meeker side coming back with a vengeance. "Ah, never, uhm, nevermind," she ducks her head away from your gaze. You decide not to answer the question if she's going to back away from it so quickly. You do, however, stash the question for later. Do you?

At one point you get out of the pool for a short moment in order to go grab something. You don't say what, but as the best swimmers in the class, you or Angie needs to be in the pool at any given time. Angie doesn't seem like she wants to leave so you're free to go... collect a couple things. At least that's what Monokuma says when you want to leave. There needs to be someone competent enough to keep anyone from accidentally drowning.

When you come back, you start pelting the class with bath bombs to the delight of some and the horror of others. Your actions are followed by squeals and laughter as the pool is dyed a multitude of colors, full of fragrance and oils. You aren't a monster so you pick bath bombs that actually work well together when it comes to their scent. It was hard hunting them down! You admittedly feel a little proud of yourself afterward.

You aren't the only person who leaves at some point during the little pool party. Shuichi and Kokichi both have to leave at some point in the middle and return later, however, you don't exactly catch the reason for why they leave.
Close to four the cubs call everyone out of the pool and start to drain it. Thanks to the bath bombs they have to drain it completely and refill it to the normal amount. They glare at you viciously. You have no regrets.

"Is the day over already?" Kaede says with the slightest hint of a frown. No one seems to what the day to be over already. It's been fun so far and for a couple hours, everyone was able to forget about where they all were. Everyone was able to relax and be friends. You admittedly don't want today to end either. You search your thoughts desperately for a way to extend it.

"It doesn't have to be. Why don't we all dry off and then we can go play around in the casino," you offer up to the group and receive a chorus of agreement. Not a single person hesitates to agree. The casino is your best answer to getting more time out of the day. Besides it, there isn't really much 'group entertainment' around the school. Not much entertainment in general, at least not the normal definition of it.

"An activity in which I can also partake! Wonderful thinking ____-san," Keebo says happily. While it didn't look as though he minded being left off to the sidelines you're sure he'll enjoy himself more when he's able to actively participate. You smile and nod enthusiastically, glad to see the joy of the robot.

The group heads back to the dorms together, laughing and joking the whole time. Kokichi cracks jokes that are meant to be rude, but they're more gentle now and people just roll their eyes. Kaede and Kaito both bring a sense of joy as they talk animatedly. They go on about what kind of games will be available and what kind of prizes will come from it. You'll have to remember to advise everyone not to buy a key when you actually get there. You hadn't mentioned it the other night since you doubted anyone would play enough to but one of those outrageously priced keys, but now there was a real possibility.

When you return to your room you start towards your closet, opening it up after retrieving the key. You get changed quickly and put the key back where it belongs, your eyes darting towards the empty spot where your room key is supposed to be. You blink twice, pausing quietly. Whelp. Honestly, you were a fool to not see that one coming.
Chapter Notes

There are a lot of heavy topics this chapter ranging from religion to conversation about Korekiyo's deplorably nonconsensual actions during his love hotel scene (nothing explicit takes place though). If either of these are triggers for you, there are a couple of portions of this chapter you might want to skip.

When you finally meet back up with the rest of the class after getting changed you discover it's not just you that's missing your keys. The group takes a couple of moments just to stand in the main area of the dorms and wonder where the keys went. No one wants to point any fingers but you can see a couple of venomous gazes flying in particular directions.

"Come on guys," you try to assuage everyone's fears with a couple comforting words. You hear grumbles of distrust permeate the group which is then followed by more glares, but eventually, everyone turns their gaze towards you. "It might just be Monokuma messing with us. After all, weren't we all at the party the entire time?" No one questions your lie, even draws attention to it. Does anyone even pick up on it? The entire class looks distracted and distraught

You know full well there are three exceptions to your little statement. Those exceptions would be yourself, Shuichi, and Kokichi. Both Shuichi and Kokichi left and you don't know why, so it would have been in both their power to steal the keys to everyone's rooms, wouldn't it?

The answer is pretty obvious to you, huh?

Missing keys luckily don't stop the class from going to the casino though. After a sufficient amount of grumbling the class heads outside together, quickly putting the entire event behind them. There's currently little notable consequence to someone else having the keys. You can list a couple of problems off the top of your head, but you don't have the feeling they'll actually become problems, so you push the dilemma of the keys behind you, seemingly moving on the fastest out of anyone in the group. Seriously, what harm was going to actually come from it that wouldn't have come along anyway considering some people could pick locks?

You aren't worried. Nothing dangerous for your classmates will come from missing keys.

The class walks together, chatting happily with one another. Some of the girls brought towels with them, still attempting to dry out their hair. You had long since given up on trying to dry out the mop which stuck to your skin in uncomfortable fashions, keeping your back damp and wetting your fresh set of clothes. It wasn't worth it to try and stand there for hours drying it when it would eventually dry itself. Eventually. Unlike some, you didn't have the heart to make the class wait while you blow dry your hair. Miu had and Himiko had, but the two didn't have hair as thick as you. Angie's hair had dried with remarkable speed and the rest of the girls all seemed okay enough just patting down their locks with a towel and waiting for time to do the rest.

Your hair would take all night, but you'd feel guilty making everyone sit around as long as it would have taken to use the blow dryer. Honestly, thinking about it in retrospect you should have conscripted some of the other girls to help you attack the wet mop with multiple blow dryers. You suppose that's what you get for having the longest hair in the group. You made a note to cut it soon.
before it actually managed to crawl its way down to your thighs. It was making an honest attempt as the situation stood.

You break away from your musing about hair in order to focus on your classmates. In particular, the one awkwardly hovering next to you like he wants to say something. You give the boy your full attention when he finally gets closer. Shuichi hesitantly takes up a position next to you, looking rather sheepish. "Hey ____-san," he says quietly and you glance at him curiously. "You already knew about the casino and the hotel right? Why, uhm, why didn't you mention that the keys you buy at the casino are the ones to the hotel?"

You feel your blood freeze. You didn't mention anything because it didn't seem important at the time. It was almost nighttime by the time everyone had dragged themselves out of their rooms. You doubted that anyone would go to the casino so late, let alone stay there long enough to win the tokens required for the key itself. They'd either need to be insane or extremely curious. The kind of curiosity often found in detectives. "You didn't," you say as you look the boy in the eyes. Shuichi ducks his head, looking like he's on the verge of panicking.

"I didn't know!" He says in order to defend himself. He looks like he's going to cry and your heart melts for the poor boy. You quickly place a hand between his shoulder blades, your expression becoming more sympathetic. You didn't mean to seem like you were attacking him. The actions combined seem to help him relax a little, but he still looks like he's on the verge of tears as he waits for your response.

"I didn't actually expect anyone to play last night after I mentioned it. After all, it had gotten pretty late already," you tell him with a frown. You wonder if Monokuma's choice in... partner was actually tactful or just random. You could see it going either way since there would be worth in either case. It could be compelling if the couple picked was actually shippable or comedic if the couple in question was just odd. Either way, you felt bad for poor Shuichi. It also made sense why he went to you, since going to Kaede or Kaito with this little problem might prove a touch awkward no matter the circumstance.

You continue on with your words, trying to pick them carefully as you watch the terrified expression on Shuichi's face. You both know what question is coming, so you try to word it gently. "Honestly given the price of the key I didn't find it worth mentioning since I doubted anyone would buy one. If I knew you were playing I would have warned you. Did... did something bad happen?" You ask and Shuichi worryingly enough presses himself closer to you. You try to be the beacon of support that he needs at that moment, keeping yourself strong and allowing him to rely on you.

Looking deeply into yourself you try to draw from a well at the center of your being. It bubbles gently and responds to the needs of your friend, just as it always has. Hope and confidence spring forth. The question just becomes how you give those aspects to Shuichi.

He doesn't answer your question immediately. In those next couple of moments, he looks like a war veteran given the distant, horrified expression on his face. It obviously wasn't Kaede or Kaito that appeared if he's making a face like this. Even Kokichi wouldn't draw out such a reaction. "Shinguji-kun," he just whispers to you as though the name itself brings back bad memories. Now that you think about it, Shuichi had been keeping his distance from the taller boy all day. Oh dear.

"What happened? Are you okay? Do you need a doll so you can point to where he touched you? Do you need me to beat him up?" You don't mean to shoot a barrage of questions at the much more fragile Shuichi, but they slip from you too easily. Defensive and familiar, you feel your hackles raising. You love all of your friends and would treat them the same, but if one hurts the
other you will lay down that top quality smackdown! Shuichi shakes his head, assumably to all of
the questions which is unnerving since one of the questions you asked was if he was okay.

"I backed out," he says quietly. "Monokuma told me that it would turn into a bad dream for him if I
did... but..." you shake your head as he speaks, quietly placing a hand on his shoulder. That wasn't
Shuichi's fault. Such an act would have been without consent. There was no fault on his part for
deciding to back out. It also saved Korekiyo from an old fashioned beating. The kind you'd watch
some of your friends dish out to each other when they crossed the line. You never crossed the line
as the records stood, so you'd never been on the receiving end. As a very gentle natured person
you'd never been on the giving end either, but you weren't above it to protect someone else. Pacifist
as you were, as much as it would stand against your morals, the defense of your friends way more
important than all things. Including your own wellbeing.

You really don't want to imagine what Korekiyo might have tried to do to Shuichi if the smaller
boy hadn't backed out. Even if it turned into a nightmare for Korekiyo, you wouldn't stop feeling
bad for Shuichi. You did, however, feel a small spark of agitation against the actual culprit of this
terrible match up.

"We'll talk to Monokuma about it when we get to the casino," you say. You're lucky that the two of
you were already close to the back of the group and you're able to lag far enough behind that no
one notices the conversation you two are having. For the moment it would be best not to draw too
much attention to the issue. Especially considering the issue itself involved Korekiyo and that was
something a little awkward. You wondered if he remembered it at all. His disposition didn't seem
too soured but he wasn't the easiest to read.

Shuichi goes silent for a long moment, the two of you continuing to stay at the back of the group.
There's a silent question resting in the back of your throat, but you don't want to ask it for Shuichi's
sake. He seems to easily pick up on your unspoken question in spite of yourself. "It was some
pretty kinky shit," he mumbles and you feel yourself shiver. It's the most crude you've ever heard
him speak, and the words themselves seem better suited coming out of Miu's mouth, but the
important thing is the words themselves. There's bile in the back of your throat.

"Rapey?" You ask though you aren't entirely sure you want to hear the answer. Your heart
continues to wrench with sympathy for poor Shuichi. You try to be gentle with your words, not
forcing an answer out of him. These kinds of things were... delicate.

"Semi. Bondage," are the only two words that the detective says before he draws his hat over his
eyes and shivers. You feel so bad for him in those next few moments. You pull him a little closer,
wrapping an arm around his shoulder protectively. You glance ahead of you at the next two closest
people and sigh in relief. Fortune seems to be smiling on the pair of you since Kaede and Kaito are
the next closest. Of course, they themselves are a good couple feet ahead of you and Shuichi
considering how much the pair of you have lagged behind.

Kaede and Kaito seem to be holding a pleasant enough conversation themselves. You clear your
throat to catch the attention of the two and then whistle at them when that doesn't catch their
attention. Luckily the whistle seems to alert the two and they glance at you with curious eyes while
you move a little faster to catch up with them, Shuichi in tow. Kaede looks worried when she sees
the way that you've got Shuichi pulled against you, your stance more protective than anything.

"Someone had a nightmare and needs a little attention," you say, your tone gentle as your gaze darts
towards Shuichi. For now, this is the most you can do in order to help him. You wish you could
address it better, but you aren't a trained therapist. You'll talk to him a little later to see what you
can do, but right now, the best thing you can do is take his mind off. Kaede and Kaito both seem to
shift in their nature slightly at the mention of a nightmare, their demeanors growing softer.

"What the heck ____-san," Shuichi says as he stumbles a little bit thanks to how closely you're holding him. The arm slung tightly across his shoulder keeps either of you from walking properly. You remember when you were younger your older brothers would do something similar whenever you would have a bad day. It was always awkward since they were taller than you, but it would make you feel better and stumbling along would often make you laugh. It does seem to help Shuichi slightly, his posture not being as tense as earlier.

Kaede falls back to stand on the other side of Shuichi while Kaito laughs slightly. "Trying to scare away the nightmares, are we ____-san," he says jokingly, regarding how protective your posture seems to be. There's more to it than that, but you laugh along anyway. You don't want to alert the other two to the full extent of what's going on. It's better if they just focus on making Shuichi feel better.

"Damn right! I'm terrifying don't you know," you bark back with a massive grin, flashing your teeth like they'll somehow become dangerous fangs. They're straight and perfect and completely human-like in nature, but you still pretend, baring them like you're some kind of protective mama wolf. Kaito laughs louder and you tilt your head back proudly in response.

Kaede ignores the pair of you while you act like idiots, her attention focused in its entirety on Shuichi. "A nightmare? That's no good, though I can't really say I'm shocked. A situation like this is bound to lead to nightmares," she says sympathetically and begins to dote. It's easy to assume that the nightmare has to do with the situation the lot of you are in, so she does. Kaede is a wonderful creature, but she doesn't have the mind of a detective, that's for sure.

"Don't worry about it! If anything bad actually does happen then I'll protect you! And, of course, it seems ____-san will too!" Kaito says proudly. You don't think Kaito can protect the much smaller boy from bad dreams, but if Monokuma changes the way that the hotel keys work then he might just be able to. Aside from that, you don't think Kaito is much protection against the biggest threats of all in this school. The exisals and the slow march of madness towards the unsuspecting minds of the rest of the group while Monokuma mercilessly crafts terrifying and torturous motives to pit each other against the only real allies any of you have in this fucked up little game.

You though? You might be able to act as protection against that if you take the right defensive measures. Shuichi himself too. Even though he acts like an amateur detective, he still acts like a detective which is enough to make him a valuable asset in potentially solving the mystery of this school. Of course, just for tonight, you decide to set those kinds of thoughts aside. You'll instead focus on yourself and your friends.

Shuichi is finally laughing and you pull away from him slightly, trading your position for Kaito's as the purple haired man moves a little closer, the three chatting amicably. Comfortably sandwiched in the middle, Shuuchi looks much more relaxed than he did early. You're content with your work, watching him trade smiles with Kaede and Kaito.

You smirk at a job well done, slipping away towards the front of the group and leaving those 3 to deal with things themselves. The most important thing though was the fact you could help Shuichi feel a little better.

Finding yourself closer to the front of the gaggle which is making its way towards the casino, your gaze hunts out another group of students to integrate yourself with. Keebo is talking with Rantaro, Kokichi, and Gonta in a rather animated fashion. They seem pretty happy, but you can see the vaguest hint of a sour expression starting to gather on Kokichi's features. They look like a good group to wiggle your way into and waste the rest of the time walking to the casino, but the thing
that catches your attention and draws you over is Kokichi's expression.

It worries you to a degree. You need to figure out what's going on.

"Sup nerds, what's the word," you say as you appear at Keebo's side. The 4 are walking in a row with Keebo on one end and Gonta at the other. Rantaro acts as a barrier between Keebo and Kokichi. The source of Kokichi's sour expression is likely Keebo. Kokichi likes to bully the robot, but this feels like a different creature altogether. Kokichi's gaze itself feels more critical, harsher than his usual teasing smirk. You have the feeling that something Keebo's saying is actually getting to Kokichi. It's a bit harder to immediately pick up on, but you can see a certain tension in Rantaro's feature's as well which leaves you all the more worried.

Keebo gives a shriek like noise when you suddenly appear, eyes widening as he glances at you. This wins a few giggles from Kokichi, his serious expression breaking for a couple of moments. His posture is still tense but his expression lightens up as his gaze lands on you. He actually looks glad to see you! You're not sure if you should be worried... Rantaro's laugh sounds more like a sigh and Gonta just generally looks confused. "___-san! Please do not sneak up on me like that. One of us could be hurt," the robot chastises you with the angriest expression as he can muster.

"Alright, alright. I'm sorry. You should be a bit more aware of your surroundings though. You could get yourself hurt if you don't pay more attention to what's going on around you," you tell the robot who ponders your words and nods quietly. "Anyways, let me ask a second time. What are you all talking about?" Since none of them responded to your initial greeting you rephrase your words, easily slipping into the conversation as you fall into step with the four.

"Keeboy was telling us about the silly student council. He and Gonta have absolutely eaten it up! Amami-kun and I aren't so naive as to buy it that quickly though," Kokichi mocks the pair once more. It's hard to immediately pick up on, but there's something genuinely upset sounding in his tone. You don't blame him. He probably trusts this student council about as much as you do, and it is his job to be the openly antagonistic one even when you two agree. Keebo rolls his eyes and you start thinking through a more diplomatic approach to this situation.

You didn't really know there was a student council being started until one of the girls mentioned it to you a bit earlier that day during the pool party. Apparently, Angie was starting to amass quite a following. It made you a bit unease in regards to aspects of current leadership as well as group safety, so you were already keeping an eye on for more information. Kokichi's response just set you all the more on edge. Still, you needed to play the role of diplomat here. You carefully measure your words as Keebo speaks up once more.

"Ouma-kun, it's not kind to mock someone's faith! Besides, what other explanation is there for the little voice in my head that's always guiding me. Atua is very kind and just, and I have faith that as long as we believe in Atua then everything is going to work out. ____-san, what are your thoughts?" Keebo turns to you, inquiring for a less rude voice in the conversation. Rantaro has effectively been silence at this point, so it seems. He's lucky. You aren't entirely certain how to approach this one, so you start off a bit hesitantly.

"I'm not the religious sort..." You say as your eyes dart to the side, not wanting to meet Keebo's gaze. You start to fiddle with the hem of your left glove while you worry your lip. Danger, your entire head was screaming with the danger of this situation. It needed a delicate touch and that was something you weren't entirely sure you had after the whole Miu fiasco.

"Well, why not?" The robot asks. He seems genuinely curious, but you're not sure if being unable to remember practicing a legitimate religion actually counts as a proper answer. At least not in this setting. The words Hope Jesus come to mind, but you feel as though that's just a childhood joke.
"I dunno," you decide to say instead with a shrug. Being as it's not a lie and you honestly don't know, Kokichi doesn't pick up on your internal struggle and instead goes back to bullying Gonta who seems quick to forgive Kokichi for his mean spirited jokes. "I'd rather not follow Atua though. Not in the way that Angie's presenting it," your voice goes a little quieter, hesitant even. "I'm just kind of worried about the dangers of fanaticism..." It's a genuine concern you've felt every since Angie started displaying signs of taking up a leadership position, but you haven't voiced it until now.

A small part of you keeps worrying that if she takes up a leadership position, she'll abuse her religious authority. You can't help but wonder if it's something she's already done in the past, pretending her own words and thoughts are that of her god. Power corrupts without checks and balances or a very steady hand. Some hands were steadier than others, having dealt with leadership before and having ultimately altruistic goals. Even they needed to be occasionally checked because no matter how goods intentions are, they can occasionally become blinding. A hand built upon religious authority though, that was a hand that went unchecked. A hand that worried you.

That wasn't to say that religion is bad! Not by any means. Angie just possesses certain personality traits that were worrying in particular to you.

"Fanaticism?" Keebo tilts his head to the side as he looks at you for some kind of explanation. He doesn't immediately shut down your words which is good. He seems genuinely curious and willing to learn, so you take a moment to gather your thoughts before you continue. Delicate topic, it needed to be handled with care you quickly remind yourself.

"It's when you start to become fanatical, which is kind of a single-minded zeal of sorts. It's blinding and if you become too deeply entrenched into your beliefs then you can blind yourself to logic, truth, and reality. Fanaticism can then easily be abused to give the prophet power even after they might have gone rogue and started abusing it. Not to mention, even the greatest prophets can possess human error and interpret the words wrong. If you can mishear me, then you can certainly mishear the words of a divine being, divine or not. Angie's belief in Atua unnerves me because it reminds me of fanaticism. In which case, no matter how productive and well-intentioned as her actions are there's the potential for them to turn dangerous," you tell the robot. You try to explain it as best you can without painting Angie as 'the bad guy'.

She wasn't, you were just calling for caution.

Keebo pauses for a moment, seemingly processing this information. "Oh... So, basically, you're saying that the voice in my head isn't necessarily wrong, but I could be hearing it wrong? Or interpreting its words wrong? And if I believed it blindly without first assessing what I've taken from those words then there's a real possibility I could hurt someone," Keebo says as though explaining it to himself. His gaze suddenly fills with panic. "Ah! That's terrible! I'll try to be more careful!"

You sigh in relief, nodding quietly. "Exactly, that's exactly it. Angie doesn't question the voice in her head, she just trusts it completely. On occasion, no matter how well-intentioned, that can be a bad thing. I'm not saying don't indulge the student council, but it's going to quickly become unhealthy if you don't keep your values in mind. Especially if you start pushing your beliefs on others!" You were hoping it wouldn't happen, but humanity was a fickle creature and if push came to shove you could see Angie pushing to have her belief in Atua become a 'school mandated religion'.

Gonta doesn't seem to be able to follow the conversation but Rantaro gives a quick nod. "In my travels, I've seen a lot of religions turn fanatic because of the desires of a corrupt leader. Those
religions themselves though well-intentioned initially become tools for power, and those who are supposed to speak the word of god start to say their own beliefs, regardless of what their gods might think. I can absolutely see how Angie might go down a similar path if left unchecked," he says as he glances towards you.

You nod in return, building off of Rantaro's words. "Yeah, exactly. It's not even that Angie herself is corrupt, it's just a facet of humanity that it's easy to become corrupt. We don't always think about the good of the group, and even when we do it's usually tinged with our own thoughts and beliefs." Keebo nods along as the both of you speak, seemingly taking your 'grain of salt' like advice to heart.

Kokichi just sighs, shaking his head at the three of you. "How can you two explaining it so simply to Keebo in five minutes when I've been trying to explain that to Gonta all night!" He throws his head back in distress as he pouts, and you can't help but feel a smirk starting to slip across your features.

"Sorry, Kokichi. Chin up though, we're here!" You say as the group finally arrives at the casino. Kokichi's expression shifts at the drop of a dime, going to one of pure joy. You wonder if he was actually upset or not. Even with all the effort you've been putting into reading the boy, it's still occasionally hard for you to tell.

"Oh! Oh! ____-san, are you going to play with us?" Kokichi asks. His lips are quirked upwards into a grin as he turns towards you. His expression is shockingly bright, excited in a way you haven't seen so far. He hovers a little closer to you as he speaks and you don't have the heart to tell him no. Not that you were going to anyways.

You smile warmly at him, seeing something at least slightly genuine in that grin of his. "Yeah, just give me a moment first. I have to talk with Shuichi-kun for a moment and then I'll meet up and we can play whatever we want," you say. You don't forget your promise to the detective to help him talk with Monokuma. Hopefully, this will keep things from turning nasty later on.

"Yes! Having the Ultimate Luckster on our side is going to make this a piece of cake!" Kokichi cheers. It's the first time you've heard your fake talent said aloud in a while and it almost causes you to jump. The four take no notice and make their way to start scouting out machines. You sigh and shake your head. You'll need to break yourself of that, jumping when you hear your fake talent. It wouldn't be good if someone more perceptive noticed. Heck, Kokichi himself might have noticed and just not mentioned anything. The talent itself just seems so strange to you, foreign and yet still oddly familiar. Almost like it's not entirely disassociated with who you are. You find a comfortable wall to lean against and settle down while you await the detective.

It takes a little for Shuichi to shake Kaito and Kaede, now with the addition of Maki, but eventually he does and he comes to meet you once the rest of the class has gone inside and down to the machines. His nerves have returned to him, causing him to duck behind that hat of his. You quietly plot to get rid of that hat later but focus on your current task for now.

"Hey Monokuma," you say once you're sure the coast is clear. "Come out, come out wherever you are. Shuichi-kun'd like to talk with you," you say, knowing that he'll heed your class. Given Monokuma's track record so far of appearing whenever you called on him, you'd be more shocked if he didn't show up. Just as expected the bear appears and tries to sigh heavily, but you denote a sense of joy radiating off of the creature.

"This is about the hotel key I assume?" It asks with faked annoyance. Monokuma glances towards Shuichi with the smallest hint of pity in his gaze. "Right, well, a promise is a promise. I'll change the function of the key to work so that you can choose who you'll spend the night with. Whoever
has a key will play the ideal, and if the other person doesn't have a key then they won't remember. If both people have keys then there won't be any ideal playing, it'll just be genuine you guys and you'll both remember. You can also go threesies if you swing that way!

Monokuma's final quip is rather translucent. Of course he'd try to force those three closer together. Which leaves the question as to why the first night Shuichi ended up getting paired with Korekiyo. Was it done purposefully just so that the three of you could have this conversation? If that's the case, maybe Monokuma wanted the key to originally work this way and other factors forced him to change it. The Gamemaster's maybe? He did seem pretty big on consent during the sleepover, but seemingly far more careless when he was describing the key to you.

That would also help in explaining why he seemed to radiate joy currently despite his best efforts not to. Shuichi turns a deep shade of crimson. "I'll even reimburse you!" Monokuma says as he pushes another key towards Shuichi. The boy turns an even deeper shade if that's even possible, but he doesn't refuse. Even if he didn't want the key, you have a feeling he'd be far too flustered to refuse.

"So... do you like Kaede-san and Kaito-kun?" You ask while Monokuma takes the chance to disappear before the conversation can continue. Shuichi squeaks instead of answering your question, but it's really all the answer you need. You pat the boy on the shoulder and start making your way inside so that he can catch his breath and calm down. These poor idiots. You love your new friends dearly, but they're all idiots.

You haven't been inside the casino yet so you have to admit you're a little impressed as you step inside. It's built beautifully, likely meant to be appealing and as casino like as it can possibly be. You start to make your way through the building, looking for the boys you'd agreed to play with.

When you get into the slots area it's not too hard to locate the boys given Keebo's hair. You weave your way through until you make it to them. They're playing at the slots, all just kind of messing around.

Kokichi has more coins than he started with and a confident look on his face. He smiles mockingly while he puts in a couple of coins at a time, setting his slot machine spinning once more. He never bets more than a couple of coins. On the other hand, Gonta seems to no longer have any coins. He's frowning sadly, just watching Kokichi play with a mystified expression. Rantaro seemingly has yet to play one of the slots since he has the same number of coins, he almost seems apprehensive. Keebo is in the process of spinning his. Judging by his lack of coins it seems he bet everything

"Ah! ____-san, are you done already? You should really try this game, it's rather enchanting," Keebo says with a bright look, expression full of childish glee. He seems to be enjoying himself, you hope he doesn't run out of coins. He's grinning and happily shifting in his seat while he waits for the machine to finish rotating. Luckily he doesn't lose it all, something that brings the brightest grin to his features.

"Sure," you say as you stroll up to the free slot that Kokichi has just abandoned. It seems someone at least knows how to quit while they're ahead in this school. You wonder if he's going to get any prizes or try a different game. You focus on your own game, quickly coming to a split-second decision when it comes to betting. You shove all of your tokens into it with reckless abandon, betting everything.

"Gonta did that too, didn't end well for him," Kokichi comments offhandedly. He's looking at you curiously, his eyes narrowed slightly as he waits for you to start up the machine. His words aren't necessarily harsh, they're matter of fact with a hint of curiosity mixed in. You remember what your
talent is supposed to allegedly be. If you do poorly here it might be a reason to start doubting you, but there's not much you can really do about it now.

"And if I run out I have plenty of useless Monocoins for the student store with which I can buy more tokens. Let me live my life, mom," you say as you start the machine. In reality, you have no intention of winning. You doubt you'll break even if you get anything back at all. You just don't really feel like playing much and running out of coins is a good excuse to watch everyone else.

Your talent is fake, it's a matter of fact, but you can always say that your talent is looking out for you and keeping you from being a gambling addict. Another reason you want to lose. You'll just watch Rantaro play when you're done, maybe laugh at Kaito whose mournful cries can be heard all the way across the room.

Neither of you are expecting a jackpot to show up on the little display screen. You nearly jump at the noises the machine makes. The noise that Kokichi makes it beyond description, shocked and strangled and floored.

You really thought that talent of yours was fake. You should have learned by now that there's a grain of truth in every lie, and it turns out that luck really is your forte. You're convinced your talent is still fake, but this is certainly an interesting turn of events none the less.

"I honestly wasn't expecting that. I was trying to lose," you quietly admit while the eyes of your companions start bugging out. Kokichi quickly takes control of his features once more, smiling and giggling while the others freak out. Gonta is confused but excited, Keebo looks absolutely ecstatic. Rantaro is screaming. No words, just screaming, and it's starting to catch more attention that Kaito's mournful howls.

You wonder if Monokuma's pulling your leg or if it's actual luck. He might just be messing around. It doesn't matter though as some of your other classmates have started peering around to get a look at the machine that's wildly blaring noises that practically scream jackpot as well as the boys who are actually screaming. Keebo has joined Rantaro in his screaming. It's a joyful kind of scream if there is such a thing.

"Do it again," Kokichi says, completely serious and steely eyes. "Bet it all, and do it again."

"Absolutely," you say without hesitation as you start clicking in how many coins you want to bet. There's nothing to shove into the machine since it didn't spit out any new coins. When you entered the casino Monokuma had given you a certain number of chips for the hell of it, but he'd also handed you a card of sorts for the actual credits since that would be a lot of coins to carry around. The machine complies, betting everything on your card.

The laws of probability dictate that you should now lose everything. You send those credits back into the universe without hesitation. You don't need them. The laws of probability especially dictate that you shouldn't get another jackpot. The slot machine decides that the laws of the universe can fuck off and are apparently bullshit as it once again throws up a jackpot on the display screen and starts blaring your winnings to the rest of the room as the number of credits on your card skyrockets.

"BULLSHIT!" Rantaro screams the moment the sirens go off a second time. "Another jackpot? You've got to be kidding me, I call lies! Hacks," the green haired boy says, his expression one of fake anger. You're shocked into silence for a long moment, not fully processing what just happened. You turn to Rantaro, making another bet. You don't put in everything this time, but you put in a lot.

You'll dip out if this bet actually falls through the cracks and you lose. You have to, need to know
if you can actually lose. Maybe Monokuma rigged the machines so that you always win or maybe you're just lucky, either way, your talent is supposed to be false so you need to know which it is. You need to know if you can lose, and if not, you have some questions.

Pulling the crank, it doesn't land on a jackpot but it lands on something high enough that your credits continue their climb upwards. "Bow, mortal," you say dismissively as you swipe your card to collect your outrageous winnings. What in the name of everything good in this world are you even going to buy with this many tokens? Rantaro is at a complete loss now, his mouth just opening and closing like he wants to say something but being entirely unable to. Gonta actually bows.

"Just as expected, I mean, it is ____-san's talent to be super lucky!" Kokichi says with a giggle as he jabs Rantaro in the side. The green haired boy idly agrees with a nod, his gaze burning into you. There's a question there he doesn't voice, but you can't fathom what it is.

You step away from the slots with a smirk. "Well boys, I'm going to go and get some prizes," you say with a grin. Keebo claps while you exit. You wander towards the prize counter, looking at whatever items were shown to be available. There wasn't much that you'd really like for yourself. You decide to avoid the key sitting on the wall like the plague. You have enough for it but you don't want it. Eventually, you decide to grab what looks to be a bracelet and a dog tag. You aren't sure why you picked these items, but they seemed the most appealing to you at the moment.

You decide to linger around the prizes for a couple of moments, trying to decide what to do with yourself. You don't really want to keep playing the slots. It was always better to quit while ahead, and you didn't feel like wasting all of your coins at the moment. You didn't need any casino keys, but you weren't above leaving one on Kaede's pillow. Admittedly, not buying a hotel key couldn't really protect someone from ending up there. It was entirely up to the choice of the user now, wasn't it?

That thought admittedly gave you shivers and your mind wandered back to Shuichi's encounter with Korekiyo. The person who used the key would have to play the role of the ideal. You wondered what your own ideal was like. Hopefully, you and your classmates would never find out! Wandering back towards the slots you find most of the class hovering near Kaito who's on a massive winning streak. He's been going back and forth between winning and losing terribly all night, begging for extra credits whenever he had the misfortune of running out.

Currently, he was on a winning streak, still in the process of thinking he could keep pushing his luck and his numbers. The stupid thing was he kept betting everything, not even leaving a handful of credits so he could recover himself if anything went wrong. Most people were starting to run out of credits at this point, but Kaito was by far the worst offender.

"He's going to blow all of his coins and lose everything," Maki says when you wander into her peripherals. It looks like Kaito is being suckered in.

"Then he'll just beg for more credits," you tag on with a roll of your eyes. Maki nods disappointedly. She was likely one of the people he'd begged for credits from. He'd absolutely spent time begging Kaede and Shuichi to pity him. Out of the small group, Maki and Shuichi were the two who actually gained any coins. Kaede was constantly fluctuating but typically stayed closer to how many she originally had than the others. Kaito was... well, being Kaito.

"Nooooo!" The sorrowful cry shoots up into the air as Kaito loses everything to the slots. You're not entirely sure what else he was expecting and Maki just gives a disappointed shake of her head. She wasn't wrong. It won't be long before Kaito convinces someone to give him a couple more credits and starts another streak. The boy stumbles away from the machine before dramatically
falling to his knees, Maki just looking down on him with a couple shakes of her head.

"Hey Miu," you call as you decide to completely ignore Kaito's disgrace. You move to stand beside Miu when you catch her attention. You think you've figured out what to do with the bracelet. "I got you a gift!" You say as you hand off the bracelet to her. You're happy to have found a good use for it and you think it might look nice on Miu. When she doesn't immediately take the bracelet you put the bracelet on her.

Miu's cheeks flush slightly as she turns her gaze downwards. "I suppose this isn't the worst gift I've ever received. You'll have to work a lot harder to pin down the tastes of the amazing golden brained and golden bodied inventor, but I suppose this tribute will work for now," she tells you. It's obvious from her expression she's just being shy though. You turn away from her quickly to help alleviate some of that embarrassment, but out of the corner of your eye, you can see her smiling to herself.

You're glad to have made her so happy, but now what should you do with your other prize? You think maybe a little later you'll give the dog tag to Kokichi. He seems like the type who would like such a thing. It's weird, you're sure he'll appreciate the weirdness of it. You'll have to track him down and hand it off to him a little later.

In the meantime, maybe you should try to console Kaito...
You didn't wake up on time the next morning. In fact, it wasn't even remotely close. You slept straight through the morning announcement, and then you kept on sleeping, the prior day's events having knocked you out hard. After the casino, you were out cold the moment your head hit the pillow. Feeling as worn as you had, you doubted there were many things that could have woken you up. There were a couple of sure-fire methods, but obviously not enough.

You aren't sure exactly when you woke up, nor did you know what it was that woke you up, but Monokuma was sitting on a chair near your bed when you came to. You try not to have too visible a reaction but it is upsetting that he was able to sneak into your room without you so much as noticing. Then again, this is Monokuma. Few creatures defy the laws of nature so effectively. If anyone in the school could sneak up on you, at least it was him. Better than one of your classmates.

"It's about time!" The bear made an intimidating pose as it hopped off the chair and slapped down a thick manila folder in your lap. "I suppose you sleeping this long did make a couple of things easier. I was able to convince your classmates that it would be okay for you to be absent after they finally agreed to use the flashback light. I told them reliable old Monokuma would take care of you. That there is a basic summary of everything everyone remembered. Of course, this one is tailored specifically to you. Your script so to speak. Do with it what you will."

Ah, right, after the casino day every agreed that the next morning the class should meet at 10 in order to talk about the flashback light and what to do with it. This implied that you'd slept in straight past the morning announcement and kept sleeping until it'd gotten to be sometime past 10. Odd, but not unexpected given the fatigue you'd experienced in the last couple days.

Thinking about it, you not getting tired until last night actually made a lot of sense. Objectively it seemed like it was a biological defense mechanism. Lots of trauma victims have completely gone numb emotionally when they still feel they're in danger, not actually getting the full brunt of their emotions until after they were out of said dangerous situation. You wouldn't be too shocked if a similar thing happened to your sense of fatigue. Your body shutting down your ability to feel it until you considered yourself 'safe'. Last night was just enough relaxation for it to kick in.

"Was anyone worried about the fact I was gone?" You ask, hesitating to think that you might have worried anyone. You could see a couple of members of the fitness club getting upset over your apparent disappearance, but you doubt anyone else would be all too torn up. At least, you hope anyway, you wouldn't want to worry anyone. That being said, you couldn't see a reason why you would. After all, you weren't entirely all that close to anyone outside the fitness club, Miu, and Kokichi. It was almost worrying that you were closer to Miu and Kokichi than any of the
comparably stable members of your group like Keebo or Gonta.

"A bunch of people were pretty anxious initially. Even Kokichi seemed worried! But they settled
down when I confirmed the fact that you were just still sleeping in. I told them you'd practically
been working yourself ragged trying to take care of everyone! They all agreed to let you sleep.
Though, you might want to show yourself before anyone starts to worry again," the bear said with
what sounded to be a smirk. You swore he would have winked if he had the capability.

There's a slight pang in your chest when you hear that people were worried. Not just some 'people'
as a vague concept, but most of your class if Monokuma was to be believed. Anyone would be
worried in a killing game like this if someone went missing, but for some reason you found it be
especially touching. Even if they were only worried thanks to the possibility you could have been
taken out by murder. It was starting to feel more and more like a real possibility.

You look down at the folder in your lap and when you look back up Monokuma is gone again.
You wonder just how he's able to do that exactly. Some kind of advanced technology? It just didn't
seem like appearing and disappearing so quickly should be possible. Maybe if Miu makes enough
progress tearing apart and studying Monokid you can actually get some answers. Then again,
maybe not.

You roll your eyes for show and quickly skim over the file to try and get a feel for the new
information. It's written in the first person like some kind of internal dialogue. You're guessing
that's likely due to the fact it's supposed to be a script of sorts. It seems that it's been pulled from a
much larger stack, stapled together given the rips at the top left of the pages. It made about as
much sense as anything else for there to be a legitimate script of your personal dialogue and
thoughts.

Giving you the whole stack would be too many spoilers so for now these sheets were all you really
had to work with. It was still more than you had before, so you read it diligently. Unfortunately, it
doesn't seem as though Monokuma's left you any extra gifts by mistake, just the script. It's not even
longer than a page.

Scenes played out in the back of my head as my distorted and shattered conscious started to finally
come back together. Truth, logic, and reality starting to once again make sense. I was running
away, running for so very long. It was my luck alone that allowed me to escape the Ultimate Hunt
time and time again. I was fortunate in a way that many other Ultimate's weren't, but still
unfortunate enough to be hunted.

Those of us with Ultimate Talents were hunted down like dogs that needed to be caged. It wasn't
safe anywhere for any of us. Even with my luck, I eventually ran out of places to run. Places to
hide. With my back against the wall, I had to decide what to do. Deep in my heart, I knew the
answer.

To escape from the Ultimate Hunt I threw away my Ultimate talent and all of the memories that
went along with it. Without those, I wouldn't be an Ultimate anymore. After that, I lived like a
normal high school student. Without any memories or any talent, I no longer had a reason to be
hunted. My outstanding luck, along with my memories, went dormant. If I didn't do what I did, I
would have been captured. A fate far worse than death would have awaited me. I much rather
would have killed myself then have belonged to them.

I made my choice. I chose to gamble on a new technology that was developed for the purpose of
protecting us Ultimates, a kind of technology that could be used to put our memories and our old
selves to sleep by controlling brain waves. I used that to put all my memories to sleep. It was a
dangerous gamble, one that I made knowing the real me might never wake up again, but wasn't my
talent always luck? Even if I wasn't the smartest, even if I only ever really got by on my talent alone, somehow I always came out on top in the end.

After letting your eyes roll across the page you shake your head dismissively. It's almost sickening how much they've scripted you into nothing more than a two-dimensional character who's supposed to exist and then die. The script is corny and reeks of disingenuous words, and you wonder if any of your classmates actually believe the words scrawled into this script. You certainly doubt you would have even if you didn't start to realize that there was something wrong.

It just doesn't seem right. At least from the standpoint of your own talent. Putting your memories to sleep wouldn't erase your Ultimate Luck. It wasn't a mental or physical skill, it was something ingrained into a person's place in the universe. If anything, putting away your memories would just make you more helpless. You'd still have your luck, but no memories regarding how to protect yourself from the hunt.

For your classmates who'd get their memories back first hand, maybe it would be a bit harder to see the falsification sitting right in front of you. Not to mention their skills were things that could actually be put to 'sleep', unlike your false talent. It's just another box to tick in regards to doubting if your classmates even have talents in the first place. You'd think that a skilled detective like Shuichi would be cautious about trusting foreign memories. Of course, even if he is an actual Ultimate Detective he has described himself as an amateur. Maybe you'll have to sow the seeds of doubt.

You focus in back on your class as a whole, seeing the potential dangers this new information caused. Who might have been affected by this flashback light in a way that might convince them to commit murder? You hadn't gotten a new motive in a while so it left you feeling slightly on edge. Was the flashback light a motive in and of itself? No, it felt more like narration and plot explanation. It was exposition for the unseen audience. That brought up some different concerns though.

How would they have filmed the internal narrations? It would need to have been done beforehand since you doubted the Gamemasters had the technology to see into people's heads. Then again, your mind trails back to Tsumugi, her notebook, and the strange way some of your classmates had acted. Not to mention if they had something, say, robotic, then the transfer of data would be much easier. A living camera of sorts. The pieces clicked in that regard almost too easily. If Keebo was some kind of living camera then you doubted he was aware of it.

If Keebo was the point of view, did that make him the main character? No, he didn't have the personality that the main character might. He could easily be a living camera but there had to be other cameras around school filming an actual main character of sorts. If anyone in your class could be called the main character it would have the be Shuichi or Kaede, possibly with the role split between the two. In which case it would make sense to kill of Kaede for Shuichi's own character development. He was leaning on her pretty heavily. Shuichi was meek, right now Kaede was supporting and propping him up. If he was supposed to be the main character, she'd need to be removed.

It didn't seem like she was going to die any time soon though. If they were going to kill her off, they would have killed her off during the first trial. So... did your presence already ruin that? You don't want to give yourself too much credit, but you might have already changed the course of events this game was supposed to take. Considering the fact that two labs were locked off it isn't out of the realm of possibility. While yes, they might locked off one lab just to demonstrate that students who were already dead would have their labs remain locked, you doubt that they'd lock off two. So one of the first killers or victims should have been Kaede or Miu, considering their labs
opened up before the first murder.

You doubt they'd kill off Miu immediately. She's not important enough to warrant immediate death, in a game like this the important plot driving characters have to go first. It's the one that sparks the main character who has to be murdered first, the driving force that convinces them to be the main character at all. Given that, it should have been Kaede. Instead, Kirumi and Ryoma died. You don't mean to be disrespectful to the pair, but they seemed inconsequential in a way that you wouldn't really expect from a first murder.

So what changed? The first motive maybe?

Thinking back, Monokuma mentioned how he doubted anyone would take the Early Bird Motive. It didn't seem important at the time, but perhaps there was supposed to be a different second half to that motive. One that would have pushed things in a different direction. He mentioned working extra hard on the motive he did give you, so maybe he made it himself or skipped to the second motive. That also answered another question as to why this next motive was taking so long.

Okay. So. You've decided that Kaede was supposed to die in the first trial and the class was supposed to get a different motive. Monokuma is so delayed because it's taking him a while to fashion new motives. There's the possibility he revamped the script because of your presence. Or even the Gamemasters did it themselves if they weren't expecting you.

You think way, way back. Back to the very first time you'd woken up in this school. Exploring the school with Kaede and Shuichi, that wasn't the first time you'd woken up here. You remember now! That was the second time you'd woken up here! The memories are hazy, but you can remember Rantaro being confused by your presence. It's possible, considering you are the 'odd number' of sorts, that your presence in the game wasn't originally intended. It would also match up with a couple of the things your old self mentioned in her letter. It also implied some interesting details about Rantaro considering he understood more than your other classmates. That just left one last thought to address.

A motive new would come soon enough and someone would commit murder, but who would it be?

Monokuma went as far as to mention you were only supposed to live two or three trials at most when you first made your deal. You wonder if this is the trial that you're supposed to die and who'd do you in if that's the case. This adds an entirely new dynamic to whatever the next motive's going to be. If you're scripted to die in the next trial were you supposed to be the killer or the victim? Either way, you should keep on your toes.

A small part of you doubts that they'd script you as a killer. Even they would have to understand that's just a little too extreme for your personality, and it wouldn't be interesting if you're supposed to be as unintelligent as you were made to feel at the start of the game. The trial would be obvious and easy. So, that meant it was likely someone was going to attempt to kill you. Or a freak accident. If someone accidentally killed you would they still get executed? Knowing Monokuma, probably.

It's at that moment you fully realize how different you are from your classmates. How alone you are. You're the only one who fully sees and understands just how upsettingly fake this entire set is, how the scenario itself doesn't feel real. There's no point in killing because there's no actual escape. This little game, it had you trapped. Dangling on strings. It's not even a game at all, you realize.

*This is just a choose your own adventure book without any choices.*

You can free yourself. With time and effort, you can free yourself. You might even be able to free
your classmates. Not if everyone keeps acting like an idiot though. You want to protect everyone, but for right now you don't see any way out. The true mystery of this game is figuring out not only what's going on here, but how you're supposed to actually win this game. If you can even call it a game. With little more than the illusion of choice, you feel like you're still just struggling with the same script as everyone else is.

You're starting to wonder if the only way to win will be to lose.

You smile to yourself, a bitter laugh bubbling out from your throat. It's probably time you left your room. Like Monokuma said, you should show yourself before anyone starts to get worried. Changing into some clean clothes, you go about trying to make yourself presentable while your thoughts wander. There are 14 students besides yourself. That's 14 potential killers. Even the seemingly harmless people still needed to be kept an eye on. You groan quietly to yourself as a headache starts to form. You wish there was someone you could trust to help alleviate some of the stress associated with watching everyone 24/7.

You wish there was someone who would watch your back.

You have to watch your own back through all of this, knowing that there's the potential someone could decide to try and target you for one reason or another. It might not even be their own reasons, it might be the reasons of the Gamemasters and that's the most terrifying thing of all. It's an unnerving but true possibility that you can't just easily dismiss.

Perhaps you're deluding yourself thinking that you being here had an effect on who's going to live and who's going to die. It could have all been planned by the Gamemasters after they realized they were going to have a 17th puppet. That's exactly why you have to try though. That's exactly why you have to watch your own back, why you have to stand alone. After all, who is this mad hell of a game could possibly be trustworthy?

You push open your door only to come face to face with another person. You're almost taken aback for a moment, as though the universe is trying to answer your question. That leaves you with an entirely new question. Is the person standing in front of you now trustworthy or your example as to why you should trust no one. "Good morning to you too, Kokichi-kun," you say as you observe the lock picks in his hand and his slightly crouched position. Should the door have still been closed, he'd be eye level with your doorknob. Now he's just eye level with your stomach. Kokichi immediately straightens up, putting a carefree expression on his face.

"Nishishi. More like good afternoon! It's going to be lunchtime soon, did you really just wake up? Wow ____-san, you're so lazy! I've been coming to see if you're still alive every once in a while, but you wouldn't answer when I knocked. Were you just ignoring me or were you really that asleep? Anyway! I was going to try and break in so that I could check on you, I was worried. Of course, that's just a lie. I really wanted to prank you. Or maybe I was going to murder you. A shame I've been caught!" The boy says as he throws his arms behind his head, his lockpicks are gone the next time he lowers them.

He knocked? And you didn't notice? You try to push that thought out of your head. Considering you're usually a light sleeper it's a bit unnerving to know that someone could have come into your room and you wouldn't have noticed. Of course, knocking and entering are two different things. You might have noticed if someone decided to meander straight into your room. Instead of focusing on that, you zone in on his words.

You believe given his tone and the way his eyes flash he's telling the truth about being worried. You doubt he'd try to kill you, at least without a good motive and so far he has nothing that you know of. A prank would be a reasonable answer, but he doesn't have anything with him. "Where
are your supplies then?" You hum with a smile. "Glad to know you were worried."

Kokichi pouts at you like a petulant child. "It was gonna be a super special prank that doesn't need any supplies. It was gonna be the best prank ever! I was gonna kiss ____-san like sleeping beauty since I love her so much!" He grins at you and you feel like you're being toyed with. How would that have even been a prank?

"You... you shouldn't joke about those kinds of things Kokichi-kun," you look away from the boy in front of you, not wanting to meet his gaze. He's messing with you, obviously. He has to be, there's no other way. You wait for him to smirk and tell you how much of a lie it is. Instead, he just kind of frowns. He almost looks disappointed.

"Wow ____-san, I didn't expect you to be the type of person lacking confidence. My beloved Saihara-chan, sure, but you? You're always so confident! If you refuse to believe my genuine love confession though, even after I've gotten jealous once before, it must mean you're lacking in an ego!" His gaze becomes critical. Analyzing. It skirts across your face, looking for a trace of something. You don't know what, but when he's done looking at you he smiles brightly. "Okay then! In that case, I'll have to make ____-chan my beloved too. That way she'll become more confident!"

You're admittedly taken off guard by Kokichi's declaration, not just by his choice of words but his sudden shift in the suffix he attaches to your name. Your thoughts jump wildly between that and the idea that he's gotten jealous before. When? Why? He's got to be lying, but his tone and his expression are tactfully guarded and you can't pick out the lies from the truth. It's too much for you right now and you start to feel the dull pang in your skull growing exponentially, signaling that you should really give up and go back to sleep.

"Kokichi, please. Don't tease me today," you sigh as you rub at your temples. Kokichi frowns even more as he watches your movement. You almost catch a hint of sympathy. His hand raises for a half second, lingers in the air, and is quickly placed into his pocket with a sly grin that you can't really attach any emotion to. Your headache is becoming worse by the moment.

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"Wha, ____-chan doesn't believe me? Fine, fine! I am a liar. But at least she believes that I'm staying true to our deal, so that's one thing. Do be careful ____-chan. Someone's already plotting," he winks at you as he turns on his heels and starts to walk away. You close your door behind you and start after him, the boy humming to himself as you catch up to walk beside him. A warning, he just gave you a warning. Not a threat, but a warning. You process it quietly, trying to think about your classmates. Your thoughts instantly jump from Kokichi's antics back to your original worries, the game. Someone is already plotting according to the boy.

Maybe you do have someone watching your back after all.

"You might be a liar, but you're pretty obvious sometimes. Would you like to give me more details or am I just going to guess?" You look at him quizzically, trying to pick apart his expression. Kokichi places a finger against his chin as he thinks, tilting his head upwards. You have the feeling he's just going to toy with you, but you doubt he's going to feed you to the wolves. He did, after all, try to lead the class to the answer during the last trial despite how antagonistic he was. What little honor he has is bound to give you a warning thanks to your deal. You'll be certain to repay the favor at some point.

"Hmmm. I think ____-chan can handle it herself so I'll let her figure it out," he smirks at you while he speaks, his grin turning coy. He sounds pretty confident with the fact that they won't pose much of a threat to you. You wonder if Kokichi overestimates you, but maybe you just underestimate yourself. Either way, you suppose this is what you're doing now. You'll investigate later, shoving
the thoughts of murders out of your head for the time being. Thoughts about Kokichi's actions once again fill the void that your previous thoughts left like a never-ending cycle of terrible.

"Are you going to keep using chan?" You finally ask. The suffix is getting to you a little bit. He's using it to tease you, and it's actually starting to work. Few people in your life have every used chan. Those people were all members of your family. Be it actual blood family or the family friends close enough to be considered family, they were always family to some degree if they used chan. Outside of those few relationships people always regarded you with san. That's what anyone outside of the people you grew up with used. Even those close friends you'd met along your journey used san. Not chan. Never chan.

Because of that chan almost felt intimate to you, reserved for those you thought of as truly close. It was gentle and warm and the way that Kokichi kept using it made your heart beat in an uncomfortable pattern that rattled your ribcage and scorched your skin using the fire in your own veins. The word echoed around your skull in a way that was strange, somewhere between uncomfortable and welcomed. You couldn't decide which it was.

You don't want to imagine the damage he'd do if he neglected to use a suffix at all.

"Oh yeah, absolutely. ____-chan is ____-chan now, no changing it!" Kokichi announces with a proud smile. If he notices the way your steps falter and you almost trip over yourself he doesn't draw attention to it. Instead, he just keeps walking, swinging his arms back and forth as he enjoys your misery. "Oh, by the way ____-chan, your little club told me that if I saw you after you woke up they're all working out together so you should go see them!"

Kokichi waves a quick goodbye before leaving you to your own devices. He decisively gets rid of you by spriting away with a giggle. You could chase after him easily, but you think you've hit your limit of Kokichi for the day. Instead, you shift your thoughts to what he said. The fitness club, huh? You figure that they'd all be fairly upset if you went missing since it would be the general assumption of the group that something happened to you, especially considering Maki was the only one in four who possessed even an infinitesimal amount of chill. These friends of yours, you should go check on them.

You know where they're meeting up so you gather yourself into a coherent person once more and head the direction that you know them to be, pushing thoughts of chan and murder out of your skull. You've been awake for all of ten minutes and you already need a break, maybe another six-hour nap.

It's only a short walk from the dorms and you catch sight of the group quickly. All four other members are on the ground. Kaede and Maki are actually doing sit-ups while Kaito and Shuichi talk to each other, you're too distant to hear what they're saying. They all seem to be enjoying themselves, but the posture of the group as a whole seems tense. Almost like they're waiting for something akin to bad news.

"Hey!" You call with a wave, catching the attention of the club. Kaede sits up straight, crossing her arms like she's about to lecture you. You have a feeling you're probably going to get chewed out for being so late. The rest of the group just looks relieved, yes, the entire rest of the group. It's not as easily noticeable but even Maki seems to relax slightly once they all catch sight of you.

"Where in the heck have you been?" Kaede asks, her voice deadly serious. Yep, here we go.

"I slept in... again. Sorry guys," you say as you move to sit down with the rest of the club. Shuichi gives you a look of sympathy, but also one that's questioning. In a way, he almost seems like he's prepared to fight someone which is weird because you're pretty sure you're still looking at Shuichi.
You wonder if the word sleep has become a trigger word and he's assuming the worst. You smile at him gently, trying to ease his fears and it seems to work as he relaxes once more. "I really didn't mean to, but I guess I've put off so much sleep in the last couple days that my body made me catch back up. I didn't mean to worry anyone," you smile sheepishly at your four friends.

You suppose you weren't just tired either if you're being honest with yourself. You stayed up much later than any of your classmates raiding the storage room for anything useful. Useful of course was a loose definition, but you'd needed some time to yourself and once the casino night was over with you didn't really want to go to sleep yet. So perhaps all of this might just be a little bit your fault, but you refuse to admit that to your classmates or yourself.

Kaede sighs, her expression melting away into one of sympathy. "It's okay, sorry for getting upset. I guess everyone is just kind of jumpy because of the flashback light. It has everyone on an edge that no one was on before. Those memories..." Kaede trails off and Shuichi quickly nods. The flashback light would have everyone upset. Someone being missing would seem like an even bigger problem than before.

"Yeah," you agree. You try to put on an upset expression, which is easier than you assumed it might be. "Monokuma showed me as soon as I woke up. It's all pretty crazy, isn't it?" You try to seem natural and the little group is none the wiser you haven't seen any new memories. Part of that is perhaps because the emotions you display are real even if their sources aren't what your friends think. There's a very real sense of dread sitting in the back of your mind, weighing you down like a lead ball. You decide that your words aren't a lie since all of this is insane and Monokuma did show you what you'd missed when you woke up.

You're sick of working with half-truths, but it's really the only thing you have going for you right now while you try to work out everything that's going on.

You push the thoughts from your mind and flop against the ground. "Let's just work out, I need something to take my mind off of it all!" You complain and the rest of your little group complies. You push yourself as far as your body will currently let you without hurting yourself. The burning of your muscles is cathartic in a way. You focus entirely on the movements of your body, pushing away all other thoughts. You do allow your mind to ponder over who you are, but you don't let yourself go down any rabbit holes.

Family. Friends. Talent. Personality. History. They're all still foreign concepts that you only have vague ideas about.

When it's almost lunchtime the club stops working out. You all agree to meet up again after lunch, coping is easier in a group after all. "I'm gonna head back to my dorm and get cleaned up real quick, I'll meet up with all of you in the cafeteria," you say as the club disbands. Considering some of your club mates didn't even work out, not everyone needs to go take a shower. You feel that you do, so your group agrees.

You head back to your room and try to clean yourself up quickly, not bothering to blow dry your hair. You'll deal with the wet mop once more. You take a little longer than you would have liked to, longer than what would have been expected for just a shower. You do take note of one interesting detail while you're getting cleaned up. Your key has been returned in the meantime. Curious... You wonder if it'll just be you or the entire class. You'll possibly try to figure that out when you actually get to the rest of your class.

After getting cleaned up you hurry to the cafeteria, knowing some of your classmates still haven't seen you all day and might still be jumpy. You try to run through the halls of the school while also being safe and not getting yourself killed. You aren't sure what might or could kill you currently,
but better safe than sorry. It leaves you moving at a semi-jog, which actually does you some good when it comes to the hour-long process of drying out your hair if not longer.

When you push open the doors to the cafeteria gazes land on you with visible relief. "Good afternoon, sorry for worrying everyone. Not only that but I manage to even be late for lunch," you say with a small, nervous laugh. As expected you're the last person to arrive thanks to your quick trip to the shower. You get a couple of good afternoons in return.

"It's fine, Shuichi and Kokichi just showed up a couple of seconds before you," Maki says as you start looking for a seat. You take what you assume is now your normal seat smack dab between Maki and Kaito. Or at least, you almost do before you feel a tug on your arm. Miu pulls you down into the seat between her and Rantaro. Rantaro looks confused for a moment, glancing at the other empty seat before smiling at you warmly. The seat between Maki and Kaito remains empty.

It almost makes sense in an odd way that Rantaro and Miu would somehow end up being close. It's hard to describe but Rantaro almost had an aura like that of a capybara. Peaceful and able to tame even the most ferocious of personalities. You'd seen it with him and Kokichi the other night, Rantaro had a kind of calming aspect to him that mostly kept situations from escalating. You likened it to the aura of a capybara because you'd seen those things just chilling while being surrounded by alligators. It was almost magical, the aura of peace they surrounded themselves with.

Maki and Kaito glance towards you as you're trapped in this new seat. You can feel the confusion in their gazes. You give a quick shrug and mouth later to them, hoping they'll understand you'll rejoin the group after lunch. They seem to get it and Maki ends up scooting into the empty seat between her and Kaito. It seems she'd rather be closer to Kaito than Angie who's at her other side. It's almost funny is a way how Maki became a member of not only the fitness club but your little five-man band without any warning for her or agreement on her part. Admittedly the same thing kind of happened to you. You'll chalk it up to the dangerously powerful combined charisma of Kaito and Kaede.

You glance towards Miu who looks seriously upset. "Way to fucking scare us you bitch," she hisses under her breath as she pushes a plate of food towards you. There's a flicker of worry behind that anger and she won't stop fiddling with a wrench she has sat in her lap like it's impossible for her to keep her hands still. You get that the flashback light was upsetting to everyone, but this seems a little extreme. You glance towards the other members of the fitness club and they won't meet your gaze. They almost look guilty, like the forgot to mention something important.

"Why was everyone so shaken up though?" You ask, caution edging on the border of your tone. There's a piece of the puzzle that you're missing and you don't like it. In fact, you hate it. There are few things in this world you can genuinely say you hate, but not knowing something important is absolutely one of them.

You see a couple of glances and hear some sighs. "That flashback light put everyone on edge," Tsumugi says. "In addition, Monokuma told us he was going to be giving us another motive, so the fact that there was only one person missing made everyone worried. If it was Kokichi or Maki maybe it would have seemed normal since they usually disappear. But you're always around, so the fact you of all people were missing made everybody double cautious," the Ultimate Cosplayer explains with a quick shake of her head. There's something belittling about her tone like she's trying to explain it to a fourth grader, but you seem to be the only one who catches it. You can hear affirmations sounding off from around the table.

"That's right kiddos!" A call catches all your attention as Monokuma appears and hops up onto the
table. He's holding a thick stack of paper. "Just as promised, since everyone is here I can start handing out this new motive of mine," he says. And by saying he'll hand them out he means he's going to hand them all to the newly appeared Monofunny who quickly races around the table passing them out. Each one has a name scrawled on the front. You're getting a strange sense of deja vu.

"These are a little something I like to call rumor cards," the maniacal mechanical bear tells the group. "You all have a rumor pertaining to one person in the room. Some of them are true. Some of them are false. Some of you might have cards that don't actually seem that bad, others might have cards that are truly horrific! No one knows who has what card or what the card says. It could be your darkest secret or it could be about the time you took an extra slice of cake at your friend's birthday party when you were six. There's only one rule. For every day someone isn't murdered, you have to gossip about the card with one other person. You don't necessarily have to spread the rumor on the card though. You can make something up based on what it says, you can sugar coat what's on there or make it sound even worse! Either way, you have to gossip about the person your card relates to. Once you've heard a piece of gossip, instead of talking about the person on your card you can talk about that new person the next day!

"Of course, if you want to spread it to extra people you of course can. You can talk about it more than once a day. For all I care, read your card off to the entire class! The basic rules though, are that you have to essentially spread one rumor each day about the person your card talks about or anyone you've heard about, even if what you're saying is absolutely false," Monokuma says with a grin.

You pause for a moment. "Okay then. Say that I end up getting a card related to Gonta. No matter what the card says I could make up something like, say, Gonta hates insects. I could go around telling everyone on the first day and everyone else could just keep repeating that?" You say. For a moment Gonta looks absolutely appalled before you reinforce the term "for example."

"Yep! Except you can't repeat a rumor to the same person twice, and if someone has already told you a rumor you can't tell it to them. So in this hypothetical anyone you told this rumor to wouldn't be able to tell you without changing some facet of the rumor itself, and if they spread it to other people those people wouldn't be able to spread it back," Monokuma says. "Of course, as you know, breaking the rules of the motive will, of course, lead to punishment. To make things fair this little game will only last for 3 days," the bear after delivering his words disappears.

"Should we even read these?" Kaede asks. You can't blame her for seeming apprehensive, but it really doesn't feel like you have much of a choice. That being said, you yourself still hesitate. You keep looking around the table for reactions instead of peeling open the card in your own hands. No one looks happy, but a couple of people seem strangely hopeful.

"If we want to abide by the rules then we have to," Shuichi tells her as he starts to break the seal on his own card. There's something to be said about his gung-ho willingness to read rumors about his classmates, but you don't nessisarily know what it is that needs to be said. Shuichi frowns deeply after reading the words on his card.

It isn't all that shocking that it takes Kokichi all of five seconds to rip into his card and let his eyes skim over the contents, a grin on his face. As soon as he's done, however, his smile falls. "Well. That's boring. Keeboi, why are you so boring? That isn't even a negative rumor," Kokichi says as he shoves the piece of paper into his pocket. Keebo looks flabbergasted. You have to wonder if Kokichi's bluffing or if he really has a card related to Keebo. What kind of rumors could there even be about Keebo?
"Do you think everyone in the room has a rumor about them?" Kaito asks as he turns to the detective next to him. It's a good question, and you again have to remind yourself that Kaito is smarter than you find yourself giving him credit for. Most of the time anyway. Too much time spent listening to Kokich, you suppose. You really should spend more time with Kaito, out of everyone in the fitness club he's the one you've kind of ignored the most so far.

"I don't know. On one hand, if everyone had a rumor it would allow everyone to play dirty. On the other hand, by making sure some people don't have rumors about them it could breed suspicion as well as jealousy, which might be more effective in instigating a murder. I'm not exactly sure how this is supposed to be a murder motive though. Yeah, rumors are kind of hard to swallow, but all of these are just that. Monokuma said they have the potential to be fake. In addition, you can never be certain where the rumors came from so even murdering out of spite seems stupid," the detective responded while he pushed a finger against his chin.

"Unless it's supposed to lead up to something bigger," you say. "There's the possibility we're all going to be spreading real stuff, as much as there's the possibility for there to be fake. By doing this, it starts to sow distrust between us all. Meaning if he just so happened to give us a motive with actual secrets we're expected to keep, some people might remember their own rumors being spread around and be more likely to lash out at the person with their secret." You still haven't opened your own card, eyes gazing at it numbly. You almost don't want to.

You see Miu fiddling with the seal on hers. She, like a good number of people, seemed not to want to open their cards. You'd think Miu would be all over something like this, but you can actually see a sparkle of sympathy as well as worry in her own gaze. She's probably worried about what rumors are out there regarding her. You can't say you don't share the same fear.

"Gonta doesn't want to read and spread rumors. It not very gentlemanly."

"Atua says that talking behind people's back isn't a good thing."

You sympathize with them as they fiddle with their cards. "Well, here's an idea. Monokuma said we can make up anything we want," you start as you catch the attention of those who are lingering on the idea. "We can assume that anything negative in these rumor cards is false. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Then we can make up some outlandishly awesome stuff about everyone talked about by the cards. Like a compliment game. It'll work on the honor system, and then we'll know not to trust anyone who's spreading negative rumors," you tell the group and a chorus of agreements go up around you.

Glancing at Kokichi, you can see him quietly trying to calculate everything that you'd said before his eyes darted upwards and meet with yours. He trades you a smile, the same kind of shit-eating grin that he always gave, but there was something about it that made you wonder if maybe he was agreeing with your current idea. With that, a certain kind of finality settled over the group and everyone else started to open up their cards.

Hesitant but prepared for the worst, you start to open up your own card. You'll assume that whatever's written down is fake. It might not be entirely possible if the rumor is a convincing one, but whoever you got deserves the benefit of the doubt. After all, if the rumor is that bad you can just approach the person in question for answers. With all the courage you need you finally read the note.

_Miu has terrible abandonment issues which resulted in her masochism._

Whelp.
Fuck.

Monokuma just had to make things 'interesting', didn't he?
Telling Lies?

After that morning you decide to spend more time with the fitness club after being released from Miu's custody. She left the cafeteria to go to her lab and work on... you weren't even sure anymore. You couldn't even follow along with her thought process. You didn't have the energy to even try to follow her words, let alone follow her out of the cafeteria. Besides, you did feel slightly guilty after spending breakfast with Miu, so you managed to slip your way back among Kaito, Maki, Shuichi, and Kaede as the group is leaving. "So what exactly is the plan for the rest of today?"

The fitness club very easily welcomes you back without much hesitation. You suppose it's as good a time as any to accept the fact you're just going to spend your time bouncing from group to group like it's actual high school. Kaede shrugs at your question, looking a little distressed. She keeps glancing at her rumor card with a vexed expression. You suddenly feel a severe sense of sympathy for her. You still haven't completely mentally addressed what you'd discovered.

"Since we're kind of at an impasse with exploration, for the time being, we decided to try coming up with nice rumors to spread and possibly spreading a few today so that everyone has more than just one person to work with," Kaito says with a brilliant smile. It's not the worst idea you've heard. Some people might have issues coming up with rumors for their given person. Some people are just going to be easier to make things up about. Spreading a couple in advance gives people options.

Looking at the rest of the group, you assume that when wait says 'we decided' he really means that he decided. No one questions him, but you do hear Kaede snort.

"You only want to do that because Monokuma's throwing shade at your sexuality," Kaede responds offhandedly. She finally puts her card down after coming to some kind of conclusion. Apparently, her rumor is about Kaito. Kaito doesn't validate that with a response, but you can see him faltering for a moment. No matter the rumor, you can't really know if it's true or false.

The rumors are designed in a way that'll cause people to doubt each other. It's pretty much the name of the game at this point. Kaede seems to already be falling for the trap of assuming that it's true. Kaito's reaction, unfortunately, isn't as telling as most people would jump to believe. Anyone would be started by the accusation and Kaede hadn't actually listed any details from the card so his expression wasn't necessarily telling either.

You wonder if Monokuma is trying to make or break ships everything considered. During the fitness club meeting earlier that day there was something awkward between Kaito and Shuichi. The kind of awkward that went along of lines of just having recently had a fight. That being said, you'd also noticed a kind of rigidity to Kaito's actions during club that implied there was something more to it.

Then an idea struck you.

Would a good writer not try to make people invested in the ships? Yes, a good writer would tease their readers while trying to make the most popular ships cannon, or at the very least any ships that they liked. If a ship that wasn't popular started looking like an actual possibility, such as Kaito and Shuichi or Angie and Tenko, wouldn't a good writer try to break that ship up? At all costs? Perhaps good writer wasn't necessarily the right phrasing. A sell out writer who would do anything for the extra views would try to appeal to fans in spite of their own morals or shipping ideals.

It was then that you noticed Kaede was stood between the pair, almost like she was a barrier.
A very slimy sensation crawled up your spine. This was going to become a problem. You try to keep your composure and continue on with the conversation. If you are right in your thoughts, you don't want the Gamemasters catching on that you know. But it's deeply upsetting to you.

If the Gamemasters were trying to messer with Kaito and Shuichi there was no telling what else they might attempt to do. If they could actually cause the two to fight? It made their power fell all the more real and present in those next couple moments, a tension that you hadn't noticed earlier creeping up on you to peer over your shoulder. You needed to figure out a way to fight back against the influence of the Gamemasters. Immediately.

"Seriously? Wow. Monokuma is also kink shaming Miu-san here so I honestly can't even be shocked," you say as you play with the card in your hands, trying to keep yourself from shaking with anger. Focus on something else, anything else.

You have no idea what you're going to do when it comes to the rumor you were assigned, the person you were assigned. You don't want what's actually on the card to spread around, but you have the terrible feeling that there are people in this school who would steal the cards and out everyone, real or fake. If it's fake then you don't want Miu to have to deal with it. If this rumor just so happens to be real... you feel a small pinprick of sympathy in your heart for the poor girl.

You can ask her about it yourself later, giving her the power to confirm or deny it as she pleases. You have the decency to take whatever her answer is at face value. Till then, you'll try not to assume anything one way or another.

"Do you have any idea what you're going to talk about instead?" Shuichi asks. He looks nervous as he plays with the card in his own hands. You can't fault him for that. Not only do you have to come up with a rumor about someone else, but there's the constant fear that someone is going to spread something terrible about you. Not to mention, there's always the threat that some card with something very negative on it could end up being real.

"Oh, don't you worry your pretty little heads. I've got plenty of nice things to say and then some. I've got enough ideas for the entire group to go for weeks," you boast proudly. Complimenting others is your specialty. You might feel like you're floundering but you have the distinct advantage of being able to come up with convincing, positive rumors. If all else fails, you can just talk about true stuff. Miu told you about plenty of her inventions the other day, enough that you can just talk her up as much as possible.

Glancing at the group of three once more, you wonder if Miu had anything to help alleviate the tension.

Despite not being part of the situation proper, you feel like you're dragged into it in a way that keeps you from being able to feign ignorance. Not that you would anyway, but you have to be involved. It feels like it anyway. The situation could be worse. You could find one of the three attractive, making the situation even more sticky.

Maki is a step removed from the whole situation. She seems to greatly appreciate all 3 of your friends as friends, but you haven't seen her display a trace of being interesting in anyone. You could see her working out well with Kaito given their complementary natures, but even if that didn't happen they have a really good friendship dynamic. It was all a giant mess you supposed, and here Monokuma was trying to make it worse.

"Sexuality and kinks aren't the only things Monokuma is calling out. Apparently, he's even throwing shade at people's talents," Maki says, only contributing to the conversation because Kaede glances towards her in a way that implies she has to. You don't know where she's put her
card, but she's the only one who isn't still holding onto it. You tilt your head to the side trying to figure out what she means. Did he imply someone's talent wasn't real? Or maybe that they weren't any good at their talent? Your heart does a small flip in your chest.

"Wait, seriously? Why the heck is Monokuma so obsessed with calling people out? Why are we letting a foot tall teddy bear shade us like this? Who did you even get?" Kaede asks as she peers at Maki. Similar looks of curiosity gather on the faces of Kaito and Shuichi. You start to get an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of your stomach. Monokuma was trash talking someone's talent...

"It's not important," the girl responds as she looks toward the four of you. Her gaze lingers on you for just a couple seconds too long. Her gaze burns at your skin and you feel yourself instantly go on the defensive internally while the external mask continues to look at Maki curiously. It isn't even anything big, the way her gaze lingers. It's just a couple of seconds and easily dismissed. But you jump to picking apart every single one of her actions towards you thereafter, watching the changes in her stance and her voice. It's the barest lead possible, but you have the sinking suspicion that Monokuma gave your red-eyed friend a rumor card related to your talent.

Assuming that these thoughts were true, what exactly would he be shading you for? For your talent being false? Either he or you had visually proved that false the other night when you won the slots so many times, but it would be tempting to believe such an outlandish rumor. Maki was distant from the rest of the class. You don't know how much she trusts you, and perhaps that's the most worrying part.

If you knew how much she trusted you, then you could either take on a more cautious attitude in regards to her or you could try and brush off the idea with a couple of well-placed statements regarding your talent. As the record stood now, you didn't know how to respond best and it left you in a lurch. Maki was an enigma, that's why Monokuma probably picked her.

You don't give any indication that these thoughts are running wild in your head, easily playing it off with a heavy sigh.

"He's probably just lying to get us to doubt each other when it comes to bashing someone's talent. When it comes to shading our sexualities, it's probably because those damn keys he's selling at the casino," you say with a shake of your head. "Either way, I can't help but wonder who the heck ended up with a rumor about me. What would even be written down? It's not like I actively keep secrets about myself." Your words are careful, calculated in their placement and timing to give you a better idea of the situation. Your gaze dashes across Maki. Her fingers tense slightly, her gaze darting toward the ground. It's not conclusive, but for now, she's the only one you've got pinned and her subconscious habits are contrary to how they normally are. Further observation required.

"Yeah, it's kinda scary. Someone could end up believing a lie about you all because Monokuma made these stupid cards," Kaede says sadly. Your classmates look fairly distressed about the idea of some rumors being taken seriously. You can't really say you're scared of the same thing. You're more scared of Monokuma having written down something true for the sake of sabotage.

You suppose ultimately the purpose of this little motive is to spread unrest. You have no doubt at this point that this motive is going to be a two-sided blade. The first was this rumor game, a way to spread unrest and get people to start doubting one another. In particular, the negative rumors would be more widely believed thanks to the simple fact that they're negative and human beings are cautious creatures. The second part, well, that has yet to be seen. You do think it's going to rely heavily on this newly spawned doubt that Monokuma's created.

"But we all promised not to believe anything written down on them," Kaito says, his expression vexed and slightly upset. You wish you had that optimistic kind of outlook. He seems to genuinely
believe the promises that everyone ended up making.

"No one is actually going to keep that promise," Maki says in a way that perfectly voices your inner thoughts. "It's in human nature to judge each other. Most of us who don't end up actively confronting the person about the issue are going to believe it. There are those who will believe it even after they've confronted the person and they've said it's not real. That's why and how rumors spread. The careers of many politicians have been shattered on a platform of lies," the caregiver says as she sighs and shakes her head.

As much as you wish she was wrong, Maki was very right in this situation. Judging and putting down other people were both very central themes to human nature as a whole. You avoided it as much as you could, but even you had your own deeply ingrained biases just because you were raised in a biased society. You very actively tried to combat those biases and always give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but it didn't stop those biases from existing.

"I suppose in that regard we're lucky he chose some pretty petty things," you say. The others turn to you with upwards quirked eyebrows, prompting a continuation of your statement. "Let's take for example Kaito-kun. Yeah, his sexuality is getting shaded, but it's getting talked about to us. A group of people who could frankly give fewer shits. True, false, the hell does it even matter? Are any of us going to suddenly turn around and start judging Kaito?" You cross your arms as you address the group, a slight hint of agitation edging your tone.

No one raises their hand just as you expected. You'd be genuinely shocked if anyone did. It didn't really matter what the rumor card said or if it was true. You didn't care. But it did help your argument.

"My point exactly! Who cares if Kaito-kun's straight or not. None of us in this school are straight, no, Kaede-san, you close your mouth. I saw how you were flirting with Tsumugi-san in the first 10 minutes of being in this damn school you have no right to argue. If all of the rumor cards are similar to this then those kinds of rumors won't provoke someone to kill or be ostracised as much as if someone magically ended up with a card that said Maki drop-kicked a baby once," you put your words bluntly. Kaede pouts for a moment when you essentially tell her to shut up but ends up giggling when you bring up the possibility that Maki has drop-kicked a baby.

"We'd still love you anyway Maki-san," the blonde snickers as she holds her hands against her mouth. Maki's temper completely flares up, glaring at you and Kaede. You doubt she'd drop-kick a baby, but a woman who glares like that has absolutely drop-kicked a person before. Perhaps she's going to try drop-kicking one of you now. That glare jumps between the two of you. Kaede for joking about it and you for even bringing up the idea.

You have no doubt that there are some serious rumors out there. You're holding one. For right now though, panicking is just going to make things worse and the gloomy atmosphere experienced by the entire group was starting to get to you. A couple of well-placed jabs and most of the group is laughing. You'll smooth things over with Maki when attention inevitable shifts once more if she proves to still be upset. For right now, you run with it.

"Stop talking Kaede-san, she's gonna suffocate us in our sleep if we aren't careful," you poke the other girl in her side as her giggling gets even worse. She swats your hand away and tries to pout at you.

"That's completely unfair! Your door has an extra lock!" The girl retorts with a total look of betrayal.

"Kaede-san, it's not the locks that are going to keep me alive. It's the fact that if someone so much
as touches my door knob the resounding sound is going to wake me up while a certain someone else could sleep through a nuclear blast," you taunt in return, your grin turning devilish. Kaede places a hand against her chest and puts on a wounded expression. You can hear Kaito trying to hold back laughter as the pair of you keep going back and forth.

"I would comment on the fact that I'm not the one who slept in late twice in a row, but up until these last two days you were consistently waking up at five so I don't think I have the right to comment. I conceded," she begrudgingly admits before sticking her tongue out at you. You only have a couple of moments to revel in your victory before Shuichi steps into the conversation.

"How did you even manage to get multiple locks?" Shuichi looks completely confused by your ability to have somehow procured more locks. Thinking about it, Kaede is likely the only one who knows you have multiple locks at the moment. Well, maybe also Kokichi since he tried to pick them this morning but he didn't get very far. Did he not notice them or did he not comment?

"I kinda got scared after the first trial so I might have convinced the Monokubs to install extra locks. There was a bit of blackmail and sucking up to Monodam but I have multiple locks now. Also, I was worried about Kokichi-kun. Kokichi-kun can pick locks," you tell the detective. Shuichi takes a long moment to process after the comment about Kokichi. You don't fear Kokichi since he doesn't have a good lockpicking set meaning that you'd notice before he got in, but the others deserve fair warning so you bring him up.

He'd make way too much noise if he tried to get into your room. His set was low class, a master could make do with anything but that didn't mean he'd be able to keep quiet enough for you not to notice. Assuming you get reasonable amounts of sleep from now on. Shuichi's expression suddenly sours.

"You've got to be kidding me... he wouldn't... he absolutely would, wouldn't he?" The detective sags so much his hair is practically slouched along with him. "Remind me to hide anything important I own." Kaede gently pats Shuichi on the back while Kaito bursts out into wild laughter, a certain kind of tension you didn't notice earlier draining from the entire group. Specifically between the trio. It almost feels like something snaps, but you can't place it.

Your gaze darts back to the most silent member of your group. The other three become absorbed in their own world, which leaves the pair of you unnoticed.

Maki is still bristling slightly while the rest of the group laughs. Oh dear, perhaps the baby comment is still bothering her. You didn't think she'd take it so personally but she looks upset. You decide to try and quietly check in on her and make sure she didn't take too personal an offense to you and Kaede messing around. "Hey, calm down. We were only teasing because you're our friend," you tell her quietly. Your voice is easily lost on the other three who continue to animatedly talk with each other, but it's loud enough that Maki still catches it. "We do it because we like you."

"Like me?" She asks with a glare you can't quite decipher. She doesn't seem to believe you given her expression. You frown slightly but that frown is easily enough turned into a brilliant grin.

"Yeah Maki, we like you. Didn't you figure that out when you realized you were stuck as a member of our group? Or have you not figured out that part yet either," you say as you lean a little closer towards her. Maki's expression turns fiercer the closer you get, but you don't back down, instead, you're able to get so close that your shoulders brushed against one another. Maki's entire body goes tense the moment the physical contact occurs, but you made no movement that indicated you were a danger.

Eventually, you see a little bit of the tension that she was displaying in her movements drain. She
still didn't necessarily seem happy with the proximity between the two of you, but she isn't openly opposed which is progress of some kind. Again you can't help wondering if Maki was the one to get your rumor and what it could have possibly said. Would she believe it? You glance back towards the other three members of the group, the likes of which hadn't even noticed your conversation with Maki.

"I feel like we're third wheeling," you say as the two of you watch the trio for a moment longer. Shuichi is smiling while Kaito laughs loudly. Kaede is telling some kind of story. It doesn't make any sense to you, trying to step into the middle of the story, so you just watch her tell it instead.

"I actually have to agree with you on that one," the girl says with a roll of her eyes, the crimson of her gaze reflecting the light. The use of the word actually stings as though she wouldn't agree with you under normal circumstance. You decide not to take it too personally considering the fact it's Maki you're talking about.

Maki is an enigma. One that while you'd gotten closer to than some of your classmates, you haven't quite gotten close enough. There's still more you need to learn about her before you actually understand her. More you need to learn before you can convince her to trust you. You've never really been one to give up though. You almost feel as though a stubborn kindness runs through your veins, the kind that could let you befriend anyone with a little effort. A useful tool, but one you hadn't really tried using yet. Maybe you'd try fostering some of these bonds.

"Hey, let's leave them behind and see if they notice! Where are you heading?" You say with a mischievous grin of sorts. You have it in your head to try tagging along with her, maybe you actually could start making a little headway in getting closer to her if you do.

"To my lab, alone," she says. Her expression suddenly sobers and becomes a touch harsher. You don't think you've stepped on any personal nerves so you reckon it's something to do with her lab. That lends to the possibility of there being something less than kind in the lab itself. For a moment, you wonder about the talent of your dear friend. While she has talents as a caretaker, it might not in and of itself be her Ultimate Talent. You hesitate to admit it, but you doubt her actual talent is something very clean if her present one is a lie.

"Okay, have fun," you say without hesitance, your mischievous grin shifting into a bright smile. You don't respond negatively to her drop in affability and she seems to take that well. Her stance seems to relax with your willingness to drop the idea. She leaves and you decidedly leave as well with the trio of three so absorbed in itself. You have no desire to try and force yourself into that conversation. Nor do you think you actually could.

You don't know what you'll do with yourself for the time being until you stumble across something interesting. It's a pair you honestly wouldn't have expected to be in the same area as each other. A pair of people you doubt would have an interest in one another. Yet, for some reason, it almost makes some kind of sense to you. Here they stand, seemingly frustrated.

Rantaro is pointedly starting down at his card in vexation like he's trying to figure out a puzzle, his jaw quietly working while he glared down at the piece of paper. Miu is out of her lab which is something of a shock to you. In fact, you're currently fairly far from Miu's lab which makes you wonder if she got sidetracked or something. She's sitting across from where Rantaro, also glaring at her card like it walked up to her and called her flat chested. They both look at the pieces of paper like it's personally affronted them.

"Are you two okay?" You ask as you make your approach. Miu jumps when your voice suddenly cuts through the silent air. Rantaro simply gives you a quick wave.
"Hey ____-san, we're just trying to figure out what Monokuma's given us here. I'm not even sure where to begin," he says as he stares at it for a nice, long time. He seems to be struggling with the card in his hands, his expression becoming more frustrated by the moment.

You shrug. "Then forget about the card and make something up related to whoever your card is talking about," you say. It's an easy enough topic to grasp. If you're at a loss for ideas related to what's on the card, then just make up something entirely new. You still haven't decided what you're going to say since you need to come up with three different rumors essentially. As long as no one kills anyone, that is.

"I don't really want to spread rumors though, it feels kind of bad lying. Even if we make up something positive, it still just feels wrong," Rantaro says as he continues to fiddle with the edges of the card. Ah yes, the idea that lying is objectively bad and you're evil if you do it yadda yadda yadda. There's a slight brush of irritation in the back of your mind. The urge to defend the idea of lying is more than you can squash, and the words are out of your body before you have time to filter them.

"It only feels bad because you've been socially conditioned to always accept lying as an objectively 'bad' thing. That's not necessarily true, now is it? It's really up to you as a person to decide if lying is a good thing or not. I mean, imagine that you have the ability to give a starving family food but you have to lie to someone who's superior to you in order to do it. It enters into a moral grey. This is kind of similar in some fashion and function. Do you want to be honest and say what the card says, knowing it has the potential to hurt someone, or would you rather lie to your classmates and let everyone believe the best in each other," you say.

Rantaro looks down for a moment, genuinely contemplating your words. This is perhaps one of the things that really kept you from hating Kokichi as much as your classmates. While you personally don't really enjoy lying, you know there's a time and a place. Sometimes the good of others needs to trump personal morals. If there ever comes a time when your morals put the lives or well being of another person in danger, then it means they're bad morals.

"Either way, I know what I'm doing," you tell the pair. They look at you curiously for a moment, searching for answers, but you just smile and shake your head, holding your card closer to your chest.

Your words reminded you of a saying, but you couldn't remember the source. Lie until it becomes true. It was something you'd been told in regards to keeping up your air of power. You had a feeling you were supposed to be someone with a strong composure and control over a situation. But it was a lie to say that you were always such, just like any good leader. That's why you and hundreds if not thousands of other people in positions of power lied about their own emotions and thoughts. The panic of a leader could inspire the panic of everyone standing behind them. Was it so wrong to lie in a situation like that? Especially when that lie can so thoroughly affect reality and become truth?

Miu sighs heavily. "I don't even know what kinds of things to say about this person though. She's just so..." The blonde trails off with a shake of her head. "It's so not fair, I bet you've got some easy mode level shit," she says. You try not to wince, knowing her words are born from her own frustrations. If only she knew how much trouble it was.

You judge your words and actions quickly before rolling your eyes for show. You decide she might as well know now. "Oh yes, of course, because you're certainly the easiest person in the school to make up rumors about," you say as you hold the paper in front of your mouth. Your words are as bland as you can make them, betraying no emotions in particular that might give Miu
and unhealthy connotation. The paper muffles your words but Miu still catches all of them. Her eyes go wide for a half second.

"Wait, what the fuck? Did you get me? Did you seriously get me??? What does it say, spill you bitch!" Miu is on her feet in a moment, eyes flashing with more anxiety than anger. You would have expected anger, but it seems your hypothesis was wrong. Judging by the look in her eyes, the only reason she wants to know is that she's worried. Worried about what exactly, you can't say. It's not like you're going to trash talk her.

"No, that's against the rules," you say as you hold the paper out of her reach. It's difficult, to say the least, considering how similar you are in height. You judge her to be a little between 5'6 and 5'7. For all you know, you might even be a little shorter. "Miu stop," you yelp as she nearly sends you both toppling to the group. Her ear is close to your mouth as she reaches for the paper so you take the chance to whisper at a volume the third member of your little group won't hear. "I'll tell you when Rantaro-kun's gone, it's not something he should overhear," you tell her.

Miu backs off like she's been burned, terror flashing on her features. The meek, submissive kind of apprehension she displays is something you've seen from her a couple of times so far, but this is different. She actually looks scared, her cheeks turn a shade of cherry blossom and she lowers her gaze, refusing to meet yours.

"Ah! I got it!" Rantaro says with a slight nod, either entirely oblivious or purposefully ignoring the pair of you. "I'm going to tell everyone that Korekiyo's slain a dragon before," the green haired boy announces proudly.

Neither you nor Miu says anything for a long moment. "Rantaro... Just... Why?" You say as he blinks at you a couple of times, his expression the picture of innocence. Either he's really good at acting, or he can't read a mood for his life. Given he's supposed to have a lot of sisters, you'll bet money on the fact he's probably acting. Even Miu's embarrassment and fear are put on pause just to marvel. You can't help wondering if he's about to try quickly escaping the situation via the lie.

"I'm not sure if that's fucking stupid or fucking lame," Miu says. You jab her with your index finger right in the side and she gives a yelp. "What the hell, I'm just being honest," she tells you. You jab her again. It's not a bad rumor, but it doesn't really fit Korekiyo. You'd sooner believe that Gonta has killed a dragon than Korekiyo. That would, however, imply that Rantaro got Korekiyo. An interesting detail you note to yourself quietly.

You hold back the urge to metaphorically avenge Shuichi by convincing Rantaro to trash talk him.

"No, no. Miu's right. It is kind of weird. I'm going back to my room to think about it a little more," the green haired boy says as he picks himself up and leaves. He doesn't seem disappointed, just confused. His confusion goes beyond just trying to make up a good rumor though. Maybe it had something to do with the rumor that's on the card? The function of this little game isn't just a motive, it's preparation for the next motive. A way to sow the seeds of doubt, you just haven't decided how he'll do it yet.

Either way, you were right about him using the rumor as an excuse to leave.

As Rantaro's leaving Miu gives you a retaliatory jab. It's a lot higher, her fingers pressing at your rib cage. "Hey! Watch it, or else I'm gonna make up something mean," you taunt as you rub a hand against the spot where she poked you. Your skin, overly sensitive as always, convinces your pain receptors to start screaming at you the moment Miu's fingers make contact. Luckily the sensation is one easily ignored. Perhaps that was the good thing of having an overactive sensory system, you'd gotten really good at ignoring it.
"You literally fucking started it," she tells you back. She does relent however and turns away from you with a quick wave of her hand. You follow after her, not entirely sure where she's leading you until you start to recognize the area as leading towards her lab. She pushes open the door, letting you in before slamming it behind the two of you. "What the hell does this damn rumor say, I wanna know," she says pointedly.

She tries to look angry. You're not sure if she's trying to direct that fake anger at you or Monokuma. You do, however, note the fact that the anger is very false. The see-through emotion falters and you can see the hesitance behind her gaze. Her bravado, it's entirely faked.

"Am I allowed to tell you?" You ask as you glance towards the card. You'd already resolved to speak to her about it, but now, you were starting to feel the nerves at the back of your mind. You have no doubt that it's completely within the rules to tell her, but now you're starting to second guess the idea. She's going to respond poorly and you're not sure if you'll be able to deal with that.

"Considering double bitch hasn't shown up to tell you off for it and he didn't give any kind of rule against it I'd go ahead and say we're good," she deadpans and you have to assume she's talking about Monokuma. Interesting nickname, but could be better. Maybe you'll brainstorm something later.

You doubt you can draw this out any further. You have to show it to her.

You force the card towards her. "Here, read it for yourself. I'm not getting yelled at if you don't like what it says," you say. When she takes the card you take a couple of steps back. You're expecting an explosion. Possibly some cussing. Okay, maybe a lot of cussing. You don't think she'll respond positively at any rate. You watch as she opens the card and her eyes skim over it. You don't want to be the outlet for all that anger when Monokuma wrote the card, so you make sure there's enough distance between the two of you that you can run when the eventual meltdown happens.

You don't believe you've ever been quite so wrong in all 18 years of your existence.

You don't see anger on her face, instead, the only expression you see is a pure kind of panic. "No," she whispers quietly. She seems to be at a loss for all other words. "No, no, no, no, that damn bear," she says. What should have been an angry phrase turns watery and fearful, entirely without venom or teeth. There's a small bubble of water in the corner of her eyes. You're at a loss for a response. "Leave," she finally says in a voice loud enough you're certain it's directed at you.

"Leave!" Miu says again, this time her voice is a panicked shout disguised as anger. Your feet move of their own accord and you can see her squeezing her eyes shut. You don't go to the door. Closing the distance you'd previously put between yourself and blonde you stand directly in front of her. "It's a lie," she whispers quietly in the weakest voice possible. "I'm not scared of people leaving me. That's why I'm not scared of love and make so many jokes because I know people won't leave me. I'm a masochist because it's fun!" Her voice cracks as she speaks.

The card is completely crumbled in your hands. Carefully, you pry it from her and set it on the table of sorts in the center of the room, not too far from where the pair of you are standing.

"Remember what I was saying about good lies and bad lies? That sounds like a pretty unhealthy lie," you tell her. After putting down the card you place your hands around hers. They're balled up and shaking. She's shaking. "If you want to talk about it, I promise I'm not going to leave," you
You don't. You don't leave when she presses her face into your chest and cries. You don't leave when she calms down and ends up dragging you both to the floor. You don't leave when she keeps talking for hours more. You don't leave when she falls asleep with her head on your shoulder.

"Monokuma sure knows how to pick the broken ones," you mutter to yourself as you think about the entirety of the rest of your class, not just Miu. You can't name a single one who doesn't have some kind of issue, especially trust issues. Those seem to be prevalent. You're not even sure what you're going to do about it. Between Maki and Miu it seems like your hands are full for the next couple of days. You want to pry at the shell the red-eyed girl had put up, while at the same time you want to try and put at ease the fragile blonde with her head on your shoulder. Then there were still the people like Kokichi who seem broken on so many levels and Shuichi who almost reminds you of a depression ticking time bomb.

At least with Shuichi had Kaito and Kaede seemingly tripping over themselves for him. Kokichi, much like Miu, seemed to be all alone. You guess you just have to up your game.
Spilling Truths?

Time almost seemed to pass too quickly as 2 days of rumors jumped by without incident.

The morning was a buzz of whispers and voices, speaking to one another excitedly in hushed tones. Some people spoke quietly, others made up the most flattering rumors they could like it was some kind of game and announced it to the entire group. Perhaps it was a game, started by Kaito and Angie, spurned by your comments from when the motive was first presented to the group. It slowly snowballed until it was almost the entire class. Some still whispered because they found it fun to do. That's how Monokuma's little rumor game turned into the love note version of Chinese whisper.

Then there was Kokichi.

Kokichi, who in all his glory and knowledge, jumped on top of the table like he was about to make some grand announcement. He held himself like he was the damn messiah, proud and cocky and about to do something entirely infuriating. You were almost impressed by how little he seemed to care. He took a deep breath and then at the top of his lungs he announced to the group, "Keeboi doesn't have a dick!"

Keebo began to sputter and panic as Kokichi jumped off the table, giggling like a mad man. The robot looked distressed. Kokichi was the only one who giggled considering how the class was split down the middle, each of your classmates belonging to one of two distinct groups. The **Keebo Protection Squad** and the **Kokichi Sucks Squad**. Considering you kind of liked Kokichi, enough to go as far as to call him your friend, you were morally obligated to be a member of the Keebo Protection Squad.

At the very least you could try to reign him in. As well as the murderous instincts of those who watched him with slitted eyes and snarls. Speaking of which.

You could feel the murderous rage coming off of Maki in silent waves as she quietly sat next to you, almost like she was trying to kill Kokichi with her expression alone. You gently, cautiously, place a hand on the woman's shoulder and pray that she doesn't snap your fingers. Miraculously, her murderous aura subsides slightly at the physical contact but her eyes continue to bore into Kokichi's form like she's trying to kill him with her mind. You aren't entirely sure what else you can try and do to calm her down other than find a way to distract her. That, sadly, seems a little impossible at the given moment.

"Does anyone mind if we sew his mouth shut?" Maki asked. The class thought she was joking, but you could see the genuine desire masked behind her question. You didn't have a single doubt in your mind that she'd actually go forward with the plan if enough of your classmates agreed. Luckily enough for Kokichi, it didn't seem that enough of your class members were on board with the plan. It honestly wasn't the worst thing Kokichi could have done or said though, so you have to appreciate that. He's not without logic and strategy it seems.

Kokichi could have started spreading malignant rumors, but he decided not to. It would have caused a lot of problems if he did, so instead, he started spreading less than fully malignant rumors, simple annoyances just to piss people off. Outlandishly strange things to say or mention. Keebo didn't even look upset, he just looked a little stunned. Shell shocked was perhaps the best definition of the expression the little robot wore.

You suppose you'll smooth things over a little later. Sooth Keebo, publicly scold Kokichi, the
things that were becoming the norm. It was a little act, a dance of sorts that the two of you had
silently agreed upon to keep the class's attention on something other than the killing game. Kokichi
acted loud and grabbed attention, making people hate him while hiding behind Gonta for physical
protection. You pretended to scold him, soothing the class by reassuring them that Kokichi was not
without punishment.

You two were starting to get good at your little game. Almost a little too good. Kokichi always
tried to outdo himself by looking genuinely hurt at your scoldings, but you could always denote the
slightest flicker of pride and satisfaction as soon as the moment had passed. You for your part were
also getting better at manipulating your own emotions and actions, as well as reading other
people's. It was a familiar skill, one that you feel you might have had at one point but had gotten
lost with your memories.

Which brought up another problem. How much had you actually uncovered so far? You still don't
have many memories back. Everything is still just a vague fuzz from family to friends. You
sometimes have a clear snapshot here or there, a memory that's so strong it's scorched into you. Or
a clear understanding of what kind of schools you went to up until high school. Homeschooled, by
the way, you'd figured out that you were homeschooled for a very long time. Sort of.

You think that at one point you might have lived on an island. You studied with all of your friends
in a very 'homeschool' environment. You were given substantial amounts of freedom to study
whatever you pleased and the tutor who took care of you when your group's parents couldn't be
around almost seemed to revel in teaching you new things. Cultivating new talents. You think at
some point once you were either old enough or had passed enough entrance exams you went to
Hope's Peak Academy. You can't remember very well though. If you're 18 you should still be a
student considering you think it's still part of the school you.

Unless you graduated early.

You suppose the benefit of that experience was the fact that there weren't any 'grade levels'. You
could skip around the curriculum as you pleased without waiting for your friends and learning at
the pace that best fit with you. And you? Oh, you went fast! It would almost make a certain kind of
sense that you got into the school a couple of years early and graduated a couple of years early. If
you did, then it was a very intentional thing on your part, a goal you worked extremely hard to
achieve. But why would you feel as though you needed to graduate early?

You turn your attention back to your classmates. A fresh wave of disgust over this game hit you
square in the chest. These were children. Hell, you were still a child. Yet you were all trapped in
this hellish game for the entertainment of an audience you couldn't see. You didn't ask for this, you
never wanted to be a part of something like this. You damn well would if you had to, but you never
wanted to be here.

Yet here you are.

So you'll defend these new friends with every drop of fire and ferocity in your veins.

For the most part, the class seems to be handling this 'motive' well, but you have a feeling these
rumor notes are only the first half of the motive. You can't help but feel anxious that at any
moment you could be falling directly into the palms of the mastermind, doing one wrong thing that
would lead to a loss. You glance towards Miu who's positioned across the table from you. You've
taken up your normal seat next to Maki who's positioned next to Kaito. Kaito is sitting on one side
of Shuichi and the boy has Kaede on the other. You're not sure when it happened but this had
seemingly turned into your normal configuration without anyone commenting on the fact.
Miu seemed to only be content if she got a spot next to or across from you. Currently the person on your left just so happens to be Tenko, who refuses to move since this was the only spot next to Himiko. Angie had swooped in to take the other. You had to admit, the artist had looked a little sad when Tenko had taken the seat you were hoping to have for Miu. The seat on the other side of Angie was still empty, and that couldn't help but make you wonder quite a bit.

You'd been watching what you could only describe as an aggressive flirting war for the last couple of days. Angie seemed intent to flirt with Himiko just like Tenko did, but you always caught the artist staring for perhaps just a couple minutes too long at the neo-aikido fighter. Himiko for her part didn't seem uncomfortable, but she did occasionally look confused when either girl would tail her down the hall and continue to try to get her to understand that yes, they did have a crush on her. At this point, it was pretty much a weird opposite to the situation centered around Shuichi, which sadly hadn't progressed at all. You were hopeful this little rumor game might help that along.

Reminding yourself of the rumor game, you remember you still haven't spread your little rumor about Miu. You lean over towards Maki, gently tapping her on the shoulder. She turns towards you slightly and you lean in towards her ear. "Hey, have you heard?" You say jokingly. The red-eyed girl rolls her eyes when you begin to spill your fake rumor. "Miu-san has totally invented a sentient AI," you say in a hushed voice so that only Maki hears. Miu has her attention drawn away when you speak to the caretaker, so she isn't the slightest bit aware you've gone ahead and spread your rumor already. You wonder if it'll somehow get back to her.

"That's perhaps the only thing I've heard all day that's actually believable," she sighs and shakes her head. You grin at her almost childishly as you bounce in your seat. "What are you looking at me like that for? Don't tell me you expect me to keep spreading it," she says. Your smile only grows wider. Maki stands up and for a moment you're fairly convinced she's just going to walk away, until she walks towards Kaede, leans forward, and whispers into her ear. You lose track of where the rumor goes but you can hear Gonta talking about it to Keebo after the group is dismissed.

Miu also seems to catch it. "Why that?" She asks you when you're on your way out. The group has mostly dispersed but Kaito told the group that you were going to meet up in a couple of hours for something really special. You have no idea what he has in mind, but you're already worried.

"Because it seemed like something you could possibly do," you say with a quick shrug. The girl nods and you see a hint of something more in her expression. It shifts into one of elation in a matter of moments and you're left feeling very confused.

"I just got the best fucking idea ever, you're brilliant ____!" The inventor bursts out before dashing off with remarkable speed. You're almost glad that you two were the last to slowly start clearing out of the cafeteria. The lack of honorific at the end of your name leaves you a blushing mess and your heart pounds perhaps one time too many as you watch her go. You'd be somewhere far beyond mortified if any of your classmates somehow managed to hear that little tidbit.

Shaking your head quietly you brush it off. She didn't mean anything by it, she was just trying to get out of there quickly, or she just forgot. It is Miu after all. You wonder what kind of 'brilliant' idea you've been able to spark in that chaotic head of hers. You aren't entirely sure if you want to know.

After that, you decide to head towards the library in order to read until the given time you're supposed to be meeting up with Kaito and the rest. You often found yourself reading when your free time wasn't occupied by your classmates. Well, reading or investigating as much as you could given the limits you currently possessed. It was still hard to believe that the first murder had only
just taken place a week ago at most, probably less. You were starting to lose track of time. The wounds are still felt fresh, and yet at the same time, it felt like it had possibly been centuries since you'd helped in solving that case. You still feel sick to your stomach thinking about the way you'd found Kirumi.

On top of that, it didn't feel like you'd gotten any closer to figuring out anything important. You were still only working off the clues Monokuma was carefully drip feeding you with the expectations that apparently something might eventually click, but so far nothing had done the trick.

You'd come to realize that you weren't going to figure out anything without more clues, and the only way to get more clues was to trick Monokuma or to allow your classmates to be killed. Both of those were harrowing thoughts for different reasons. You tried to put the thoughts out of your mind for the time being. Right now, the biggest clue you could ask for was the reality about your talent, but so far, nothing seemed to be doing the trick. You'd skimmed almost the entire library top to bottom. Some books you weren't even aware you knew the language they were written in until you started trying to read them. Your apparently extensive knowledge of Latin wasn't helping you discover your talent.

You were pulling blanks, shooting in the dark, and that did not bode well for your ability to figure out the rest of this game. You weren't as smart as Monokuma seemed to think you are, none of this made sense to you.

A book falls off the shelf next to your feet while you're walking past. Out of the cover slips a note. It looks like gibberish as far as you can tell. "Vsddo vsyx, dgy vopd, dox ez?" It's total gibberish, you tell yourself, but your mind provides a different answer. Check the back, it prompts you. Flipping it over, the phrase you find is just as odd. "Ciphered right A126. What's your symbol minus 26?" You look at the note for a long time before coming to a logical realization.

It's a Cesar cipher. The number of movements can be found by taking the letters in your 'symbol' and attaching them numbers. Add those numbers together, subtract 26, and then you have the cipher. convoluted is the first word that really comes to mind, but a clue is a clue. You do wonder why you actually know how to deal with this cipher, but maybe the cipher itself will help to answer that.

Finding a piece of scratch paper and a pen you jot down the alphabet. The only problem now is that you're not entirely sure what your 'symbol' is supposed to be. You check yourself over, but nothing is obvious. You find a couple of things that could be 'your symbol' but nothing that pans out. On each of your gloves is a crest of some kind, but you don't know what they represent. After a while, your eyes finally land on the left pocket of your blazer. The crest of Hope's Peak...

Interesting.

Hope. 7, 15, 16, and 5. Added together it made 43 which resulted in 17 when you subtracted 26. You put a small A under the Q of your alphabet and started filling in from there, making sure to go right when you'd typically move left.

Once you'd completed the reference sheet you went about trying to cross-examine the cipher with the sentence. It yielded an interesting sentence, to say the least. "Little lion, two left, ten up," the note now read. You put the book the note fell out of the back on the shelf and take note of the two books next to it. To the left is a copy of Narnia. As good a place to check as any. You count two more books left and then start moving upwards. You have to retrieve a ladder due to the fact it calls for 10 up. The shelves only go up to 10 and the book fell out from the fourth shelf, so you end up fiddling with a stack of books placed on top of the shelf.
You finally locate the book you assume is the one you're looking for presently. You don't believe you've ever heard of this book. You weren't even aware it existed. The Murder Of Cadfael. You recognize the name of the character. Cadfael is a famous fictitious detective, but first glance proves the book to have him painted as the victim of murder. You take the book from the shelf and start to return to your room.

On your way out you run into another person. Most people don't really come down the library so this proves to be a shock to you. You yelp, stumbling back a little. "Ah! Sorry!" You recognize the voice as Kaede's. The both of you stop and you're able to catch sight of the girl. He looks a little frantic almost. Her movements are jumpy and rough.

"Hey Kaede-san, you okay there?" You ask hesitantly as Kaede nods perhaps a little too enthusiastically.

"Oh yeah, absolutely fine! No need to worry about me. I just need to get past you and... see a book or two? Okay? Okay!" The blonde pushes past you without another word and you're left wondering what exactly is going on. Kaede looks uncomfortably jumpy. Something up and you don't know how to address the issue. It didn't seem like she was doing something malicious. If anything, she'd seemed scared.

Her hands were shaking, you quietly note to yourself. She's disappeared among the books and you're not sure you'd be able to track her down and talk to her even if you knew the right words to say. The library's not large by any means, but it seemed like she didn't want you around. If you tried to approach her you had the feeling it would be pointless and she'd just end up avoiding you. You feel your own body freeze up with indecision. Act, a little voice in the back of your mind is screaming. Act before something goes wrong, terrible and horribly wrong. The little voice is overpowered though. By what, you aren't sure, but you feel your body starting to drag you away from the room.

The little voice in the back of your mind cries. Screams. Throws a fit and tugs on the threads of memories it can't summon. Your body doesn't respond, it just moves, dragging you back to your room and zoning in on the book in your hands. The majority of your thoughts won't let you focus on anything else, but the little voice continues to beg like someone's life is on the line. You ignore it because you know you can't answer it. You can't pay attention to that little voice because you aren't good enough.

It's weird. Feeling like you're not good enough. Not good enough for what really is the question though. The voice continues to speak, resonating with something you can't quite place. A part of yourself that continues to sleep with your memories. A fragment of who you are, one that you've pulled up to the front even though it continued to sleep. It might have helped you in that past during this game, but as of right now it continues to refuse to wake up. Is it ashamed? Is it lost in its dreams? You can't tell. You don't even know what it is, this little fragmented piece of what was once a whole person, the person you were prior to this game. In spite of that, you miss it for some reason, you miss it so deeply and the little voice gets louder but the present you blocks it out because the present you is scared, and you won't go back to being "you" until the fragment wakes up.

The little voice quiets and stills when you arrive at your room. You think it's given up, but it seems that it just switches tactics. You focus shifts to the codebook in your hands as you push your way through the hall and towards your dorm, eyes skimming over its features in a desperate and almost feverish fashion. Skimming like your life depends on the contents of this one book. The rest of you now happily answers the voice and your focus on the book becomes pinpointed, all-encompassing.
The thing is littered with what you can only assume are codes, secrets, and the like. There's highlighting and underlining, notes in the margins, certain phrases are outlined in different colors. You couldn't begin to pick it apart and you don't want to risk losing it, so the only logical response is to take it to your room.

As you travel through the school, the halls are eerily quiet like some kind of dark omen to come, though you aren't sure how soon the catastrophe this omen foretells will strike. When you push your way into your dorm room you feel slightly safer. Though not insulated enough for the chilling feeling racing up and down your spine to fully dissipate. Instead, it gets quieter and less frequent, but the ominous chill is still there. Foretelling some kind of doom that you can't figure out yet.

You move to your desk immediately, intent to try and puzzle out this book only to realize there's a foreign object on your desk. Your first reaction is one of panic as you think someone might have rummaged through your closet and looked at the motive letter from so long ago. It's a simple envelope that's sitting on your desk. As you approach, however, you recognize enough difference in the hand to realize that this is an entirely new letter. You aren't sure which fills you with more dread, someone having realized you didn't burn your letter or the idea that this is a new motive.

So you were right. The rumor cards were just one part to a much larger motive. You're guessing this is the second half of it. The part that's actually going to trigger a murder one way or another. You pick up the envelope feeling the weight in your hands. It's light, almost as though there's nothing in it at all. Or maybe it's a single slip of paper. You doubt he'd repeat motives and give you all another letter from your past selves. Or a letter at all for that matter, so this has to be something different.

Your fingers graze across the sealing of the envelope, going back and forth for a couple of moments while you try and decide how to proceed. You're curious and whatever might be in this envelope could prove useful. For all you know, you're the only person who gets one and this is a special letter directly from Monokuma just for your little agreement. Yet you hesitate at the same time. If this is a motive you don't want to jump the gun. Opening it here and now could prove dangerous since it would incriminate you for any crimes that could get committed in response to the letter itself.

Eventually, you decide to put the letter down and focus in on the book instead. He wouldn't give you two hints in a day, and this is obviously a hint. Though given the size of the book it could easily prove a red herring. Then again, there was a small grain of truth in every lie so it at least would be worth looking over.

There's one page dog eared. You flip to it and notice that there's only one phrase that's highlighted. You shiver, and something wakes up.

Glancing at the clock, you realize it's probably about time you met up with the rest of your class for whatever Kaito has planed. You don't even get the chance to leave your room before the screens all across the school simultaneous crackle to life and a terrifying image appears on them.

"This is an official announcement! Everyone, please report to the gym immediately," the voice of Monokuma calls out.

Your mind races a mile a minute as you try to decide what he's going to do. You stand up from your desk, approaching your door. There are a couple of other people leaving their dorms the same time you are. In particular, the members of the Fitness Club who have subconsciously started to get closer to one another as a couple of other students group up and start to talk.

"Any idea what's going on?" Shuichi asks the other 3 as you make your approach. Maki nods to
you in the greeting, but the other 3 are too distracted to really give a proper welcome. You don't blame them, you can feel your own fear starting to linger in the back of your mind. It isn't as strong anymore though. It almost feels as though a quiet sense of calm has washed over you.

Maki, who has been acting notably odd towards you for the past couple days, actually moves a little closer towards you. Not in a friendly way. "It might have to do with the envelope I found on my desk," she says. Her eyes burn into you for a couple of moments. "It seems you were right about this motive being a double up. It's absolutely going to cause some trouble," her words are so ferocious as she speaks it almost feels like the air is starting to break under the pressure. Her force of will presses against you so formidably you can't help wondering what in the hell you did.

"There's no way we're going to know for sure unless we head over, come on," Kaede says while you try to keep your feet under you. You can't tell if Maki want to kill or intimidate you, but both make you equally uncomfortable. Luckily both of those are a bit hard to do to you of all people, so you stand your ground and make a show of tilting your head curiously so she's aware of you have no idea what's going on. Maki's posture relaxes slightly but she continues to glare at you in a manner that's almost... frightened?

That intimidates you more than anything else.

Your group, along with a couple of other smaller groups, makes its way to the gym just as ordered by Monokuma. As you head towards that gym you can feel your pulse racing. And for good reason.

As the Fitness Club shuffles into the gym, you look around and see that pretty much everyone else has already arrived. It only takes a couple of moments longer for Kokichi to wander in last, looking as confident as ever. Monokuma's ever-present smile seems to be glinting brighter today, his teeth looking sharper than ever. "Now that everyone's here, I just want to say how proud I am for how well you dealt with those little rumor notes. Such nasty things rumors can be, but everyone was so nice to each other! That's why I've decided to cut it out with the rumors and give you your real motives already," the bear says. The glint in its eyes gets brighter as panic fills the room.

"Real motive? I thought that was the real motive," Kaito says in a fashion that's almost accusatory. He leans forward, clenching his fist and bearing his teeth in something that's just short of a snarl. You quickly reach out, placing a hand against his shoulder, his posture relaxes slightly but his brow is still dangerous lowered in a glare.

Monokuma just laughs at him. "Something that pathetic? Of course not! I've prepared something extra special this time. As some of you might have already noticed, I've left something for each of you in your room. No, they aren't letters this time. These are real, 100% bonafide secrets about your fellow classmates. Each student gets one secret about another person. The catch? At the bottom of your secret, you'll find the name of the person who knows yours. Now then, have fun!" The bear says as it makes to disappear.

"Is that seriously all you're going to give us?" The astronaut once more speaks, his disbelief and anger shared by the rest of the group as mumbles of horror ripple through the group. You don't want to say you saw this coming, but it's impossible to deny the fact you did.

It all makes sense now. Monokuma gave you these secrets after just having a game where the goal was quite literally to spread each other's secrets. This would add an edge to everyone who didn't want their secrets spilled. In addition, these were all real secrets, and there was no doubt that some of these secrets were the rumors that Monokuma handed out.

"Yep, that's all. I'll leave you brats to figure out what to do. Will you end up killing or will you
band together? I can't wait to see!” The creature says and finally makes its exit. So it seems there are no rules. Another detail to foster animosity and doubt.

Kaede glances around for a couple of moments before speaking up. "Obviously, I think we're all going to be forced to read the secrets like last time. I think everyone should go back to their rooms, grab their secret, and we can meet up in the cafeteria and decide what to do from there," she offers up.

"And end up reading a secret about someone in the same room as them, no way in hell is everyone going to agree with that. Who even made you leader anyways?" Kokichi says as he glares down Kaede. You had a feeling this was coming, but you don't intervene for now. "Though I suppose it's a good idea if you're going to suggest that everyone out each other on their secrets. In fact, that might be one of the best ideas that little brain has managed to come up with yet," the purple haired boy easily goes into antagonist mode.

You don't appreciate what he's doing but you understand why he's doing it. If everyone got their secretsouted, then it would let everyone else avoid those with dangerous secrets and eliminate the desire to kill based off keeping your secret hidden.

You don't agree with the mentality though. While it could have that kind of effect, something like that could much sooner lead to total chaos. A person will sometimes keep secrets because they're scared not of the secret itself, but how a stranger looking in might interpret it. You could quite easily see some secrets being taken out of context and causing even more discord within the group. Even some of the more altruistic people in the group, the real innocent ones like Gonta and Keebo, could easily have their reputations trashed by a secret being told without any context. That was bound to scare people a lot more than anything else could.

On the other hand, who was to say it was your darkest secret? Someone could easily assume their secret is one thing when it really turned out to be another thing entirely. Someone could be tempted into killing for literally no reason in that case.

You laugh bitterly, quietly. "Damn. What a chaotic mess. The fucker won," no one seems to catch your words over the arguing that suddenly surrounds Kaede and Kokichi. The group is only dispersed with a couple of angry shouts from Kaito for everyone to go sit down and cool off before an actual fight breaks out. You don't know what to do. How do you prevent this madness from resulting in death? You aren't entirely sure if you know how.

The class started to filter out of the gym, all the tenser due to Kokichi's prodding. The fitness club lingered for a couple of moments, glancing at one another.

"I still think it would be better if we all read them with one another. Not even out loud, just surrounded by other people would be better than sitting alone," Kaede says mournfully. Her heart is in the right place, and honestly, you can understand why she'd think this way. It's actually not the worst indeed in the world when you think about it yourself.

By being surrounded by others, those you trust, it allows a sort of buffer between you and the full secret whatever it might be. It helps put things into perspective, and if it's truly a despicable secret then it allows for counsel on the topic. Especially if the secret was related to one of those close friends. Hiding the secret and keeping it to yourself could lead you to avoid someone out of misplaced caution in regards to something you might not have correctly interpreted. It led to a mess of emotions which could be remedied much easier in a group. At the same time, a group could also be messy for an entirely different slurry of reasons.

You were willing to take a risk on reading with a group.
"Well, why don't the five of us still open our letters together? We can meet where we did earlier and then maybe... try to figure out where to go from there," Shuichi says. He's fiddling with his fingers as his gaze flits over all of you. You smile encouragingly and the rest of the group agrees with the sentiment.

All five of you disband to go retrieve your individual letters. You were smart enough to bring yours with you just in case, so you head directly to the designated spot to read the secrets. The rest of the group slowly meets up with you. There's a heavy tension in the air. Maki looks like she's about to break something, her letter already open in her palms. No one faults her. The rest of the group all have sealed letters and Kaede is shifting nervously as she sits down on the grass. You decide to stand. Kaito and Shuichi both sit down next to Kaede. Maki also decides to stand.

"Alright, let's do this," Kaito says. You can't tell if he's actually excited or trying to cheer up the group, but all of you quickly tear into your envelopes and pull out the little sheet of paper.

Monokuma has to be kidding.

_Maki Harukawa is actually the Ultimate Assassin_

_Kokichi Ouma has your secret_

Your jaw clenches as you hear groans of distress all around the circle. You try not to have to visibly negative a reaction. It isn't hard, you're more in shock than anything. Not because of Maki. You already saw this coming to a certain extent, honestly, it just confirms a theory you already had. What shocks you and scares you is Kokichi. You couldn't feel it, but you know that you went pale the moment your heart started to chaotically pound in your chest, wondering what kind of secret Monokuma possibly game him.

You're terrified you've already lost your only ally before you've even had the chance to truly solidify him on your side.

"He gave mine to Miu? Really?" Kaede says in total disbelief and distress. She's lucky. Miu might seem a bit odd, but you doubt that Kaede's fellow blonde is going to spill any of her secrets.

"Better than Angie," Kaito counters almost sulkily. Again, he should consider himself to be luck. No one comments on whose secret they ended up with, but you can see the panic in Shuichi's eyes as he desperately glances at Kaede not so inconspicuously.

Maki gaze burns into you with the ferocity of a sun. It scalds your skin and blisters against your clothes. You know she's searching your gaze for any indication you're going to spill her secret. Any indication that you're intimidated by her secret. You don't even focus on her though, for a couple of moments the rest of your classmates don't matter. Don't exist. You're just focused on the five words sitting under the secret that echo in your head like church bells on gallows day.

"At least neither of you ended up having your secret in the hands of Kokichi," you say as you turn your gaze downwards. You don't know how to process. 3 of the 4 gazes instantly turn to pity.

"Do you have any idea what secret he might have about you? At least I've got a rough idea of what Monokuma might have said about me," Kaito says as he picks at the corners of the paper. He's still anxious, but you can tell that he's worried. They're all worried. Kaede more than anyone looks ready to throw down and she starts to mutter various curses and threats about anyone who decides to spill their secrets.

"Not a clue, I don't keep many secrets," you honestly admit with a shrug. "Even if I did, the thing
is, we don't know what secret he might have picked. It could be something similar to the rumor notes. He might have decided to air out your secret kink or maybe he copped out by talking about how you accidentally squashed an ant that one time when you were six. We can't be certain, which adds even more to the motive itself. You could end up killing to keep secret the fact you are a homicidal maniac outside this school setting or you really might just be silencing the fact you wet the bed till 8," you tell the group. Maki's gaze doesn't relent but you can feel the others calm down slightly at the idea it might not be their darkest secret. Of course, you know it'll be anything Monokuma can use to stir up trouble. Even trouble born from spite over a 'weak' secret.

You still wonder just what exactly Monokuma decided to give to Kokichi, but you put the thought out of your mind. Kaito recommends everyone work out for a couple of minutes before bed to help blow off some energy.

After a couple of basic exercises you have less trouble with than most, the group starts to disband starting with Kaito who's eventually followed by Kaede and Shuichi. You're about to head back to your room and try to work out the ciphers in your new book, slowly having pushed secrets out of your mind. That is, until a grip like iron wraps around your wrist. "I'd like to have a quick talk," Maki says as she looks you dead in the eyes. Once again, you can't find it in yourself to feel fear.

"Very well then, where to," you say. Your voice is entirely even and she quirts an eyebrow at you as though she's trying to decipher your actions. You can practically see her thought process move from questioning if you actually have her secret to if you're just acting calm. Fear fled you much earlier that afternoon.

"My lab," she tells you as she begins to drag you towards the door you'd so pointedly ignored so long ago. This was going to be a tough conversation.
You know that you should be scared in a situation like this, maybe even terrified. Your wrist was gripped by the red-eyed girl in such a way it almost completely blocked off the idea of escape entirely. Almost. Yet you found yourself entirely too at ease with what was going on. It wasn't like you didn't believe the secret. You'd honestly seen it coming from day one if you thought hard enough about the assessments you made in regards to Maki at the time. But she doesn't scare you. She can't because she's still Maki. She's still a member of the fitness club. Not to mention, there were still puzzle pieces that weren't completely lining up perfectly.

The girl brings you to a stop outside the door to her lab, leaning against it as she lets go of your wrist. Her expression tells you not to run, not that you were planning to anyway. "What did it say?" She asks bluntly. She crosses her arms as she leans against the door frame, her eyes narrowed. You decide to return the favor with an equally blunt answer.

"It talked about your real talent," you say. In one fluid movement, the girl opens the door to her lab and shoves you into the room. She quickly follows inside herself, shoulders raised in a way that reminds you of a wild animal stalking prey. The way she slams the door behind the two of you is supposed to be intimidating, but you find yourself on the verge of laughter and you don't know why. Maybe the rational part of your brain is going into mental shutdown. You make no move to try and resist her, instead just entering the room with an eerie calm. She looks at you like a lion that's cornered a rabbit, but the look in her eyes makes you think more of a kitten than a fierce beast.

"Say it all," she says. It's almost like she hasn't yet come to accept the fact that Monokuma spilled her secret.

"Maki Harukawa is actually the Ultimate Assassin," you repeat the words on the card easily and without hesitance, despite the intimidating show the other girl is putting on. Fear just hasn't started to process yet. It's just hard to be afraid of Maki because it's still Maki, the same one who pouts at Kaito and tries to look threatening but she's barely between 5'4 and she honestly glares like a kitten, no joke. It could just be some messed up coping mechanism, but still.

You're in a room surrounded by instruments of death. Hammers, axes, guns, knives, they're all proudly presented on the walls and it's no wonder she's been doing her best to keep everyone out of the room as best she could. Under a spotlight of sorts is a red cloak. It all feels showy. Too exaggerated for her to be a legitimate threat. Like someone taped a knife to a Roomba. Yeah, it can stab you, sure, but it's a fucking Roomba none the less. It might look scary, but it can't really do much if you've got half a working brain cell to avoid it.

You aren't entirely sure how you know, but there's a disconnect between Maki and her supposed talent. It feels fake on a deep level, deeper than most people would notice but not beyond the scope of your understanding.

That's why, no matter what, you can't be scared. Looking this woman dead in the eyes, you know for a fact she's one of the safest people in this school to have locked in this room with you, and you let this confidence show in the way you stand. Relaxed and unintimidated. That little fragment who woke up earlier laughs, it boasts how none in this school can touch you without you actually
letting it happen, and you actually believe that fragment of your lost self.

Maki frowns deeply at this and it's all the more telling that there's something missing between talent and action. If you're being honest, Maki was the first person to tip you off that everyone's or at least some people's Ultimate Talents might be fabrications. Back then it was a much smaller disconnect because you could still see her as the Ultimate Child Caretaker. Now the error is glaring and you can't help but wonder just how much of her is real. What memories? What thoughts and emotions? You can't be certain, but the more you let your gaze pierce that shell she's put up the more you realize she's just as scared as anyone else in this game. She just doesn't seem to know it herself.

"Aren't you scared of me?" She finally asks with that icy, impassive tone that she gives everyone. You almost laugh aloud at the question.

"In a situation like this? It doesn't matter who's going to kill, who has killed, and who thinks they could get away with killing. You're smarter than that, so as the situation stands, you're no more intimidating as an assassin than anyone else in our class. Simply put, I suppose the answer to your question would be a resounding no," you say with a quick shake of your head. It would honestly be stupid to fear her at this point even if you didn't realize just how off things were. Logically speaking, no matter what, she's at the disadvantage at this moment. A big disadvantage.

She laughs. A cold, dead bark of a sound that lacks all humor. "Aren't you scared I'm going to kill you to keep my secret a secret?" She asks you. It's obvious she wouldn't. That would be outright unintelligent and as an "assassin" she knows that. You shake your head sighing heavily, watching the way her expression twists once more into confusion as you meet her gaze.

"But why would you when there are much easier ways to get someone to keep a secret, safer ones too that don't require you risking execution," you say with the most gentle voice you can possibly manage. It doesn't really seem to help all that much, but at least you make an effort towards trying to set her at ease.

You know even if she is a real assassin, she wouldn't try to kill you right now. You have the upper hand considering the first person they blamed would end up being her. Yeah, she could always keep your rotting corpse locked in her lab, but if it was found in her lab things would be pretty damn obvious. It was already pretty sketchy that she'd end up being the last one to see you, something that could be proven by the testimonies of both Shuichi and Kaede. She couldn't hide it, couldn't cover it. An assassin who couldn't disappear without a trace to never be seen again was one who'd get caught within the hour.

Her face scrunches up for a moment as she mulls over your words. "Blackmail? I suppose that makes enough sense. I doubted anyone in this game would be honorable anyway," you see a flicker of dimness in her expression almost like a small spark of hope going out. Were you perhaps one of the few she thought of as honorable? Good intentioned? "What are your terms then?" She says as she straightens herself slightly and gazes at you evenly. It's almost business-like and you can see a flicker of the same expression she likes to turn on Kokichi when he's being annoying.

You can't help a ghost of a smile slipping across your features. You decide you want to tease her a little. "Say please!" You announce, batting your eyelashes like you're trying to beg. Maki blinks once. Then twice.

"Excuse me?" She says like she's trying to work her head around what you just said. She seems entirely disabled by your question, suddenly taking a step back from you as though the idea took her seriously off guard. The questioning look in her eyes is painfully confused like she honestly expected the worst of you. It stings a little, but you suppose she has a valid reason to feel such a
way, especially given the way half of your class tends to act.

"Maki-san is still Maki-san, you might not see it this way but you're still our friend and a member of the fitness club. I wasn't going to mention anything anyways. There would be no point since really, in a situation like this being trained make you no more dangerous than any one of our other classmates. If anything it makes you less dangerous since you already know covering up the murder would be nigh impossible. On top of that... it would be kind of cruel to subject even an enemy to the kind of hatred and ostracization such a revelation would encourage. I would hope you'd have more faith in me to not do it to a person I've repeatedly called my friend," you tell her with a frown.

You put extra emphasis onto the words repeatedly and friend, allowing a little bit of the hurt to seep into your voice. Maybe you're laying it on a little thick judging by the fact Maki subconsciously flinches, but feel as though you need to make it very clear to her where she currently stands with you. You've been watching Maki long enough to realize that putting it this bluntly is probably the only way to get her to realize that you do actually regard her as a friend.

"That's it? That's all you want me to do? Say please?" Maki's still seems to be in disbelief. You let your eyes linger shut for a moment as you hum, nodding your head as you open them. You lock eyes with the red-eyed woman and dare her to find a lie in your words. There isn't one.

"I suppose I could ask you to be our friend a bit more if actually making a request would help you feel better. You keep pushing us away, I'd like to see you trust us other members of the fitness club, but I can't force you into doing something like that. A demand like that would be unethical. So I'll leave you with what I've already asked," you give her the warmest smile you can muster. There's a slight sting in the back of your throat, your eyes casting downwards for half a second without your permission, but you ignore it. A small part of you wants to make the greedy request, force her into being your friend, but friendships take time and effort and the situation is just going to sour if you try forcing it. This is the best you can do for now.

Maki's gaze drops for a moment before she brings it back up to meet yours. "Please, don't tell anyone," she says. You can see her shifting slightly as if the words themselves are awkward, or almost even painful, for her to say. She scrutinizes you with a narrowed gaze like she doesn't entirely believe your words. Not really much you can do about it.

"I wouldn't dream of it," you say with the smallest bubble of a laugh at the back of your throat. "Now, if you don't mind, I'll leave you to whatever you were going to do before this who secret debacle. I have a lot of investigative work to trudge through and I still need to figure out what I'm going to do about Kokichi having my secret. I still don't even have a clue what Monokuma decided to tell him..." You trail off as you make your leave with a still very confused Maki left behind you.

"Actually, wait!" Maki's voice sounds slightly distressed and you pause, turning back around in order to face her. You see her worry her bottom lip for a moment before pulling out a little card. You're pretty sure judging by the appearance it's a rumor card.

"Monokuma... earlier with the rumors he gave me yours. I'm not sure if I should believe it or not," she hands you the card so you can read it yourself and decide what to do. It's honestly exactly what you're expecting it to be, which is actually a little disappointing. Just a small little note telling the reader that your Ultimate Talent isn't your real Ultimate Talent.

You don't really know what to do. There are a million lies and multiple truths that you could tell her at this moment. After all, who's to say what's true and what's a lie when you yourself aren't even sure. So you decide to tell her just that. It's not like she can do you much damage right now anyway, you're holding most of the cards. "To be completely honest I'm not sure if my Talent is
fake or not. I... have a feeling that all of my memories are counterfeits. Falsifications of a person that doesn't really exist. I don't always act in a way that's befitting to those old memories, hell, I don't even talk like I used to. I'm pretty sure most of them are fake," you trail off for a moment, contemplating your next words carefully.

"My Talent could be real or it could easily be fake. There's enough evidence to support either claim at this point. I really don't know, and the only thing that scares me more than that is the thought that by this time tomorrow more of our friends could be dead. My own death doesn't even scare me as much! A bit pathetic, isn't it? Believe what you will about the rumor being true or false, because honestly? At this point, I don't even know..." You feel very weak like the air is being sucked straight out of your lungs. You admit more than you mean to, but looking at Maki, it actually seems to win you a little favor.

There's sympathy and sadness in he gaze. Gently, as though she might break you, she presses a hand against your shoulder. You feel a droplet of rain hit your hand, but you're inside and it hasn't rained since you've gotten to this school. You almost panic when you realize you've started crying. You don't know why you cry, oh, oh no, this isn't good. You don't like this, you don't like crying, and you especially don't like not knowing why you're crying. Something at the center of your being in mourning, something you can't remember and can't touch and it deeply disturbs you, which only really makes your vision blur further.

You can see Maki go into panic mode. You've completely dropped your guard and you don't think she takes it lightly. "It's, uhm, it's okay," she says and pulls you into a hug like you're a child. Even if she's the Ultimate Assassin now, you have a feeling that her relationship with the children at the orphanage wasn't as falsified as she'd like you to believe. She treats you gently and you ruefully think to yourself how delicate the hands pressed into your back rubbing small circles are. They aren't the hands of a killer, they just aren't. Her movements are nervous and careful and just too gentle.

Maki is Maki and you promise yourself that Maki is the one person you'll drop your guard around because you know that she's the only person that you can. You don't need to pretend to be confident around her because that isn't what she needs, and you don't feel like you could be scared around her. So dropping your guard, just for a couple of moments, it feels safe.

Much later you return to your room on shaky legs craving sleep.

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Ever the creature of caution you sleep with the note under your pillow that night. You're a light sleeper by nature so you trust no one would be able to get under your pillow without waking you up. True to your estimates, you wake up the next morning with little issue. The note is safely under your pillow, your door is locked, and your room is exactly the state you left it in. Someone would need to be infinitely more stealthy and skilled than any of your classmates in order to have gotten away with such a perfect crime.

That isn't to say you wake up feeling comfortable the next morning.

You wake up a little before 5 that next morning and swear that there's a foreboding chill in the air. Something just seems odd to you, so you decide to stay in your room and read until it hits five, at that point you can go to the library to continue the investigation. You've already made good progress with your cipher book, so you decide to try and make some more as you flip on the lamp on your desk.

You don't get out of bed to read, almost finding something nostalgic in the act of curling up under
your blankets and letting your eyes skim across paper. You can figure out all the ciphers and what not later assuming they aren't red herrings, but for right now you might be able to glean something valuable from just reading the book. On top of that, it turns out that it's actually a really good book. It's rare to find a well-written mystery that you haven't guessed in the first ten pages. You have a guess but you aren't absolutely certain which is good.

It's no more than 10 minutes later, a couple of minutes before 5 exactly, when you hear a curious clicking coming from your door. You turn in your bed so that you're sitting up straight and facing the door. Ah, yes, it must be that someone's come to pick the lock to your door and kill you. Simple logic really. Simple logic that makes no sense. Skipping over the irrational thoughts linked mostly to self-preservation you think a little harder about what might be going on here as your locks continue to be tampered with.

Kokichi seemed pretty keen on the idea of sharing secrets the other day. You wouldn't put it past him to sneak into everyone's room and try to snag their notes before they even woke up.

You slip out of bed quietly, trying not to make any noise that would alert the boy trying to pick your lock. Your footsteps are silent as you pad across the room to set your book on your desk. You slip a bookmark into it and return to your bed, retrieving the piece of paper. There's an inside breast pocket in your nightgown, strange really and you wonder why Monokuma's given it to you. At the very least, for now, it serves a good purpose of protecting your note. Once you're done and Kokichi is just finishing up with his very rudimentary lockpicks you swing the door open with a flourish.

"Didn't I tell you that I wake up at 5 in the morning during the last trial?" You ask as you watch the purple haired boy skitter back a step in shock. He's absolutely taken off guard for a couple of moments as his eyes turn up towards you with panic. This feels all too familiar and you'd really hate for this to become a normal greeting between the pair of you. He's quick to regain his composure after he catches sight of your fairly calm expression. He straightens up and adjusts his posture to casual.

You actually aren't all that upset by Kokichi's attempted intrusion. For all you pretend to be frustrated with the boy you can't bring yourself to hate him. It is Kokichi after all and you quietly admit to yourself and yourself alone that you enjoy his company, but you are a little annoyed since you were getting to a good part in your story.

"Aww, I suppose that ruins that surprise," the boy says with a giggly laugh as he puts his hands behind his head. "Although, I thought this might happen. I'm glad I got a bargaining chip. I'll make you a deal, ____-chan. Hand over the secret you got, and I'll give you yours." He goes silent for a couple of moments as you can process his words and think about his offer, eyes glinting with excitement. You don't like where this is going, not in the slightest.

"I'm sure you'd love to know what it is. I haven't even looked at it yet for an added bonus. I'll never even know," he says. You wonder exactly why he's offering to make this deal. You wonder if he's lying about not reading the note, but something gives you the impression he really hasn't looked at your secret yet. This would be a golden opportunity to get it out of his hands. You're not sure why he trusts you though, what you might have done to earn this is beyond you.

Sure you made your deal and all, but he's essentially trusting you not to have a malicious secret by offering to exchange it for Maki's secret. Of course, the tradeoff of this is a test to your own loyalties to the formerly mentioned assassin. You've already made a promise, you intend to keep it.

A twist in your gut makes you shake your head and sigh. "I understand what you're doing. You're going to read everyone's secrets in order to get a read on who might be dangerous or not. You want
to watch the people who might end up doing something stupid over their secret or those who have secrets that need to be watched out for later down the road. I understand that, and while your methods of antagonizing everyone are beyond me, I have to respect the attempt you're making in order to pull one over on the bear.”

His eyes light up for a moment and you think that you've pretty much hit the nail on the head. Unfortunately, he can't have this.

"That being said, I'm sorry. In making this deal you imply a certain level of trust. I'm asking you to think about that trust, and really put your faith in me when I say I have this one handled. This is a very delicate secret, and to be honest? This situation lies a bit more in my skill set than it does yours. So please. Do what you will with my secret, but, I'm keeping this one." You instantly feel bad for not agreeing, for not going along with the boy, but you know you need to do what you need to do.

Kokichi smiles in a demented kind of way. "Trust? Ha, as if, you're just easy to make a pawn. I'll get the secret one way or another. Just don't come crawling back to me when you want to know your own secret!" The boy hisses at you. You seem to have struck a nerve but there's a lot more in his voice and his eyes than just the demented and vicious expression he tries to portray. Fear, of course, stands out the most. Someone is finally on his tail who understands his thought processes. For a split second thought, you think you see the barest hint of respect.

Then you see something you honestly never would have respected. Well, a lot of somethings. Relief, regret, sorrow, and hope to name a few. It's a confusing mix and you can't really pin down Kokichi's actually feelings in those moments. You can't tell if he's just acting like there's a swirling pit of chaos in the center of his head or if he's honestly struggling with his own emotions right now.

You two made your deal much earlier on in this little game. It, however, was a deal that was forged on a kind of shared trust with one another that whatever you did was for the benefit of yourselves more than anything and would happily benefit each other since you had the same goal. A deal with the goal of getting out of here alive by playing good cop bad cop in a way. This takes that deal to the next step entirely. It suddenly turns into make or break. At this point, it's hard to say which direction the dice will fall.

Will you ultimately regret or adore this situation? It's hard to tell. Kokichi turns on his heels, stalking off. You watch him for a moment as he rips into what you assume is your secret. He hasn't opened it, which means he shouldn't know that he has your secret unless he already retrieved all the others, which makes it obvious you have Maki's secret if he's had the time to read through them all to figure out who was missing and whose secret he has.

That at least deserves a little respect.

You see him slow for a minute as he reads over it before coming to a complete stop and glancing back towards you. You lock eyes and find that his expression is nearly impossible to read, there's just too much to dissect. His face splits into a magnificent grin and he gives a little "nishishi" before sprinting off like a mad man. You have no idea what kind of secret he just read about you, let alone how he's reacting to it internally. You feel deeply afraid, but what's done is done.

Closing your door with a quiet click you get changed into your day clothes and switch the location of your secret note to the inside pocket of your blazer. You aren't going to get any more relaxing done this morning so you might as well start trying to do something useful before you start lingering on Kokichi and Kokichi based antics. You'll drive yourself mad if you think about that boy for too long.
You reemerge from your room trying to decide what to do with yourself for the next couple hours. It's fairly early in the morning and you don't really expect anyone to be up at this time of the day, except apparently you're wrong. When you're on your way out of your room you note Korekiyo also emerging from his. You take a deep breath and steel your nerves for another predictably uncomfortable encounter because that seems to be the only kinds of encounters you can have lately.

He seems a little fatigued but he perks up when he sees you, his eyes jumping across you in a way that makes your skin crawl slightly. It's not perverse, that would be the wrong word for it. It borders on predatory, but really, you can't say that you're genuinely fearful of anyone in this school let alone a stick figure like Korekiyo. It's odd, the way he looks at you just makes you feel uncomfortable and you have to stifle the urge to shift awkwardly on your feet. It's not fearful as much as it's understanding you should be afraid, and that is a strange sensation, to say the least.

"Ah, good morning ____-san, a little early is it not?" The anthropologist asks and his voice sends just as many shivers through your body as his eyes do. He doesn't seem like a bad person, but the Gamemasters have made everyone into bad people. It's a very cautious factor and a very fragile difference, one you apply with care since it doesn't really change the outcome of any one encounter. Just how much you pity the person you've encountered. It makes you feel more sympathetic to your classmates, the majority of which are still acting with puppet-like scripting to their nature. Korekiyo is one of those.

You've started to come up with an idea or two as to why some people have broken this kind of puppet-like quality. The first couple people you noticed having snapped it were Kokichi and Shuichi. This would imply some kind of analytical merit to peer through the illusion created by the Gamemasters, but then there were Kaede and Miu. No insult to Kaede's or Miu's intelligence, but the two certainly girls both paled when it came to intellect and understanding the human psyche. They're charismatic and quirky in a way that sets them on a different playing field than the two boys. Considering they were also first, that kind of shattered your first theory.

The second theory revolves a bit around the fact that it started with you. You really don't mean to compliment yourself, and it could just be correlation, but you shouldn't discredit the idea as of yet. The people who you've spent the most time with all seem to have shaken control the most while the people like Korekiyo or Tenko who you've spent a lot less time with are still playing by the scripting so to speak. Baring Tsumugi which plays into her being the mastermind.

You can't say for certain, but the third theory is that everyone just keeps doing things that 'break character' just enough to snap them out of it without it being as grandiose as your own snap had been. You broke out of it because the Gamemasters tried to make you way less intelligent than you actually are. This didn't fit with who you are deeply as a person, hence a sort of snapping effect where you realized that everything was very wrong with your memories. It could have easily been less pronounced in the rest of the group, small enough they didn't quite question as many details, but effective enough that it was still 'freeing'.

That left the question of what factor exactly caused it, and how you could apply something similar to your remaining classmates.

Korekiyo continues to give you a piercing stare for every moment of silence, so you pipe up to respond quickly. "I always wake up this early. The bigger question is why you're still up. What are you doing? Anything interesting?" You try to strike up a friendly enough conversation with Korekiyo, but it's hard given his mask. There's a lot in a conversation that you judge by facial expression, the real subtle movements that tip off emotions. Korekiyo doesn't give off those movements readily because all you can really see are his eyes.
The anthropologist laughs slightly. "I assure you, it's nothing fun. I'm simply going to head to the library in a few moments in order to get some studying done. It has a wonderful selection of books, don't you know, including a wide array of stories focused around indigenous peoples in... Ah, I'm likely boring you, am I not?" You can't tell if he's frowning or smiling ruefully but you can see a shift under the cloth and his eyes dart downwards for half a second and crinkle at the corners. You hate not being able to read him so you approach with caution.

"Of course not, you have no reason to be worried about boring me. I find this kind of thing quite intriguing. I was actually thinking about heading to the library myself to look into a couple of clues I've gathered surrounding our situation. Perhaps it would be more enjoyable if we went together?" You're a bit hesitant to offer and your id encourages you to flee the scene. Your superego counters with the fact that if he's dangerous you don't want one of your meeker classmates around him. Unfortunately for yourself, you have to side with your superego.

At the very least you know how to defend yourself. Genuinely know as opposed to some of the other people up at this hour. Kokichi is wandering around here somewhere and it would be a cold day in hell before that boy was able to beat back an attacker. No offense to Kokichi, but he is a leader and a dictator. He stands and he leads, he doesn't fight. It's not in his style, but it is in yours.

Korekiyo pauses for a moment and nods. "What a brilliant idea. Such a wonderful person you are ____-san, always concerned about everyone and trying to get everyone out of here. It's a shame that the situation is so dire, you would make a wonderful friend for Sister," the man says and you swear on your life that he smiles behind that mask. It's not a friendly smile either.

"How about we meet up together in the library at 5:30? There are a couple of materials I've been meaning to study that I've left scattered around and I must retrieve them," he says before bowing out of the conversation. You're left feeling like the arctic wind has blow straight through you. You retreat back into your room yourself, shivering violently once you've closed the door.

It's not fear, you tell yourself silently. It really isn't fear that you feel in those next few moments. But your hands are shivering as you sit down on your bed and press your palm against your chest. You aren't sure why it's not fear that creeps around the corners of your brain. Your body is quite obviously having a fear response, but it's not fear. It's just not fear your ego tells itself but you can't stop your heart thrumming against your rib cage like a chained up bird.

You aren't scared but the situation itself is terrifying you finally amend, setting the distinction between the two. You know you should be scared, a normal and logical person would be and your own body seems to follow along with that logic. But there's a certain disconnect, an almost lofty kind of barrier that keeps reminding you that you aren't scared and shouldn't be scared because you're used to this. Perhaps the fact that a small portion of yourself is telling you that you're used to situations like these is more terrifying than anything else you've experienced today.

Forcefully you shift your body out of a panic response and manage to get yourself to calm down a little. It's shockingly easy to muffle the defense mechanism, almost like you've practiced doing this before.

You focus on the task at hand and what you know. There's a slight potential that Korekiyo might be trying to murder you for one reason or another. You honestly should be expecting such considering the fact that you're apparently supposed to die either this case or the next according to Monokuma. Which means if this falls through you'll have to be careful during the next motives since the Gamemasters have a backup plan and if that's not a slap in the face you don't know what is.

So, that comes down to a single simple question. How do you avoid getting brutally murdered?
Unless Korekiyo somehow managed to get a gun (a real one, not like the airsoft stuff that you noticed hanging on the walls of Maki's lab) then you're fairly confident you'll be able to fend off an attack. Where do you go from there though? Tell the class? Just ignore it? Ignoring it could be bad because then he'll just try again but ousting him is just going to cause mayhem in the class. Especially since you can list at least one person who would accuse you of lying.

You don't think Tsumugi likes you much right now. Not with how you've been flipping the script on the little mastermind.

You stand up and gather a couple of papers, slipping them into your blazer pockets so you can study them while in the library. It's mostly some notes on a couple of topics that you want to look into as well as a list of places where you think you might be able to find some potential clues. You want to try combing the library thoroughly today.

You resolve to try investigating the door behind the moving bookshelf. You think you might be able to convince it to open up, though you aren't entirely sure how yet. It's just a hunch at this point, one based off a faulty memory that might not be real. It's vague at best, but you remember someone teaching you the trick to electronic locks once upon a time. Were they a coder or a mechanic? You can't remember. Either way, you want to give it a try once Korekiyo gets there since you'd rather not do anything dangerous or potentially incriminating on your own.

You grab whatever other materials you think you might need and slip outside for, what is it, the third time this morning? It's already been a long morning.

You make to leave the dorms and head towards the library but stop absolutely dead in your tracks. Confusion mixes with anxiety but mostly it's outright confusion. "Shuichi-kun... what'cha doing buddy?" You ask carefully and the boy possessing the title of Ultimate Detective nearly jumps a foot in the air and turns on his heels like he's been caught in the middle of a crime. He seems as though he was pacing around outside of Kaede's door. When you came out he was anxiously standing outside of her room like he wanted to knock but didn't want to knock. Then he fiddled with the knob for a moment like he was going to try and force it open before instantly retracting and looking at the door itself with a torn expression.

The expression he gives you now speaks of pure terror and embarrassment.

It's a total hand caught in the cookie jar reaction. Nothing speaks of outright malice, just guilt over knowing you're doing something you're really not supposed to be doing. You have your doubts that whatever he's doing is actually dangerous, but he is acting mildly sketchy. You dismiss him being up to anything dangerous, but you still allow the slightest hint of a piercing glare to form in your expression. If he is doing something bad, you'll pull it from him.

"Good morning ____-san, I was just... I wanted to talk with Akamatsu-san but I'm a bit..." His cheeks flush crimson and you can't tell if he's guilty or just embarrassed by the fact he can't knock on a girl's door. He mutters something and you swear you hear the word mastermind which doesn't put you anymore at ease. Quite the opposite actually as, the air taking on a different kind of feeling while you give him another once over, glaring hard. You feel a slight churning in the pit of your stomach and sigh, trying to decide how to approach this.

"Well, you know you can just knock. I'm sure she wouldn't mind if you did that. But why are you up so early, it's really not like you to wake up before the morning announcement," you take half a moment to wonder why it's been to busy this morning. It's rare that you're not the only one up at this time of the day, and yet you've already stumbled across two people who were also up. Perhaps it's just one of those mornings?
"Er, well, I. I couldn't sleep so I just stayed up in the library all night and I still don't think I'll be able to get much sleep. I was going to talk with Akamatsu-san but I don't want to wake her up," Shuichi turns his head downwards and you can once again see that brilliant flush of crimson on his cheeks. This poor meek boy doesn't know what to do with himself and you feel like you're glaring at him with the intensity of a prosecutor trying to glean clues to strike down the defense. It's not a friendly visage.

"I'll leave you be then, I was just heading to the library anyways. Good luck with your Kaede-san situation," you say. You're a bit hesitant to leave him be but Shuichi is outside of Kaede's door. Anyone else and you would have been a bit more nervous, but he's thinking about waking up Kaede. If there's anyone you trust him not to hurt it's probably her or Kaito, so you don't mind too terribly much leaving him in the state that he is.

Shuichi awkwardly jerks at the mention of the library. "Be careful! I mean... the books a bit precarious so just, uh, make sure none of them fall on you," the detective offers you an extremely awkward half-smile and you feel yourself internally cringe. You have no idea what's going on, but Shuichi is a terrible actor and something is up. You suppose this means you should carefully investigate the library.

You shake your head and leave the boy behind, still awkwardly standing outside Kaede's room like he's trying to decide what to do. You almost want to slam on the door yourself before running off and leaving, but you eventually decide that Shuichi needs to do this himself. You have to get to the library before 5:30 after all.

It's a bit cold on campus this early in the morning, but you make the brisk jog from the dorms to the basement without any trouble. Your eyes easily adjust to the darkness associated with the lower floor. It doesn't bother you, the dark in general, most people have pretty bad night vision so the dark is safe. At least for you anyways. The most dangerous animal is a human being, wild animals can be dealt with logically. The same can't always be said of humans. A human can't attack in the pitch black though. There aren't any boogymen to worry about so it doesn't bother you.

What does bother you is the person leaving the library the moment you arrive. Why are there so many people awake this morning?

"Rantaro-kun? Don't tell me you can't sleep too," you say in an exaggerated fashion as the Ultimate Amnesiac wanders out from the library. He laughs lightly at your comment, rolling his eyes. He stops his leave in order to pause and speak with you, apparently, none too shocked by the fact you're up this early. He seems remarkably relaxed, but then again, Rantaro is almost always relaxed. His chilled out nature is almost startling since so little phases him. It's almost admirable.

"Unfortunately, you are correct ____-san. I couldn't sleep so I got to the library about an hour ago when Saihara-kun was just leaving. You here to get in some early morning studying? Akamatsu-san told me that you tend to do that every morning you don't sleep in." He crosses his arms and smile at you in an easy fashion, but you can't help zoning in on his words. What was Shuichi doing for the hour he wasn't in the library?

He couldn't have been standing outside of Kaede's room the entire time. You and Korekiyo would have noticed him pacing out there like a mad man if he was there the entire time. So it brought up the question of what he was actually doing.

"Yeah, I was actually. I met up with Korekiyo-kun earlier this morning and the two of us are just going to study together until everyone else starts to wake up. It seems like everyone is having trouble sleeping so it shouldn't be long now, but we need something to kill the time until then," you say with a shrug. Korekiyo's name still summons a shiver to run along your spine, but you're able to
control your actions well enough that it doesn't show.

Rantaro frowns deeply as though something you've said is upsetting to him. "Shinguji-kun, huh? You be careful sitting in here alone with another person, you don't know what his intentions might be." The warning is a bit out of left field so you take it without question. Rantaro did get Korekiyo's rumor card so it's not unreasonable for him to warn you to be careful, especially depending on what the rumor said.

"Don't worry about it. If I get killed at least you have a prime suspect," your comment is perhaps a bit nihilistic but it outlines your thoughts very nicely right now. Everything seems pretty hopeless so you turn the despair into comedy, a pretty common theme for your generation as a whole but one that seems to upset Rantaro even further. "I'm just kidding. Really, you don't have to work. My ma trained me how to defend myself when I was younger," you say. But which one?

Rantaro eventually nods and lets a smile back onto his face, "Okay ____-san, I trust you to be careful. I'm going to try going back to bed and getting a little more sleep before the morning announcements. I'll see you in a couple of hours. Hopefully."

You nod as the green-haired boy bids you goodbye and you focus on the task at hand. You sit there and wait until a couple of minutes past when you're supposed to meet up with Korekiyo, just taking up residence in a corner of the library and read whatever's closest to you. You sit there for a long couple of moments, just waiting out the time for Korekiyo to arrive. The minutes slowly grow longer and without warning, it's already five minutes past your meeting time.

A bit odd, but nothing too exceptionally strange. You leave the library for a couple of minutes to go to the nearby game room and look for something interesting. You think you saw some old handhelds the other day, and you figure it would make for a good way to pass the time. It takes you another five minutes to find the games before you return to the library, but you doubt it'll really cause much of a difference.

You swing open the doors to the library and walk in before freezing. It's not fear, and this time you mean it. It's not fear, it's anger.

You should go get two others.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, not sorry.
"A body has been discovered! Everyone, please report to the Library," the announcement went off but you barely processed it, your thoughts a hurricane inside your skull. You thought you'd be able to conduct yourself better the second time. You thought it wouldn't have hit you as hard. But this time hit worse. Your emotions pressed inward on you and it took genuine effort to set them all aside and force yourself into 'work mode'.

You found yourself standing between Miu and Maki who looked at the body of the Ultimate Anthropologist with mixed expressions of shock and disgust. You didn't know Korekiyo. You didn't particularly like Korekiyo. But a deep regret and the sense of your own failure weighed heavily in the pit of your stomach. You leaned against Miu a bit, feeling perhaps a little sickened. In your rush out of the library to find other witnesses, you ended up grabbing these two and dragging them with you. There was no real thought behind the actions, it was just their doors you instinctually ended up knocking on. It was apparently a smart decision as their combined presence was at least a little more steadying. Miu placed her hand against the small of your back while you lean against her. Maki was the closest to the body, for right now she stood between you and it. Neither of them were talking, neither really knew what to say right now, but them just being there was more than enough to make you feel a little better.

The stretch of silence between the announcement and the first person to walk in is remarkably short.

You jump when the library door swings open with a violent panic. It's actually Kokichi who bursts into the room first. He glances at the three of you and you almost catch a faint look of panic on his expression before he schools it into that grin of his. "Uh oh, looks like another accident, huh?" Maki seethes beside you, and you swear you can physically feel her desire to do Kokichi harm. How many words did it take to rile her up, 7? That's got to be a new record.

"Geeze. When they said library I almost felt scared for a moment! After all, you're the only one who's usually up around this time on top of the only one who likes this dusty old place," Kokichi's eyes burn into yours for a moment and his expression is incredibly hard to decipher as it burns into you. "Of course, that's just a lie. What kind of idiot would actually care about you, ____-chan?"

Kokichi puts on a show and a fake laugh and you can feel Miu's hand turn into a fist, balling up the back of your shift. She shifts slightly and her own body presses a little more into yours. "Shut up you little shit! Someone's just been murdered, this is serious," she snaps. A ferocious kind of anger that actually manages to equal Maki radiates off of her and Kokichi just laughs louder. His voice wavers slightly, but not enough for the girls to notice.

Was he genuinely worried? Was that what caused his entrance? You don't know, but he seems to have his guard a lot higher than usual. You aren't sure if you even want to know what's going through his mind right now, you can't deal with much more in the way of revelations. Not without putting on an investigative persona and taking a step or two back. Something easier said than done right now.

Korekiyo was dead and Kokichi was potentially genuinely worried about you. One of these is a fact as the corpse is sitting in front of you. The other is a hypothesis that you have yet to add any real
credence. Unfortunately, neither of those details are as important right now as figuring out why Korekiyo is dead. You shove everything out of the way and take a deep breath, centering yourself and focusing on that goal. You can pay attention to everything else later. Without a Monokuma File to attach your attention to, it's a bit harder to get yourself to focus than you would have thought.

"Can we please get investigation over with," you say as you lean even heavier onto Miu. The inventor doesn't comment on it. Instead, she allows the fist pressed against your back to flatten out and she rubs small circles. Maki's positioning also changes so that she's standing almost in front of you, blocking both Korekiyo's corpse and Kokichi from view.

What usual aura and demeanor you typically keep around yourself seems to falter for a moment. Perhaps because you're in a room full of only the people you've come to trust. Kokichi you trust not for his actions themselves but the clarity behind them. Maki, you trust because of the innocents you've seen hidden behind the guise of an assassin. Finally, Miu, you've come to trust with the growing friendship between the pair of you that you can't really explain. The two of you had gotten fairly close. Maybe because she really trusted the fact you had no intention of abandoning her. The air of control you like to keep about yourself only falters for a moment, but you're certain that all 3 notice it. How could they not? You conduct yourself with such an aura of strength and confidence, of course they'd notice you shrink inwards slightly, loathing the fact you couldn't prevent another murder from happening. You feel powerless, and that's a sensation that you're truly unaccustomed to. Memories or no, it feels wrong to be so deeply removed from a position of power.

Even your control over your own self isn't as good as it should be. That's really what upsets you more than anything.

This situation, something about it makes you uncomfortable and not feel as much like yourself. Perhaps it's the loss of your most vital memories or maybe it's just the Game Masters, but you feel like you yourself are occasionally pushed out of your own character.

You should be better at compartmentalizing details like this. It should be easier for you to slip into the persona of the ruthless detective who couldn't care less about who's dead, just the fact that someone's dead and you need to figure out the clues. You have no idea why you think this, but part of you says this is the character you're supposed to pay. Another little voice dares to remind you that even that was in itself a character, and your loss of memory has left you more honest.

You don't know how to feel about that.

There's a very long silence between Kokichi's entrance and the next group of your friends to come into the room, enough of silence that you do start to get a more stable grip on your own self. There is, after all, a rather important task at hand that needs to be focused on for the time being.

The moment you hear more sets of footsteps you right yourself and force your gaze past Maki to look at the corpse. It's going to be a long day, that much is certain. You take a deep breath and let it out in quick succession, forcing away all of your emotions and flicking the switch into investigation mode. This time the attempt actually sticks and the fire in the pit of your stomach cools down as you focus on the end goal here. You can't let how you're feeling sway how you're supposed to be acting. Everyone is relying on everyone else so that you can figure out the killer together and the rest of the class can live.

Rantaro, Kaede, and Shuichi all arrive together after a long stretch of time following Kokichi's arrival. They look sleepy, but nowhere near as sleepy as everyone else. The rest of the class lingers
behind slightly, rubbing at their eyes and looking generally uncomfortable like they've just woken up. No one seems particularly happy to be there and unfortunately for poor Korekiyo, there isn't much mourning over his death. You swear you even see a small amount of relief in the way Tsumugi's shoulders sag.

You make a note of the fact that Shuichi looks nervous but less nervous than Kaede who looks like she's about to start sweating bullets. The two are pressed side to side looking like they're waiting to be attacked any minute now.

Monokuma appears not long after the class. "Finally! We've got the ball rolling and it seems like all of you are going to start dropping like flies. Hopefully. Anyway, it's time to start the investigation of the murder of the Ultimate Anthropologist. Take the Monokuma File and get started," the bear says with very little fanfare as he starts handing out the file. You distinctly notice the absence of the Monokubs who have mostly been on radio silence for the last couple of days.

You really hope that's a good thing and not a bad thing. Turning your attention to the Monokuma File you turn it on and focus on your job for the time being instead of any overarching questions you might have.

_Ultimate Anthropologist, Korekiyo Shinguji. Murdered at 5:38 in the library. Cause of death, blunt force trauma to the head. The witnesses are ______, Maki Harukawa, and Miu Iruma. Cause of death is blunt force trauma to the back of the head._

The file looks fairly complete compared to the last one, which means none of these things were glaring giveaways to what happened as the cause of death had been for Kirumi. That meant you'd need to be extra thorough with investigating this time around. Your eyes find themselves drawn to the corpse and before anyone in the class can start delegating tasks you've already started moving towards it. Monokuma hasn't even had the chance to leave the room yet. Something about it just seems off to you

"Strange," you comment to yourself while a couple of your classmates look at you. Mostly they ignore you. Your muttering, of course, draws attention, but not as much as the muttered thoughts of one Ultimate Detective might have.

"What is it?" Said detective asks as he comes to stand next to you. This draws a little more attention than you were able to, but not enough to distract anyone from their own individual jobs. The rest of the class slowly starts to divvy up tasks as it becomes obvious you'll once again handle assessment of the corpse.

"Just something I noticed..." You end up trailing off and glance towards Shuichi, smiling at the boy as warmly as you can manage. "Ah, I suppose we should still be working together in pairs to make sure that no one messes with any evidence. Do you intend to work with me?" You don't like the flicker in Shuichi's gaze but you aren't sure if it's malicious or if there's more at play than that. He opens his mouth, but that's about as far as he gets.

"No. I will," cuts down the middle of your conversation before Shuichi has the chance to answer you. He actually flinches when Maki's authoritative voice makes her statement sound more like an order. She isn't glaring or openly fierce, but you can see a subtle tense in her form as she comes to stand next to you. Her crimson gaze is as sharp as one of her blades, the comparison gets you a little sidetracked though and you find yourself wishing for a pocket knife to twirl between your idle fingers.

Shuichi is smart and backs down immediately, ducking his head and averting his gaze. Maki isn't an assassin, you know this, but there is a certain degree of ferocity attached to her personality. It's
not the kind of vicious you'd ascribe to a professional killer, it's actually the defensive kind of venom you'd use to describe a protective mother or older sibling. You think you're starting to piece together what details they took from the real Maki's history to make this Maki.

Admittedly you don't want to think about it in terms of 'real' or 'fake' since that just leaves you a little bit hollow. Like you're standing on a set becoming attached to a bunch of cardboard cutouts. You decide that these versions of your friends are just as real as the originals, their pasts and some of their odder (read as: more violent) quirks are fake.

"R-right. I'll go help Akamatsu-san collect testimonies then," he says with a nervous laugh and quickly retreats. You glance at Maki and smile slightly. If you're being honest with yourself, you're a little relieved you're working with Maki instead of Shuichi. To be fair it's nothing against Shuichi himself. Maki, however, like yourself is another witness which guarantees her innocents. You don't want to accuse someone you think of as a friend, but sadly Shuichi is a suspect right now.

"Alright, let's get down to work," you say and kneel down next to the corpse. Looking over the body you start with the head. "It looks like the impact is, as the file states, right at the back of the head. Rounded indent, it looks like it should have been instant. He should have died the second contact was initiated." Korekiyo's body ended up pitching forward into the bookshelf when he died, or so it seems, and he then fell to the side because of gravity. You roll him onto his back so you get get a good look at him.

Flinching slightly you look at his expression. "Is it just me, or does he look like he's grimacing?" You turn towards your partner in deduction who gives a quick nod. You can see the gears starting to turn in the head of the faux assassin as she observes the scene as well. She moves to stand in front of the bookcase Korekiyo was at.

"It looks like someone set a trap. Something probably fell on him," she says. You stand up and look at what she's inspecting. True to her word, it seems like someone's jerry-rigged a trap on the 8th shelf.

"Huh. It looks as though the trap relied on the movement of the bookshelf. I remember Shuichi-kun and I mentioned to the rest of the class the moving bookcase led to the mastermind's door but trying to kill them was pointless, so who would set up the trap?" You still don't know what exactly the trap released onto Korekiyo so you lean back down to continue inspecting his injury. It's particularly large, larger than it seems like it should be...

"Maybe it was set up before you two explained that and no one ever took it down," her voice takes on a certain edge and you shiver. That... leaves a very small suspect pool. You tug down Korekiyo's mask to try and get a better view of his expression and almost gasp. You end up squeaking and quickly push the mask back up when Maki turns to you. "Notice something?"

"Uh, yeah. The wound is abnormally large so I think the murder weapon would need to be large too, but I don't really see anything that could be the murder weapon, do you?" You hope the shiver keeps out of your voice while the possibilities run rampant in your head. You think you've just stumbled across a potential motive, but you don't want to jump the gun too early. "I'm going to look around, what I need you to do is measure the distance between the bookshelf that the trap is on and the floor," you pull a measuring tape out of your blazer and hand it to Maki.

You don't actually need her to measure. The average shelf of a bookshelf is roughly a foot in length, and this should be no exception. The trap is on the bottom of the 8th shelf, but there's also a bottom portion of the bookshelf which means that the bottom of the 8th shelf should be exactly 8 feet off the floor. You want her to confirm this for you, but also you need to distract her while you gather your thoughts.
There's a lot to unpack, seeing Korekiyo's full face. There were two interesting details that stood out above the rest though. The first being the... make-up, of course. The second was the twisted expression of pain on his features. With a wound like that, he should have died instantly the moment the weapon made impact. There shouldn't have been time to respond, let alone time to feel pain. Did that mean there were two impacts? The wound wasn't telling. It was large and messy and too bloody. You could probably figure it out if you probed his skull, but if you were going to be touching a dead person you at least wanted gloves.

A silvery glint in the corner catches your attention while you survey the scene of the crime. Maki confirms the height of the bookcases just as you're striding over to the metallic ball. "Bingo, murder weapon," you say as you pick it up. The spattering of blood is identical to the indentation in Korekiyo's skull.

"A shot-put ball?" Maki asks, quietly weighing out the details herself. You heft the ball in your hands, noticing something very intriguing about the weight.

"Not just any shotput ball, it's a women's shot-put. A normal shot-put weighs about 16-pounds. I say normal but I mean a men's shot-put, you know, patriarchy and stuff, anyways. Women in competitions are usually given the lighter 8-pound shot-put. Now, as you'll notice by the heft, this is, in fact, an 8-pound which means it's a women's shot-put." You turn the ball over in your hands a couple of times. You probably should weigh it properly just to be certain, but you're fairly confident.

"So do you think that means it's a female classmate of ours?" Maki asks and you can see her going down the same line of reasoning that you were a moment ago.

You pause, worrying your bottom lip for a moment. "I'm not sure, we have some suspects but we can't really say for certain until we review all of the details." You hate the idea that this trap was set up earlier and just never taken down because that points you in the direction of two people. Kaede and Shuichi. You know they were both aware of the bookcase at the start when you decided to reveal it, and the worst part is that both of them were acting entirely too suspicious earlier.

"Do you think we should try looking in Shinguji-kun's room for his secret letter? If we found out who has his then we might be able to pin down a motive," you flinch at Maki's words realizing that rest of the class probably hasn't caught on to that little detail yet.

"I don't think that's going to be possible. This morning a little bit after I woke up Kokichi-kun tried to break into my room. I think he stole everyone's letters so that he'd have all the secrets," you see a flash of panic in Maki's eyes and rush to reassure her. "Don't worry, don't worry, like I said I was already awake. He couldn't really pickpocket it either unless he wanted me to start screaming for Tenko-san," you laugh mirthlessly as you pat your blazer where the secret is safely kept in the inside pocket.

"That probably means he got mine though... how did I not notice?" She says as she turns her gaze away, glancing towards the floor. She seems to find this deeply upsetting, probably because an assassin is supposed to be aware of these kinds of things. You feel a little bit of sympathy but the more distance between her and her fake talent the better. At least in your opinion.

"You aren't the only one. It seemed like I was the last one on his list. He even had a backup plan in case he couldn't snag the letter off of me, going as far as to offer a trade. He was trying to use my own unread secret as a bartering tool in order to get ahold of your secret. Obviously I said no," you roll your eyes remembering earlier that morning. A dull pound starts to manifest around your temples. Maki gives you a shocked look before turning away slightly. Are her cheeks pink?
It's only then you realize you admitted to letting Kokichi have your secret so you could continue to protect hers. Hopefully, that at least wins you a couple of points in the trustworthy category. "Well, we should try and figure out something else to do in the meantime. We shouldn't waste any precious moments. We could see how testimony collection is going or we could always try to convince Kokichi-kun to tell u-" you cut yourself off with a yawn and rub at your eyes slightly.

"You okay?" Maki asks with a small look of concern. Of course, you're fine, it's still just pretty earlier in the morning.

Monokuma appears out of nowhere looking frustrated. "You better not be planning on going back to sleep after I had to personally wake up so many people!" The bear shakes his head with a disgruntled expression. "I had to wake up everyone who hadn't seen the body yet," the bear says with a sigh. "Everyone who was already awake got to see the corpse way ahead of time. So unfair. I'll have to try and do things better next time. Either way, you two better hurry up. It's almost time for the trial," the creature says with a dangerous glint in its singular red eye. You could feel a shiver running up and down your spine as it seemed to size you up.

The bear disappeared after that, leaving you and Maki to fumble over what to do next. Eventually, you decide to try speaking with Kaede. You don't really expect many of your classmates to have alibis, but you do know off the top of your head three people who were awake. Starting with them is your best bet. Assuming it wasn't the trap that killed Korekiyo in the first place.

You and Maki find Kaede talking with Kaito. It sounds like they're talking about Kokichi, but it's mostly just rude things and the tail end of the conversation anyways so you ignore their quips. It is interesting to note that you don't see Shuichi with them. The class agreed that no one should do anything solo... "Anything interesting?" You ask the pair, trying to keep all the clues on the table before you start pointing fingers, internally or not. You can't walk into the trial with a bias or you might just want out in a casket.

Kaito took the lead on the conversation, sighing heavily while shaking his head. "Almost absolutely no one has an alibi! I, much like every other normal person, was asleep at the time," he crosses his arms with a frown and you can't help a small laugh from bubbling out of your throat. He actually looks a little worried, but nowhere near as worried as you feel.

"So that makes Shuichi-kun and I weird, huh? Of course, getting up so early would seem strange to the Luminary of the Stars. I bet you only get up so late because you're up until 2 in the morning star gazing," your tone is light and teasing and he laughs in return, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly like you've caught him with his hand in the cookie jar. The levity doesn't last you very long.

"The problem is not many people have solid alibis and the killer could easily just say they were asleep. The only ones who admitted to being awake this morning are Saihara-kun, Amami-kun, and Ouma-kun, and none of them are going to admit to having been around at the time of the murder," Kaede cuts into the conversation with a sigh, trying to force the conversation back on track. She looks agitated and scared and it's really not a pretty look for Kaede who's usually the sole force for positivity, especially during the last trial.

"Oh? And what exactly are their stories?" You ask with a tilt of your head. You try to keep your voice gentle, hoping not to upset her further in such a fragile state. You doubt Kokichi gave her a straight answer, but this might be a helpful insight into Shuichi and Rantaro's involvement in the cases. Considering you can't find either of them and you don't know where to start looking for them, you'll have to take Kaede's word.

"Well, Rantaro told me that he saw you on his way out of the library early this morning. He ended
up getting stopped by Kokichi on the way back to his room, talked with him for a bit, and then he went back to sleep. Shuichi... was with me this morning." Kaede's cheeks tint pink a little and Kaito gives her a scandalized look. "It's not like that! He couldn't sleep and neither could I, so he knocked on my door and wanted to spend time talking for a bit. We both ended up falling asleep and when he woke up Monokuma was telling us that a murder happened," Kaede crossed her arms and turns her gaze away, refusing to release any more information.

So. You could use Kokichi to validate Rantaro's story, possibly giving him a pass as a suspect. Kaede was the only one who could vouch for Shuichi but you did see him pacing outside her door this morning so those details did add up. "Okay. Who fell asleep first, are you sure that Shuichi was asleep? Is there any way you can prove it?" You slip a little too far into detective mode and realize just a little too late it might feel like you're grilling her. Which honestly isn't your intention. You just think you might finally have a lead.

"No, okay! I can't prove it, but he did fall asleep first so I know he was there the whole time," Kaede actually snaps at you and you're left feeling a bit shocked. You blink twice and you feel Maki move a bit closer. You knew her response wouldn't be positive if she felt like you were starting to suspect her or Shuichi but this just feels like a bit much. Especially for Kaede. You can't even tell if it's a genuine reaction or not. It doesn't seem like she's being controlled but the words and actions themselves just feel so... not Kaede?

"She was just asking you questions to try and figure out who the murderer is. Or perhaps do you already know?" Maki's voice takes on an edge as she glares down Kaede and you can see Kaito looking for a way to defuse the situation.

"No, of course not!" Kaede crosses her arms and her expression turns into a pout as she turns on her heels. Her actions are boxy and defensive and they set you a little bit on edge. Maki's eyes follow Kaede and she glances at you, you nod and Maki moves to shadow Kaede as the blonde leaves the area. Kaito looks torn but eventually tails both Maki and Kaede out of the room. Hopefully, Maki is able to pry some important detail from the girl. You don't want to suspect Kaede but you also don't want to dismiss her on the merit of being your friend either.

The same goes for Shuichi after that encounter.

The final pieces of evidence you want to gather all belong to Kokichi, so you leave the room and eventually manage to track him down. He's right where you expect him to be, having come back to the library once everyone else cleared out. "Oh ____-chan! Are you here to interrogate me? Saihara-chan tried to earlier but he wasn't any fun, so I didn't give him anything useful. If you're fun I'll make sure to tell you some extra useful details," the purple haired boy's voice comes out as a coo when you approach him and the grin on his face almost make you forget the conversation revolves around the fact a classmate of yours is dead.

You have to make this fun or else he isn't going to give you any details, at least according to Kokichi. Well, you aren't sure what he'd define as fun but you can try and pull some details from him. He already slipped up in revealing the fact that Shuichi was currently working to gather clues alone, which could mean two very different things depending on what else you're able to get from Kokichi. Alright, you think you can handle this.

"Sure, sure. How should I make it fun then? Tie you up, waterboard you, beat you black and blue? Or maybe you respond better to positive reinforcement instead of coercion," you lean a little closer, your tone somewhere between teasing and genuinely threatening. It's remarkably easy to slip into the interrogator role and you have a feeling you already know what Kokichi's weaknesses are, so this shouldn't be impossible. You obviously have no intention of abusing the boy as you're still a
pacifist. Physically, anyway.

Kokichi takes defeat by moving a step back, his expression flashing fearful and curious as he tilts his head to the side. "So unfair ____-chan. Are you experienced or something? I can't say I'm entirely shocked but it hurts a little to know I won't be your first," he tries to keep up the playful appearance and drops an innuendo you'd be more accustomed to hearing from Miu, but the important part is you distinctly notice the way his voice cracks halfway through the question. You've phased him. Apply the right pressure and you have the answers you'll need.

"All the more fun for you though, since it means I know what I'm doing." You smirk as you lean forward a little more, tone light with a hint of sing-song. You keep this tone when you ask your first question. "Now then, would you mind telling me who exactly had Korekiyo-kun's secret letter?" If you're being honest it's not the most important question right now. Asking it should help you get where you're trying to go.

"Ah, nice try ____-chan but I'm not going to spill that easily. I do have a little discipline, sorry I'm not as much as a weak-willed whore as Iruma-san!" His words take on a venomous jab and the insult is aimed just as much at you as it is at Miu. You don't respond, he's trying to get you riled up so that you'll get distracted. You, however, are fully aware that your methodology of approach has completely thrown Kokichi through a loop and you're the one with him on the fence for once.

You're not certain if you're playing a game or not right now. You're not even sure which answer you'd honestly prefer.

"Ah, what's that? Is that jealousy I hear. My, my Kokichi. Taking the Tsundere approach, are we?" Your choice of response causes Kokichi's expression to give away something it shouldn't have. There's the smallest hint of color staining his cheeks as you take another step closer and narrow your eyes at him. You allow your words to hang in the air as long as they need to. He'll dig his own grave trying to fill the silence.

"Jealous? Of that cum dumpster of a bitch? Of course not, what's there even to be jealous over. It's not like you're much of a prize or anything. Did you honestly think I was worried this morning? No, I was just near the library at the time of the announcement thanks to a quick little conversation I had with Rantaro a couple of minutes before it. I didn't actually give a shit, it just would have been funny to fake cry when I saw your corpse sprawled out across that dusty ass library where you belong, a shame it wasn't you," his words are harsh but he won't meet your gaze and the corners of his mouth keeps twitching. His tone feels forced and it hangs way too heavy off his tongue.

He was actually worried... You lean back, deciding that's enough teasing for now. You still don't know if this 'interrogation' was just a game or not, but you do think he genuinely cares about you in some facet. He's unstable because he's still shaken over the fact you could have been the dead one. Hence why he disappeared so quickly after the Monokuma File was handed out. Hence why it was so easy to tease out the one detail you needed most of all. Enough is enough, you need to give him time to recover before the trail.

You'll all have to go out there and fight your hardest for the lives of your class, after all.

"I think that's enough for now, thank you for your help Kokichi-kun," you say as you switch out your expression for a more pleasant smile. You try to make it a gentle one, something a little reassuring. You wait a moment to gauge his response before doing anything else.

"Ah? Already?" He actually sounds a little disappointed but his shoulders sag ever so slightly with relief as you put some much-needed distance between the two of you. You see his Adam's apple
bob slightly when he swallows a bit harder than he should if he really didn't care about the situation he was in. You got to see the persona break today and you wonder what kind of person Kokichi was before Team Danganronpa assigned him this character. Was he similar? Opposite? You find yourself wanting to know, enough so that it takes you a little off guard.

Kokichi luckily recovers quickly and puts his old mask back on now that the game is over. "A shame, you weren't any fun at all ____-chan. You didn't get any important information!" He grins at you but it isn't malicious. It's taunting, like a cat that stole all of the cream, but it's not dangerous or threatening in the slightest. You doubt he'd sacrifice himself to make fun of you, so he's likely just happy that he can still drag you and everyone else through the trial by the nose. Unfortunately, that's an inaccurate assumption on his part.

"Actually," you draw out the word and press your index finger to your chin, "you gave me the most valuable detail of all. Congratulations Kokichi-kun! You practically told me who the murderer is. It's pretty obvious actually, now I just need to prove it to the class. Thank you for all your help, I'll see you in the trial!" You turn your most dazzling smile on him before turning on your heels and concocting a gameplan in your head.

He looks at you like he's trying to pick apart a lie but your words ring honest. You can't help but smile a little to yourself, satisfied with the confusion crossing his features while he tries to figure out just what exactly he told you to prove the case one way or another.

You drop the mask of the investigator the moment you hear Monokuma's announcement echo through the school. Taking a deep breath, you start heading towards the trial grounds and don the mask of the prosecutor. No more playing, not more information gathering, it's time to pick your target and spill out their lies before the class for everyone else to see.

It's show time.

(~)

The Murder of Cadfael

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Highlighted Portion

"Is he really the investigator?" She asks with a tilt of her head. She already knows the answer, but she's like to hear it from the mouth of the stranger in front of her. The 'investigator' in question is wandering around the scene looking at the small details but failing to see them for their meaning. The murder wasn't an obvious one, not by any means. It wasn't supposed to be, after all. Cadfael was a very famous detective and a dear friend of the woman. She'd met many a famous detective in her time but never any as brilliant as her mother.

She'd usually keep her nose out of something like this and focus on her own work, but apparently, the murderer was specifically targeting detectives. Cadfael was the 3rd and considering he was the most famous of the group so far it had finally gotten enough of a stir surrounding the case to grab media attention. A detective murdering menace put the lives of the woman's family in danger, which in addition to the death of a dear friend meant that she felt the desire to involve herself regardless of the challenges associated with the task.

"But of course," the police commissioner said with a proud smile. "He's the best in all the area from what I've heard! He'll find Cadfael's killer in no time flat, I'm certain of it. Worry not madam, we shan't rest until the situation has been dealt with properly." The commissioner was a good man
but he was just as bumbling as the detective if he thought an amateur was the best in the area. Especially when she herself was around.

She couldn't blame either party. The detective never had a good teacher, so it seemed, and he wasn't by any means bad. He was picking up a lot of clues that others wouldn't find. But he was nowhere near the status of a profession, the likes of which the woman was. That's why she already knew the way this story was going to end. Deep down she already knew. Who would believe her though if she tried listing off half the clues she'd already found? They'd just think her mad, unable to recognize the weight behind her name.

So instead she strode over the other detective. A year her younger and yet their skill levels so vastly set apart from one another. "Need some help, detective?"

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to post an extra chapter this week, but this single chapter alone has been the largest pain to edit. I suppose that's ultimately my fault, but still.
The trial ground gives you a terrible feeling deep in the pit of your stomach. That's to be expected, but the feeling is borderline sickening with the way it causes your stomach to churn and twist. Entering the trial grounds for the first time was already one time too many, but a second time has you outright wishing you could just skip that trial. That, of course, wasn't an option.

On top of Monokuma likely forcing your presence, you know full well this case isn't one to take lightly. The Gamemasters weren't going easy on the class, and they certainly didn't seem to be doing the Ultimate Detective any favors right now. The boy in question was looking confused and torn and all around nervous. He pulled his hat downwards a little farther to cover his eyes, and you feel the urge to snatch it away and snap at him. You blink a couple of times as the desire blindsides you and disappears just as quickly as it came.

Stupid amateur is the only thing that comes to mind as ways of an explanation for the sudden urge. You can't pinpoint exactly where the sudden emotion came from either. All you can tell is that it came from a spot in the far back of your mind, somewhere you can't reach anymore. You've definitely heard someone mutter it before but you have no idea who.

You store that away and remind yourself to focus. You're all currently waiting for the fanfare so that the elevator could arrive and take your class to where it needs to be. Monokuma is always so showy, you almost wonder how no one else has brought up the idea that you're being observed like some kind of twisted reality TV show.

The question then comes down to how you can get the game to end. You still don't have a single theory. Of course, you can always just wait out the end until you're ultimately one of the final 2, but that would make you feel terrible and you don't want to have to watch all of your friends die. Killing someone absolutely isn't an option and absolutely never will be.

You could always let yourself get killed.

Another thought from a part of your mind you can't reach. This one echoes loudly around your skull and you try to shoo it out as quickly as it appears. That also absolutely isn't an option and you'll be genuinely shocked if you're somehow convinced to change your mind.

The elevator's arrival saves you from your own thoughts.

The class shuffles into the elevator quietly and you can feel eyes darting around. Everyone is looking for someone else to blame. The panic in the room is palpable, thick and heavy like steam as it clings to the skin of everyone present and drags them lower and lower to the same level as Monokuma. It's only a matter of time before they're hissing out insults at one another, playing the judge and the jury when the entire class could use a competent prosecutor.

Or maybe a detective that isn't a backstabber.

Your mouth tastes bitter and your chest stings because no matter what way the tale gets spun, Shuichi is a traitor as of right now. He has the chance to redeem himself in the trial, but you somehow doubt it's going to happen. Maybe his betrayal isn't quite what everyone else thinks, maybe it's not obvious yet, but he's a traitor right now and you aren't sure how you're going to deal
with this situation. You sigh just loud enough for others to hear, but only one set of eyes actually turns towards you. You think it's Kokichi's gaze that burns into your shoulder blades for half a second as the elevator finally comes to a stop and you set out into the trial room first.

Your first steps feel like a march to the executioner's block and a simple phrase comes to mind. "When I raise this sword, so I wish that this poor sinner will receive eternal life," you say just loud enough for yourself to hear. There's a hint of irony that you're quoting the inscription on a German executioner's blade when you're about to jump into the trial for the Ultimate Anthropologist's death. You feel like Korekiyo might have approved.

Your body feels heavy as you move, the churning in the pit of your stomach growing all the worse still it turns painful and starts to sting. Like a swarm of bugs are crawling around the side of your body, writhing and biting and devouring one another like a fucked up Kodoku ritual. Pain and misfortune were the results of this curse, and the bile grew higher in your throat while you set in tone the mask of the much-needed prosecutor for this case. You couldn't be sentimental and potentially let the killer win the trial, so you threw all of your emotions to the side of the road. Like offerings of gold and silver for a surviving Kodoku insect.

Yes, you decided. There's a great irony to be found in offering up historical cultural analogies when you're about to put Korekiyo's killer on trial.

The rest of the class takes their spaces at their individual stands and Monokuma smirks down from his chair. "Well, well, well. Look how far all that buddy-buddy bullshit got you! Let's get this trial underway! I wonder if you'll kill the killer or if the killer is going to get the class killed? There's only one way to find out, let's get this debate rolling," Monokuma's laughter fills the room as Shuichi takes control of the conversation almost immediately. He leaves no time for anyone else to start the conversation, supposedly forcing it where he wants it to go.

"I think the first thing we should do is start to establish alibis," he says, looking around the room for someone else to jump into the conversation. His movements are jumpy and his voice is way too forceful. So he decides to seal his fate? You sigh heavily to yourself and shake your head. You guess there's going to just have to be a verbal execution to go with the literal one. Later of course.

"Everyone was asleep though. What good are alibis when everyone can just say they were asleep at the time of death? The only person who's ever consistently awake around that time of the morning is ___-san who's a witness and can't be the killer," Himiko says in a drawl that sounds more disappointed and frustrated than it does bored. Maki glances towards you, her gaze probing. She likely expects you to offer up your own comments on alibis, but it's too early for that. You stay silent for now. You can jerk around the conversation as you please later.

The conversation continues on in a different direction, moving away from alibis. "The cause of death is obviously the impact to the back of the head! So maybe that'll help," Kaito says with a puff of his chest and you can see Shuichi's expression turn nervous for a moment. Kaito being captain obvious doesn't really mention anything the class doesn't already know and he gets a couple of disgruntled looks for his rather obvious statement.

"Indeed," you cut into the conversation, leaning forward slightly to peer at the astronaut. Time to gives things a push in the direction you want them to go. "The cause of death is the impact to the back of the head! So maybe that'll help," Kaito says with a puff of his chest and you can see Shuichi's expression turn nervous for a moment. Kaito being captain obvious doesn't really mention anything the class doesn't already know and he gets a couple of disgruntled looks for his rather obvious statement.

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You already know the end to this story, the answer the class is looking for. Of course, the class
trial is nothing more than trying to convince them of something you've already figured out. You put on the demeanor of power that you wield so well and easily state the facts, well, part of the facts anyway. It seems like Shuichi isn't going to be much help this trial, so you'll have to put in the extra effort the balance that out.

"Our victim? Isn't that a little cold?" Kaede says with a worried expression, glancing towards you with frightful eyes. She looks torn and hurt, on the verge of tears even. You ignore her comment entirely. You say a silent apology in advance for how you're going to have to treat some of your classmates, but you have to take on the role of the prosecutor. To do that, it means breaking a couple of people's wills in order to pull the truth out from their own lips. Kaede has, unfortunately, put herself into a tricky position of her own accord, so you'll still do what needs to be done.

"So the shotput ball was used as a trap!" Tsumugi's redundant declaration does nothing for the conversation except earn her a couple of glares and heavy sighs.

"That's fucking stupid," Miu says, looking everywhere except at you. She won't make eye contact, and the one time you almost catch her gaze she flicks it away with a look you could easily mistake for worry. Is she scared you're going to get upset at her for debating? A valid concern, you suppose, but you won't fault her for trying to figure out the killer. "Why the hell would someone set up a trap like that anyways? If you ask me, someone definitely came in and murdered the poor fucker themselves! Besides, would a trap like that even work, I mean, I could set up an amazing trap, but all of you are too stupid to figure out how a basic snare trap might work... except, ah, ____-san maybe might be smart enough..." Her words begin to peter out toward the end until they become senseless mutters.

"Yeah, yeah, we know you're a thirsty bitch, you whore. That aside, was that an admission of guilt?" Kokichi speaks for the first time this trial and you can't even bring yourself to be shocked at this point. His expression is drawn wide into a mocking expression. He seems to be even worse towards Miu than he is towards anyone else, his words scathing. Miu flinches and makes a sound somewhere between a whimper and a moan. It's overall a very awkward situation as Miu accidentally makes eye contact with you, turning bright crimson in the process.

"She's a witness," Maki hisses with a narrowed gaze and you manage to force your attention towards her with nothing short of relief. Kokichi just laughs a little before letting the accusation drop like the baseless jab it was. You try to figure out how to get the conversation back on track, but luckily Maki does it for you. "Either way, the trap obviously worked. Iruma-san, you saw the body as well as we did and the blunt force to the back of the head was obviously what killed him. The question is why the trap was set up," she says with a dismissive shake of her head.

Miu sags slightly and her eyes dart downwards. You want to reassure her, but you have to keep things going in order if you want things to make sense to the rest of the class. For that purpose alone you don't jump to the line of reasoning Miu was bringing up. It stings a little, but there are a couple of things you need to address first before turning your attention to the quality of the trap.

Rantaro pauses for a moment before adding in his own thoughts, "well, moving on, the trap could have been set up when Saihara-kun and ____-san first told us about it. Or even before they told us about it."

The class pauses for a moment before Kaito also speaks up, looking slightly distraught as he seems to realize what Rantaro's implying. "Well, yeah, it could have been set up then, but why would it? I bet someone really smart set it up later when no one was looking! I mean, there would be no reason to set up a trap earlier because killing the mastermind would have been pointless!" Kaito looks desperate to protect both Shuichi and Kaede from suspicion, his trust in them unfailing.
"Have we not already addressed the fact that ____-chan practically lives in that stupid dusty library? Who could have set it up, tell me ____-chan, does anyone besides you ever go in or out?" Kokichi asks innocently, smiling brightly at you while he waits for you to deliver the 'final blow'. He already knows the answer well enough. He's observant enough to have realized by now already. Which means he should already know where the argument starts to fall apart. None the less, you give him the desired reaction.

"Well, rarely. Whenever someone does come in they usually stay within my line of sight. The only exception to that rule has been Kaede-san. I've seen her go in and out a couple of times, and sometimes when we're in there together I don't really keep an eye on her since it's Kaede-san." You see Kaede's hands ball into fists as she retracts from her stand slightly, breath hitching for half a moment. There's a flash of guilt that runs across her face.

"Why would Akamatsu-san set up the trap though? I mean, we already knew that killing the mastermind wasn't going to do us any good, furthermore, wouldn't she have just taken it down?" Shuichi speaks up and his voice sounds mildly panicked. He keeps glancing at Kaede and this is perhaps the most shaken you've ever seen Shuichi.

Traitor.

"Except you and Kaede-san investigated the moving bookshelf long before anyone else knew it even existed. You did investigate it together, after all. The only reason everyone knew about the mastermind's room is because I decided to bring it up, knowing something like this would happen. Yes, we all agreed that killing the mastermind would be pointless right now. Except the problem is she would have set up the trap long before that agreement ever happened, and because the situation she wouldn't ever have gotten a chance to take it down," you say to feed the conversation a little more. You can see something starting to break, just a little more pressure.

You aren't saying everything you know yet, not bringing up every lead. In fact, you've probably led some people to false conclusions, but you need to apply just a little more pressure in the right direction to get things spiraling the way you want them to go.

"Even if we did agree that killing the mastermind wouldn't do us any good, people can still kill out of spite or even by accident. There's the potential that Akamatsu-san forgot to take the trap down! Or maybe she didn't care and just wanted to see the mastermind dead regardless!" Kokichi's smile shifts once more into something venomous. It's terrifying and cruel, and it's you have to silently admit it's exactly what you were hoping for. The straw to break the camel's back.

It's that last little bit of pressure that's needed for the entire situation to start cracking and breaking down like a wooden bridge in an action movie, all the lies plummeting downwards into the chasm below. You see Kaede's expression fall into one of true misery. "Fine," she says, voice breaking slightly. The words are barely above a whisper. "I set up the trap," she admits, lowering her head in shame.

The class seems taken aback. Both by how easy it was to pull the confession from her lips and how she's actually admitting to being the killer. Kaede Akamatsu, the girl who continued to preach the fact that they were all going to get out of there together, is the killer to be executed. That's what everyone thinks anyway.

She waits for a moment before she continues. "I set up the trap at the start before we agreed that killing the mastermind wouldn't do anything. I actually took down the trap after the first murder happened... but, I don't know what I was thinking. I set the trap back up the last time I went to the library. I just wanted it to be over and killing the mastermind seemed like the only thing to do. I was going to take it down again, but then this happened," she says. You can list two occasions that
Kaede has been in the library without you seeing her that you know of.

One was the night you two spent in the library because neither of you could sleep after the first murder. You took your eyes off of her for quite a while. The other event took place when you discovered the codebook. Two events that could easily coincide with her taking down and setting back up the trap.

You try to speak up at the same time as Kokichi, but both of you are beaten to the punch by Shuichi. "It wasn't Kaede's kill though because I modified the trap!" He practically yells over the entire rest of the class. A wide range of expressions turn on him. Some are mystified, others horrified, you once again taste bitter in the back of your mouth. You have the urge to shut Shuichi up with words or a smack to the back of the head, but you don't do either. You allow the rest of the conversation to play out before you move to the next part of the conversation, know it'll be better if you time your actions carefully.

"Talk about top 10 anime betrayals!" Tsumugi gasps loudly and everyone ignores her in favor of looking at the show down that's about to start. You can feel the tension starting to build as you also turn your attention towards its source.

Kokichi perhaps looks the most taken aback by the sudden outburst. You can't really tell, but for a second you think he looks betrayed. Before you can really pick apart that expression it's gone, replaced with the blank poker face that Kokichi tends to hide behind when he's trying to figure something out. "You what?" The question is entirely emotionless.

"I modified the trap last night because it wouldn't work otherwise. Akamatsu-san's original trap wouldn't have actually triggered, so I modified it. I was in the library all night last night because I couldn't sleep, ask ____-san. It would have been plenty of time to change the trap to be more effective," Shuichi says the words almost proudly as he straightens up and stares Kokichi right in the eyes. He isn't proud though. Shuichi Saihara is a detective, and by extension, a very terrible liar. You can see it plain as day in the way he grimaces as he speaks.

Kokichi for his part in the conversation is starting to look well and truly pissed. His anger is genuine and visible, by no means is it a lie. The rest of the class seems to be able to feel and see that as much as you are, and when he speaks people flinch. "You have the balls to not only lie straight to my face but to defend a killer? What kind of detective are you, huh, Saihara," he hisses and the lack of -chan definitely isn't a statement of how fond Kokichi is of Shuichi. Shuichi has dropped from being someone of interest to Kokichi to a very bitter enemy in the blink of an eye.

"Did Saihara-kun kill or not kill Shinguji-kun?" Gonta asks hesitantly with a tilt of his head. His expression reminds you of a hurt puppy with the way he pathetically tilts his head and looks between you, Shuichi, and Kokichi for answers. The rest of the class shifts uncomfortably.

"Obviously degenerate males would kill each other before a girl! I think it was Saihara-kun!" Tenko says with a quick nod. You can tell there's more to her assessment than Shuichi just being a boy, you can actually see the cogs turning in her head when she makes her announcement.

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Angie, on the other hand, doesn't seem to have a single thought in her head when she blurts out her own answer. "Atua says that Akamatsu-san is the more likely culprit. I think..." Angie pauses and tilts her head to the side as though she's trying to listen for a voice. You wonder if she's schizophrenic, listening to the gamemasters, or if an actual god is whispering in her ear. With Angie, it's frankly impossible to tell.

"He didn't, and neither did Kaede-san," you interject, once again jerking the class back into confused expressions. All attention turns on you within an instant, probing gazes scanning you for
information. Kaede and Shuichi both look confused and they glance at one another like this is news to them as much as it is to the rest of the class. These stupid children...

"What do you mean? The trap is obviously what killed him, you and I inspected the body thoroughly. It has to be the trap that killed him, meaning that it has to be one of the two since they're the only ones who were likely to set up the trap at all," Maki says the words more forcefully than the question should be spoken, but you simply shake your head and tsk.

"That's all well and dandy, except obviously, I'm the only one in this damn school who's passed a physics class." The majority of your accusation is flung at Shuichi and Kaede who both duck under your gaze and look mildly embarrassed. "Well, I can't yet say that Shuichi-kun isn't the killer with full confidence, but I can at least prove Kaede-san's innocents and the fact that the trap isn't the cause of death. If you want to punish her in a nonlethal manner for intent later, that'll be the decision of the class, but this murder isn't on her shoulders."

The class gives you silence as a kind of indicator that they're waiting for your explanation. The trial is going exactly how you want it, meaning this should be easy. "Now then, to start off, Maki-san would you remind me of the distance between the ground and the shotput ball trap?" You say as you start to trudge off into explaining to the class how impossible Kaede murdering Korekiyo should have been with a trap like this.

"Roughly 8 feet," Maki says with a hesitant look. "That's the distance between the shotput ball and the floor." You nod at her thankfully before turning to the next classmate who's going to be helping you.

"Now Miu-san, congratulation. You've been right since moment one. Knowing this detail about the bookshelves and the fact that the shotput ball is an 8-pound woman's shotput ball, we can ascertain that this trap is utter bullshit and wouldn't have been able to kill Korekiyo-kun. Would you like to help me explain why?" You say with a grin as the inventor's eyes practically light up. Miu is an inventor. She might not seem like it, but she's genuinely smart, and you have no doubt in your mind that she's already realized where you're going with this. As odd as she might be her science is sound, meaning she should realize as well as you do all the failings with this explanation for Korekiyo's death.

"Alright you little shits, professor Miu is about to school you all!" She laughs loudly before jumping directly into the lecture. "As we all knew, the creepy bastard was a tall fuck. 6'2 roughly. The bookshelf being 8 feet off the ground, or the trap more exactly, meant that there would have been less than 3 feet between his skull and the ball. That is nowhere near enough time to build up the velocity needed in order to crack open a human skull. You'd get a bump and a nasty headache and nothing like the damage on that fucker's head. Certainly not from an 8-pound shotput ball anyway!"

Miu looks proud of herself and you take over the rest of the explanation. "Correct on all accounts. If Korekiyo-kun had been tilting his head to the side than the force would have easily snapped his neck, but that blunt force trauma was the cause of death, meaning he had to have been hit head-on. As we can see if we look closely, Korekiyo-kun's head actually has two indentations. One on the very top and one on the back. It's likely that this first mark is where Kaede-san's trap landed and the second was a true murder attempt."

"Atua wants to know if you have any other proof," Angie pipes up and you easily oblige her. She isn't looking at you with disbelief, it seems she just wants more confirmation of your theory. That's something easy enough for you to provide.

"In fact I do. Korekiyo's expression was wildly twisted in pain, something both Maki-san and I
picked up on. If the second wound had been the one to kill him he would have died instantly, and if the second wound had been where the ball fell on him then he would have died to a snapped neck, not blunt force trauma. These two factors combined imply that there had to be someone who actively sought out to kill Korekiyo-kun instead of him just dying to the trap," you say.

"Way to go, detective," Miu drawls as she glares at Shuichi. "In fact, I think ____-san has been more helpful this entire case than the defective detective, you really need to up your game!" Miu says with another laugh, a small look of pride on her features when she glances towards you.

You know that Shuichi's not really the one at fault here. He probably could have figure out all this stuff himself. Circumstances just didn't allow for it, which is something that you blame the Gamemasters for.

"While I hate to have to agree with such a thirsty bitch, Saihara has lost a good amount of trust, hasn't he? On top of that, he admitted to being awake all night. Which means he was awake this morning and by extension, still a suspect," Kokichi says with a vicious grin like he's about to go on the attack. You don't know if he's actually trying to accuse Shuichi or if he's just attacking the boy for the evident betrayal.

"Saihara-kun was with me all morning, and in case you forgot, you admitted that you were awake that early in the morning too and there's no one who can confirm where you were at the time of the murder," Kaede does her best to defend Shuichi but it just earns her a scoff. Kokichi smiles mockingly and leans forwards a little, his smile turning more and more into a sneer with every passing minute. He's taking the whole situation harder than he's openly admitting, and you have a feeling the offense is more so a defense for his own emotions.

"Yeah, well, neither of you are necessarily trustworthy right now since you did attempt to commit a murder. So how about both of you just be quiet and let the rest of us more trustworthy classmates talk," Kokichi says mockingly in a tone that borders on sing-song, knowing fully well that his words have to sting. He just called himself more trustworthy than the pair, and right now, for a lot of other members of the class, it is. You see Kaede flinch and go silent, curling back in on herself.

Shuichi has entirely pulled in on himself. He's not speaking and you're not sure if he's still processing what's going on. He's completely spaced out, his gaze glazing over while he stares into what is seemingly the void. This entire trial is going to be a mess when it comes to cleaning up the aftermath. You dread the idea, wondering how much damage has been done to Kaede's position as leader. You really don't want to have to take the position from her, but you might be forced to if you can't help her recover it. The anarchy of being leaderless is a lot less pleasant than the already unpleasant idea of making yourself the leader.

"Let's not go throwing accusations around yet! I still believe in my bro, just watch you, he's innocent," Kaito glares down Kokichi who thankfully blows off the comment with a smile, allowing for the next phase of the conversation can begin.

"Since Akamatsu-san did bring it up, perhaps it would be pertinent to look at alibis now? Whoever was awake at the time of the murder has to be the killer," Tenko says, looking proud of herself. It's simple logic but effective none the less, so you give a warm smile towards Tenko as a way of telling her it was a good move. Hopefully, you can keep the conversation on alibis and nail the killer. Things are still going according to plan which makes you feel a little better.

"Oh! I can handle that!" Kaito says with a smile. "Okay, so the only people up at the time of the murder were Shinguji-kun himself, ____-san, Saihara-kun, Amami-kun, and Ouma-kun. Saihara-kun and Amami-kun went back to sleep so it must be Ouma-kun." Kaito smiles as though he's cracked open the case and you feel bad that he's about to be proved wrong.
"What an idiot," Kokichi says with a heavy sigh as he shakes his head dismissively. "Considering how early in the morning it was, anyone can just lie and say they were asleep. The only proof that can really point us in a good direction, is the motive. Luckily for you all, I know exactly who had everyone else's secrets because I stole them all this morning!" Suddenly everything not going according to plan, and a little spark goes off in your stomach. Anger, you tell yourself as you feel it burning and scorching your insides. You feel the smallest amount of anger.

There are cries of dismay as everyone realizes that their secrets are missing. They glare at Kokichi who doesn't miss a beat. "Well, all of them except the one that ____-san is holding on to. I'll tell you what ____-san since you didn't like my deal this morning I'll make you a new one. I'll tell everyone Shinguji-kun's secret and who had it in exchange for the secret you're holding on to! Of course, you'll have to read it out for the class," Kokichi leans forward as he smirks at you.

"Really?" You ask quietly, not letting a single emotion show on your features. Maki is looking between the two of you, her expression somewhere between actual fear and resignation for what's about to happen. You see Kokichi nod, and you can tell he's being genuine. That only stokes the fire slowly growing out of control in your stomach. You feel a flush of outrage that rivals Kokichi's anger from earlier. When you speak next you spew flames. "Are you for real right now? Do you think I need to sink down to your level to solve this case? You think you have any information that I don't?"

Laughter fills the room as you tilt your head back. Fuck it, you dragged the conversation around enough, the class is hanging on to your every word and as long as you don't give anyone the chance to interrupt you, you can gut this case here and no without a shred of doubt left in the room. You smile victoriously as you tear off one of your gloves and outright chuck it at Kokichi's face. "I'm not going to let you play games right now."

"Alright, prove it then, let's hear what you have to say."

"Since this should pretty much be the end of the trial, I'll go ahead and make it into a closing statement," you say as you clear your throat, righting your posture and motioning for your glove to be passed back to you. You only start once you've put on the missing glove. "At a little past 5 this morning I left my room and met up with Korekiyo-kun who agreed to meet up in the library with me while I studied. He needed to grab some materials first so we parted ways. I met Shuichi-kun along the way who admitted to getting no sleep and was currently pacing outside Kaede-san's room looking for a friend to help him occupy his time. I left him behind and eventually made my way to the library where I met up with Rantaro-kun.

"I mentioned to both boys that I was planning to meet in the library with Korekiyo-kun. Shuichi-kun told me to be careful that nothing falls on me like bookshelves and the like. Rantaro-kun told me to be careful of Korekiyo-kun. This is because Rantaro-kun got Korekiyo-kun's secret, the exact same secret he had for his rumor card! It was a very malicious secret, and that's why Miu-san and I both watched him struggle to come up with something nice to say. Fast forward a little and
I'm waiting in the library. The meeting time has already passed so I go across the hallway to grab a game from the game room. Something to waste my time. This is the moment when Korekiyo-kun actually shows up and by chance manages to investigate the moving bookshelf. The ball falls on top of him, but of course, it doesn't do much damage.

"It does still hurt however and Korekiyo is entirely distracted while the ball rolls towards the door. Rantaro-kun who was talking with Kokichi-kun moments before retrieves the ball and kills Korekiyo-kun before escaping the scene of the crime and returning to his room so as to pretend he had returned to sleep," you finish off, already formulating the question you know are coming.

"How do you know it was me? Why would I do it? What possible evidence points towards it being me!" Rantaro snaps at you just as predicted. He knows he's been backed into a corner, and being out of the spotlight this entire trial has left him particularly underprepared for what's happening now.

"Because Kaede-san and Shuichi-san did end up staying together and both falling asleep prior to the murder, and it was likely they were both asleep during the time of the murder. You, on the other hand, have Kokichi-kun's alibi to thank for the fact we know that you were awake prior to the murder. It takes at least 15 minutes to fall asleep, at least. Trusting Kokichi-kun's alibi, you wouldn't have been able to get to your room and fall asleep before the murder took place," you say.

"It's true," Kaede says. "Saihara-kun and I both fell back asleep after we started talking for a while. We were so fast asleep that Monokuma had to actually come and personally wake us up."

Rantaro grits his teeth. "That doesn't prove anything! Who actually knows who was asleep? They could just be lying! I went back to sleep and woke up when Monokuma's announcement went off just like everyone else."

"Very well then, my most damning piece of evidence? It was actually given to me by Monokuma," you smirk quietly to yourself. You do have to admit, you love it when liars dig themselves into holes.

"To quote Monokuma himself, 'I had to wake up everyone who hadn't seen the body yet'. This line seems fairly insignificant, but do you know what it means? Monokuma had to personally wake up everyone who hadn't seen the body yet. Kokichi-kun appeared before the class, rendering him innocent by this assessment. There are also those of us who are witnesses. You though? You claim to have been woken up by Monokuma's announcement. Maki-san and I are the only ones who heard Monokuma say this phrase, so moments earlier why would Kaede-san lie?" You see the defeat flicker into Rantaro's gaze, but there's a little fight still left in him.

"That's still not enough! Prove that I actually had a motive to kill Shinguji-kun. There is none," Rantaro is desperate for an escape, it's audible in his voice, but you don't give him one.

"You killed Korekiyo-kun because if you didn't, he was going to try and kill me. You knew this because both your secret and your rumor card regarding Korekiyo-kun told you that he was a serial killer who targets women, known most wildly for his habit of dressing up like a woman himself and killing girls he finds to be suitable friends for his sister. After I lowered Korekiyo-kun's mask to see the make-up and remembered a couple of his quips towards me and the other girls, everything fell into place," you say, though your voice is gentle and sympathetic. The resistance in Rantaro's eyes shatters. Finally, he sighs and nods his head.
"Yeah, okay, fine. I was awake. I saw the body because I was the one who put it there," his voice sounds sad and broken but you can't allow yourself to linger on it long. To be honest, you feel terrible. Rantaro only caused Korekiyo's death to protect you, so there's a rather heavy sense of guilt resting on your shoulders. You don't really get the chance to linger though.

"Okay everyone, that's enough arguing. It's voting time!" Monokuma cries happily. Rantaro's grief turns into panic for a moment before it turns into a rueful kind of acceptance. He smiles at you sadly and nods, almost as though he's trying to encourage you. Almost like he picks up on the way that your stomach churns painfully and imaginary needles start to prick at your eyes.

The voting panels appear and everyone presses a button.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, this chapter was a pain. Fun fact, Shuichi wasn't even a part of the rough draft. He was a last minute addition when I realized the trial was going to be way too easy (even now it was still kinda easy) and this meant rewriting this chapter along with the last two. So that was a lot of fun, but hopefully, it made for a more fun trial!

Anyway, sorry to the Rantaro fans. It truly makes me sad to kill off characters because each one has so much potential, unfortunately, some characters do need to die and I ended up picking who based entirely on the motives I made up beforehand. If one of your favorites dies, I really didn't want to do it, they just fit the motive. Guacamole for everyone!
The class is entirely silent during the vote. Rantaro gets voted as the guilty party (entirely unanimously) and Monokuma's little machine gives off chipper whoops and joyful noises that indicate the class picked the right answer. There's a bitter taste in the back of your mouth as you quietly watch your green haired classmate who gives you a bittersweet smile. "Why?" Is the only thing you're able to force from your throat. "Why would you do it? You know that if you killed him, you were just going to get killed!"

Rantaro sighs heavily and nods his head. "Yeah, I did know that. But here's the thing, when I saw his secret all I could think about was my sisters. He was a serial killer who targets girls specifically, I just... Then I started thinking about how he was probably going to kill all the girls in the school if he could. ____-san, I think I only got to the second trial because you told me to be careful. I think the Gamemasters wanted me out of the way earlier than this, so for that, I owed you my thanks already. It might have been a small gesture, but you did go out of your way to give me advice when this game began..." He trails off.

His expression is remarkably serene is vaguely regretful. He takes a deep breath and lets his shoulders relax, a small hint of defiance in his gaze. That defiance is pointed entirely at Monokuma and this game though, all he shows your class is kindness.

"I suppose there's no point in really hiding it anymore since I'm going to be executed anyway. The reason I've seemingly know what's going on this entire time is that I am Rantaro Amami, the Ultimate Survivor. This is actually my second Killing Game. I don't know anything past that though, no important details regarding what's going on here. All I ever got was a special Monopad that just had a complete map of the school and complete biographies on everyone, including real talents and other details regarding our past selves," you note a sort of glimmer in Rantaro's eye as he says this. It's the kind of look someone gets when they're about to pull one over on an enemy, or when they know a secret they're not supposed to.

"I did figure out a couple of things along the way. I hid a special notebook and my Monopad somewhere in the school where hopefully Monokuma won't find it and be able to tamper with it. If you know a location like that, then you probably know where it is already. ____-san... Thank you for catching me. I wasn't really thinking when I tried to defend myself in the trial. Me living would mean everyone else dying, and that wouldn't be fair. So promise me, promise me you'll get out of here alive with everyone you can protect," he turns his full attention to you and only you, making it sound like he's asking you to swear a vow. His tone is almost desperate.

"I promise," you say without hesitation. You'll do everything you can to protect your classmates. Rantaro gives you a tired smile and nods.

"Thank you. Okay, Monokuma, let's get this execution started," Rantaro turns to Monokuma without a trace of fear in his expression. Of course, that would make sense. Maybe he doesn't remember any important details, but there's no doubt in your mind that he remembers the last killing game in its full glory, executions and murders included. It wouldn't shock you if he's desensitized to this kind of thing. The class turns their attention towards the screen, waiting for the fated words to appear.

Monokuma giggles in reply. "Okay kiddos! Let's give it everything we've got! It's punishment time!"

The Ultimate Survivor, Rantaro Amami has been found guilty
Commencing Execution

It stung more than you could have possibly imagined to be reading those words. Your jaw clenches while you watch the cord descend from the roof and drag your friend upwards, a hand reaching out towards the rest of you as he's pulled far away. It's more reflex than anything, and you watch Rantaro's composure break for half a second. As he's yanked upwards into the sky and towards his execution, you see the genuine fear in his gaze.

The class turns back towards the screen to view Rantaro's execution. It's a mixture of morbid curiosity and the desire to stand with your friend until the bitter end that keeps most of you watching the screen. You do note that Kaede and Shuichi have both turned away from the screen. They're huddled together in a corner, far from the rest of the group. Even Kaito won't look at them and they won't dare to look at anyone else, let alone the screen. After all, Kaede probably thinks this should be her execution, which no doubt makes her feel all the worse.

Rantaro is quickly placed at the end of a long hallway. The Monokubs who have been jarringly absent finally make an appearance. Monofunny, in particular. She looks terrified, standing at the end of the hallway holding up a sign that says "Goal" in big red letters. The other three are absent which gives you the feeling that this is also her execution. Not entirely what you were expecting to be fair.

Your attention doesn't last on the Monokub long though as realize just what this execution is going to be. Well, not exactly realize per se as much as you feel it in the way that your blood starts to chill. A darkening familiarity that reminds you of something that shouldn't be. You, unfortunately, can't identify the source of the feeling, only that there's something deeply wrong about this execution. That's the only way you can really put it.

Survivor's Gauntlet

The Game(er)'s Curse

Most of the class doesn't find this execution familiar, and it's hard to describe why you do. The word gamer makes one too many rebounds around your skull and you continue to feel the ice pumping through your body and chilling you down to your soul. The goal of the game is simple, Rantaro needs to get to the end of the hall without getting killed by one of the many, many traps. Truly, a gauntlet fit for a man who already survived one killing game.

Rantaro takes off running down the hall, seeming to put in the actual effort to try and survive this madness. You know there's no hope, you already know the way this story is supposed to end. You can't say why, but you do, and you really don't want to watch to the conclusion of this gauntlet, but you do anyway. In a lot of ways, Rantaro died for you. Yeah, the Gamemasters wouldn't have let him live much longer anyway, but as long as you were alive they weren't going to target him. He didn't have to die, he chose this fate in order to protect you. For that, you'll watch. You'll stand with your friend and you'll watch.

"Come on Rantaro-kun!" You shout at the screen, fire seeping from your lips. Your classmates glance at you with looks of confusion and shock before similar cries of encouragement shoot into the air. You doubt Rantaro can hear you, but you swear he runs a little faster. He's still smiling even though you can see the fear creeping around in the corners of his gaze. He drops his body a little lower as an ax comes swinging down from the ceiling, barely missing him. A couple of green hairs fly into the open air but you don't see any red yet.

Unfortunately, that doesn't last long. A howl of pain shoots from the body of the man on the screen as a bullet ricochets off the wall and through his thigh. He stumbles, his body threatening to trip,
but he grits his teeth and keeps going. Red gushes from the wound, droplets of crimson liquid following him as he continues to throw himself down the hall. He refuses to slow down, but you can see him losing steam. He bites down on his lip, hard enough to draw blood, doing his best to ignore the pain in his thigh.

He doesn't have to ignore it long. A different kind of pain catches his attention soon enough. A blade slashes through his upper arm, almost taking the limb itself. Rantaro screams once more, the sound is sickening and it drowns out the cries of your classmates. Keep going they yell, live they scream, but it doesn't seem as though it's going to do him any good. He's getting closer and closer, your classmates growing more and more excited, but the growing pain in your stomach only seems to get worse. You know what happens next. You know what happens next. The little voice that woke up shakes its head quietly, telling you that you already know everything, you just need to open your damn eyes.

So you do. And you watch is abject horror. You know what comes next.

He's just about to make it to the goal, hope in his eyes. You can tell that Rantaro thinks he can taste victory, he's inches from Monofunny. His victory doesn't last long. Spikes shoot out of the ground from all sides when he's little more than an inch from the goal, impaling the man completely, as well as the mechanical bear just within his grasp. Though she doesn't matter at this moment. The spikes are almost overkill, but, that's to be expected. Monokuma has to be thorough considering how many times he's had people walk off spears through every part of their body. What's his obsession with spears?

The ending is so sudden that the class hasn't even really processed it yet. One moment Rantaro is alive and running with all of his might, and then, without a second thought or a moment's notice, there were spears sticking into and jutting out of every inch of his body. You could hear distressed gasps and you have to look away.

The Rantaro you know is nothing more than a slab of butcher meat now. Practically a pile of chunky salsa dripping messily off metal poles, causing him to contort at odd angles, an expression of pain still twisted on what's left of his face.

"Ah, you gotta love a good execution!" Monokuma declares as the spears slowly slip out of the boy's body, resulting in a rather graphic display of blood. You can't block out the noises. The gurgling, soupy kind of noise that comes from dead flesh. The creaking and crunching of bones that scrape against the steel. Kaede runs out of the room, a hand pressed to her mouth. Everyone else looks queasy as well. You take a deep breath and force the sickening sensation back into the depths of your mind. You're better than this, not as shaky, you remind yourself. Corpses don't scare you. The dead don't scare you.

The one thing that leaves you shaking is the knowledge of how painful Rantaro's last moments had to be. That nearly sets off the queasy feeling once more, but you force it out of the way and level a silent glare at Monokuma. You don't trust yourself to speak yet, but there's no way you're going to let him think that you're rolling over and giving up. Even if you don't trust yourself to speak, you put on a show of rebellion.

"What? Does no one want to say anything? No grand declarations of hope, no proud words? Or are you all finally starting to understand that there isn't any hope in a world like this," Monokuma says with a vicious sneer. His tone of voice slips into a truly malicious glee. His voice is high pitched though. This is nothing like the Monokuma that usually comes and speaks to you privately. The one whose actions you can't really decipher. This Monokuma is entirely well and truly deranged, obsessed with the sport of bloodletting and spreading despair like some kind of viral disease.
You wonder if they're actually two different Monokuma's or if one of them is little more than an act put on by the other. Either way, your classmates don't respond very well to the bear's words, looks of disgust and utter hatred filling the faces of those around you. Shuichi pauses for a moment, torn between standing with the class or following Kaede out of the room. You can't really blame him when he decides to follow Kaede. Those two are going to have a long conversation with the class later, they might as well recollect themselves now while everyone else is distracted screaming at Monokuma in righteous fury.

"Shut the fuck up you miserable excuse for a teddy bear. Having hope doesn't mean we can't mourn you disgusting half-wit! Rantaro wanted us to have hope and I'll be damned if I'm going to let that die!" You don't recognize the voice that speaks until you realize that your throat is sore. The rage in your own voice is raw and unbridled and it almost takes you a back for a second, but the rest of the class quickly joins you, you can feel the solidarity shared by the group.

You can't win. Not until you figure out the win conditions. And there's no way any of you are going to be able to keep more murders from happening. Monokuma is too good at crafting motives, too good at engineering just the circumstances needed to make all of you turn against each other. But like hell you're all just going to roll over and let him get away with that.

You feel bodies pressing against you, the anger of the class rising to meet your own as they stand with you, a united group. "Yeah, you stupid bear!" Kaito bellows as he produces the volume that you can't at that moment. While your statement was ferocious, it was remarkably quiet. Despite your ability to drown out the whole class during trials, you can't find it in you to be much louder at that moment, so Kaito does it for you. "Two of our friends just died. Yeah, we're in shock. Yeah, we're going to mourn. But we're not giving up so you can just keep trying you demented teddy gram!" Kaito says.

"Teddy gram? Really? Teddy gram?" Kokichi says as he slowly turns his gaze towards the astronaut. Kokichi's voice pretty much gets lost in cries of defiance. Battle cries, you think to yourself. Battle cries against the Gamemasters and mourning calls for the friends that you'd all lost. There isn't a single person in the class who doesn't seem to be genuinely crying out their defiance besides Kokichi. Either the mastermind is a good actor, or even they've been caught up in the spell of hope.

You wonder actually... Turning to Tsumugi, she actually looks a little shell shocked. Her eyes are wide and misty, distant like she's just remembered something. Her screams leave her throat with an unshaken ferocity that you have no doubt is going to leave her throat raw. Tsumugi is the best candidate for mastermind that you have so far, but she looks deeply distraught.

With Kaede's position likely trashed, you suppose you might as well make an impact on your fellow students as a potential new leader. You straighten yourself up and glare down Monokuma. You smirk defiantly at the creature and stick out your tongue. It's childish, and you have the feeling it actually takes the bear off guard.

With your head held high, you turn on your heels and act as the first person to leave the trial grounds. The others follow you. For once, everyone walks the same path with their heads held together and their voices raised as one. Even Kokichi doesn't antagonize the group while he walks close behind you. When you all return to your rooms, you go your separate ways. You cry, and you mourn, and you promise yourselves that you'll be strong. You know there'll be more death, but damn it all if Monokuma thinks he can make you lose.

Your room has some new additions by the time you get back, including a book about ciphers that now sits next to your new favorite murder mystery. The book itself has already proven useful,
helping you to realize something vital about yourself. There isn't much else that was exactly telling though. There are a lot of notes scattered around the room in various places, but you can't make sense of them. "The things in the air might make you sick, but if you try to do anything it'll make them blind," you read to yourself aloud as you investigate one of the notes.

You'll have to try and decipher all of these later, as well as go looking for where Rantaro hid his Monopad. The thing wasn't likely to tell you much you didn't already know, but it could prove useful. He mentioned it held details about everyone's real talents as well as who they were before the game. That raised a lot of questions for you. You don't get the chance to dive too deeply into your thoughts.

A rapping against your door catches your attention and you move to open it. Standing outside is a very nervous Kaede who looks slightly more distressed than usual. Between Shuichi and Kaede, she's the one you're frankly least upset at. Kaede's response made sense, her actions were more forgivable as long as she never tried anything like this again. Shuichi, on the other hand, was easier to view as an unapologetic traitor.

The unforgivable part of Shuichi's actions is the fact he was more than willing to let the entire class die to protect his not even girlfriend. You're fairly certain they aren't even dating yet. He was convinced that Kaede was the one who'd killed Korekiyo with her trap, yet he was willing to lie saying he modified it if only to get the class to vote for him and spare her. It would have worked if Kokichi wasn't a sentient lie detector and you hadn't been around to destroy that argument.

The worst part is that Shuichi was so blinded by his initial assumption that he didn't even realize Rantaro was the killer. That's what upsets you the most. Yeah, you're upset that he tried to protect Kaede and sacrifice the class. What's more upsetting to you is his failure and betrayal as a detective. It strikes you deeply, resonating with a certain chord that leaves you mildly furious.

All things considered, the rest of the class was still likely very pissed at both halves of the pair, hence why the blonde shifted from foot to foot and barely dared to meet your gaze while standing outside your door. "Hey ___-san, the Monokubs gave us the keys to the new portions of the school, do you want to come to help us explore?" Kaede asks. Her gaze flits between almost meeting your eyes and looking at her feet. She seems uncomfortable and deeply regretful already.

You shake your head with a sigh. "I'm sorry, but I don't have the energy today," you say. The girl nods and scurries away without making eye contact, let alone even looking up at you. This likely did more damage to her psychologically than she's being completely honest about. Pissed at the pair or not, you're still worried about the both of them. You'll have to figure out what to do about it later though. You don't even really have the energy to do more than slink into your bed, but you feel compelled to do something useful.

Perhaps the trial took more out of you than you were being honest about. It's strange. The trial itself provided a kind of emotional barrier during the proceedings. You were able to act (kind of) professionally and without personal attachment, just as you were able to during the investigation. Once your initial moment of distress had passed you were able to proceed with the goal of keeping the class alive, regardless of who the killer turned out to be. But now that the trial had passed and the execution of Rantaro was over with, well, you felt everything slowly starting to climb onto your shoulders at once.

There was only one emotion which stood out far above the others as they swirled in a confusing mess. Anger. A vicious kind of anger that burned the back of your mind and left you grinding your teeth until your jaw ached from the pressure. It was only the second murder, you had no clue how many more you'd have to go through before this game 'ended'. Worst of all, you didn't know how
many you could go through before you yourself snapped.

Snapped was the best way you could put the thought into words, but it wasn’t necessarily accurate. The word "snapped" kind of implied the Gamemasters had the ability to push you far enough that you might consider killing one of your classmates. This was a sheer impossibility. When you said "snapped" you meant how far the Gamemasters could push you before you started to trash the entire school.

It wasn’t like the Exisals could pose much of a threat if all of their drivers just so happened to die during the next couple executions. Two Monokubs were already down for the count. What was the harm in taking out three more?

You felt so mentally drained but the blood in your veins was absolutely boiling with the fire that curled around your stomach, the flames licking at your lungs while you tried to focus on that chaotic force on something productive. The problem was, mentally drained meant no attention span, which left you with very few options when it came to getting rid of this excess physical energy.

You paced for a couple of moments before you submitted to the fact that the energy crackling under your skin needed to be gotten rid of immediately before you went mad. There were still so many rampant thoughts doing damage to your mental state, you needed to do something. Anything really. If you didn't want to burden your already stressed classmates you probably would have found one to vent to. Unfortunately, venting required airing details about yourself that presently only Maki was really aware of. There was no way in hell you wanted to bother Maki right now.

Not out of some ill-placed fear, simply because Maki probably had her hands full with a distraught and peeved Kaito. You'd seen the way he looked like a kicked puppy during the trial, an expression which had slowly turned into a look of betrayal and anger when it dawned on him exactly what happened during the trial. Maki had her hands full, which meant you needed to take care of yourself. Nothing new there really.

Gathering yourself up you tried to clean up your thoughts enough to be slightly coherent if you ran across someone. You made sure to put everything important into your blazer before you left. No more leaving your keys behind in an unlocked room. You also had the distinct feeling Monokuma would be pissed if you burned the secret letter (despite the motive being over with) so you also held on to that. Just in case.

Pushing open your door you shut it behind you quickly and slipped out of the dorms, intent not to run across anyone else. You weren't sure if conversation would help or hinder you right now, so you just tried to avoid your classmates in general. You needed fresh air and freedom from other people, so you pushed your way outside the dorms and were about to take off running in search of a quiet place. Fate seemed to have other plans.

"____-san? What are you doing? Tenko thought Akamatsu-san said you didn't have the energy to explore," a voice catches your attention your gaze lands on Tenko. The neo-aikido master looks at you with worried eyes. Her arms are full of water bottles.

"More like I'm out of mental fortitude. Turns out I have too much physical energy," you admit but do your best to keep what composure you have left. On second thought, maybe spending some time with Tenko might help. You don't need to actually admit anything to her, and Tenko herself seems like she’d be a good distraction given her personality. She has some odder quirks but those shouldn't really show themselves around you all things considered.

Tenko pauses for a moment as she contemplates your words. "Ah! Tenko has the perfect idea!"
"Come with me," the fighter says with a giant smile. Moving closer she tries to grab you by the wrist and start leading you to a destination unknown. She almost drops the many water bottles that she's holding. She has to give up on grabbing your wrist and you end up taking a couple of the water bottles from her. You wonder where exactly she's trying to lead you, but the girl makes it immediately clear in true Tenko fashion.

"Tenko's lab just opened up! It's the perfect place to blow off some steam however you like without any menaces coming to bother you," she announced proudly. Your heart twists a small amount as she smiles at you warmly, still trying to juggle the many water bottles which make a little more sense now. Tenko really is a kinder soul than the others give her credit for. Yeah, she's loud and bit extreme. Her comments are oft completely unwarranted as well. But you'd seen her show genuine kindness to anyone who needs it. Even those 'degenerate males'.

If anything, her comments about degenerate males seemed more the kind of thing a child might parrot after listening to an authority figure go on multiple tirades. Which made sense, given you were fairly certain Tenko mentioned her Master being the one who told her that boys are bad. Her Master who's very much a man himself from what you'd gathered. A father figure not wanting the innocence of a child to be lost in relationships with the unworthy if you had to bet money on it.

Tenko chats with you about this and that as she leads the way, doing a remarkably good job of keeping the water bottles from falling despite there being so many. You were just struggling with the ones she's handed off to you. Tenko, in fact, seemed completely oblivious to any kind of struggle, talking about this or that, mentioning the latest fun thing she'd done with Himiko and Angie. A lot of the conversation revolved around Himiko and Angie.

This struck you a bit. It wasn't for lack of her really wanting to talk about anything else, you could tell by the way she was speaking that she thought the only interesting things she had to talk about were Himiko and Angie. Their interests, the things they'd told her, the things they'd done which really caught her attention for one reason for another.

Tenko seemed very, very lonely. Isolated from most of the rest of the class. It made a certain degree of sense. None of the boys wanted to dare to spend time with her, and you doubted most of the girls had the eccentricity to keep up with her. You listened quietly and tried to comment when she gave you the chance. She really isn't a bad person, just weird. The same thing could be said of a lot of your classmates.

If you could keep up with Miu and Kokichi, then you could probably keep up with Tenko too you suppose.

The rest of the walk passes wonderfully enough. The weather inside your bird cage is always pleasant, which makes you feel as though it's fake. No one has really tried sticking their hands through the bars, there's an unspoken fear that bad things will happen. You've thought about it, but you have a feeling you already know what's going on. If only a little. No one else really notices the constant perfect weather though. You miss the rain, especially its smell.

Tenko leads you inside what is essentially a dojo. She wasn't lying. The room's floor is carefully padded to minimize damage to anyone sparing. There are various dummies propped up around the room for practice, and Tenko drops the many water bottles in a corner that seemingly serves no other purpose. You deposit your own water bottles. Looking at the pile makes you feel like your classmate is stocking up for the apocalypse, however, you have the feeling that even these many water bottles won't last so much as a week for Tenko. Possibly less if she brings others to practice with her.

The girl is thirsty in more ways that one.
Standing in this room Tenko almost seems to glow. She looks prideful and strong beyond simple words. She holds herself in a way she hasn't acted all game, comfortable here. You realize she's probably been on as many pins and needles as the rest of your classmates. A lot of your friends have put on brave faces. Others put on stupid faces. For all of Tenko's actions, the game probably bothers her more than she's willing to admit.

Here's though, this is a domain that she rules. A queendom entirely her own. She's powerful and in control here, that's something plain to see in her expression alone. She trots into the middle of the room with all the effortless grace of a sentient hurricane. Then she turns to you with a grin that almost makes you blanch. Almost.

"OKAY! Come at Tenko! Don't hold back!" The warrior announces as she takes a fighting stance. She's smiling at you expectantly, prepared for any kind of assault you can dish out. You frown at the idea of attacking Tenko. Not because you're worried about her. You're worried about yourself. "Tenko won't do anything that Tenko doesn't think you can handle, Tenko promises," Tenko assures when she picks up the reasoning for your worries.

You nod, swallowing your fear and taking a couple of steps towards Tenko. You don't know exactly what she wants you to do, so you just go in to try and punch her. The warrior queen moves like lightning, her efficiency is ruthless as she grabs you by the arm and flips you. You're on your back in moments, quietly looking up at the roof of the building. The pain doesn't even properly register it happens so quickly. Tenko's speed and grace leaves you reeling, and you wonder how something so deadly can look so beautiful even as you're being slammed into the ground. You hear tutting from above you.

"You're still holding back," she says as she looks down at you. She doesn't seem disappointed, but she does seem a little sad. Worried maybe? You can't think of a reason why she'd be worried though. Tenko offers you her hand and she seems like she's thinking over her next words very carefully. Her eyebrows are drawn together, her entire face seeming tight as she watches you.

"You know ____-san, you move like someone who's been trained to fight before. You talk like someone who's won verbal wars. You're holding back so very, very much and I have to wonder if you even realize you're doing it. There's so much ____-san there, more than you show us, sitting under the surface. I can feel a deep wellspring of strength from you, the kind that could easily demolish this game. Are you scared? Or do you really just not realize it yourself..." Tenko trails off, words ending hesitantly. She doesn't speak in the third person, she seems to know that now isn't the time. There's a kind of heavy seriousness in her gaze as she looks at you, eyes burning into your skin.

You blink once, then twice. You're left entirely speechless. This is the first time someone in the class has called you out like this. Either she's the only one who's cared enough to mention it or she's the only one who's caught on. She's right, entirely and absolutely right though it only seems to fully dawn on you now. You've been holding back. A lot. You're a little stunned because if anyone was going to call you out you thought for sure it would have been Kokichi.

Tenko is probably the only one who's noticed any of this if you really think about it. It kind of makes sense in a way. Tenko, much like Miu, is smarter than people give her credit for. Tenko sees things in a way that the rest of your classmates don't. She sees through people in a way that a lot of your classmates don't. In a sense, she's the only person in the class who could so flawlessly peer through you. At least, people are easy for her to read when they try to fight her, and you did just that.

"Tenko, what's my talent?" You ask her. You almost hesitate before you ask, thinking about if you
really want to do this, but you feel as though maybe you can trust Tenko. There are so many words that burn the back of your throat and demand release, filling your lungs with an awful kind of smoke. You need to talk to someone about this is a little more detail than when you talked with Maki. Tenko just quirks an eyebrow, a little caught off guard by your question but not immediately dismissing it.

"You said it yourself, Ultimate Luckster," she says as though she's trying to figure out where you're going with this. She looks you up and down, almost as though she's looking for something else. Almost like she's looking for another answer. You pull yourself into a sitting position before you take a deep breath and the words spill from your throat with little prompting.

"I think that all my memories are fake," you tell her simply. You kind of already admitted this to Maki, but this feels different. Maybe it's just the setting or the nature of the confession, but it feels different. Your chest feels a little lighter, so you keep going. "I don't think I'm who my memories tell me I am. My memories tell me that I'm slow and stupid. The only thing I'm good for is being fortunate and I've just flitted my way through life barely making it through because I'm so lucky," you continue to explain.

You've done a lot of work sorting through what's fake and what's real, but there are still so many things you just can't grasp. Sometimes the memories you've identified as fake come back with a vengeance and it feels like they're going to strangle you. They tell you things you know can't be true, but at the same time, you don't. What's true and what's not is such a messy subject in and of itself. You want to know who you were before, but you can't grab ahold of anything concrete.

You look at your hand as though the palms of your gloves might give you some kind of answer. "This person sitting here. This creature you just described earlier with all that strength. She isn't that. I'm not that. So who is she? Who am I?" You say as that hand molds itself into a fist. You aren't in any kind of deep emotional turmoil, just deeply confused. Figuring out you have no intention of standing back up, Tenko moves to sit next to you.

"I can't tell you what's real or not," she says hesitantly. She's fumbling here, unsure how to deal with this kind of conversation, but you have to give her props for trying. It's almost painfully hesitant, but she wraps an arm around your shoulder and tries to offer some semblance of support. You appreciate it, and it does actually help to ground you for a moment. You feel a bit more present and you find your voice once more.

"It's not about what's real or not. Reality is so fragile, there's only a faint line between truth and lie. It's just what you interpret as reality. But... what even is my interpretation? I want to know who this distant and seemingly better persona was, the one who knew herself and existed prior to me losing my memories to this game. On one hand, I want to have blind faith and leap forward knowing exactly who and what I am currently. But on the other, I can't keep but continue to rip apart what I know so that I can look for facts and evidence and solid ground to forge my new reality," you place your hands over your eyes as the little droplets begin to escape.

It's a bit strange. Almost like there are two halves of you railing against one another. The first half is hopeful. It wants to have blind faith in yourself and your classmates, knowing that you are smart and strong and kind. The other half is truthful. It wants solid proof and evidence to your reasoning before it even starts to place its faith in something as fragile as hope. These two halves fight each other, and you aren't sure which you should be supporting, which will lead to a better ending. You aren't sure how to get them to agree.

Somewhere in the middle is a much quieter aspect. Chaos. You don't know what to do with it. It sits in the background, letting all the other pieces argue for the time being. It carries with it
memories you can't quite reach, a reconciliation of sorts between all these swirling thoughts, but for now, it apparently decides not to interact.

"It doesn't help that I've been forced to confront certain thoughts and emotions I'm fairly certain are a 'new' thing for me," you feel yourself tense up in frustration once more. You don't even really want to think about this line of thought, but it's another one that you really need to address. If you don't it's just going to keep eating you alive.

"Like?" the aikido master continues to prompt. Her expression is open and without judgment even after everything you've said. You're a bit more skittish about this next topic even though it's objectively less fragile than the one you were talking about moments for that somehow garnered no judgment. Despite that, it is subjectively more mortifying than anything you've talked about with anyone in the whole game.

"Like having a crush on someone for the first time in... ever maybe? And that crush actually maybe being two crushes on two different classmates," You continue as more frustration starts to build in your voice. You squeak a bit at the end and Tenko laughs a little, though it's not mocking or malicious. It's amused but also deeply, deeply sympathetic.

"Mood! But you wanna elaborate on who? This is at least something Tenko might be able to help with. Maybe. You've seen all of Tenko's failed attempts," she sighs heavily and you know exactly what she's talking about.

"Yeah, well, the problem right now seems to be who we're talking about," you mutter under your breath as the crimson comes to your cheeks. Tenko looks entirely unimpressed.

"____-san. You're talking to the Queen of Useless Lesbians. There are very few people in the school that Tenko would judge you for being attracted to! Of course, if it's a degenerate male I'll need to personally threaten them before you start dating, but most of the boys in school aren't as worthless as some of the men I've met. At least, not the ones who are still alive," Tenko is absolutely forgetting about one boy in particular and sadly it just so has to be one of the two you're freaking out over.

"Okay, okay, fine," you groan. You feel hot all over like you're going to burst into flames. The self-proclaimed queen of useless lesbians nods contentedly and crosses her legs, watching you quietly and waiting for you to speak. At least she's being patient and letting you explain at your own pace.

"Okay. Okay, okay. The first one isn't so much of a problem in regards to who it is as it is in regards to how they feel about me. It's Miu-san, the problem is that it's Miu-san. Yeah, Kokichi-kun was teasing her practically all trial over maybe having a thing for me, but it's Kokichi-kun. The liar would tell you that there are cows living on the moon if he thought it would win himself a cheap laugh. So now I'm stuck in this purgatory of not knowing if I have a chance or not and a small part of me still worries that she hates me because of this terrible encounter we had close to the start of the game itself and then everything else that's happened and I just can't help but worry," you cut yourself off only to take a breath. Tenko seems entirely unphased by this information so you continue.

"The next problem is the second person I might maybe have a little bit of a crush on and you're not allowed to judge me. Please don't judge me. You're going to judge me. It's Kokichi-kun. Don't look at me like that, I already know I have shit taste! We've known each other for this long, you should know this by now too! I don't know exactly when it happened but he started attaching -chan to my name and that made me feel really weird and it just kept getting weirder and then it seemed like he was actually worried about me when he found out someone died in the library and I kind of maybe flirted with him to get some information from him regarding alibis and then it kind of just crashed
down on me in a terrible realization- and stop staring at me like that!" Tenko isn't giving you a weird look as much as it's a smug look like she saw this coming. It kind of makes you want to try fighting her again.

It's almost as if she's trying to distract you from your existential crisis in a tactful manner.

"Well, first of all, you can date Kokichi-kun over Tenko's dead body," Tenko says bluntly, crossing her arms and making her distaste very clear in her voice. Everyone hates Kokichi so you can't be shocked, of course, you doubt Kokichi would have a thing for you back so that's not really an issue right now. "But if you think you might have a crush on Miu-san, why not tell her?"

"Why haven't you told Himiko-san?" You shoot back. If you have to be mortified right now, she's going to be mortified with you damn it! The fighter flinches as she looks away with a splash of crimson on her own cheeks. It's a bit childish, but you feel better not suffering alone.

"Because Angie-san is hard to compete with. I'm always loud and annoying, even worse when I'm around Yumeno-chan. I can't control myself. If I had a fraction of your composure I might stand a chance, but Angie-san is just so much gentler and Yumeno-chan seems like she actually enjoys the time they spend together unlike me," she says with a bitter laugh. This actually takes you a bit off guard, you were expecting some kind of stuttered excuse. Not something so genuinely heartbreaking.

"From where I'm sitting, it looks a bit like Angie-san has more of a thing for you than she does Himiko-san," you say. Tenko just shakes her head, not believing you for even a second. You suppose the both of you will just suffer together, unable to confront your crushes. After a long moment of silence, Tenko stands up and drags you to your own feet.

"Come on. If you can't figure out who you are, then the people around you can help you figure it out. That, of course, includes me. So come on! Really put your full colors on display and give me the best you've got! I won't tolerate you holding back for even a second!" The neo-aikido master bellows at you while you blink a couple of times. Nodding with just a bit more resolution you move to punch the girl.

You think that you might actually hit her with enough force at one point to leave a bruise.
"Tenko-san, I adore you, but this is a terrible idea," you can feel a mixture of exasperation and terror twirling around your insides as Tenko does her best to describe what could loosely be defined as a 'plan' to you. At least this plan was the least dangerous out of those purposed. The reason either of you needed a plan was because Tenko (who failed in just about every aspect of romance) had taken it upon herself to act as your wing woman. So far, the plan wasn't too terrible compared to some of the others.

Tenko had purposed the two of you steal a couple of bugs from Gonta's lab and let them loose in Miu's lab. You could just so happen to swoop in and save Miu and get some alone time with her while Tenko repeatedly apologized to Gonta and helped him gather his bugs back up. There was only one problem with the plan. "Did you honestly forget that I'm scared of bugs?"

"Oh... right... Tenko did forget. You don't seem like the type ____-san. You're always so composed, Tenko assumed nothing was able to scare you," the warrior turns away looking slightly embarrassed. She's not wrong in her assumption. There are only one or two things that genuinely and truly scared you beyond the point of functioning as a person, bugs aren't one of those things. Just because you aren't truly terrified of bugs doesn't mean they aren't a valid fear of yours.

"Perhaps scared isn't the right word," you say, "perhaps the right phrasing would be whenever I see one I just want it to stop existing. Especially if it's in my personal space. Bugs can do whatever they please out in the great wilds of 'outside' but if another one somehow manages to get under my door late at night I'm honestly going to start crying. It's not like I'd ever kill one or anything, but they need to just not be in my space. Or near me. If Gonta asks then I will love them at a distance."

You shake your head, trying to banish the phantom crawling sensation across your skin. Hate and fear weren't really even the right words. Fear implied a sensation of terror that could be crippling and render one entirely inactive in a given situation. You were just mildly worried about the idea of accidentally getting bit by something poisonous. Plus, bugs were tiny. You hated them for that fact. You couldn't fight back against one easily. Yeah, giant bugs would be absolutely terrifying but you could defend yourself against a big one a lot easier than you could a tiny skittery little thing that may or may not have venomous fangs.

"Okay, Tenko will scratch that plan from the records since Gonta-kun would probably get upset anyway... but now what?" Tenko literally scratches something out on her notepad as she speaks, moving her pencil down to the next item on the list. She's put way too much thought into this and you're not sure if you should be grateful or disturbed.

"Nyeh, what are you two doing?" Both of you jump when Himiko suddenly appears and jumps into the conversation. Did she use actual magic!? You didn't even notice her entering the cafeteria. The usually laid back, borderline lazy girl glares down the two of you. "I sensed some kind of malicious intent coming from in here, as a mage I was obligated to investigate. I didn't think Chabashira-san had any mana, but ____-san has more than enough to cast very potent dark magics. What kind of curses are you two fiends working on!" She puts no energy into her accusation to the point that it's almost jarring.

"Malicious intent?" You mutter while Tenko rushes to try and explain what's going on. And boy, is she ever failing.

"Yumeno-san! Good morning," she says, despite the fact it's about midday. "We aren't doing
anything malicious, Tenko's just ahh... Helping ____-san investigate something!" You suppose that's one way of saying 'we're stalking ____-san's crush to try and see if it's unrequited or not'. Whatever makes you seem more normal Tenko. "Nothing malicious going on, nothing at all," she lied, knowing full well that releasing bugs into Miu's lab would have been the definition of malicious.

Himiko justifiable doesn't believe Tenko for even a second. Instead of upset, she just seems resigned in a way. You don't even catch agitation when she lets loose a heavy sigh and dismissively shakes her head at the pair of you, either lack the energy to stop whatever's about to occur or trusting neither of you are plotting something worth the effort of stopping. "Please don't bully any of the boys," she says, though she doesn't put much effort into trying to sound convincing.

"Ah, anything for you, Yumeno-san!" Tenko gets way too excited, it's almost like watching a puppy. She reigns herself in quickly enough though, a dash of crimson coloring her features. "We should get going, right ____-san! Don't want to miss our opportunity or anything, nope!" Tenko quickly escapes before embarrassing herself worse. The neo-aikido master practically sprints out the cafeteria door. You find yourself matching sighs with Himiko.

The mage doesn't look particularly put out though. "If only she'd calm down, then maybe..." Himiko's voice trails off. She lifts a finger to her lips before shaking her head resolutely. "Nevermind. That would be way too much effort, and I don't have anywhere near the energy. Angie'll probably get to her first anyways," the mage almost goes entirely silent as she utters that last phrase, but your hearing is bat-like and you catch it for what it is. You discreetly excuse yourself as well, moving to catch up with Tenko who's sprinted down the hall and around the corner. Her back is pressed against the wall and her entire face is a deep maroon.

She slides downwards with a pathetic groan reminiscent of dying animal, hiding her face into her hands while she repeatedly plays over the scene in her head. You know that's exactly what she's doing because your reaction is similar when you embarrass yourself in front of Miu.

"You weren't kidding when you called yourself Queen of the Useless Lesbians," you sit down next to the girl while she catches her breath for a moment and continues making noises like a dying animal. "You know she has a thing for you, right? And so does Angie-san, right?" You try to talk some sense into the other girl but there's no way she's going to listen. Of course, you've mostly been doing the same thing to her when it comes to Miu. At the very least you can provide evidence to support your claims, all Tenko has is her gut instinct.

"Tenko thinks you're just reading the situation wrong ____-san, but thank you anyway," she sounds miserable as she assures you that neither likes her. "Angie-san probably hates Tenko, and Yumeno-san just gets annoyed with Tenko most of the time. Tenko... I don't see any reason why they'd like someone like me. I don't have an attractive personality. I'm loud and crass, sometimes I'm just as bad as a degenerate male when. I'm a mess, it's no wonder they wouldn't like me," she lowers her head against her knees, her expression is pathetically miserable. You feel bad for the girl. She honestly doesn't see how wonderful a person she is. Without warning, she jumps up to her feet. "At least if they end up together, Tenko doesn't have to worry about them getting hurt by any menaces!"

Tenko wheels on you, yanking you to your own feet in one fluid yet jarring motion. "Now come on! Tenko has a brilliant idea. We're going to get Gonta-kun to help us. He is the purest out of all the degenerate males, almost pure enough to not be a degenerate! Almost. If we tell him it'll help with his gentleman training, then he's sure to help us," she says.
It's not the worst idea she's had all morning, but you feel like it's a little bit manipulative. Still, you're running out of options and maybe a second opinion would help some. Heck, Keebo's opinion might even be helpful considering he's also a good friend to Miu. Sometimes you couldn't help but worry that Miu would end up with Keebo, but Keebo seemed to have no desire for any kind of relationship with anyone in the class outside of friendship, so you didn't worry too terribly much about it.

"Alright then. We'll recruit Gonta-kun and maybe Keebo-kun since he could also prove helpful," you say with a nod. Tenko smiles and nods back. Much like Gonta, Keebo isn't all that loathsome in the eyes of Tenko so they'd be the best two to help with the job if you intend to keep getting help from Tenko. The two of you start making your way through the halls to the lab of the Ultimate Entomologist.

A terrible decision really.

Tenko pushes open the door first and steps inside casually. The door is unlocked and Gonta likes to leave a sticky note on the door when he was present in case someone came looking for him, so you knew he was there. "Gonta-kun we-" Tenko immediately cuts herself off and you peek around her shoulder to see what the matter is. Gonta is currently sitting on the ground... covered in tarantulas. Giant, hairy, tarantulas. "Tenko understands ____-san's hesitance and would like to withdraw this idea," she says in the quietest voice she's ever used around you, almost like she's scared being too loud will startle the giant spiders.

"I... this is... this is okay," you say when really it truly isn't okay. You aren't sure if you're more or less scared of these creatures than their smaller cousins. They're larger which makes them easier to see and easier to fight. But they're also larger and you'd heard of some spiders who hunted birds for their meals. You were torn, but it was too late. Gonta had already been alerted to your presence, meaning there was no escape. Thanks, Tenko.

"Ah! Friends! Gonta was just feeding spider friends. Need something?" The boy, bless his heart, removes the spiders from his body and starts to put them back into their designated chambers. Gonta doesn't like people who dislike bugs, but you'd been able to convince him of the difference between dislike and fear. He seems to notice the way that both of your postures tense and thankfully puts the giant fuck-off arachnids away (which technically weren't even bugs, damn it Gonta!), though he hadn't given up on trying to convince the class that bugs were friends and shouldn't be feared. Let alone disliked.

You had argued that it was a genetic predisposition to fear that had evolved from your ancestor's needs to avoid potentially deadly things. Gonta was pretty hard to convince, but citing most people's natural fears of snakes or heights had done wonders to convince him. While he'd still tried many times to show you that bugs were friends, he could at least tell when you were deeply uncomfortable enough that he had to be a 'gentleman' and remove the bugs from your vicinity. Especially spiders.

Perhaps the one thing that convinced him the most was the fact you appreciated bugs. Especially when it came to agriculture and the like. You just, couldn't stand them being near you. Apparently nearly breaking into tears when he put a centipede on your head was enough to convince Gonta that trying to force you and the rest of your friends to like bugs was very ungentlemanly.

You weren't exaggerating either sadly... During free time at one point after Gonta's room had been opened up you made the mistake of visiting. He took the opportunity to show you his favorite bugs, including centipede which ended up on your head. There were tears. Gonta was panicking. You were panicking. Kaito walked in and started panicking because you were panicking. It wasn't
a fun day. Kaede had to make dinner that night. It was a traumatic experience but at least Gonta got
the point. That being said, you also lost your composure which was deeply mortifying. At least it
was a situation which was easily brushed off as abnormal and not a 'real' break of your typical
control in most situations.

You both watch Gonta put every single spider away before either of you speak up. Atua forbid you
manage to wake up with one just chilling on your chest. Only once each and every single one of the
spiders is away and Gonta has approached does Tenko speak up. "Gonta-kun! It's the duty of a
gentleman to help his friends get together, so you're going to be helping ____-san and I today,"
Tenko says the magical trigger words and suddenly you have Gonta's full attention.

"Is Chabashira-san going to ask out Yumeno-san? Gonta will assist in whatever ways Gonta can!"
The gentle giant looks at the pair of you with a study kind of resolve, giant smile resting on his
features while Tenko turns a deep shade of crimson. You choke back a laugh.

"We're not helping with my crush today! We're going to be helping out ____-san!" Tenko
desperately tries to set the record straight while Gonta cocks his head to the side like a confused
puppy.

"Gonta didn't know ____-san has crush. Gonta will still help in whatever way Gonta can. Ah, but
Gonta wanted to ask ____-san about something Gonta found first." Gonta trails off, looking
slightly nervous. Considering it's the day after a murder and trial you're a little jumpy when you
hear his tone of voice, but you try and focus on what he's saying instead of the potential for it to be
something bad. The boy pulls a small piece of paper out of his pocket. "Gonta found this taped
under a table Gonta was lifting up to find bug. Note, kind of confusing. Gonta doesn't understand,
he not that smart. ____-san very smart, maybe she understand?"

You take the note from Gonta and glance over it. The situation suddenly changes and your heart
slams against your ribcage in a kneejerk kind of reaction. Your mouth feels dry, but for the sake of
Tenko, you decide to read it out loud.

"Monokuma is only trying to help. Signed Owada..." You stare at the card quietly for a long time.
The signature is done well enough. It looks like a normal signature. But a little voice in the back of
your head tells you that isn't the way that Owada signs things. You aren't even sure if you should
trust that voice considering you don't remember who Owada even is. In spite of that, the name
triggers a sense of nostalgia.

"Congratulations!" A pitched up voice suddenly shouts loud enough for all three of you present to
jump. Gonta nearly chucks the spider container he's carrying and you see the relief on Tenko's
expression when he doesn't. You recognize the voice as the friendlier of the two versions of
Monokuma. He has a large book of sorts tucked under his arm. "Before you ask, no that isn't a
motive. It's a reward for your class since you've all been doing so well." He's always smirking but
now it seems to reach his eyes as he looks at the three of you.

It isn't a prize for the class. Given the meaning in that expression, it's a prize for you. The question
comes down to why.

"What is it?" Tenko asks. Gonta stands close to Tenko and the both of them stand a little bit in
front of you, almost like they're trying to protect you. It's touching in some ways but deeply
agitating in others as you'd rather get hurt or even killed than let someone get hurt for you, even
mildly.

Monokuma doesn't seem at all bothered by Tenko and Gonta's body posture. He strides right
between the pair and hands the book off directly to you. "That is the first of many notes I've hidden
around the school. The people who’ve signed these notes are the participants of the very first two killing games!

"Tenko knows that Amami-kun confirmed it, but Tenko didn't want to believe there were really games before us. It's so cruel," Tenko says, lowering her gaze to the floor almost as though she's mourning the many students who had to be lost in the games prior to yours. So many people dead and gone. And for what? Entertainment as far as you'd gleaned. It was pretty sick.

"The book you have now is a book with all of their signatures and with little details about their personalities. I even left you with little pictures. Make sure you pay very, close, attention," Monokuma slowed down, enunciating every little syllable of the last three words. You shiver, heart thumping wildly against your ribs while you watched Monokuma walk away. You flip to the page dedicated to Owada.

"Should we assume that any notes with signatures that don't match are lies?" Tenko asks while she leans over your shoulder. You wonder if her heart is beating as hard as yours is, but you aren't sure why it would be. You aren't even sure why yours is beating so badly.

"I can agree with that," you say as you glance between the signature on the note and the one on the page. They're wildly different, so you sigh and discard the words on the paper. Of course that's a lie, but it does open up some interesting questions. "Like we didn't already know that," you mutter when Tenko seems to come to the same conclusion. It takes a little more time to explain to Gonta how you've figured it out, but once he realizes it's just matching the appearances he gets it quickly that the signature on this card is a terrible forgery and not to be trusted.

"From what Monokuma said there are more cards like these around the school. Would the two of you like to go on an adventure with me?" The two nod enthusiastically at your words as you shut the book and tuck it under your arm. There was no telling where the other cards were. It would be best to also keep things on the down low for right now since you weren't sure how the rest of the class would react. Especially if you discovered something that was actually kind of important. Gonta and Tenko freaking out, you could deal with. The entire class would be a different question entirely.

The group makes you the keeper of the notes and you slip your first acquisition into the book itself for safe keeping. With that, the three of you begin the hunt.

The first note the three of you track down is pretty easy to get. You actually stumble across it the moment you step out into the hall. Your eyes dart upward out of habit and you find the small notecard taped to the roof. "Do you guys think that he's putting these up as we look for them?" You ask after drawing attention to the piece of paper. If he was then no doubt he was going to make you all suffer for the cards.

"Gonta think it possible, but that really mean," Gonta says. He's thankfully able to reach the card given his height, but he ends up standing on the tips of his toes to do it. It's a pretty comedic scene, Gonta stretched to reach the piece of paper while Tenko of all people cheers him on in the background. It gives him a little trouble since it's taped on pretty good, but eventually, he gets it down and immediately hands it off to you for inspection. Just like the first time you read it out loud to the group.

"The longest killing games have only ever gotten to the sixth murder. Out of all 53 killing games, only those that have ended early due to the death of the entire class don't have six murders. It's signed with the name Nanami," you tell the two as you hand the card to Tenko so you can easily open the book. The page itself is just as detailed as the last, talking about the Ultimate Gamer and the killing game she was apart of. According to the book, she was a part of the second killing
game. Allegedly she'd survived an undeserved execution prior to the killing games even starting.

The execution is described in detail and your stomach churns when you make a connection that just raises more questions.

"Tenko thinks that the signature looks right," Tenko says while you're skimming over the information on the page, feeling iller by the moment. You nod hesitantly, noting the almost perfect replica of the signature, baring a couple of smaller details that would come with rewriting it over and over. Nothing large enough to indicate a forgery. You would know considering you had somehow managed to forge Monokuma's writing on the front of your letter way back when. That being said, the note and the write itself made you deeply nervous.

"Why do these notes exist though. I mean, think about it. In order to have this note be written with such confidence then the writer would need to have written it just before this game started considering what it's about! That would mean this girl is still alive, as well as all of these people who wrote these notes. Which means we need to assume that they're the survivors of their individual games. That just doesn't make sense though. The book describes how some of them die. Furthermore, why would they be convinced to write these notes? Surely they'd want to move on with their lives, they'd have to be old if there have been 53 different games." You don't mention some things to the pair as you speak. In particular, you neglect to mention the fact that Team Danganronpa has only been around for 8 years as far as you're aware.

That being said, Monokuma admitted that the first two games happened separate from the rest, so they could still be pretty old. Unless that was a lie. The part that was upsetting you the most was the living status on the writers of these notes. Both of the note writers so far had apparently died at some point in their game. That contradicted the fact they would have needed to write these notes right before the game you're currently in. On top of that, they would need to be in contact with Team Danganronpa for the team to get the notes. That made the least sense of all. Dead or alive, they surely wouldn't want anything to do with a copy cat killing game company.

Rational sane people wouldn't want anything to do was a company like this. Especially if they actually had to go through a killing game of their own. Something about all of this just felt wrong to you.

"Tenko doesn't know. Maybe they're all just fake?" Tenko tries to help but the idea just doesn't feel right to you. There's something too real about all of this. That's why it's striking you so hard. You just can't figure out what it is.

"No, I think the ones with the accurate signatures are real. Monokuma is nothing if not cruel. He'd lord the truth over us, make us grovel to get it and then use it to shatter every fragment of hope we manage to gather up in our bleeding fists. There's nothing that brings a creature like that more joy than destroying ours. Why should he lie when the truth can be so much more painful? While the logic itself is taken from Kokichi-kun, it's not necessarily false logic by any means. Why would he tells us lies when there's a chance the truth would shatter us so much better," you say, piecing out the logic bit by bit.

Monokuma wouldn't lie to you right now. The truth of this situation as a whole, you don't think it's something friendly. If it's something grotesque and horrifying then Monokuma would absolutely tell it to you. But he'd make you work for it.

"Overall, I think we can assess that this note is in fact true. Which is kind of unnerving given what that means for us. We're only just past the second murder," you tilt your gaze downwards, heart sinking with it.
Tenko places a hand against your shoulder. "We're better than those other games though. Our class has so many strong people. I'm sure, one way or another, we're going to beat this game. Tenko knows it because we've got the best ____-san ever!" Tenko's words do cheer you up and you nod. The three of you continue on with your hunt. It would be bad if one of your classmates was to discover a note without knowing all the details, so you move quickly.

Eventually, you find yourself skulking around outside the cafeteria. Wouldn't you know it, you find a note. A note which is stuck to Himiko's hat of all things.

Angie and Himiko are sitting, drinking tea and mostly just talking. Himiko's hat bobs and so does the note, drawing three sets of eyes who watch with rapt attention, trying to figure out how best to get the note away from the pair without looking suspicious. The three of you watch for a couple of minutes without actually doing anything, just listening to the conversation. It's a pretty boring conversation to be fair. You don't even hear the word Atua mentioned.

It's actually interesting for you to watch. Angie and Himiko only really shine around each other when Tenko is present. Sitting in each other's presence alone, they almost look a bit awkward. Casting cautious glances towards each other and sitting stiffly. It isn't the kind of awkwardness that followed around two people who had a crush on each but won't admit it. It's more the kind of awkward that clings to a pair of girls who full well known that they're rival in one aspect or another. Unfortunately, you're the only one who seems to notice this.

Tenko glances between the two nervously like they're going to start making out at any moment. She looks torn between walking in and running away. You never really took Tenko for dense, but this is more of an issue of lacking the proper amounts of self-confidence to even realize. Also maybe a hint of projecting.

"One of us is going to have to go and get the card... Tenko, I think you're up," you say, trying to encourage the girl who makes a noise of pure distress, something between a squeak and groan. She looks at you pleadingly, hoping that you'll rescind your order. You have no intention of doing such. Finally getting the picture, the girl looks down at her feet before straightening up and nodding. She takes a deep breath and enters the room like she's marching towards her death.

She's actually a pretty good actor and her demeanor switches immediately. She bounces into the room with a giant grin. "Yumeno-san, Angie-san!" She says, walking towards the pair on light feet. You notice a very subtle tension in the corner of her gaze, but it's a small enough detail that the average person wasn't actually going to notice. She sits down next to the mage and the artist but doesn't seem to know how to progress from there, eyes awkwardly dancing up to Himiko's hat every couple of moments.

"Hello, Chabashira-san," Himiko says with a heavy sigh. The exhausted expression doesn't quite meet her eyes. If anything, the pair both seem to relax slightly at the presence of Tenko, their tones becoming lighter. Himiko's posture even seemed to relax slightly and she leaned in a little more, turning the majority of her attention towards Tenko.

"Yumeno-chan and I were just talking about holding a magic show one of these days!" Angie proudly announces. Tenko begins to minutely vibrate, likely in part due to the fact the word chan was used. You realize this conversation was going nowhere besides terrible very quickly. It was your hope that maybe you could play the part of the wing girl, but it seems Tenko isn't equipped for a situation like this.

"Oh. I see. So you two are pretty close. That's great! Better than being friends with any of those degenerate males!" Tenko's voice is tense enough that it seems to catch the attention of Himiko. Angie doesn't seem to be able to read the mood but Himiko notices. You see the mage's eyes flash
for half a second and she chews on her bottom lip, eyes skimming across Tenko's form.

Part of you wants to watch the situation play out and hope things turn out for the best. Best case scenario all three get together and they live happily ever after. Best case scenarios do not exist in a game like this. You either need to force them to happen with your own two hands or pray that you can avoid the worst-case scenario. Unfortunately, it seems that's the one Tenko is hurtling towards very quickly if she doesn't rediscover her ability to form coherent not sketchy sentences.

"Chabashira-san, are you okay?" Himiko frowns deeply, resting a hand on Tenko's shoulder. You can see thing spiraling out of control as Tenko panics. Her hands ball up and you're pretty sure Himiko can feel Tenko vibrating as the other girl visibly struggles to speak normal language like a typical human person. Now Angie is starting to notice and she turns her attention towards the pair. You think you're going to have to step in.

You turn to your other companion. "Gonta-kun, release one of the spiders into the room!"

"Why?" Gonta immediately looks taken aback by your request. The boy has been carrying around a single spider in a carrier of sorts. The trapped spider is best described with the adjective 'massive'. It looks friendly enough by comparison even if it is the largest, but that might just be a byproduct of it being trapped. Friendly or not, it would likely make a good majority of your classmates faint on the spot if they saw it just suddenly appear.

"So it can rescue Tenko-san!" You really hope this plan works. Your hope is that the appearance of the spider will give you and Gonta an easy way in so that you can rescue the suffering Tenko. Trying to capture an escaped spider is the perfect excuse.

"Oh! In that case, spider friend will absolutely help to save Tenko," Gonta says with a smile. It's precious and genuine despite him having no clue how the spider is actually going to help in this situation. To be completely fair, you aren't entirely sure how much help the spider is going to be either. It's too late to go back though as Gonta leans down and opens the container. The spider emergences sending a shiver down your spine. Gonta ushers the creature into the cafeteria and it goes without a second thought. It takes all of five seconds for a trio of screams to be audible.

You see the panic on Tenko's face triple. Tenko tries to do the logical thing in this situation, but giant spiders often cause most logic to turn upside down. Tenko tries to defend the other two girls. In her attempt she snatches Himiko's hat without thinking and places it over top the spider, holding down the edges so the creature can't escape. The other two girls shoot for the door.

"Keep the hat and burn it, I have extras!" Himiko says with perhaps more energy than she's possessed all game so far.

Tenko gives you a look of betrayal when you and Gonta slip inside past the panicking girls running in the opposite direction. "We didn't know what else to do," you saw with a shrug. Tenko lets go of the hat when Gonta leans down next to it. She plucks the card away and takes a couple of dramatic steps back. You take the card when she hands it over.

"Besides the first two games and the occasional very rare oddity, none of the players in the third game onwards have had actual talents. It's signed Byakuya," you say. You hand Tenko the card while you flip open the book. Both she and Gonta have looks of complete disbelief. "Yeah. Uhm, yeah. That's, hm. That's obviously a fake signature," you say as you keep the book pointed in a fashion that doesn't allow the other two to see. You're glad Kokichi isn't around to see through your lie.

"Of course it is. Tenko obviously has a real talent, just like everyone else! That means all of that
trouble was for nothing though..." Tenko's expression darkens as she seems to sag slightly, remembering the mess that was the prior interaction. Her cheeks are still a deep shade crimson. She's mortified. "____-san, you're gonna know how Tenko feels too soon so stop giggling!"

"I doubt that," you say. Gonta just tilts his head in confusion as he glances between the two of you, petting his arachnid while he coaxes it back into its container. When the three of you have reorganized yourselves and you've stashed the card in the back of the book with the rest the three of you set off once more, agreeing that you'll try to find one or two more cards.

It's starting to get fairly late into the day, but none of you necessarily mind. You don't have anything better to do and it's kind of fun. A bit like an easter egg hunt in a way. Gonta especially enjoys it, carefully inspecting everything around him with a joyful gleam in his eyes. Tenko, after recovering, seems just as enthused to continue the search.

The next person you run into just so happens to be Miu. And guess where the card is.

Tenko smirks like a child in a candy store when you just so happen to poke your heads into Miu's lab, finding that a card is stuck to your own crush. Except, instead of being stuck to a hat, the card just so happens to be stuck onto the back of her skirt. The girl in question is currently tinkering with an incapacitated Keebo. You think you remember her mentioning that she would be doing maintenance work on Keebo today. She also encouraged you to come to visit if you had the time.

"Tenko thinks this would be a good time to tell Iruma-san how much you love her," the woman blurts out and you nearly choke on air. "After all, it is your turn," her smile is a bit devious. You suppose she considers this to be revenge. Or karma. In the eyes of your little group, there's no way you'll be able to mortify yourself less than Tenko did. At least Tenko only stole a hat (one that she's apparently keeping despite it touching a spider). There's no way you can pull off something like this gracefully!

Tenko doesn't know you very well.

You shoot the girl a confident smirk and motion for Gonta and Tenko to stand outside of the room. Honestly, these idiots. You can actually see Gonta's anxiety as he tries to figure out silently what the least rude way of addressing a situation like this might be. Of course, you have your flaws. You can become too combative and lash out in certain situations, but a lack of tact to the point of embarrassing yourself certainly isn't one of those flaws.

"Afternoon Miu-san," you greet. The girl turns to you slightly with a smile.

"Hey bitch, the fuck is up with you today? Haven't seen you all morning, at least you usually come and visit me once." She turns back to Keebo the moment she's finished greeting you. Not out of some dismissiveness, but just because she needs to finish her work. You stand there for a couple of moments just watching her work before you act.

"Oh, hold still for a second," you say. Discreetly you pull the card away and slip it into your blazer. When Miu turns to you with a look of confusion you've already switched out the index card for a feather, crossing your arms and giving the other girl a playfully unamused look, cocking a single eyebrow at her. "Seriously?"

"Fuck! Again? I can't believe that damn blanket sprung another hole," she sounds deeply upset. there's a chance she's upset for no reason, but more likely than not the blanket she's talking about does actually have a new hole. Or, more so the same hole she's been trying to stitch back up for days has come undone again.
"Why don't you just take it to Tsumugi-san? I know you don't really like her that much, but honestly, she's better with a needle and thread than you or I." You flinch as you remember your own attempt at trying to help Miu with her problem. Like you said, you really aren't flawless. Some things you just weren't taught, and sewing happened to be one of them. You're pretty sure you nearly butchered the blanket you were trying to repair. The blanket in question was the only feather blanket either of you had been able to find in the storage area. Miu had laid claim to it immediately and you didn't really sleep as much as she did so it didn't mean much to you. According to her feather blankets are more comfortable, even fake feathers.

Sadly, Miu had accidentally cut a hole in the blanket while she was working on an invention in her room and had the thing around her shoulders. Instead of taking it to Tsumugi like you would have, she tried to fix it herself. Then she tried to have you fix it. You both just kept making the problem worse and now the stitching comes undone at random intervals, often leaving Miu with feathers in her hair or on her clothes. This would have been the third time you found one on her skirt if you hadn't faked it.

"She's so creepy though," Miu mumbles as she sulkily focuses on Keebo. You hang around for a couple of minutes before discreetly slipping away to meet up with the rest of your group, card in hand without any deeply mortifying events happening.

"Tenko hates you so much right now," is the greeting you end up receiving when you're out of earshot of Miu's lab. You smile at Tenko, taking in Gonta's impressed expression. You clear your throat and hold up the note while you prepare yourself to read it, only to feel your blood start to freeze.

"Tsumugi is the other Ultimate Survivor. Signed... Amami," you don't need to check the book to know it's legitimate. You've already seen Rantaro's signature. You all go silent, just kind of looking at one another for answers and finding none. "I. We shouldn't tell anyone about this." "Agreed," the other two say quietly. You fall into silence for a long moment before continuing the search, a heaving sitting over all of you. No words need to be said, all of you can feel the tension caused by that one small sentence. The questions it causes, the questions it answers, and you end up dragging yourselves down a mental rabbit hole of overthinking things. Miu's earlier statement rings a little too loudly in your head while you think it over. The group doesn't dismiss itself though.

It was starting to get very late so the three of you agreed to search for one last note on your way to the dorms. You're all starting lose steam so you don't go out of your way to look. Especially Tenko with the trauma she faced earlier that day. You return to the dorms, ready to give up when you actually find that final note. Taped to your own door of all things.

That at least helps prove the fact Monokuma isn't putting them all up immediately. Almost like he's teasing you, he's picking the when and where almost like he's leading you down some kind of trail. Sticking it to your door almost feels like the bear is laughing at you. He probably is.

"You are a detective. Tenko doesn't get it. The note has to be fake, after all, not everyone who reads the note can be a detective. This would only be true if Saihara-kun read the note. So it has to be fake. Check the book and make sure ____-san, it's signed by a Naegi," Tenko seemed proud of her logic while you began to pull out the book.

"You aren't wrong. The signature is completely off," you say, ignoring the way that your heart thrums. It patters the inside of your chest while you look at the page titled Makoto Naegi. The signature is nothing alike. "I think that's enough hunting for today. Why don't we all take a break and regroup tomorrow morning? Maybe fill in the rest of the class before they start stumbling
across notes?" Much like every other note, Tenko hands it off to you for reference.

Your two companions agree and they disperse to their own rooms while you pull out your key. Your hands are shaking but you manage to unlock the door. You set the book down as well as the note. Your fingers quiver as you flip through the pages of the book, skimming over the names of the rest of the first class to ever participate in an official killing game. "Yeah, it's absolutely wrong. It isn't the signature of a Naegi," you mutter to yourself as you stop on a page colored in lilac.

"It might not be wrong though if you hyphenate it with Kirigiri."
The two sit on the floor looking deeply embarrassed by the whole situation, but this is honestly something that needs to be done. This is something you've needed to do since the last trial, but you didn't want to have to face it yesterday. After all, it was the day after a murder and you were feeling just as drained as the rest of the class. Plus, you weren't sure how to deal with the situation on your own. You knew what needed to be done and said, had the skills in order to do so, but approaching it alone really wasn't the best way to approach the situation. Now you had back up.

Said back up was Tenko, who was currently glaring at the two people sitting on the floor of her lab looking terribly abashed. Said two people were Kaede and Shuichi. It was a conversation that needed to happen, but boy, were you ever not looking forward to this moment. Tenko makes it easier. Tenko can hiss and glare and growl in ways that you can't bring yourself to without letting your emotions get out of control and lashing out, at which point things would just become unproductive.

This though, this works. You and Tenko playing good cop bad cop almost seems to be an effective strategy, especially considering the ease with which you seem to flip flop your roles.

You've been dreading this conversation, but Tenko makes it easier. Now you just need to find the right words which with to lecture Kaede and Shuichi on the terrible decision they made without upsetting either of them enough that they do something worse. That was still a possibility if you weren't extremely careful in a situation like this one, and you made sure to remind Tenko of that before you called Kaede and Shuichi to Tenko's lab earlier that morning. Both of you were walking on pins and needles just trying to do what was best for the class.

"Tenko isn't upset, Tenko can understand where Akamatsu-san was coming from. Bad choice, but understandable, Tenko can't say she wouldn't have tried to do the same thing. However. Saihara-kun is a fucking moron!" Tenko gives the boy a flat expression as the last sentence rolls from her body visibly. You almost choke on air thanks to the other girl's choice of language. You're pretty sure you've never heard Tenko curse before so it comes as a shock to you. Shuichi flinches so you jump to damage control.

"I believe what Tenko-san is trying to say is that we're disappointed, but not necessarily upset or angry. Disappointed in both of you for that matter, but, Shuichi-kun you need to understand how deeply your actions affected the rest of the class. You're our detective and Kaede-san was starting to become our beacon of hope. To have both of you drop yourselves so low, especially for each other, well... it's unnerving for most of the rest of the class. It feels a lot like a betrayal, especially with how willing Shuichi-kun seemed to kill the rest of the class including himself so that Kaede-san could walk free," you say in an attempt to balance out Tenko's louder and fiercer statements. Your disappointment is palpable and the two flinch at your words more than they do at Tenko.

They were expecting the kind of loud anger that Tenko's giving off. They weren't expecting your brand of disappointment. Quiet, betrayed, you purposefully give them a hurt and miserable kind of expression. You want to get it through both of their heads just how bad their actions were. Maybe you're manipulating the situation a little much, but you want to try and ensure a situation like this doesn't happen again.

Tenko seems to flare up even more. "Betrayal is putting it lightly! Who's going to lead the class
now? Shirogane-san?" She crosses her arms as she looks at you and it's your turn to flinch. Right. The class is going to need a new leader or else anarchy is right around the corner. You can try to prop Kaede back up, but that idea worries you somewhat.

"I'm willing to try and trust the two of you again. Understand you're on fairly thin ice, but I'm willing to forgive and forget considering, in the end, it wasn't either of you that directly caused the murder. That being said, I am hurt. Deeply." You turn on your heels to face away from them. The shame was apparent on both their faces the entire conversation through. Tenko had confiscated Shuichi's hat on behalf of the fact that 'he needed to face his punishment himself' and it didn't seem as though she wanted to give it back with the way she'd chucked it in a corner dismissively.

She wasn't the only one that hated that hat, and she had the right idea for a conversation like this. Both teens needed to face up to their mistakes, and Shuichi was prone to hiding behind his hat. Sometimes you needed to be gentle with someone to get them to change their actions. Guiding them step by step until they could overcome. Sometimes they needed a shock to their entire system, something closer to a wake-up call. Hopefully, that was what Shuichi needed at that moment and you weren't being too rough.

You wanted both of them to overcome this obstacle and walk away as better people. You felt the most disappointed by Shuichi, his actions had also stung a little more than Kaede's. He'd betrayed you on a level that felt way too personal. Not just as your classmate, but as a detective. You'd finally figured it out why the other night and that had made it sting all the more. That final card you, Tenko, and Gonta had discovered had been the trigger of a gun and a lot of details had come cascading forth from the barrel. The revelation had also left Shuichi's betrayal feeling a lot more like a personal afront, a deep insult that left something in your blood absolutely boiling.

You are a liar. That was one of the many things you'd realized. It was kind of funny, you'd convinced yourself at the start of the game you were bad at lying, but you could probably go toe to toe with Kokichi. The thing was you knew the very distinct difference between a good lie and a bad lie. When Shuichi decided to try and cover up the truth, it became personal and judging by Kokichi's actions it had become personal to the miniature dictator as well. Kokichi who had typically hung off of Shuichi with a 'Saihara-chan, Saihara-chan' just before the murder had been giving the detective the cold shoulder since the trial.

Kaede was more easily forgiven considering the nature of her offense. You can't say that many people in the school wouldn't do the same right about now. The fact that upset you most was that she'd done it right under your damn nose and you hadn't even realized.

"We're sorry," Kaede says quietly, causing you to turn back to them slightly. You could see the smallest hint of a vaguely bitter expression on her features, but there's enough self-loathing there that you think it's more so a knee jerk response than anything. Shuichi doesn't talk, instead, he looks down and refuses to meet your gaze. While Kaede is ashamed of her actions, Shuichi is mortified. There's a flicker of something darker in his expression, something almost dangerous and reminiscent of a lost self, but it gets drowned by the realization of his own actions.

While Kaede fights an internal battle, it almost seems like Shuichi is embarking on a war.

Eventually, he nods, Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows hard. "We deeply apologize, my actions were unprofessional and I'll endeavor to do better on future cases." He stands up and leaves after speaking the lines almost mechanically. "It's almost time for lunch." You contemplate going after him, but you think you'd do more harm than good right now. Whatever he's struggling with he needs to be alone or left with people who can handle his personality type a bit better like Kaede or Kaito. Speaking of which...
Kaede stands up and slinks after him, giving Tenko and yourself more of a proper goodbye than the boy did. You glance at Tenko who's expression is thoughtful. "Tenko thinks that we might have made some progress with those two, but Tenko doesn't think it's quite enough. They're struggling with something that Tenko doesn't understand. Can't understand without knowing them. The only way Tenko can truly know someone is by sparring with them though..." The girl frowns and mutters to herself as she trails off. That does give you an idea though.

A little later you'll talk to Tenko about maybe allowing the Fitness Club to come to her lab and spar with her. It would do wonderful in ways of a workout and you're 100% convinced that Tenko gives the best advice in the world but only after she's thoroughly beaten you to a pulp. You accept this as immutable fact. So far it's been working for you wonderfully. You've felt better ever since you had your own heart to heart with Tenko and a lot of things about the situation you're in are starting to click now that you aren't holding yourself back.

The two of you start making your way towards the cafeteria where there's hopefully food. You didn't get the chance to actually make anything this morning. As soon as Tenko was awake she had been trying to convince you that the two of you should talk with Kaede and Shuichi. Yes, this had been her idea originally. She was apparently just as worried about the pair and their actions as you had been, so she came up with the good cop bad cop framework and the two of you went from there.

You'd also talked about telling the rest of the class about the little notes you'd been finding from the previous classes. "Tenko thinks that maybe she should stay with Saihara-kun and Akamatsu-san all day, just to keep an eye on them." She flashes you an apologetic smile but you completely understand where she's coming from purposing such an idea. Neither of you are quite sure how the pair is going to progress from here. There's just as much of a chance they could become dangerous as there's a chance they could return to their normal selves and become harmless. Furthermore, you'd seen something in pair that didn't quite make you optimistic.

"Yeah, I think that's a good idea. Actually, take Gonta-kun along with you. If the class agrees to actively hunt for the notes then I can find someone else to help me look," you say with a comforting smile. Tenko seems to relax a little and nods.

"Maybe Miu!" She elbows you and you elbow her back before rubbing the spot where her elbow made contact. She really doesn't hold back around you. You knew from experience she could very well be gentle. She acted like she was in the middle of a fine pottery store every time she was in the presence of Angie or Himiko. She didn't seem to find many reasons to be gentle with or around you though. Was that a compliment or an insult?

The two of you made your way to the cafeteria talking lightly about nonsense while you tried to formulate your announcement of sorts in your head. You wanted to be careful not to set off the class. This could either cause a lot of chaos or just be another random aspect of the game depending on how you decide to approach it. So, you decide to approach it cautiously but openly so that no one else can pick up on how much it worries you. Well, Kokichi will pick up on how much these notes worry you. There's no way around that, but you're pretty sure you can wrap the rest of the class around your pinky finger.

 Heck, maybe you might even try outwitting Kokichi. Put your little theory from earlier to the test.

Tenko sits next to you when the pair of you get to the cafeteria. Shuichi and Kaede have already, for the most part, isolated themselves as they've been doing ever since the murder. Maki ends up sitting next to you and Kaito next to her. The way that the fitness club group dynamic is going to change worries you, but you compartmentalize those worries and focus on the notes. You're better
at it than you give yourself credit for, you just have to remember to actually do it. Everyone else slowly filters into the room picking random spots as they see fit. Tenko prods you when both Kokichi and Miu gives her tiny glares upon entering and you store that little detail away for later.

Once everyone is present, you waste no time getting down to business. "Now that everyone is here, a little discovery was made yesterday," you say, keeping your tone light and your posture relaxed. It takes some genuine mental gymnastics to keep your disposition from showing but you do so effectively. "While talking to Gonta-kun yesterday I found out that he'd discovered a little notecard that was apparently written by members of the 'classes' who went before us in this killing game. Specifically from members of the first two games."

"Monokuma informed us that some of these notes are false and others are true and he gave me a little book to hold on to in order to be able to tell the two apart. Myself, Gonta-kun, and Tenko-san didn't tell anyone yesterday because we were worried about what might be on these notes. So we spent the day searching for the various notes and were able to find some. It seems like these clues range between earth-shattering and relatively harmless. Unfortunately, they seem to also be our biggest clue as to what's going on with this game. I've decided to tell all of you so that you know what the notes are if you run across one, and that it might not be true. If you do then I encourage you to bring it to me since I am the one with possession of the book that lets us validate the clue," you keep your tone entirely relaxed, your body casual, and you just hope. No one questions why you more or less put yourself in charge.

"If these notes could potentially be clues as to what's going on... maybe, uhm, maybe we should split into groups and go look for them? Cover more ground, find as many as possible, and maybe piece something together. You know, just an idea..." Shuichi tries to speak up and be helpful. He's genuinely trying to go back to playing the role of the detective who would help the class, but his voice shakes violently as he speaks. Some members of the class seem ready to forgive him at the sight of such a display, their eyes shifting towards pity. Some (read as: Kokichi) just glare quietly. You could see the genuine pain on Kaito's features as he tried to work out what to believe himself.

"Tenko thinks that sounds like a great idea!" You jump when Tenko blurts this out at full volume right next to you, almost seeming to be excited. You think she has an idea but you can never be certain what kind of idea she has, considering it is in fact Tenko. Sometimes the most cunning person on earth is easier to read than beings formed from the good kind of chaos, much like you'd come to realize Tenko was. "We can all pick groups and bring the notes back to ____-san who can work together with Saihara-kun and the two of them can maybe figure out some kind of answer together. They are the smartest people in the class, after all!"

What Tenko does at that moment is honestly a bit brilliant. By calling on the sway your own name has over the class, she softens them to the idea of Shuichi taking up the role associated with his talent once more as long as he's supervised by you. You are someone who is seen by the class as equivalently smart to Shuichi, especially after the last trial. She says your name first, makes it sound like you're in control of the purposed situation, and as such she gets pretty much complete agreement from the rest of the class who already starts splitting off into groups.

Tenko is perhaps just the blessing you need right about now.

"So if we're all in agreement, then we should all split up and start looking for those notes," Keebo says, voice cheery as ever. It seems that your little ploy of sorts actually worked. No one suspects that something dangerous and terrible is going on. You can keep it that way considering you're the only one with the book and effectively can lie your way around any notes you don't want the class knowing are true. Assuming you don't have to analyze them in front of Kokichi.
It takes great effort on Tenko's part not to dash off after Angie and Himiko who seem to be looking in a pair together. She restrains herself, grabs Gonta, and then forces Shuichi and Kaede to become a group of four with her. You really, really hope this will actually do something for the pair. Tenko apparently appoints herself the leader and her first decree as the leader is that Shuichi doesn't get a hat. It's snatched from him and handed to Kaede who smiles sheepishly when she refuses to give it back.

There's a distinct amount of tension between the pair and the rest of the class. You can practically feel some members of the class judging them despite the apparent willingness to forgive coming from most people. Just maybe if anyone can fix this, it might just be Tenko.

Keebo somehow ends up dragging away Miu. You take your eyes off the pair for one moment and suddenly they're gone. You aren't jealous. Okay, you are. You're really jealous. You wanted to spend time with Miu. At least you aren't threatened since it's Keebo of all people. What a weird and foreign thought for someone like yourself, but you've come to accept the control you have over the emotions you feel is limited, how you act on them is the only thing you have true control over. You accept that you have a crush on Miu that makes you feel jealous of Keebo, but you also acknowledge the fact Keebo is sweet and innocent so you curb the sensation.

The pair, or more so the individual in a pair, that shocks you the most is Kokichi who you expect to go alone. Except he doesn't. "Shirogane-san! Entertain me!" He says in a haughty demand. He refuses to look at Shuichi and most other people end up getting snubbed when they extend invitations to him. Despite having picked Tsumugi and ignoring most other people, he doesn't quite snub you. He locks eyes with you for a moment, a flicker of understanding between the two of you. Cover more ground and keep the potential dangers around those you could trust.

Kokichi often bullies Gonta, but Kokichi to a certain degree trusts Gonta's good and protective nature. That's why he didn't really bat an eye when Gonta and Tenko ended up taking your murder idiots on some unknown adventure. Furthermore, it's apparent that you trust Tenko and Kokichi seems to mostly trust your judgment. Angie could be dangerous, but she wasn't dangerous around Himiko. Tsumugi was an unknown variable, one that you'd begun to feel very uncomfortable about after the little secret you read yesterday on top of Miu's comment. Apparently, Kokichi was on the same wavelength as you. Judging by his actions, he didn't much trust Tsumugi either, so he dragged her into being a pair with him under the guise of entertainment.

That either left you alone or joining the pair of two in the back of the room who seemed more content talking between themselves. Kaito and Maki are an interesting pair. They don't seem like they should get along, but they probably have the most powerful friendship out of everyone in the school. That's why you feel a bit nervous trying to approach the pair to join their exploration. You wander up to the duo but you don't even have to ask to join the pair.

"Did everyone else forget about you again? Idiots. They only pay attention to you when there's been a murder and Saihara-kun is being too much of a putz to solve it," Maki sighs when you wander close enough to them that it becomes obvious you're alone. Her expression is remarkably gentle as she appraises you.

"That's okay because that means we get ____-san all to ourselves! Our group is going to find the most notes and discover the most details. Watch out Monokuma, the luminary of the stars and his wonderful sidekicks are coming for you!" Kaito's voice catches when he tries to say sidekicks but you overlook it.

The luminary of the stars was perhaps the one most hurt by Shuichi's actions. He was blindly trustful of others, often to the point of it being dangerous. It was probably his best and his worst
feature, as the most powerful character traits tend to be in a person. Kaito, however, had taken a serious hit when that blind trust ended up snapping at him and nearly taking his fingers off in the last trial. Of course, Kaito was still Kaito so he tried to ignore it and blindly forgive his first sidekick. That being said, Kaito is also a human being and sometimes emotional injury, just like physical, takes some time to heal.

Maki was doing a good job keeping him distracted, playing the role of the best friend fairly effectively.

You take this as an invitation to the pair's group and Kaito led the three of you out into the school on your adventure. "How many cards were you able to find yesterday?" Maki asks when the two of you start searching a wing of the school without too many other groups.

"Four, and Gonta-kun already had one when Tenko-san and I went to visit him. Some of them were in really embarrassing places like stuck to other people. Tenko-san had fun trying to get a card off of Himiko-san's hat. Not all of them were true though. Monokuma also gave us a book with details on each of the students who wrote the notes, as well as their signatures. We've been comparing them to look for forgeries. We should stop by the dorms so that I can grab my book before we meet back up with the rest of the class," you say and Maki nods silently.

While the two of you talk Kaito looks in every nook and cranny. It's almost like he's competing against someone, but you don't know who. At one point your trio wanders into the dorms and you're able to grab your book for reference in case you do find something. You decide if at all possible you want to keep as many of the cards to yourself for as long as possible and only release the information that's useful to your class. Holding your cards to your chest and an ace up your sleeve is something familiar and comfortable. The power that comes with information is something you didn't quite realize you craved so badly until now. Not for malicious reasons, but you crave this kind of power because it can give you enough of an upper hand to protect your classmates.

The first card is found by Maki, who understandably has the urge to glance up every half a minute or so. She points it out and it takes a little effort since much like the second one your group discovered yesterday it is in fact stuck to the roof. It takes you and Kaito a little effort to get it off of the roof since neither of you are tall enough to so much as touch the room, but eventually, you manage. Almost seeming to abide by the ritual you, Tenko, and Gonta built up yesterday the card ends up in your hands to be read. "Team Danganronpa are all remnants of despair."

You hand off the card to Kaito while you crack open the book. It's signed by a Komaeda whose page you quickly flip to. An Ultimate Luck huh? You read a couple of pages the night before, but you didn't through many. You haven't gotten the chance to look through Komaeda's yet.

"What's a remnant of despair though?" Kaito holds the card next to the book for you while you cross-reference the book and the card. Maki shrugs when Kaito looks towards her, as oblivious as her companion to what exactly a remnant of despair is.

"I'm not entirely sure myself, but the words make me feel sick to my stomach for some reason. What's worse is the fact I'm pretty sure the card is real." You take the card from Kaito and slip it into the book for safe keeping. Your stomach churns uncomfortable, it's almost similar to the feeling of butterflies being in your stomach but a million times worse. A fluttering feeling that turns so intense it borders on painful. "Let's just keep looking."

The next card does nothing to settle your senses. You don't find it yourselves. Instead, you have Angie and Himiko suddenly appear. "Ah! We were looking for the three of you. Yumeno-san found a card!"
"Oh? Have you already read it?" You ask as you hold your hand out. Angie shakes her head as she hands it over. You clear your own throat in order to read it out. "Other groups of remnants exist and hold their own killing games separate from Danganronpa. They aren't as well known and they're intrinsically different in nature. More 'real' and not as 'public'." Your stomach goes haywire as the pain almost seems to double. The name Hinata sits at the bottom of the card.

You hand it to Kaito who readily takes it, but you can see the way his fingers shiver slightly. All the rest of the group has gone entirely pale. You flip to the page dedicated the apparent writer of the card. You take a shivery breath, forcing your shoulders to relax. "The card is fake," you lie without missing a beat. The other four people present take your words at face value and all seem to relax. They're all still shaken up, but they relax. "That had me worried for a moment," you say, playing off the way that your entire body is still mildly tensed and you're having trouble forcing it to behave accordingly. You suppose it kind of plays into the act since the group is having trouble relaxing after that.

The thoughts chaotically twirl together in your head. How are you going to hide your lie if someone more educated tries to look at the cards like Kokichi or Shuichi? You suppose you can change the cards themselves. They're written in pen so you'd need to do a full rewrite, but these are just index cards so you have the feeling it wouldn't be too hard to track down the writing materials, redo the cards, and purposefully butcher the signatures to agree with you. Yeah. You'll find a reason not to show anyone any of the cards and you'll do that later tonight. If you're lucky a motive will distract the rest of the class tomorrow and you can figure out how to go from there.

"Angie-san and I will keep looking for more cards. Maybe. It's so much trouble looking for these cards. Maybe Chabashira-san found some?" Himiko's voice trails off and Angie nods enthusiastically, dragging the other girl as far away from the cards and the book as possible. You wonder if they're actually going to try and find Tenko, you wouldn't put it past them to try and steal away five minutes of the comfort associated with the presence of the powerful neo aikido fighter. You would have gone back to hunting with Maki and Kaito, but the moment one duo disappears a new one takes its place. Kokichi is excitedly dragging Tsumugi down the halls with the kind of vigor that suggested he was doing everything in his power to fuck with her head and get her to slip up. "____-chan!" He cheers as he barrels down the hall with his companion in tow. You just sigh as he comes to a halt before you and presents a card to you. "Our offering!" He says. There's a noticeable tension in his smile and you get the feeling he already read the card. For some reason, your eyes catch on the word Ikusaba signed at the bottom of the card and you already don't like the way your stomach twists.

You take a breath and sigh before holding the card in front of you and reading it for yourself. "5 players of this game have been in 1 or more killing games prior to this one." You can see the eyes of Maki and Kaito widen. Kokichi continues to smile at you, but it's perhaps one of the tensest expressions you've seen on his face. It's the most obvious you've ever seen his actual emotions.

Kokichi snatches the card from you, grin getting wider. "Go on, look in the book. Tell me if it's real. Come on ____-chan!" He whines at you and puts on a childish expression but you can see the terror in his gaze. He wants so desperately for this to be false, nearly as bad as you do.

You open up the page. "It's... it's not. it's not real," you once again lie to the best of your mortal capabilities. You make those three words as convincing as you know how. You see the rest of the group sigh and half expect Kokichi's expression to darken or tense up. For him to see through the lie and realize that there's something very, very messed up at play. Except, he doesn't. His posture relaxes as though you'd just honestly confirmed that the card was false. He drops the deception, just for you, and you can honestly tell that he believes your lie.
The moment passes quickly and he puts on a disappointed scowl. "Ah, how boring. Come on Shiro-san! Let's go find a card that's actually fun," he announces, tossing the card back at you as he leaves, turning on his heels and once more dragging Tsumugi with him to continue his mental assault of her. It takes a long moment to dawn on your that you actually just lied to Kokichi. Convincingly lied to Kokichi. Kokichi.

You short circuit for a moment leaving Kaito and Maki having to drag your through the halls as they search for more cards. You try to help but things pass in a blur. Until your fingers touch one card in particular.

The three of you decide to check the storage area since your close. It feels like trying to find a needle in a haystack, but that's exactly where Monokuma would hide something important. Plus it gives you the chance to grab some note cards and a pen for your plan, so you don't complain. You wander up and down the aisles in a haze, eyes half glazed as you hunt for paper and try to dissect the fact you're somehow convincing enough to lie to Kokichi, something you just have to accept as fact after that encounter. You thought it was possible but you didn't actually think you'd pull it off with your skills.

Before you can go too far down that particular rabbit hole, a small index card manages to catch your eyes.

You pluck the piece of paper off the shelf, noting that it seems different from the other cards you've seen today. On the front are two letters written big and proud. The letters R.O. are written in deep black ink. You flip the card around in order to look at the back. There's a small message written there. You have to read it twice, no, more like three or four times to actually make sense of the phrase. It's not complex by any means, but you start to grow confused by it. You lose track of how many times the words repeat over and over in your head while you try to make sense of them.

All 17 of you are going to live, as long as your final choice is a smart one.

Unfortunately, this note doesn't seem to be a part of the rest and has already reached its expiration date considering not all 17 of you are alive. Your heart sinks with disappointment. Thinking back you discovered a similar note in the nurse's office. Same initials too. Maybe you were supposed to discover it back and then it was going to encourage you to do something to keep all these deaths from happening. All of you were supposed to live, but somehow you failed, and there was no going back. When someone was dead, they were gone for good.

There's no such thing as second chances. You can't rewrite what's been written in ink and stone without writing out a new story altogether. Yeah, maybe you can rewrite the script, but it'll never be the same story. What's done is done. Move forward.

It's a bit disheartening and you need a pick-me-up. You decide it's a blessing when the storage room door slams open and the words "hey sluts!" echoes through the room proudly. Yeah, Miu is exactly what you need right now.

You wander towards the door. Kaito and Maki are already there, having gotten to the front much faster than you. You meet up with Miu and Keebo, Miu actually holding two cards as opposed to one like the previous groups. "This gorgeous brain has found two wonderful cards to read and use in order to reassure our dear Keebo-kun," the inventor announces proudly. Taking a second glance at Keebo, the robot seems out of sorts. Maybe due to the content of the cards?

You hold out your hand and Miu presses the cards into your palm. You read out the first one, signed by a Fujisaki. You actually read his entry last night, so you can tell right off the bat the validity of the card. "A robot as advances as Keebo can't exist. Well, that's a lie. I already checked
this person's signature last night. It's completely different." You're admittedly pretty glad you can finally tell the truth for once. If you had to keep lying this entire time you'd probably get fatigued and accidentally blurt out something that you didn't want the rest of the class knowing was actually true.

You hold up the next one and immediately realize you might have to lie again. "Keebo isn't actually a robot..." You can't help but trail off as you stare at the card. This one is signed with the name Souda. You keep ahold of the card instead of handing it to someone else this time. You keep this card damn close to yourself as you open the book and look for the name. It's, unfortunately, a perfect match. You're so deeply taken off guard by this information, so unable to process it, you don't get the chance to form a lie before your classmates see the answer plain on your face.

The panic is immediate. Keebo screeches, an unholy noise that tears at your eardrums and causes you to flinch. "What am I!" He runs out of the room still making terrifying noises you can't imagine coming from anything except a machine.

"Wait! Keebs no! Slow down!" Miu takes off after the distressed... well, you can't really call him a robot with full confidence anymore, can you? Miu can hopefully console the boy better than you can, you're still trying to siphon through all the information. You're starting to go into overload and Keebo not actually being a robot is just too much to understand in that short moment. You're still having trouble.

"Maybe it's some kind of trick?" Maki offers up. She stands a little closer to you, pressing a hand against your shoulder. "Maybe he could technically be classified as an android since he's so human-like, and Monokuma is just trying to terrorize us with semantics?"

You nod a little, grateful to her for trying to point out alternatives. You don't know what to think so instead you run down the list of facts you do know. You compartmentalize and form a hypothesis, calling on a detective like calm. You know that Keebo's insides are very much reminiscent to a machine. That means as he exists here and now he needs to be a robot, you've watched Miu do maintenance on him. So, therefore, it should be impossible for Keebo to be anything but a robot in this form of existence.

This form of existence.

Click. Click. Crash.

You feel like you've been slammed over the back of the head with a stick as so many chaotic details suddenly arrange themselves into neat little lines. It all suddenly makes sense. Keebo is a robot. In this existence. Specifically here and now. But he isn't a robot. Not where Monokuma is referencing, anyway.

It all clicks together so beautifully in a wonderful picture that you can't even understand why you'd thought anything else for so long. It all makes sense, you suddenly get it, all the little pieces come together. Those wonderfully little clicks. You put another piece into place before deciding how you want to move your pieces, finally understanding the layout of this chess board.

"I need to go sit down. Maki-san, I have a really big favor to ask you. I feel terrible, but we need to find as many cards a possible. Could you and Kaito-kun keep looking, as well as bring me any cards that you find for me to review? I just, I really need to go sit down in my room," you tell her. The way that your voice shakes nearly as much as the rest of your body does wonders for convincing Maki that you really do need to go sit down.

"Of course," she says with a worried expression. She glances at Kaito who mimics her expression.
"We'll bring you all the cards, including whatever other groups find, in about an hour since I doubt anyone is going to want to keep looking after that long. Take care of yourself ____-san." There's a genuine concern in her voice and you appreciate it, but your thoughts are racing.

You nearly run to your room, breaking out into a jog as soon as you leave the storage room. You bolt for the dorms and start to come up with ideas to lend credence to your theory. Questions and ideas. You wait to solidify anything though, you run through your thoughts for about an hour and then the new notes are delivered to you by Maki. She hands you four. You take them shakily, your body won't behave and it jitters like you've just been up for 36 hours chugging nothing but coffees and strawberry rockstars, something you're entirely certain you've done at least one.

New cards. Okay. You read them all out. These will either make, break, or be irrelevant to your theory and you really hope they make them.

This academy is the last one to serve Ultimates specifically. It's signed with the name Kirigiri and you confirm it to be true. That doesn't really mean much for your theory yet, but you suppose nothing is better than something that comes crashing in and destroys your ideas.

Ultimate titles stopped existing after Hope's Peak started accepting anyone and all students took on the title of Ultimate Hope. That seems to be a lie considering the oddities you could find in the signed name of Naegi. You have no doubt given the truth of the first card that Hope's Peak did stop giving out Ultimate titles, but they absolutely continued to exist. The next card confirms this theory.

Ultimate titles are now a marker of talent as well as skills and prestige a person has earned by working hard in their field. It's possible to hold multiple titles at one time and for multiple people to hold the same title. The signature once again proves the card to be true. So it's essentially become an indicator of mastery or something admirable about a person while working in a certain field. That makes a bit more sense as to why the card from yesterday said that almost no one who played this killing game had actual titles. They were most likely assigned by Team Danganronpa in order to better fit the mold of the first two killing games which you bet were prior to Hope's Peaks sudden change.

The final card. The participants of the first 2 killing games are between 40 and 60. Once again, this card proves true. Of course, Monokuma wouldn't give you a more solid age range, would he? Then again, maybe some members of the class simply flunked a lot and this was an accurate age range. Either way, it didn't matter.

You finally had an idea of what was going on. There were a lot of questions in your head because of that, but only one really big one. How do you end this?

You don't think you can answer that yet, but you think you're getting closer. Right now you need to just focus on trying to make as much progress as you can. So what should you do now? Ah, right, you should probably get ready for tomorrow. You pull out the index cards you snagged before leaving the storage area and pull out a pen. You can probably get all of these transcribed before tomorrow.

Is it weird that you're almost excited?
Big reveal stuff this chapter, huh? I love it when you guys leave theories so please do leave a comment if you have one!
Thanks to the whole 'note fiasco' all the new areas of the school got explored fairly quickly. Some new labs opened up, but generally, nothing that interests you past trying to hunt down more clues. You still have no idea where your own lab is or what might be inside of it. There's the question of if Monokuma even gave you a lab. It would make sense for him to lord it over you until the last minute, keeping it some grand finale kind of secret. You'll surely disappoint him soon enough.

After the mess with all those notes is over and dealt with the class falls into a kind of routine while everyone awaits the next motive or roadblock that's going to cause trouble for the group.

It's really just a question of keeping yourselves occupied until then.

You've noticed that Monokuma has been unnervingly silent ever since the murder. Even towards you. Usually, he likes to pop up and harass students at random intervals, but no one has seen him since the last trial. That does not bode well, not in your expert opinion anyway. Either he's winding up for a real sucker punch of a motive or he's waiting for something to happen. You're not sure which worries you more.

It's upsetting that you have so much free time but you're not farther along in your own personal investigation. At least, you haven't dug up anything substantive. The notes had been one thing, but there was only so much you could infer from those notes along. You've got a pretty good gut feeling that you've figured a couple of things out, but you don't want to act recklessly.

You've been meaning to go looking for Rantaro's Monopad but that hasn't really been an option. You're usually surrounded by at least one other person at any given time and you really don't want to get too many of your classmates involved in your investigation.

Then there was the question of Kaede and Shuichi. The two had bounced back slightly after the one on one adventure of sorts with Tenko. Kaede expectedly bounced back a little quicker and was seen by the class in a little bit of a better light. Shuichi... not so much.

You were actually starting to get worried about the poor boy. Yeah, you were upset. Everyone was upset. How could they not be upset? You, however, were one of the more forgiving members of the class and had gotten over it enough to give Shuichi a second chance. The rest of the class has not.

It was starting to become a problem, so you took the problem to the shockingly wise Tenko who was also ready to give Shuichi a second chance to be a proper detective. Said neo-aikido fighter had been training you in the afternoons, and with a little prompting, you were able to convince her and the rest of the Fitness Club that you should all spar together.

She wasn't all too keen about the boys, but she understood that both Kaito and Shuichi kind of needed the practice as well as the advice. You were determined to possibly start nipping the whole 'degenerate' thing. Tenko you'd found to be a good person, but, she was also kind of a stupid person who'd been tricked into believing a toxic lie as a child. You weren't sure if you nessisarily had the ability to try and curb that, but you could at least make an attempt. You dragging the fitness club to
her was a good way of killing two birds with one stone.

You still did regular exercises, but now Tenko was an unofficial member and taught all of you self defense. Which was admittedly good in case of an emergency because you had severe doubts that Kaito, Shuichi, and Kaede could defend themselves if anything remarkably terrible happened. After sparring with Tenko you'd started holding back less and less and were confident enough in your ability to protect yourself if one of your classmates came at you with a knife. Maki was something else entirely...

Maki seemed hesitant about the neo-aikido practice at first. It was to be expected. She didn't want to out herself by being immediately too good and she equally didn't want to hurt anyone. Those fears went out the window the first time Tenko demolished Maki while the girl in question was actually trying to win the fight. Demolished was the sugar-coated way of putting things. Tenko was a legitimate force to be reckoned with.

Maki stopped worrying after a while as long as she wasn't sparring with one of the three weaker members of the fitness club. When it came down to you, Tenko, and Maki, all three of you stood on relatively equal grounds for different reasons which meant all bets were off regarding who would come out on top. It was actually kind of fun sparing with Tenko and Maki, trying to see if you could actually pull one over on either girl. Maki still didn't quite act like an 'assassin' if you were being honest, but she was genuinely strong and could hold her own against Tenko for a little while when she was being serious.

You weren't sure if they were going easy on you or not, but you did actually manage to win once or twice. Kaito and Shuichi started to outright refuse the idea of sparring with anyone besides each other or Kaede, regardless of how stressed the relationship between the three had been as of late.

You liked to think you'd gotten a little better physically and emotionally with the help of Tenko. She encouraged you to be yourself in a way that no one else in the school really did, regardless of how it might break or ruin the game. It was kind of funny. You'd been holding back because you were scared of taking someone else's 'role'. After the last trial and all the nonsense that accompanied it, those fears had gone moderately silent.

So that was how two days passed in moderate peace and quiet. No murder, no fights, just friends being friends and trying to recover while they silently mourned all the losses this game had caused. Which brought you to where you were now, sat in the corner of Tenko's dojo watching idiots tire themselves out while Tenko sat next to you and picked apart everything Kaito and Shuichi did wrong, occasionally shouting advice (read as: orders) at the pair. The only people she didn't constantly order around were, as expected, you and Maki.

"Wow ____-san, Tenko would ask if you've been professionally trained if it wasn't for what you'd already told Tenko," Tenko says offhandedly out of the blue, fiddling with her hair a little. Your last sparring match left both of you in a little more of a mess than usual and you at least both tried to make yourselves look semi-presentable in the aftermath. That being said, Tenko was still trying to get her hair back into place.

Tenko mentions the secret you told her rather tactfully, not directly talking about your loss of memory. Not that it would really matter if she did. Kaito and Shuichi are completely absorbed in the mess that is their own sparring match, awkward fists trying not to actually land any hits while they try to force themselves and each other to come to an understanding. They're both trying, but it isn't nissisarily working. The only people who could really notice your conversation are Kaede and Maki who are chatting quietly on the other side of the room. Maki was particularly forgiving towards Kaede and Shuichi when all was said and done. The word idiot got tossed around a lot, but
she offered companionship to them.

"I honestly wish I knew, but it kind of does seem like that. Which is odd. I have the strangest assortment of skills out of anyone I've ever met in my entire life," you say while you yourself finish up redoing your own hair.

Your skill set really made no logical sense. Medical knowledge, professional cooking knowledge, investigative knowledge, and apparently now combative knowledge. You were sure there was more you hadn't stumbled across yet too. It was strange how natural it felt slipping into so many different roles, almost like you'd spent time practicing to do just that.

You're beset by a sudden headache, the inside of your skull thrumming slightly as you subconsciously reach for your lost memories. This has become something normal over the last two days as you've tried harder and harder to grapple with the holes and falsifications, especially with the new ideas the notes have put in your head. You wonder if you're the only one dealing with this, but the others have yet to realize their memories might also be false. You haven't brought it up to Tenko, but you have the strange feeling she's been considering it.

Even though the attempts to trap and grab hold of your old memories feel painful, you feel as though you're making progress. Before you were able to locate small truths in your memories and occasionally grab hold of what seemed to be smaller and more insignificant memories. Now though, you've been waking up in a cold sweat lately, your thoughts racing. This is nothing new, you suffer from nightmares and insomnia more often than not. What is new, is the fact you can remember things, and they're actually starting to turn into coherent thoughts.

You have yet to piece together anything concrete, but you think you can remember the faces of some of the more reoccurring figures.

You can remember a red-haired and red-eyed woman howling with laughter as she gave you your pocket watch.

"You do have an awfully weird assortment of skills, but it makes you special and interesting so you shouldn't worry about it much. It's actually kind of cool. All Tenko can really do is fight, but you have all these cool skills! Maybe you even have more than one Ultimate Title!" Tenko says, a slight glimmer of excitement in her eyes. Tenko is convinced that even if your memories are false you're still an Ultimate. It's comforting in a way to know she has so much faith in the idea, even if you're starting to lose yours. It's become something of a little game between the two of, trying to figure out your talent and who you were before. Making up backstories and fake families.

"Maybe you're the illegitimate child of last Ultimate Detective so you've spent years traveling the country impersonating people in order to get to your parents and try to get them to accept you," Tenko says. You almost burst out laughing. She puffs out her chest like she's proud of her assessment.

"I feel like Shuichi-kun would have figured it out if that was the case. He's probably met the last Ultimate Detective, so wouldn't he just be able to tell based on what I look and act like? Besides, what would my talent be if that was the case?" You ask and Tenko smiles brightly. You have a feeling she's going to keep running with this idea. Your observational skills have her entirely convinced that you're at least somehow related to the last Ultimate Detective. She's even gone as far as to make up stories about how you're related to Shuichi himself.

Bastard or long lost child seem to be her favorite scenarios, long lost child being her all-time favorite. She has this fantasy stuck in her head that once this game is over you'll reunite with your lost parents, become a detective, and then become Shuichi's equal, convincing him to better
himself as well. You have deeply entrenched doubts.

You can't really put it into words, but something feels wrong whenever she tells the story. It's always only one particular part, but you can't figure out which part it is that makes you feel so weird. Your head feels fuzzy and you try to force yourself to focus on Tenko's words.

"Obviously with a backstory like that you'd be the Ultimate Impersonator. Or Copycat! Able to learn any skill and pretend to be anything," Tenko sounds proud of herself as more bubbles of laughter escape your body. "Ooooh! Or what about some kind of secret agent and you had to learn those skills so you could better go undercover," she says with a sagely nod. You're almost amused by the fact this isn't the most outlandish idea she's come up with.

"Okay, mercy," you breathe out between your giggles. You turn your attention back to your friends for a couple of moments as you and Tenko fall into a comfortable silence. Maki and Kaede are still chatting away in an amicable fashion. Those two seem to get along well enough, you're glad. Kaito and Shuichi still have you a bit worried though.

Shuichi keeps his head down as much as he can manage. He's hiding behind his hat despite how many times Tenko has yelled at him to take it off while they're sparring. He doesn't even seem like he wants to get too close to Kaito. You think you can see shame in his eyes, but it's hard to tell past the brim of his hat.

Kaito, on the other hand, is easier to read, and no less upset over the situation. His eyes are narrowed in a look of vexation like he's not entirely sure what to do about the problem standing in front of him. He doesn't know how to address Shuichi or the real issue here, so instead, he just stays quiet, stuck somewhere between angry and exasperated. Watching them makes you feel like the air is thick with tension. You want the two to kiss and make up already.

All of this is made all the worse by the dynamic that the pair share. You were fairly certain that much like Kaede, Kaito had a thing for Shuichi. Then again, you couldn't be quite certain considering how much the Gamemaster have been yanking all of you around like puppets on strings. If Kaito did have a thing for Shuichi, it's very likely that he's struggling right now. You frown as you watch the pair, trying to come up with remedies to the situation. You aren't sure if there's anything you can do besides be there to support the two and yell at them when they won't own up to their own feelings.

You don't think you can watch this any longer. Tenko made you feel better. Maybe if you leave them alone with Tenko long enough she'll be able to do something about the situation. Something... Sighing you stand up and stretch. "Everyone is starting to look pretty tired! I'm going to make a snack and water run," you tell her. Tenko's water bottle supply has already been practically destroyed by the easily winded Fitness Club.

It's a bit ironic how terribly out of shape 3 out of the 5 members are. You and Maki can hold your own perfectly fine. Kaede's lack of stamina is to be expected given that she's a pianist. Shuichi is obviously the kind of detective who scans the crime scene and quietly tells the cops what to do, not the kind of detective who books it down the god damn street and tackles a man twice his size to the ground himself. Then there's Kaito. Kaito who you worry is going to pass out with how often he drops out of practice early, already wheezing like he's going to fall over.

You think Kaito's sick, but you don't know with what and you don't have any proof yet so you can't really corner him and demand answers. The most you can do for right now is hope it's some cold and keep an eye on him. If it keeps getting worse than you'll bully the answers out of him one way or another. This is a killing game, you'll be damned if you're pathetic enough to let one of your classmates die to a disease.
Tenko just nods quietly in your decision, her eyes narrowing when Shuichi gives a small yelp. "Do you need any help?" She asks out of courtesy, but all of her attention is sharply focused on the sparing pair. You shake your head and Tenko vaguely acknowledges your answer, gaze narrowing.

As you leave the dojo you can hear Tenko start shouting behind you. "Momota-kun, that's an illegal move!" The fighter is on her feet in an instant, you can hear her bolting towards the pair. There's some complaining followed by a very loud thump and very vicious coughing. You wince, deciding that you'll have to have a little talk with Tenko later regarding how she manhandles her students, yourself included. Kaede's laughter suddenly fills the room and the last thing you hear before you shut the door behind you is Maki muttering "you idiot" just loud enough to be heard.

You love these idiots and you would absolutely die for them.

Your graceless retreat allows you to relax a little, the air outside feeling a lot less charged than the air inside the dojo. You can only hope that Tenko stepping in means that she'll help to straighten things out, but nothing Tenko ever does is straight so you don't hold your breath.

You start walking towards the school, intending to actually keep your promise and bring back snacks. Something in the back of your head starts to jab at your senses though, and you're drawn to take a quick walk the long way around. The air feels clean and cool in your lungs, the sun is warm, the grass smells sweet. Despite that, there's something sticky and gross in the back of your thoughts. A little inkling of worry.

What you do can only really be described as a perimeter sweep, one that's executed with an almost militant effectivity. You walk the outside of the school, following the border of the cage while your eyes dart across everything around you. Everything seems entirely normal but the feeling doesn't ease up, in fact, you think it almost seems to get worse. You walk quickly so you can scan the entire school. Your speed eventually brings you in a full circle and you head for the entrance of the school.

Maybe it's on the inside? Or, maybe you're just being ridiculous.

As you're about to give up and try to ignore the feeling, you notice an interesting sight just outside the school door. Gonta and Kokichi are standing there, Kokichi with a can of spray paint in hand and Gonta looking thoroughly distressed. Where did Kokichi even get spray paint? You have the feeling the Gonta is trying to convince Kokichi not to do something, that something likely being tagging the school. It seems like a distinctly Kokichi action to try and attempt, but you worry that tagging the school would count of vandalism.

Wait. No. That doesn't seem like a Kokichi action, you quickly correct yourself. Tagging the school is fairly stupid. Kokichi is a dick sometimes, but he isn't stupid. The off feeling in the pit of your stomach suddenly makes more sense now and the small puddle of worry starts to churn into a sea. You decide that it's your job to intervene.

Gonta seems to have the same worry and is trying his damndest to convince Kokichi this is a terrible idea. Despite the failure of his attempt, you truly salute him.

"Hey you two, what exactly is going on?" You ask as you approach the pair. They both turn their attention towards you, Gonta wearing an expression of relief and Kokichi's grin instantly becomes devilish. His eyes seem glazed over in a very odd fashion that sends a chill down your spine.

"____-chan! Gonta won't let me do beautiful art, the big dummy. He's getting in the way. It's sooooo barbaric, totally not gentleman-like at all!" Kokichi fake pouts and Gonta flinches, looking
torn between letting Kokichi paint the school in whatever colors he pleases and trying to defend the school against Kokichi's assault.

"Ouma-kun, painting school without permission very ungentlemanly," Gonta tries desperately to explain to Kokichi, but Kokichi is already fully aware of this fact. He just glances towards you with an annoyed expression. Gonta looks more and more distressed by the second. He also turns towards you, his expression pleading.

You sigh, shaking your head and stepping a little closer towards the pair. "Kokichi-kun, tagging the school could get you in serious trouble. You do remember Monokuma's rules, right? If you break one of the rules, then he's going to send the Exisals after you and then no one is going to be able to protect you. Gonta-kun is trying to protect you," you say and Gonta nods vehemently beside you, his pleading expression turning to Kokichi while the both of you silently beg him to stop.

Kokichi ponders this for a moment. Truly, actually ponders this, eyes flitting in all directions while he thinks. It's almost like he's trying to weigh the odds. His eyes are unfocused though, they aren't clear and calculating like usual. They're deeply cloudy. Finally, his smirk returns. "Monokuma doesn't have any rule against spray paint," he says simply, turning towards the wall. Both you and Gonta jump at him, intent to yank the spray can from his hands if he won't listen to reason. Unfortunately, the two of you are just a little too slow.

The moment the smallest amount of paint hits the wall of the school a siren starts to go off from who knows where. Kokichi drops the can, expression turning to one of panic. Those clouds are gone in an instant, replaced by confusion and then quickly followed by panic. You cover your ears and Gonta bristles in a manner distinctly similar to a cat, his hair fluffing up to make him appear twice his size while every muscle in his body tenses. The siren stops a moment later, but you know this is far from over

Monokuma appears immediately, as soon as siren has stopped blaring. "Vandalism constitutes as damages to school property!" He says in a tone that borders on joyful. He's still not using the voice that you're comfortable with. It's high pitched and you hate it and it's dripping with joy as Monokuma assess Kokichi with vicious eyes.

The Gamemasters probably see Kokichi as a threat just like they do you. Assuming this to be the truth, that means they've also probably been looking for ways to get rid of him just as much as they have with you. You have no doubt Monokuma would jump on this opportunity to try and get rid of the annoyance, and you aren't even sure what to do in order to get him out of it.

Your heart stutters a couple of times, skipping over beats as your thoughts race and are replaced with a wild sense of fear. You desperately search mentally for ways in order to protect your friend, to keep him from getting executed over a school rule, but you can't come up with any kind of answers. Gonta who stands at your side looks like he's ready to try and fight Monokuma for Kokichi's life, but you doubt that he'd get far. No, the only way you're going to be able to save Kokichi is to try and use reason. Logic. Fuck.

"Fucking finally! We've been waiting for yous to break a rule so we could take these for a spin again," Monosuke cheers. Kokichi absolutely goes pale at that moment. His expression speaks of actual fear and your chest gives a painful twist. He honestly didn't think that Monokuma was going to try and kill him for this, if those actions were even entirely his own. If you're being honest, you didn't think Monokuma would either. This is all the Gamemaster's doing. You're once again reminded of the real(?) Monokuma's distaste for this game and its scripting.

This, this was a scripted event, and you aren't sure how you're going to throw it off the tracks.
"Wait, wait, wait!" You call, luckily the kubs don't attack Kokichi immediately. The three remaining kubs look at you curiously before turning to Monokuma. He crosses his arms but doesn't give the order to attack, allowing you a chance to speak. "There was never any specification into what regards as 'damages' to school property properly stated in the rules. This, therefore, classifies as an error on your own ability to clearly define the rules of the game. Kokichi-kun tried to tag the building, spray paint isn't damaging in any way, it's just kind of ugly. Therefore since you never stated any kind of rules regarding vandalism of this kind, he should be let off with a warning and the rules should be changed in order to be more clear!"

Monokuma looks at you for a long second and you wonder if you're actually going to manage to get away with such a weak excuse. In an actual court, vandalism holds up a type of 'damage' but you aren't going to mention that now. He seems to be thinking it over in his head for a long time. Finally, you feel your heart drop when his expression splits into a giant grin. "Be that as it may, you and Gonta were able to understand the fact this would be a violation of the rules. You even warned him. Therefore, the rules are clear enough and Kokichi was purposefully negligent. Monotaro, if you would."

There's no fanfare or warning, no finishing lines shouted. The exisal piloted by Monotaro just sprints forward. Cold, mechanical, and careless. Your blood freezes as you realize that once again the number of living friends that you have is going to drop. There won't be a trial, so you'll only lose one, but still, you're losing another person to your inability to do better in this damned game. Worst of all, it's one of the people you've admittedly become truly fond of. One of the few that you actually trust in helping you defeat this game.

There's a spray of red as the exisal rends flesh, a scream shooting out into the air. Your head feels heavy and dizzy and you want to wretch. You also want to punt Monokuma off a 50 story building. You look over to see the remains of your friend...

Only to find Kokichi entirely unharmed.

Anger glints in Gonta's eyes, his jaw tightly gritted as he stares down Monotaro. An outright feral growl rumbles from the giant's chest. The exisal takes a step or two back, and Monokuma actually seems surprised by this turn of events. Not necessarily upset, but a little taken aback. Gonta continues to stand in front of Kokichi like a human shield, crimson staining his suit as he grimaces. The scarlet liquid drips to the ground too quickly, but Gonta somehow manages to stand.

"Gonta no let you hurt Ouma-kun!" The giant bellows in a powerful voice. His grimace turns into a grin. "Ouma-kun friend!" His voice becomes a low pitched growl, his stance is animalistic and threatening. You think you might even be able to taste the fear rolling off the kubs. That's nothing on the fear that claims you though, your heart slamming itself against your rib cage. You lack a response, your thoughts pulling a blank as you watch Gonta slowly bleed out and yet somehow remain on his feet.

Despite the awe-inspiring display of courage happening before him, Monokuma has to gal to look bored. He fakes a yawn and if he possessed the ability he would have rolled his eyes. "What a shame. Okay kids, call off the assault. We can only afford to lose one at a time."

You're utterly shocked, your jaw falling agape. "Gonta-kun didn't break any rules, aren't you going to help him?" You say as you watch the two-toned bear. It silently regards you for a long time while Gonta wobbles and finally falls to the ground. Out of the corner of your eye, you see Kokichi flinch. You store away the small detail that the boy is crying, but you have more important things to focus on.

Monokuma shakes his head and sighs like he's about to lecture a child. "Of course not. You see,
this kind of thing has happened before in older games. People like to get in the way of one
another's punishment. I used to heal them up and send them back to the group, but the thing about
that is, the person who broke the rule doesn't get a punishment now! So, in recent games, I've
implemented the replacement clause. If you jump in the way of the punishment, you become the
proxy, the replacement. Gonta took Kokichi's punishment, which means Gonta gets to die for
Kokichi," Monokuma's red eye glints dangerously.

You stare in disbelief, numb for a short second. After you recover your mind starts screeching at
you. You manage to whisper out one word over the din of thoughts. "Stretcher."

"Excuse me?" Monokuma says with a tilt of his head. You aren't sure if he didn't catch the word or
is acting incredulous. You do, however, note a small hint of joy in the words. His tone drops a little
becoming more familiar. Excitement is even present in his tone. It doesn't help to ease the
mounting anger that forces itself into your voice the next time to speak.

You turn on the Monokubs with venom. "One of you bring me a fucking stretcher or the next time
you leave those damn exisals I'm going to methodically dismantle you!" Your composure is gone
and you bellow at them, the ferocity of your voice actually rivaling Gonta's from moments ago.
No. You're not losing someone else, not today. Not-to-fucking-day. Your lessons with Tenko have
struck a chord, and you're done playing the role you're supposed to. "Now," the word comes out as
a demanding whisper and the exisal shivers.

"Y-you can't, it's against the rules," Monotaro says hesitantly. He doesn't sound like he believes
himself and you actually smirk, expression dangerous. You're this close to going off the deep end
and tearing this entire school apart, they better listen to you. They better be scared of you.

After all, you've finally figured out what your talent is.

Haven't you?

"Violence against the headmaster is prohibited by the rules. No one ever said anything about you
obnoxious little shit. In fact, if I got rid of you all Monokuma might even thank me! Reward me,
even! Now do you want to join your other two siblings, or are you going to bring me a stretcher,"
you say? Monotaro moves so fast you barely have time to blink before he's brought the stretcher.
It's go time, the moment you have the stretcher you jump to action, nearly bumping into a frozen
stiff Kokichi who has yet to recover.

You place your arms under Gonta's armpits and attempt to lift the upper half of his form.
Unfortunately for all your strength, you can't lift Gonta on your own. You can't waste the time to
go get Tenko or Maki either, so you abuse the one resource you do have accessible to you. "Lift!"
You bark at the kubs and Monosuke lifts Gonta's lower half so gently he could be handling a
kitten. The two of you manage to get Gonta on the stretcher.

You waste no time once the gentle giant is strapped down. You start pushing the thing fast enough
to run over anyone who gets in the way, rounding corners as gently as you can. You fling yourself
towards the nurse's office so fast you don't think the exisals could even keep up with you if they
tried. The only thing able to follow your exit is Monokuma's laughter.

You slam the door open when you get to the room and push Gonta next to the surgery table. It's a
lot easier sliding his body onto the table than it was trying to get him onto the stretcher, and you're
able to move him without too much issue. Once he's safely on the table you discard your blazer on
the desk and roll up the sleeves of your shirt. You remove your gloves, wash your hands, and
replaces them with surgical gloves as well as a mask. As a final thought, you pull the ribbon out of
your hair and bundle up all of your unruly locks into a high ponytail so it stays out of your face a
Once you've prepared yourself you gather any nearby supplies that can help and start to assess the damage. The wound is large, stretching from Gonta's right shoulder all the way down to just above his left hip. As far as you can tell though, you're lucky. The wound is large and bleeding profusely, but it's also shallow enough that it didn't hit anything too vital. All his vital organs are entirely undamaged. That makes your job a lot easier.

If his lungs got punctured you might be able to help, but there's little you could have done for a heart injury. The stomach would have been a pain to patch up since it would have started leaking stomach acid everywhere. You aren't even sure you have the proper materials to try and handle injuries that serious. This will mostly be a matter of stitching him back up and trying to mitigate blood loss. The problem is you have to work fast which makes working alone and trying to grab everything yourself a problem.

Once again, your luck pulls through.

Kokichi comes to the door panting, looking at you with a confused and mystified expression. He's shivering. You can tell that the Kokichi who's been a part of this game up until now has officially checked out. You aren't entirely sure who this Kokichi is, and you're not sure if you're happier having him around, but you put him to work immediately.

"If you're going to stand there and gawk then at least help me, grab a blood bag and set up a transfusion. He's lost way too much already and I'm not sure he'll hold on much longer if we don't set up a transfusion. In particular, grab the bags that have O marked in sharpie please, I trust them more than I trust anything else back there," you tell the smaller boy. He runs to the back of the room and heads for the cooler. He doesn't dare question your instructions.

There are no snappy remarks, no cunning, nothing. The transformation is similar in nature to the flicker you saw in Shuichi's eyes not too long ago, so you mentally connect the two occurrences and leave it at that for right now. When he returns there's only silence and the blood bag. You know he's not going to be able to do anything on his own so you snatch the bag away and set up the transfusion yourself, placing it into Gonta's arm. Luckily the surgery table is surrounded by most of what you need. "Scissors," you demand. Kokichi stalls for a moment before he realizes the demand is directed at him.

He grabs the scissors off of a nearby counter and hands them to you. You say a silent apology to the gentle giant and start getting into the suit. You need to get his shirt off of him so you can properly see the injury and deal with it. You also have to make sure that there's no clothing stuck in the wound, which could cause infection. You'll need to disinfect the wound as well just to be certain that nothing else can cause infection. Knowing Monokuma he probably smeared the kubs weaponry in some kind of nasty something.

Your one blessing is the fact that it's a clean cut. The slash could have been a lot more jagged, but the smooth stroke of the blade at least makes this a little easier.

Kokichi takes a step or two back once he's handed you the scissors. He's entirely out of his element, looking at you with wide eyes. You're almost a little shocked by his lack of composure, but again, the quieter part of your thoughts which has been noting all the little details about Kokichi reminds you that he hasn't been acting 'normal' since you first stumbled across him and Gonta. "How does this scare you but the corpses and the executions don't?"

"I'm not scared... that's just... a living person. You're sewing back together a living person," he says almost breathily. You almost laugh. So much for an evil supreme leader. Has this kid never had an
injury that required stitches? You add another detail to the pile for proving that everyone's talent is a bunch of bull. Any 'supreme leader' should at the very least know how to stitch themselves or an ally back up if necessary. Not to look at a slowly dying man with as much terror as a newborn kitten.

"He won't be living long if we don't do something. Look for something called Aprotinin, quickly, hydrogen peroxide too if you could," you say without batting an eye. Kokichi thankfully brings both of what you asked for quickly enough. You apply the hydrogen peroxide to clean the wound, glad that Gonta has already lost consciousness. It makes the process a little easier even if it is slightly unnerving. You'll need to give him so many pain killers later. The aprotinin also does its work, helping to slow the flow of blood while you stitch.

Stitching up a wound is similar and different from a piece of cloth, and yet only one you're comfortable and good at. It's a routine motion that you repeat a couple of times. Stabbing the flesh with the needle and drawing the string through. Of course, it's not really string. You can't just use random string to stitch up a person, but you get the idea well enough. You continue this motion, tugging it taught but not tugging it tight enough that the string snaps and you have to redo the stitching. Or worse, tug so roughly it rips through the skin.

Your stitch work is evenly spaced apart, and tight enough to pull the wound together nicely. After you closed off the wound you take a moment to admire and check over your work before applying an ointment you made Kokichi go find you. It was one of the harder things to find so luckily it took most of his attention while you did the delicate work. After applying the ointment you grab a roll of bandages.

"Help me sit him up, we need to bandage him. The pressure will help decrease bleeding and the bandage will also keep the wound itself from getting infected," you say. There are other things to worry about but you think things will be okay for now. Kokichi does very little to help you given his lack of physical strength, but you're able to weave a bandage around the section of Gonta's body where the wound exists. Looking at the drained blood bag you go to the back to grab another. You know that Gonta's is type A, but you don't necessarily trust the stuff Monokuma has back here. In addition, allergic reactions and the like are always a possibility and the bag could be label wrong. That's why you told Kokichi to specifically grab the blood bag you did. Luckily, you're a type O, meaning there was no harm in occasionally drawing your own blood to be set aside in case of emergency. Now is kind of emergency. You're very grateful for the fact you're a universal donor.

Bringing back another bag you hook it up to the now empty transfusion and start setting up a different kind of transfusion. A cocktail of different drugs to try and help minimize the damage. You don't think he lost enough blood for oxygen deprivation and potential brain damage to kick in, but you're taking every precaution.

There's a heart and oxygen level monitor in the back that you quickly set up. It's normal for what his situation is, but there's no way you're leaving the larger man alone. You turn back to Kokichi who's finally recovering from what you can only imagine is shell shock at the situation. He's starting to recover and turn back to 'your' Kokichi, but it's obvious this whole event shook something else loose. You just aren't sure what yet. "Gather everyone up and tell them what happened. I'm going to keep an eye on Gonta-kun and set up a couple of other safety precautions to make sure nothing goes wrong," you say and Kokichi thankfully just nods and leaves.

Turning back to Gonta you sigh. You hope that one of your closer friends stops by soon. You're going to need books, less you succumb to boredom while you watch the loveable oaf. Not to
mention a fresh, not blood stained, set of clothes.

Chapter End Notes

To be completely honest I'm not entirely content with how this chapter turned out. Unfortunately, that is in part due to the fact my cat (recently spayed) was acting a bit off today so I spent the whole day with her. I didn't want this chapter to be late since I haven't missed an upload yet, so if it doesn't quite seem up to snuff then my deepest apologies.
Bound

Your hands still feel tacky with blood and your pulse is racing anxiously. There's no real way to calm yourself down at this point, you just have to wait out the thrumming in your veins and the churning in your stomach. The terrible byproduct of trying to save a life you suppose, but well worth it. Tragedy, unfortunately, is a lonesome creature and hates to strike alone. Of course, of course, this day wouldn't be over! Of course, there would be more! Monokuma would make sure of that.

There's only one response to this affront you can possibly think of.

You carry yourself with a vengeance, rage sitting where the anxiety once sat. You hold yourself like an unruly god at that moment, intent to strike down Monokuma regardless of risks to your own well being. You're angry and you're ready to bear your fangs.

You don't care if it's lethal, you're outright to the point of contemplating single combat with an Exisal to prove a point. If you contracted Miu to build the weapons you're pretty sure you could win.

But why are you so angry? Well...

You'd just spent the last three or so hours making sure that Gonta was stable. You have him hooked up to various machines which monitor his blood pressure, the oxygen level in said blood, and various other little details and you've got a nifty little remote that beeps at you if he starts dropping into a dangerous level. This machine should allow you to leave Gonta alone for small amounts of time, but you don't dare to leave him alone for too long. Anything could go wrong at any moment, so you have to be on your toes.

Kokichi came back a little into the first hour to mention that he's told everyone about what happened. Probably sans a couple of details. Or maybe he admitted that Gonta's near-death experience was his fault. It's hard to tell given Kokichi. He'd returned to his old self a little but if you weren't mistaken he seemed even more aggressive and jokester like. Again, not too terribly shocked by that. Lies and jokes are Kokichi's coping mechanism. If he blames himself about Gonta, he'd try to hide behind them.

Perhaps that's why he harried you for a couple of minutes when he reported in. No one else came to visit you. You don't put your blazer back on since you don't want to mess it up, but you do try to clean yourself up a little once you've done your best to make sure Gonta is stable.

You wash off your blood splattered arms in the sink and put your normal gloves back on after disposing of the surgical gear. You don't even make an attempt at trying to clean up your shirt. It's not worth the effort and as long as no one tries to accuse you of murder you can't find it in yourself to care. You're tired and your anger finally gave way to fatigue when you settled down and contemplate falling asleep at your desk. Or at least it was going to!

That was the moment that Monokuma decides he isn't done fucking with you yet. No, no, a near-death experience for one of your friends isn't nearly enough yet! He really needs to make sure you and your classmates suffer and is he really sure yet? "Every able-bodied student please report to the gym!" The voice crowed into the speakers and the use of the word able-bodied really ticks you off something fierce. You wait for a little before you leave the nurse's office, making sure that Gonta is completely okay and double checking the working status of your remote before you do.
That is what leads you to walking through the halls of the school like you're on your way to battle. Your mothers were war, cunning, and truth, and while your father might have been mercy he did not hold sway over the way that they taught you. There will be no mercy for Monokuma. You're no doubt going to be the last person to enter the gym which will only make your entrance all the grander. You almost smirk at the thought, perhaps you'll rally your classmates into a war charge! Of course, attacking Monokuma would be suicide and you've had enough of death for one day so you leave those thoughts as nothing more than amusing jokes that sate your hatred for the time being.

You slam the door to the room open without a trace of hesitation, your clothes still crusted with dried blood. Your classmates squawk and scramble from your path as you weave through them, intent to stand in front of them all. Monokuma watches you with an even expression that's too hard for you to read.

Despite their initial reactions the class quickly moves to stand behind you, raising their heads and looking defiant. They follow your lead without question. You're the leader now, aren't you? Even Shuichi and Kaede are allowed entrance into the group as you all stand together, misdeeds forgiven for the sake of showing Monokuma how strong your collective is, forgiven in the face of absolute hatred against a common foe. It won't last long, but the sense of solidarity at least makes facing murderbear mcmurderson a little easier.

There's a long silence as Monokuma just stares down your group, watching you silently. The kubs are present but they don't speak a word. They're out of the exisals now. Monodam looks unphased but the other two looks genuinely scared as they look at you.

"Is he still alive?" The bear finally asks. He tries to keep his voice flippant and careless, but you can detect the curiosity. It's not quite the voice you're comfortable with, but it's not the high pitched almost mickey mouse like tone either. It's halfway stuck between them and you're not sure if that worries you less or more. You can't be scared of him though, you have to make him scared of you. No more holding back, after all.

"And going strong," you respond back in the strongest voice you've summoned this entire game, a vicious grin forming on your features as your silent dare rings around the room. You hold yourself like the equal to this bear, your determination reinvigorated and your motivations set ablaze. This is perhaps the strongest you've ever felt this whole game. Today you open a box, a box full of every evil in the world. Not to unleash them on the world, but so that one by one you can slay those evils with your own two hands using the hope that's never dared to leave.

Do not go gently into the good night. The words of poetry swing around your skull like nursery rhymes and lullabies, spoken in a voice you can't remember fully but one that fills you with flame and confidence none the less. Considering the wispish memories you've been finding in the corners of your skull recently, you have never gone gently and you don't plan to start.

Monokuma moves on quickly enough, dismissing your assessment of the situation. "Now that everyone who can be is here," the bear says with a dangerous smirk. Suddenly you feel something cold clamp around your wrist. "I believe it might be time for the new motive," the creature tells you with sadistic glee. The remaining Monokubs retreat to the front of the room to stand with their father while everyone inspects what's been put onto their wrist. Well. Almost everyone.

"As you can see, as a part of this next new motive most of you idiots have been chained together. Now, this is a little complex, so please, try to follow along carefully. There's a special dynamic attached to these chains. One person in each partnership will 1000% no debate either absolutely hate or romantically love the person they're attached to! None of you know what kind of
partnership you have, though for some it might be obvious. Just remember. Either you're the one who's madly in love or totally spiteful towards the person you're chained to, or the other person feels one of these two ways about you. Heck, in some cases it might be mutual!" The bear tries to explain slowly as to make sure everyone understands. So either the person you get chained to feels strongly about you or you feel strongly about them, regardless of love or hate.

"When does everyone get the handcuffs off?" Keebo voices the concerns of the group, though you make the distinct note he remains unchained to anyone. The same can be said of Himiko who's looking around a little confused. They, however, are the only two if you don't count the incapacitated Gonta.

"Yeah, you're lucky robot boy. You don't have anyone who legitimately hates or romantically adore you. The little mage just got off easy because I didn't want a group of three wandering around. That would get on even my nerves. As for when you get unchained, you don't! Not until a murder occurs anyway!" You hear a rush of murmurs that sound more distressed than anything, the clink of chains sounding around the room while people tug on each other. "Don't worry though, I realize that doing normal people things can be kind of tough if you're chained together all the time so there's one rule attached to it."

You find yourself not wanting to take your attention off Monokuma. The metal surrounding your right wrist feels dangerously cold. You don't want to know. You don't want to know who you're chained to. You don't want to know why you're chained to them. You don't want this chain to be attached to you anymore because you have a sinking feeling you already know who you're chained to. You want the chain taken off immediately and a little voice in the back of your mind reminds you that you can pick locks, you should pick this lock. You settle down your rampant thoughts and keep your attention on Monokuma.

Monokuma's grin grows even wider. "Don't worry though! You each get one hour a day where you can be unchained from the other person. This lets you get showered, change clothes, take care of all your baser needs that being chained to another human 24/7 really doesn't let you do unless you're pretty damn close," the bear says. "Of course, there is a catch. There will be sheets of paper on the wall outside the gym for everyone to see! Each of you will write a specific time next to your name. That will be the start of your hour! Each day the kubs will come, unchain you, and then at the end of the hour, you'll be reunited with the love of your life or your worst nightmare! Or... just another person depending on what end of the dynamic you're on," Monokuma says.

"That makes committing a murder harder since if you try to do it while you're unchained from the other person it's obvious you don't have an alibi," Shuichi comments out loud. You're glad that the boy seems to be readjusting over time and starting to act more like the Shuichi you knew prior to Korekiyo's murder. He's hesitant and a little shakey, but you can see the cogs turning in his head while he throws himself back at the task of being a detective. This wins him a little favor with the group. It's going to take a lot of effort, but the progress is visible.

"Give the boy a prize! Someone gets it!" Monokuma cheers as he throws a fake mini party for the detective. "Anyway, that's all I wanted to say. If things don't pan out, have no fear, I'll be back with another motive soon enough! After all, this one isn't really as much of a motive as it is drama for the romantic subplots!" Monokuma says almost proudly. He disappears without much warning and the Monokubs dart after him, seemingly being entirely unwilling to sit in the same room as all of you.

Monotaro and Monosuke do pause for a half a second to look at you. Their anxiety is palpable. They're probably next. This worries you though. The Monokubs as a whole have been getting quieter and less important seeming over time. Not good. Nothing about this is good, but they're
especially not good. If you know one thing about dramatic timing, the fact they slowly been growing less important isn't good. You just hope it's something you can deal with.

You take your mind off the kubs by focusing on the mess quickly devolving around you. "I didn't expect him to so boldly admit to such a thing," you mutter under your breath as your eyes dart all over the room. You look at everyone else first before you even so much as acknowledge the chain on your own wrist. You... have a feeling, but it's a lot to unpack and you'd rather throw the whole suitcase out the window.

"Romantic subplot? Huh?" Maki's words come out as a growl as she glares down the boy she's chained to. The murderous rage coming off of her in outright waves crashes against you as you try to figure out some way to make sure this one pairing doesn't terribly mangle each other by tomorrow morning. Right now, they seem to be the most at risk to each other. Both are hopefully smart enough to realize killing each other is a bad idea no matter how badly Maki really wants to kill the brat her wist is bound to, right?

"Aaaah, this is going to make everything so boring. No way I can do my normal thing with you hanging around the whole time," Kokichi says with a large smile as he tugs on the chain that's connecting the two. It's almost painfully obvious just where the pair sits in regards to the motive. You can taste Maki's hatred and she's on the other half of the room...

Not only that, but you can see Kokichi's frustration. You aren't sure what he does in his free time. Often he'll pop up out of nowhere and decide to annoy you for the kicks, not that you really mind. Anything else he does is typically a mystery. You have a feeling that his comment about not being able to do what he usually does is a very real concern of his right now. In addition, the two seem to have the shortest chain out of everyone in the entire room.

"I really hope Monokuma isn't seriously hoping for any romantic subplots. I don't date ugly. Nishishi. That's a lie, considering I'd date ____-chan! Or, maybe that's the lie."

They'll kill themselves out of annoyance if they don't kill each other first...

Kaito and Shuichi have both gone silent, their eyes meeting as they tug on their chains and realize they're connected. Neither one talks, they just stand there in icy silence as both try to decipher the situation they're going to be facing within the next couple hours. It's uncertain who holds the emotions in this situation. If it's Shuichi then it's obviously not hatred. Kaito, however... after everything that's happened you're not entirely sure about the emotions of the man. Especially not considering the lack of time you've spent with him.

You'd never go as far as to say Kaito hates Shuichi, but the luminary has seemed deeply frustrated within these last couple of days, the last trial and everything that happened after it has only added to that frustration. Kaito turns away first, seemingly unable to puzzle out his own feelings. Perhaps Monokuma is hedging a bet on the fact it could go either way and chaining Shuichi together with Kaede would have left more people unchained than just Keebo and Himiko. Speaking of the blonde.

Kaede not only looks distressed by the boys being chained together but she herself is chained to Tsumugi who honestly looks a little confused. Correction, they both look confused. They don't know why they're chained together, but for some reason they are. It makes no sense for Monokuma to try and imply the two have a thing for each other, they obviously don't. Their interactions up to this point wouldn't even begin to imply that. But why would they hate each other? This worries you slightly.

Tsumugi is still your best bet in regards to who the mastermind might be. That being said, you
can't read Tsumugi very well. Her actions are too chaotic, hidden under a layer of faux boring that's *plainly* obvious if you listen to her talk for more than five minutes. You can't decipher her motives or emotions easily, which means she could quite vehemently hate Kaede or be madly in love with the other woman. This worries you. Fortunately, if Tsumugi is the mastermind, you doubt she'd get herself killed by trying to kill Kaede.

If anything it provides a unique opportunity. If you dropped a hint to Kaede then the blonde would quite happily keep an eye on Tsumugi for you, at least you think she would. Despite your attempt to scold them they both seem to still be on good terms with you. Drop a hint to the both of them and maybe you can get them watching Tsumugi like a hawk. That's dangerous in its own right though, if Tsumugi really is the mastermind there's no telling how she'll react.

Begrudgingly you scratch the idea from the list. At least these two don't worry you.

What does worry you, probably the most out of everyone, is the final pair you take note of. Tenko and Angie. They stand in absolute silence much like Kaito and Shuichi, but this seems more like a battle of wits. Each one is trying to decipher why they're chained together. Why isn't the person chained to them instead chained to Himiko? Certainly, it would make for a better pair and Himiko simply must like one of them by now! But no, the religious girl and the aikido master find themselves bound at the wrist and neither is sure how to approach it.

Neither would say they hate the other. You've seen the way Angie looks at Tenko sometimes, you'd say outright it's probably the opposite. However, something you've noticed about both girls is the fact they're kind of cynics when it comes to love. So, as expected, their minds seem to want to jump to hatred being the reason they're chained together. This then leads to each one looking at the other very carefully and trying to decide why the other hates them. You're willing to bet Angie's emotions for Tenko are the reason they're chained together.

You're reminded of the fact Monokuma mentioned Himiko being unchained because a group of three would annoy him, this has to be what he was referring to. At least these two idiots seem to have the longest chain. They aren't lethal to one another but they are a dangerous, chaotic kind of combination that could lead to any number of outcomes, a good number of which are relatively unpleasant. You pray to Hope Jesus that Himiko mediates this mess.

With that, you've inspected every pairing... except for your own.

This leads you to your final revelation. You look at the binding on your own wrist, feeling ice drop into your stomach. You already know the answer by process of elimination, but as you follow the length of chain you don't want to believe it. Eventually, you're forced to look up and meet a pair of icy blue eyes which seem to mirror your distress. Miu and you look at each other in silence for a long time, both of you seemingly trying to puzzle out what's going on here.

Perhaps you're more of a cynic than Tenko and Angie combined.

You force yourself to look away, turning your attention to the group as a whole. "Do you think he might be bluffing?" You ask, trying to keep your voice from showing your nerves. You're desperate to find any way out of this situation. Any way to make it feel less odd. Any way to stop the rolling sensation in your stomach. This is a terribly awkward encounter just waiting to happen and after the whole Gonta incident, you aren't sure you have the strength of will to face it. But face it you must.

"I mean, maybe? Some of these pairs seem pretty weird, right guys?" Kaede awkwardly says as she tries to ease the situation. Yes. Weird. "I mean, why chain together ____-san and Iruma-san together, they're obviously friends..." the blonde trails off as she glances towards the two of you.
Her obvious first assumption is that one of you hates the other. It's easier to assume that someone hates another person than it is to guess that they love them, or so it seems.

Kaede, however, is blissfully oblivious to the second implication of you two not hating each other. You think you see Tenko visibly flinch, sympathy in your gaze, but you could just be imagining it. Your attention is flicking around wildly just so it will stay anywhere except for on Miu. Unfortunately, Kaede's words just help to prove the fact that no, Monokuma probably isn't bluffing and you don't have the tact to hide behind the lie that he is. Well, you do, but you're a touch too frazzled to keep up the charming facade of a liar. It takes a lot of energy, especially if you want to try and pull one over on Kokichi of all people.

"Are you kidding me? They're the most obvious pair! The ugly cow is obviously head over heels," Kokichi says as he glances towards Miu. His tone is more aggressive than the situation calls for and a spike of irritation runs through you. In the corner of your vision, you see the strawberry blonde flinch at his words. You can see a meek reply, an attempt to defend herself, resting on her lips. But your own voice cuts the air like a knife.

"Kokichi, I'm going to need you to shut up. Immediately," your eyes narrow as they look towards the smaller boy. He blinks a couple of times and looks at you with confusion. Your usual tolerance is completely void from your voice and the rest of the class looks at you with something akin to shock. Even you don't typically drop into a tone as harsh as you use now. It draws utter silence from the room. "After what happened to Gonta, I can't stand your fucking voice right now. So, if you want to run around slinging insults, I swear to god I'm going to slap you, Capiche?"

The root of your agitation is Gonta, and you know you're just lashing out, but you feel angry and helpless and now you're suddenly chained up to Miu and it's all too much for you in too short a span of times. Three hours ago you were trying to close a wound longer than your forearm. You haven't gotten the chance to get changed yet, your nerves are strung taught, and you feel oddly possessive of Miu in the face of the boy who got Gonta stabbed earlier that day.

"Atua says he could let it slide," Angie says from her spot in the gym, voice quiet and smug. After the initial shock fades no one seems overly bothered by your aggressive tone in spite of the fact you immediately feel bothered by it. Regret begins to bubble under your skin and Angie's words make you visibly flinch, your teeth sinking into your tongue as you internally chastise yourself. You need to stop lashing out like that when you get stressed. This is the second time now, the first being when you lashed out at Miu much earlier in the game.

Kokichi seems to recoil, his eyes narrowing at you. You can't quite pick apart the individual pieces of his expression, but he's warry and perhaps a little hurt. But almost, somewhat regretful if you aren't imagining it. He's silent for a long moment, watching the shifting display of emotions in your own gaze. You see one more dramatic shift in his gaze before he summons a response. "And why do you think I should care?" His words are light and teasing but you can tell how measured they are. How reigned in they are. His words are dismissive and teasing, an attempt to be cruel without stomping on any of your exposed nerves. He doesn't want to pick a fight, he wants to put on a show, wants you to follow the lead he's setting. You end up relaxing slightly while he backs off and attacks you from a different direction. A direction that has thicker walls built up. You'll need to apologize later but for now, you help him with the grand finale.

"Oh just shut the fuck up you little gremlin," you outright snarl the word like the actress you are. You force as much of your frustration into your tone as possible, but the anger doesn't quite meet
your eyes. It's enough to trick all of your classmates sans Kokichi and possible Maki who quirks an eyebrow at you, possibly detecting something hollow in either your tone or your gaze. A smile quirks up at the corner of Kokichi's lips, his eyes far too gentle. It's a bit unnerving and it's hard to express why. You're used to Kokichi being rough and putting on a show. This feels too delicate, and that honestly scared you a little.

"Nishishi. You're such a cute little idiot ____-chan!" He coos and the class tenses up. He's an asshole. Gentle or not he's still an ass who manages to yank you around on strings. But you get it. You can tell that his intentions are good even if his actions are terrible. Together the two of you put on a show.

At the end of the day, you're not much different though. While Kokichi takes the role of the antagonist, you play the protagonist. At the end of the day, you have the same goal. Get out of this mess alive with as many other people as possible. Lie and trick as many of your friends as you need to in order to achieve this goal. The difference between the two of you is in the way you play your roles. It dawns on you the reason you're worried is that you're starting to see Kokichi break character. Which means it's only a matter of time before you do too, whatever that means.

For now though, even if you're starting to lose your touch you both still have your masks. Together you'll put on a fabulous performance.

You stand there just long enough to let the tension in the room get drawn out. The more the rest of the class focuses on the show, the less they focus on their own drama. This is the only way you can really think of to distract them. The only way to minimize damages. Feed the hungry masses of fans with a little good old fashioned drama. Yeah, that'll make Monokuma happy. After the long silence, drawn out longer than you're comfortable with, you turn on your heels and yank at the chain as you walk away.

Miu trials along behind you quietly, getting the non-verbal command loud and clear. You're grateful for that since you don't really know what you'd say and you don't trust your voice. You slam the gym door's closed behind you once you leave and allow yourself a sigh of relief once you're free from the gaze of the majority of your classmates. You aren't necessarily free from all prying eyes, but you're free enough that you let yourself relax slightly. You need to go to the nurse's office before you can truly relax though.

You take note of the sheets of paper taped to the wall with blank spaces next to them. The sign-up sheets for times, you assume. A pencil is also crudely tied to a string which is taped to said wall. As though to add insult to injury, Monokuma's list has every student's name on it. The ones who have died just got roughly scribbled out, but their names are still printed in bold, black ink and are visible enough to make you flinch.

You scribbled down 6 am next to your own name, knowing that you would absolutely end up awake that early in the morning. Miu, on the other hand, signs up for 5 pm which works well enough. Technically this means that each pair is going to get two hours, but you have a feeling Monokuma is going to do something to make it unbearable for the person who isn't on their hour.

You summon up all of your internal strength and turn towards Miu who won't even lift her gaze in order to meet your eyes. "Sorry about dragging you out of the gym like that. I was getting, well, a little frustrated," you laugh lightly but the sound is devoid of joy or comedy. It's a muted noise that rings out just a little too loudly.

Miu smiles weakly at you in return, her expression just as hollow. "It's fine, the little shit stain was starting to get on my nerves too," she says. She won't stop messing with her hair. You've come to realize that her restless hands are an indicator of her nerves, which means that she's just as unhappy
and nervous right now as you are. You decide that doesn't bode well.

There are really only two options in a situation like this. You aren't sure you like either.

The first is the most painful of the two but the least dangerous. That's to just ignore the fact that you're chained to Miu. She seems as though she's content to follow your lead if the way she's recoiled into herself is any indication. If you both just ignore it, neither of you have to address the fact that one of you might hate the other. Or... your thoughts trail off roughly and you decide you don't want to think about it right now. At the same time though, just ignoring it is going to be painful and there's no telling when the next murder might happen. In addition, this method of approach almost makes you want a murder, and that's something that makes you outright sick to your stomach.

The second option is the more dangerous of the two because it means sitting Miu down and trying to discuss this like logical adults. You are not logical adults. You yourself might be an adult but for all your maturity you are still 18 and you see every other person in this school as having the emotional maturity of a child at best. In addition, you aren't sure if Miu would survive the conversation considering you have no idea what the conversation itself would end up being like.

In the end, you know you're a direct kind of person. You hate secrets, or more so you hate when you don't know a secret, you love deciphering them more than anything. Tearing them apart like they're broken toys and figuring out how they tick. You build up elaborate lies and stories, form elegant tales, all for the sake of discovering more secrets that you can pick apart and weave into your stories to gather even more secrets. Letting Miu's emotions stay secret would just drive you insane.

You're a big girl, you're brave. You're mature enough to know that the reason you're chained together is probably because of your own emotions. Logically speaking she does not hate you. So, even if she doesn't like you, the two of you can move on and keep being friends even if you tell her because that's what adult human people do. They laugh it off if one person has some stupid little crush and then they keep being friends.

This isn't some cheesy fanfiction where miscommunication and second-hand embarrassment are used for the sake of comedy. You'll square up and communicate like a proper adult before you dance around the damn topic. The very thought of trying to dance around it almost gives you shivers. It feels like it would go against your very being.

All of that being said, that doesn't make the actual talking part any easier.

"Were you planning on going anywhere after the meeting? We should really..." You finally speak up only to awkwardly trail off, eyes flitting towards the gym door. You wonder what everyone is doing considering how long they've stayed in there. They could be having awkward conversations with hard to fill silences, or everyone could be trying to restrain Maki. You aren't even sure which seems more likely anymore.

Miu seems to hesitate for a moment, lips parting and closing twice before she finally speaks. "M-my lab." The chain rattles as her fingers work tirelessly through her hair. You're having a lot of trouble not getting distracted by her constant movement. After you've actually processed her words you nod a couple of times.

"Okay. We'll have to check on Gonta-kun every half hour or so, at least until I'm sure he's stable. I don't want to leave him alone for too long," you say as you think back to the behemoth in his damaged state. You hope he doesn't wake up alone in that terrible place. A nurse's office alone is never a fun spot to be. You do hope he wakes up soon though.
You start leading the way to Miu's lab, thoughts already racing. "Of course. Is he going to be okay?" Miu's expression shifts to one of concern and you're grateful for the distraction from the awkward silence. The chain still jangles ominously between the two of you as you walk. A promise of conversations to come. For now, you're able to focus on something you're familiar and comfortable with.

"I don't know yet, we'll have to wait and see. The wound isn't deep, but it's large which makes it dangerous. I stopped the bleeding, gave him a transfusion, and then drugged him out of his mind with the best and safest concoction I could actually make. Luckily I found some files in the back room with details on everyone's basic medical history. Allergies and stuff, so it should be safe. The problem now is just keeping an eye on him and making sure he doesn't go vegetable. If he does, I'm not sure I'll be able to take care of him with the equipment I have," you say, admitting a couple of things you probably wouldn't tell anyone else in the class.

The files were something you'd kept quiet about because of Kokichi. You didn't want to openly admit there was the chance you wouldn't be able to take care of Gonta if he went into a vegetative state or a coma also because of Kokichi.

Miu nods a couple of times before falling into silence. That's how the rest of the walk is spent. The atmosphere heavy for a plethora of reasons, the likes of which you really don't want to face. When you arrive at Miu's lab you've managed to get yourself stuck in a kind of silence that neither of you has the courage to break.

Miu almost flings the door open she enters so quickly, almost like she's taking refuge. Your wrist gets awkwardly yanked forward as she leaps for her inventions. You don't mention it and she doesn't seem to notice. Only once she has some of her tools in her hands do you see her shoulders relax from the tension they've been holding ever since the motive was announced. This is, after all, her safe space compared to everywhere else in the school. You wish you had a lab you could actually access. At this point, you aren't even sure if Monokuma's going to give you one.

You find a spot that looks comfortable enough to sit and you plop yourself down while Miu works. She only fiddles with small stuff right now. Despite being way more relaxed she still seems jittery. Her eyes keep darting towards you. Every time she starts to work on something she glances towards you once more and manages to accidentally catch your gaze, at which point she nearly jumps out of her skin and returns to her work.

Of course, all you can really do is sit and watch her since you neglected to grab a book or anything on your way to her lab. This exchange repeats a couple of times, the number of minutes between each glance slowly growing longer and longer.

You hate this situation. You're deeply uncomfortable and astoundingly bored. You frankly could watch Miu work for hours, but you don't really think she's working. She's trying to distract herself and calm herself down. The usual grace and vigor she has when she works is completely absent, and watching her just makes you feel scared. On top of that, you still haven't gotten to get changed so you're wearing a bloodied shirt and your blazer is still abandoned in the nurse's office. That, of course, leaves you feeling very bare.

"Hey ____-san," Miu is the first to break the silence as she catches your attention. "You're kinda smart right, so, why the hell did that bear chain the two of us together?" You completely freeze up, struggling to answer. Miu won't look at you and you're terrified. You decide that it's now or never really.

You could probably lie to Miu. Say that Monokuma was just yanking your chain and you two are obviously best friends. But that doesn't sit well in the pit of your stomach. It settles uncomfortably
like a chunk of unlit coal. You're used to feeling fire sitting in your stomach and ice in your veins. The lump just sits there awkwardly, existing but doing absolutely nothing and that agitates you even more than the way your stomach usually curls in on itself and starts to churn when you start to feel anxious.

You manage to calm yourself down a little, chastising your own cowardice. This isn't some no good romance novel where the plot goes nowhere and the characters just quietly dance around each other until the end of the story. You remind yourself of this fact while you mentally scold yourself. You are an adult who deals with adult problems in adult ways.

You're still absolutely terrified of her reaction, but you grab hold of your resolve. You choke down the desire to flee from the conversation and look Miu right in the eyes. Of course, that happens to be the moment your brain decides to overheat and short circuit, rendering you with no control over your response. It just kinda slips out however the still functioning autopilot half of your brain decides it should slip out.

"Because I have a crush on you."

You actually manage to say the words with some semblance of suave. Your voice doesn't shiver, which is an absolute blessing. You're also able to keep your posture relaxed instead of closing up and retreating from the statement. You feel better once it's actually out in the air. Apparently, your autopilot is powerful since you can feel yourself grinning, but it's more like an out of body experience since your ears of still ringing with the sound of your own pulse. While one of half of your brain is putting the charm to max the other is internally screaming while you wait for a response.

This is how you adult ladies and gentlemen.

Miu goes completely silent for a long moment almost like she's processing the information. Then she makes a low humming noise like a computer that's overheating or failing to process and that's when you actually start to worry that you've done something wrong. "Uh, Miu-san?" You say at the volume of a whisper. Then Miu breaks.

"You what!?!" She nearly busts your eardrums with how loud her shriek is. "Are you fucking kidding me? I've been freaking the fuck out because I was hell-bent on the idea that you secretly hated me this entire time and you what? Of course, that had me freaking the fuck out because I don't want you to hate me. If you hated me then you'd leave me just like everyone else and I don't think I could handle that because you're always so nice to me even when the rest of the class is full of assholes and it's made even worse by how pretty you are and then I thought 'oh fuck, maybe I have a crush on you and somehow that two-toned fuck could tell' so I'm freaking the fuck out and then you spring this shit with that in control attitude and that is so unfair by the way-" Miu cuts herself off and makes another sound like a laptop desperately struggling not to overheat. You are entirely sure that she's literally vibrating.

"I'm sorry?" You aren't sure how else to respond but this only seems to set Miu off further.

"You better be fucking sorry, couldn't you have told me that shit sooner? Do you have any fucking idea how terrifying it is to realize you have a crush on the one person you consider to be your friend in this god forsake hell hole of a school? I was freaking the fuck out and then you over there just fucking come in with that line like the smoothest mother of fuck and that's entirely unfair you bitch! Like, what the fuck do you mean you have a crush on me, that was supposed to be my line!" Yeah, she's vibrating. She's shaking so badly for one reason or another that she actually looks like she's vibrating.
You can't say you were really expecting this kind of reaction, but it's very Miu so maybe you should have. Then again, you were so convinced that she was either going to be disgusted or laugh it off you didn't really take into account the off chance she might like you back. Taking that into account this reaction makes a little more sense.

You're pretty sure anything you say or do is just going to rile her up further, so you embrace that fact. She'll calm down once she spends all her energy. There's no having a reasonable conversation at this point so reason gets to go out the window you guess. You stand up and use the chain to tug Miu a little closer, Miu stops moving and goes completely rigid, just looking at you. There's a small hint of terror in her eyes like she thinks she's done something wrong.

"Can I kiss you?" You lean forward a little more. Her flush turns even worse and you can't help the sly smile that slips onto your features. You're pretty sure you're also blushing but she's blushing worse so you consider it a victory.

"So fucking unfair," she mutters but initiates the kiss none the less.

It isn't really fireworks. You never believed in that anyway, that a kiss could be like fireworks, all sparkly and magical. It might not be fireworks, but it certainly is something amazing. It's deep and it's comforting like home. It feels like safety and it tastes like strawberries. The absolute dork would wear strawberry lip gloss, wouldn't she? What else could you expect from this scatterbrained idiot? You pull one of her hands into your own and can feel it shaking. You thought you were nervous, but you're fairly certain she has it worse. Understandably so, remembering back to the secrets and the rumor cards.

It's not fireworks, but still magical. You're pretty sure it's better than fireworks.

You pull away only when your lungs are begging for air. Miu is completely red-faced, there's a dopy kind of smile on her face though when she looks at you.

"Hey, Miu? I love you," you say, pulling her hand a little closer to press a smaller kiss to her fingers. You'd be lying if you said her reactions weren't the best thing on earth, but you'll never admit to actually trying to rile her up to get a couple more out of her.

She sputters for a moment as your lips gently brush her knuckles. She's blushing from the tips of her ears to the base of her neck. "You aren't supposed to say something like that so early in a relationship, dumbass!"

You smile like an idiot at her regardless.

Maybe there's still hope for some of the rest of your classmates.
One hour typically wasn't a lot of time. Monokuma had only chained all of you together this very morning, and already you were fairly certain that your classmates were going to go mad before the next murder even happened.

Admittedly, it had been a very long day. A day that started with sirens and a bleeding Gonta. The middle of the day had been the announcement of the new 'motive' if you wanted to actually call it that and that had led to many tense encounters all throughout the day. As well as some embarrassing stories from your classmates...

You're pretty sure Monodam nearly not drop kicked and thrown through a wall because Tenko had yet to finish her show when her hour ended. She was only given 5 minutes to dry off and get dressed before the chain went right back on. She ended up taking 10 minutes, and none of the kubs questioned it because she'd actually broken a damn door out of fright when Monodam appeared out of nowhere. These chains were going to start to quickly become problems, especially those with particularly long self-care routines.

On top of that, there was also the issue of sleeping arrangements. Being unable to take off the shackles at night meant that people were left sharing rooms. This did not bode well for most of the class. You were fairly certain Maki was going to die of sleep deprivation long before a murder happened. You didn't blame Maki for not wanting to go to sleep in the same room as Kokichi, but swearing off sleep all together seemed like it was going to become a problem fast. Maybe you'd have to spend a day or two entertaining Kokichi if only to win a catnap for the faux assassin.

There was at the very least a single silver lining. Everyone getting to pick an hour meant that everyone technically got two hours of freedom, a second hour when their partner took theirs. Monokuma was still Monokuma though and had to find some way to ruin that.

The difference, you'd discovered, was that the person whose hour it wasn't still got to be attached to the chain. It made doing things like changing or showering nearly impossible, but at least it was something of a break. It doesn't matter how much you adore a person, being stuck to them 24 hours a day is bound to make you start going batty after enough time. You could just stare at Miu for hours, but you knew it was only a matter of time before the situation started to grate on your nerves. You were certain Maki was just a prank away from completely losing her shit.

Yet it hadn't even been a full day...

Currently, it was Miu's hour. You were pretty glad that the two of you had ended up picking the times that you did. Miu's being in the afternoon meant the two of you would be getting that hour today. It was unfortunate you still couldn't really change your own clothes with the chain on. It meant you were stuck wearing a bloody shirt and no blazer until tomorrow morning unless you really wanted to put in the effort of forcing the chain through your sleeves. Even though you couldn't really do much with the hour, the solitude was still nice.

Miu becomes talkative when she gets nervous. This was something you'd already know for a while, along with her actions more often than not being an elaborate act to bolster her wounded disaster of an ego. This was only supported by her rumor. You could deal with Miu being nervous, you're already used to that. After your little confrontation, however, Miu had entered a state of tangible anxiety. Which extended into constantly babbling.

You loved the girl, but she was going to drive you insane if you didn't figure out how to get her to
relax. You yourself were still a little thrown off guard by the whole situation, but moderately okay. You were good at recovering your composure. It could be worse. It would be worse if you were just as much of a babbling mess. Recently freed from Miu, who'd supposed skittered off to go do Miu things, you realize you should probably go check on Gonta again.

You move through the halls with a purpose, your path set for the nurse's office. You'd been checking on Gonta intermittently the whole time, but you always felt bad when you dragged Miu away from an invention to come to check on him with you. You similarly felt bad for leaving Gonta alone for too long in case something ended up happening.

Though stable, Gonta's state was still very delicate. You needed to monitor him in case something went wrong with his health. It wasn't a constant kind of thing, but you still needed to check on him every once in a while just to be certain. There was also the fact that you were currently locked in a murder school with the murder bear who keeps telling you that someone else needs to die. Lots of murder, and Gonta just so happened to be a sitting duck lacking consciousness in a room where the murder itself could easily be covered up.

While he hadn't dished out any serious motives, the entire school was still on pins and needles. Gonta was innocent, sweet, and gentle but that meant nothing in a situation like this. You didn't want to doubt your classmates, but less had driven greater men far madder than this, and someone who was completely incapacitated made for a very easy kill. An easy kill meant that the killer had more time to manipulate the crime scene.

That thought brings a little anxiety to your pace and you end up walking faster than you typically would have. So far, the crime scenes themselves didn't have much tampering done with them. The murders themselves had been fairly cut and dry when it came to motive, killer, and the how of the murder itself. You didn't really expect much more from high schoolers, but you were still on your toes. One of these days someone smart enough was going to snap and make the entire class run in circles trying to figure out who committed the crime.

You push open the office door, your heartbeat a panicky hum. You relax with a sigh moments later. Considering what you come across, you aren't sure if you should be more or less worries so you decide to be less worried since you're stressed enough as is.

Kokichi is sitting off to the side, looking at the unconscious body of Gonta. He jumps when you enter, eyes landing on you before they narrow. "Just when I thought you coming to visit had a pattern," he sighs with a shake of his head. He perks up more when he notices you freed from the other half of your equation. "Oh? Is that slut taking her hour? You being here is fine then!" He says with a quick nod of his head. His posture is notably more relaxed than it usually is, and you have to wonder why. You do, however, find it wise not to comment on such things.

"Yeah. I see you're also taking yours. You driving Maki-san nuts?" You ask as you quietly move to sit down in another nearby set. Whatever settles between the two of you is... comfortable? At the very least it's amicable, maybe even friendly. Kokichi's normal antagonistic aura is gone and he doesn't seem to be acting like the glimpse of the scared little boy you got earlier today. You start to wonder how genuine this Kokichi is but you quickly catch yourself. Every fragment of Kokichi you've seen so far has been real, genuine to a degree, since they're all still fragments of a single Kokichi.

You wonder if you'll ever be able to piece together the whole thing, but broken glass is hard to mend.

"Nishishi. Not purposefully, but it seems my existence alone infuriates her plenty. I don't get how you two can be friends, she's such a tightass! Oh, wait," Kokichi drawls as he studies his hand. He
shifts back into the act of putting on a show for some kind of viewer. Or perhaps putting on a mask so you can't touch him. Well, that's not allowed. You take a guess at the fact he's still upset.

"I'm sorry about earlier," you say with a sigh as you shake your head. "I'm terrible at this, aren't I? I'm supposed to have more composure than this but every time I start getting stressed I just bottle it up until I snap at the person closest to my firing range. The fucked up part is that it keeps ending up being my friends," you say with a bitter tone of regret as you watch the rise and fall of Gonta's chest. To be honest? Neither of you handled earlier this afternoon well. Kokichi started it off by being more aggressive than it needed to be and you just lashed out at the first thing you could touch. You wish he'd apologize too, but you doubt you'd ever manage to get an apology out of him so you satisfy yourself with trying to measure his expression for one instead.

"Friend? Are you trying to imply that I am in fact, a friend?" Kokichi says. He opens his mouth as though he's going to launch back into his little liar's game, but you can read him easier than that. You're admittedly getting a little sick of all these walls he has up. While never official, you've been working together for a while now. To hell with these walls, you're smashing them.

"Yeah, you idiot. You are. Would either of us be honest with each other for so much as half a second if we didn't trust each other at least on the level of friend," you instead retort and the boy looks at you for half a second, confused by your words. He struggles for a response long enough for you to read him. Just like everyone else in this game, he's still just a little kid. Talented liar though he may be, your real talent is kind of rooted in being able to see through people like him. Talent is nothing in the face of trained skill, and the facade shatters when you look close enough.

"When have I ever been honest with you?" He asks with genuine curiosity in his voice. He doesn't get nervous as he still has perceived control of the conversation (even though you know well enough he actually doesn't) so his curiosity makes him a little more open.

"Verbally? Never, I think, but you have a lot of physical tells. The others don't pick up on them because they're fairly hard to notice, but your eyes are always a dead give away. I can see the regret in every trial, I could see the fear when Gonta got hurt. Heck, maybe you're even lying to yourself, but whether it's on purpose or not... Kokichi-kun, I don't think you have the power to lie to me," you say with something of a half laugh.

The purple haired boy is quiet for a long time. "No, perhaps I don't..." He says as he glances towards you. He pointedly makes sure that you don't catch his gaze. "So then, the question is, what will you do with that knowledge. Hm? Going to convince everyone I'm a goody-goody? Try to reform me?" He taunts with a grin.

"I don't need to change you, you're fine the way you are. Well, unless you decide you want to change yourself. Your character growth isn't my decision. Furthermore, I think Kaede-san would just lock me up for having finally gone mad if I tried to convince the class you're actually on our side. So no, I'm not going to do that either. What I am going to do is help you," you say.

"Help me?" The smaller boy asks as he moves to meet your gaze. He quickly remembers what that means though, and flicks his head back in the direction of Gonta. Even the smallest flicker of a glance is enough to tell you everything you need.

"We're both trying to end this game. For good. No more murders, no more deaths, no more suffering, for the friends we've lost and the friends we still have. The reason you're nobody's favorite is that you play to the character type you need to. And the reason I've been avoiding putting all of my skills on display is in part because I've been worried I'd snatch someone else's role. I realize, given the trials, I might have already done that. So I'm done giving a shit, it's time to go all out if it means putting an end to this game," you say as you wait for Kokichi to figure out the
"But the problem is... neither of us can do much by standing on one side of the road. So you're proposing a deal, are you?" Kokichi hesitantly asks. You allow a smirk to follow up the assessment of your offer.

"Precisely. You can't interact with everyone the way I can, and I can't bully everyone into doing what needs to be done as you can. This was we're both able to get what we need doing in order to fuck over murderbear mc-murderson. The thing is, we're absolutely going to have to act against each other sometimes. Not to mention keep secrets. Like with the most recent motive. We're going to have to trust each other absolutely," you offer up the deal and let it sit in the air for a couple of moments.

Kokichi allows himself a heavy sigh before fully turning towards you and letting his eyes lock with your own. He cautiously extends a hand. "I suppose there are worse people in this school to get stuck in such a deal with," he says with the barest hint of a smile on his features. The boy then stands up, stretching his body out.

"I think my hour is just about over though. What a shame. I should probably return to Maki. After all, we're so madly in love she'll be distraught without me," the boy's words actually elicit laughter in the face of such a tense conversation.

"Now that you mention it, it's late enough to almost be time for dinner, huh? I wonder if anyone's decided to cook tonight..." You trail off and Kokichi shrugs as he makes his exit. You glance towards the unconscious Gonta and feel a little bit of the weight that's been on your shoulders as of late fall off. You don't know if it's the smartest decision you've ever made, but at this moment, you absolutely trust Kokichi. Perhaps soon you'll be proven a fool, but as the situation stands, you don't see any harm in the decision. After all, it's with confidence that you say the two of you have the same goal.

Heading for the cafeteria, you decided that if no one was already there you'd cook something up for the group. There were a couple ideas buzzing around your head. It would certainly help the group to have something solid and filling. Food could be a big indicator on mood, and being in a good mood would without a doubt help your class with the plethora of awkward conversations that were likely to follow in the next couple of hours if not days. If awkward situations weren't already taking place, that is.

A hearty soup is the best option in your mind right now, so you get to work preparing your ingredients. It isn't more than 10 minutes later before one of the Monokubs comes wandering in. "Ah! Finally found her!" Monotaro says proudly. You glance towards the bear and cock an eyebrow. "Hour's up," he simply says. Ah, right.

"Forgot about that," you say quietly as you walk towards the bear. He takes the end of your chain (though he avoids getting too close to you) and as you walk out you come across Miu who he attaches it back to. Miu still looks fairly embarrassed on top of vaguely worried, though she tries to pretend she isn't. She tries so very hard.

Your thoughts once again move backward in time to linger on the rumor card that the girl herself had verified as truth. Abandonment issues were a tough thing to tackle, and you have no doubt it was a small fraction playing into the anxiety the poor girl was feeling now. "I'm making dinner for the rest of the class, want to help?" You ask as you walk over to the other girl and weave your hand into her own.

She's quiet for a moment as though weighing her response carefully. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to
"help out," she finally says after a long silence on her part.

"Great, let's get started," you say gently as you start to lead her back towards the kitchen area. You can't help but smile as the strawberry blonde quietly watches you work, amazement in her gaze. She's not a bad cook, but you're on a different level. Your movements and fluid and practiced in a way that most don't manage to achieve. The recipe you're following isn't particularly hard, but you don't have a recipe to work off of which makes it a little more difficult. Entirely based on memory you portion the perfect amounts.

The impressive thing though, for anyone who's ever been taught professionally at least, are your knife cuts. Knife cuts can be one of those things where it's hard to get them perfect but it's the thing you should focus on making the most perfect. You're able to render a perfect uniformity to the type of cuts you're doing each time, right down to the centimeter measurements that once upon a time you think you had drilled into your head. Miu, for her part, cannot tell the difference between a large cube and a Jullien cut no matter how many times you describe each for her.

You don't act like a professional, but much like with your swimming capabilities you act like you were taught by a professional. Miu holds her own, but it's plain as day she was never actually taught. Probably self-taught if you had to place a bet.

When you're done with dinner you notice people slowly starting to file into the cafeteria, likely following their noses judging by the way their faces are tilted upwards and their mouths are ever so slightly open. It's not long before the entire class quickly appears, taking bowls of your creation and sitting down together at the table. It feels emptier than it should. You've lost 4 people in total. You can't ever forget that, but sitting together as a class once more makes everything almost feel okay. Almost

The chains make everything more awkward, clinking against one another as people move about. Shuichi, in a way that's reminiscent to before the second murder, is trapped between Kaede and Kaito. None of them, however, look happy right now. Tsumugi looks disgruntled as she stares off to the side. Kiibo is next to her, quietly trying to endure the glares he occasionally gets from some of your less than pleased classmates who envy the robot. Angie and Tenko are both still silent, neither one talking to another classmate let alone each other.

Himiko has very wisely decided to sit across from them on the far end of the table, far away from the potential blast radius if those two eventually do hit a snapping point. You wonder what way their relationship will fall. Of course, this positioning sits Himiko down right next to Kaito, blocking off the other members of the Fitness Club from Maki. Therefore, the red-eyed girl decided she was going to sit next to you. Which forced Kokichi to position himself between her and poor Himiko.

It seemed that you and Miu are the only people who are even remotely okay with this situation given the tension in the air. You're most worried about the trio of Fitness Club members who sit quite awkwardly now. Your anxieties over their wellness are well rooted in all things considered.

"All of you look like a bunch of limp-dicked sad sacks. Just face your fucking issues and move on," the strawberry blonde next to you finally blurts out no more than five minutes into dinner, apparently wanting nothing more to do with this situation. Damn it, Miu. You can't really blame her. The five minutes before her outburst had been full of tense silence, the largest amount of tension sitting in the 4 empty chairs. While her outburst is understandable it is not nessisarily appreciated by you or anyone else at the table.

"You're one to talk aren't you? Have you even addressed the situation you're in," Kokichi hisses at
the blonde. He narrows his eyes at her dangerously and you have to wonder if for some reason Miu is the one person in the entire class Kokichi hates. The word jealous strikes for half a second but you don't let it linger in your thoughts for too long.

In a shocking display of bravery, she actually belts something back instead of getting frightened off by Kokichi's insults. "Of course I have you fucking defunctive noodle!" Some snorts go up around the table but you're just genuinely left baffled by the entire exchange.

"Defunctive noodle?" You ask with a look of confusion. Defunctive as... ceasing to exist? Did she mean defective or was she threatening him? You have no adequate response to the insult. Miu simply shrugs, giving you a blank expression. "Are you running out of material?"

"He doesn't deserve the good stuff!" The girl says as her icy blues glare down Kokichi. She looks at him like she would a rival, ferocious and fearless for the first time since this game began. Miu's usual modus operandi regarding Kokichi's insults is to shiver in the corner looking like she's getting off. Now though? She looks ready for a fight and for the life of you, you can't figure out what changed.

"Oh wow! Somebody finally grew a spine! Too bad you'll still be just as much of a coward when you're little shield isn't sitting between us anymore," Kokichi mocks. You aren't sure if you should stop him or let him keep going. His position as the 'bad guy' of the story is an important one, but you can't let him go too far. Usually, this is about the point you'd step up and stop him from bullying Miu, but Miu isn't taking his shit tonight.

"She ain't a fucking shield because she isn't an object! Unlike someone, I can tell the fucking difference!" Miu hisses back. Her eyes slip towards Kiibo for one second as she says this. The motion is almost protective in a way. You know the inventor is fond of the robot for the simple merit of him being a robot, but she's likely also vengeful towards Kokichi for his constant treatment of Kiibo as little more than an object.

Kokichi picks up on this almost immediately, as expected of him. He's well versed in body language so he attacks her where it hurts. "Considering how you act towards Kii-boi, I don't think you can tell the difference either Iruma-san. Or else you'd treat him like an object too since he's just some shitty robot," Kokichi smiles as he continues to provoke the blonde. His eyes land on your for a second and there's something almost prompting in his gaze. You aren't certain, but you think he wants you to stand up against him. In spite of that fact, you do catch a genuine hint of something darker in his gaze. The way he looks at you...

Either way, he continues on with his assault against Kiibo, which deal or no deal is something you can't stand for. "He's just data jumping between cable and hunks of steel. He's not real," Kokichi says dismissively.

"Then neither are you," you say bluntly. This seems to take everyone off guard, including Kokichi. He wasn't expecting an argument like this. "If Kiibo's just data jumping between wires, then you must be worth even less. After all, we as humans are essentially just hunks of wet bacon trapped inside of a bone cage being powered by less electricity than it takes to power a lightbulb. If you want to make this argument, then human lives are worth even less than the life of a robot. We're dispensable and pathetic, are we not? Prone to mental disease and hallucination, something Kiibo-kun likely won't ever have to deal with. But we attach a special meaning to ourselves because we believe in the potentially fictitious existence of the soul," you say with a shrug.

The moment you pause to let someone else speak, it's Angie who ends up leaping into the conversation. "Oh! Oh! I get what ____-san's saying! We're all just robots created by Atua, so even though Kiibo-kun wasn't made by Atua he has a purpose and a life. After all, he was born for some
reason just like all of us. Since everything is simply Atua's will then Kiibo-kun is just as important. Yes, I believe that Kiibo-kun must have a soul too! So Ouma-kun, no more being mean to Kiibo-kun!" The fanatic declares to the group.

Kokichi goes silent for a long moment before looking at you. He wasn't expecting that kind of argument, but none the less, he does look pleased by your willingness to play along. You see it flash in his eyes for only half a second before his expression twists into one of distaste.

"Ugh, fine, I'll be nicer to Kii-boi. But not Iruma-san!" He announces while he points an accusatory finger at the girl. "After all, you've seen the way she acts. The ugly bitchlet must enjoy the insults," Kokichi coos in a voice that's almost an attempt at seductive while still making him sound like a sadistic asshole. It's mostly disgust that causes a small shiver to run up your spine.

"B-but I don't," she whines as her face turns red. You feel disbelief in the gaze of your classmates. You... might regret what you're about to do but you feel like the class needs some kind of levity or good news before everyone snaps.

"She isn't lying," you decide to speak up as you glance towards Kokichi. There's the barest hint of a grin on your features. If he wants to put on a show then you'll damn well be putting on a show. "Miu actually has a preference for sweeter actions and words," you say. You make it a point to leave off honorifics and lean a little closer towards the blonde then you should. Miu bursts into a ferocious blush that consumes her entire expression. Her jaw tightens and you swear one of these day's you're going to break her. Your own heart rams against your rib cage and no matter how stunning and charming your smile is you're quietly dying on the inside. There's a long pause, utter silence.

"When did this happen?" Kaede yells as she actually stands up, looking at you both in shock. She seems to be the only one freaking out. A couple of other reactions are found around the table, like Tenko's sudden smirk or Shuichi turning red, but it seems like most of the rest of the class is processing still. When they do figure it out many of those expressions turn to absolute shock.

"What? Did you think we were chained together because we hated each other? Kaede-san, if I'm not with the Fitness Club or in the library who's the only other person I spend time with?" You ask. Kaede looks truly baffled, as does the rest of the group who didn't quite see a revelation like this coming. Even Kokichi, who'd read Miu's emotions last trial, seems confused. Only Tenko doesn't wear an expression of shock or confusion. In fact, she proudly wears a tiny congratulatory smile.

"This is disgusting, I want to leave," Kokichi says as he stands up, pulling on the chain he's attached to. His expression very quickly turns to one of disgust that just barely hides the kicked puppy expression he's flashing you. He truly tries his best to escape the cafeteria.

"No," Maki simply says as she pulls him back to his seat. It's quite obvious who's stronger and bound to win this tug o' war. Maki looks a little ruffled, but she seems to recover faster than a good number of your classmates. Some are just trying to wrap their head around the how and the why while some seem actually happy. It makes a little bit of the tension that was hanging in the room scatter.

"Actually, maybe it is about time we call dinner to an end. After all, as Miu said, I think all of you have a couple of issues to work out," you say with a beaming smile as you stand up. Said inventor quickly stands up to leave with you. She's still a blushing mess, incapable of speaking. You'll have to do something to say sorry for the embarrassment.

The two of you leave first. "Sorry," you whisper as soon as you're out of hearing range. You lead her towards the dorms since honestly it's been a pretty long day.
"Don't worry about it," she says, trying to tame the blush that's claimed her cheeks.

The two of you check one last time on Gonta before making the rest of the way to the dorms. It's only then you pause and realize something important. Looking at the chain at your wrist, you turn towards Miu. "How are we supposed to sleep?"
You aren't entirely sure if the night before was the worst or best night you've had since this entire hell game started. Either way, it was... something. Obviously, you and Miu weren't going to be able to sleep in separate rooms considering the chain attached to your wrists. You also realized that your room was a mess of notes and chaotic scrawlings detailing how in the hell you're supposed to beat this game, a realization that resulted in a short moment of panic before Miu resolutely decided that the two of you would sleep in her room. Her declaration was weakened a fair bit by the fact she was desperately trying to keep her voice from cracking.

Classic Miu, you suppose.

She did not make things any easier on herself or you as the night progressed. Her lack of a filter kept her from thinking through the statement before blurting out some innuendo about getting you into her bed, said line was quickly followed up by an obvious voice crack and Miu blushing so hard you could literally feel the heat radiating off of her.

As a side note, while not a proper diagnosis you're fairly certain she has histrionic personality disorder. You'll have to figure out what to do about that at some point since it really isn't healthy for her or anyone around her, but that's kind of beside the point.

You weren't really going to argue against her decision of sleeping quarters. She was probably just nervous and being somewhere more familiar was enough of a safety net for her. You weren't one to critique. In addition, every room had its own special quirks, apparently decided on by the gamemasters. It made every room just a little different. Miu's room just so happened to have the largest bed. You didn't have the energy to pick apart that little detail since it would have ended up pissing you off.

Miu's room was comfortable enough though and you're quick to adapt, so by all means sleeping in her room doesn't throw you off as she would have gotten thrown off by trying to sleep in your room. You were lucky you could fall asleep just about anywhere if entirely necessary. On the flip side, you could only get an hour or two of sleep before insomnia and chronic nightmares kicked in. You figured this would be a similar case and you'd just spend a couple hours sitting there bored out of your skull trying not to wake up Miu.

That was exactly what didn't end up happening. Again, best and worst night for differing reasons.

On the one hand, it took you an hour or more to actually fall asleep. Miu managed to somehow fall asleep almost immediately. You suppose it makes sense. A lot of things had happened that day and Miu for being an awkward blushy mess didn't seem too terribly bothered by the actual proximity between the two of you. She seemed genuinely comfortable as long as she didn't have to try and hold a conversation. That was when she apparently devolved into "pan panic" which involved stuttering, innuendos, bad pick-up lines, and internal screaming.

All of which you were fairly certain she only did as a 'going through the motions' kind of activity. Looking at her reactions to Kokichi, again, you were starting to match up her actions to the priorly mentioned disorder. Something that was a problem but a problem that could be fixed with patience and a little therapy.
You were a little better at holding yourself with some semblance of grace externally, but your own panic involved a lot more internal screaming. That was perhaps why it took you so much longer to fall asleep. And seriously, that's all it was, sleeping. Or at the very least trying to. There was nothing weird about it other than the fact you were pressed against another human being but this wasn't anything new. It just felt weird. It wasn't even like you were opposed to physical contact! This just felt... too close?

Miu apparently didn't care all that much about the situation when she was asleep, so somehow her arm ended up around your waist. Fun. It made your skin feel sticky and static-y. Your body was already still overcharged with too much adrenaline from everything that happened earlier. It had almost been a constant chain of adrenaline highs from Gonta's accident, to the motive, to the confession, to dinner, and it was all just one adrenaline shot after another and this just smacked you upside the head with a fresh batch.

Your heart thumped uncomfortably against your ribs, loud enough you at one point had found yourself worrying you'd wake Miu up. If it wasn't the sound then surely the vibrations as the organ pulsed overtime. For the first hour at the very least, it was miserable.

Of course, you did also say there was a 'best' part of this encounter.

After you did finally manage to fall asleep you slept. You can't ever remember sleeping that well since the game began. Heck, you can't remember getting a night of sleep that good since weeks, months, maybe even years before the game. You woke up around 5 like usual, but it was slow and kinda dazed. It wasn't the 'okay we're awake now' kind of feeling you usually got. It wasn't the kind of feeling where the moment your body registered it was 'awake time' too much energy started swirling in your skin. It didn't make you feel like you had to throw yourself out of bed and get to work before the backup of energy broke you and fried your nerves.

It was slow and relaxed, a dreamy kind of drift between still being sleep and waking up. The weight of Miu's arm didn't feel constricting anymore, instead, it felt comforting. You still had nightmares, which was to be expected. It would be insane to just expect them to disappear. But they didn't wake you up as often and drifting back to sleep wasn't a 20-minute endeavor. It was more like 5 minutes followed by the feeling of the arm around your waist tightening which was effectively what lulled you back into a relaxed enough state to drift off again.

Get rid of the first hour of feeling like you were going to pop and you could probably get used to this. Heck, the nervous energy would probably start to disappear as you got used to it. The idea of getting used to something like this was jarring in and of itself, but it wasn't necessarily a bad feeling. Just new. From what you'd managed to figure out about yourself, romance wasn't really something on your radar.

In fact, you're pretty sure the reason you fell for Miu let alone any of these idiot children is because of your scattered memories. You aren't sure who the hell you were before this, you still don't really know what she was like, but you aren't entirely sure if this is something she would have condoned. You don't really care. She's not here anymore, and if she does come back she's never going to be the same. Your affections towards Miu, for good and for bad, are here to stay.

That, of course, brings you to the now. Miu didn't wake up when the Monokubs wandered into the room at about 6. They just quietly released you from the chain trapping you to Miu and you carefully wiggled your way out from under the arm that was trapping you just as effectively as the manacle. There was a lot of things to do this morning, meaning there was no time for a show. Unfortunately. You did grab some fresh clothes and wiggled your way down to the nurse's office to check on Gonta and also deal with... something interesting.
Something interesting walks in at about 6:10 and you can't help but glare. He's late by about 5 minutes, but late is acceptable considering he's here at all. You were a bit worried he'd try to skip and you'd have to get Maki to drag him down here for you. She'd do it, you swear she would.

Free for an hour, much like yourself, is the man sitting across from you. It's easy to tell by his facial features he isn't necessarily comfortable and frankly, he shouldn't be. You're about to ream him for not coming to you sooner, let alone of his own free will. You can smell the blood on his breath, you've been able to for days, but it's only now that you've been able to sit Kaito down and really grill him about what's going on. With a little blackmail to speed things along of course. Maki had realized something was up as well so she quite readily supported your plot to try and corner the man. Yesterday before the fitness club started you were able to convince the other members of the club to agree to regular check-ups in order to make sure everyone was doing okay.

It wasn't really a hard sell. You had Maki supporting you while she quietly glared down Kaito. Kaede was easy to convince whether she noticed the plotting in the background or not. Shuichi was a bit harder but he went along with the idea after a bit of pressure from Kaede. Kaito couldn't really argue with a 4/5ths majority. Even if you considered Tenko as an unofficial member and cast her vote she probably would have agreed. With that, your master plan was complete and with the help of Maki you were deftly able to make Kaito have the first appointment.

A fairly sad master plan, but you've finally got the astronaut alone and vaguely compliant.

"____-san, there really isn't anything that can be done," he says with a sigh. The resigned tone of voice does not sit well with you, it sounds like the voice of a man who's come to terms with not just suffering but with death. It actually makes you a little mad to know he's giving up so easily.

"As the doctor, I believe that jurisdiction is at my discretion," you say as you grab a clipboard and a pen. You jot down Kaito's name, recording the date and time before you write symptoms and underline it. If you're going to diagnose and treat whatever this is you're going to have to do it properly. To save one of your friends though, you're willing to go the whole 9 years.

"You aren't a real doctor," he deadpans while he locks gazes with you. You break that gaze by shaking your head and tutting. Maybe you aren't a real doctor, but what does he know. Maybe you've been professionally trained (you haven't) or maybe your real talent is something in the medical field (it isn't). Either way, you have enough confidence in your training and skills, professional or not, to be able to tell what's going on with Kaito. If it's a disease that you wouldn't have to go searching through books for hours to find then you probably know what it is.

At the bottom of the page, you pointedly write 'Patient displays disbelief and disrespectful behaviors'. Your silent spite makes you feel a little better and you get to actual work. "So. On to those symptoms. Would you please give me a quick summary of what's been wrong lately?" You smile brightly as you look at him, making it very clear you have no intention of giving up. You stitched together a giant hole in Gonta (who is both asleep and alive over in the corner) so at this point, it's fairly safe to say you've got a stubborn personality when it comes to saving others. The luminary sighs, finally seeming to relent. Or he gives up. Either or. Both work.

"I've... been coughing up blood ever since this game started," he says and you notice a couple of his nervous ticks go off. Everyone has them, but his are discreet enough you have to carefully watch. "Lately I've been more fatigued than usual, it's hard to work out because my back hurts and I get out of breath so easily. Then getting out of breath leads to even more coughing which leads to more blood," he says with a shake of his head. You write down everything he says on the clipboard, nodding quietly while you look at what he told you.

"Is this something new that just started happening?" You ask as you run through the gambit of lung
diseases with similar symptoms. If it's a new development it might be related to the game, or it could be something long running that he just doesn't remember having because of said game. You aren't sure if Team Danganronpa would let Kaito remember a life-threatening disease if he had one or if they'd just try to kill him off before it got him first.

"It only just started happening when the game itself started. I've never had to deal with anything like it before," he says ruefully. "I wouldn't be in the space program if I wasn't healthy!" You look at him for a long, quiet moment trying to see the reality in those words. What he says is true. Kaito's physical prowess itself is a bit too sturdy for something that's been hitting him this hard to have existed prior to the game.

You bite your lip as you strike Cystic Fibrosis from the suspect list. The genetic disorder would have shown ever since he was a child if he was a sufferer so you have your doubts it's got anything to do with that. That can also eliminate terminal illnesses and any other genetic diseases you may or may not know about. That narrows the problem down, now you just need to figure out what bodily changed happened that could cause these results. "Alright, that helps. Now, tell me about this pain. Is it back or chest?"

Kaito pauses for a moment in silence. "I think that it might be both," he says after the short pause. He obviously hasn't thought about the disease this much if his vexed expression is anything to go off of. That pisses you off even more. He was so ready just to deal with this quietly. Somehow you can't think of anything more 'Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars'. It still deeply upsets you. He's your friend. He's yours. Things that are yours aren't allowed to suffer and just quietly crawl off to die on their own. Not if he says so and not if the gamemasters say so. Your turns your vexed rage into determination and focus on making the symptoms spell out a disease.

"Alright then, is the blood that you cough up part of the problem or is it a direct result of the problem itself? For example, is there blood in your lungs or do you think that the coughing is what's causing you to bleed so heavily?" You ask him. You're sure this question is going to give him some trouble. He doesn't' seem the kind to go to the doctor often, which is probably why he's had so much trouble identifying the problem within himself.

Kaito gives another pause just as you expected. "I don't know. It just... it just seemed like there was so much of it that it wasn't normal," he says with a shake of his head. This is certainly a problem. Maybe, just maybe there's more than one culprit in this case. You figure you should tell him as such.

"Well, the thing is, you could be feeling the symptoms of multiple illnesses at once. Coughing up blood can be a sign of both lung disease and stomach disease depending on the situation, or even multiple lung diseases. You could have both. For right now, I think I have an idea regarding what one of your problems may be. We're going to do a couple of regular checkup things and then I'm going to have you follow me so I can take an x-ray of your lungs," you tell him as you look for a cuff to test his blood pressure.

You somehow manage to part Kaito from two layers of jackets. How he doesn't overheat dressed like this, you'll never know. Regardless of that, his last shirt seems to be a tank top which makes it easy to attach the cuff. You run your test, watching Kaito flinch when the cuff gets tight. You look at the results and nod, satisfied. "Okay, looks like that's pretty normal," you mutter more so to yourself than him while you jot down the results on your clipboard.

"Okay, I'm going to take a quick listen to your lungs. I'm going to need you to take your shirt off. Proper practices and all, stethoscopes work best on bare skin," you say. Kaito seems none too phased by this. He's apparently entirely unbothered by the concept as he takes his shirt off and
tosses with his jackets without a second thought. You put on the stethoscope and place it over his left lung first. "Okay, deep breath," you tell him. He takes a deep breath and it sounds a little rattly. You move to the right. "Okay, again." This time it sounds a little different, less rattly.

You note down your observations quickly and move over to a shelf, tossing him one of those cheap hospital gowns. "Okay, put that on. We're going to do a quick x-ray of your chest. X-rays use a small amount of radiation to work, but it's no more radiation than you'd get from a flight over the Atlantic so I promise you it's not dangerous. Make sure you remove any jewelry."

"Monokuma gave you an x-ray machine?" Kaito asks. That's what he got hung up on?

"I was pretty shocked when I found it too, I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth," you say. It's better not to ask questions in this case. The machine itself had been brought in long after you actually started using the nurse's office and for a long time, you weren't entirely sure what to make of its appearance. After guaranteeing it as safe you figured it would be helpful one way or another so you hooked it up to a display screen and got it calibrated.

Kaito follows your orders without question as you make him lie down on the bed resting under the machine. He looks a little nervous but he's fairly complacent. He's not nervous out of distrust, that boy wouldn't see a murderer coming if it slapped him in the face. He's too trusting and you doubt he'd ever suspect you after the troubles you went through with Gonta. He's nervous because there's a giant x-ray machine looming over him like an angry god and sometimes accidents happen. Sometimes Monokuma causes accidents because he likes to see what happens.

Luckily there are no accidents today.

As soon as you tell Kaito the machine is done doing its work he slips off of the table with a heavy sigh of relief. The machine takes a couple of moments, but without fail, the x-ray pops up on the display screen. You look at the scans of his chest and smile, Kaito's problem becoming rather obvious. Well, one of what could be many anyway, but you decide to be optimistic.

"Alright, Kaito-kun. It looks like you have something called Pulmonary Embolism. It's basically a situation where a blood clot forms in the lung, specifically what looks to be your right lung. Trouble breathing and heart attack like chest pains are both common symptoms of the disease. This x-ray confirms the presence of a clot. While I'm not entirely sure if this is the cause of your bleeding, taking care of this problem should help and if it doesn't stop we can look into other diseases which might be the cause, specifically some stomach related problems." You do your best to explain while you start running through treatments and potential other causes just in case something else goes wrong.

You don't think it's tuberculosis and given his heart seems normal it can't be congestive heart failure. You're relieved to find this means it isn't a tumor. The symptoms don't fit pneumonia either which is comforting. For right now this is the only real conclusion you can come up with unless it's some rare disease Monokuma made up.

"I'm going to prescribe you a bottle of blood thinners. These should break up the clot as long as you take them regularly, however, you'll have to be careful if you get any cuts or bruises. In addition, physical activity can keep clots from forming in the future so as soon as the clot has broken up to a safe level where it won't travel through your veins and clog your heart, you're going to have to work extra hard in the fitness club," you jot down the prescription and make a note of it for later.

You manage to track down a bottle of blood thinners which shouldn't be dangerous for him in the proper dose and sign the ledger for it. You go ahead and give him the whole bottle. You still remember when you were possessive over these pills, but it seems everyone's forgotten about the
poison via medicine route of murder so you'll drop your guard for Kaito. In addition, you doubt Monokuma would allow for something so boring as the same murder occurring twice to happen. It would be too obvious. "I do want you to keep a careful eye on your situation. Tell me if anything changes, especially the amount of blood you cough up or your physical state. Hopefully, it'll clear up in a couple of weeks at most."

"Wait, for real... I'm going to be okay?" The boy asks with a look of utter confusion. Did he really think he was going to die? Did he think that you were just going to let him die?

"Did you really think you were just going to keel over? Kaito-kun, I might not be an actual professional doctor but I was trained by an actual professional top quality nurse who lived on the same island as me. If it's been accurately documented before as a real phenomenon then I can probably figure out what's wrong and at least extend your lifespan if not treat it. We're just lucky I pestered you enough. Something like this can turn deadly if left alone for too long," you tell the purple haired boy.

"How can I ever repay you?" He asks as he gratefully takes the bottle of pills. You pause for a moment. How can he repay you other than not dying?

"Try to talk to Shuichi-kun... If possible, maybe also talk to Kaede-san. The situation with them right now..." You trail off as you glance towards Kaito. He frowns at the mention of their names, turning his gaze so that it doesn't meet your own. The situation is only going to get worse if those three don't talk it out.

He sighs and runs a hand through his hair, looking distressed. "I know. I know we both... I'm just worried. It's an awkward situation that just isn't..." Kaito shakes his head like he can't push the word out. You suppose you're pulling double duty today as both doctor and therapist. You don't mind, so you wait for him to finish. You've got the time after all. "I don't know how to feel, I trusted Saihara-kun. Obviously I forgive him, but it still stings. He was my sidekick!"

You twirl your pen between your fingers, weighing his words for a long moment. "Well, obviously Shuichi-kun made a mistake. You and I both recognize this fact. Have we made certain that Shuichi-kun himself is certain of this fact? I believe I've made it quite clear and he seems remorseful. So the question comes down really to if you want to try talking to him or not." You're used to twirling heavier pens and pocket knives, so the lightweight pen ends up flipping out of your fingers.

"I'm not sure! I want to talk to him about it, but I can't figure out why he did it. I tried asking him about it and the only answer he really gave me was that he felt 'compelled' to do it. So what? Was he possessed by the living ghost of Ouma-kun for the trial? We all would have died if you hadn't pointed out all the inconsistencies," Kaito says. He sounds frustrated like he doesn't actually believe Shuichi's answer. "Including him as his girlfriend," there's a hint of something bitter in his tone that you think is best ignored until this issue is first dealt with.

You have less trouble believing the answer Shuichi gave since you feel like he might have actually been compelled to act, but not by Kokichi. More so, you think he was pressed to do what he did by a combination of who he was before the game and the pressure applied by the gamemasters. You aren't certain yet, but you aren't sure if Shuichi was a very good person prior to this game. You can say that for a lot of people though, so you aren't particularly keen on judging him for it.

You've been seeing hints of personalities popping up in people that just don't make sense explained any other way. Rare bursts of apathy from Kaede, or even Kokichi's actions almost the entire day before. Kokichi, in particular, seemed to be falling apart at the seams, playing the role of a liar wearing too many masks while even more masks are forced into his arms. He's skilled but even
he's starting to shatter.

All in all, this game is falling apart. It's total chaos. And to be honest, you wouldn't change it for the world. Chaos is where you thrive. You can't really work with rules and scripts, being told what to do isn't your style. But chaos? You can work with chaos. If you thought it wise for one reason or another, you'd stir up a little of it yourself. You focus back on Kaito, trying to see how you can twist this chaos into a reasonably pleasant outcome.

"I just don't know. I feel like he's going to turn on us again. On me again..." He trails off and you see a flash of something so deeply wounded it makes your heart wrench. You press your hand onto Kaito's shoulder and he turns to you, expression still so painfully sad.

"That's part of having friends. Part of connecting to and with other people. There's always the potential you can get hurt. The beautiful thing about you is how you can trust so easily. Don't stop trusting people. It hurts sometimes, I know this better than you'd think, but the world becomes so very much worse if everyone stops trusting one another. The class so desperately needs someone like you right now." You smile and Kaito returns the expression. "Shuichi-kun most of all needs someone like you."

"Yeah, you're right," he says with a nod. The fire that he'd kept burning this entire game lights up in his eyes like a reinvigorated inferno. This is exactly what the class needs. Kaito is the complete opposite of Kokichi when it comes to the roles they each play. The class needs someone feverously trusting and ferocious, the kind of person who'll defend someone in a trial on the merit of their character alone. The class needs the balance he provides.

"Wonderful! In that case, please talk to Shuichi-kun. Whatever happened I'm sure we can fix it and make sure it doesn't happen again if we all try our hardest," you say. The encouragement works and Kaito is practically glowing. You finally give him a chance to redress himself, just talking back and forth about any random nonsense. You aren't done yet though. There's still more time in the hour and more problems to do deal with if you want to start rolling out the big guns in order to fight Team Danganronpa.

"You know though, unless I'm reading the situation wrong, there is one other thing you could benefit from talking to Shuichi-kun about," you say offhandedly. Your tone and the way your eyes linger on his wrist kind of says it all. Kaito flinches and picks up on what you're implying quickly enough.

He coughs awkwardly into his hand, eyes jumping around like a little kid who just got caught being naughty. "Yeah, uhm, about that. Obviously I don't hate him.... and obviously, he likes Akamatsu-san. There isn't much more to say," Kaito expression once again flatlines into miserable and you sigh. Here comes the hard part of this conversation. It isn't so much about puffing up your classmates with hope as much as it's about giving actual advice about dealing with other people. Considering the amount of internal screaming that takes up your thoughts during any conversation with Miu, you aren't sure if you're qualified to give this kind of advice but here you go!

You roll your eyes and clear your throat at least trying to put on the air of knowing what you're talking about. "Might I purpose the same idea I purposed to Kaede-san herself. Polygamy!"

You have no better answer.

You were never prepared for a conversation like this.

Kaito chokes on thin air. "Well, I mean, that isn't really... yeah. I kind of doubt..." He keeps fumbling over his words, unable to exactly get across what he's trying to say. "I kind of doubt
Saihara-kun would be interested. I don't even think he's... like that." Kaito trails off into awkward silence and you just stare at him.

You aren't entirely sure how to respond to that statement. "Oh sweet baby boy, this is a lot to unpack. Okay! First of all, you say that as though you aren't like that and yet the evidence would quite readily point to the contrary. Secondly, Shuichi-kun is quite obviously, blatantly, borderline painfully bi. If he's not a disaster bi then I'm straight. Thirdly, I said the same thing about Miu and yet here we are."

Kaito snorts. "I'll give you that one, but would he actually like me? He has no reason to like me over Akamatsu-san."

"If you'd just follow my damn suggestion then he wouldn't have to like one of you over the other. Healthy relationships are built on trust, communication, and understanding where the situation stands. Talk it out with the idiot squad, actually, communicate the situation instead of festering in your own nervous energy and fear. If you actually talk to them, something good might come of it. The worst that could happen is you get shut down, move on, and just be normal friends again."

You feel a small burst of irritation. The worst thing Kaito can do is not talk about it, that's just a good way to let things get out of hand. When you don't communicate, people get hurt a lot faster than airing your dirty laundry. "Besides, if you don't think Shuichi-kun has a thing for you then I suppose you're as big of an idiot as Maki says you are."

"Harumaki really does call it as she sees it," Kaito says with a half-hearted laugh. "I guess I can give it a shot."

"Indeed. Now scram. There's isn't much time left before you get chained to Mr. Detective again and have to figure out what to do. I recommend waiting till Kaede-san's freed from her own chains before trying to have any important conversations though," you lean towards Kaito and begin to whisper in a conspiratory kind of tone. "I don't know why she would, but I'm pretty sure Tsumugi-san got chained to Kaede-san out of hatred."

Kaito almost flinches. "I don't know if you've noticed yet, but Shirogane-san acts kind of weird sometimes. I didn't want to mention anything, but she kind of scares me," he says. You give a quick nod in response to that, making a similarly distressed look as Kaito is currently. The two of you say a quick goodbye to one another after that little revelation since you still have other work to get done. The astronaut is quick to shuffle off and leave you be.

You still have so much you wanted to do today before you end up reattached to Miu. There were too many things you needed to get done and you were starting to understand the biggest drawback of this motive. It practically muzzled you.

Maybe it was intentional, maybe it was an accident, but there were certain things you couldn't do without tipping off Miu. As much as you loved her with all of your heart, dragging her into your demi-detective work seemed like a bad idea. You didn't think she'd purposefully squeal, but she was prone to thinking after she'd already spoken. There were just some things you needed to make sure kept quiet.

You begin to wonder just how serious Kokichi was being when he said he couldn't do his regular activities while chained to Maki. You think you're starting to sympathize. You stand up and start making your way out of the nurse's office. There's still so much you need to get done and not close to enough time. It's likely you won't get that time. You jump slightly when you end up immediately coming face to face with Monokuma.
"I was wondering when you'd finally leave! I've been waiting out here so patiently the entire time to give you this wonderful present!" There's a large machine next to Monokuma. "Now you might be wondering what this lovely machine is. This is an air quality tester! I dunno why you'd actually want this, but it was sitting around so I'm giving it to you! Just, uh, don't use it in the nurse's office. If you want to test the air quality in there just stick the vacuum part in the room and do the rest from out here."

"Why?" You don't understand what the bear is getting at. In fact, you aren't sure if he's trying to help you or if he actually just gave you something entirely useless.

"Don't question it!" Monokuma growls at you before disappearing in a sudden huff. That was... odd to say the least. You ponder this for a couple of minutes longer. Monokuma almost seemed like he was panicking for some reason. What could he have any reason to be worried about that would relate to an air quality tester. Unless it has something to do with poison gas, but you'd already be dead if that was the case...

He emphasized not using it to the nurse's office so you follow his directions, not wanting to break anything by accident. The machine has a long nozzle which connects to a vacuum holding chamber of sorts where the air is probably tested. Right now the chamber itself is all squished up and uninflated.

You lean down to fiddle with the machine and put the nozzle inside of the nurse's office. You turn on the machine and it makes an awful noise as the bag inflates, sucking in air from the office. The machine makes three beeps and then the video panel on the front lights up. It reads no contaminants detected.

You frown, wondering what the point of even checking the nurse's office was. Or... maybe it's not about what's inside the nurse's office as what isn't in it compared to the rest of the school. You flick the switch and the bag starts to deflate as the air leaves it. Once it's done deflating you hold the nozzle outside of the room and try again. This time the little screen lights up with the words contaminants detected.

The panel switches to what seems to be a magnified view of whatever's in the bag. The air catches inside of your lungs for a moment. Tiny, minuscule even, versions of Monokuma holding cameras practically infest the bag. They crawl around the bag trying to find an escape, thousands of little wings beating while the tiny bear bugs fill every crevice of the bag.

This confirms a couple of things, but brings up more questions. You leave the machine outside when you reenter the nurse's office. You don't want to bring any technology into the room until you're certain as to what's causing the tiny Monokuma's to be unable to enter the nurse's office. You have an idea that will hopefully lead to a couple of answers.

Searching through your desk you check drawer after drawer until you find a little box that wasn't there before. It's a small box, one of those boxes you find around electricity to protect against surges. Or EMP waves. That would also explain why Monokuma's never wanted to enter the room, why he hung around outside waiting for you.

What's in the box though?

Well, you have the feeling it might be Rantaro's Monopad. He mentioned hiding it somewhere Monokuma wouldn't be able to tamper with it, and it would make sense to hide it in your desk to protect it from the mastermind. If you're right about it being Tsumugi, she might be hesitant to do something around you that would draw attention to herself. And you'd probably yell at anyone who went rummaging around in the nurse's office regardless of why they were there. You leave the
room and put the box on top of the machine. You need to get both of these to your room so you can hide them.

Luckily it's still early in the morning. It's 15 till 7am and few people want to be awake at this time so fewer still are going to be awake. The halls remain blissfully clear. You aren't sure how you would have explained this to one of your classmates.

It takes you 5 minutes to actually drag the machine to your room and get inside which leaves you 10 minutes of investigation time before you have to return to Miu. You're good at time crunches.

You swing open your closet, deciding to stash the machine away in there. Not only is it nigh impossible for anyone else to get into your closet, but the machine will draw attention away from the hidden panel in the bottom hiding everything else. Before you slip the machine into it you open up the panel to check once more that all your items are still there. And then you pause.

You know what? Fuck it.

You pull the letter out from the panel and slip it into your blazer. You've stashed a bottle of oil and a cloth somewhere in case you ever came to this point in time. You're gonna try cleaning off the letter. You've made a lot of progress so far. Whatever secret it holds, you're ready for them.

After retrieving the letter you put the paneling back in place and slip the machine over the top of it, closing your closet and locking it back up.

You'll start with Rantaro's Monopad and then you'll move on to cleaning up the letter.

You manage to crack open the pretty basic lock on the box and open it up. It's practically child's play which worries you. The Monopad clicks to life without any hesitation. The screen is a bit distorted but it doesn't look like it's been too terribly damaged. You open up the map on the Monopad and find that it quite readily supplies the entire map of the school. It even marks off each of the undiscovered labs with little symbols just like the ones that have been discovered so far. They're all fairly easy to guess. A magnifying glass for Shuichi, etc, etc.

And then there's a pocket watch. It's inside of the hellish road to despair that you managed to conquer so early on into this stupid game. It must have been well hidden or not even opened. If you get the chance you'll have to investigate it some other time, preferably when there are no chains involved. This lab... the symbol makes you think that it has to be yours. No one else in this entire game could be represented by a pocket watch.

You go to the students page next. At first glance, it looks fine, except for the fact your own icon is greyed out. You try to click on yourself but it doesn't let you go to the page dedicated to you. Instead, there's a password. It's 12 characters. You can't help but smile to yourself. Yeah, there's nothing on that page you need to know. Nothing you haven't already figured out. You'll leave it be.

The rest of the pages don't require passwords and they're a little more interesting. Of course, they have the generic game history background each person got assigned. A full list of details talking about their character in the game. What catches your interest is that each person seems to have a new page dedicated to them, a tab that sits at the top of the page. The tab doesn't have any label, it's more like a button.

You settled on Shuichi's page first and click on the tab. It doesn't open immediately. Again, another password pops up. It's only 4 letters, so you take a wild guess and type in Hope. As stereotypical as it is it's been the password to a couple of other puzzles in this school and it seems like something Rantaro would have been able to guess. You silently thank Rantaro for leaving this
behind where you could find it. In response to the password, the Monopad gives a little chirp and the screen shifts.

The picture of Shuichi on screen shifts. The only thing familiar about him is that damned hat. His uniform is unfamiliar to you, almost as unfamiliar as his expression. It's meek and maybe a little twisted. Insane even.

And then your world crashes down.

Shuichi Saihara, cast as the Ultimate Detective. Longtime fanboy of The Danganronpa series, he wanted to be the Ultimate Detective so he could be the traitor at the end of the game and get his very own execution. We have instead cast him as the protagonist. He has an unhealthy obsession with the Danganronpa series stemming from the fact he was forced to participate in a different killing game hosted by a different despair sect at a much younger age. While his concerned uncle has tried to get him into therapy it's never done him much good since his own worthlessness was only ever cemented by absentee parents. Danganronpa is a way for him to gain some kind of twisted recognition. Changing his personality to fit the role of protagonist might cause issues, ensure there is a backup plan to kill him off just in case.

Your thoughts go back to the cards signed by those who had participated in the first two killing games. One of those cards, if you remember correctly, was '5 players of this game have been in 1 or more killing games prior to this one.' You'd told the others that the card was a lie, while in reality, you were the one who was lying. You have no reason to doubt the Monopad, so it leaves one simple truth for you to try and grapple with.

Shuichi is deeply not okay because he went through this one already.

You have so many questions but the most important one seems to go back to the fact the card claimed there are 5 people in this game who've participated in other games before. You can count out one as Rantaro and by what you've already gathered you'll make an educated guess the second one is Tsumugi. That's a fact you can confirm by reading her file. The third then becomes Shuichi who you'll have to keep a careful eye on if he's really breaking down into his old self.

Kaede Akamatsu, cast as the Ultimate Pianist. An apathetic girl who's thoroughly fed up with humanity. Her twin sister was always the golden child in the family, more friendly and open to strangers. Kaede loved her sister dearly but was often jealous and hated everyone around her sister by proxy. She decided to join Danganronpa because she thinks she could kill a person. On record, during her interview, she said she'd even kill her own twin sister if they ended up in the game together. It seems deep down she wishes to be more like her sister, so making her bubbly and more outgoing shouldn't cause her to drop out of character.

Miu Iruma, cast as the Ultimate Inventor. A child from a very neglectful home, was often thrown around between distant relatives who didn't want her after the suicide of her mother. Learned very early on to act out in order to get attention, a trait we could easily twist since we're still lacking both a proper comic relief and fanservice character. While her core personality is highly sex adverse due to the nature of the bullying she often faced in school, we believe that we might be able to twist that enough that it won't jar her out of character.

Kaito Momota, cast as the Ultimate Astronaut. Taken care of by his grandparents after the passing of both his parents, he grew up getting bullied until he ultimately became more aggressive. His core personality remains that of a carefree idiot so taking away his memories should sort out the trust issues he's developed over time. Don't give him a reason not to trust people and he should remain blindly innocent. Be careful to maintain that he gets shipped with the assassin and NOT the detective. We've already been seeing potential issues popping up in that regard.
You start to feel sick, you can't force yourself to read any more of these. You'll have to power through the rest at a later time. It's more than you wanted to know, but it was something you needed to know. Each entry was written so methodically, like stage notes. It almost felt as if the notes themselves weren't talking about actual people as much as they were talking about stage props. You want to lie down for what little time you have left and forget about this stupid game, but unfortunately, that's not how things work for you.

You pull the letter out of your blazer as you move the Monopad out of the way, glaring at it in disgust. Setting the letter down flat on your desk you find the bottle of oil and the cloth hidden in your room. You apply a small amount of the oil to the cloth and begin to rub it into the whiteout. The whiteout starts to dissolve and rub away. Slowly you start to see the beginning of ink appear. You thank your past self for being smart enough to use an oil-soluble whiteout but not an oil-soluble ink. As well as you thick paper.

Your eyes fall across the words that start to appear. The words that now form a sentence.

*There are only 3 ways to truly beat this killing game.*

Yeah. You think you might already know what they are. Consciously or unconsciously, you've already been preparing the end of this game. The gamemasters have made their moves, it's time to start making yours. You start with the queen, and move in for the execution. You might not win this game, but you will beat it.

Your pocket watch makes a quiet tick.

Chapter End Notes

I've officially made a Twitter in order to keep readers updated as to what's going on. I'll be using that to mention delays and when chapters should be going live from now on as well as announcing new stories and oneshots, so if you wanna keep up to date on the status of my various stories then go ahead and follow me @NightsShadeWolf
Today... wasn't shaping up to be a necessarily productive day. Not for the Fitness Club anyhow. You suppose by technicalities it was a productive day. You were able to meet with Kaito earlier that morning which had resulted in you not only being able to bully Kaito into helping you figure out what ailment but finding a treatment for said ailment. He'd still drop out of Fitness Club earlier than usual. The effects wouldn't be that instant, but he was looking a little sprrier than the days prior. Probably the idea that he wasn't going to just keel over helped him to perk up a bit.

In addition, you'd done some fairly useful things for your own personal investigation. No more than an hour or two ago you'd cracked some codes which had been bothering you for a while, and you were starting to come up with a plan. Starting to anyway. There were still details you needed to piece together and a couple of things you wanted to confirm before going through with it all.

The plan you had brewing in the back of your head wasn't necessarily a... friendly one. You had some reservations about it in general. You could easily pull the strings in the background and make it play out all nice and clean, but doing so would be damn near psychological trauma for the idiot crew at this point, and you weren't sure you were ready to go through with it yet. You wanted to confirm that Tsumugi was actually the mastermind first, as well as explore other avenues.

This plan of yours wouldn't be pleasant, so you wanted to leave it as a last resort if all else started to go wrong. Putting it into play at this point would just... hurt too much. It would hurt so deeply. You had to try pressing some of your other options.

Aside from those two points, productivity wasn't the word of the day. Not by any means. Especially not for the members of the fitness club. It wasn't so much that the core members of the group were being unproductive. Kaito drops out early, but that's an always thing. Shuichi starts to seem pressed when he finishes 10 push-ups, but again, that's an always thing. Kaede holds her own fairly well, Maki is a taskmaster as always setting a near impossible pace, and there is no Tenko. What you do have, are three new temporary members who really don't want to be there.

"Can't... breath..." Tsumugi pants from her position of being flopped down on the grass next to Kaede. Luckily the two have one of the longer chains so the cosplayer's lack of physical prowess doesn't inhibit Kaede. Maki is a different story entirely. The length of the chain made it impossible for her to do anything without Kokichi abiding it. Maki wanted to do her exercises, but Kokichi wanted to lie on the grass and take a nap. He is currently flat on his back enjoying the sunshine. Or at least trying to.

Maki is making her best attempt to try and annoy him into working, doing situps so that the chain jostles uncomfortably. Ever the master of guises, Kokichi doesn't seem all that bothered. In fact, if he wasn't coming up with a new insult for Maki every ten seconds you'd actually believe he wasn't bothered. The constant flurry of insults keeps you from actually believing that though. He doesn't even insult Miu half as much as this.

Speaking of which...

You glance at the girl next to you. The final compulsory member of the club. Miu is doing pushups or at least trying to. She's currently suffering more than Kaede and Shuichi did when the Fitness Club was first founded and finishing a single sit-up was apparently difficult. Admittedly, you have
to give her credit for at least trying. Trying more than Kokichi and Tsumugi in fact. "All this working out is going to damage my beautiful perfect body! Do you want that _____, because it's going to be your fault when it happens and you're the one who's going to have to live with the consequences the most!" She cries but still keeps going.

You smile to yourself and shake your head quietly. The drama queen.

Kaito and Shuichi look to be taking a break. You glance at the pair between your own sit-ups, trying to watch their body language. They aren't talking animatedly, but they seem relaxed. More relaxed than they've looked in days, actually. You feel yourself relax a little more when Kaito lets out a boisterous laugh at something Shuichi says. Shuichi almost seems to light up, probably thriving from both the attention, positivity, and sense of normalcy.

Maki gives up on trying to work out, glancing towards you and then following your line of vision. "I forgot to ask, how was the first check-up?" She asks. The question is directed at both you and Kaito.

"Like pulling teeth," you say dismissively. Maki quirks an eyebrow while Kaito gives an indignant overdramatic gasp of betrayed trust. "I had to practically drag out any kind of admission to anything less than perfect health. It took forever and he fought me nearly the whole time. Luckily, it doesn't seem like there are any major problems." You're careful with your words since you don't want to air Kaito's problem to a group of people who will either harass him or worry over him. Oh, who are you kidding? You don't want to air his problems to a group of people who would worry over him and Kokichi.

The use of the word major ensures that your words aren't a lie and Kokichi doesn't bat an eye, he just keeps tugging on the chain while Maki stands up and moves a little closer to the group. It seems like working out has stopped for the time being and now it's time to chat. Subconsciously the group moves into a broken circle and the attention shifts towards Kaito to get his side of the whole thing.

Kaito puts on a giant grin and shoots a thumb up. "I'd definitely recommend the rest of the group to go to her if they're having problems. I had something small that I thought was normal, but now it's all better!" Kaito's lie is blatant and bad, but the all better part is genuine enough that most of the group doesn't question it. They only look relieved.

Everyone was probably starting to get worried about Kaito at this point, he'd been acting off enough that it would raise questions. Kokichi, of course, picks up on the lie and decides he wants to mettle. He quickly learns that Maki has sharp elbows which aren't fun to have jabbed between your ribs. You don't hear any cracks so you assume that Kokichi is fine enough for you to ignore both him and Maki. She might be easy to frustrate but she's not stupid enough she'd actually get herself killed just to kill Kokichi. Right? Right.

"So the first check-up was a success!" Kaede cheers, full of energy and pep.

"Yeah, I'll be expecting all of you to make appointments with me soon," you say and Kaede energy quickly sags into a sheepish smile. Your goal was to make sure Kaito didn't die, but prevention is the best kind of medicine and really wouldn't it be safest to check on everyone else too? Not to mention you can quietly probe their mental states during check-ups. Most of the class wouldn't even realize what you were doing. That brought up an interesting thought though. "Actually guys, maybe we should convince the entire class to start doing check-ups!"

"That's a really smart idea actually, we can bring it up during the next class meeting," Kaede says. It seems like she's recovered better than Shuichi. She's back to old bubbly Kaede. Well, you say old
tentatively considering her entry in Rantaro's Monopad. You aren't sure what the 'old' Kaede was actually like, you can only guess based on what you read. A better phrasing would be she's acting more like the start of the game Kaede, which means it's the perfect time to start encouraging her to act more like a leader again.

It would be nice to have a little more of the unity and official leader can provide a group. While nothing had fallen apart and blown up in your face just yet you knew it was only a matter of time and you still really would rather not be the leader. You know for a genuine fact you're capable of it, it just... isn't fun.

"I'll second the vote if someone brings it up!" Kaito says, shooting you a giant smile. Your beautiful idiot son, you hope he never changes. Maybe you're mother henning a little too hard, but you can't help it anymore. You have a feeling you're entering the end stretch. Maybe it's still going to get drawn out a while longer. Maybe there's still more to slog through. But you have a feeling that this is the ending stretch.

You'd better start prepping your grand finale.

"Check-ups would be especially smart since ____-san can keep an eye out to make sure no one's gotten poisoned. She can also keep an eye on everyone's mental states," Shuichi pipes up. Of course, he'd be the one to mention that little detail. It's harder to get people to admit things if they know you're paying attention, but you suppose it'll still be fine.

"Why mental states though?" Kokichi says. "That's a therapists job, and who's actually going to trust ____ not to blab," the purple haired boy says with a laugh. He's obviously trying to make jabs to antagonize you in particular, but he gets shut down pretty quickly.

"I will," it's actually Maki who speaks up first as her eyes turn towards you. "She did threaten to essentially take a secret to her grave the last trial," the red-eyed girl says. She turns away quickly, but for a moment, you're actually rather shocked by the amount of trust in her gaze. You did pretty much threaten just that, didn't you? In addition, you've avoided treating Maki any different just because you're privy to such information. You suppose the amount of trust she's showing you shouldn't be a shock, but it hits you in a way you weren't really expecting.

"If no one actually has any legitimate arguments to the contrary, then I believe we'll bring it up the next time the whole class meets," Kaede says with a nod. She looks happy. Maybe things are going to be okay after all.

"What about Kiibo?" Kaito asks. It's a valid concern. You aren't really much of a mechanic. You knew enough of the basic to keep a motorcycle in working order, your vehicle of choice, but besides that, you aren't good with machines or advanced computer programs. You friends who are the children of experts when it comes to things like that, it's always been better you ask them for help. Of course, there were skills like medicine you took into your own hands, and you do know the basics of everything you could learn, but everything you have learned has so kind of utility to it. Every skill of yours has a greater purpose.

"That's Miu's job," you say as you glance towards the blonde who seems to preen at the statement alone.

"Hell fucking yeah! That boy's in good hands," she boasts with a puff of her chest. "Robots and people are similar in their need for routine maintenance. Of course, it takes a genius to handle it, so you're lucky you have a pair of brilliant minds who are good at each!" She says with a haughty laugh. It's partially unexpected, but not entirely, that Miu would begin to include you in her prideful boasts. You take it as a compliment that the girl who was calling herself the smartest
person in the school at the start of the game is now considering you an equal.

Of course, she'd have to in order to keep up her airs if she really does have HPD like you think she might.

"Oh my god, stop flirting before I throw up," Kokichi says, making a gagging noise. You can't tell if he's playing the role of the antagonist or if he's genuinely being petty given the way his sneer forms on his features.

"Either I flirt or we make the three musket-idiots figure out their issues already," the strawberry blonde retorts. You try not to flinch. Miu is more observant than you honestly give her credit for sometimes. Of course she'd pick up on that, of course it would annoy her, of course she with her lack of filters would mention it. Her timing, unfortunately, is absolutely shit and you can only hope she doesn't make the situation any worse than it already is.

"What do you mean by that?" Shuichi asks with a confused look. Kaito and Kaede both go completely still. There is one on either side of Shuichi at this point. Kaito started out uncomfortably close to the other boy while Kaede slowly gravitated towards them as the conversation progressed. She was actually kind of sly about slowly scooting closer, but now that attention has turned itself onto her it's fairly obvious she's scooted closer.

"Oh my gosh, I can't believe I'm saying this, but Iruma-san please continue," Kokichi says. The largest grin starts to split his features as he watches the trio starts to squirm under the gazes of the rest of the Fitness Club. You glare at Kokichi but he doesn't look at you. His eyes are mostly trained on Shuichi who he enjoys watching squirm the most. You wonder if the trio are going to try and lie. If they do, you know Kokichi will call them out and enjoy doing it. Of course, he'd have a right to considering lying would be fairly hypocritical of two out of the three.

You guess Kokichi still hasn't forgiven Shuichi. Maybe that'll be the next thing you look at.

"Are you fucking kidding me right now? Are you that dense? You, staridiot, and bakamatsu need to go get a damn room already! Preferably one that unlocks with those damn hotel keys," Miu huffs. "I mean, it's pretty freaking obvious to everyone here."

Kaede looks panicked. Kaito looks panicked. Shuichi looks confused and panicked. "What are you talking about?" Kaito says a little too loudly. "You guys don't actually think so too, do you?" He looks at you and Maki in particular. There's a muttered 'I ship it' in the background, but Tsumugi is smart and doesn't engage the situation any further than that.

"Do you want me to tell the truth or lie for the sake of your pride?" Maki says with a deadpan kind of expression. She truly calls it as she sees it...

You've already admitted that it's plainly obvious to you. Which means Kaito is looking towards you in hopes that you will lie. Hypocritical indeed. So you shrug. "Sorry Kaito-kun, but if I lied about it Kokichi-kun would just call me out. There's some background laughter while the three look at each other pathetically. They are unsure how to progress from this point.

Just as the situation is turning awkward one of the Monokubs appears and unclicks Tsumugi from her position trapped so close to the action. "Oh look at that," she says with an awkward laugh. "Guess I'm just going to go now," she says as she quickly makes her escape. She all but runs away, turning towards the school. Apparently, her self control breaks and she ends up sprinting the last couple feet towards the school as she ducks inside.

You decide that you don't want to be here for this. You've done all you can for the situation, your
presence will undoubtedly just make it worse at this point, so you gracelessly remove yourself and the tactless Miu from the situation. "Waaait! Don't leave us!" You cry as you drag Miu to her feet and start sprinting after the cosplayer. Miu makes no complains as she follows.

"Hey, no fair! You have to say start if we're going to be racing!" The little Ultimate Dictator yells as he jumps to his feet. Most shocking of all is that Maki actually stands up and follows as the five of you make your way inside the school. Kaito, Shuichi, and Kaede don't have the time to actually respond before they're being left in the dust outside. Your group slams the door behind you as you leave the three to fuddle through whatever mess they've made for themselves on their own.

"Let's hope that they make some actual progress," you comment as 4 out of 5 of you stop once you get inside. Tsumugi just keeps going, but you and Maki end up stopping to talk which leads to Miu and Kokichi being forced to stay as well.

"They were going to just keep dancing around each other, so I'm glad someone said something," Maki says. You decide to talk to her since she understands your pain the best. She's been watching the train wreck that is those three as long as you have, and from what you've seen she does genuinely care about them. In particular, she's fond of Kaito, but besides Kokichi who isn't? His friendly is infectious, like some kind of smiley plague. You can tell she sympathizes your sentiments, and you're both undoubtedly glad the bandaid got yanked off one way or another. And yet...

"Perhaps we could have approached a bit more... civil?" You say as you glance at Miu. You're hopeful that everything will go well considering the conversation you had with Kaito earlier that day, but you can't ever truly be certain. Things like this are hard to predict. You aren't sure if Miu blatantly telling it how it is made things better worse. You'll have to talk to her a little later. And also possibly start thinking about HPD treatments...

"Those dense fucks needed things spelled out for them. Sometimes it's the only way," Miu says with a dismissive shake of her head. While you don't necessarily disagree with the entire statement, things still could have been handled much better.

"Because you're the relationship expert?" Maki says with a raised eyebrow. She glances towards you for half a second and you almost choke on air when you catch her incredulous look.

"Hell fucking yeah I am. I know everything about relationships," Miu says with a puffed out chest. She says it like you aren't the first person she's ever dated in her entire life, which given the way she acts, you severely fucking doubt.

"She doesn't and she's just as much of a beginner as I am," you undermine the boast and the blonde glares at you for a moment. The jest is gentle though and she brushes it off with a sigh, knowing that unlike Kokichi the things you say aren't directly malicious.

Kokichi once again wrinkles up his nose at the pair of you while Maki roughly jabs him in the side.

"So what do we do now since this seems to be the official club disbandment for today," Maki says as she looks between your little group. This actually gives you a moment of pause.

"Admittedly, I don't know," you tell the assassin with a shrug and a quick shake of your head. You would typically go scrounging for clues, but you don't want to tip off Miu too much about what's going on. It might be a little too much for the strawberry blonde and while you trust certain aspects of her personality you don't trust her ability to be rational. At all. Even slightly. Then again, you don't trust a single person in this school to act rationally at times, yourself included.
You especially don't trust Kokichi who starts grinning like a fox. "Hey! Why don't we do something actually fun? I saw some video games in the game room," Kokichi says. The last time you checked most of the thing in the game room were broken, though it's entirely possible that Monokuma might have added something. Though, something about videogames leaves an ominous aftertaste in your mouth. You brush it off and decide that it's worth investigating.

"I don't have any problem with that idea," you say. This seems to convince Miu and Maki to go along with the idea and the 4 of you go down to the basement where the game room is located. The three of you manage to get there without any fights between Miu and Kokichi or Maki and Kokichi breaking out. You consider it an achievement.

You enter the room and it brings back a couple of bad memories related to the last murder, though it isn't any worse than trying to step foot in the library itself. That being said, it feels deeply wrong in a different manner. Like something here is displaced or estranged from how it was before. The only way you can think to describe it is like a glitch you don't completely notice. Just something small, like an asset clipping. You don't notice that the one NPC's face looks a little off, but you can tell that something feels strange about it. Imagine that, but it's a game you've played so many times you've memorized the dialogue for the start of the game. It's that kind of wrong.

You don't mention it though, and you do your best to brush it off. If something is wrong, it's your job to figure out what. Just as expected the room has changed since the last time you saw it. There's a TV in the back of the room with actual consoles hooked up to it. The cases of games are scattered around the room, though the largest pile sits next to the consoles. The consoles themselves look okay enough. Everything here is run down, from the broken arcade machines to the fact there's literally nothing to sit on, but it looks like the consoles should at least work.

"This place looks like a trash heap," Kokichi comments, appearing to be no help to the group goal of finding a game to play. You start searching through the games piled up next to the consoles while Maki and Miu gather the other ones thrown all around the room.

As you start looking through the games you take note of something distinctly confusing to you. "What the fuck is this?" You say as you pick through the cases. "Amazing Plumber Brothers, Boom the Superfast Armadillo, Capsule Demons... The fuck is this rip off bullshit?" You end up blurtting out. You feel offended on a personal level...

"Hey! You better be grateful I gave you any games at all," a certain black and white bear says as he appears, a hint of disdain clinging to his voice. It's somewhere between the annoyingly pitched up show voice he likes to use and the deeper one you've gotten used to. This middle ground voice is more unsettling than the sum of its parts. "In an economy like this? You gotta do everything you can to avoid copyright strikes. Those things are deadly! If you must know though, there is one game among the group that's a Monokuma Original the likes of which even outshines Twilight Murder Syndrome!" He gets a series of blank looks for his statement. "What? Before your time? Eh, doesn't matter," he waddles towards the stack of games and starts to sort through them all.

Monokuma ends up pulling out a certain case. "Madness Massacre!" The bear announces as he hands you the case. "It's a murder mystery game where you get to play as a detective. But the detective actually has to hide the clues from everyone else in order to reach the real answer! A good thing they aren't isn't a Kirigiri. I hear any Kirigiri who obscures, hides, or forgets about the Truth ends up getting... burned," Monokuma says with yet another demented smirk. Again, silence. "What? Still before your time. Geeze, I must be getting old or something," the bear says with an agitated huff.

You dismiss both statements and look down at the game. The cover is an, interesting, collage of
blood spatters and terrible photoshop editing. The bodies on the cover look fake and the blood is an off shade of salmon. It's almost laughable how badly it's trying to be edgy and ultimately failing.

"This game... looks pretty bad," Kokichi says as he peers over your shoulder to look at the cover.

Monokuma makes a look of pure rage. "Well then, I suppose you should know this game is impossible to beat! If any of you idiots can beat it on hard mode then I'll give you a special prize. But here's the catch, you have to start playing on hard mode and end playing on hard mode. No easying out and then going back once you have the answers, no telling each other the answers either! Not if you want to get the prize at least," Monokuma says. You perk up at this, your attention garnered by the word prize.

"So it's a logic game then?" You ask at you start to put the disk into the receptacle and boot up the machine. There's a little intro preview thing. The graphics aren't terrible. It's no Naughty Dogs or BioWare by any means. In fact, it's one of those old fashioned looking RPGs. You're almost reminded of corpse party, which is probably an accurate comparison given the nature of the game.

"Yep! And you gotta win by solving all the puzzles, including the final murder and who the killer was. Bonus points if you can figure out what's going on that caused the murders in the first place. It'll be a good time waster I'm sure," Monokuma says with a bob of his head. You're already grabbing the controller. He dares challenge you with a videogame of all things. Laughable. Logic and puzzle games are the only things you could really trounce just about any one of your friends as a child. This was going to be child's play.

"Can we collaborate if we play together?" You ask. You start up a new file, pondering for a moment what to call your little character before assigning them the name Sapling. You don't know why but it feels right?

Monokuma ponders this for a while. "As long as you're both in the room and talking when you come to the realization, then sharing answers is fine, but helping someone play through if you've already passed them up will disqualify them from the prize," Monokuma says before he finally takes his leave.

"Are you actually going to try?" Kokichi asks as he watches you turn the game up to the hardest difficulty. The controller easily fits into your palms. A strong memory hits you, one you're sure that's real. Sitting on the couch in your best friend's home, playing any video game under the sun. Old games, new games, you two played it all. You were equals and no one else could stand on the same ground as you. Especially when it came to puzzle games.

"Kokichi-kun, Maki-san, would you two go check if the three idiots are done talking yet? If they are, get Shuichi-kun and bring him to me so that we can decimate this game," you tell the two.

The floor is hard but you sit yourself down on it anyway without much complaint. "You seem pretty pumped up," Miu says as she sits herself down next to you. You smile at her, a wild and childish kind of grin. The general feeling of wrongness still sits in the back of your mind but it's easily overshadowed by the pure joy you feel just holding the control in your hands. You want to get started this second, but you should honestly wait and see if Maki and Kokichi can find Shuichi. Having him here to bounce ideas off of would be a huge help and it would feel weird to play alone when your entire life you've never even played singleplayer games without another body pressed against yours screaming in your ear to dodge repeatedly.

"Videogames are something important to me," you finally settle on telling Miu. You set the controller down as to not tempt yourself and you bring your knees up to your chest. Miu hesitates for a second but eventually sits down next to you. "Videogames are one of those things that remind
me a lot of childhood. So do books. Funny enough, so does Kiibo, but it's fairly vague compared to
how acute the sense of familiarity caused by videogames is. They just mean a lot to me, and if this
game can give us some kind of clue..." you trail off and smile sheepishly at Miu who rolls her eyes.

"Dork," she says but presses a kiss to your cheek anyway. Your expression lights up as hers turns
crimson. "Anyway, this is a logic game so I might be able to help even if Saihara-kun can't help." She
wraps an arm around your waist and you nearly freeze up on the spot. Miu thankfully doesn't notice
and you suppress the urge to start nervously shifting around.

There's a thump from the doorway and your turn around expecting a person. What you find is an
Exisal awkwardly holding a couch. "Uhm, hello," you greet the yellow Exisal.

"Pops said that you were taking his game challenge, so ya bastards needed a cough to sit up,"
Monosuke says from inside of the Exisal. Monotaro's Exisal is holding the other end up the couch.
You stand up and pull Miu to her feet well, kicking the controller out of the way before moving
yourself. The two creatures struggle to push themselves and the couch through the doorway, but
eventually, they manage to fudge their way into the room. Again, you're reminded of two assets
clipping into one another as you watch the struggle.

They thump the couch down where the two of you were sitting earlier. Miu throws herself onto the
couch like some kind of queen, lounging across it. "It's pretty damn uncomfortable, but I suppose
it's more comfortable than the floor. Why is your old man so convinced to make this room as shitty
as possible?" She looks up at the Exisal with a disgusting amount of bravery. For someone who
whimpers when Kokichi insults her, she has no problems sassing a giant killer robot. Or maybe she
just knows they won't hurt her unless she breaks a rule, and there are no rules against sassing the
Monokubs.

"Actually, we picked it," Monotaro says with the smuggest voice you could possibly imagine.
Monodam makes no appearance, but that would make sense considering he's more or less usurped
rule and made himself the leader. He would be making the other two do the dirty work.

You sit down as well. Miu isn't wrong. The couch is more comfortable than the floor, but
comfortable is perhaps a word that's too kind for something this stiff. It's only just barely better
than sitting on the ground, and part of the reason for that is the height advantage and no so much
because it's nicer to sit on. "If we can convince Maki-san and Kokichi-kun to keep doing our
bidding maybe we can get them to find us some comfy blankets? Or maybe Kaede-san will do it if
she shows up and we ask nicely."

"You can ask nicely, I'm just going to tell the little shit to go find us something more comfortable,"
Miu says. The mention of Kokichi alone is enough to make her voice sound slightly bitter.

You roll your eyes and sigh. "You know he won't listen to you, right? He hates you as much as you
hate him."

"Yeah, but he'd listen to you." Miu's voice dips into something you'd almost say is jealous. Oh my
gosh, she's jealous.

"Miu, look at me," you say. You lean towards her a little as she turns towards you. "I love you,
okay?" You say. You try to make yourself sound reassuring but you aren't good at the whole
reassuring thing, let alone the whole emotions thing. You face turns red and your voice shivers a
little more than you're strictly comfortable with. At least it seems to have an overall positive effect.
A small smile breaks out on her features but it falls away just as quickly. "What's wrong? Talk to
me. I need you to communicate if we want to keep this relationship healthy."
You don't mean to put so much emphasis on communicating, except, you kind of do because it's one of the biggest reasons relationships fall apart. If there's anything your family has drilled into your head, it's that. Between your parent's healthy relationship and the many failures your brothers have had in their own romantic endeavors, it's that.

Miu's face deepens into a worried frown, her eyes darting off to the side. "It's just that..." She struggles with her words for a moment. You don't say anything, giving her a moment to collect herself and her thoughts. She sighs deeply before turning her gaze back towards you. "You know that he had a thing for you, right? You know that he still does, right?" She looks miserable.

"And this bothers you?" You keep your voice neutral as you try to prod at the situation and gather more details into what exactly is bothering her. You were, in fact, starting to have a feeling that this was the case, but Miu thinking the same really cinches it. Not to mention how he's been acting towards Miu ever since your little reveal. He already wasn't the nicest to her, but his actions have become more constant.

"Yeah, I guess? I don't know why," she crosses her arms and once again turns away from you. Liar. She's getting defensive. The small inkling sensation rises up in the back of your mind to attack her weak spots and tear her lies apart. That portion of your personality needs to shut up because this isn't supposed to be an interrogation, it's supposed to be you talking with Miu.

You pull on one of her hands and slowly she uncrosses them, allowing you to take her right hand into both of yours and cradle it gently. "Miu, are you jealous?" She doesn't answer but she doesn't have to. Her body language says even. "Oh, beloved. Fancy me as he may, I picked you. I picked you first. I would never do anything to hurt you. If you're worried I might cheat you shouldn't be."

Miu flinches at that. "Of course I wouldn't fucking think you'd do that!" She snaps before falling silent again. "I worried you might decide to regret picking me," she says it so quietly you barely catch her voice. You almost don't know what to say to that.

You open and close your mouth a couple of times as you struggle to properly form a response. "I love you, completely and honestly. I'm not going to just wake up and realize that, oops, my mistake. I don't make mistakes, it's a rule. No, shh, don't interrupt, it's a rule if I say it's a rule. My point is, no one is just going to steal me away. Regardless of what happens, I will always love you," you tell the girl. The turns back towards you and nods quietly, a little relief finally loosening her shoulders which had started to hunch up.

You smirk slightly, grin turning slightly dangerous. You pull Miu into your lap with little warning. She gives a shocked yelp as you wrap your arms around her waist. She struggles for a moment but gives up as you bury your face into her shoulder blades. It still feels staticky and fiery whenever you touch her. It's unfamiliar and uncomfortable, but not unwelcomed. Quite the contrary. You want to keep holding her until you get used to feeling.

A couple of blissful minutes elapse before the door swings open with a loud slam. "We found the id-" Kokichi cuts himself off and stares blankly. You crane your neck around the stare at the new arrivals. Maki is dragging a thoroughly crimson Kaede, Kaito, and Shuichi, but none of them look too terribly worse for the wear. They all shoot you smiles (baring Maki who only gives a brisk nod of acknowledgment) and Kokichi seems to be the only one deeply judging your decisions right now.

"Who's the top," he asks sarcastically, probably in an attempt to rile up either you or Miu. You just give him a deadpanned expression.

"Do you really think we've gotten that far?" You ask him. He just shrugs, pulling a pretty
convincing look of mockery and disgust.

"Who knows with the little whore pig. Then again, ____-chan is a bit of a prude so probably not. Although, you should both at least know by now!" He says. He looks at you both like he's expecting some kind of answer. You just roll your eyes. Miu looks torn between answering and just silently glaring. You are grateful when she settles on silently glaring.

"Kaede-san, would you be a dear and go grab some blankets while I tell Shuichi the deal about this game," you say as you brush off Kokichi. Kaede happily obliges and dips out of the room.

Shuichi sits down where Miu had been sitting before you pulled her into your lap, Kaito stands off to the side, looking at the screen slightly. You remember discarding the controller off in the corner. Pathetically you point at it and whine, refusing to get up. Kaito gets the memo and grabs it for you. Kokichi sits on the back of the couch and you feel the entire think awkwardly lurch.

"Scoot," Kaito demands. You awkwardly push yourself and Miu to the far left end of the couch Shuichi shimmies to the middle. Kaito sits himself down on the far right where there's now enough room for him. "So what is this game?"

"Apparently a really difficult murder mystery. We get a prize if we win," you say as you take the controller from him. You don't press play because Kaede is still getting blankets. You see Maki shift awkwardly, trying to decide where to sit. Kokichi having perched himself on the back of the couch makes it impossible for her to sit on the ground in front of where she probably would have. You shimmy a little more, moving slightly back towards Shuichi and pat the armrest. This couch is quickly becoming not big enough. When Kaede does arrive there is no room.

"Thanks, guys," she says. Eventually, she decides that today has been... something and she's done actually caring. She drapes herself across Kaito and Shuichi's laps, the both of which are apparently too tired to care. Or they've actually solved their problem. You can't tell, but it's Kaede, so lack of physical boundaries isn't actually unusual for her. The blankets are awkwardly adjusted and eventually, everyone gets comfortable on the too small couch.

You press start on the game, watching the prologue with analytical eyes. Shuichi watches with just as much attention as you are, but the rest of the group are only half watching. They've probably figured they won't be much help at this point. The prologue doesn't provide anything too useful, just setting. An eerie abandoned mansion with 10 people locked inside and forced into a killing game. "How original," you scoff under your breath and get a satisfying amount of giggle in return.

The investigation starts and you start moving your little character around on the screen. Controls work well enough. You go to inspect one of the cabinets... which falls on you. It hasn't even been a full five minutes and yet a you are dead screen stares back at you.

"So it's one of these bitches," Miu sneers, her eyes narrowing. Indeed. You know these types of games. You've beaten these kinds before. You'll beat this one just like every other one of its brethren.

"So be it," you whisper as you continue from the last save point. This was going to be a long game. In spite of that, you felt comfortable surrounded by these idiots. Maybe everything was going to be okay.
You aren't entirely sure how much time has elapsed since you and Shuichi started playing this god awful game, but you knew that it was already too much time. You'd dedicated at least 2 days to this game so far. Admittedly playing the game wasn't the only thing you did. There was cooking, cleaning, chores, things like that. You still had to check on Gonta and go to Miu's lab so she could grab various different items. It was better for everyone's sake she had the ability to keep herself occupied.

If Miu spent too long stationary or without the ability to invent anything she started to look like she was going to explode. Not the angry yelling kind of explode, you mean she literally started to look like she was going to combust. She started to twitch and jitter, starting with her fingers and hands and the jostling of her legs. Constantly switching positions like she couldn't get comfortable no matter what she did. The most accurate comparison you could think of was a drug addict going through withdrawal, but that wasn't a very nice comparison, so you kept it to yourself.

While 2 days might have passed, it wasn't the only thing you spent time doing. So it really shouldn't be a shock to anyone you'd spent as much time trying to finish the game as you already had. In spite of that, the hour count next to your save file still felt like it was mocking you. You had a certain degree of video game related pride that was currently being wounded. Any other game you would have already had finished by now.

You blamed Shuichi.

Not because he was useless. He was amazing at puzzles and you were pretty sure the only reason you were able to speed through the actual organization of the evidence was that Shuichi and you were a dangerous team working together like this. The problem was...

"Shuichi Saihara, don't you fucking dare," you growl as Shuichi navigates the character towards a lever. You level a warning glare at him, but he doesn't miss a beat.

"There's nothing else in the room I can interact with and we're still missing clues," he says, glancing towards you. Your expression is a mixture of fury and horror as you attempt to strong-arm him into not doing the stupid thing he's about to do. "Besides, I have to know," he presses down on the activation button. Just as expected, the character pulls down on the lever and spikes shoot up through the floor. Fucking amateur.

Shuichi sighs and hands over the controller to you. The pair of you had been switching control back and forth like this for a while now, considering just watching for too long could get grating on the nerves. Every time one of you died or a major accomplishment was reached you'd swap control. The major accomplishment (such as solving one of the six murders) was something that the two of you had put into play later after realizing your turns tended to be much longer than Shuichi's. You were a gamer, it was something you learned at an early age. You could quickly enough identify most of the rage-inducing death traps. Shuichi, however, could not.

The only reason he ever even got a turn was thanks to the fact there was no actual combat in the game, just traps. If there was combat then you were fairly sure his turns would all last about five minutes.

The game loads back up quickly and you stare at the screen in abject horror. "Shuichi-kun, hun, you forgot to save again," you say very quietly, not really wanting to acknowledge how far back his little mistake had flung the two of you. Shuichi groans and lowers his head, pressing it into his
hands as you set about redoing the area your companion had already completed.

"Way to go, Shittyhara," Miu says under her breath. You jab the girl in the ribs. She yelps and nearly falls off the couch, barely protecting whatever she's working on at the time. Shuichi just sighs and shakes his head, seemingly used to the treatment by now. It's not like she's being as mean as some people. She's just acting like normal Miu, and while you'd like to work towards making normal Miu a little more nicer, she isn't openly antagonizing him the way that some people are. Or even how some people were.

Miu's ambivalent trash talking of everyone was almost a good thing in this case. Almost.

"Hey! Leave him be! He might not be the best player, but he's trying. Besides, at this point I'm pretty sure ____-san could put anyone to shame," Kaito speaks up in the defense of Shuichi. Miu deflates slightly at this. You've already had a talk with some of your classmates about trying to address Miu's temperament among other things. You don't want to completely change Miu or anything. The innuendo spewing bag of sass and sex jokes is, unfortunately, the creature you fell in love with. But you do think that she has a problem and she as well as her relationships could be a lot healthier is she learned to tone it down sometimes.

She was starting tone it down a little around you, but you also don't enable her. The rest of the class, save Kokichi, kind of enable her. Towards the beginning of the game, Kokichi seemed to be the only one actively trying to curb her attitude. Unfortunately, the farther you've gotten into the game the more those insults have become less and less productive, turning more towards genuine malice than a way of treating her like she's acting.

Suffice to say, maybe you should have realized that just possibly he was jealous.

But come on.

He's radiated chaotic twink energy since day one, can anyone really fault you for not catching on all that quickly?

Speaking of Kokichi, he and Maki are currently absent. They don't spend as much time here in the game room as Kaito and Miu, mostly because they aren't forced to. The member of the squad who's missing the most is Kaede, mostly because of Tsumugi. You aren't sure what the two get up to, but they aren't around often. You aren't sure if Tsumugi dislikes all of you or just finds you boring, but she doesn't really hang out with any of you much. You swear she would have gone full on reclusive after Korekiyo's murder and Rantaro's execution if it wasn't for these damn chains.

You aren't so much worried about Kaede as much as you're worried about how, well, almost broken Tsumugi has seemed lately. You're probably the first person to admit that you don't trust her, but it's not like you hate her either. If she is the mastermind she's just as much of a victim and a puppet as the rest of you are. If the gamemasters are able to manipulate the thoughts and memories of the rest of the class then you have no doubt the mastermind, be it Tsumugmi or not, isn't excluded from getting twisted in uncomfortable directions.

Perhaps it would be worth it to take a look at her entry in Rantaro's Monopad. It might give you a little insight, but that's something for later. Later like when you aren't chained to Miu.

You pull your attention back to the game once you get to the point where Shuichi died. "So first of all, save," you say as you open up the menu and create a new file. Shuichi had a habit of saving over old files, you dislike this habit very much as it has already caused you to have to replay the entirety of chapter 3 because you missed a clue that was right at the tail end of the chapter.
You said it once and you'll say it again. You are a gamer. Shuichi is not. Shuichi has probably played very few videogames in his lifetime, be it the faked one that Team Danganronpa created for him or the actual real one. He seems like a book person. You suppose you probably would be too if it wasn't for your dad and your best friend.

"This game is bullshit anyway," Miu says under her breath, glancing upwards at the screen from whatever she's working on. She seems to like this game the least out of anyone, though you aren't completely certain why. She's trashed the graphics, the story, and everything in between. "I mean, the two-toned fuck even lied about the premise!" She jabs her screwdriver at whatever she's working on, barely missing her fingers in the process as she gives a couple of disgruntled noises. Probably something along the lines of 'my golden brain could develop a game that's twice as good' but you can't hear it clearly so what she actually said is up to the imagination.

"I suppose technically he did," Shuichi says, placing a finger against his chin. "I wonder if it was intentional or if he did it by accident. He might be trying to mislead us," he picks up a small notebook the two of you have been writing important clues in, giving it a vexed and rather frustrated look. Monokuma is always trying to fuck with you, the question then comes down to regarding what.

Admittedly, you can understand Miu's and Shuichi's frustrations. Monokuma said this was going to be a murder mystery where the detective hides the clues. This part of the premise had only come up in the game once, with a shadowy figure hiding some of the clues. So far the character you were playing seemed to have no understanding of the fact that certain details were being hidden. In fact, so far, nothing had actually been hidden. All the characters in the game seemed more than ready to help solve the cases and all the clues were in plain sight. You almost felt click-baited in a way.

Nothing was ever as it seemed though, so you weren't going to pass any judgments yet.

The game itself had interesting murders, but the first two were extremely easy on top of being deeply unsettling. That was probably in part due to the fact they mirrored the murders your class had already solved. A case of poisoned tea and a shot-put to the head. Shuichi had looked deeply uncomfortable during the first two murders, eyes refusing to look at the screen for too long. Refusing to look at a body that looked too much like Korekiyo's and a character that looked too much like Rantaro. At least the murderer didn't get executed at the end of the case.

Thankfully, that was where the similarities seemed to end. None of the rest of the characters looked like your classmates and unless Monokuma could predict the future, the next two murders probably wouldn't be the next two murder to occur within the school.

Furthermore, the setting was entirely different. The game takes place in a small town where a lot of murders have been happening and no one is entirely sure as to why. While there are multiple murderers, they don't really give you much detail into how everything connects. Though, given what's happened so far, you're entirely certain that all the murders are somehow connected.

There was actually one more correlation to this game and the game you were actually in. If you guessed the wrong killer, everyone would die. You weren't sure how, you weren't sure why, but the bad end always showed the corpses of everyone in town scattered all over. Even the people who had supposedly already died. It was an eerie sight that made the hair on the back of your neck start to stand up.

Powering through the first four murders, you are currently on to the fifth out of six. Nothing in or about the game actually said that there would be six murders, but according to the rest of the group, it felt like a good number. Except for yourself, everyone had just subconsciously agreed there were going to be six murders and no one questioned it. You were currently questioning it,
given the way that the fifth murder felt like a finale.

For the longest time, the character the two of you had been playing worked alongside a rival of sorts. The rival character was admittedly a little smarter than the player character. That wasn't the say the player character was stupid, but they weren't nearly as experienced as they should have been. The rival character made up for this lack of experience, pointing out smaller details that didn't quite get picked up along the way. The fifth murder was the murder of the rival character.

None of you had taken it well when it happened.

Shuichi's expression had instantly morphed into a mixture of horror and disgust, followed by the absolute panic that the case was going to be impossible to solve now. Kaito had let out a long, dramatic ass 'No' while Miu had let out a much quieter dismayed noise sounding like a whispered variation of 'no'.

You couldn't really say you hadn't seen it coming. The rival character had been working much harder than the player character to try and prevent the murders to start with. They had dragged your character halfway across town, mourned for everyone who died, and straight up threatened to get into a fist fight with your player character if you didn't shape up. The rival was really the one leading the story. And now they're dead.

That isn't even the worst part though.

"All the evidence contradicts itself. There's too many crime scenes, too many murder weapons, too many suspects with simultaneously convincing alibis and details that prove those alibis wrong," Shuichi says as he flips through a couple of pages of your notebook. "I think maybe we're not even supposed to win..."

You're starting to believe he's right. You wouldn't put it past Monokuma to design a game where you're supposed to get stuck at the end so he doesn't have to come up with some prize. "Okay. We've guessed every single suspect and we got the game over screen all four times. What in the heck are we missing," you mutter as you glance over Shuichi's shoulder to look at the evidence you've collected so far. "Either the four suspects aren't the actual killers, or we haven't gathered enough information to actually deduce which one it is so the game is giving us an automatic game over even if we guessed right once."

"I bet we just haven't found the right clues yet! Look at that smarmy bastard and tell me he's innocent," Miu points at a drawing of one of the four suspects which you have taped up to the wall. Some of your other classmates have visited throughout your play sessions and Angie took it upon herself to draw portraits of all 22 characters. In record time you might add. They're only quick sketches because she didn't have the time to do anything more detailed, but they're still better than anything you could have done. You've slowly been crossing out the characters who've died so far.

Kaito nods enthusiastically. "I have to agree. Look at him, isn't he sketchy?" Kaito jabs a finger at the same character Miu's pointing at and the two share a proud nod as though they've solved the murder. You... ignore the terrible pun, intentional or not.

Shuichi shakes his head. "Something just doesn't seem right. I don't think it's one of the characters who isn't a suspect. They all have more concrete alibis and the game has been pretty good at making things seem logical. If we don't have a logical reason to suspect them, then I doubt we'd suddenly get tricked out at the end. That means it needs to be one of these four. But none of the information we've found directly correlates to any of them being the killer," Shuichi says as he flips to another page of the notebook. It has all the details which are missing listed out, including a span of about 2 hours where no one was accurately accounted for. Everyone was MIA and you're pretty
sure these are the two hours in which the murder took place.

Unfortunately, a murder where the killer had two hours to make it look however they please is bound to be complicated. It's so chaotic to the point of being extra. You'd say that the killer was making fun of the rest of the cast if you were certain a suspect was sitting in front of you in order to gloat. But none of the cast feels like they could have pulled it off. So far every murder had been simple, which made sense. These people weren't skilled sociopaths. They were just random idiots.

The simple murders made sense because these were, in the end, simple people who weren't accustomed to trying to trick police. This felt like the work of someone who was intimately familiar with the workings of crime analysis.

Of course, there were a couple of characters who could technically be that understanding of how to make a crime look convincingly not like them. Three were actual suspects. But they just didn't feel right. "It feels like something is being hidden from us. So this is the crime referenced in the cut scene at the start of the game. We need to figure out who's hiding things. Furthermore, we still need to figure out why these murders are taking place. Figure out those two details and then we'll finally solve this awful case," you pull up the menu once more and hit the save button. "However, if we keep agonizing over this I think all four of us are going to go mad, maybe it's time for a break."

The others sag slightly, their expression turning to mixtures of relief and fatigue. You really hope whatever reward Monokuma's got in store is worth it, because you swear this game is going to get you killed. You stand up, stretching out your body to try and work out all the kinks that formed from sitting in one place for way too long. Your joints ache and pop awkwardly as you roll your limbs.

The other three stand up as well, their joins making similar groans and pops as your own do. You're about to start coming up with things to do now when a god awful chime rings through the entire building. The temperature of the blood in your veins drops by a couple of degrees, gaze flitting towards the monitor in the corner. The rest of your party goes rigid, various expressions of fear filling their faces.

The only good thing you can say about that chiming is that it's not the body discovery announcement. It sounds different.

It's just a normal announcement, but there's never anything good about one of Monokuma's announcements, so you don't see yourself relaxing any time soon. "Students! Please report to the gym for an important announcement!" The bear says, voice bouncing a couple of octaves too high and a couple of ounces too joyful for your tastes.

"What do you think he wants?" Miu asks. Her voice audibly shivers, though she manages to keep herself from stuttering. She edges closer to you slightly and you can't help but gravitate towards her as well, brushing your shoulders together. The rooms feels too cold all of a sudden, tainting the childish glee that's filled this room since the discovery of the game. It's only held good memories so far, and you want it to stay that way. Sadly Monokuma seems to think ruining every single drop of happiness is in his job description.

"Given the fact there hasn't been a murder in so long, he's probably going to throw another motive at us," Shuichi says. You can see him edging towards Kaito who seems to puff up slightly.

"Yeah, well it ain't gonna work! That stupid bear has another thing coming if he thinks he can keep convincing us to kill each other. The rest of us who've survived, we're all going to live long enough that the stupid bear has to give up. There's nothing he can do," Kaito sounds a little too convinced of his own words as he speaks, which leaves you internally filling in the doubt.
While it's true Monokuma leaves room for all of you to fight back against the motives, when he pulls out one of his stronger motives the class finds it hard to resist. The logic is simple. Pick something generic for all of you to overcome, and then pick something that targets a certain member of the class without being too open about who's getting targeted. Not only does overcoming one obstacle instill a sense of hubris, but a more targeted second obstacle makes it harder for the target to refuse temptation. Not to mention, a well-targeted motive would be harder for you to guess the outcome.

"We'll never know if we stay here, come on," you say. You pull Miu's hand into your own as you lead the way out of the room. She frowns, you wonder if it's something in your tone that makes her expression shift. She tightens her grip around your hand and you're grateful for the silent reassurance. Shuichi and Kaito tail you a half second later, continuing to chat with one another about what Monokuma wants and how the class can go about 'defeating' his next motive.

There will be no defeating the next motive. No motive of Monokuma's is ever 'defeated'. Sure, there are ways to avoid people dying. That's done on purpose though, and when death is avoided it's always by the skin of someone's teeth. By fortune and luck. These murders are a vehicle for despair, their original conception was supposed to be something that could be escaped or defeated because the woman who created this game was outright aroused by the idea of losing. The gamemasters aren't like her though.

The motives are viciously targetting in this game to try and bring the chances of murder up to the highest number possible. Even the last motive, these damn chains, they're something concocted in order to cause another murder and make it interesting, though you don't know how yet.

Whatever Monokuma is about to announce to the class, you have a feeling it's going to be a death sentence regardless of what you do. That's why winning or losing isn't an option. You need to beat this game.

When you enter the gym there are only a couple of people already there. The tension of palpable and the silence is absolutely deafening. The only noise is the subtle ticking of a clock, though the only clock you see is a broken one that sits on the wall. Every time the hand tries to move forward, it just moves backward again, making the awful ticking sound even more awkward and grating than a regular clock.

The rest of the class shuffles in over the course of about 10 minutes. Some people are in the middle of something or on the other side of the school, so it takes a little while for them to show up. You still feel like there should be 17 of you, but your numbers have already started to dwindle since the start of this game. Monokuma sits on stage with the three remaining Monokubs. Monosuke and Monotaro hover as far away from Monodam as possible, outright standing on the left of their father while Monodam stands to the right.

Almost like they think Monokuma is going to protect them. Yeah, right. You still think Monokuma would thank you if you dismantled all 3 of the survivors in the middle of the night.

They're gimmicks for entertainment purposes, and Monokuma has already told you what he thinks about this game being for the sake of entertainment.

When the last few people wander into the room Monokuma looks pleased, stepping a little closer to the edge of the stage where he's perched on. "All of you have been doing really well lately! No murder or anything, and it's certainly been a while. At least compared to how quickly the other murders happened. So I figured I'd reward all of you..." Monokuma trails off and the word reward sends shivers down your spine. No way in hell is it going to be an actual reward. You brace yourself for some nasty kind of trick.
Some of your classmates seem as anxious as you, catching on to the fact that nothing Monokuma ever does is good. Others seem curious, more ambivalent than anything. They don't trick themselves into thinking it might be something good, but they don't have quite the same pessimism as some of you. Others even seem to be naively hopeful, like Kiibo for instance. Poor summer child has no idea that Monokuma's about to hit the class with a sucker punch.

"10 bucks says he's giving us a new motive," Kokichi's voice comes out as a whisper right next to you. You don't know from whence the demon has appeared, but both he and Maki are suddenly hovering next to you. The problem with Maki and Kokichi being a pair is that neither one is particularly loud unless Kokichi wants to be loud. Meaning they have an easier time sneaking up on you than most of the people in this school could. You do little more than snort in response. If you tried to bet against Kokichi now you'd just lose.

Monokuma lets the silence become heavy before he speaks again. "Your rewards... is a very special new motive!" Monokuma cheers. The entire class bursts into groans and disgruntled noises. Kokichi gives you a look which you return after crossing your arms and shaking your head slightly.

"I thought he was going to unchain us," Kaede's voice carries enough that you're able to hear it. You knew that Kiibo would expect something good, but seriously, Kaede? You glance towards Kokichi who rolls his eyes and cocks an eyebrow. The corners of your mouth tipping downwards and you flick your head towards Monokuma. He gets the point and you both turn back towards the front of the room. Miu grabs your hand, her fingers shaking slightly. You hope that the squeeze you give her fingers is reassuring.

"Now, now, everyone settle down. I know you're all super duper excited, but I have to explain what this new motive actually is!" The sing-song tone makes you want to take off your shoe and chuck it at the bear, but you're pretty sure that constitutes as violence against the headmaster. "Anyone who gets away with murder from now until a new motive gets announced will be able to take one other person along with them when they win!"

This catches the attention of the class for all the wrong reasons. You flinch and can't help glancing at Kokichi for the third time. His jaw tightens and you see him glance towards you out of the corner of his eye. This is a bad motive. This is a really bad motive and both of you know exactly why this is a bad motive. And sadly, there's nothing you can really do about it. You sweep your gazes across your classmates, trying to decide who's the most likely to do something they'll end up regretting.

You manage to catch Maki's gaze for a moment. You notice the way her shoulders have tensed up slightly, and unless you're imagining it, for half a second you think her expression turns to pity. Okay. That makes three people who understand how terrible this motive is.

Monokuma waits for the mutters to quiet down and continues once more. "Now then, there are a couple of rules that go along with this deal. You cannot be working with the person you decide to take with you. Having the person you decide to escape with as an accomplice will effectively disqualify them from leaving. That doesn't mean they can't figure it out on their own and still help you, you just can't tell them and make them an official accomplice. Remember though, if you end up being this person just know that you might not be the one to get picked. Be careful who you decide to help! Just like always, everyone else will be executed if they get it wrong, except for the person you decide to bring along with you! And of course, you can't be unchained from your other halves yet. Any questions?"

The class becomes very quiet, seemingly thinking over what they've been told. You can escape
with one other person, but this person can't be told about the murder. It certainly could set up some interesting dynamics, especially considering the chains. There's one important question that drags at your thoughts.

"What happens if two people work together because they want a single person to escape? Technically they're still accomplices, but they both committed the murder to make sure this one specific person escaped," you figure it's something you should ask in case someone starts getting ideas. You know of a couple of people in the school who might pull something like this.

Monokuma lets out a quiet hum, tapping his paw against his chin. "If that were to happen and both people committed the murder, then the single person they want to escape could leave but the killers would be executed with the rest of the class. In addition, if either one gets caught and voted for then both accomplices will die! Now then, any more questions? No? In that case, happy hunting!" Monokuma gives one last chaotic laugh before disappearing.

You listen carefully to the quiet muttering of your classmates. Panic and fear were the most noticeable sounds in those voices, but you could detect a hint of something almost predatory in the glinting of certain sets of eyes. Even if it was only for half a second, almost everyone had something dangerous flit across their face.

Some of those expressions were probably unbidden intrusive thoughts. Everyone has them, but there was without a doubt some eyes that glinted with genuine contemplation before stamping out the idea or pushing it far enough into the back of their mind so it didn't show anymore. There are only a couple people you didn't catch such looks on.

Kiibo is, of course, one of them, looking as distressed as you expected. When he heard the word reward he probably thought of an actual reward for the class to share or something, not another reason to murder your classmates. Kiibo's too innocent for his own good.

Maki's another person who didn't look too thrilled. She actually looks kind of pissed off. "Who would actually be stupid enough..." her eyes narrow as she trails off. Her expression only softens when she looks at you, Kaito, Shuichi, and Kaede. But the four of you are the only ones who don't get glared at. Kokichi gets a glare, but it isn't as venomous as you were expecting. Maybe she recognizes the fact that Kokichi isn't necessarily stupid, and as such wouldn't be one of the aforementioned idiots to actually try his hand as this motive.

Kokichi's expression is hard to read. He doesn't seem too particularly worried anymore, but that could easily be some kind of act. Then again, he might also have some kind of plan to deal with this mess. It was difficult to tell given the fact it is Kokichi...

One final fact sets you a little more on edge than the rest of your classmates. Monokuma said the gamemasters had planned to try and kill you during the second or the third murder. This would make the third murder if someone makes a genuine attempt. Meaning that someone could potentially try and make you their target unless you find a way to counteract the attempt.

And to add one last issue onto the list, Gonta is still a sitting duck. Fun.

Wait...

Gonta!

You tug on Miu's hand slightly, getting her attention. "We should go," you whisper to her. Miu nods, needing no further prompting. She catches on quickly to the issue. You wouldn't put it past someone to commit murder immediately if given access to an easy target. The two of you are the
first to leave, slipping out the room with a sense of urgency. You worry that someone might question your actions, but they aren't given the chance to.

"Nishishi, talk about a fun motive!" Kokichi says, louder than strictly necessary for the statement. No one pays attention to the two of you leaving as just about everyone turns on Kokichi, ready to turn him into the bad guy. Maki, for once, doesn't look as furious as usual. Instead of turning to Kokichi and saying something hateful, she watches you and Miu leave. She gives you a tiny nod as you close the gym doors behind you.

"What are we going to do about big dig?" Miu asks. It's obvious who the question's about but you sigh and refuse to answer. She mutters some series of innuendos and curses under her breath and tries asking again. "What are we going to do about Gonta-kun?"

"I don't know yet. The safest thing to do would be setting up a guard of some kind, but the question then comes down to who we trust... It would be unreasonable for you and I try and sit there 24/7 after all, and I'm not sure how many members of the class we can trust..." All things considered, it's a vexing conundrum without a clear answer. There are a lot of wrong ways to go about this and you don't have much time to think.

While picking someone chained together would be the smartest option there's always the chance two people that hate each other might work together in order to get someone else out of this mess. It's altruistic, which is an oddity compared to Monokuma's usually dark and greedy methods. But it's a way of twisting something altruistic into something that could tear the class into shreds. All in all, it's fucked up.

Miu goes quiet for a moment before letting out a heavy sigh. "As much as I hate to say it... the little cock stain might be a good bet. Him and miss cold-blooded seem the least likely to kill someone, let alone work together to kill someone. While I hate to admit it, if there are only two people in this game the little shit cares about it's you and Gonta-kun. Not to mention at the very least cold-blooded seems willing to do what you tell her!"

You ponder Miu's words for a second. She isn't wrong. Kokichi is probably one of the people you least expect to commit murder, let alone without a very good reason. Maki is just as unlikely to kill anyone considering she knows it's a bad idea and none of the motives could really work against her. As ironic as it is, in a situation like this professional killers are probably the safest people to be around. As much as she'd love to kill Kokichi out of spite, she isn't an idiot. The current motive doesn't really work on either of them either. Kokichi might want to escape with you, but he's too much of a showman and a planner to take a risk like that and not tear this game to shreds on his way out. Maki has more than one person who's managed to get under her cold exterior at this point so you doubt she'd want to take the motive either.

"I think that would work if we could get them to agree, but we can't make them sit here constantly. Even if you and I help, that's still going to be a lot of sitting for two pairs. We're going to need at least one more group to watch Gonta," you aren't entirely sure who's the safest pick at this point. There's a lot of ways the other pairs could go wrong. You don't even want to think about the mess sitting Angie and Tenko down as guard dogs would cause.

Miu just scoffs. Apparently, she thinks it's obvious. "Then we just ask titleless and Kiibo-kun," she says proudly. You take a guess that titleless is probably Himiko. Your confusion as to why those two is apparently evident considering the almost disappointed look she gives you. "They aren't chained together so they'll be working on the honor system, meaning they'd work even harder to keep someone from dying since they'd be the first ones to get blamed. Pancake chest couldn't kill someone if her life depended on it, not to mention she's too lazy to do it. Kiibo-kun, well, he should
speak for himself. It's honestly the perfect fucking pair, come one ____ , we're supposed to be the 
smart ones in this school."

"I, actually think that's a good idea," you say, contemplating it a little more for yourself. You 
couldn't really see the motives working too much against either of them. If Himiko and Angie were 
a little closer you'd be tempted to say they might work together for the sake of Tenko, but you 
couldn't quite see it happening at this point in time. While she could still try and escape with 
Tenko, you don't think Himiko's that emotionally attached to her yet. In addition, Kiibo really is 
Kiibo. He would take the job almost too seriously and start crying if he even thought a murder was 
going to be committed.

"Of course it's a good idea, yours truly came up with it!" Miu says, puffing out her chest slightly 
and grinning like she just won a Nobel Prize.

You smile and pat Miu on the head. "Oh, but of course. I never doubted your genius for a minute." 
You can't help grinning at the way her cheeks burst into the color of flame. She looks torn between 
ducking her head out of embarrassment and leaning into the touch. "We'll talk to them later, but I'm 
sure you and I can manage keeping an eye on Gonta-kun for tonight. I'll also maybe see about 
convincing Monokuma to give me a key and a lock for the door so that no one has to actually miss 
any sleep."

In a perfect work, Monokuma would let you lock the nurse's office 24/7, but this was, 
unfortunately, a very imperfect world. The most you could hope for was that Monokuma would let 
you lock it overnight, and even then, that was you being hopeful. In addition, you weren't sure how 
many people could actually pick locks. Kokichi could, and it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume 
Maki could, but those two were the least of your worries. Everyone else was a wildcard.

The two of you arrived at the nurse's office to find a still very much knocked out Gonta. At least he 
seemed peaceful, and his vitals looked good. You were still worried that he might not wake up, but 
you tried not to think about worries of this or that too often. You have enough worries, you have to 
let yourself be hopeful about something.

You still weren't certain what you would do if Gonta never woke up, but you ignore the thought 
and take a seat at your desk, trying to decide what to do. You could read, or skim over your clue 
notes. Both of those were safe activities even with Miu present. Your books, save for the various 
markings, look like normal books. As for your notes, well, you doubt Miu could even be able to 
read them.

The language of Novoselic was apparently one of a couple different languages you are fluent in. 
Seeing as your classmates had the least chances of knowing it, you'd taken to writing your notes in 
the tongue after a couple scares where you almost got caught trying to crack open the mystery of 
this game. You couldn't help but worry about how your class would react to the amount of 
information you've been hiding. Not out of malicious intent, but because you don't trust anyone to 
act with some semblance of adult reason if you brought half the things you knew to them.

Miu settles in next to you, using a spare chair you'd kidnapped from the storage area. Half of your 
desk is covered in screwdrivers, wrenches, and god knows what else. You try to ignore the way 
Miu's shoulder pressed against your own as she settles in, sending a shiver that's actually pleasant 
for once to travel down your spine.

It's hard to focus on work when it's just you and her, but you figure you can manage.

Before you could really get to work though, a groan that isn't Miu cracked the silence. You bolt 
upright, jumping to your feet the moment you actually processed the noise. The noise sounds
deeply pained and fatigued, but very much alive and it's more than you've heard since the whole Kokichi accident. Miu barely makes it to her feet with a start before you're dragging yourself and her by extension over to where Gonta lays.

The gentle giant actually moves, shifting slightly. "Come on, come back to us Gonta-kun," you say quietly. You lean over him, eyes darting between his face and the monitors as you recognized the shift in his brain activity. You don't even try to keep your hopes from getting up. You need something hopeful. After the announcement of the new motive, you need something good. So you press yourself against the edge of the bed and hope on stilled breath that something good is happening right now.

After what feels like an eternity Gonta stirs and his eyes open. Miu gasps beside you, and you can't help the giant smile that splits your features. "Good morning big guy, how ya feeling?" You ask him. You pick up a flashlight, shining it in his eyes and watching the way his pupils dilate. There are still so many things you need to check to make sure that he's okay. You need to make sure he hasn't suffered any kind of damages, after all. The most reassuring thing for you right now would just be hearing him speak.

He groans once more, seeming to struggle with his words for a moment. "Gonta alive?" He finally asks hesitantly. You laugh lightly, relieved beyond words. You hear Miu let out a hissing breath beside you, her own shoulders releasing a small amount of tension.

"Yeah, you're alive. Just barely buddy, but you made it," you tell him. It's dopy and it's pure and you're so very grateful for this nurse's office. Grateful for the skills you've gathered over the years, and grateful to the people who taught them to you. Most of all though, you're just grateful that Gonta is still alive. Gonta's expression falters for half a second thought.

"Did Gonta protect Ouma-kun? Did Gonta do good?" Your heart threatens to melt when he asks. He seems like he's struggling to stay away, eyes fluttering slightly. He isn't going to be awake for long, he's only holding on long enough to get his answer.

"Of course Gonta-kun, you did wonderfully. Kokichi-kun is safe. Everyone is safe and there haven't been any more murders yet. You did amazing Gonta-kun, you should be proud of yourself," you tell him. You place one of your hands over his palm which is opened upwards. His hand curls around your own. His grip is gentle and your heart cracks a little more.

Gonta smiles up at you once more, looking satisfied with himself. "Gonta is... glad... he protected friend," his voice grows quiet and his breathing levels out once more as he falls back asleep. Heartbreaking as it is he fell back asleep, this is entirely normal. He wouldn't be able to keep himself awake for very long. You wonder if he'll even remember this conversation the next time he wakes up, but for right now this is enough. Even only waking up for a couple of minutes, it's enough to reassure you.

Miu's hand rests itself on your shoulder. "Come on, let's go sit back down. We'll be right here the next time he needs us," she tells you. You nod quietly, leaving Gonta's side. You want him to wake up and be okay right now, but that's too much to ask. The fact he's woken up after this long in and of itself is a blessing of sorts. Things could be much worse.

You sit back down next to Miu, watching her fiddle with her inventions. There's so much to do if you want things to play out in your favor. There's so so very much to do, your mind is racing. It might not be for a while longer, but everything might be okay.
It was hard to keep your eyes open, but you didn't want to risk dozing off. No one had wandered into the nurse's office all night so you and Miu ended up spending the whole time there thanks to your paranoia regarding Gonta's current state of being combined with the newest motive. You didn't want to take any risks, but goodness you were starting to get sleepy.

At least it wasn't scary, not for you anyway.

Schools were something you often spent a lot of time in as a child, ironic all thing considered. Many considered them to be liminal spaces. Being in a school at night could freak most people out. Before she'd actually dozed off you'd noticed tension growing in the shoulders of Miu the later it got. That being said, she dozed off fairly quickly and that was that. You on the other hand actually felt relaxed by the silence. The school was empty, sure. Far beyond dark, absolutely. But scary? Yeah, no. The scariest thing about the academy was the people currently attending it, and you yourself had hit a point of being far beyond fear.

The only thing the pitch black nurse's office made you feel is sleepy. You stifle another yawn, pressing your palm to your mouth as you watch the door from where you're sitting at your desk. You refuse the urge to put your head down and fall asleep as well. Another yawn. You can't even do anything useful right now. The lights are all currently off within the office, a courtesy to the two sleeping people within it. Your eyes have long since adjusted to the low-level lighting. Even then, you're mostly left relying on your ears.

You would have already started to fall asleep by now if you hadn't distracted yourself by meticulously counting Miu's breaths. You weren't exactly a stranger to sharing sleeping places and falling asleep wherever you had to. That being said, you weren't nessisarily the most comfortable around other people. Counting Miu's breaths was enough to keep you awake. Enough to remind you that there are other people around and you should be on your guard. Even if it is only Gonta and Miu.

Even that was starting to wear thin though. Moments slowly turned into hours and it felt like you were no closer to dawn. If you don't fall asleep beforehand, you'll eventually go insane. Movement. What you need is movement!

Carefully, you pluck yourself from your chair while desperately trying not to disturb Miu. Like you could if you were actually trying. Miu is one of those people who has a set time she wakes up in the morning and an atomic bomb wouldn't be able to wake her up at any point before it. You had learned this first hand while being chained to her.

Even though you couldn't wake her up if you wanted to, you still found yourself moving cautiously. Perhaps it wasn't an attempt to not wake up Miu as much as it was an attempt to ensure whatever else wandered the halls at this time of night didn't notice you still wandering around. Not that you thought there was anything.

You doubted Monokuma would leave any terrible monster wandering around, but the night breathed the sigh of a beast as you carefully weaved your way through the nurse's office. Night time is not for people folk, so you moved carefully and quietly. You barely brushed against cabinets and shelves as you made your way through the roof, half based on memory and half based
on touch. The chain attached to your wrist jangled ominously, you found yourself glad the one chaining you and Miu together was at least long enough you should be able to get to the door and a little way out of it.

Adjusted to the darkness or not, there wasn't much light that vision like yours was able to pick up. Geared towards color instead of nighttime detection, you were pretty much stumbling through the room entirely blind. That left you entirely reliant on touch. Your fingers brushed against counters and walls, grazing ever so gently as to not catch on any number of dangerous objects you might have lying around. You're typically a very tidy person, but there's no telling what kind of mistake you could have accidentally made.

Eventually, the tips of your fingers brush against material that is undeniably door like in nature and it only takes running your hand across the surface twice for you to find the cool touch of metal that means the doorknob. You push the door open and wiggle your body outside without opening it too much. The door closes behind you as much as it can with the chain still being very much attached to Miu. Enough that the light shouldn't bother the people inside.

You can't exactly wander the halls, but this should be enough for you. You press your back to the door and let your weight rest on it. It's brighter out here.

The halls of the Gifted Juvenile's Academy are much like any other school in that there is at least one very dim light always on. It's that dim kind of light that sits in elongated bulbs all the way down the hall and you only ever see them on such a dim setting during very specific times. Like during a school event when you wander off on your own, more interested in exploring a school during the night than paying attention to whatever silly games the adults think children would enjoy. Or perhaps the kind of light that's only on really early in the morning when you show up just as the doors have been unlocked, sitting outside of your teacher's door and reading from a book because it's silent and you're alone and the teacher probably won't show up for at least another hour.

The lights the speckled these halls felt a lot like those. Not bright enough to be comforting but not dark enough to let you close your eyes and hide from anything you see. Anything that might see you. In spite of that, there was something intrinsically comforting about them. Nostalgic and gentle, familiar even.

For someone who had family that ran a school, it wasn't actually all that frightening. It reminded you of showing up early with a set of keys you weren't supposed to have but screw the rules you're the daughter of the headmaster and he's not going to pay attention to what you do with the extra set of keys. As long as you don't make trouble. You weren't supposed to have those keys, but you did, and you'll admit there were times you used them to your advantage.

The lights reminded you of moments where you'd unlock the rooms of teachers and rifle through their belongings. Never moving anything except in the case of a prank, like stealing every pen you could find and leaving them all in one singular classroom. Not for any reason other than the fact you could. It reminded you of reading through attendance logs and textbooks and learning secrets you weren't supposed to know but secrets that you'd still never tell. Secrets you occasionally used to keep an eye on the mental and physical well being of your classmates.

Some of the things you did with those keys were probably deeply illegal. Was that so bad if you were doing good?

Dim and eerie to most, these were the kinds of lights you ran through the halls playing make-believe under when you had to come into work with your dad early because there were papers to review and new incoming first years to approve. They were the lights you danced and sang under
like they were dimmed spotlights because your father had to work late and you didn't want to walk home all alone. The only scary thing that ever appeared in halls like these had always been your mother, who showed up from time to time when your father lost track of the hour and had to be fetched from work by one of the only three women who could ever control him.

You like to think the number had become four over time, but you're something of an enabler so what proof do you have?

Either way. Halls like these for most people are odd and scary and feel wrong compared to how many people cram themselves into them during the daytime. Wrong even because the lights aren't glaring and bright. They're dim, a gentle kind of glow that's just bright enough not to trip. To you, for all the horrible things that had happened in the halls of this particular school, it just felt vaguely like home.

You were a little shocked but not necessarily scared when something tugged at your skirt. Glancing downwards it was nothing you'd necessarily call terrifying as much as something you'd call annoying. "Monokuma?" You didn't raise your voice above a whisper. There was a gentle, fragile, important kind of silence that permeated the school at this hour of the night and one needed to speak quietly lest they break it. It's only when you break one of the 'rules' that things start to feel wrong and weird in a place like this. You never, ever, raise your voice at such a time and place.

Apparently, Monokuma also knew the rule. He didn't say much. He didn't drawl onward for hours at a time like he usually seems to do, putting on some kind of show for people you couldn't see. Instead, he just handed you what seemed to be a key. "Only for the nighttime. It's pathetic watching you sit here trying to stay awake for hours on end," was the only thing he said. You took the key, the cool metal chilling your palms. The key was a welcomed blessing for you were truly starting to feel the effects of fatigue. Hours this late into the night, or this early into the morning, they were hours of chaos and madness. Strange times to be awake and alive. Strange thoughts did enter the minds of those still awake at such an hour.

It was time for either sleep or indulgence of fanciful thoughts that were better left buried. Intrusive almost in nature.

You weren't above strange thoughts, and so you'd spent the hours leading up till now carefully picking through those thoughts and deciding which were the least likely to result in death and madness. Though, you have to admit, for the good of the group you wouldn't be above a little chaos. Not at this hour anyway, with your inhibitions starting to fall asleep since the rest of you couldn't. That being said there was no chaos to be created when you were pretty much bound to the nurse's office... and still bound to Miu.

None the less, now you'd been given a key to your freedom if only for the nighttime hours.

You meander back into the office, leaving the door ajar so that fragments of light split the darkness of the office and allow you to more accurately pick your way towards her. It isn't worth even trying to wake Miu up, so carefully you wrap your arms around her body and heft her upwards. She certainly isn't the lightest thing in the world, but she isn't heavy either so you think you can manage. It's a bit awkward trying to carry her in your arms so after some terribly awkward shuffling you manage to get the woman up onto your back. The things you do for love...

You close the door behind you with a quiet click, using the key to lock up the door nice and safe for poor Gonta. You have a couple of errands you need to run before heading back to your room but they're dealt with quickly and easily. Just a couple of small things like checking over the school to make sure nothing is amiss.
Perhaps comparing the school to your childhood wasn't a wise idea as now you were doing something of a ritual from your childhood. Before bed every night you'd wander the whole house. For one reason or another, you were usually the last to sleep. So you'd check on your parents, your brothers, you'd check over windows to make sure the ones on the first floor were closed and locked, and then you'd finally check the door to make sure it was locked.

Almost on autopilot, you do the same thing now, completing small tasks that need to be done. Or tasks you thought needed to be done anyway.

Throughout the entire process, Miu doesn't so much as stir. Not until you're nearly done and on your way to the dorms. The one thing you hate most about the dorms is the fact it's separate from the school, meaning you have to go outside to get to the dorms every single night. It always seemed odd to you, but maybe you're just the odd one.

Going outside proves to be what finally causes Miu to stir. It could have been the chill in the air or just the fact her current circadian cycle was coming to an end, but you hear a groggy groan next to your ear as you pass underneath a deep blue sky speckled with glowing dots that are nowhere near bright enough to pierce the darkness this school has come to know. "____?" The sleepy voice asks. She sounds confused, her voice heavy with sleep. You can feel her shifting slightly against you back and you have to readjust her grip not to drop her.

Of course she wakes up now, after you've finished doing all the chores you need to do for the night. You aren't really upset at her though. You're glad at least one of you is getting some sleep even if you are a small bit jealous. Not only of her ability to sleep but of her ability to sleep so deeply. It's never a trait you'd had, and you doubt it's a trait you'll ever get after going through something like Danganronpa.

"Shh, go back to sleep. Monokuma gave me a key to lock up the nurse's office. We're going back to our room," you say. You aren't sure why the word our comes to your tongue so easily when the room isn't even remotely yours. It's entirely and without question Miu's. Miu doesn't catch anything wrong with this statement though, so you don't decide to draw attention to it. She mumbles some words you can't entirely make out. They're fatigued, completely inaudible slurs of what could have maybe been words once upon a time. You just smile. "Shhh, back to sleep my beloved."

She goes quiet again and you aren't sure if she's gone back to sleep or if she's starting to try and wake up. Either way, you walk slowly as to enjoy the last vestiges of the night before you yourself finally go to sleep. The nip at your skin is almost enjoyable because it's one of the few things that feels real. Just about everything else in this school feels like some chintzy production or stage show put on by Monokuma for the sake of entertainment. The moonlight feels too harsh and it's been full for the last 8 nights if your observations are correct, but the sky as a whole feels almost kind of okay, if only for a couple of moments before it starts to feel painful and fake again.

"Your hair is beautiful," comes a mutter pressed into the back of your neck. You can feel Miu's breath against your skin and it's enough to elicit more of a shiver than the chill's been able to. You don't think she's even trying to have this effect on you. She's still half asleep, maybe more. You try not to comment on sleepy Miu being more of a charmer than her fully awake counterpart. Instead, you decide to enjoy the interaction. The lack of innuendos and screeched words makes the comment feel gentle, so you treasure it.

"It's not my natural hair color, you know," you tell her. You watch a lock slowly bob in front of your eyes as you study the color. You shiver again as she twirls a stand between her fingers, accidentally tugging it ever so slightly. It takes you a hot moment to not get distracted by the fuzzy
feeling inside your skull.

"Still beautiful, just like the stars. The stars are beautiful," you hear muttering once more. It slurs off into mumbles again towards the end of the sentence. You have the feeling she's probably falling back asleep.

"Yeah, they are," you say. Maybe the moon feels fake, and the sky feels like some kind of painted on scenery, but the stars feel real. Hundreds upon thousands of twinkly lights. Distant suns that are probably already long dead. What should be sad feels like a poetic justice though? So strong was the hope of these stars that their light is able to reach the pair of you long after they've stopped burning. That's the kind of hope your father always wanted to be, once upon a time you shared his dream.

You aren't sure what your dream is anymore. You aren't sure if you knew before the game sent a good majority of your memories scattering into the far reaches of your mind. You've recovered a good number, enough to know more about yourself. Occasionally more come back to you, much like tonight, but you're still missing chunks of whoever this... person used to be. Maybe you had a dream, maybe you didn't, but you can't remember either way now.

Is there poetic justice in a star that burns out so quickly there's nothing left to see?

...

You've should go to sleep.

A constant rhythmic pounding pulls you from your dreamy state. You groan and burrow further into the warmth. You aren't done yet, you want to keep sleeping. The pounding fades in a couple of seconds, probably some kind of hazy dream or imagined thought. Doesn't really matter, sleep now think later. Slowly your mind begins to slip back into darkness. Before you could finish the journey the pounding picked back up again.

Fully roused from sleep you let out a hiss of distaste. Who in the fuck is it and what in the fuck do they want?

Waking up and getting up are two different things. You find yourself far too entangled in the bed to get up with any semblance of speed. Sheets are wrapped around your ankles, arms are wrapped around your waist. Both your face and hands are absolutely buried in Miu's hair which apparently at some point you'd burrowed into. You aren't even sure how you managed it considering she's facing towards you. At least it's your fingers and not your own tangled mop that managed to get entwined with her locks. That would be an entirely different problem if the two of you had managed to get your hair literally tied together.

Miu doesn't even rouse in spite of all of your desperate thrashing and the continued pounding on the door like the world is about to end at any second. If anything she just holds on to you tighter as the pounding on the door continues and you try in vain to get away. Or, at least you thought she was still sleeping. "Just fucking ignore it," she mutters as she presses her face into your shoulder.

"What if it's important?" You gently push her back slightly as you continue to try and separate what's hers from what's yours. Anything from hair, limbs, and blankets is a tangled and confusing mess of who's who's. She makes a rather unhappy noise and lays there for a couple of moments but eventually, she starts helping you unwrap yourself as well as herself from the prison you'd somehow created in your sleep. Throughout the entire process, the knocking on the door does not
stop. If anything it only gets more panicked.

"I swear to God if that's Satan's little shit stain..." Miu trails off into her silent threat which is distinctly unintimidating. For as much as she'd grown in the last couple of days, Miu still isn't good with conflict. Especially conflict including Kokichi and his antagonistic attitude towards her. On top of that, Kokichi's temper towards Miu had only seemingly gotten worse and worse. They acted almost like jealous children fighting over a toy. You still aren't sure how to feel about the fact that according to Miu, you are the toy.

You shake your head dismissively, trying to straighten yourself out a little to at least look vaguely presentable. Drat, you'd missed your free hour, hadn't you? Guess these are now the clothes you're going to be wearing all day. "I doubt it's Kokichi-kun. You'd hear a lot more whining if it was him. It wouldn't sound as frantic either. Judging by the tempo and the aura of anxiety and fear literally seeping through the door... Shuichi-kun?"

You finally open the door. As expected it's Shuichi who nearly bonks you in the face trying to continue knocking. He squeaks and recoils slightly. Kaito is also standing off to the side, awkwardly trying to rub the sleep from his eyes as he waves at you, you give a small wave back. "Good morning ____-san, Iruma-san. I'm sorry to wake the two of you up considering it's kind of only 7 in the morning but there's been just a little tiny problem."

Your heart drops into your stomach with panic. "What kind of problem? Is it an emergency kind of problem? What is it? A murder? Gonta-kun?" You don't mean to bury him with questions but it just kind of ends up happening as you try to judge the situation as best you can. You try to calm yourself down considering it's only Shuichi who looks nervous. Kaito is entirely unperturbed by the situation, whatever it is, so it can't be that bad if Kaito's calm.

"No, no. It's not really an emergency. Just a problem. Come on, I should really show you," Shuichi leaves and you glance at Miu who shrugs. Since neither of you really have a problem with it you follow after Shuichi. He leads you into the school and down the halls, into the basement and walks towards the door of the game room. Ah, this might not nessisarily be as bad as you were assuming. Perhaps he just wants to play, though his hesitance and the use of the word problem doesn't really make you feel that way. Maybe he skipped ahead a little and wants your help with one of the mysteries? Though that wouldn't really be fair to you and Shuichi seems more considerate than that.

When you manage to make your way across the room you finally see what the problem is. The disc for the game you guys have been playing nonstop is entirely destroyed. Shattered into tons of pieces on the ground. You don't know how to respond immediately, luckily, Miu is responsive enough for the both of you.

"What kind of fucking jackass would break the game?" She says a little louder than nessisarily. Shuichi flinches, turning his gaze downward.

"I don't know, that's the problem," he says. You aren't entirely sure either. Not even Kaito or Miu would break the game, and after the amount of time you'd forced the both of them to spend trapped down here playing it with you, they were the only ones who had the right to want this game destroyed.

"I bet it was that damn Ouma-kun," Kaito says. You can't really say you didn't see that accusation coming, but it just doesn't feel like a very intelligent accusation. There's no evidence anywhere around you, there's nothing to base the hypothesis off of except Kaito's own perception of Kokichi, and there's most certainly no reason for Kokichi to do it in your own opinion.
Kokichi wants to end this game as badly as you do. Though he's more of a proponent for a negative kind of chaos, he's still trying to end it. You hate how he acts, sometimes he's an abhorrent human being, but he's distracting in a way that you can't be. He helps to pull the strings you can't reach in the right order. He's terrible at times, yes, but he isn't without logic and reason. This here, this broken disk sitting on the ground, there would be no reason for him in particular to destroy it.

While it can be argued he might want to keep everyone from getting whatever prize Monokuma promised if you won the game, there's nothing inherently negative about it. While Monokuma isn't something either of you would willingly trust, he does extend help from time to time if he thinks it can make things more interesting. There would be no reason for Kokichi to try and screw the class out of the prize before you'd even gotten it. Let alone before you know what it is.

"I'm not sure, I think we should call a class meeting. Kaito-kun, Shuichi-kun. Meet back in the cafeteria at 8, tell everyone else you see to do the same. I'm going to look around for a couple of minutes here," you tell them. Shuichi and Kaito both nod, leaving the room. You turn your attention to the disk.

There's no real pressure if you can't figure out the answer, so you take your time carefully picking through the 'crime scene'. There's not going to be any execution if you get it wrong. Nor will there be an execution if you get it right. So really, other than your own pride getting damaged there's no danger in having to admit you don't actually know.

Miu ends up leaning down next to you while you inspect the trashed disk. "Spacefuck must be off his rocker. The shitstain is a walking dick, but he wouldn't do something like this. I doubt it was Shittyhara considering how he was acting, but at the same time, he's been acting kind of weird and jumpy lately. Like, yeah, he's a jumpy nervous kind of person. But if you ask me, he's been even worse lately."

You hadn't exactly been a witness to what Miu was describing so you weren't sure what to make of the statement. It was true that Shuichi had been a little jumpy ever since the second murder, but that was to be expected everything considered. You doubted Miu would tell you this for some malicious reason so you had no reason to doubt her for that. What you could and should doubt her for is the fact she wasn't necessarily trained to pick up on discreet cues the same way you were.

"Well, we'll see during the class meeting. I'll be asking everyone for alibis. I doubt it'll actually help, but it might. Especially considering we were out late enough we might be able to call bullshit on certain things. First, though we should try and get some details on what happened here," you say.

You start to pick through the shattered remains of the disk. It was well and thoroughly destroyed. Even Monokuma with his limitless resources would have some difficulty trying to salvage the thing if it was even possible at all given how small some of the shards had been reduced to. Some pieces of the disk almost looked as though they'd been powdered they were destroyed so thoroughly.

The ground had small divots, likely from where some kind of blunt object smashed the disk repeatedly. "Hammer?" You glance towards Miu.

"Hammer," she nods as she looks at the way the ground breaks and chips. The divots didn't really look deep enough though, considering the damage done to the disk. There were too few and they were too small.

You solved at least one of the problems in this case but it only brought up more questions.
"Okay. Either two people who were chained together did this, one person did this while the person they were chained to was sleeping meaning they would need to be strong enough to drag this person, or it was Kiibo-kun and/or Himiko-san. I don't know if I want to point any fingers at those two yet, so for now, we'll try to approach it from the angle that it was one of the former options. I don't get how someone could have used a hammer to get this fine dust if the other person was sleeping. Furthermore, it would have needed to happen after we went to bed since I played a little bit last night!" You bite down on your bottom lip as you look at the disk once more.

Miu stands up, only to gasp. "Behind the TV, look," she says. You spot what she's looking at. It's a mortar and pestle. Who knows where in the hell it came from, but it looks like a more likely culprit. Hammers were a dime a dozen and the hammer in question wasn't anywhere to be seen. You'd never seen a mortar and pestle set anywhere in the school before aside from the one still in the nurse's office. So it either had to do with someone's talent and it was snatched from a lab or the criminal was someone with resources the rest of the class didn't possess, like the mastermind.

"What a determined bastard," Miu says she hands it to you. Sure enough, fragments of the disk are still in the mortar. You actually have to agree with her. Something like this would have taken hours to get away with. Not only would they need to find some random ass hammer to make it seem like it was just a hammer, but they'd also need to be quiet enough to not attract detection and then sit here for hours grinding down the disk. And for what? To make you stop playing it? Pure dickery?

"This makes no sense, why would someone do this?" You try to wrap your head around it but you can't come up with any kind of logical answer.

Miu turns her gaze away from you, looking like she wants to say something. You give her a curious look. Emboldened just enough she turns back to you. "You know, the entire class has been acting more and more odd lately. I think something's off about this whole situation. For the time being it might be safest to assume there is no one innocent in this school."

"Does that include yourself?"

"If it keeps you safe, I'd rather you doubt me too."

You aren't sure how to react to that statement. Your gut twists uncomfortably. Everyone is guilty until they die. That's the rule Miu is essentially purposing. Trust no one, trust not a single person trapped in this school. You can't say the sentiment is wrong. Anyone could turn traitor at any moment. It still hurts though.

You gather up the broken shards of disk into the mortar and stand up. "Come on, let's go the cafeteria," you tell her. Your voice comes out quieter than you intend. Quiet than you want it to. You feel weak all of the sudden and you hate it.

The two of you walk to the cafeteria in silence and somehow manage to be the last ones to arrive. Everyone else is sitting uncomfortably. Some are probably unaware of the situation given the way they glance at you. Curious and cautious, just like you're supposed to be. You wonder just how right Miu actually is.

As you enter you move to stand at the end of the table. You study the eyes of your classmates careful, trying to watch for recognition or guilt. Unfortunately, you don't see anything. Whoever broke this thing must be a good liar. You tip out the mortar at the end of the table, letting the broken pieces scatter across it. "Alright. Who broke it," you ask. You can't make out a single answer over the noise the erupts from the table. Accusations, pointless statements, nothing concrete.
"One at a time!" You manage to raise your voice about the class with little issue. If you didn't have issues shouting over 16 other people at the start of the game you aren't going to have much trouble now, especially with some people being eerily silent. Your statement brings everything into that same eerie silence. No one speaks, and you aren't sure if it's because they're scared to implicate themselves or if they just don't have anything of worth to offer.

You press your hands into your face and sigh. "Okay, if this is going to go nowhere this quickly then we're going to do things my way. We're going to go around the table and all of you are going to tell me exactly where you were last night. The entire night," you tell them. The class doesn't need to know how late you were up, nor does the class need to know what time you assume the disk was broken. The less they know, the easier it'll be to catch them on a lie.

Tenko just so happens to be the person seated closest to your right so you point at her first. She looks a little frazzled when you put her on the spot, doing little more than jabbing a finger in her direction. "Uh, Tenko was in her room all last night..." She trails off.

"Nyahaha! We were having a sleepover in Chabashira-chan's room!" Angie announces proudly. You chalk up Tenko's awkward response to shock instead of guilt, though it's possible they could have both broken the disk without anyone to confirm their location. There isn't much of a logical root in the assumption though, so you move on to the next person. You don't press the issue, but you don't let it go quite so easily.

Your gaze turns to Himiko who shifts around nervously. you aren't sure if the way she wiggles in her seat is guilty or... Eventually, she pulls her hat over her eyes slightly as she speaks. "... having a sleepover in Chabashira-chan's room." She doesn't raise her voice above a mutter and she turns bright red. The direction her eyes dart as she speaks implies she isn't lying, and the slightly reddish tint to Tenko's own cheeks that follows the statement makes you question a lot of things. Things you don't want to be questioning.

"Ooooh Yumeno-san, how naughty! I would expect something like this from that filthy pig, but you?" Kokichi mocks her and Himiko starts to look like she's going to cry.

"It was nothing like that you degenerate male!" Tenko jumps to her feet, looking about ready to fight Kokichi on Himiko's honor. Kokichi then starts mocking Tenko too, sticking his tongue out and making some actual scary faces at her as she growls. Quite literally growls, deep in her throat like some kind dog or particularly pissed off cat that isn't aware it's supposed to hiss.

You pressed your hand into Tenko's shoulder, somehow managing to convince her to sit back down. You turn your attention back to Angie. "Do I even want to ask?"

Angie continues to smile at you brightly, completely unphased by whatever has her companions blushing so badly. "Atua says you probably don't want to know!" The pep of her tone sends actual chills down your spine.

"Moving on then, Kokichi-kun and Maki-san," you say as you look towards the next pair. Kokichi doesn't seem too fazed. Since you're going counter-clockwise around the table it would make sense for him and Maki to end up next.

"Nishishi, Harukawa-san and I were having a staring contest all night!" He says as though that's a normal or fun thing to do. You'd assume it was an innuendo if it wasn't for the fact he was claiming to have had a staring contest with Maki. Maki would take any excuse to brutally maim Kokichi at this point.
Maki seethes, her expression dropping into a glare. "I refused to go to sleep until I was certain he was asleep because I don't trust him. He refused to go to bed and we both ended up sitting there all night. We didn't leave my room at any point though." It's a wonder how Kokichi managed to convince her they should stay in her room. Small miracles you suppose, deciding for the safety of the rest of the class you should probably move on. Preferably to a nonhomicidal classmate?

the next sets of answers following Kokichi's and Maki's aren't anything spectacular. Kaito, Shuichi, Kaede, Tsumugi, and Kiibo all claim they spent the night sleeping in their rooms, or in the cases of some sleeping in the room of the person they were chained to. You weren't expecting anything of significance but it still disappoints you.

You click your tongue, realizing this was getting you nowhere fast. You realize you aren't going to get an answer out of anyone, not as a group. "Okay then. Let's try something different. We're going to end this class meeting and everyone is going to go about their day, but I'm going to be going around and asking everyone a couple of questions. I'm also putting in place a new rule that someone has to be watching Gonta-kun at all times since he's still more or less incapacitated and because of that at more risk than anyone else. Himiko-san, Kiibo-kun, would the two of you mind keeping an eye on Gonta-kun first?"

"Nyeh? I suppose that doesn't sound like too much work. Fine."

"I would be more than happy to help take care of Gonta-kun! I will do my utmost to make sure nothing bad happens!"

You feel a little weight fall off your shoulders. Kiibo and Himiko should be the safest in school paired together to watch Gonta like this. Hopefully. It was a little bit of a gamble but a necessary one. "In that case, class meeting adjourned! I'll see all of you relatively soon depending on the order of investigation," you tell the group. Slowly everyone stands up and makes their way out of the cafeteria. You linger a little longer running over the evidence in your head.

"____-chan~! You should let me and Harukawa-san help," Kokichi says. Maki is trying to leave but Kokichi is putting up a pretty good fight to stay in the cafeteria. Maki glances at you, almost to ask as if helping would actually be okay. Miu glances at you like she desperately wants you to say no. Kokichi's eye are big and watery, full of painfully fake alligator tears.

In spite of that... "Fine," you tell him. He almost looks shocked for half a second before straightening up.

"Don't worry ____-chan, I won't disappoint! We'll hunt out all the liars since you and I obviously hate liars!" He tells you, his lips turn upwards into something of a grin. The only reason you said yes is that Kokichi manages to call people out on their lies like it's second nature to him. While unbearable to a good majority of your classmates, his skills are useful. As are Maki's. She's probably one of the most intimidating people in school and you know there are at least 3 people who would spill their guts if she glared at them angrily enough.

Miu's silently sulks but you ignored her in favor of focusing on the task at hand.

"We should start with Shuichi-kun and Kaito-kun," you tell the group before leading the way out of the cafeteria. What Miu said has you at least slightly worried. So you'll check on the idiots first.

Shuichi and Kaito are both pretty easy to track down all things considered. If Shuichi isn't spending his time with the various other students he's usually trying to do something productive like reading in the library or hunting for clues. Kaito probably couldn't say no to Shuichi if he tried, so the luminary is along for the ride evidently. The school has been checked and checked again for
anything new, so there's no point in Shuichi trying to hunt down any clues. So the library it is.

Of course, he's there. Sitting at one of the tables and pointed annoying the spot where Korekiyo died. You don't think anyone is comfortable being down here anymore, most certainly not alone or late at night. You don't really mind it, but apparently, you don't mind a lot of things. Even if you don't mind it, you still notice it. The way the air feels chilled and its aura feels tainted. The room feels wrong. It's the same reason Kaede doesn't go into her lab anymore. You can't help but wonder if the spirit of those who've passed in these rooms still linger.

Would they be upset with the rest of you? Proud? It's been a while since the last murder, but that just makes you feel more like you're on the last couple minutes of a count down. There's no way of stopping time, occasionally you wonder if there's a way to stop murders. But people are a lot like time. Regardless of what you do they just keep moving forward, with you or without.

Shuichi looks up when he hears you enter. He smiles but that smile drops slightly when two people enter the library behind you and Miu. Kokichi smiles at him before sticking out his tongue. Those two apparently still aren't on the best of terms. You wouldn't call it childish, but it is annoying.

You can understand Kokichi's point of view. One of the things the class has always gone on and on about is the importance of not lying. Of being truthful. Of getting along and surviving this. Shuichi lying probably felt not just like a betrayal but also the biggest hypocritical move thinkable. At the same time, Shuichi had realized he made a mistake and was moving forward. At least in that regard, he deserved to be forgiven. On top of that, he wasn't the most vocal of the group in regards to denouncing lies. That was Kaito who had in an ironic twist of fate lied about his own health and nearly got killed for it.

"Hey ____-san, I'm assuming you have some questions," Shuichi asks, trying to ignore Kokichi. Maki decides to do Shuichi a favor by standing in front of Kokichi, completely blocking him from view. Kokichi wiggles his way back into view, but just barely since Miu decides to help Maki is blocking him. If only to spite him.

"Yeah just tell me... hun, what's that?" You get distracted by something sitting on the table. It looks like the grip of a knife. You pick it up and inspect it before Shuichi has time to answer your question. You can see a distinct amount of panic on his face as you play with it, a knife slipping out of the handle. You almost manage to cut yourself on it, but after a couple of moments holding the knife feels natural. You toy with it, feeling the weight and heft in your palms. This thing could do some serious damage, even in the hands of someone inexperienced. Especially in the hands of someone inexperienced. "Why do you have this?"

Shuichi tries to duck behind his hat so you take it from him. You're sick and damn well tired of that fucking hat, so you hand it off to Kokichi. "Do whatever you please with it," you tell him and his eyes practically light up. "Now Shuichi-kun, I'm not upset. Just tell me why you have a pocket knife of all things blatantly sitting on a table."

Through all of this Kaito has been silent but he attempts to jump it. You silence him with a glare while Shuichi tries to stumble through an answer. Instead of Kaito coming to the rescue, it actually turns out to be Maki who steps in. "I gave it to him."

You turn to the red-eyed girl, trying to carefully monitor her expression. It's calm, no hint of a lie. She doesn't seem worried either, as if having a pocket knife in a situation like this is completely normal. Well, actually, perhaps in a situation like this it is completely normal to her. But you want to hear an actual explanation before you drop it. You close the knife with a flick and set it back down on the table. "Why exactly are we giving people pocket knives?"
Maki didn't seem all too phased by the question. "We aren't giving people knives. We've giving Akamatus-san and Saihara-kun knives because they're the only idiot in the fitness club who don't know how to defend themselves," she says as though it makes perfect sense. So it isn't just Shuichi, Kaede also has a knife.

You aren't exactly sure how to respond. Maki and Kaito obviously both trust the pair and they've never done anything that directly screams murder to do. Yeah, they've done stupid stuff and Kaede set up an obvious and terrible trap, but they don't quite have the aura of a killer. The one time Kaede tried she failed so fucking miserably and she cried afterward. At the same time, any amount of weapons being distributed to other people in school is dangerous.

"Don't look at me like that," she says, almost seeming embarrassed for a moment. "We all know self-defense is still murder by Monokuma's rules. I've been personally teaching them nonlethal ways to use the knife in case they get into trouble. I don't nessisarily trust everyone in this school," her gaze lands hard on Kokichi for half a moment, "and I'd rather not have them die because they couldn't defend themselves."

It's not the easiest thing for Maki to do. Admitting that she likes a person, as roundabout a way as it is. But saying she'd rather not have Kaede or Shuichi die is enough for you to get the picture without dragging the admission out of her. You can't really chastise her either because she has a point. Kaede and Shuichi are pretty helpless. Not as helpless as someone like Himiko mind you, but there are some pretty savage people still left in this school and the numbers keep whittling themselves down. Teaching the people you personally favor how to defend themselves is a good way to keep the people you like alive. It's just not the best plan of attack for keeping everyone alive.

"Is it Shirogane-san? Is she the one that worries you?" Kaito asks. Maki shakes her head at that, looking vexed for a moment.

"Shirogane-san feels a little off, but not quite dangerous. It's... nevermind, it doesn't really matter and I don't want to point any fingers. That's just asking for trouble.," she says.

You sigh and nod, leveling your gaze with Maki. You catch her gaze and she almost looks abashed for a split second. "I can acknowledge the fact your fears aren't nessisarily unfounded, I just really wish you would have told me before so it would have been less of a nasty surprise. Stumbling across it like this I was actually starting to panic that Shuichi was planning something stupid. I don't get why you couldn't just tell me you were giving them knives." You feel a little hurt if you're being honest. You thought she was starting to trust you.

Maki refuses to meet your gaze. You can't tell if she's embarrassed or ashamed.

"Nishishi, I bet it's because Harukawa-san has a secret! She's part of the same _____-chan fan club as the filthy pig and I, maybe she was trying to pin a murder on someone else." You honestly can't tell is Kokichi's joking or being serious when the words come out of his mouth, but he looks at Maki with the same gaze that's usually reserved for Miu. Hateful and perhaps a little jealous. Seriously, does he see her as a threat? You can understand why Miu sees Kokichi as a threat and vice versa. At least Kokichi acts like he might have a thing for you. Maki though, she hasn't done anything distinctly over affectionate yet. Even taking into account Maki seems like the subtle type, she hasn't done literally anything that could imply she's a threat.

Maybe he's just getting upset because you're closer friends with her.

Maki to her credit isn't even phased. Perhaps she's just gotten used to Kokichi or maybe the
statement is so outlandish it doesn't have an effect. Either way, she just turns towards him slowly. "Unfortunately out of anyone in this school you would be the person I kill. I am intelligent enough to know ____-san would figure that out without even the slightest hesitation. Since I am not as much of an idiotic fool as half the people in this school, I will not be committing any murders since then both of us would be dead, and then what would ____-san do?"

You give up on this interrogation.

"Okay guys, come on, let's move on already," you sigh. "Kaito-kun, Shuichi-kun, in a couple of hours we should have a fitness club meeting today. I need to blow off some steam."

The two agree and wave goodbye while you set off to try and find answers. What were you even investigating again?

None of the other interrogations go any better after that. Kaede and Tsumugi have nothing useful to provide, Kiibo only tells you things you already knew, and you learn things you maybe didn't want to know about Himiko and Tenko from talking to Angie. Nothing explicit but... more than you ever wanted to know. You find yourself sitting on the grass outside, watching the fitness club to their regular exercises.

"You know... Some secrets are better left kept and some things are better left unknown. This could be one of them," Kokichi says with a shrug.

You don't have the energy to argue.

Chapter End Notes

This story is rated M for Miu. Jokes aside, I actually have some news to share.

I finally finished my last quarter as a first year in college, yaaay! While probably not all too important to you guys, this does mean that I'm officially on summer now. That by extension should mean longer or more frequent chapters. In addition, it means I can start getting to work on some of the others stories and projects I've had waiting around for a while, specifically some of the ones I'm going to be switching to when this one comes to an end. And yes, a couple of these projects are going to be Danganronpa projects! More details are going to be available when Off Script starts to come to a close.
Liar

Everyone else had things to do, so once again it's your and Miu's turn to keep an eye on Gonta. Was everyone just too lazy or were people just generally that distrustful of one another? The most recent motive obviously put a damper on everyone's willingness to trust one another. Even subconsciously you'd be the only one the class really trusts to take good care of Gonta. And another issue was sure to come down the pipe without reservation.

At least it was calm. For now anyways.

Yesterday had been a mess with the game getting broken and everyone more or less being put more on edge than usual. There was no reason behind the game getting broken like that, at least, there was no obvious reason for any of your classmates to do it. No one could point any fingers but you knew well enough that everybody wanted to. You still don't even have any suspects. Apparently as clueless as the rest of the class for once. Such a small and insignificant thing to fail at too, truly, Ultimate Detective your real title is not.

It bothers you less than it should really. You read your book quietly, counting Gonta's breaths while Miu braids your hair. It was getting to be a mess and the braid needed to be redone, but you were too lazy to do it yourself. Apparently, its current state was starting to annoy Miu so she offered to do it for you. Ever since the night the disk got broken she's had an obsession with your hair. You don't know if she actually remembers the conversation the two of you had or if she even really finds it to be that attractive. She decides to answer your internal question. "I take back what I said. Your hair is prettier than the stars. How in the world do you get it this soft? So fucking unfair."

She's distracted enough to speak candidly but apparently not fatigued enough to drop her usual choice in language. Well, beggars can't be choosers so you'll take the compliment. "Really I'm just as amazed as you are. In case you can't tell it's a pain to take care of given the length so I don't... really take care of it... at all." A shiver runs up your spine when she runs were hands through a stray lock.

"How the hell do you have so much then? If I didn't take care of my hair it would have just ended up a tangled mess. Which would have resulted in someone yelling at me to just cut it off already."

"Oh, it was. I'm pretty sure more people than just my parents were going to hold me down and lop it off if someone didn't take care of it. It was made even worse by the fact I wouldn't let other people take care of it either. My mom wasn't always the warmest person and she didn't understand the concept of being gentle when she brushed hair. Dad was pretty good at it, but I wiggled around too much and he had trouble making me sit still. The rest of our family didn't want to risk injury since I was prone to scratching most people if they tugged too hard, including my other mothers terribly enough. It's a good thing I've at least grown out of that. Mom and dad were two of the only three people I didn't scratch. My eldest brother was the third..." You trail off for a moment, catching onto the fleeting wisps of memory. You refused to let go of them, and wonderfully enough you convince them to stay.

You do wonder, why are you the only person in the school who's been able to grab on to some of their old memories. Ones you're certain are real.

"My eldest brother's name was Arashi, he's a full 5 years older and my other old brother who's the middle child is 4 years older. I ended up being the youngest because my mother was having a bit of trouble actually having me. Arashi was the only who could detangle my hair with any semblance
of grace. He, unlike my father, could also get me to sit still for more than five minutes. I would probably have short hair if not for him. He also taught me how to do things like makeup and matching colors when picking clothes. Of course, those were lessons supplemented by our favorite baby sitter."

"it's kinda funny. Kiyoshi, the second oldest, was also pretty good at makeup. Why was I the one who was always terrible at it? Oh, Kiyoshi's the one who taught me how to dye my hair in case you were wondering," you cut off your words with a hiss when Miu tugs a little too hard on one rebellious stand. One of the reasons you hated having your hair brushed was thanks to the sensitivity of your scalp. Arashi really was the only one who was able to get you to sit still and brush it without yanking it every ten seconds.

"Don't like hair pulling, good to know," she comments under her breath like she has the balls to actually try and make a move. You make your lack of faith obvious with a snort and she tugs a second time on purpose. Your eyes well up slightly. Oh, that's it.

"Are you trying to get me to fake moan, is that it? Do you want to hear that badly? Come on Miu, you have to earn it!" She tugs the whole braid and despite the fact your eyes water up and sting you burst into laughter. Her furious tug tilts your head back enough to catch sight of the scarlet painting her cheeks. "If you can't take it don't try to dish it out, babe." She struggles pathetically to try and come up with a good retort. In the end, there's really no come back that can save her at this point. Not one she can think of.

"Shut up already! What the fuck kind of color was your hair before you dyed it?" Victory. You hope that driving her away from the topic will help to mellow her out but you could just be making things worse. You sincerely hope that isn't the case. On top of the counseling everyone in this school is going to need after this stupid game is over, you have the feeling that Miu might maybe need extra to push her in a healthy direction.

"Oh, you mean my natural color? L-" you don't get the chance to finish the sentence when the nurse's office door swings open with such ferocity both of you jump. Miu almost accidentally lets go of the braid, but she manages to keep a grip on it.

"What the fuck?" She asks, placing her free hand against her chest. You blink a couple of times, trying to analyze the scene that quickly starts to play out before you as two people enter the nurse's office.

Tenko pants like she ran halfway across the school, pressing her palms into her knees and bending over slightly as she tries to catch her breath. Angie, who was assumably dragged, stumbles and collapses against the door frame like she's going the keel over at any second. "Did something happen? Is it an emergency? Take your time to catch your breath, but please, try to tell us what's going on if it's something bad." You stand up and Miu makes a noise, barely just finishing tying off the braid in time. Luckily she was down to the last portion anyway when the two rushed in, so it's easy enough to finish off quickly.

Tenko holds up a note. A too familiar note. The looping signature on it catches your eye. "Tenko and everyone else found more cards," she finally pants out. "We haven't read any yet. We thought the entire class should be around to read the cards this time, and ____-san is also the only one who can tell if they're forged or not." You doubt you're the only one who can tell, but you're the only one with the proper resources to tell.

You turn to Miu who looks a little pale. You turn back to Tenko, eyes narrowing slightly. You are in no way going to leave Gonta alone unless you are absolutely certain he's going to be safe. "Where is everyone?"
"Tenko already called a class meeting! Tenko and Angie-chan are the only ones who aren't in the cafeteria. That way if anyone else leaves and something bad happens, we'll instantly know who it was," Tenko looks proud of herself as she smiles at you. You nod, thinking it over carefully. If a class meeting has already been called then only an idiot would try to sneak out and kill Gonta. You don't think anyone is quite stupid enough to try their luck, so it's as safe as you're going to get.

That cards are the bigger problem right about now.

"Okay. Tenko-chan. Angie-chan. Come with us. We're going to go to my room and grab the book so that we can try to tell what's true and what's false. Then we'll go to the cafeteria and see what all of this is about," you tell the pair who nods. "We'll walk..." Angie's breathing has not calmed down in the slightest. Tenko glances at Angie. Without hesitation, Tenko picks up Angie. Bridal style of all things... Tenko makes it look unreasonably easy for her to pick up another human being roughly her own size. Angie seems rather okay with this turn of events, you even notice the smallest hint of a smirk at the corner of her lips. You are sure what detail worries you more. "Or that. That also works."

You don't blitz through the halls, but all of you move with a sense of urgency as you leave Gonta behind. You trust Tenko to have coraled the class, and you doubt the rest of the class will let someone leave, so you aren't nessisarily worried about that. What you are worried about is these new cards. You were certain that the rest of the class had found the last of them. At least the last of the genuine ones. In fact, you could have said it with absolute 100% certainty even if you couldn't quite explain your reasoning.

Were you wrong? Is it even that simple?

You arrive at your room and you quickly gather up the materials you need. You think about grabbing the other cards, but you decide to only grab the book. You still haven't gotten the chance to reforge the first batch to fit whatever lies you'd originally told. You've been occupied with other things recently. Those two hours you got away from Miu seemed to become more and more precious. Especially considering the amount of planning you had to be doing at all times. this game is going to end. And it's your plan that's going to bring it crashing to the ground. You just need a little more time.

After gathering the book make your way to the cafeteria with the other 3. For one reason or another Tenko refuses to put Angie down and Angie does not complain. Hate each other, ha.

Miu was unnaturally quiet the whole walk. Well, she probably still remembers the last time cards like these were found. She had to track down Kiibo and explain the difference between a robot, an android, and an AI and that Kiibo himself was probably just defined as something different. You weren't completely convinced but you didn't have any other explanation yet so you put a tab on that train of thought. It was significantly less important than a couple of other problems you'd been struggling with.

Right before you actually enter the room, one of the Monokubs appears to free Tenko and Angie from one another. Not that either one is going to really do anything important with the hour. You think the cards might take a little bit of precedence.

You walk into a room that's unbearably tense. You are entirely unprepared for the aura of the cafeteria. The rest of your class sits in silence, a stack of cards sitting in front of what's usually your seat. They're all face down as if to hide whatever horrible secrets they were hiding. Tenko places the single card she showed you to get you to leave the nurse's office on the top of the stack and then takes her seat in the same general area as Angie and Himiko.
You take your own seat in silence, watching the expressions of your classmates shift between worry and fear as you lay the book down flat on the table. The fitness club hovers near you, which Shuichi sitting directly next to you. He hides his hands under the table, but you know damn well that they're shaking. He, much like many other at the table, keeps swallowing uncomfortably every five seconds and shifting around to try and alleviate some of the pent up nervous energy everyone is feeling. There's no telling what these cards are going to do to their psyches, fragile as they are currently. The game is starting to drag on everyone.

You don't really want to acknowledge it, but along with the fear you can see the fatigue plain as day on the features of your classmates. The constant tension, the most recent motive, the game in general, it was all starting to slowly get to your classmate's heads. Even though the effects weren't readily visible the whole mess yesterday had also done some serious damage. People were starting to not trust each other anymore. Which made these cards even more dangerous. The chances of something with the sole design of damaging what little fragile trust was left being printed on these cards is substantial.

The weary sense of distrust made you a bit sad. It hurt seeing your classmates act like this. But what had to be done had to be done, meaning that you had to read out these cards and tell everyone straight to their face if they were true or untrue.

You sigh and pick up the first card, letting your eyes wander across the remnants of your class before you flip it over and set it down face up in front of you. You don't even have to read the card to know it's true. You recognize the tight handwriting and sharp signature. Though you aren't sure if you recognize it from the last time or from something else entirely. Either way, an identical copy of the word "Kirigiri" sits on the paper, perfectly matching what you already know to be in the book. You flip open to the page anyway to humor Shuichi who's pretending that he isn't staring over your shoulder and analyzing the text just as much as you are.

The card is entirely plain except for the black inked words. "None of you are who you think you are. All of you are just playing characters in this killing game. None of you are real, simple fabrications imposed on real living people. People that the masters of this game have ensured don't exist anymore. Not in this reality. None of you are who you really are. Who you really were. You aren't even who you think you're going to be."

The words aren't as shocking to you as they are to the rest of the class. For the rest of the class though, the declaration shakes them to their very cores.

"Oh come on. Monokuma is just messing with us now. I'm supposed to be the liar here, does he actually think he can trick us with some pathetic lie like that!" Kokichi laughs and for once the class laughs with him. Laughs at the absurdity of the statement. Laughs because it has to be false. Laughs because they don't want to believe in the words. Believe they must though, and believe you have to make them.

"Guys... I'm pretty sure it's true," you say. Shuichi is the only one who doesn't join in the laughter that comes to an abrupt halt. His eyes are fixed on the page as well. Silently a couple of eyes turn towards him. Oh, so now they trust him. When they're looking for the answers they want they'll trust him. Typical. It doesn't bother you much though since Shuichi's answer has no room to differ from yours.

He hesitates for a moment. You see the urge to pull down his hat and hide away from the situation. Kokichi still hasn't returned it. You don't think he will. Shuichi has been slowly adjusting though. You think it'll be good for him after everything that's happened. Eventually, he straightens up and nods. "I think it looks identical as well. As vexing as it is, there's nothing readily visible that
implies the statement to be false..."

"So, none of us are real?" Kiibo voices the concerns of the group with a shaky voice. He's already been forced to question his existence at least once, so he ends up being less shell shocked than the rest of your classmates who fall into a tense silence.

"Does that mean whoever's running this game just controls us or something!" Kaito sounds furious when he belts out the question. You quickly remind yourself to be careful about how much you say. Your classmates don't know Team Danganronpa is running the show, and bringing that up now would just cause confusion and concern. Doing something that could jeopardize your position within the group is completely out of the question. It would ruin everything.

"I don't think they can exert control over anyone. Not directly. Not anymore. I observed something very similar to that concept much earlier in this game, but it seems to have disappeared the farther along we've come. I think the only thing they can really do to control us at this point is manipulating us mentally. Giving us false clues and bad memories. I still have reason to believe the flashback light from much, much earlier was entirely false," no one sees anything wrong with your words. It's not like you're trying to lie. You omit a couple of the details you know, sure, but you say enough that no one looks past what you say.

It's really Kokichi's job to call bullshit when he sees another liar, and there's no reason for him to be paying much attention to you. In fact, it seems like he's focused on everyone except for you. Ironic when you think about it. It makes you feel a little bad. At the same time though, you're both just doing what needs to be done to bring this game to an end, so you don't feel terrible about your actions or anything.

Shuichi nods along with your words. "There is always the potential that we've been given false information, but if this is for entertainment purposes then we need to have some ability to 'win' if we're cunning enough. Which would make it entirely pointless for the people running this game to lie to us. Anything that seems like a valid clue should be true unless we find a reason to disprove it. So while we should walk into these notes with a certain sense of trepidation, unless we find something distinctly wrong with the notes themselves we shouldn't distrust them."

He would have been right if the person running this game was the same person who ran the first two killing games. Monokuma expressed distinct displeasure with the staging of these games. So you have reason to believe that they would lie to the class. At the same time, in a situation like this telling the truth might be all the more damaging. But what do you actually know? There's no way to be certain about anything without going back in time and meeting your classmates before they joined this game. Or at least hearing about them.

You suppose it's time to properly get this nightmare started. You pick up the next card.

You notice immediately that there's something different about it. In the top left-hand corner you find an I, while the right-hand corner has a 13 written in it. At the bottom, it's signed with the name Togami. The signature is swirling and elegant while never wasting a single swipe of the pen. It all feels deeply intentional as though to cut out any movements which might be unnecessary. This single word puts up the perfect facade of unmatched elegance and strict policy. Certainly, it's fitting. The I and the 24 are written in a different hand than both the signature and the sentence on the card, implying it was written on at the last minute or by someone else.

That being said, the I and the 24 are perhaps the most familiar looking thing of all, almost like looking into a mirror in an odd way.

You decide your best option is to read the card out loud, but you're already starting to feel sick to
your stomach. Just trying to read it makes you feel guilty for the simple crime of being the one to have to utter the words. "Shuichi is a suicidal freak who used to be a massive fan of Danganronpa, the killing game you plebians are a part of now. While everyone signed up to be part of this game willingly, he was the first to try and sign up for this newest season. He wanted to play the role of traitor detective since he was the character no one would expect. He went as far as to list details for his dream execution. That's why Team Danganronpa though he would be good for this season."

Kokichi's expression tightens instantly, twisting into something fairly vicious. "Oh Saihara-chan, that's no good," he's back to using the suffix of chan for the first time since Shuichi's accident, but it feels forced. The words are strained and mocking. You can't even begin to decipher what's going on in that head of his, but he's obviously deeply upset.

"No fucking way, that's got to be a lie!" Kaito is understandably the first one to come to Shuichi's defense.

"And what would you know, space boy? It's not like any of us knew each other before this stupid game, and that card already told us that all we are is a bunch of silly characters and fabrications! Isn't it great? All of you hate lying so much, and yet you're just living one giant lie. Isn't it ironic? But, I suppose now you'll have to see the value in lying. Especially if this is the real Saihara-kun. Tell be Momota-chan, Akamatsu-san, will you still love him when ____-chan tells us how real the cards are? Of course, we haven't gotten through all of them so you might not have any room to judge regardless," Kokichi looks and sounds amused but you can see the undeniable tension in his shoulders as he speaks.

He's just as scared to hear the answer as Kaito and Kaede are, the latter looking like all the breath has been pulled from her lungs. She seems like she's having trouble speaking, floundering between looking at you and Shuichi pathetically. At least she can still look around. Shuichi goes still like an animal caught in the headlights of a truck on a new moon. You can practically see his heart rate spiking. His eyes remain locked on the card.

You grab the book, flipping a couple of pages until you reach Togami. "I... it looks pretty similar guys," you tell the group pathetically. You don't want to be the one to say it's true, so you simply hold up the card and the book for the rest of the class to examine.

It looks like it's the same looping but efficient handwriting. All the way down to the tiny detail such as the size of the g. It almost looks too perfect, almost too perfect to be human, but the smallest of differences exist which makes it seem all too real. Those tiny things that crop up not when someone is trying to copy a signature, but when someone who's written it 1000 times is asked to write it 1000 more.

"Saihara-kun can't kill himself! Tenko will beat the self-hatred out of him if he tries!" Tenko suddenly blurts out. You never thought Kaito would shout a very determined 'yeah' after something Tenko's said, but that also happens. Tenko nods at Kaito and actually looks proud, fluffing up slightly.

"That's what you cling to? Seriously? Didn't you listen to ____-chan you stupid fucking disaster of a lesbian? Saihara-chan used to like Danganronpa, the people who put us in this game. He wanted to be here. He wanted to betray us!" Kokichi's voice shivers and while it's hard to detect you catch the faintest crack in his voice that reveals just how hurt and betrayed he really feels. Early on Kokichi had a crush on Shuichi. There's no way around it. There was something about Shuichi that drew him in or he admired, and he had a crush. So he probably feels more hurt than most of the class right now. Not to mention, you can still tell there's a part of Kokichi that worries about Shuichi enough to be scared when he heard the suicidal portion of the note.
Tenko doesn't even hesitate for a moment. "Didn't you listen to ____-chan you thirsty fuck boy," she mockingly slurs the chan in Kokichi's usual tone of voice. He looks completely scandalized as Tenko continues. "All of us signed up for this game willingly, from you to me to ____-san herself. For one reason or another, this was something all of us did to ourselves. And you know what? Like the first card said, those people don't exist anymore. So we shouldn't just judge one another based on what we supposedly did before this game. Not when we can barely trust Monokuma!"

"I bet you won't be saying that when Monokuma calls you out for being some kind of fanatic," Kokichi says, his expression shifts into an outright demented one. Taunting, vicious, and altogether chilling.

"Then watch Tenko, because Tenko's going to show you up when you get called out for the same!" Tenko meets Kokichi's challenge and you can only hope for her sake she'll actually be able to pull through her own name getting slandered. For her sake, as well as for the rest of the class who's started to perk up a little more with Tenko's bold declarations.

"I never thought I'd actually agree with Chabashira-san of all people, but I have to agree with Chabashira-san of all people," Maki turns to Shuichi as she speaks, her eyes distinctly softer than usual. "All of us have bad pasts. It's something I've lived with for a long time. But the fact that some of the things we knew aren't actually real, well, it's a bit eye-opening you might be able to say. Regardless of who you were, it's who you are now that really matters. If you want to be a good person, then be a good person." She seems oddly at peace as she speaks, more relaxed than you've seen her all game. Maybe because of the revelation that she might not actually be an assassin.

Unfortunately, you have to cut off the feel-good moment. You clear your throat, catching the attention of the rest of the class. "Shall I read the next card? I kind of have 6 more," you hesitate for a moment, wondering if you should encourage the class to stop for now. This doesn't seem productive... But all eyes turn to you and the fire that's burning in their gazes makes you continue.

The next card has a VI printed up in the left corner, while the right corner boldly proclaims an 26. You still don't have any clue what these numbers mean, but if they keep appearing on the rest of the cards then it might be some kind of puzzle. This next card has a kind of handwriting you can only really describe as perfect. It's standardized and without flaw, to a point, you'd mistake it for the work of a printer. The signature is just as boxed. There are a couple of quirks present with the express purpose of making it harder to forge, but it looks almost like the writer was forced to make them. Ishimaru is written in those perfect letters.

The first word already has you hating this card. "Kaito wasn't necessarily the nicest person when he auditioned for Danganronpa. Maybe he could have been a good person, but whatever hope for that existed was tainted by absentee parents and abusive classmates. It was either become the bully or get bullied, and he has the physical prowess of a jock so you can take a guess at what he did. Such a despicable act. It's no wonder a person like this abandoned his ailing grandparents in order to get famous on a TV killing game."

Kaito's expression immediately goes from 'we've got this' to 'recently punched in the stomach'. You don't have to say if the card is true or not. Shuichi has it in his hands, squinting at it with all the scrutiny of a real detective. He flips to the page on Ishimaru, looking between the two for any sign of difference before his expression turns to one of defeat. "Kaito..." He says in a quiet voice, glancing towards the astronaut.

Kokichi starts howling with laughter. "Oh, that is rich! Mr. Let's Believe in People and Tell the Truth! A bully of all things! How does it feel Momota-chan, knowing that you're just as bad as me if not worse? Here I was thinking that you were so boring, but you've really proven me wrong."
Kokichi pulls no punches. He's lashing out harder than usual. Never a good thing.

The corner of Tenko's mouth twitches as all the words she'd said for Shuichi get forgotten with a fresh wave of doubt that washes in the direction of Kaito. Shuichi and Kaede have both seemingly recovered from the shock of Shuichi's revelation and try to show some solidarity to Kaito by reaching over and pressing hands to his shoulders.

"Is that seriously the worst Monokuma has? A bully because he got bullied? That's kind of a petty thing to insult him over," Maki, instead of trying to defend Kaito directly, attacks the supposed source of the information. It's odd you haven't seen hide nor hair of Monokuma, but maybe he expects the class to do enough damage to itself without him having to come in and stir up extra trouble. It certainly seems like things are going that way. Two cards in and you can practically feel the doubt starting to weigh down the shoulders of your classmates. Kiibo looks like he'd be crying if he could.

There are still more cards. You're never going to get through them all if things keep going at this pace. You pick up the next card, deciding to treat the whole thing like you're ripping off a bandaid. The class quiets down and turns its attention back to you.

This next card is nothing short of a mess. Its scrawlings are all over the place, chaotic at best unreadable at worst. It's a miracle you're able to tell what the thing is saying. Ironic considering this person's other persona. II sits in the top left while 25 sits in the top right. So far it's been a rather odd assortment of numbers, has it not? Either way, your gaze turns towards the signature messily created at the bottom of the card. Syo. As in Genocider Syo. Yeah... The mess that is her handwriting is extremely ironic to you considering her alternate self is the literal Ultimate Writer.

Then again, writers can sometimes have the messiest handwriting of all. Hands have trouble keeping up with how fast the mind thinks. That's why the backspace on every keyboard your aunt has ever owned has been abused beyond use. Then again, maybe that's just her.

"Kaede was almost as big a fan of Danganronpa as Shuichi, but for an entirely different reason. Her parents always favored her twin sister, and people weren't necessarily kind to her growing up. She was always bullied while her identical twin of all things got ceaseless praise for being more talented and better adjusted. She became disillusioned with humanity. She went as far as to disown her own sister for thinking Kaede's obsession with the show had gone way too far! In her audition video, she even stated she'd happily kill her own sister if somehow the two got put into the same game together!" Your mouth was starting to feel dry.

Kaede took the revelation remarkably well, smiling sadly. "Seems like everyone in this game has something terrible in their past," she doesn't even question the validity of the card. She just accepts it as fact and moves on you. You double check it just in case but don't know what to tell her once you do.

There's a certain kind of grace in the way that Kaede handles it. She doesn't freeze up or try to deny it. She just takes a deep breath in, lets a large breath out, and smiles. "As true as that might be though, I think that there's still hope. Even in the darkest of places, there's still hope. I don't know who the Kaede described in that card is. She doesn't exist anymore. Which means I'm already one step closer to becoming someone better." Her eyes are watery but her gaze is strong as it pans over the rest of the class. It's the most like a leader she's ever looked, and that hits everyone hard.

You can see Kokichi trying to think up a way to spin it, but he doesn't get the chance.

"That's very brave and also very correct of you Akamatsu-san! As your friend, I will do everything in my power to also help you keep moving forward, as well as everyone who apparently has a bad
past. After all, there is typically a reason humans become these ways! The voice inside of my head is telling me that all of us can keep moving forward as long as we keep hope," Kiibo smiles bright enough to blind, and Kokichi fakes a face of disgust.

"Gross," he mutters but he doesn't try to tear apart the argument. So far the class has been handling things fairly well, but you're pretty sure that's because whoever wrote this has been going easy on the class so far. You brace yourself for a sucker punch.

The next card has a V in the top left and a 21 in the top right. The handwriting is pretty, but it isn't anything to make too serious a note about. It's very simple, but it gets the job done. The name on the card, Koizumi, is written in looping script. The card looks pleasant at first glance. You doubt it is pleasant, but one can hope.

You suppose it was only a matter of time before one of these cards forced the class to hit a breaking point of sorts. "Tenko has such an unhealthy view of men because of her own history with them. So stereotypical, but it makes for an interesting enough character and the audience needs someone to dislike! The nitty gritty details of what we mean can truly be left up to the imagination. After all, this is still TV."

No one says anything. The silence is suffocating for a long drawn out moment. No one wanted to say anything. Not even Kokichi. Maybe their thoughts actually did turn to what the card meant. What kinds of abuse it was trying to imply. How bad it actually was, or how bad they were making it seem without saying anything. Either way, the silence is thick enough to choke on.

Through it all Tenko's face remains completely blank. She doesn't say anything. It's hard to tell if she actually believes the card or not, and she doesn't give you a chance to tell her if it's true or not. She just quietly stands up and walks out. Doesn't run, doesn't rush, doesn't panic. She just walks out without a word. The spot where she'd been sitting between Angie and Himiko suddenly feels like an icy void.

"Wow... Not even I'm messed up enough in the head to comment on that," Kokichi says, glaring at the card slightly as though it's personally offended him. He isn't the only one though. The way some of your classmates flinch makes you think they agree. This card feels wrong... Though it feels wrong to you in a different way than it might feel wrong to the rest of the class.

Kiibo is the only one who looks, well, confused. "Wait, I don't understand what the card means. What did a man do to Chabashira-san? What does that have anything to do with her being a better character?"

"The card is trying to imply a man either physically, emotionally, or sexually assaulted her," Maki says what no one else in the room is willing to. You flip to the proper page in the signature book and Shuichi flinches after comparing the two. You don't say anything about it. "I think the card is intentionally left vague to make us as well as Chabashira-san herself ask questions. For all we know it didn't even directly happen to her. It could have happened to her mother or someone else close to her. That being said, it's certainly enough to break down Chabashira-san. Not good."

"We all braced ourselves for each and every one of us to be a bad person, to the point we forgot that bad things could have happened to us. All good characters have a tragic backstory, but the kind of tragedy has to vary or else it'll get boring for an audience. When we braced ourselves for one thing, it made this hit all that much harder," Tsumugi says hesitantly. Her eyes are cast downwards. Everyone, even her, looks upset over this turn of events.

"Something about this is starting to feel deeply wrong... Atua does not like the way things have been going. He doesn't know exactly what it is, but something feels very off right now," Angie
keeps glancing at the door Tenko left from. So does Himiko. Himiko is the first out of the two to inevitably stand up.

"I'm going to go check on Chabashira-chan," she rushes away the moment she announces her intentions. There are hints of panic in her expression, and it's perhaps the most energetic you've even seen Himiko. Have you ever even seen her run before? You honestly can't say for sure.

Angie stands up immediately after but you stop her before she rushes out like the two before her. "The next card has your name on it..." you trail off as ways to give Angie a decision on what to do. Would she rather stay and hear out the card, or would it be better to just never know? She pauses, glancing between you and the door. She decides to sit back down, but her gaze won't raise from the table and she's shaking slightly. You can only imagine how terrifying it must be, to sit there patiently while you're confronted by what someone else is telling you are the worst demons from your past.

You glance over the card. It's messy, but not as messy as Syo. That being said, Syo's handwriting was the only thing about her card that was a mess. This one has stains. Stains. The name Hagakure printed at the bottom does not shock you. Who else would have handwriting that looks like they were high while trying to write it? In fact, knowing him maybe he was. At least it's easy to read the IV in the top left corner and the 11 on the right. The puzzle only seems to get odder and odder the further into this you get.

"Angie belonged to an abusive cult that berated her constantly, told her to be the same as everyone else and that art was bad. Atua was a vengeful god who demanded blood sacrifices, fasting, and all number of cultish activity. she actually came to resent Atua and the cult that represented him. But a cult leader is a lot more interesting than a cult victim, so the gamemasters did a little tweaking there." You can taste both blood and bile in the back of your throat.

You aren't sure what kind of reaction you were expecting from Angie, but you're fairly certain laughter isn't on the top of the list. Yet, that's what you seem to get. Laughter. Echoing, demented, lost laughter. It's humorless and dangerous, and the sound alone is enough to make your skin crawl.

Angie's gaze goes from panic to panic in an instant. "That's so stupid! Does Monokuma actually believe that? Who told him such terrible nonsense?" She asks in the same chipper voice as always. The class looks just as uncomfortable as you feel. You flip to the proper page in your book and glance at Shuichi who shares the same worried stare as you do. You both then turn to Angie. Neither one of you speaks because you don't know what to tell her. Luckily your silence is enough to get your point across.

The laughter instantly dies in the back of Angie's throat. Her face seems to freeze on a look of joviality like a video buffering before an inevitable jump scare. So you wait for it to come. And boy does it ever come. She stands up so quickly her chair slams to the ground, causing you and a couple of other people to flinch. You can see Maki's instincts kicking in as her shoulders tense up. You can tell that if things got out of hand both she and possibly Kaito would jump to their feet to apprehend Angie.

She doesn't turn aggressive towards you or even the class though. She wheels around, glaring at empty air, almost like she's looking for a camera. "You're wrong!" She shouts as though Monokuma is in the room for her to be yelling at. "Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong!!! Atua is good and kind and would never demand abhorrent acts of his followers. He protects us! All of us! And Atua is going to welcome everyone in the class to heaven if someone else bad happens just like he's welcomed our other classmates, even the killers! Because just like Atua none of us have
actually done anything wrong! Unlike all of you! Whoever you are, Atua is never going to let you into heaven, you hear me you sad excuse for a human being?"

You aren't sure if you're more terrified or amazed when she turns back to the class, putting on the same big smile as always. "Remember, Atua is good and kind and will protect all of us no matter what. We just have to have faith! Angie is going to go find Tenko-chan and Himiko-chan now. Angie has to make sure they're both okay after all," the smile doesn't drop from her face once as she turns on her heels for the last time and literally skips out of the room.

You feel a shiver start at the base of your spine and travel all the way up as she leaves. What a horrifying display. But what else could you really expect? It was only a matter of time before the class started cracking. No one says anything, they just look towards you and wait for the next card.

Two more to go.

The handwriting on this card is once again beautiful, it looks delicate and you can't help but think someone was trying to write as small as physically possible when they were making this card. You have to squint to make out the words properly. Just as always the left and right corners are filled, a III and a 24 respectively. The name printed at the bottom of the card is Komaeda. Yeah, that would make sense. Considering who the card's written about, that connection would end up getting made for the benefit of the audience's amusement.

"Kokichi was a worthless orphan prior to the game, not to mention completely talentless. His organization, DICE, was actually just a bunch of orphans he tried his best to lead and protect. He couldn't protect a single one though. He was a pathetic leader despite all the other kids looking up to him. That's why he joined Danganronpa, so he could get the money to take care of the others. While not necessarily with one of our studios, this isn't the first time he's done this either. The things he'll do for the people he cares about, and yet, the people he's already let die. What a worthless leader."

This card is targeted, it's obvious in the way Kokichi flinches when you read off the final two words. Worthless leader. It really hits the nail on the head when it comes to his biggest worries this entire game. He's been trying so hard in his own messed up kind of way to make sure this game doesn't go poorly. To make sure as few people as a possible die. To make sure it actually ends. Yet, here you are, with too many people already dead and the majority of the class no closer to any answers.

He tries to play it off cool. "Ha, as if, do any of you actually believe I could care about another person?" Kaito looks at him with pity, and that's what really does it for Kokichi who looks like he's about to go full aggressive if only to protect his reputation and his wounded pride. You aren't going to let this devolve into a fight until you can escape it.

"There's one more card! You can fight after I read it. Let's just get through these already..."

The class actually agrees, thank god, and you're able to inspect the last card. It's plain, completely average in appearance, but there's something special in the way the script curves. Completely unnoticeable at first, but more apparent the longer you stare at the swirling text. It's printed with the name Naegi at the bottom and something in the pit of your stomach stirs. This last card has VII in the top left and 19 in the top right. It should be the final piece of the puzzle but you aren't even sure what the puzzle is yet.

"Unlike the rest of the class, ____ isn't related to anyone from the first two killing games. Out of the entire class, she's the only one who's completely average. For better and for worse," the card
reads. It's not the worst thing in the world. There are much worse things that could be written about you. But it feels just as bad because deep down it feels... well, you suppose wrong is the word you're looking for.

"So all of us have some relation to this terrible game on multiple levels... except for ____-chan?" Kaede asks hesitantly. That seems to be what the cards is implying. For a moment there's peace and silence as the class absorbs everything that's been read. It doesn't last long.

As you come to an agreement about the validity of not only the last card but all of the cards the class finally hits peak 'break down'. It was something that had been happening the entire time. Between Tenko having to leave the room with Himiko and Angie's own breakdown, it was evident that the class hadn't been ready for what was going to be on these cards.

Chaos. The only thing born from this encounter is going to be true unadulterated chaos.

You take a sharp breath and try to think of ways to calm down the class. Truly, it hurts you to see them all so distraught like this, but at the same time, it's one of those things you can't really do much about. One of those things you shouldn't try to do much about. Whatever this madness is, it needs to run its course for better and for worse. At the very least you can be grateful that not everyone in the room ended up getting trash talked. There was no telling what could have been said about Tsumugi or Miu. You didn't think those two would have been able to handle it, and that would have led to this being too much for you to handle now.

"Everyone calm down!" It's actually Shuichi's voice that manages to rise above the chaos and slowly bring the attention of your remaining classmates back to some semblance of order. It's a marvel he has the composure he does right now considering what was said about him not too long ago. He's really recovering better than you've given him credit for.

"There's no telling how true these notes actually were. After all, the signatures could have been forged," he says. Shuichi brings up a very valid point. Something you yourself were wondering about. How Team Danganronpa managed to collect signatures of the dead is a wonder to you even now. You aren't sure if these are true or not, but here's the thing. They all managed to line up perfectly with the information on Rantaro's Monopad. So if these notes are fake, that left Rantaro's Monopad as also being subject to tomfoolery.

So it came down to a question of if Monokuma was actually making this game fair or not. Certainly, the Gamemasters were trying not to.

"Is it really that easy to make these seem like fakes though?" Kaede voices the concerns of the rest of the group, but Shuichi stands his ground.

"Forging a signature isn't actually that hard. I could even forge a very basic signature. Monokuma, or whoever's controlling him, seems to have limitless resources. Would it really be that unthinkable that the person behind the bear would have the ability to fake the signatures of people who for all we know are already dead? After all, given the number of signatures, there's already been way too many for it to all be the survivors. Even if it was the survivors of both the first two games combined, too many different names have been written on these cards."

Shuichi isn't wrong, you'll give him that. But there's more to this situation than readily meets the eye. Perhaps it's a bit more difficult than that. Who's to really say?

What do you actually think?

Regardless of these cards being elaborate forgeries, Monokuma giving you bad information, or the
real deal, it has the class stirred up enough that the already tenuous peace seems seconds away from shattering. You don't like the direction things are turning. You can see flickering distrust in the eyes of your classmates, each one carefully trying to decide who's going to be the one to snap and who's going to catch them if they end up snipping.

It's pathetic in a lot of ways. The only person who doesn't have a set of eyes glued to them just so happens to be you. Negligence? Trust? You can't tell anymore, but you're starting to feel fatigued after all of this. There's more to these cards than meets the eye and you don't know what it is. You wish this chaos would stop, you want everyone to get along. 13, 18, 17, 13, 3, 16, 11.

A puzzle the class can't solve. How unfortunate. It's probably a bad thing. 13, 18, 17, 13, 3, 16, 11.

You sigh, feeling the tension starting to slowly build up into a headache. There was a sharp tension behind your eyes that quickly gave way to pain. You rub your hands against your temples in an attempt to alleviate some of the pressure. "Maybe we should all just calm down for a couple of minutes, okay? Let's all just go to our rooms or do something fun. I need to go check on Gonta-kun anyway." Before one of the three girls who've already left get some kind of funny idea.

"But ____-chan, the game is never going to go anywhere if you keep puppy guarding him. You do know someone's going to have to die before this game can move forward! Oh, I wonder who it's going to be, I'm so excited," it would be Kokichi who decides to pop up and make things worse. Stirring the pot and causing aggression to bubble up in the eyes of those who are usually calm.

Kaito jumps to his feet, curses resting on his tongue and growls backing up his throat. "Listen here!" He starts. Shuichi grabs Kaito's arm. Unfortunately, Kaito isn't the biggest problem right now. Maki stands up, ripping Kokichi out of his seat and holding him by the throat. He keeps his expression as calm and condescending as always. He's confident in the fact that things are a controlled kind of chaos. Maki can't outright kill him. She's said it herself. She'd be the first suspect on your list, and if both of them die where does that leave you?

Maki might be frustrated at this moment, but she's also smart. She knows that killing Kokichi is a bad option. Unfortunately, Kokichi is just as smart and is also privy to this information, meaning that all the intimidation that comes along with being held a full foot off the ground by your throat is lost on him.

"What's wrong Makiroll, are you angry?" Maki's grip tightens when he uses the nickname.

"That name is not yours to use," she says in a tone so quiet and deadly that you might actually start thinking she's serious if you didn't notice the way her hands are just so slightly shaking. She isn't a real assassin, you're once again reminded by that of the hesitation in her body language. Even if conscious Maki isn't quite aware of it, subconscious Maki is freaking the fuck out. Whoever she was before the game, this isn't her. And somewhere deep down she knows it.

After all, Team Danganronpa can't change a person's actual personality. They can give a person false memories and allow their conscious self to act out of turn with whoever they were prior to the game, but even that only goes so far.

You would do well to remember that in future reflection.

Characters. No matter how far up the rabbit hole you get the people around you are still playing characters. And yet, at the same time, they really aren't.

While the history of each and every person in this room is little more than a fabrication, their personalities are not. So then. How does this change the story? Everything you've learned today,
everything you knew before. It's time to really assess what's actually a fabrication or not. Have you figured it out yet? Well, you might need a little more time. Luckily there's still enough time left to figure it out. You aren't even three murders in. Yet.

"Guys! Fighting like this isn't going to do much good. Kokichi-kun is an asshole. What's new about that exactly?" You turn to the group. Maki hesitates for a moment but eventually drops him with the intent of having it hurt. You're pretty sure the yelp he gives when he lands on his tailbone is genuine. You try not to flinch when you glance at him. "Now then, like I was saying, everyone needs to go chill out and I need to check on Gonta-kun."

You stand up, carefully watching the class shift and prepare to disperse. The energy in the room is heavy and you hate to leave things like this, but what needs to be done needs to be done.

You leave and Miu trails after you silently. She's been entirely too silent this entire time. In fact, you don't think she's spoken since Angie and Tenko came to get the two of you. Usually, she'll cut in with at least one crude joke or something else of a similar nature, but she doesn't. In fact, she seems generally off, like even the way she presents herself feels off kilter. She feels smaller in a way, recoiled in on herself. It's like when Kokichi insults her, but even worse. You can't tell if she's scared or what, but you find yourself a bit unnerved by it. You weave your hand into hers and she almost jumps.

"You okay?" You ask in the most gentle voice you can possibly manage. She looks up at you before looking down again.

"I'm scared, I want this game to end," she admits, pressing herself a little closer to you. It feels like a stab in the gut. You pull your hands apart so as to wrap your arm around her shoulder. She just curls into you tighter. She's shaking. You don't like the fact she's shaking.

You can't decide if this is more Miu or less Miu. Obviously, it isn't the kind of persona she puts on display for the world to see, but humans are multifaceted creatures. While it's not her typical persona, you don't quite feel that it's out of character for Miu to be acting like this. She's shown her softer parts to you before, but never quite like this. So yes, this is still Miu, but it's a side of Miu that you're frankly scared to see. While it's still Miu it doesn't feel right. It's now how she's supposed to be when everything is normal and isn't completely going off the walls dangerous.

You fall silent for a long moment, entirely unsure as to how to respond. "I want the game to end too, preferably sooner rather than later," you finally tell her. She goes silent for the rest of the walk to the nurse's office.

Against all odds of probability, Gonta is absolutely fine, still out cold in his bed. You let go of a breath you didn't realize you'd been holding.

Instead of sitting down in her usual spot, Miu paces. Her movements are jerky and awkward at best, and her eyes dart around constantly as if she's having an argument with herself. "Do you want to talk?" You ask as you sit down in your own usual seat.

Her lips part a couple of times, closing moments later before she finally turns her full attention towards you. "Do you trust everyone here?" She asks you. You're a bit taken aback by the question, but you suppose it makes a certain degree of sense. Just the other day she was telling you that you should be more distrustful of others if it kept you alive. Maybe she's just worried about you. You are kind of a prime target considering how you've been propping up the class. Then again, Shuichi's been making something of a recovery so he should be able to start holding his own. You shouldn't be any more of a target than him. Shouldn't be more of a target than Kokichi given how he's been acting.
"I don't know how to answer that. Trust is such a strange thing. There are levels of trust, and someone I trust in one regard I might not trust in another," you say. Miu looks confused so you elaborate. "I wouldn't trust someone like Kaito-kun to keep Kokichi-kun alive, but I know I could trust him to keep Shuichi-kun alive. I know that together I can trust them not to do a stupid. Maybe Shuichi-kun did something stupid before, but he did that on his own and he's moved past the mistake. So to a degree, yes, I suppose I trust everyone in the school. Do I trust everyone not to kill each other, well, that's a different story?" You begin to twirl a pen between your fingers. It feels uncomfortable keeping them idle for too long. You wish you had one of those knives Maki gave to Shuichi and apparently also Kaede.

One of your moms taught you some pretty cool knife tricks. They were a good way to stave off boredom when neither of your brothers and none of your friends were around to entertain.

"Is there anyone you trust not to kill one another?" She asks hesitantly. You aren't sure if she'd rather you answer yes or no since either way you'll be including her in some regard. You think very carefully about the answer. It's best to be honest, but the answer is always going to be more complex than a yes or no.

"I believe in people's innate ability to resist persuasive force when given the right support networks? I mean... Any person on the planet can be pushed to kill, be it someone else or himself/herself. It's really a matter of finding the right stimuli, pressing the right buttons. I used to know someone who was really good at always pressing the right buttons to get people to play whatever game she wanted. Because of that, she got bored... until she met someone who knew how to cope with that stimuli. It wasn't about their innate 'goodness', it relied entirely on the fact this person valued those around him and the morals he'd grown up with. This made his resistant, tolerant. Sure, maybe in one of the millions of parallel universes that exist, maybe in one of those he was convinced to do something horrible. Hell, maybe in one of those stories he went so far as to become the bad guy! The thing is, anyone can be convinced to kill and anyone can be given the resources to convince themselves not to."

"There are people in this school who for the time being I would hope have those resources, but there are people in this school who might very well decide to kill themselves under the right motive. Trust and probability are such tricky things and unfortunately they really do go hand in hand. I'm not sure if I can give you a straight answer," you smile apologetically. You feel Miu move closer, but you don't look up. You look down at your gloved fingers and wonder. What would it take to make those you treasure the most fall?

"Do you think everyone in school is a good person?" An odd question, but you'll humor it. You can hear something teary in Miu's tone like she's about to have a breakdown.

"Gods yes, absolutely. Anyone and everyone can be a good person. It's always been the philosophy of my family that everyone starts out as a good person. The world, however, isn't good. One way or another it breaks people down. Even before people were being bad to one another, the world was being bad to people. That was what made bad people who in turn turned on others and make more bad people. I think everyone in this school, both those alive and those dead, are and were good people. The world just hasn't been very good to us so far..." If this conversation keeps going you might start to cry.

Miu's arms wrap around you and you feel her press her face into your shoulder. "I love you. You're too good for this place," she tells you. "I'm sorry."

You don't know what she's apologizing for. The pieces don't click together. Not when something unfamiliar presses itself into you back. Not when you feel electricity searing your cells, running up
and down your spine until your body short circuits. Not when everything goes suddenly very dark. You're left with nothing on your mind except confusion.

Liar.
The world goes... strange for a little while. Your thoughts scatter and you become unable to hold onto anything. You're present, but you aren't present. And so, you float around in total darkness for some time. It's impossible to tell how much time passes, as you can't actually hold on to any conscious thoughts. You're only vaguely aware of the fact you even exist in what seems to be an entirely empty void.

Time passes and eventually, your consciousness starts to try and piece itself back together. You become more and more aware of the fact you exist, but the understanding is foggy at best. You can't tell what time it is so you don't know how much time actually passes between you starting to put your thoughts back together and when you start to try and leave whatever void you've woken up in. Unfortunately, you don't get the chance to leave. Another lance of electricity shoots through your body and you find yourself back in the darkness once more.

It's not a bad kind of darkness, and neither is it permanent darkness, so you allow yourself to float. That being said, it isn't comforting or comfortable darkness. You're just ever so slightly aware of something being wrong. That understanding hovers at the back of your mind while everything else melts and blurs, making you unable to retain any information that might actually help you right now.

It's unnerving to know that something is wrong, but there's nothing you can really do about it. You aren't here right now. But you're right here and right now and you're a thing. A sentience. Yet are you really? Floating in a void of nothing, aren't you just nothing too?

At some point in your life, you can remember fearing death. Ironic, given your line of work. It's not nessisarily safe. If this is death it isn't so bad though.

You, of course, can't make that connection as right now you can't think. You just are, and at the same time, you aren't.
When your mind slowly starts to crawl its way back a second time you become vaguely aware of the concept of noise. The first set of noises sounds like some kind of announcement, though you aren't sure why the comparison comes to mind when you still aren't present enough to understand the concept of an announcement in and of itself. At least not fully. A small part of you in the back of your mind seems to understand, and whatever the noise is, that part of you hates it. It makes your skin start to prickle. You aren't sure how you know when you can't really even feel your skin. Something about the high pitched noise just sends you on the defensive. You don't know what to do though. You're just a set of thoughts drifting on a sea of dark waves. You have nothing better to do with your time than listen to the noises, so you keep trying to listen.

The noises are quick to change. They don't worry you as much, but they do still worry you for a different reason.

The noises start to echo with sounds of panic. Distressed sounds that you can't pull apart from one another. They swirl together in some kind of chaotic blob which crescendos in staccato bursts. Rising and falling and full of fear. Internally you flinch at the volume. The voices are loud and so scared. In spite of the urge to hide farther in the darkness, you start pulling yourself towards the voices. You aren't sure if it's a sense of protectiveness or pride, but something hammers home the fact defending these voices is more important than protecting yourself. As you draw closer the voices start to separate into actual people talking instead of a woven mess of strings.

You still aren't present enough to tell one person from the other let alone make out any kind of words, but it's something at least. It's difficult but you continue to trudge forward trying to get any of your muscles to move. Time is still meaningless, so you don't know if you're moving at a snail's pace or blitzing forward. Either way, it's practically torture. Your entire body feels completely frozen. Heavy and solid and completely unresponsive, nothing moves. You try again, this time a little bit of panic tingling your own actions. Again, nothing seems to want to move.

You still can't make out any words, but that makes things worse. There's something wrong and you can't move. Why can't you move?

You try to pull in a sharp breath but not even your lungs are paying attention to your orders. You can feel each breath you draw, shallow and weak. You are entirely conscious of your own breathing, but you can't control it, which is a weird paradox. You keep breathing but a small part of your brain panics, stuck between holding control and handing over conscious control to you. Your own fear seems to shake the paralysis as you regain the ability to breathe for yourself. With that comes the ability to finally move your arms and legs.

The process jolts from slow to sudden, a terrified breath filling your lungs sharp with as much air as you can physically get in the span of a short second.

Against all resistance, you manage to open your eyes and push your body up. Where are you? You can't remember anything that happened before now, which totally isn't disconcerting or anything no sirree. On the edge of your senses, you detect some noises of shock mixed with relief, but they aren't the first thing on your mind. The world is finally coming into focus, though you head hangs awkwardly considering the effort it took you to just sit up. Your... yeah, your desk comes into view with sudden stark clarity and you're sent reeling by how everything comes into focus with little warning. Almost too much focus.

"Thank goodness," a hand rests on your shoulder and without warning, words are a thing again that you can understand and speak yourself if you could actually work your tongue. A voice you can only guess is attached to the same body as the hand speaks in a gentle voice. Considerate. A little meek. Radiating chaotic anxiety. Shuichi. "We thought there were going to be three."
The situation hits you like a sack of bricks at that moment as you finally manage to banish the confusion from your skull and grab ahold of the situation. "Three?" You ask. Your throat feels dry, your own tongue threatens to choke you and your speech is slurred. Doesn't matter.

Your head shoots upwards to face Shuichi a little too quickly. Your vision starts to swim and your ears are ringing but that isn't important. "What do you mean three?" The panic is evident in your voice, perhaps it's the first time you've shown your classmates general confusion and fear. Visceral and raw judging by how sore your throat feels as you speak the words. Judging by the way Shuichi flinches and regards you with pity. Why in the hell would he be looking at you with pity?

"Wait, ____-san, don't look!" A voice you half recognize as Kaede's reaches your ears. She's either a couple of seconds too late or you don't pay attention to her, you can't tell which, but your head turns the direction it really shouldn't.

The blood drains from your features and you feel your body get cold. So very, very cold, like ice is building up in your veins. You aren't ashamed to admit that your fingers start to shake a little. You can't speak, for both a lack of ability to form words and your sudden lack of ability to remember what they even are. You don't even know what you'd say. There's no one to say the words that coil up in the back of your throat to. There are words back there, choking you softly, and there's no way to get them out because there are two fucking corpses sitting on the ground of your office.

Jesus Christ. You aren't sure if it's the after effects of whatever the hell happened to knock you out in the first place or the shock caused by such a sight, but you feel faint again.

You stand up and immediately stumble, unable to so much as support your own weight. You aren't sure who catches you, but you see blonde so you guess Kaede with the possible aid of Shuichi. Your breath hitches repeatedly as you physically struggle to take in the sight before you. There are so many ways in which this is fucked up. You lose count.

You're vaguely aware of more sets of footsteps showing up. You can hear voices shouting and bodies cram inside the small office. Again, a small part of you is aware of what's happening, but the main part of your brain is still thrown into complete chaos. There are questions that your more put together self would be asking, but you're reeling too hard to even think of what those questions might be. Your body is moved slightly, your weight shifting to a different set of arms. "____, calm down," the only reason the voice manages to cut through the fog is that it's sharp. Dagger-sharp. It's Maki, it's got to be. Of course, if Kaede and Shuichi were trying to prop you up the stronger member of the Fitness Club would take over upon discovering such a scene.

It's her hands which are holding you up now. You don't feel like you're going to fall any more, you don't need to be propped up, but the sensation is grounding so you end up falling further into her grip.

"It's about time," Monokuma says in a voice that burns your ears. You don't know where he is. You don't look at him. You keep looking at the corpses. You... gods above, gods below, you don't even know what to say. What to do. This outcome was entirely expected. You could have seen it coming from a mile away. And yet it scorches your very soul in spite of the ice pulsing in your veins. You feel cold. You... you're shivering a little. Another hand rests on your shoulder. You don't know who's. You stay fixed on the corpses.

The first corpse to catch your eye would, of course, be the larger one. You don't know how, but he's the less battered of the two in spite of the giant red stain going all the way across his body. Gonta. It's Gonta. You... It's Gonta and you just can't. You don't know why. You don't know how. You can't. You Just Fucking Can't.
Who? Why? The thoughts swim too quickly through your head for you to act appropriately to try and answer them. You already knew that Gonta would be a sitting duck, that's why you'd been guarding him for so long. But what member of your class would actually go through with killing Gonta of all people? He was the purest member of the class and you honestly wish you'd gotten a day more with him around being conscious. The entire school feels a little darker in the gentle bug master's absence.

And in spite of that, the second corpse still hurts you more. Oh, it hurts so much more. "Miu," you mutter quietly because you'll never be able to come to term with what's sitting right in front of you if you don't say it out loud. The grip on your shoulder tightens with the way you grit your jaw. On the ground sitting in a pool of her own blood is your now dead girlfriend. It looks like the work of someone with a particularly bitter ax to grind, given the number of stab wounds that litter her chest. It's not an insane amount. Hell, it's few enough it could have easily been self-inflicted if someone was completely off the deep end. Yet it seems so completely over the top, the number makes you feel like there's something odd about the injuries no matter what their cause was.

You force yourself not to gag, watching and waiting, hoping beyond all reason they'll both jump up and yell surprise like the fucked up kind of game that Danganronpa is. They're not dead. They're not dead. They Are Not Dead. This is fact, but you don't feel like explaining why.

Of course, they won't just sit back up. This is exactly what Monokuma wanted. In a bitter twist of fate, it might be exactly what your plan needed in order to work. You'd laugh in the fact of how fucked up all of it is if you could even breathe.

"Come on ____-chan, it's time to investigate," Kokichi whispers. Why is he so close to your ear? Is it his hand that's still affixed to your shoulder? His breath brushes against you and your world comes to a sudden screeching halt, your brain doing an emergency rewire, and all it takes is that one little word. He says that word like he knows it's a trigger, like he know it's programmed to have a very specific effect because you needed that kind of training when you were a child and still couldn't stand the sight of the innocent lying on the ground in a heap of their own mangled flesh. As soon as the word investigate leaves his mouth the ice in your veins freezes the confusion and panic, leaving you own with questions and a bloodhound-like ferocity to find their answers. No matter how many teeth you're gonna have to pull in order to do it.

Metaphorically.

While it doesn't nessisarily extend to Monokuma and his shitty hellspawn, you are still a pacifist. At least that won't ever be changing.

The word investigate is the one word you really need to hear at that moment. You think it's about time to admit something.

You are a detective. While it's not an official talent of yours, you are a detective because your mother was and your great grandfather was even if your grandfather picked a different path. You have taken that legacy in a bit of a different course, but it's still a legacy that means as much to you as the one your father has handed off to you. Even if it isn't your talent, it's still important to you. When you were young though, it was a bit hard. You are a sympathetic person, and looking into the eyes of those who'd had crimes committed against them was hard.

Investigate. Your grandfather had made it a trigger word. It meant it was time to start acting like how your mother's half of the family is expected to behave. No emotions. A cold and ruthless truth hunter. The phrase didn't always work. You are an emotional creature, and you always hated the straight and narrow kind of views your great grandfather held, on top of the fact some of the ways he'd treated your mother as a little girl had bordered on abusive.
This kind of level of emotional distress though? The word takes like a charm and you turn to Monokuma with an icy kind of chill in your gaze. Bring it.

"You guys kept me waiting for quite some time, I was starting to get worried," Monokuma says with another big laugh. The words grind on the back of your mind. Unfortunately, Kokichi is right and it's about time you get your shit together and focus. He claps his paws and the remaining Monokubs appear. They start to hand out the Monokuma Files with a kind of glee that boils the one spot in your stomach that hasn't frozen over yet. Maybe it's a bit malicious, but you aren't going to claim fault or innocence when Monosuke trips. Wasn't like anyone else was watching.

You think Monokuma saw it, but the way his smile widens at the corners makes you think there isn't going to be much that comes from it.

Wait. How in the fuck did they get in the nurse's office?

"I'm sure this little mess is going to make for quite the interesting trial. Good luck everyone, you're certainly going to need it!" Monokuma once again disappears. You doubt he'll reappear till the trial starts, not wanting a repeat of last time where some of his words managed to make the solution a bit easier for you to prove.

"Oh Miu," you say quietly more to yourself than anyone else as the class starts to chat amongst itself, divvying out roles.

Shuichi, still hovering near you, manages to catch your attention. "Maybe the two of us should investigate together?" He offers up hesitantly. You know he's worried about this trial given everything that happened last time. You honestly have no problem investigating with Shuichi as he seems to have gotten past it and is genuinely interested in solving this case if the look in his eyes is anything to go off of. With the disappearance of his hat and the confidence boosts from Kaede and Kaito he's actually been starting to flourish. Even under Kokichi's scrutiny. The same can be said of Kaede who's reputation has pretty much recovered at this point, or at least has recovered as much as it's going to considering those awful cards.

You have no problem investigating with Shuichi, but apparently, someone else has problems with it.

"Nope, no way, Tenko is investigating with ____-san," Tenko buts into the conversation causing both of you to move a little farther from one another when she places herself directly between you two.

"You have to investigate with Yonaga-san, you two are still chained together," Shuichi argues, or at least tries to argue. It sounds more like a country gentleman firmly wording a complaint to the manager. You're a bit shocked seeing him stand up to Tenko like this, but less shocked than you are over Tenko's actual actions. You thought out of everyone in the room, Tenko would be able to trust Shuichi. She'd been the one trying to help him out ever since you asked. But she just glares at him and you expect 'degenerate male' to spout from her lips at any second. Talk about one step forward two steps back.

The line of reasoning brings you to look at your own wrist and shiver. It's still on. You're still chained to...

"About that," Monokuma cuts in. The class turns towards him as he waves a key in his paw. "Since the murder happened the motive is officially ending for the sake of convenience, meaning all of you are free and can investigate or spend time with anyone you want." You never thought that you'd see both Kokichi and Maki so relieved at the same time. They sigh at each other, glare
heavily, and then put themselves on opposite ends of the room as soon as they're freed.

The Monokubs, who are sent around the room to unchain everyone, start with those two. You're second thankfully, and you slowly drift farther and farther away from the corpses for the time being.

You're a little disappointed in yourself, but you can't say it matters to you as much as the fact the corpse of your girlfriend is sitting less than five feet away and Tenko looks like she's about to dropkick anyone who disagrees with her. For the life of you, you can't figure out why! But what's a detective who can't solve a mystery?

"It's fine, it's fine. Shuichi-kun, if you want to be helpful keep a leash on our favorite liar. I'll work with Tenko-chan. I'll be fine. I... Don't know how much help I'll be anyway," you say. That's a lie. Kokichi notices, but he doesn't say anything. Instead, he grins at you, his expression flashing to border on dangerous. He knows exactly how much help you're going to be. You'll let Shuichi do the talking, as much as he can handle on his own. It'll help get his confidence back up and ensure you aren't the only one talking.

The moment he stalls, you're going to flay the whoever did this.

If you're being honest, you have a feeling that whatever happened, Miu brought this on herself to some degree. You aren't sure if that makes you feel better or worse about the state of things. Your recent memories still bubble with electricity. The moron, what was she even thinking? You might say stupid things sometimes, but at least you have the single brain cell required to realize whatever she'd been trying to do was a horrible idea.

You try to gather up everything you can from the situation while the rest of the group continues to divvy up jobs. "Come on Saihara-chan, let's go check the filthy whore's room for clues!" Kokichi says at the loudest volume he can without actively screeching. Animosity radiates off of Maki who quietly slinks after the duo. You watch the pair leave in silence, hoping beyond hope for things to not go terrible.

You think Kokichi is finally offering amnesty to Shuichi. Shuichi carefully takes the olive branch, physically tensing up when Kokichi wraps himself around the taller boy's arm and drags him off. You really hope those two are going to be okay. Kaito, oblivious to Maki's intentions of shadowing the idiots end up grabbing her by the shoulder and dragging her out of the room in what can only be the opposite direction. Kaede sighs, glances towards you, and shrugs. "Come on Kiibo-kun, why don't you help me investigate?" She asks the visibly distressed robot whose eyes keep darting towards Miu's mangled corpse.

He'd be so lucky he won't have to see it long.

Kiibo's own attachment to Miu is probably tearing him up too. You wonder how much pain he feels. Can he turn it off? If he can, you envy whatever degree of inhumanity this universe has deemed to give him. Trigger phrase or no, you can't just turn things like emotions off. Eventually, it's all going to hit you. So you just have to work hard and fast.

Himiko and Angie are the last ones to leave, deciding to leave together after glancing at Tenko who remains uncomfortably close to you. Angie won't stop rubbing her eyes, movements sluggish. She glances at Himiko who shrugs awkwardly and the two leave to go do who knows what.

That just leaves you, Tenko, and Tsumugi. "I'll stick around here to make sure no one tampers with the crime scene. We kind of forgot to do that last time. It would be terrible if the criminal was the first to investigate and managed to mess everything up," the way her eyes linger on you for half a
second too long makes the statement feel more like an accusation. You don't think that's the reason Tenko decided she would be your partner, but you feel a bit more on edge now knowing that at least one person is already blaming you for all the wrongs in the world.

Thinking back, you're pretty certain Tsumugi was one of the people you vaguely heard while you were knocked out. Obviously, Kaede and Shuichi were two of the others if your tactile memory is anything to go off of. Kiibo is the fourth and final person if your senses are to be believed, though you'll have to confirm it a little farther down the road. Or, maybe you can figure it out now. "Tenko-san, I'm sorry I was a bit out of it when everything... started. When did you and Angie-san arrive?" You ask.

"Tenko and Angie-chan got here after Saihara-kun, Akamatsu-san, Shirogane-san, and Kiibo-kun. Tenko and Angie-chan were taking a nap after we had some tea, so it's a bit shocking we actually got here before the rest of the group," she tells you.

Tsumugi decides to confirm the statement with a quick nod, her eyes darting around as she pulls on her memories. They're going in the right directions for memory recollection so you doubt she or Tenko is lying about this snippet of detail. "The four of us were the ones who discovered the bodies. We thought it was a triple murder until you woke up. A bit strange," she doesn't add anything else but her eyes burn at your skin. You refuse to back down.

Thinking back to your own memories you're able to line up the statement. The memories themselves become a little more clear now that you have a solid comparison and the time to properly think. You nod, humming a little. "That makes sense. Angie-san did seem extremely groggy. She usually isn't ever groggy, so it did seem a bit out of character." Knowing she and Tenko were napping you let the detail drop for now and focus instead on the tasks at hand. "Let's figure out what happened here." First, investigate the bodies. Then the crime scene. Then collect alibis. Once you have everything you can start trying to figure out the actual story. No jumping to conclusions. You have to get this right. For more reasons than just the threat to your own life if you're wrong. This time you're out for justice.

Even if your beloved dumbass did do something to deserve this...

"Okay! Tenko will investigate the bodies and ____-san can investigate the surrounding area," she says with a nod. You wonder if she thinks she's doing you a favor. No, no, that's not how this is going to work. As much as you'd like for it to be that simple, you have to play detective now since someone in this school has to be an actual professional now that Shuichi's been demoted to a second rate replication of one. Again, you don't doubt his innate talents, but you doubt he has experience with actual corpses aside from the first two cases.

"I'll investigate the bodies," you tell her as you start flipping open the Monokuma file to see if it even has anything useful. Given Monokuma's statement earlier, you doubt it's going to help all that much.

Tenko turns to you, jaw falling slack. "You'll... what? But ____-san," she looks distressed as she glances between you and the long cold Miu. You understand what she's trying to do, spare your emotions the same way anyone else in the class would, but it leaves the sharp tang of iron slipping between your teeth. Pride and wrath swirl together in the back of your throat and you barely keep yourself from snapping.

"I'm a professional, Chabashira-san, I can handle myself," your words are much sharper than you intend. The use of the last name hits Tenko hard, but she doesn't seem too offended by it. You feel bad instantly, but a dead girlfriend seems to net you something of a pass. More than anything she seems worried about you as she continues to glance between you and the body. "Let's get started
already, I wanna figure this out quickly," you tell her. You turn your attention to the Monokuma file.

_The victims are Miu Iruma the Ultimate Inventor and Gonta Gokuhara the Ultimate Etymologist. The corpses were discovered roughly half an hour after their death at 2:02. Miu's estimated time of death is 1:23. Gonta's estimated time of death is 1:34. These times are imperfect estimates and may vary by a couple of minutes. There are no traces of poisoning present. Cause of death is unknown. Witnesses are unknown._

You flinch at the time. It was roughly 12:30ish when you and Miu got back to the nurse's office so you have no idea when you got knocked out. Around 12:35 is your most educated guess. That made nearly a full hour between the murder and when you got knocked out. You can't even start to make a guess about the second time you got knocked out.

Well, this case is about to become a pain in the ass. You already had a feeling you weren't going to be on the witness list given the fact you were out cold when the bodies were discovered, but the fact there are no witnesses at all makes things even more difficult. In particular, it means a lot of fingers can be pointed at past actions and used as justification. Kaede and Shuichi are probably going to get thrashed, and you haven't even gotten a general sense of who the actual culprit might be. Worst of all, fingers can end up getting pointed at you. Of all the murders, why in the hell does it have to be this one? Tenko finishes up reading the report as you let out a heavy sigh.

"Let's get this mess started," you mutter as you lean down next to the corpses. Gonta first. You need to prepare yourself, and the best way to do that is by getting into the flow of things.

Now that you really kneel down next to Gonta and get a good look at the injuries, you see that they aren't pretty. His bandages are completely soaked through with his own blood. Tenko is hesitant, but she slowly leans down next to you. She refuses to so much as touch the body. Yeah, there's no way you could have confidently left this investigation up to her. Tsumugi hovers nearby to keep an eye on things but looks just as hesitant. "I'm going to undo his bandages to try and see the damage, okay?"

The question is directed at Tsumugi since she's making sure the crime scene doesn't get messed, but also Tenko who looks a little queasy. They both give affirmatives, but Tenko doesn't seem comfortable. She looks pale and you're sure at this point she's glad you didn't let her handle this part on her own.

You slowly unwrap the blood-soaked bandages, the pungent scent of iron attacking your senses. The odor is thick enough you aren't sure if it's made better or worse by the fact it's half an hour old. Tsumugi gags in the background and Tenko closes her eyes for a long moment. You don't even bat an eye at the scent, let alone the sight, grotesque as it is.

The wound caused by the Exisal had been in the middle of healing when whatever happened actually happened. The wound itself is just a half scabbed over mess now. The stitching is absolutely busted. You can see where the thread managed to snap and where it cut straight through the skin instead. That isn't the worst of it though, oh no. The worst has to be the fact that the wound ruptured open. The angry red line is laced all the way down Gonta's body. The injury itself is thick enough that given time he'd bleed out but small enough that it wouldn't happen immediately.

You finally feel something starting to churn in the pit of your stomach as you imagine just how incredibly painful it must have been. And Gonta's death was so long after Miu's.

You're grateful in some fucked up kind of way when you find the thin red line pressed across
Gonta's throat. "Gonta-kun looks to have been the second one attacked. He probably did something which busted his stitchings and was debilitated by that. Given that line of reasoning... I think maybe he was trying to defend Miu. From what I can't say yet. The killer was probably freaking out for a while before they realized that Gonta was still alive. Cutting his throat was probably some kind of mercy given the amount of pain he would have experienced in those last few moments. Even then, I doubt it was quick."

Tsumugi gives you the side eye. She's probably judging how thorough the statement is because she thinks you're the culprit. You can't really blame her given how exact you are with your judgments. Tenko goes extremely quiet and you can't help but wonder if she thinks you're guilty too.

You move on to the part of this investigation you've really been dreading. Miu's corpse.

Her body is what can only be described as a mess. The entire top half of her form is stained with her own blood, she's sitting in a puddle of it. The wounds themselves are extremely large, not to mention deep, either created with a long knife or a lot of violent dedication. All the wounds are noticeably in the chest area though, and it wouldn't have been instantaneous by any means. Even if the first hit was directly to the heart itself, it would have taken some time to bleed out. There is one other detail that manages to catch your attention. The skin around her neck looks a little off color. Strange.

"Do you have any ideas yet?" Tenko asks you hesitantly.

"I do... but I think I'll wait until we have some more evidence before I start trying to piece it together," you tell her as you press your fingers gently to Miu's throat. You're almost amazed. The skin looks damaged, but it's only slight. Yet the bones underneath seem completely demolished. A small touch is enough to tell you how much the throat is completely ruined. That just leaves one question. "Do you think the stab wounds killed her or this neck wounds?"

It could be a good indicator of when the crime started. Depending where a person gets stabbed it can take varying degrees of time for a person to die from bleeding out. Heck, a major artery if hit once can take a full 10-15 minutes to bleed out depending on the nature of the wound and various other factors. That's probably why there's such a stark difference between Miu's time of death and Gonta's time of death. That being said, knowing what killed Miu can help you get a rough estimate of when the murder was taking place.

It's actually Tsumugi who pipes up from the background. "It was obviously bleeding. Post mortem bruising is a total thing, but stab wounds will stop bleeding at a certain point after death." Tenko doesn't comment, but she does nod along as if she understands.

"Good answer," you tell Tsumugi as you stand up and look for anything out of place. The human body is a strange thing, and perhaps the most frustrating thing in the detective industry is the amount of variability that comes from that.

When it comes to the state of the room, it's hard to say what's useful and what's not. There is a small mess that implies maybe there was some kind of struggle. Some of the things on your desk are knocked over as well as some of the equipment sitting on the table next to the beds, but it doesn't provide anything helpful yet. Everything else is where it's supposed to be. Empty blood bags sit on the counter, everything is in its proper places when it comes to medical tools, most of the bottles are put away... One does, however, sit on the counter. You have no idea where this bottle came from though. It doesn't belong in this room.

"What kind of medicine is that?" Tenko asks as she catches sight of what you're looking at. Next to the bottle is a syringe you assume is full of the stuff.
"It's not medicine. It's a kind of poison," you tell them after inspecting the bottle and the way it's labeled, feeling the hairs on the back of your neck start to prickle. Well, you suppose in the proper amount it could be used as medicine. That's a rule that goes along with all poisons, as most medicines are just poisons which are in the proper dosage. Going back to the whole Tylenol debacle. This shit though? Highly unlikely...

"But there wasn't any poison used," Tsumugi says as though she's caught you in a lie. She looks proud of herself. What an ignorantly sweet summer child. So astoundingly unassuming to the actual intricacies of a murder case. Poison not being used doesn't mean it's any less important.

You switch into lecture mode, analyzing why it's there while explaining what it is. "It wasn't intended to be used for murder. At least, not on purpose. Looking at the dosage it surely would have killed. This stuff is called Tetrodotoxin, it's the stuff you find in pufferfish poison, the same thing dolphins get high off of. While it's more lethal than cyanide, just the right dose is a really easy way to fake a death given the symptoms themselves. There've been people legally declared dead before who were later found to be under the effects of this stuff. Some survived it, but most of the time this was found later after the fact. Problem is, the dosage is really hard to get right if you're looking to fake a death," you tell the duo.

A small enough dose and it becomes medicine, but won't simulate a death like response in the body. Too much and you've just killed whoever's death you're trying to fake. Getting the 'just right' amount is a complex calculation with way too many factors to confidently get right. That shit in the syringe right now could probably kill a horse in under half an hour.

"You think the culprit was planning to fake their own death?" Tenko asks. Again, Tsumugi's gaze burns into you. You don't blame her. You don't. She's using the evidence she is aware of to come to a conclusion of who the most likely suspect is. But it's really starting to piss you off. What kind of idiot would assume that you of all people in this hell school would try to kill Miu? Let alone be stupid enough to use dangerous ass toxins like this to fake their own death. Honestly, who does she take you for?

"Not nessisarily, I need to gather a couple more clues," you say as you turn your attention towards the ground. Not for yourself, but to prove Tsumugi's assumption wrong without a shadow of a doubt. A couple of feet from Miu you find a broken machine. Small, a handheld creation. It looks like it got shoved off the desk at some point and broke on ground contact. Or maybe it was thrown, you aren't sure of the situation yet. Either way, it's broken.

"A stun gun?" Tsumugi asks as when you point it out.

You smile bitterly, nodding your head. "That is why I was knocked out," you say. You pick it up and inspect it carefully, a bitter taste in your mouth. Flipping it over you find Miu's signature emblem printed onto the thing. Just a small little logo, nothing extravagant ironically enough, but you know the logo by heart. It's Miu's handiwork, her craftsmanship. And, unfortunately, you have no doubt she's the one who used it on you. Twice, if your frazzled memories are accurate.

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Tenko flinches and gives you a look of what you can only assume is pity. "I'm sorry," she says quietly. Tsumugi doesn't glare at you this time, in fact, she doesn't even look at you. You wonder if she believes you now or is just trying to find another reason to blame you. You put down the machine back where you found it. Gotta preserve the crime scene for the next investigators. A fresh wave of pain clogs up your thoughts. You press your palms into your eyes when you start to feel them sting, taking a long shuddery breath.

"It's okay," your voice cracks slightly but you ignore it. It's not okay. Nothing is okay right now. But you aren't going to admit that. There are more important things to worry about right now. The
story so far implies that Miu knocked you out for some reason with the intent of doing something. You're going to hedge a bet on kill Gonta. Then using the toxin it was probably your death she was going to try and fake. Thank goodness she didn't get to that part since the dose she was planning on giving you would no doubt have been extremely lethal.

After knocking you out a second time someone must have come in and for some reason decided to kill her and then Gonta, but not you because you weren't awake at the time and either deemed not a threat or assumed to be already dead. Of course, those are shaky details and you aren't completely sure why Gonta's stitches got buste dout, why he had to die, and why you were left alive.

You turn your attention back to Miu's knife wounds. "Look around for any kind of other weapons. I don't know who has access to weapons besides Shuichi-kun, Kaede-san, and Maki-san," you tell your two helpers. Tsumugi is now your assistant, whether she likes it not. She's the one who wanted to stay and keep an eye on you, keep an eye on the crime scene, she might as well be helpful if she's going to glare at you in such an accusing manner every five seconds.

"Why do those three have knives?" Tsumugi sounds alarmed and you flinch. Good job, why the hell did you bring that fact up? As if it wasn't already going to be hard enough to keep the class impartial till the evidence is actually pointing a certain direction, now you've gone ahead and scripted both Tsumugi and Tenko to distrust those three.

"Maki-san was starting to get worried. Since the other two can't defend themselves she gave them knives and has been teaching them how to use them. I only found out the other day. Trust me, I'm not necessarily happy about it either," you tell her with a sharp sigh.

Tsumugi looks like she's going to implode in on herself when Tenko starts to light up. "Oh! Tenko knew about that! Tenko confiscated Saihara-kun's knife earlier this morning! But then she lost it..." Tenko deflates slightly at that, looking vaguely embarrassed. You resist the urge to slam the palm of your hand into your face. Losing it is even worse than letting Shuichi keep it since now there's no telling what happened to it. It's hard not to get frustrated with Tenko. She had good intentions, but she seems to be making this case worse and worse.

"You lost a knife? How do you just lose a knife?" Tsumugi looks more alarmed by the minute as she snaps at Tenko. Tenko flinches. It hits you that she hasn't made a single anime reference since the investigation started, so you think she might actually be worried.

"Tenko was a bit frazzled this morning after the class meeting!" She snaps back, her cheeks turning a deep shade of scarlet. "Tenko doesn't know what she did with the knife, she just misplaced it, okay?" You rub your eyes as the two argue, trying to fight back the urge the cry. This isn't getting anywhere. If anything, you think it's just making things worse. You really shouldn't have mentioned anything, but you can't take that back now. You can only try to mitigate whatever damage you've done.

"Can we please keep looking for clues?" You ask the pair who shut up and go back to scanning the ground.

Drenched in blood tossed behind your desk guess what you manage to find. Shuichi's pocket knife! Yaaaay... And it's covered in red liquid. Double yaaaaaaaaay. You kick it out from it's hiding spot and the two girls instantly pounce. "I trusted Saihara-kun to have gotten better," Tenko says, putting on her most betrayed voice.

"We don't know if he's the one who used it since, Tenko-chan, you lost it. Which means that anyone is the school could have found it and used it. It could have been Kokichi-kun, it could have been Kaede-san, it could have been Himiko-san. We don't know anymore," you say. Tenko goes
quiet and turns her gaze away from you. You're starting to get a migraine and you're only halfway through the things you want to get done before the trial.

The knife itself is short and thin like typical pocket knives, glistening with what is most likely Miu's blood. Unless someone made a raspberry jam cake and somehow lost the knife here. You'd be impressed if such a feat was actually managed by one of your classmates though. In all actuality, this is a pretty strong piece of evidence again Shuichi since it is his knife. That being said, you aren't so ready to start pointing your fingers in random directions and hoping you get the right answer. There's also the question of how well the pocket knife matches the wounds. The knife is on the longer end of the spectrum when it comes to pocket knives, so the possibility is certainly there.

Tsumugi glances between the two of you, looking suddenly nervous.

"It could have been Akamatsu-san?" She offers up. You still aren't sure why she and Kaede were chained together during that whole motive mess, so you aren't completely trusting when she makes an accusation against Kaede. An accusation that could fully be biased with hatred and venom.

"Do you have any kind of proof that this could be the case?" You ask.

"I did actually see Akamatsu-san heading towards the nurse's office a little earlier. If Saihara-kun and her both got knives from Harukawa-san it would make sense for them to be matching, so this could easily be her knife. Or she could have found Saihara-san's knife after Chabashira-san lost it and just decided to use it," she says. It's a valid statement, but the one thing that's still missing through all of this is a motive.

Shuichi or Kaede could have fallen prey to this motive thanks in part to the fact they're so closely tied, but then you think about Kaito. No one ever quite said that they'd gotten together, but you'd gotten the feeling from Shuichi that they had. You could have easily been wrong, but part of you hopes that you aren't because Kaito for being an idiot sometimes really does a good job of keeping Shuichi from acting like an idiot.

There are other people this motive could have easily targeted too.

Tenko leans down next to Miu once more before noticing something and gasping. You aren't sure where she pulls it from, but suddenly Tenko has a piece of paper that she's reading. "What is it?" You ask. Tenko doesn't immediately answer. She finishes reading, folds up the paper, and shoves it in the front of her shirt.

"Something important! Tenko wants to share during the trial though. For reasons," she says as she glances between you and Tsumugi. Is she doubting Tsumugi or did Tenko honestly just imply she distrusts you? You feel yourself fluff up slightly at the turn of events, but keep your emotions under control. You shouldn't be getting offended by something as stupid as that. It's a killing game. People aren't going to trust each other. And yet Tenko's well-hidden distrust hits harder than Tsumugi's rather blatant distrust.

It's a different kind of hurt. You hate it.

You glance around the room one last time before turning to Tenko. "I think that's all we're going to get from here. You wanna help me go collect alibis?" You ask her. Tenko nods and you turn to Tsumugi. "I'll find someone else to come in here and wait with you. After all, we wouldn't want the killer being alone with the corpses, and you're still a culprit too," you say, if only because you're feeling a little spiteful. Tsumugi flounders for a moment as you turn on your heels and leave.

It wasn't Tsumugi. You can say that with as much confidence as you can say it wasn't Kiibo. But
you're not in the best of sorts and she was starting to get on the worse half of your temper.

Believe it or not, collect alibis might just be the more painful of your various pre-trial tasks. Tracking down your classmates and speaking with them is a pain in and of itself. At the very least you have a vague understanding of what Angie was doing since you've already got Tenko's alibi. You manage to forget to ask Tsumugi but that's fine because, again, you really don't suspect her. Not compared to some of your other classmates.

The first pair you manage to stumble across is Himiko and Kiibo. Both of which are hovering around a little way outside of the cafeteria looking particularly lost. "Something wrong you two?" You ask in order to get their attention. They turn to you and Himiko just shakes her head with a fatigued sounding noise. She pulls her hat a little farther down her head. You're starting to really hate hats.

"Kiibo-kun and I were just talking about where everyone was. After I calmed down Tenko-chan I went back to the cafeteria to try and see if anything important had come from the cards, but everyone was already gone. Kiibo-kun filled me in on a lot of the more important details and since neither of us really knew what to do we agreed to try and make a meal together in order to help out the class. So that's where the two of us were. We also know where Shirogane-san was most of the time. She came in to wait with us and wait for Akamatsu-san to be done with her hour. But we have no clue where anyone else was and when we tried to interrogate Ouma-kun he got all... Ouma like," Himiko pulls her hat farther down her features and Kiibo tries not to grin.

This reminds you of an interesting conundrum related to this trial. There could, in theory, be two culprits given the nature of the motive Monokuma gave all of you. While it might not happen, it's still a possibility. Which means you need to be careful about what alibis you do and don't trust.

Luckily this is Himiko and Kiibo you're talking about. Out of anyone in the school, you honestly expect these two to be as far away from dangerous as you can physically get. That being said, always better safe than sorry. You can't ask Tsumugi for confirmation right now, but they might have something to confirm it themselves. "Do you have anything to prove it?" You aren't even sure why you ask because Himiko just points at the table which is set with plates of food. It has enough on it that it definitely would have had them occupied during the time of the murder. "Thank you," you say turning away. That makes three people who are highly unlikely to be the suspects depending on just exactly how much time Tsumugi spent with Himiko and Kiibo.

"Of course Himiko-chan would never do something terrible like kill someone," Tenko says, sounding perhaps a bit too chipper for the given situation. You block her out, feeling the sharp sting of bile in the back of your throat. You try to remind yourself that this murder is just hitting you hard. Harder than it should. You're overreacting to the small stuff. It's your own fault too. You aren't supposed to get attached.

You swallow hard and pull out your Monopad, flicking through to see who else is in your general vicinity. You lead the way and manage to stumble across Maki and Kaede who are talking. Maki looks frustrated, even more so than Kaede who's expression is a mix of distress and total frustration. "What's going on here?" You ask hesitantly as you approach. Kaede jumps and turns to you, but Maki manages to keep her composure.

"Akamatsu-san has about a half hour stretch of time where she wasn't around anyone else, so we're trying to figure out what to do," Maki says. Kaede ducks her head sheepishly and you cock an eyebrow as a way to implore Maki to continue. Thankfully, she does. "Most of us were on our hours when the class split up. Ouma-kun and I, Momota-kun and Saihara-kun, and Akamatsu-san and Shirogane-san all started their hours between 12:30 and 1, give or take a little bit of time for
varying pairs. Ouma-kun and I split at exactly 12:30. I waited in my room for a little bit and Akamatsu-san came to meet me between 12:50 an 1:00 after she and Shirogane-san split," Maki pauses for a moment, her eyes lingering on Tenko.

There's really no getting rid of Tenko so she continues in spite of the fact you can already sense the incriminating evidence that's about to get spilled. "I was teaching Akamatsu-san how to properly use a knife. We split up at 1:10. According to Akamatsu-san, she was off on her own in her room at the time before eventually meeting back up with Shirogane-san in the cafeteria at 1:50 and then going to then check on you." You can feel Tenko's hackles starting raise.

So Tsumugi and Kaede met up in the cafeteria, meaning that you should be able to verify Tsumugi's innocence at this point unless Himiko or Kiibo bring up something else during the trial. Tenko opens her mouth to comment but Maki cuts her off quickly enough.

"Before you make any accusations, Akamatsu-san still has her knife on her," Maki says.

Kaede, without needing to be prompted, pulls out the knife. It's vastly different from the one Shuichi has. It's larger, a lot larger, and the knife itself looks to be longer. It's notably clean as well, gleaning almost to a polished shine. It lacks any scuffs or wear and tear typical to a knife that's been used, be it on a person or even for sparring. Tenko calms down slightly beside you, but only slightly.

"If you and Kokichi-kun split at exactly 12:30 I'm guessing you were both chained back together before Gonta-kun was even done dying. Given the time constraints, it sounds like the two of you should have a pretty airtight alibi," unless they were working together or the 'rough estimate' from Monokuma was significantly off. Which could be an actual issue you might have to deal with. He called attention to the fact it was a rough estimate for a reason. You don't finish that statement though. Not out loud where Tenko could attack it, as that seems her modus operandi for the day.

Maki nods. "Unfortunately I'm in a similar situation to Akamatsu-san. I was in my lab up until I had to meet up with Ouma-kun and Momota-kun at 1:20."

"Kaito-kun?" You find it a bit odd that she'd willingly meet up with him, but what do you know. You haven't been keeping that many tabs on that relationship. In spite of that, there's a sharp stab in your chest you can't completely give a name to. You don't think it's jealousy, but it isn't friendly either. You can't wrap your head around why you'd feel that way either, but now isn't the time to be thinking about that.

Even more curious is the fact that Kaito would be willingly meeting up with Kokichi, then again, he might be willing to take the fall if it means hanging out with Maki. Again, you're entirely uncertain as to how far past acquaintances their relationship goes. Maybe they're best friends. Why do you feel so uneasy about that though? It's not like they're dating. Kaito seems like he's closer to dating Shuichi than he is Maki. Not that it would even be your business anyways.

Maki nods, pouting slightly. "For some reason, the two idiots were together when we met up, and Momota-kun decided he was just going to tag along with us after that. Not that I minded all too much. At least he isn't as annoying as Ouma-kun. Still annoying, but Ouma-kun distracts me less when those two are around to distract each other."

You aren't sure if Maki can answer all the questions her testimony raises, so you just nod shakily. "Thank you for the alibis, I'll see about tracking down those two in order to give me their takes," you say. Maki nods and you leave with Tenko in tow. Tenko who doesn't seem particularly happy.

"I don't trust her. Teaching Akamatsu-san and Saihara-kun to use knives," she grumbles under her
breath. You don't see how it's that much different than aikido when taught properly, but you decide it's in your better interest not to comment. As promised you hunt down Kokichi and Kaito next, who are thankfully talking to each other. Well, talking is a term you'd use loosely. It seems more like they're trying to psychically fist fight each other while holding a very tense conversation as means of a ruse.

You glance at Tenko. Tenko glances at you. You don't want to do this, but you have to get in the middle of whatever's going on if you actually want answers.

The next thing Kokichi says almost makes you want to turn tail. Or punt him. Honestly, with how all over the place your emotions are in those next few moments, you feel torn. "Wow, can't believe Saihara-chan and I didn't find anything useful in the dirty slut's room. You would have at least expected some kind of grand master plan to kill us all!"

"I'm pretty sure if such a thing existed, ____-san would have found it," Kaito speaks slowly in the most patronizing tone possible. Like he's speaking down to a toddler that's seriously getting on his nerves.

"Ah, no, she wouldn't have. My beautiful ____-chan is too blinded by love. She'll get over it now though, and realize what a terrible whore that filthy pig was," Kokichi laughs and for the first time since this game began you honestly feel the urge to break something. To rage and rail and just completely wreck something. Anything, besides another person. You... don't know what you want in regards to Kokichi. You don't want to hurt him, but you want to make him shut up already. You swallow down bile once more and steel yourself.

Luckily, you don't have to be the one to break the ice. Tenko stomps past you and lifts Kokichi up by the scruff of the neck. "You should pay more attention to who's in the area when you're talking about certain people," she says. Her tone borders on dangerous in a way you've never heard it. Kokichi doesn't have time for a come back before he's dropped onto the ground. At least Tenko is kinder than Maki and doesn't choke him outright, but it looks like she wants to. You felt a little pity this morning, but this feels justly deserved. Are you just being spiteful now?

It fucking hurts, so you don't care.

Kokichi almost looks abashed for half a second when you follow up Tenko and approach the pair, but it's quickly replaced by the same grin as always. "Alibis?" You cut directly to the chase. You're tired. You want to get this trial over with. The clues are pointing in every direction and you're starting to feel frustrated.

Kaito rubs at the back of his neck. "Being totally honest here... we were actually together during the time of the murder," he tells you.

"I know Harukawa-san already told us this, but Tenko is finding it really hard to believe," Tenko deadpans as she glances between the two who still have a certain degree of animosity in their body language.

"Can you give me some more exact details?" You ask. Kokichi finally stands up, brushed himself off, and takes a breath.

"Well, I was separated from Harukawa-san at about 12:30. I went off to go do my own thing and then Momota-chan and I ended up crossing paths at 1:00 when he was freed from Saihara-chan. We talked for a little bit about this game, you know, this and that, and then we split off from one another at 1:20 since he wanted to go check on Saihara-chan. Sadly Saihara-chan could not be found so he met up with Harukawa-san and I at 1:30 and the three of us all chatted nice and
friendly like until we heard that awful announcement," Kokichi says with a brilliant grin.

Kaito pauses. "Are you sure about those times? They feel a little too exact. I might have been separated from Ouma-kun and Makiroll for a little longer than that. I did spend a good bit trying to find Shuichi-kun," he tells you. Alright. So that's already a contradiction and you can't tell if it's faulty human memory or something more malignant. Maki didn't mention a time gap at all, Kokichi is mentioning one that includes the murder timeframe but wouldn't be a large enough gap to pull the murders off, and Kaito is trying to say they might have been longer with no degree of actual certainty. How peachy.

All of this with the same general uncertainty as to when the murders occurred, how long they took, and the amount of time the killer had to abscond considering Gonta did still bleed out. Even with a throat slash, it could have given the killer quite the opportunity to escape before Gonta finished bleeding out. You didn't even think about the throat slash being post mortem as ways to throw you off either.

"Does anyone know where Shuichi-kun was at the time of the murder?" You ask them. They both shake their heads. Good. Wonderful. How great. You still haven't talked to Shuichi though, but by all logic, this implies he was entirely alone and unless he has a picture or some nonsense, it's going to be hard to prove his location at the time of the murder.

You want to track him down and ask him, as well as try to pull some more details from Tsumugi, but the announcement is already going off.

"Please report to the statue of judgment. It's time for the class trail!" The overly chipper sing song grates at your ears and you sigh, finding the entire situation to be topsy turvy in a way you don't want to look at for too long. What a mess, what a total mess.

It's a good thing you thrive in Chaos.
Hello friends! Sorry again for recent delays! Life can be rough sometimes, but we all gotta keep moving forward.

A quick warning for mentions of self-harm as well as the description of resultant injuries.

You can never bring back the dead, no matter how hard you try or how much it hurts. It's something you've heard repeatedly in your life, a phrase that hangs heavily in the minds of anyone who's ever lost someone important. You aren't entirely certain the circumstances usually behind that phrase, but sometimes it's wrong. Sometimes the world acts strangely and people who shouldn't be alive suddenly are. In your line of work, you've seen this happen a lot of times. A woman detectives took for dead suddenly discovered stashed in a dark closet or hidden among the rubble. Sometimes the dead aren't really dead, and such a phrase ends up being wrong.

This doesn't look like it's going to be one of those situations.

You wince as the elevator brings you down deeper into the earth. You were never claustrophobic before, but you think you can understand the people who are a little bit better. Everything feels small and confined. It makes your head spin. The elevator is considerably large, larger still given the number of people who've died, but you think you're going to choke on your own breath at this rate. You have an idea. You think you know who it might be. You aren't certain though, and you feel like a couple of details might be missing. You have ideas, but revealing the truth is going to be an uphill battle.

Especially when your class has the collective IQ of a moldy grapefruit.

The elevator grinds to a halt with a screech, it rings in your ears and you flinch slightly. You curse Monokuma. You curse this game. Most of all, you curse your own weakness. At the very least, despite the many setbacks, you think you're finally on the right path to beat it.

It's just a question of how, and at least part of you is already aware of that answer.

You all take your places under the gazes of Monokuma and his awful 'children'. The likes of which shift around nervously. Monotaro and Monosuke keep glancing at Monodam who's been relatively quiet. There's no telling what he's thinking, but all three know that at least one of them is going to die today. Maybe they'll finally understand how your class feels. Monokuma just sits there, completely above it all, a ruthless omnipotent master who just enjoys watching you struggle. Enjoys the fact that the script is gone and every ounce of tension and fear is completely real as it slashes at your hearts and rends apart your minds.

"Welcome to the third trial. Took you long enough. Honestly, I'm not sure if I should be upset or impressed by how long you little shits held out for. Most classes I've ever presided over crack within the span of a day or two at most after a new motive's been announced. If even that long!
Anyway. Today we're looking at the double murder of Miu Iruma and Gonta Gokuhara. Let the trial, begin," he says.

You try not to let Monokuma's words bother you, or even your own emotions which are still sitting and stewing in the back of your head. For the sake of the class, for the sake of your justice, for the sake of beating this game, you have to solve this case. It's time to give it everything you've got and punish the blackened.

"So where exactly do we start?" Kaede is the one to get the conversation rolling, though she doesn't actually contribute much. She seems to be at just as much of a loss as the majority of the rest of the class. Tsumugi, however, doesn't hesitate for a second.

"With the fact you did it," she comes out of the gate with an outright sucker punch, the accusation takes everyone off guard. Especially Kaede, who flinches like she just got backhanded. She's left floundering for a response while Tsumugi goes all out on the offensive. "I saw you heading for the nurse's office around the time of the murder, so it was obviously you!"

What a wonderful trial this is going to be.

"Shirogane-san, with all due respect you were with us for a good majority of the span of time in which the murder could have taken place, so when exactly did you stumble across Akamatsu-san heading towards the nurse's office?" Kiibo speaks up and Himiko nods along with the robot. Tsumugi sags slightly, glancing downward sheepishly.

"Well... I didn't actually see her heading towards the nurse's office as much as she was coming from it when we met back up together at the end of our hour," Tsumugi tries to clarify but the damage is already done. the class all narrow their eyes at her and she shrinks slightly. Bad evidence is a good way to lose clout in the eyes of the class, which put Tsumugi's believability in a tight spot while at the same time putting a spotlight on Kaede for other accusations to take place. Put into simple terms, it makes things messy.

You suppose it's your job to get things as back on track as possible. Making accusations right off the bat before analyzing any of the clues is a good way to screw up. You look at the evidence and then work backward to a suspect, at least, if you're doing things the professional way. "While we can't really confirm or deny Tsumugi-san's claim, there is a small span of time in which Kaede-san has no confirmable alibi. That being said, we should analyze the evidence a little more before we start actively trying to point fingers. Assuming that Tsumugi-san isn't lying, Kaede-san would you like to try and defend yourself?" You turn to Kaede who bites down on her bottom lip and nods.

"Yeah, just give me a moment," she says. Her eyes dart around, but you notice the direction they're going. Recalling memory. Not making up memory. "After I was done practicing with Harukawa-san I went back to my room in order to leave my pocket knife there. I passed by the nurse's office because that's just the way you have to go in order to get to the cafeteria where Shirogane-san was according to the Monokubs who were going to chain us back together. I didn't notice anything off because the door was closed."

"Why does Kaede-san get a knife and who gave it to her?" Kaito asks a bit nervously. He isn't worried about Kaede having a knife though, that's obvious from the direction his eyes dart. They dart towards the rest of your classmates who tense up and begin to glare at Kaede as soon as a knife is mentioned. It doesn't bode well from Kaede, but hiding it and then having to explain it later would have been far worse, so she made the right call mentioning it early on when she has the time to defend herself before a vote gets called.

"I gave it to her and she gets it because I said so. Have a problem?" Maki's glare is harsher than the
eyes of anyone else in the class, causing a few people to back down or look away. Of course, when you say the whole class it's mostly Kiibo, Tsumugi, Himiko, Angie, and Tenko. Shuichi and Kaito are quick to jump to Kaede's aid along with Maki. Kokichi is unnervingly quiet, watching how things play out more than anything.

Tsumugi doesn't quite back down from Maki's glare. Apparently she no longer thinks you to be the culprit, and her full attention is pinned to Kaede as her new suspect.

Once again, you find it's probably your job to step in and push things back on track. "No, not unless it's the actual murder weapon. That being said, for the sake of transparency, we should also address the fact you gave Shuichi-kun a knife as well with the intention of teaching both self-defense because, and I'm paraphrasing here, they probably couldn't fight off an angry butterfly if their lives depended on it. You did not, however, inform anyone else of this. Including myself. Certainly, something to address later if necessary. Setting that aside for the time being, I'd like to go back to Kaede-san's statement. you mentioned not finding anything about the nurse's office odd because the door was closed. I usually leave the door open during the day, so why didn't you find that odd?"

"I don't know. You and Iruma-san could have been doing gross stuff! I didn't want to barge in on that," she says, her face going a shade of cherry.

At this point, it's safe to say your emotions are shot. Far past functioning properly. Your synapses don't fire in a way that causes you embarrassment. You don't feel anything of the sort. Just a deep-rooted sense of disappointment. You put your head in your hands for a moment, resisting the urge to scream, before raising your head and giving Kaede the blankest expression you can physically. "Gross stuff? Would you perhaps like to define exactly what you mean by that? What, perchance, did you think we would have been doing? In the same room as, the albeit unconscious, Gonta-kun? Seriously? Who do you take me for? Who did you take Miu for?"

Kaede doesn't get the chance to defend herself as the conversation just spirals.

"While Iruma-san might have been a whoreish cow she still acted like a senseless virgin, and ____-chan is absolutely one, so I doubt those two have ever gotten up to anything given the way holding hands makes ____-chan look like she's gonna faint! And now they never will~ Of course, a stupid virgin like Akamatsu-san wouldn't be able to recognize other stupid virgins. It's a law."

"Open your mouth one more time, Ouma, and I'm throwing you across the room."

"I don't think the Ultimate Caretaker should be indulging child abuse..."

"Guys, please, can we get back on topic?"

You press your fingers to your temples and decide to drop this line of questioning. It's not getting you anywhere productive. "Kaede-san do you have your pocket knife? Can you please pull it out for the class?" You ask her. While she's doing that you pull up a picture of the knife which was found in the nurse's office. The one that's supposedly Shuichi's. "Okay. So. These are the two knives we think are suspect. Right now it's a question of which one actually did it," you say.

Kaede's knife seems like the easier of the two. Being both larger and longer the size of the stab wounds are closer to her knife. That being said, there would have still needed to be some work done to replicate the stab wounds on the body. Shuichi's knife looks even harder to explain. It's shorter and smaller so someone trying to kill Miu would have had to not only put in a lot more work but have gotten especially violent. While Shuichi's knife is bloody, there are ways to explain that away. "Assuming it was Shuichi-kun's knife then the person doing the killing would have
needed to get especially dirty. They would have needed to be on their hour since they would have had to change their clothes. Kaede-san's knife would have still been a mess but less of a mess. So that means it would have had to be someone on break regardless."

Oh. Oh, actually. Hmm. No. Something feels off.

"Actually..." All eyes turn towards Shuichi who's been noticeably quiet. "____-chan, you forgot to check somewhere in the nurse's office. The backroom where the blood bags and the chilled medicines are stored. Shirogane-san and I found a bloody poncho. It makes it kind of hard to say who did it since it was just one of those rain ponchos you find in the storage room, but it does mean that people who weren't on break could still have committed the murder."

You try not to sigh in relief. That oversight. You dread what could have become of the class if Shuichi hadn't caught it. "Thank you Shuichi-kun, a wonderful catch. I guess this is why you're the detective. So. That means anyone could have done it. Which means we're back to the knife question."

"Wait, isn't it obvious though. It's Shuichi's knife that's covered in blood," Himiko says. She's talking a little louder than usual, almost more energized.

"Not nessisarily," you narrow your eyes at Tenko who smiles nervously.

"Tenko might have noticed the fact Saihara-kun had a pocket knife, so Tenko might have kind of maybe confiscated it. Tenko had good intentioned though! Tenko just... didn't have a very good morning... and Tenko might have lost it... But at least it was better than having the knife in the hands of some degenerate male!" She blurs out. A couple of members of the class mutter out sympathy considering the kind of morning she had. Others a... less kind.

"Thank you Chabashira-san for your contribution to the greater good. Truly wonderful, you useless lesbian," Kokichi frowns and tuts, but quickly changes his expression into a smile. "But that's okay because it was obviously Akamatsu-san's knife anyway!" The accusation nets him a couple of looks of confusion including Kaede's. "Look at how clean it is. Harukawa-san was teaching Akamatsu-san how to use that knife before she left it in her room. You know. Like a dumb ass. But look at how clean it is! Doesn't it look like someone cleaned it? Maybe after using it?"

"So Akamatsu-san used the knife to kill someone! Atua is disappointed." Angie is quick to jump on with another accusation. Why is the class so damn trigger happy today? This is like trying to crawl through a bog on your hands and knees. It almost makes slogging through the trial physically painful. You can't help the irritation that's starting to build up in the back of your throat.

"No, no that's not what it means. Kaede-san still left the knife in her room. She wasn't lying about that. Whether she did the crime is still debatable, but at the very least it means that the knife was left in her room," you tell the group who relax slightly excluding one member.

"Which means that Saihara-kun's knife was used. Which lines up nicely with a piece of evidence Tenko found!" Tenko produces the note from earlier. The one she wouldn't show you. "Tenko found, guess what, a suicide note!" Tenko presents the note to the class and it quickly gets passed around the room in something of a circle. Eventually the note in all it's terrible glory finds its way to you.

"____-san, you should read it to try and see if it's fake," Shuichi encourages. Apparently, being able to tell if the cards were fake qualifies you to make judgments on this as well. It's a good thing they assume as such. You skim the note. It's a vague declaration saying nothing more substantial than an apology for failure and a wish to save you.
It doesn't read like something Miu would write. It isn't even written in her hand, let alone her signature. "This is a really bad forgery," you cut into whatever explanation or story Tenko is coming up with. She stops completely dead in her tracks and turns back to you, as does the rest of the class who was slowly starting to buy into the whole thing. "This doesn't look anything like something Miu would do, and if she was going to kill herself, the note wouldn't be on her body. All of you assume Miu's just some idiot because of her speech and mannerisms, but honestly? She's smarter than a lot of you. A hell of a lot smarter than whoever decided this note would be convincing." Your eyes travel around the room and a couple of the people who assumed Miu's unintelligence flinch away.

While Miu might have often acted like an idiot, the collective intelligence of the class has undoubtedly gone down with her death. You think the assumption also applies to someone like Kokichi. The class as a group doesn't approve of how someone acts or conducts themselves, so they assume that person is an unproductive idiot with nothing of value to offer the class. Low and behold, Miu had many valuable things to offer the class.

"While the note might be forged, there's still the possibility that Iruma-san killed herself," Tsumugi says slowly, chewing on the idea while she speaks. "The wounds themselves would bleed out slow enough and Saihara-kun's knife was in range of her." That would have never worked, but you don't feel like explaining the sheer amount of physical pain that would have caused. Not to mention the magic that would have been involved in Miu somehow materializing Shuichi's supposedly lost knife. That, again, would be a pain to explain to your classmates, so you take a more simplistic approach.

"It wouldn't explain Gonta-kun's injuries though. Unless by some miracle the two deaths are entirely unrelated."

"What if Gonta-kun busted his stitches trying to save Miu, but it was already too late and while the two were slowly bleeding out she cut his throat as a mercy move!" Tsumugi's trying, you'll give her that. Unfortunately, she's assuming a couple of things about the case that seems to be messing her and her explanation up. The least of which being the involvement of Shuichi's knife in the accident proper. Let's try to explain this again. Slowly.

"The knife wounds are wrong. Miu did not have the kind of physical discipline it would have taken to carve injuries like that with a knife that dinky, and if she did she would have been dead long before she finished. I don't care how much you think she's a masochist, I can fucking promise you that carving up your own chest the way her injuries look is not feasibly possible for someone who hasn't legitimately trained to tolerate extreme pain. Even then, this looks unlikely. On top of that, Gonta-kun died way too long after Miu for something like that to have even worked," you counter. This is in no way a suicide. You don't know why the class is so fixated on the idea.

"What if Gonta-kun decided to help Iruma-san committee suicide?" Kaito is trying to be helpful but you wish the topic would just change already. The conversation is going absolutely nowhere.

"Then it would have been a murder and Gonta-kun would have been the culprit. However, Gonta-kun would never be able to do something like that without a certain level of manipulative dickery only Kokichi-kun is capable of. On top of that, the wounds still wouldn't match unless Gonta-kun slit his own throat and then yeeted the fucking knife halfway across the room. You are aware of the distance between Gonta-kun and Miu's corpses, yes? So let me present this idea to you instead. It wasn't Kaede-san's or Shuichi-kun's knives. The injuries don't match up," you're able to win yourself a couple of precious moments of silence with the statement, but you're still agitated.

The next person who tries to say it was suicide gets a boot to the head.
"There was a kitchen knife that seemed like it was missing when Kiibo-kun and I were cooking
lunch, but I thought I was just imagining it. A couple of slots don't have knives at all for some
reason, and I remember Tojo-san having once told me there were 8 knives in total when we
arrived, but only counting 7 during the preparation," Himiko speaks up with a rather useful
contribution. "I think it might have been the right size too..."

Now that is something interesting. A kitchen knife absolutely could have matched this kind of
damage if it was the right shape and size. Better than either of your favorite idiots pocket knives
could have. "That's really helpful Himiko-san, unfortunately, we have no way of proving when the
knife went missing. No one's been in the kitchen who's willing to admit it since breakfast.
Considering you and Kiibo-kun were together the whole time it seems unlikely it could have been
either of you as well..."

"That is correct! Himiko-san and I were together with Shirogane-san during the time of the murder.
None of us even had to leave for some silly reason like using the restroom, so I believe it is safe to
say all of us have airtight alibi's given the time of the murder," he says.

"If the times of death are even accurate," you turn to Maki as she speaks, quirking an eyebrow at
her. "It takes a long time for a person to bleed out. While injuries like this are severe, I'd guess that
the stabbings could have happened 5 minutes in advance at the very least. On top of that, the
Monokuma File says that they're an estimate. A guess."

"That's right!" Monokuma chips in from his seat, not being helpful. "In making those guesses I
took into account the personal skill sets of everyone in this room. If everyone was given the best
technology accessible to them, I made them as accurate as the most skilled person among you
could have made them. They could be completely spot on or wildly wrong!"

The rest of the class groans, now assuming that the murders are completely and absolutely off.
You try to hide your grin. Based on the accuracy of the most skilled person if given top tier
equipment? Ha! That clears things up for you! That means that Miu and Gonta died at exactly the
time it says on the file give or take a minute at most. How do you know this? Well, given the right
technology, it's as accurate as you could have gotten it.

You might not be the Ultimate Nurse or the Ultimate Detective, but who's to say you weren't
tutored by them? Hmm, what's that? The card said so? Haven't you figured that out yet? No? Well,
you suppose it's ok. You've still got a little more time. But oh, the clock, it's ticking!

"So that leaves us with a forged note without a clear author, an unclear time of death, and no clue
as to what the murder weapon is. How wonderful," Kaito scratches the back of his head while the
class goes quiet for a moment to ponder the conundrum. You think you might finally get a chance
to speak up and start leading this conversation in the right direction, but such isn't the case.

"Atua says that Saihara-kun admitted to being able to forge things earlier this morning," Angie
decides this is the most helpful detail that she can bring up. She's trying to be helpful but really it
just stirs the class up into another tizzy.

Shuichi panics and tries to cover for himself. "All I did was express concern about the simplicity
involved in being able to accurately forge a signature, I never said I was good at it," he panics as he
speaks which makes his voice crack pathetically.

"That's a lie Saihara-chan, you said you could forge anyone's signature in the class," Kokichi
chimes in. You don't think he's really trying to accuse Shuichi. If it was an accusation it would be a
lot more pointed. It feels more like he's just obligated to point out any lies anyone decides to tell.
Even if it doesn't really help the situation...
You do wonder. You don't think Kokichi's ever called you out on a lie before, but he's called out anyone else in the class. While it could debatably be over some kind of fondness towards you, you don't think that's it. That wouldn't really be his style. Maybe it has to do with the fact you've never tried to say that lying is a strictly bad thing? You aren't sure if Shuichi has, but you do know that there are other people in the class who would swear against it, for better and for worse.

"So Saihara-kun has a knife, no alibi, and the ability to forge a note. Nhey, that seems pretty obvious to me," Himiko glances around at the rest of the class, looking for dissent. Without hesitation, you step up to meet the challenge.

"Except Shuichi-kun had no access to his knife during the time of the murder. Tenko-san took it, and while she might have lost it, there's no telling if Shuichi-kun is the one who found it. Furthermore, the knife is small enough that even with the addition of the poncho the blood spray would have caused way too much of a mess if you were trying to cause injuries like those!" You turn your gaze around the room. It's going to be hard pulling the class out of the pit it's dug itself into. So self-assured. Not an impossible task for the likes of you though.

Out of the corner of your eye you see Tenko starting to get a bit upset. "Saihara-kun would have used the knife on someone eventually, I had to confiscate it! And apparently, I was right, because even if it wasn't Saihara-kun who did the stabbing the knife was drenched in blood at the scene of the crime," Tenko spits at you. "It only makes sense that Saihara-kun would kill someone."

"And what exactly makes you say all of that?" You cross your arms and level a glare at Tenko who's getting fired up in a way you frankly weren't expecting from her.

"Because Saihara-kun admitted to me he's starting to remember life before the game and the things on that card from earlier only scratched the surface!" She yells. The entire class goes silent and Shuichi seems to crumble in on himself.

"You promised not to say anything," he whispers, turning his gaze downward. He refuses to meet anyone's eyes, seeming to collapse for a moment. Whatever seeming confidence has been built up in the last couple of days completely washes away with Tenko's statement.

"What the fuck Chabashira!?!" Kaede turns on Tenko, ready to pounce. You don't really blame Kaede for looking pissed. Tenko, however, looks completely unabashed.

"It's true. He told me so! I promised not to tell because he promised me he had it under control. But obviously, he didn't if he somehow convinced Harukawa-san to give him a knife, which is an entirely different problem. Do any of you realize just how messed up that is? The menace and Akamatsu-san have knives after what they did!" Tenko turns to the rest of the class, almost in an attempt to split opinions. She obviously has Angie and Himiko on her side without question.

"How stupid are you?" Kokichi's voice slices the air like one of the knives themselves, a small laugh dancing on the tip of his words. "I mean, seriously? Saihara-chan couldn't hurt someone if he tried to. At least, never physically, maybe emotionally or mentally with a little effort. Why don't you pull up your sleeves and show everyone your tiger stripes! Show them what you've been doing with that knife Saihara-chan!" Kokichi turns his piercing gaze on Shuichi who seems to crumble even farther.

"Did you just accuse Shuichi of being a cutter?" Kaito looks about ready to deck Kokichi but he gets off too quickly to continue the statement.

"He isn't wrong," Shuichi whimpers pathetically. He won't meet the eyes of anyone in the classroom. The panic in the room suddenly becomes palpable. Tenko's ferocity fizzles out and
quickly goes from a 10 to a 2 as she flinches, jaw shutting with an audible click. The entire class goes completely silent, just watching Shuichi who rolls up his sleeves. Hesitant, ugly red lines cover his arms. There aren't many, and they're thin as though he didn't actually want to do it.

"See? The only idiot Saihara-chan would use that knife on is himself. That's why Akamatsu-san's knife is so clean, right? Because you got into her room and used her knife after Chabashira-san took away yours?" Kokichi is relentless, looking at Shuichi like he's attempting to peer into the other boy's soul. It borders on malignant without being actively vicious. It's Kokichi, he could do something way worse. At the same time, this is already pretty bad.

"He what?" Kaede asks, the panic and fury evidence in her tone alone as she turns towards Shuichi. He flinches slightly but rolls down his sleeve and sighs.

"Chabashira-san was right when she said I started to remember some of the things from before the game. Not much, but enough. It... haunted me. It was terrifying. I didn't want to be whatever that used to be. I wanted it all to go away. It hurt so much... I just wanted to try and get rid of it. I was curious if this would actually help, I only did it a couple of times, but Ouma-kun's right. I took the knife from Kaede's room. She's started leaving it unlocked ever since the most recent motive, in case Shirogane-san needs something. I... this is what I did. This is why the knife is clean." Shuichi pulls up his other sleeve and reveals a couple of cuts that are a good deal fresher.

The tension in the room gets thicker with the silence that follows Shuichi carefully pulling his sleeve back down. Contrary to how you think he might respond, he ends up puffing out his chest and raising his head. "Kaede and I are both innocent! I realize now that my actions might not have been the best, if anything, I think they might have put me closer to those awful memories. That means I have to try harder, so we're going to solve this case!" His resolute determination helps to throw off a little of the heavy air, but there's still a silent question resting in the air.

If it wasn't Kaede or Shuichi, then who was it?

Shuichi continues to speak, watching the class with determined eyes. "Myself, Kaede, Kiibo-kun, Shirogane-san, and Yumeno-san are the only ones without chains. As the latter three were all together during the time of the murder they can be discounted as suspects. For the most part, Kaede and I have had our own innocents proven. That means it would need to be someone who was with their partner at the time of the murder."

"Including ____-san."

You feel your blood chill slightly. You're at a loss for words. You turn to Tenko who seems hesitant. In spite of that, she turns to you and looks you dead in the eyes. "It could have been ____-san," she repeats a second time and gets a burst of whispers in return. You know that there are people in the class who would defend you. More than would side with Tenko without question, but the conversation getting this far derailed takes a little bit of the wind out from your sails. You? Is she honestly accusing you? Why?!

... Oh...

*Oh. You get it. You get it completely.*

You didn't realize that it was *execution* time, but you have no problem killing this conversation decisively.
Tenko continues to speak, trying to build up a base for her case. "I mean, think about it. ____-san has advanced medical knowledge, meaning that given the amount of time she had between the actual deaths and the discovery she could have easily made things look however she pleased! Not to mention, who would actually suspect her?"

"Are you an idiot? ____-san is the only reason we usually don't end up dying in these trials!" Maki comes to your defense, glaring down Tenko with as much ferocity as the assassin can muster. Tenko doesn't balk, she just continues trying to sway those who aren't already siding with her.

"Not this trial she isn't. Hasn't she kind of been holding back more than usual? I mean, Saihara-kun and Ouma-kun have offered up two of the most important piece of evidence so far. And I'm just saying, it would have been pretty easy for her to off Iruma-san and then conveniently pretend she'd been knocked out the entire time," Tenko seems like she's trying to appeal the most to Tsumugi and Kiibo. Angie and Himiko are already on her side. Maki, Kaito, Shuichi, and Kaede all seem to be on yours, with Kokichi forever being a wild card. That being said, he's smart, and you doubt he'd side against you. Those things considered, it doesn't matter if they're on your side or not. Eventually, you'll run out of time to talk if it keeps getting wasted on this line of reasoning and majority or no, you'll probably vote wrong if you can't get the conversation on track.

"But she loved Iruma-san," Tsumugi looks hesitant, glancing between you and Tenko a couple of times. She doesn't seem like she believes Tenko. It's progress considering the first thing she did was accuse you. You wonder why she's had such a change of heart, but it doesn't matter as long as you can get things back on track.

"Simple. She was faking," Tenko pauses for a moment to let the class absorb this information. You remain completely silent. You'll wait and watch a couple of moments longer. Then she'll say something wrong and you can call her out easily. Let her dig her own grave and all. "You've all seen the way she acts towards Ouma-kun. She must have been pretending to like Iruma-san so she could kill Iruma-san and escape the game with Ouma-kun! ____-san and Iruma-san being chained together could easily be love or hatred, what if ____-san hated Iruma-san?"

"Nice theory, complete trash," you blurt before any of your friends can come to your rescue.

Tenko deflates slightly, looking at you with a little shock. You don't know what takes her off guard more, your blunt assessment of her claims or the way you're looking at her right now. You regard her with a glare. The meanest you can manage in those moments. Maybe Maki isn't able to throw her off her stride, but your expression sure does.

"Oh yeah?" Himiko asks. "If it's so wrong then explain yourself!"

You can't help but smile a little. "Happily," you tell her.

"I'll start off by going over all of the pieces of evidence you all managed to miss or fail to bring up during our earlier conversation regarding the deaths of Miu and Gonta-kun. This included the stun gun and poison Tenko-chan has happily forgotten about, which Tsumugi-san was there to watch us both discover, but also why Miu wasn't killed with a knife. And trust me, for those of you with half a brain cell, the situation is about to make a lot more sense," maybe it's a little harsh but you spit the last couple words at the Tenko and her two defenders. She falters for half a second, but she doesn't back down.

"Let's start with the actual cause of death. It wasn't stabbing. I know what you're thinking, you're wrong. Assuming it was me who did it, there would have been no time to find and retrieve Shuichi-kun's knife! Assuming that Tenko-san's testimony is honest it sounds as though she's claiming she lost the knife after the card mess, in which case it would have been impossible for me to retrieve
unless by some convenient twist of fate it was left in the hallway on the way to the nurse's office. I
was there with Miu in the nurse's office the whole time because in case you all have forgotten, we
promise to watch Gonta-kun to make sure nothing happened to him. Of course, the testimony of a
single woman really isn't enough so you have a right to be skeptical. What you can't be skeptical
about is how Miu died," you stop for a moment, pulling up the evidence on your Monopad.

"As we can all see Miu is sitting in a pool of her own blood, or so we assume. Looking at the type
of stab wounds it surely would have produced that much blood. However, the injuries do not match
either of the knives. They more similarly match the aforementioned kitchen knife that's been
missing since earlier this morning. Again, it would have needed to be someone who went into the
kitchen for some reason or another between the time of our conversation about the cards ending
and Himiko-san deciding to make lunch with Kiibo-kun. Maybe someone who decided to do
something quiet and simple, like making a cup of tea." The movement is subtle but you can see
Angie's posture tense up. Oh right, didn't she and Tenko have some tea before they took their nap?

"Isn't that a bit of a long-shot considering the knife is nowhere to be found, so there's no actual way
to connect it back to crime?" Kiibo voices his concerns. Your wonderful little robot friend's
question perfectly allows you to slip into your next point flawlessly.

"Exactly right you are! Which is why I'm going to prove that it wasn't a knife at all that killed
Miu," you say, a small hint of a vicious smile twisting the corners of your lips. No one has the time
or courage to interrupt the onslaught. The most you get in terms of interruption is a quick quip
from Kokichi.

"Nishishi, we pissed off ____-san and now she's getting mean!" He says. It sounds cheery, and
almost borders on excited.

You tighten your tie and move on without giving anyone else the time to comment. "Now then, as
you can see Miu has more marks on her body than just the stab wounds. The bruising around her
neck is indicative of damage there. While post mortem bruising is absolutely a thing, it shows
more prominently when the injury to cause the bruising occurred before or immediately after the
death of the body, giving the body itself time to react before all functions have shut down.
Investigating the injury, we can see that the neck itself is broken. I believe this is what actually
killed Miu."

Shuichi's eyes light up for a moment and he jumps into the conversation. "Something like this
would need to be done by an extremely strong person. If we continue to believe that Gonta-kun
was killed in a struggle trying to protect Iruma-san it would make sense that someone would have
probably killed Iruma-san in hand to hand combat since the busted Gonta-kun's busted stitches are
likely a result of something similar. Besides the mercy slit of the throat, there are no knife wounds
present on Gonta-kun."

You wonder if he's picked up on who the killer is. It's pretty obvious to you by now, you hope it's
obvious to him.

"Correct you are. Continuing on from this I know some of you are already getting ready to argue
the blood issue. Someone doesn't bleed this much post mortem you internally cry! She's already
betrayed her own self! Whelp, I say y'all are oblivious fools. Tsumugi!" You point at the girl who
jumps in a panic. "You were there the entire time, yes? And you had access to the item ledger
during this time, correct?"

Tsumugi nods. "Speaking of which, I actually noticed something on. You note five different times
where you gave Gonta a blood transfusion. But there are 8 blood bags missing and 8 empty blood
bags sitting on the counter," she perfectly wanders the conversation just where you want it.
"Correct! Now, you'll notice something interesting about 3 of those aforementioned blood bags. They have stab wounds in them! Stab wounds that are awfully similar to a certain someone's knife. A bit odd, don't you think? Well, when you take the size of the blood bags and calculate it you'll realize that the amount of blood in those three rouge bags is almost identical to the amount of blood that can be found sitting on and around Miu's body. Meaning not only do we have an explanation for the presence of Shuichi's knife, but we have a real cause of death, being the wound on Miu's neck and a confirmation that the time of death should have happened at exactly when Monokuma stated since Miu didn't bleed out and given top tier equipment it would have been child's play to figure out her time of death!"

You manage to stun the class into silence for a moment, a moment you take to regroup your thoughts. Your evidence isn't as strong as you would have liked. But you think it's strong enough to stand against a jury of children. This class, such poor stupid children.

"So what? ____-san is pretty strong. She still could have done this. Harukawa-san, you and I are extremely strong, and sometimes we struggle in sparring matches against ____-san, don't you think she could have caused this damage? This doesn't prove her innocents at all!" Tenko is still trying to win over the class. Maki glares at Tenko, unable to speak against your strength but in no way wanting to speak against your innocents. It's touching how much your friends in the class honestly believe in you, but you can feel Kiibo starting to slip more and more towards believing Tenko.

"Oh, I'm sorry! did you think I was done?" You ask her. "Now Tsumugi-san, you were in the room the entire time Tenko-san and I were investigating, so I'm going to need you to confirm a few things. The first of which being the stun gun that was present on the ground. What can you tell me about that stun gun?" You never thought Tsumugi would be your most valuable piece of living evidence, but weirder things have happened in your life. You just hope she keeps going the direction you want her to.

Tsumugi pauses and stares at you for a long moment. Then, almost like a light switch going off, her eyes flicker and she beings to speak. "Well, it was obviously a stun gun given the design and looking at it a little closer Iruma-san's emblem was very clearly on it. Given the way that you were acting, it's very probable it got used on you by Iruma-san. In addition, we found a bottle of poison that in small doses can be used to fake a death. We believed that Iruma-san intended to use the poison on you to make you look dead and take you out of the game before killing Gonta-kun so she could escape with the two of you," Tsumugi says, glancing at Tenko as she speaks.

It looks as though you may have one more person on your side.

It's a bit sad that the strongest evidence you have are facts that you've told the class. If you actually decided to commit a murder, you could probably lead the entire class around by the nose if you felt the desire to. That being said, you have no intention of ever killing one of your classmates and dooming the rest. Fortunately enough for the rest of your class.

"I can also confirm the presence of the stun gun and poison from when I was investigating the scene. I was one of the first people to actually go to ____-san and considering the way she was acting when she woke up, it would take an extremely skilled actor to fake how she was acting," Shuichi says.

"So who did it then?" Tenko asks more to you than anyone else.

"You did," you say without missing a beat. The poor girl looks so taken off guard. She certainly doesn't have enough time to hide the panic which flashes across her features. Tenko. It was Tenko the whole time. Of course, it was Tenko. Now you just have to prove it.
"Why does that mean it was me? If we're just going to go ahead and assume that Iruma-san died to a broken neck, couldn't it still be someone like Harukawa-san or Momota-kun? They have valid motives and the strength to pull it off! Not to mention their whole testimony is shot." Tenko's starting to panic and it leaves her argument wanting.

"While there was some variance in the joint testimony of Kaito-kun, Maki-kun, and Kokichi-kun, none of them actually would have been too strongly affected by this motive. On top of that, the variation doesn't provide enough time for the murder to take place. If we were to give them all the maximum amount of time difference stated within the testimonies, it still wouldn't be enough time to kill both Miu and Gonta-kun in the time permitted while making sure to keep themselves clean. On top of that, Shuichi-kun's knife is still present at the crime scene even if it's useless. A knife I don't think you actually lost," the accusation lands wonderfully and Tenko's expression turns into a glare.

"How dare you accuse Tenko-chan of such awful things!" Himiko blurts out, her cheeks turning a bring red.

"Tenko-chan and I had been taking a nap, so I fail to see how it could possibly be her to have committed such a grave sin against Atua's will," Angie also comes to Tenko's defense, but you've already figured out the caveat there.

"Correct, a nap, meaning that the both of you should have been unconscious which renders both of your testimonies suspect. On top of that, however, I noticed something interesting. Tenko-san and Angie-san were the first two to arrive after the witnesses. One might find this a bit odd if they were both asleep. But here's the thing. Tenko-san arrived completely and absolutely awake and ready to go, while Angie-san seemed groggy. A bit out of character for Angie-san, no? I mean, when have you ever seen her anything less than chipper, even just after a nap," you can't help but smile, knowing this will be the final blow.

"What are you getting at?" Tenko asks.

"Oh, nothing important. I was just thinking that you two had tea before your nap, correct? It would have been an awfully convenient time to slip some sleeping pills into Angie-san's drink. You know, the ones you never returned after Kirumi-san's murder." Tenko visibly deflates the moment the words are out of your mouth.

"That's stupid," Angie spits back but Tenko just shakes.

"She's right," Tenko says pathetically. This seems like you've figured things out. I give up. It's true, I killed Iruma-san, but it's not what all of you might be thinking. I was actually just going to the nurse's office to talk with ____-san about those stupid cards when I found Iruma-san using the stun gun on her. I thought Iruma-san was trying to kill ____-san, so I knocked the stun gun away and ended up killing Iruma-san. By total accident mind you, I only wanted to knock her out. Then Gonta-kun woke up and I had to fight him too because he thought I was hurting Iruma-san maliciously. I didn't want anyone to die, let alone get hurt, but then I panicked! I didn't want to die! So I tried to hide it and figured I could escape with Himiko-chan..."

Tenko's eyes turn misty for a moment and she refuses to meet your gaze. "I'm sorry. Can we please vote?"

Monokuma steps in at the request. "What an... interesting trial I suppose. Anyway. It's voting time! Will you be terribly right, or terribly wrong? Who's it gonna be? Who's it gonna be?"
"I'm shaking with anticipation!" Monotaro throws in. It's not the anticipation that has him shaking.

"No... That's... that's a lie, it has to be a lie!" Himiko says, looking utterly distraught. Tenko shakes her head, refusing to meet Himiko's gaze. Tenko and Angie both slam down their buttons resolutely, but you don't think they're on Tenko's name.

You have to admit this victory doesn't feel good. It's miserable and rotten and makes you hate this game all that much more. None the less, you press the button.
As I'm apparently an idiot who can't math properly, for those of you yet uninformed I made a mistake with my cipher. A mistake that has led to some very wrong answers. That mistake has now been fixed (along with the numbers) and hopefully, the answer should be a lot more obvious.

A character has a panic attack (or at least something similar) this chapter, so trigger warning for that. Just in case.

There are only two votes that aren't for Tenko. Those two votes just so happen to be for you, but two against the rest of the class isn't enough to sway the final judgment. "Come on you two," Tenko sighs sadly after seeing the two votes that aren't for her. She looks at Himiko and Angie sadly, the likes of which are already crying. Your throat feels dry when Monokuma's machines make it obvious how right your vote was.

You're losing a lot this trial. Your best friend. Your girlfriend. Your sanity.

No one speaks, no one dares to break the silence which settles over the class like a heavy coat. It makes Tenko's footsteps all the more audible as she moves away from her spot in the trial circle. She's the first to move. The first to break the silence. "Alright Monokuma, what kind of judgment do you have for me?" She asks the bear, smiling bitterly at it.

"But you, you can't, you can't leave us," Himiko stutters out the most pathetic of complaints which is at the very least more than Angie can muster. Angie seems, for lack of better words, absolutely crushed. She just looks at Tenko in complete continued silence, mutely begging for something though you aren't sure she even knows what she's begging for.

You watch the whole display in a similarly muted kind of silence. You have neither the energy nor the words to try and add to the situation, and you aren't sure there's anything of value you'd even be able to add if you could. At the end of the day even though she hid her crimes, Tenko did less wrong than some people. It was still murder, but it was second degree, which is something compared not only to members of your class but also the players in former games who'd premeditated far nastier cases. Yet regardless of motive or method or degree the punishments are always the same in the eyes of Monokuma. A death penalty, careless and cruel.

Goes to show the importance of a nuanced legal system with wiggle room to respond appropriately to every factor of a crime. Given Japan's prosecution rate though, you can't really say society is much better than Monokuma.

She turns towards you for a single somber moment, the expression on her face full of more raw emotion that you can express. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to kill anyone, I honestly didn't want to either. But what's done is done. The past can't be erased and this is the class's judgment. I'm sorry ____-san. I'm sorry for Gonta-kun and Iruma-san. I'm sorry for the rest of the class. I am truly sorry," she gives one last bitter smile and directs it mostly towards Angie and Himiko who are starting to seriously tear up.
Your legs shake for a moment, your breath feeling sharp in your lungs. You launch yourself away from your own podium and careen around the trial ground till you reach Tenko, colliding into her full force. She's taken off guard and nearly falls over before she realizes that you're hugging her. "It's not your fault! It's not your fault!" You tell her. Your eyes sting so you press your face into her shoulder for a couple of moments. You don't want the class, let alone Monokuma or some apathetic audience, to see you crying.

She rests a hand on your head, another bitter laugh bubbling from somewhere deep in her stomach. "I know, but it was still my mistake. So I'm sorry," she says. Her voice sounds deep, heavy with remorse and sadness. Not to mention fear. It's laced almost pathetically with hints of terror but she forces it down.

Himiko and Angie throw themselves into the mix, almost in unison. They jump from their podiums, crying freely. "Tenko!" Himiko cries out, Angie verbalizes the same thing nearly seconds later. The two throw themselves into the hug and you move slightly to allow for more room.

"You didn't use a suffix," Tenko comments slightly as the other two cling to her. You separate yourself, being careful to make it look as though you didn't cry. You can't break down. You can't... you shouldn't which means you can't. Even though your entire chest feels tight. "Okay you two, it's time for me to go. You have to get off," she tells the pair gently. Angie removes herself after a moment with a short nod. You and Angie are forced to remove Himiko when she only ends up clinging tighter.

"Are you all done now? Good? Good! Let's get this execution started!" Monokuma cuts into the tender moment, slamming his paw down against a big red button that appears in front of him. A screen comes down from the roof, taking center stage so as to allow for the whole class to see it.

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Tenko Chabashira has been found guilty

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You expect some kind of chain to appear from the roof, one that'll drag away your friend away like with the last two executions. Monokuma is, however, Monokuma. He doesn't do predictability. Instead of a chain, the ground falls out from under Tenko's feet. She shrieks, disappearing into the trap door which closes with a slam before any of you have the time to react. Before Himiko has the time to throw herself down the trap door with Tenko.

That isn't to say she doesn't try.

Angie falls to her knees and lowers her head, she begins to mutter something. You can't really tell what the word are. They could be the mutterings of a madwoman, or they could be prayers. Both are equally possible at this point. Instead, your eyes turn towards the monitor, waiting for Tenko and whatever dreadful execution is planned to appear.

Commencing Execution

A Warrior's Disgrace

When Tenko appears on screen she seems to be locked in a generic dojo. Behind her is some kind of large scoreboard, though it doesn't display anything as of yet. She looks around hesitantly, eyeing the place as though there's some kind of escape. The illusion of hope almost makes you sick to your stomach. It's faint, but you can see a bright glint in her gaze. Maybe she can fight her way out, she is an Ultimate. That's what your class and probably Tenko herself is thinking. She wouldn't be so lucky.

The door swings open and in comes a large Monokuma robot dressed in a hakama. The Monokuma
bows to Tenko, so Tenko bows back. After bowing, the Monokuma charges Tenko. It's almost too easy for her when she deflects the hit and lands one squarely in the Monokuma's stomach. It seems too easy for an execution. So, you wait for the punchline. And oh, does the punchline of this sick joke ever come. The moment Tenko's attack lands it isn't the Monokuma who doubles over with the pain of the blow. It's her.

There's a loud buzzer sound, the kind of thing that usually follows a foul in some sports or a point getting scored in others. It's jarring regardless of what it is and your stomach sinks further towards your feet. What you thought was a scoreboard lights up with one simple phrase.

“To injure an opponent is to injure yourself. To control aggression without inflicting injury is the Art of Peace.”

The motto of aikido, if you remember correctly that's a direct quote from the man who first spawned aikido as a practice itself. It was originally designed as a form of using the energy of an opponent to try and defuse their attacks. The picture it all paints is rather clear. Any damage Tenko does to her enemy is going to happen to her. She seems to pick up on this too. From there the entire dynamic of the fight changes, Tenko switching tactics to account for this new issue. She spends the entire time throwing off the attacks of the Monokuma, deflecting them and kiting her enemy in various directions. For its size, it isn't very skilled. That being said, it also has more stamina than Tenko. You can see the small beads of sweat starting to appear on Tenko's forehead.

Along with fatigue, you can start to see stress and frustration building in the eyes of Tenko. Hit for hit, the battle goes nowhere with the Monokuma bot unable to land hits on Tenko and Tenko unable to do damage to the Monokuma.

The execution itself doesn't seem to be going anywhere either. This is her one foe, a foe she can never defeat. Defeat is inevitable. The speed at which it eventually happens, how death actually takes her, that's put into her hands. She's going to die, and the decision of how and when it left entirely up to her.

You can see it in her eyes when she gives up. Even when he does give up, she seems intent to take her last breath fighting.

She slams her palm against the creature's shoulder with little regard for the rules of this execution. She throws back her head and howls in pain, grabbing her own shoulder as the creature advances. It doesn't matter if it's dislocated or broken, but whatever strength she used in that attack has managed to render her own arm useless. It goes completely limp.

She grits her teeth, glaring down the monstrosity, and you don't know if it's insanity or rebellion when she starts to completely wail on the Monokuma robot, landing hit after hit even though the bruises start to appear on her own skin. The creature eventually stops trying to fight her under the flurry of blows, but it doesn't need to. With each hit, Tenko is doing more and more damage to herself.

It doesn't take long before she kicks the robot in the throat, having managed to render both arms worthless. Her neck shoots backward with an audible snap. She goes completely still and falls to the ground in a heap, the screen you'd been viewing the execution on goes dark.

Monokuma watches the class in silence as a small hole opens up in the roof. From the hole falls a bloody choker with a bell, clinging against the ground right in front of Himiko and Angie. You're once again left with a sense of uncertainty as the two look at the bell in silence for a long, long time. "Why?" Himiko's voice cracks as she whispers the word, falling to knees and starting to bawl.
You fall to your own knees and wrap your arms around her. You think you understand how she feels, if only a little. It hurts, it hurts so much knowing that Miu's just... gone. In a way, it's kind of greedy to mourn a death. You don't cry because of what the dead have lost. You cry because you're never going to see that person again, let alone hear their voice. The only things you're left with are pictures and recordings and the way their scent still kind of clings to your clothes, but the first two aren't perfect recreations and the final one fades with time. It hurts because they're gone, they've left you behind for one reason or another. It's a greedy kind of sadness that's pervasive and cruel. To be honest though? You don't think it's always a bad thing to be greedy.

Angie's composure cracks not long after that, she tumbles to the ground and presses her face into the gaps of space between your body and Himiko's. Himiko starts wailing the moment her face is buried into your chest and even though she's quieter given the way your side starts to feel wet you're willing to hedge a bet that Angie is doing the same. When you feel the way they shiver and hold onto you like a lifeline, you refuse to cry. You grab onto all the strength and resolve you have left and make it into a mask. It might be a cracked mask, but it's a brave mask, and it does enough to fool your classmates.

Angie and Himiko aren't the only ones to fall into the crying pile. Kaede throws herself into it, hugging your little trio with an almost motherly ferocity. She somehow manages to bury your own face into her shoulder, holding on to you in a way you desperately need. She doesn't know it, but in those moments she becomes your lifeline.

Almost, almost begrudgingly Maki approaches the pile. She doesn't quite enter the pile, but she starts to pet your head. She runs her hands over your hair, trailing her fingers down to your back while you try your damnedest not to let any of the tears pushing at the back of your eyes escape. Himiko is shivering and Angie is hyperventilating. They need the attention more, that's why you can feel Kaede giving her full attention to them. They need it. Certainly more than you do! But Maki gives her attention to you and it's so hard not to break down.

When you pull your face from Kaede's shoulder, eyes misty but cheeks thankfully still dry, you become vaguely aware of Shuichi and Kaito standing off to the side. They don't quite join the group as this seems to be something of a girl's only cry session, but their presence is close enough that it feels like support. They lower their heads in silence. It's only Himiko and Angie crying so far, and understandably so. The rest of the class is sad, but they aren't weeping. They didn't quite lose someone as important to them as the girls did.

... As you did.

You can't cry though.

Kiibo looks like he wants to cry, he looks like he wants to cry so badly, but you don't think he has the equipment to be able to. Instead, he looks at you pathetically. For a moment you can feel his empathy, it's almost laughable how similar you are in that short moment. Miu, you're both mourning for Miu, but neither of you can cry. For different reasons, but it's the same end result. Your eyes are dry even if the pain in your chest is sharp. "I'll go make everyone some tea. Come to the cafeteria when everyone is feeling better," he says. You're grateful that in spite of everything he's keeping a level head, unlike most everyone else who seems to have devolved into an emotional mess.

Tsumugi follows meekly after Kiibo, glancing towards the group of you before escaping. You aren't sure why she doesn't join you, but you swear for a moment you see the faintest traces of guilt in her features. Her eyes do land on you for a moment longer than the rest of the group before she skitters away.
Kokichi excuses himself quietly, making no comments on the current state of the class. You'd expect him to play the role of the antagonist, but perhaps it's the fragility in your own eyes that convinces him to hold his tongue long enough for all of you to grieve. You lost Tenko. You lost Gonta. You'd expect even he's been hit by all of this, especially considering he appreciated Gonta's innocent kindness. You wouldn't put it past him to be blaming himself either. The reason this was a 3 kill case was because of Gonta getting hurt on Kokichi's behalf. You have no doubt things would have played out differently this murder if it wasn't for Gonta's incapacitation.

A couple of water droplets land on your arm and you turn towards Kaede who's started crying too. You and Maki are the only ones left not weeping, but your eyes are in no way dry. Maki's are misty and your own sting with the tears you refuse to shed.

"Come on, get up. We should go to the cafeteria," Kaito says. He doesn't try to convince everyone that everything's going to be okay. It would have been a lie, and at the very least he's not a hypocrite most of the time. You pick up on the underlying meaning of his words. Stand up, pick yourself up, sitting here and weeping isn't going to do any good. Move forward. The rest of your little cry pile doesn't seem too inclined to move through. Even Maki seems to be frozen while Angie and Himiko wail and scream into Kaede's arms who's valiantly trying not to cry herself and ultimately failing.

Monokuma looks at you, cold and uncaring with his three remaining children. Two of which seem to be celebrating the fact they didn't die. Given that a typical killing game has 6 trials, you think they're shaking one another's paws a little too soon. The way Monokuma smiles at the lot of you... it pisses you off. Like someone snapping their fingers an ember lights up in the pit of your stomach.

You force yourself to stand because no one in the group will. Not because you're ready, not because it's stopped hurting, but because there are other people who need someone to stand. Need to watch someone do it and realize that their legs aren't broken. You push yourself to your feet because a group needs a leader and somewhere deep in your veins you know that your kin has done this before. You know that you are the legacy of the people who were able to push themselves to their feet, brush off their pain, and keep moving forward even if the blood and tears haven't even had the time to dry.

Maki takes that as an indicator and stands up immediately after you. The two of you do your best to help up the other three. Kaede, Himiko, and Angie all somehow manage to stand with your aid. Angie wobbles in an uncomfortably unsteady fashion and Himiko leans heavily on Kaede like her legs are going to give out at any moment. You ignore the way your own legs feel like they'll buckle under your own weight, let alone the weight of the group which you try desperately to pull into your palm.

"Yeah. Let's go. Kiibo's made us some tea. I'll... make dinner. Or maybe just some cookies. Cookies would be nice," you say as you take Angie's hand in your own. She needs the guidance, if only for a moment. You don't know how long you can lead her for though, so you'll probably pass her off to Maki or Shuich once you've managed to get her under control.

"I... I..." She says, lip quivering as she tries and fails to speak.

"I know. Do I ever know," you say in the gentlest voice you can muster.

"Why not me? Why did Tenko want to take Himiko, and not me? Why did this murder even have to happen?" She whispers as her grip suddenly tightens around your hand. "Why did Atua let this happen? Is he mad at me?" The voice of the teal eyed woman cracks. Broken. You recognize it as
the sound of someone who's lost everything, even the faith that once kept them afloat. She stands there, once such a hopeful creature looking as delicate and fragile as the rest of you.

"Gods can't reach us here," you smile ruefully as you feel a fresh stinging come to your eyes. "Oh. Then... Atua wanted to take Tenko-chan because she didn't deserve to be here anymore. Iruma-san and Gonta-kun too. They were too good for this place, so Atua took them home," the fanatic says almost frantically, taking the explanation and grabbing onto it like proven fact just to keep herself from drowning in her own thoughts. You hug the artist and you feel her hug you back, desperate and unsteady. Kaede has Himiko under control at this point and the two are slowly making their way towards Kaito and Shuichi who seem keen to lead the way to where Kiibo has something warm and soothing to drink.

You glance at Maki and she seems to immediately understand. As soon as Angie's through hugging you Maki takes Angie's arm. You need time to figure out how to stand before you can support someone else's weight so Maki does the carrying for you. "Thank you, just give me a moment to myself if you could?" You say, giving her a pleading look. Maki seems hesitant, but eventually, she leads Angie away towards where Kaito and Shuichi are still waiting. Well, Kaito anyway. Shuichi has disappeared, presumably to help Kaede with Himiko. Kaito follows in turn, helping Maki support Angie as the two disappear into the elevator. The doors close behind them, making another trip to the surface. It'll make one last trip today, you just... you need a moment.

The Monokubs also disappear after watching you for a moment, but Monokuma remains sat up in his chair. "So. Are you going to make some grand declaration about hope or are you finally going to break down in a heap of despair?" He asks. His voice has once again shifted towards the deeper of his two personas, the one you've begun to associate with the AI or whatever it is. You'd dare to call it familiar but you can't place exactly why. He sounds bored.

You don't give him an answer. You allow yourself to fall against the ground, one leg crossing in front of you while you bring the knee of the other up to your chin. "Fuck off," you tell Monokuma point-blank.

This manages to elicit a laugh. "Fair. Oh, before you forget, when you get back to the nurse's office you have to remember to do something. There's a switch in the very back, make sure to flip it upwards. It's an EMP. I'm sure you can figure out very quickly the importance of this switch and why we had it turned off for this case. For your own sake, I'd recommend you remember to turn it back on." There's a certain heaviness to Monokuma's words that make them sound more serious than one would assume a black and white teddybear can be.

That certainly answers a lot of question you forgot to ask when this case started. Though it just so happens to bring up even more questions at the same time. If it needed to be turned off for the case and Monokuma obviously can't enter unless it's turned off, who turned it off?

You can't help but shiver. Not knowing could have ruined this case all things considered.

You decide it's better to push such thoughts out of your head for the time being. You turn your attention towards the elevator and decide maybe it's better to go back to your class. You aren't sure how everyone's doing and it's safest to go check on them before you don't have the strength to. You manage to push yourself into standing, and you make your way towards the elevator. It pulls you upwards and you find yourself unsure of how much you're going to be able to take. You feel drained, but appearances must be made and an effort must be put forth.

To your surprise, Maki is waiting for you when the elevator doors finally swing back open. "Did something happen?" You ask her with a tilt of her head.
"I don't know. Did it?" She asks you in turn, eyes searing into you a little too observantly for your tastes right now. You decide to take that as a no. Maki was just waiting for you because... why is Maki here right now? You start towards the cafeteria and Maki tails you, standing close enough that your shoulders almost brush but never quite close enough that they actually do.

The halls pass in a blur and it feels like you get the cafeteria too soon.

Kaede is sandwiched between Himiko and Angie, helping to not only buffer their grief but act as the pillar the two need in order to lean on. Shuichi sits at Himiko's side, positioned to the left of Kaede, while Angie and Kaito are on the right. Kaede glances at you as you enter and smiles. You easily fake a smile back and she buys into hook line and sinker, thinking that you're absolutely fine and already recovered. Shuichi to his credit hesitates for a moment but eventually smiles back at you. Kaito gives you a funny look, but his attention is quickly pulled away from the two of you by Angie.

There are cups of tea on the table as well. Tsumugi and Kiibo are sitting together at the other end of the table, separated from the rest of the group and holding their own hushed conversation. Kiibo fiddles with something you can't quite see while Tsumugi talks in hushed tones. You find it a bit odd these two are relying upon each other, but you've seen odder things in your life and don't have the energy to question such a turn of events.

Kiibo turns his gaze towards you when you and Maki enter, giving you a bittersweet smile. "There's more tea in the kitchen," he says. He has no idea how much you appreciate the statement. The kitchen is separated from the rest of the dining area by a wall you can hide behind. And to be frank you need some time to hide. That wall is kind of thin, but it's enough for now. Just like this situation. You hurt so badly, but for right now, this is enough. You're alive and present and this is enough.

"You mentioned cookies?" Maki says so quietly you almost don't catch it. Her voice is gentle and doesn't cause the same kind of ringing in your ears that the other voices in the room cause you. Most of the other people who speak have their voices followed by an echoing muffle that makes it hard to process. But Maki is close and her voice is gentle, which is apparently enough to cut through the fog that muddles the inside of your skull.

You nod to your companion and retreat into the kitchen, silently running through a list of ingredients that might be necessary to make cookies. Maki retreats into the kitchen alongside you, never quite straying far from your side. Your tears are drying, your back is straightening, and you're brushing off the experience to once again stand tall and proud. Kaede, Shuichi, and Kaito all seem to think you've recovered. Tsumugi and Kiibo pay you little to no mind at all. Those who aren't wailing like banshees have their attention focused on the two girls who are openly crying and look like they're in desperate need of support.

You don't matter. Your strong, you'll survive. You'll straighten your back and live. As far as the rest of the class cares, they don't need to keep an eye on you.

Maki though? Maki seems to know better. She takes you into the kitchen and you hide, there's no other way to describe it. Maki grabs ingredients silently, saying nothing. You measure off ingredients by memory, saying nothing in return. The dull sounds of voices reach you from the other room, but they aren't as overpowering hidden away in the kitchen. Perhaps it was too much of a stretch to try and play leader so quickly, but you think the baking helps. Baking is a type of science, and science is particularly difficult for you to fuck up. You can mess up a conversation because you can't account for every variable. Science though? That's just measurements and rules and you don't have to account for personality quirks or bad days. Measurements are universal, and
if you weigh the ingredients on a scale properly you'll always get the exact same result.

It's safer, it's familiar, it has clear rules to follow. It's wonderfully distracting and easy to focus on. The baking without a doubt helps.

It goes without saying that the pair of you make chocolate chip cookies.

As you and Maki bake you can hear the group eventually starting to quiet and calm down. The wails and cries stop, slowly getting replaced by whimpered words and then borderline silence over the course of the half-hour it takes you to actually finish the cookies in your dazed state. The trial is starting to finally catch up to you. Miu's death and all the emotions you shoved into a box are starting to catch up with you. You can't return to the group even if they've started to calm down because you still hurt, and it isn't safe to hurt in front of other people.

Even the people you trust.

It's never safe to hurt in front of another person.

And yet you start to feel yourself cracking, even under the gaze of the one person who won't leave your side. You press your back to the wall with a shuttering breath and slide to the ground. You sit there in silence feeling ice close in on your rib cage, crushing it and making it harder and harder to breathe. You shouldn't be breaking. You shouldn't be cracking. You can't let yourself do that. Not in front of another person. Even if it's Maki. You can't. It's not safe.

You can't help it though. You know it's not safe, but Maki's presence is gentle and calm and quiet enough that it feels safe.

You nearly jump out of your skin when she sits down next to you, putting a cup of tea down on the ground. There's another in her own hands. The silence is so loud you can hear the ticking of the oven's timer and the thrum of your own labored heartbeat.

Your fingers close around the cup of tea and you pull it upwards, gazing into the slightly cream-colored liquid. A stalk floats at the surface, sticking straight up. It almost makes you sick to look at, so you pluck out the tea pillar and once again push the existence of both Tenko and Miu from your mind. Pressing the cup to your lips you chug the contents. It's still hot and it burns your throat all the way down, but that fire slipping into your stomach melts the ice in your rib cage on the way down. Your chest feels a little lighter, a little loser.

It still hurts.

"Do you want to talk about it, or do you want to just keep sitting?" Maki asks you, glancing in your direction but only for a couple of seconds. You notice she's mostly keeping her eyes averted from you, which takes you a bit off guard for a moment. You can't help the small droplet of panic that slips into your thoughts when you realize she refuses to look at you. Did you do something wrong? But then you realize it might be a small mercy. She might just know how you feel, and she's looking away so that you can take the time you need to in order to break. You still refuse.

You notice she hasn't even started her tea. She's just sitting there, staring off in the distance, offering to be whatever you need her to be. Glancing down at your own cup of tea your realize the entire thing's gone. But you only took one sip...

"There's nothing to talk about," you say, biting down on whatever words want to escape in a jumbled up heap of hurt. She glances at you, her expression unreadable. She treats you as gently as she knows how, pulling the cup from your hands and setting it on the floor. She then replaces it
with her own cup.

This goal you've set for yourself, this idealistic version of 'strong', you realize that it's impossible. The red-eyed girl sitting next to you continues to speak in quiet tones, her movements small and slow. Never sudden. She doesn't get too close but she's still close enough that she feels tactile and real, which is more than you can say about the rest of the world around you. Maki treats you like she would a child, and you find it impossible not to act like one. A couple of stray tears manage to escape you. Two or three tears quickly turn into more.

Maki places a hand against your shoulder. It's warm and strong. Finally, she looks at you for a long time. There's no judgment in her gaze, no danger, at least none from her. Monokuma is a different question, but you aren't strong enough to think about that let alone care. You allow it to happen, you let yourself break, feeling the way a small piece of you shatters.

It feels good when you lower your head, small shivers and half-choked sobs causing your shoulders to quiver and jump. It hurts, it hurts so much and this damn game isn't even over yet.

You think you might be scared.

Your throat feels dry, which hurts, so you turn your attention back to the tea.

This time, as you take a long draft, you actually taste the liquid before it goes rushing into your body. The warmth radiates from your throat and your stomach and finally, the ice water that sits in your lungs starts to evaporate and it actually feels like you can breathe. The taste of honey and cream rests on your lips, mingling well with green tea and ginger. Another long sip starts to clear the fog that pushes around your skull and there's a sharp sense of reality that overtakes you, but the moment the liquid passes your lips and is down your parched throat, the fogs comes rushing back in like a miasma. Again, you shiver.

The fog makes it hard if not impossible to tell just what's going on. You blink. Maki's gone. You blink. Maki's back. She has a teapot now. Your breath hitches and spikes in a way you don't understand. In a way that isn't familiar or natural or you, and yet... you know it isn't fake either.

Maki takes the teacup and sets it down before wrapping her hand around yours. You focus on the sensation of her hands pressing against yours. The sensation leaves you feeling desperate and hollow because you need that physicality but Maki's fingers laced with yours just isn't enough. Not through gloves anyhow. You need touch and comfort and something else but you aren't sure what and the fact you don't have it is distressing you and making it harder to verbalize what you do know you need. Faster, your breathing just seems to be getting fast and you don't know how to keep it calm.

Your chest is feeling tight again.

"____.," Maki uses her voice like a knife which slashes through that ugly fog which settles in your skull. The way she speaks makes it very easy to focus on her voice and cling to it. "I need you to try and match my breathing," she says. She breathes through her mouth so that you can hear it better. Each breath is long and slow, held for a certain number of seconds before released just as slowly. Her breathing is also deep. You do your best to match her pace, long and slow and deep. Eventually, your own breathing manages to even out.

Maki glances at the door, seemingly torn. As though she needs to go get something but doesn't want to leave. Thankfully for her, Kaito seems to magically appear when he's needed. "Shuichi was a little worried, but I got him to go to his room. Kaede has Yumeno-san and Angie-san staying in her room for tonight. Kiibo-kun and Shirogane-san have already gone to their own," Kaito says as
he kneels down next to you. Why does that matter? His demeanor is calm and Maki seems slightly relieved, nodding at him gratefully.

This is the quietest you've ever seen Kaito. His typical volume is set to loud, so as to make it seem like he's just talking even when he's trying to whisper. Now he talks in an actual whisper, his movements just as slowly and calculated as Maki's. You don't... understand... what's going on?

"Thank you, Momota. I trust that Kiibo-kun would deal with this kind of thing well, but I doubt the others would be very helpful. Akamatsu-san is kind but I doubt she's equipped to deal with something like this. The rest of the class would just get riled up, which would affect _____ even worse," Maki says. They're both talking quietly in gentle voices that don't make your head spin.

You're fairly certain this is the most gentle Maki's ever spoken. She turns her gaze toward you. It's gentle too. "____, are you with us right now," she says. What an... odd, question to ask. Her eyes are gentle when they make contact with yours and she speaks as though she's talking to a frightened child. You feel like a terrified child given how hard it feels to move. Why does it feel hard to move?

Kaito gently rests a hand on your shoulder and his presence is simultaneous appreciated and despised. You generally don't like to be touched, but it's okay when it's someone familiar and well-liked, and right now you need familiar. But his hand also feels like fire pressed up against your shoulder.

You try to speak but you can't. Your throat feels closed off which makes it hard to talk and even harder to breathe. You manage a nod, but moving is also hard. The only thing about you that isn't silent is the absolute pounding of your heart which rams against the inside of your chest painfully. It hurts, your chest hurts so much, but you can't articulate that. Are you dying? That idea only makes your chest tighten all the more painfully.

Maki frowns, her grip on you tightening. It's a little too tight. You wish you could flinch, or show some kind of displeasure. "Listen to me _____, I think you're having a panic attack. Do you understand?" You nod again even though you find it hard to believe. A panic attack? Why would something like that happen to you? You don't have anxiety, and you're fine. Absolutely fine. "Kaito and I are going to help you stand and then we're going to take you to your room. Okay?" Another nod, because all you can physically manage are nods.

It's amusing how they still ask you, as though you have the ability to be noncompliant. They could do anything they wanted with you right about now and you'd be essentially helpless. A good thing it's Kaito and Maki.

"Hasn't she been staying in Iruma-san's room though?" Kaito tries not to speak loudly enough for you to hear when he asks the question, but you do. Miu's name is enough to send spiking lances of electricity through your veins and painful stabs through your heart. Enough to make breathing impossible. Enough to make your eyes sting.

Oh. Oh no. No, no, no. Now Kaito's seen you too. Kaito knows how much of mess you are. Oh no, you're terrible, you're supposed to be better than this. How dare you. How dare you be such a mess, how dare you. How dare you be mortal, human. You're supposed to be better than this. And now Kaito's seen too.

"And you think we should leave her there?" Maki hisses, eyes narrowing for half a second. Kaito doesn't seem to mind your breakdown as much as he's mindful of Maki's tongue, but you mind.

"Point taken." Kaito loops one of his arms through yours and Maki takes the other. Together the two have absolutely no difficulty pulling you to your feet. In fact, it's almost unnerving to the pair
just how little difficulty they have.

"Do you even eat? Good lord," Kaito says, marveling at your weight or more so lack thereof.

"While her weight is a bit unnerving, we'll figure that out later," Maki says, glaring at Kaito who holds up his free hand in surrender. You don't weigh any less than you usually do though. And you've always maintained a normal healthy weight for your height group. At least, you always thought you have. Nothing makes sense.

Kaito and Maki easily carry you, hefting you around like you weigh less than air. It should be easy for them though. Maki's an assassin and Kaito's an astronaut. They have to be physically fit. Your weight is perfectly healthy, they're just exaggerating.

You blink and suddenly you see dorms. The way things keep skipping around almost makes you flinch. Kaito and Maki take you to your room, unlocking your door with your key. How'd they get it? Wasn't it in your blazer a moment ago? And why is your blazer slightly ruffled in the front? "I'll stay with her until she's better. Or at least seems stable. You go check on everyone else. Tell me if anything else happens," Maki says and Kaito gives a quick nod and a two-finger salute as he retreats from your room and closes the door behind him.

Maki gets you to lie down before kidnapping the chair from your desk and dragging it over so she can sit next to you. "You should get some sleep," she says, still talking like she's addressing a young child. Most would find such treatment to be a little demeaning, but you don't particularly mind if you're being fully honest.

"Can't," you finally whimper out. The word is the first you've spoken since whatever this is started, so it scorches your throat on the way up from the pits of wherever the hell your voice has gone. You attempt to summon up a couple more words, panicking while you try to elaborate on your pathetic answer. Maki just watches you patiently while you struggle and eventually succeed. "I always have insomnia. I'll just get nightmares," your voice is weak, even to your own ears, and it takes everything in your power not to wince. Maki's eyes soften with sympathy.

"Do you get nightmares and insomnia often?" She asks. You barely responded the first time, but answering a second time almost feels a little easier. The words aren't as hard to dredge up, though they're still weak.

"I get nightmares every night, and I wake up every other hour. Usually, I can only sleep from 12 to 5. 10 if I'm lucky," you admit.

Maki sighs before standing up. You panic, thinking she's going to abandon you. You're too much effort, and certainly, someone as weak as you isn't worth that much time and effort. She doesn't go towards the door though, she instead approaches the bookshelf in the back of your room. Her eyes dart over titles like she's sizing them up. You try to twist and shift to get a better look, but you aren't able to see the title she grabs. She returns with the book in hand before sitting down. "If you wake up or can't fall asleep, I guess I'll just have to read to you till you can," she says with a resigned sigh. She admittedly doesn't sound too put out by the situation. In fact, you think you see the faintest hint of a smile at the corners of her cheeks.

Maki opens the book and begins to read. You don't process any of the words though. The voice of the woman who should have been the Ultimate Child Caretaker has you asleep before you even know what the story's about.

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You press yourself further into the covers, watching your mother with curious eyes. She’s never been the most affectionate person in the world, but she has her own ways of showing you just how much she cares. You don’t mind. Right before bed if she’s home she always makes the time to come and tell you a story.

Others might pity you, having some so seemingly distant as a parent. It doesn’t really bother you. There might be a lot of ways you take after your father, but there are still a lot of other ways you take after your mom. At times you can be just as standoffish and unaffectionate as her. From avoiding touch to outright refusing to relax in the presence of some people you don’t explicitly trust. You don’t like physical contact with people you wouldn’t consider a close friend.

“What story will it be tonight?” She asks you, removing one of her gloves and running her hand over your head. She calls the marks on her fingers scars, but you think they’re beautiful patterns. Unique only to her. They’ve never bothered you, even if you don’t really see them all that often. Mom hates taking off her gloves, so you’ve only really seen them in moments like these. These moments are precious to you. Regardless of the rest of the world, in moments like these, you feel entirely safe as all little kids should. Blind to whatever terrors your older self might one day face.

You think for a moment, pondering the prior inquiry. Your mother has a lot of stories. She’s a detective, so a lot of her stories are about crimes she’s solved. Your favorite though have to be stories about the crimes your great grandfather used to solve when he was alive. Grandios tales about phantom thieves and hunting for the truth. That being said, you don’t much like the way your mother describes your great grandfather. He sounds mean, and your father’s descriptions only feed that assessment. You’re a little glad you never had to meet him. You can still marvel at the tales though.

That being said, tonight isn't the night for those kinds of stories. You know exactly what tale you want. "Tell me about the game!" You say. The game, as you've called it for many years, is a story that your mother doesn’t really tell you often. You don’t like it because it's a happy or daring tale. Even at the age of 10 you can recognize all the ways the story is wrong and scary. That's not why you like it. You like it because it's about family, and you like it because the ending is hopeful.

You mother sighs and smiles at you, moving a stray strand of hair behind your ear. "It's such an unhappy tale, I can't fathom why you enjoy it," she tells you as she tucks you in a little tighter. "Because everyone's happy at the end, and because one day I wanna be strong. Like you and daddy. I wanna do something that cool, and protect people like the two of you did!" You look at her with big mystified eyes and what's usually a very small smile grows a little wider.

"Alright, fine. A long time ago there was a class of 16 friends," she begins the story like she always does but quickly gets interrupted by a thumping against the door. It's gentle, likely hesitant due to the hour and the fact you really should be asleep by now. "Yes?" Your mother asks, pulling her fingers out from your hair and slipping her glove back on.

Your aunt peeks her head into the room. "There's been a small issue regarding you know what. [Redacted] told me to go get everyone who's still awake, we're having a meeting," she says. Your mother nods and your aunt ducks out from the room.

Your mother then turns to you with a sigh. "I'm sorry, we'll have to skip the story for tonight. I promise we can still go out tomorrow though," she tells you. The two of you had planned something of a day trip since your mother had just finished a big case and was in turn given a couple of days off baring emergencies. She stands up and kisses you on the forehead. "Goodnight," she says, flicking off your lamp and heading for the door. Even mostly in the dark, she's able to walk with such an air of grace, you marvel at it, and so dearly want to be like that one day.
What your aunt said has you slightly worried. You know that something strange has been going on lately. It's not just your parents who have been worried. All your aunts and uncles seem to be on edge. Blood relatives or not. You and the rest of the kids on the island have been kept inside more often lately.

You wiggle your way out of the blankets, sitting up and gazing at the door as soon as your mother's footsteps are far enough away she's unlikely to notice. You carefully remove yourself from your bed, following the path your mother took out the door and down the halls.

You sneak the direction she took until you reach a set of stairs. You can hear voices from the top of the staircase easily enough, and staying up here allows you to better hide, so you sit at the top of the stairs and try your best to listen in. What upsets you the most is the fact you think you can hear... crying.

You're pretty sure by the sounds of things all the adults on [Redacted] Island are present, though it's hard to say for sure.

"We need to take action! The Neo Despair have gone too far!" [Redacted] shouts, her voice a good indicator of just how furious she is. Which is terrifying because it's the voice of your ma, and she's supposed to be the calmest one in the family. Even things that upset your mom (which have usually already upset your mama) don't so much as phase your ma. Now she sounds ready to pick a fight.

"[Redacted]..." Your father's voice is gentle, and your ma falls silent. "We need to be careful, this is the Neo Despair we're talking about. We don't know what they're capable of. Even without Junko, there's no telling how dangerous or intelligent they are."

"But they took [Redacted]! [Redacted]'s child! How would you be reacting if ____ got up and kidnapped!" One of your uncles yells. Another bout of furious whispering fills the room while the cries get louder. You feel the blood in your veins freeze. They took someone? They took one of your best friends?

Your father again speaks up, trying to act like something of a voice of a reason. "If ____ got taken I would be contacting everyone I could to try and come up with a plan to rescue her without the risk of her getting hurt. If we just storm the Neo Despairs they have leverage over us right now. They could just hurt [Redacted]. We need to think through this logically."

You lean a little closer as the conversation turns less feral and into more plaining. Until you feel a hand on your shoulder. You jump, barely suppressing a yelp. You turn around, only to come face to face with your oldest brother. "Arashi?" You manage to squeak out.

"What are you doing up? It's 8:45, you should be in bed," he says.

"You're up too," you pout instead of actually answering the question.

"I'm 15, you're 10," he's all too quick to remind you. He realizes what you're doing when the voices kick up again. He sighs, looking at you a little sadly. "Come on, you shouldn't worry about these kinds of things. You're still just a kid. I'll take you back to bed. If you can't fall asleep I'll sing for you or something. Being sleep deprived won't do anyone any good," he tells you. You try to shake your head rebelliously, showing you have no intention of standing up. Unfortunately, Arashi doesn't need you to stand up to take you back to bed.

He picks you up with very little effort. There's a five year age gap between the two of you and Arashi is an idol, of course he wouldn't have trouble picking you up. You try to struggle against him but he's older and stronger and he's already carrying you back in the direction of your room.
You eventually give up and just keep pouting.

It doesn't stop you from worrying though. What's a Neo Despair? Is it anything like the Despair in your mom's story about the game? You only find yourself more interested as you internally ask more questions and get no answers.

You... want to help!

But what exactly can you do?

You'll ask auntie R____ in the morning.

This is Truth.
Since I'm fairly close to my final transformation into the sentient embodiment of anxiety, I decided to try and stave off that transformation in the only way I know how. Escapism. Enjoy.

Your aunt has never been the best of influences over you. Her ideas are often chaotic and dangerous. As young as you are, you're completely aware of this fact. You know what she says is going to get you in trouble one day, or worse. In spite of that, you still listen to her. You take her ideas and pick them apart for value, and sometimes you're able to find something.

This is one of those examples of the fact you really shouldn't listen to her. You should just go on your merry way and find something else to do. This isn't your problem. You're a child. Arashi is right, you're young, you shouldn't be worried about this. But this is also your best friend you're talking about. You need to try and do something, even if that something isn't very smart. Especially considering some of the things you'd heard from your parents earlier that morning. They tried to speak in hushed enough tones you wouldn't hear, but you really have better hearing than most give you credit for.

They wouldn't be able to save her. This is something your parents mournfully admitted to one another.

She was a hostage, trying to bust in would only get her hurt. It's not like they can pay some kind of ransom either. This is the Neo Despair you're talking about. They'll take your friend and twist her head up in knots, making her think this or that and all manner of wrong. They'll break her.

You parents think that means there's no hope. You think they're just in a state of panic right now, and it's keeping them from seeing some of the more obvious answers. Your parents are usually really smart, but your father gets frazzled quickly when the people he cares about are in danger. This usually leads to your mothers being on edge and missing some of the more obvious details of a situation. Perspective can be funny like that. Your mom is the smartest in the group, but then again she's detective smart. Not rescue someone from Neo Despair smart.

The answer is obvious to you, but that's only because you had it explained to you by someone who considers herself to be smarter than almost everyone else on the island. Your best friend's father might be smarter, but in your aunt's words, it's because he cheated. You don't think that's really fair though, considering how unhappy it used to make him.

The answer according to your aunt, an answer that makes a lot of sense to you, is stealth. Someone needs to sneak in and break your friend out. Easier said than done for an adult. It takes very careful tactics. But children? They seem helpless. Innocent. Stupid. It's easier from a clever child to trick an adult than it is for adults to trick one another. Or for adults to trick a clever child, for that matter.

Your aunt told you that to do so was all in the art of acting. You like to act. Sometimes it's hard for you to do certain things. You aren't really that much of a social person, you weren't raised to be one. But you can pretend to be one. That's easy. One of your cousins is a really good actress! She's
one of four kids that your actual biological aunt on your father's side adopted alongside her wife. You have one last cousin in that branch of the family, an actual blood-related cousin who's a year younger than you. You still aren't sure how she was born since your aunt on your father's side married another woman. Something to do with bone marrow? The science goes over your small head. You don't think it matters too much. A cousin is a cousin, regardless.

As far as you care your best friend is just as much family as anyone else on the island. A cousin who needs to be saved and protected. So you're more than willing to do the dirty work to save her if that's what needs to be done. It'll be like an adventure! It'll be fun, you'll come back with her and your whole family will be proud.

You'll be a spy!

Your aunt only corrects you to tell you that you'd be closer to a secret agent. That sounds cool too, so you suppose that's acceptable. She pins fake hair to your scalp, as bright and red in color as her own. She shows you how to put contacts in which change the color of your eyes from grey to blue. "Tell no one your actual name, I don't care what it is but make something up," she tells you. You don't understand why, but she's smart so you shouldn't question it. She gives you a GPS and tells you to steal a boat.

The task of stealing a boat isn't hard given the current climate on the island. Everyone's in such a rushed panic no one notices when you slip off on your own. No one notices when you pull yourself into the boat and press the buttons that your aunt told you to. You plug in the GPS and the boat moves by itself.

You wait for what feels like hours until the boat eventually pulls up to land. It seems to be another island according to the chirpy voice of the GPS, telling you that you've arrived and the name of your destination. You step off the boat hesitantly, watching your surroundings. Standing there, you feel very small.

It takes all of five seconds for a pair of men to come rushing out of the trees which sit right where the sand of the beach meets the island proper. They both have guns that they point at you. Your pulse stutters in fear that become very clearly visible on your face. You absolutely freeze as the two glare at you for a moment before slowly lowering their weapons. "A kid? How the hell did a fucking kid get here," one of them asks. His voice comes out muffled by the mask covering his face. They both wear masks. Bear masks. Half back and half white.

You try to keep your emotions under control but you can feel the prickly sting of tears starting to well up in your eyes. No, you refused to cry, you aren't gonna cry. You're once again reminded of your aunt's words though. All of this is acting on your part, you just have to act. Maybe they'll take pity on a child if it's crying.

You still try to keep your expression strong but you sniffle as large wet tears start to gather in your eyes and cascade down your cheeks. You grab on to the front of your dress to keep your hands from shivering as you valiantly pretend to fight against the tears. It stops being pretend the longer they glare at you.

"It's crying," the second voice says. There's something a bit softer about it and you realize it might be a woman.

"I want my mama," you say pathetically. Your voice is shrill but not quite a shriek. The female of the pair lowers her weapon and starts to approach.

"Do you know where your mama is?" She asks cautiously. She's obviously wary of your parents.
being on the island, or the idea that this might be a trap. You'll just have to keep trying to lower their guard.

"Mama told me not to play in the boat, but I was curious so I snuck on. I was playing with some of the buttons and then decided to hide under the seat to spook her, but she never came so I got bored and came out and then the dock was gone and I was all alone," your voice takes on a hint of hysterics as your breath comes in short gasps. It's easier than you thought it would be. Just lying to strangers like this, making up a story and pretending it's real. The emotions themselves aren't fakes. You're terrified of these strangers and what they could do to you. But the story is a fabrication in full.

It’s easy, bordering on fun. Does that make you a bad person? A bad heir for your mother who’s a detective and your father who’s an emblem of hope itself? Perhaps, but now isn’t the time to question it. You have to find your friend.

"Well little girl, why don’t you come with us? We’ll take good care of you till we can find your mama. You’ll have food and games and lots of other children to play with,“ the woman tells you. The man finally seems to relax and lowers his gun slightly, apparently deciding that you are of no threat and there’s no one else around. There’s a dangerous edge to the woman’s voice but you push down the fear it elicits and force your expression to light up with joy.

"Really? Really, really? You promise?" You cling to the woman's leg, very carefully avoiding the muzzle of her gun which she finally puts away. Now that you can get a closer look, you realize it's a pretty terrible quality gun. You could probably take it apart. Make it so that it doesn't work and that it'll explode the next time someone fires it off. Your ma, Kiyoshi's mother, once upon a time taught you how. She thought teaching you the dangers of weaponry and guns would be a good way to convince you and your siblings to never use or interact with them. It worked on you and Arashi. For her own child... well, it was almost destined to backfire, leaving Kiyoshi dead set on some future having to do with firearms. If you had to put money on it, you'd say he'd end up a soldier against the Neo Despairs.

Or their robots.

You're fuzzy on the details but apparently, the first wave of Despairs had giant Monokuma shaped robot bears which were used to terrorize a city. Your biological aunt was there at the time and has regaled you with a censored version on many occasions. Apparently, that's where she got your cousins... and also her wife. Again, you don't really know the details.

According to your parents, the Neo Despair apparently found the blueprints and with a little editing to the software were able to start manufacturing new ones that are a bit easier to control. Only children could control the first version, but now any Neo Despair could with the right remote control. Your family still isn't quite sure where they got the funds or the factories to make these new Monokillers.

Given the quiet growling and shifting in the forest around you as the woman leads you deeper and deeper towards their base you’re willing to bet a couple are prowling around you. Giant flashes of white and black fill the gaps in the trees around you. Accents of red, deep and glowing are only made more terrifying by the dirty steel claws which are caked in brown, the scent of iron filling your nose and making your eyes water.

"Don't worry, they protect us," the woman says when she sees you taking note of the creatures. The mouth of one opens, large rows of browned steel teeth leering at you. A noise not too dissimilar from a growl emits from the creature and you feel a fresh wave of tears. Those tears only stop threatening to fall when the creature seems to grow bored and turn its attention elsewhere.
The guards bring you inside of a large steel building, a much older looking man without a mask looks down at you. "What exactly is this?" He asks, gaze narrowing.

"A child," the woman answers with a snort.

The man looks at you carefully. For a second his expression relaxes and you think you're in the clear. Then suddenly an awful sneer claims his features.

This isn't the way this story is supposed to go. You know that, right? Have you forgotten the real ending to the rest of this story, or has someone bid you to forget? Either way, this isn't it.

He grabs you by the arm roughly, his fingers seeming to sear at your skin. "No, this is a little wannabe hero. A stupid little liar who was supposed to be a detective. How disgraceful, don't you think? I think we should burn her. What do the rest of you think?" The man asks. Suddenly there's more than just three people in the room. And the room's suddenly not a room anymore either. It's an open clearing inside the forest you were in before.

Laughter crashes against your ears, loud enough to make you flinch. You look all around you. The smiling faces of black and white bears leer at you, gleaming teeth exposed in the sharp glare of sunlight which feels too hot. You don't like it. It doesn't feel good. Wrong, wrong, wrong, this is all wrong. You want safety. You want darkness, you want moonlight, you want the smiling faces of the people you care about. You want to be able to hide yourself in dappled starlight because the night is safe. You can hide in the darkness and real monsters won't be able to find you. But it's midday right now and the sun leers down at you like an awful god.

"Burn her, burn her!" Cheers go up all around you, speckled with more laughter. The faces grin widely on one side, red eyes glinting at you in the same shade as blood. You swallow hard, trying to push the bile back down into your throat.

"Wait, wait," you cry out as you pull against the man's grip. It's strong though, and you can't pull away. More men appear, dressed in the same awful masks. One of them sets a long stick against the ground, the kind you'd see used to roast a pig in a movie. The man holding onto you forces you down to the ground, making you lie against the stick. You don't like the way he's holding you, it feels gross, but there are bigger issues than that. You can't wiggle away, can't get up.

You're tied to the stick by the other men. Finally, the first one lets go, but only for your entire body to be pushed upwards along with the stick which is then held in place by a pyre of wood. There will be no sudden fire truck to make this less painful.

"Detectives who lie deserve to burn," the man says and flicks a match against the stacked up wood. You begin to scream. Begging and crying for someone to save you as the flames crawl higher and higher. There's no escape though. You'll burn. That's the way this is supposed to end. You'll burn.

(-)(-)(-)(-)

You sit up with a scream, your breath coming out in panicked rasps as you place a hand against your chest. A nightmare. It was just a nightmare. None of it was real. Well, the death part wasn't real anyway, you aren't necessarily in the right state of mind to comment on if the dream was rooted in any kind of reality or not.

You're used to nightmares. It goes hand in hand with insomnia, at least, that's how it seems at times. This was different though. It felt so real and deeply wrong that it actually leaves you shaking
as you try to gather up your scattered thoughts and make sense of what's going on right now. You take a couple deep, methodical breaths. You make sure to count them, keeping a steady rhythm as you gather yourself up and try to think.

You take a couple more moments before slowly trying to take stock of yourself and your surroundings. You're fine. For the most part. With consciousness comes memories of recent events that you really don't want to think about.

The second more prominent thing you notice is that Maki isn't there anymore. She must have left sometime after you fell asleep. You suppose that makes sense. You can't blame her, she'd probably prefer to go sleep in her own room anyways. Free from the thrashing and the whimper that comes with nightmares that you don't want to think about. This one was especially rough and you don't know why.

Maybe it was trying to catch up for what it missed when Maki was around. Fatigue, insomnia, and nightmares didn't seem to haunt you when Maki was around. They also didn't haunt you when Miu was still alive.

You grit your teeth and push against the thought. You want Miu gone, out of your head and away from your heart. Her name tastes like fire on your tongue and you hate it in ways that words fail to accurately describe. It feels like her ghost is there to haunt you for your own inadequacy. It was your fault, the reason all these deaths happened. They were your fault. You're the one who wasn't good enough to stop them, an insult to your own name.

It feels like they're all haunting you. But the worst one is obviously Miu.

You miss her.

Your throat feels like it's swelling up the more you think about it, making it harder to breathe. You need to do something in order to face this pain. One of the things you'd learned as a child was that bravery came from facing your fears. Could the same be said of torment? Could you find bravery in facing the dead? How exactly does one put a ghost to rest when you don't even know if it's there...

You can only think of one way, and honestly, you don't want to try it. But what else could you do at this point? You were genuinely going to go insane if you didn't try something. Anything!

You pull yourself out of bed and do the bare minimum for making yourself presentable. Changing your clothes and yanking a brush through your hair. It's a mess, and the ends need trimming, but like hell you trusted any of your classmates to do it. It wasn't that you thought they'd stab you, you just thought they'd probably mess your hair up worse.

Tenko would have been good to ask...

You try not to think about it, instead just focusing on the task at hand. Small steps, baby steps if you have to. Brush your hair. Your teeth. Make sure you don't smell like you feel (garbage) and make sure your clothes are immaculate. You refuse to look how you feel because you're better than that. Smarter than that. You can't show weakness, not in a situation like this, not anymore. Pretend you're fine and you haven't ever done anything wrong.

Even though it's all your fault. There's still a chance, isn't there?

That happy ending you crave, it hasn't completely flown through. Slim as it might be, a chance is a chance. A chance is worth taking if even for a second you think the benefits are better than the
drawbacks. Despair and unhappiness fester in your classmates like a disease. There's hope, but it's
tainted. The only thing left is one or the other. Hope or Despair. But the Hope is rotten, marching
in an orderly fashion, boring and predictable. So is the despair. They're both being dangled on
strings like all of your classmates are and you hate it.

You hate the formula which will result in exactly what everyone else wants. A couple of victors
who'll keep this vicious cycle going forever and ever.

Finally, you manage to make yourself presentable and leave your room. It's quiet. The number of
students left in the school continues to slowly drop. The school itself only gets bigger and bigger
with each new trial, revealing new rooms and talents and yet never does it seem to tell you who
you are. The bigger the school gets, the smaller the group of students becomes, the lonelier it
feels.

The little lounge-like area outside the rooms is as quiet as the grave. There's a menagerie of doors
that'll never again open, locked tight and silent. You can see the dust on the doorknobs of Ryoma
and Kirumi's doors. It's been so long, but the wounds still feel fresh.

You sigh, moving slowly as you force your body to keep going despite how much you want to go
back to bed and just never wake up. You drag your feet at the pace of a crawl. There's no point in
rushing. Your destination will no doubt cause more pain than any other thoughts you manage
to linger on while you get there. And as far as you could care, you'll deserve it. You'll deserve it
because you failed.

You forced yourself through the halls, ignoring the heavy sensation in your chest. Everything is
still so quiet, no matter where you decide to go. The aura consuming the school is somber and
cold. You can still remember the way things had been at the start of this game. The school was so
bright with noises and people. Even with the situation seeming so dire, there was still life in the
school at the start of the game. Full of optimistic children who thought they still had a chance to
win this game without the need to kill.

Stars always seemed to fall without warning and when they burst and shattered the only thing left
was always darkness. Darkness and silence.

That seemed to be what was writhing around the school now, like some kind of angry fog. The
lights were on and the sun was shining but everything felt dark. The only noise was the make-
believe baying of a church grim.

You come to a full stop outside the one place you really don't want to go, but you know bravery
means facing your fears so you swallow the bile in the back of your throat and open the unlocked
door.

Miu's lab.

The moment you open the door you're hit with her scent. Motor oil and sweat mixed with perfume,
the notes of which you can't even hope to place. The room is entirely untouched and in the same
order she left it the last time you two visited it. It's almost enough to trick you. Like any moment
she could come waltzing out of god knows where, sling an arm across your shoulder, and press her
lips to your cheek. You can almost hear her voice speaking all kinds of profanity and innuendos
before being flustered by a single ranchy comment from someone else.

You don't want to forget her voice, but you know well enough it'll be the first thing to go. You'd
lived with a detective long enough to hear her bemoan the fact that victims always have the most
trouble identifying someone in a line up if all they have is a voice.
You don't want to forget her. You want to sear her voice into your thoughts and scorch her image into your brain. But you aren't a painter. You don't know art and you don't have any recordings of her. You can't bottle her scent because you don't know what perfume or shampoo she used, you could never hope to match it perfectly.

A small part of you is glad. A small part of you wants to forget. You want her gone immediately, out of your head so she can't keep haunting your thoughts because you failed her. It's all because of you she's dead.

You press your hands into your eyes and push, the heel of your palm rough against your eyelids. You try to will back tears that you manage to convince not to fall. You aren't the type to cry. You shouldn't be. It was never in your family, your blood, at least not on the half you took the most after.

You want to forget her, but you have the feeling even if you manage to forget every little detail about her, her presence is still going to be scorched into your soul. Like a phantom pressed against your back, wrapping fingers around your throat. Maybe it'll get easier but you have the feeling that it's never going to leave.

You're about to start investigating the room, your original goal. You're still supposed to be playing the role of the detective to help Shuichi and yourself, but a presence at the door catches your attention almost immediately. You turn on your heels and glare.

"Wow ____-chan, I never took you for a masochist!" Kokichi's voice is instantly recognizable as he leans on the doorframe and smirks. No, no you don't have the energy for Kokichi of all things. You don't want to have to deal with the mess that is Kokichi Ouma when you yourself can barely function properly. You frown and he makes a pathetic expression. "Aww, ____-chan, what's wrong? Aren't you glad to see me!"

He giggles and strolls up to you, the smile on his face screaming danger and red flags but you can't move. He stands on the tips of his toes in order to lean right into your face, smirking the entire damn time.

"What do you want?" You ask. Your voice sounds wearier than you want it to. The unintentional display of weakness just spurns Kokichi on further, keeping the distance between the two of you minimal no matter how many times you try to back away.

"I wanna know why you're still hanging around the filthy skank's lab," Kokichi said, finally leaning back and inspecting his nails. You feel yourself starting to get angry but you refuse to visibly give Kokichi the reaction he wants. "____-chan is too pretty for her anyway, and she knew it. She knew she wasn't good enough. That's why she did what she did. Poor, stupid, stinky Iruma-san. Dirty, filthy, dimwitted Iruma-san," Kokichi sings, beaming at you the entire time.

He's expecting some kind of reaction. And he gets one. It just isn't the kind of reaction he was honestly expecting. He completely freezes up like a deer the headlights when you whimper and your eyes get wet. The tears you've been trying to hold back because you don't want to look weak, they finally sting and burn at your eyes enough that you can't hold on to them any longer. "Just stop it!"

Kokichi, miraculously, stops. His brow furrows as he looks at you. "I expected you'd yell. Or maybe try to slap me. Oh ____-chan, did I overestimate your reaction? Or maybe it was an underestimation. You don't look as pretty when you cry, you should really stop," he says. With a hand that's more gentle than you would have expected he brushes away your tears.
He looks at you with something very closer to fondness. It makes you uncomfortable. You shift awkwardly under that gaze, feeling so terribly pathetic.

"Hey ____-chan. Do you know why I hated Iruma-san? Part of it was because I thought the way she was acting was stupid and she needed to learn a lesson. But I was also jealous of her," Kokichi's voice takes on a tone that you can't quite place but it makes you shiver. The uncomfortable feeling turns into a burning sensation in the back of your mind that leaves your feeling uncomfortably lightheaded. And yet there's a dreamy kind of pleasantness to it. The sickness in the pit of your stomach brings you reeling back to reality.

No, no, no. Nope. Not here. You refuse to continue this conversation but your body refuses to move. You don't like the direction things start going. Kokichi leans closer, once again standing on his tiptoes. Except this time his expression isn't teasing. It's dangerously serious.

"I was jealous that she got to spend so much time with you. You always gave her so much attention, was always so kind to her. I hated that. I wanted your attention too. I really like you, ____-chan," he smiles in a way that isn't mocking or teasing. Just a genuine smile that runs shivers up and down your spine. He takes a strand of your hair and runs it through your hair. "I was really jealous of her, but now I almost feel bad. I was so happy when she died because then I could have all your attention, and I still hate her. But now I feel just a little guilty because of how sad you look."

You still can't move. He's so close and you want to flee. But you can't move.

"Such an expression on such a pretty face looks to wrong. It hurts seeing you look as lost and upset as you do. Hey, ____-chan. Iruma-san is gone. Dead. Forever. She isn't coming back. So get the fuck over it. You look ugly and pathetic," he grabs you by the chin as he speaks, forcing you to look directly into his eyes. His grip is stronger than you would have honestly expected.

He frowns when your expression doesn't change, but that frown quickly turns into a grin. "Fine then. If you can't get over Miu, maybe you just need a distraction!"

"Distraction?" Your voice sounds weak even to your own ears. But apparently something about it pleases Kokichi as his grin gets all the wider.

"Right, a distraction. Something to make you forget all about stupid old Iruma-san. Of course, your options are rather limited in a trash heap like this. Lucky for you, I'm a very benevolent person who's willing to grace someone as beautiful as ____-chan with my presence as long as she goes back to being the normal ____-chan. So I guess I'll just have to be your distraction," he says. You don't know what in the world he's talking about until he leans forward and drags you closer at the same time, forcing your lips together.

Oh...

OH!

The kiss is nothing like your first kiss with Miu. It's forceful, bordering on painful. It isn't as messy which makes you wonder about Kokichi, but that doesn't make it nicer. It has its own merits, but for some reason, it burns. It isn't an actual burning sensation that you feel on your lips. Instead, it's something that you feel in your chest. Above all things though, you very much recognize the fact what's going on isn't okay.

The longer he kisses you, the more it hurts. The more your own thoughts and feelings turn into a chaotic swirling mess. It feels like you're going to die when he deepens the kiss, and not in a good
way. You're going to start crying again. If not now, then when he finally breaks away at least. You
hate it, you hate it so much.

And yet it does its job.

For one suffering moment the word Miu doesn't manage to enter your mind. The only thing you
can think about is Kokichi and how much the way his lips press ferociously against yours hurts.
The only words you can properly use are violent and feral. It's nothing in the technique that
summons up such thoughts. He presses a little too hard, but it's not in how the kiss is actually. It's
how the kiss feels when it bounces around your head like a windows logo, slamming against the
confines and screaming wrong the entire time until Kokichi breaks the kiss and you're left with fire
in your mouth and smoke fleeing slightly parted lips.

He smirks and you hate it.

Bitterly you think about how Tenko once said you could date Kokichi over her dead body. What
irony! Miu and Tenko both are probably turning in their graves right about now. If Monokuma
even had the decency to give them graves.

You could have liked Kokichi at one point. If you'd picked him, you would have been just as
wildly in love with him as with Miu. At least, you think so. The thing is, now it just hurts. You
don't want a rebound. You don't want a replacement.

As much as you want to forget about Miu, you don't just want to plaster someone else's face over
all the memories you have of her. If anything, you feel like that might be worse.

"I don't mind being the second choice," Kokichi says. He almost sounds sad, but the grin never
leaves his face as he turns on his heels and skips out of the lab. You mind. You don't want him to
be some kind of second choice. You don't want to betray Miu in that kind of fashion. You don't
want to abuse Kokichi like that either. Even if what he did wasn't exactly fair or right and the
moment the pain fades you feel the slightest spark of anger.

Your head is spinning and your chest hurts. You hate this, you hate this so much. For as much as
the kiss hurt, it was still distracting. It was toxic and chaotic but you didn't necessarily mind one of
those things. It was completely and utterly painful but there was only so much pain someone could
endure before they either broke down or learned to enjoy it. You now found yourself sitting on that
tipping point, trying to decide what to do.

You don't want a replacement, but Kokichi so freely offered as though he was resigned to only ever
being that. Never anything more. Forever and always just some pathetic replacement. That almost
upsets you as much as him deciding to just kiss you without any permission.

You don't want to think about this anymore.

You shove Kokichi and all thoughts associated with him out of your mind. You have more
important things to focus on and right now, thinking about Kokichi is just going to give you a
headache. You'd go back to bed if there was any kind of release in sleep, but even that was haunted
by the ghosts of those you'd failed so you might as well try to do something useful with your time.
Whatever's left of it.

Maybe someone will finally murder you and you won't have to deal with this anymore. That's
probably the way you'll go if you ended up going. The people pulling the strings can throw as
many motives at you as they wanted, you aren't going to kill someone else. Not now, not ever.
You turn your attention back to your original goal. Checking Miu's room. Knowing Miu, if she thought there was a chance she was going to fail she'd leave behind something. Whatever inventions she deemed important, stashed away in a location where they were unlikely to be found. There were a couple of locations that fit the bill, but few of them were actually Monokuma proofed, just unlikely to be checked by your fellow classmates.

You go through cabinets the drawers, looking for anything useful that your beloved left behind. Most of it is random nonsense. Bits and pieces, inventions that no longer work, inventions with functions that you find useless. Bits and bobs you couldn't have less interest in. You finally get around to checking the last space. The table in the center of the room where she does a lot of her creating. As well as maintenance of Kiibo.

The table was actually the first thing in the school she decided to modify. A secret compartment. You'd watched in awe as she figured out how to install a secret compartment into the table where she hid the corpses of the Monokubs who'd died and used them for experimentation purposes.

Even at the end, she was hell-bent on figuring out how to disable Monokuma. A hope that there was still a chance for a peaceful escape. Any other motive and Miu would probably still be alive. Which meant she was targeted, individually. The thought made you sick and angry.

You swipe your hands against the underside of the table, pushing against it until your fingers hit a button. On top of the table, a small compartment opens and reveals a keypad. Miu, being Miu, originally had it set as her own birthday. Miu, being sappy, had later reset the password to be your own birthday after you'd started dating.

You have to wonder what the actual date outside of this game is. You can't even tell by now. You do remember that the game originally started fairly close to your birthday. Given how much time has elapsed, you wouldn't be shocked if you'd missed it. You'd mentioned this to Miu once upon a time when you were just rambling since talking made you feel better. Miu looked offended, to say the least, fluffing up like an angry cat at the idea that she'd missed your birthday. You hadn't really cared. Growing up, birthdays were something really special. You'd had plenty of fun birthdays, it was fine if you missed one or two.

Miu demanded to know the date and then made it the passcode for the secret compartment so she'd never forget it. She promised that when you got out of here you'd have a party to make up for it. Nothing big, just something small and sweet. But your next birthday she vowed to make the most extravagant you'd ever have.

You told her that'd be pretty hard to beat considering some members of your family. She'd just taken it as a challenge, grinning ear to ear. You didn't tell her that any birthday you got to share with her would have been the best ever. You really should have.

Snapping yourself out of your memories you press the code into the keypad and it gives an affirmative little beep. The top of the table swings upon. Inside of it are the various pieces of dead Monokubs as well as a particularly large cardboard box. Printed on the top of the box are the words open in private. You can't tell for the life of you if it's going to be something helpful or lewd, but you figure for your own safety you should probably go somewhere private either way.

You genuinely can't tell what would be the more Miu thing to do. Leaving you a weapon if she thought she was going to die or a dildo. Knowing Miu, probably both.

The box is sealed up with tape and looked to be sturdy enough. The question then left you with where to go with said box. Your first instinct is the nurse's office since no one went there and the cameras couldn't watch you. But apparently that was only because of science nonsense that killed
all the little Monokuma looking bug things which recorded you all.

Speaking of which, you had to turn it back on.

Whatever Miu left you was probably technology. Meaning if you took it into the room and then turned it back on, anything useful would probably get fried before you even knew what to do with it. The only other place you could think of would be your room, since while it wasn't free of cameras it was at least free of students. It seemed like it would probably be your best option.

You pick up the box, noticing it's fairly heavy. You'll swing by the nurse's office first and then head for your room.

When you get to the nurse's office you leave the box outside. You doubt anyone is going to touch it in all of five minutes and you don't want to bring it inside the room. Nonetheless, you make sure to be quick. Darting into the room, finding some kind of switch in the back, and turning it on quickly. The air seems to shift slightly in a way you never noticed before.

You leave as quickly as possible and gather the box. The box isn't the only reason you rush. You can't stand to look at the office. It's cleaned pristinely, and there's no hint of what happened. No hint that something even did happen. But no matter how well it's cleaned you still see the dead faces of those you couldn't save every time you look around the room. You shiver.

It's going to be a while before you can go back in there without feeling utterly ill.

Your next stop is your room, which you head for quickly and quietly. You cling to the box, begging mercy for the gods of probability not to just suddenly drop a random student in your general vicinity. They seem to pity you and your return trip to your room goes unhindered and as far as you know unnoticed.

You slip inside your room and lock the door behind you, feeling yourself relax slightly once you're back in the safety of your own den. The best part is no one can enter without your permission. No random Kokichi's can come running along, sneaking up on you and kissing you without warning just because they could. Tell you that he actually...

The liar.

You don't believe anything that he said! You can't. He's messing with you and you know it because that's just the modus operandi of one Kokichi Ouma.

You set the box on your bed, taking a deep breath to try and calm down. You don't want to think about any of your classmates right now. You just want to focus on this box and a way to possibly get out of this stupid game. The box is sealed with tape, but Kaede and Shuichi aren't the only ones with pocket knives.

You go for your closet and start rummaging through it. Not long ago you'd realized that sometimes Monokuma would leave trinkets in the pockets of your spare outfits. Usually before or after a trial, as per the deal you'd made with him. They were all clues, but they didn't make things any less confusing. Last trial you'd realized that in the pocket of one of your outfits was a knife. Not just any knife. A swiss army knife. A real Frankenstein level creation.

You had more questions than answers at this point, but you tried not to think about it too hard. It wouldn't be above Monokuma to try and overwhelm you with information by giving you random trinkets only vaguely related to anything important. Besides, that didn't matter anymore either. You already had an idea of what your talent was. You suppose the knife fit. Kind of? You could see it
being useful to your line of work, at least in certain situations.

You pull out the knife and quickly cut into the box. Before you forget you put the knife back into the closet and make certain that the closet is locked. That should continue to deter everyone but Kokichi. And you know Kokichi can pick locks so he'd probably avoid snooping too much since he'd just look sketchy if he can't reserve lock pick it shut again.

There was still the issue of the one time the keys to everyone's rooms went missing and then were suddenly returned one day, but that didn't actually worry you.

You open the box, taking a quick peek inside. At first glance, there wasn't anything of remote importance inside. Random inventions with unknown functions, some of which you really don't want to know given the way they're designed. Gods, Miu.

Just as you're about to give up, your eyes catch on something. You pull it out of the box, inspecting it for a long moment. A laptop. You think you saw... yeah, there it is. You ignored it initially because it looked fairly, well, phallic, but there's also a flash drive sitting in the box. Of course, Miu would make a flash drive look like that if only to make the obvious joke when the flash drive was put into the laptop.

Typical Miu. You smile sadly as you inspect the laptop and the flash drive. Those two things look to be the only two useful things in the box. You could investigate further, but something about using the laptop in here makes you uncomfortable. If you've only got one shot, you'd want to use it in a place where the laptop itself could be made more powerful. You don't know why you get the feeling, but you think you only have one chance to use the laptop before you're caught and it gets destroyed.

And of course, aside from the nurse's office which would outright fry the laptop, there's nowhere you can go where you wouldn't be seen. Regarding cameras and private places, Monokuma learned his lesson the first time.

You put the laptop back in the box and decide you need to stop thinking about it. You haven't checked the rest of the school. Post-trial, surely something new is opened up. Maybe you might be able to get inspiration through exploration. You'll visit the dining room to see if there's anyone else around who's scoped the place and then you'll go see for yourself what might have changed.

You leave your room and take the familiar path to the typical school meeting place. If anyone was milling about with nothing to do, there was a good chance they'd be in the dining room. You turn out to be correct as you can already hear chatting from down the hall when you approach. You reach the door and push it open, hesitantly poking your head in. You're running if Kokichi's there.

Thankfully there's no Kokichi. Instead, you find more pleasant company. Kaito, Shuichi, and Maki are all sitting at the table, chatting with one another. You don't know what they're talking about but the conversation doesn't seem all that important so you push the door the rest of the way open and catch a couple of glances as you approach.

"Good morning ____-san!" Kaito says. He sounds too chipper like he's trying to force it for your sake. You smile, but the expression feels awkward on your face.

Shuichi doesn't meet your gaze and Maki's goes as far as to cloud with worry. The expression is almost as weird to see on her as the smile feels for you right now. It's unnatural like everyone is walking on eggshells. Kaito and Shuichi are sat next to each other with Maki nearby but a seat or so away. Enough distance to be comfortable instead of pressed shoulder to shoulder like Shuichi and Kaito are.
You think about picking a seat that'll put a safe distance between you and the other people, but you second guess yourself and end up sitting right next to Maki. You take the seat on her right since the boys are positioned to her left with Kaito being the closer of the two.

Maki doesn't raise any complaint so you decide that your presence isn't minded. "Have you eaten yet?" She asks. It feels like a loaded question but you aren't sure why so you decide to be honest.

"No, I was in bed all morning before... visiting her lab," you don't know what compels you to admit that much. You should have just said you were in bed all morning and left it at that. But something about these three feels safe.

Maki's frown deepens. "Here," she says as she pulls a plate of cookies you hadn't really noticed closer. You'd completely missed the platter. "They're the ones we made yesterday, so they should be good," she says as she pushes the plate towards you.

"It's fine, I'm really not all that hungry," you say, trying to push the cookies back towards her. Your stomach's been so upset all morning you don't even know if you can handle food. You don't have the energy to eat, you don't want it. You think you could only manage to get down a glass of water at most. Maki frowns, letting the plate be pushed towards her. You think she's going to give up. But Maki has her title for a reason.

She picks up one of the cookies off the plate and outright shoves it into your face. "Eat," she says the word in such a way that you obey the order on reflex. You open your mouth and she shoves the cookie in. You bite down and she pulls the cookie away, setting it on the table.

The flavor isn't bad. It's not perfect by any means. They're a little overcooked and there's too much chocolate, but right now that second part isn't such a bad thing. The chocolate is real chocolate instead of cheap chips, so it's melted perfectly throughout the entire cookie. You think Maki might have dusted it with salt before she actually set the cookies out. You swallow faster than you actually mean to, barely taking the time to savor the taste.

You immediately pick up the other half of the abandoned cookie and scarf the thing down.

"Not hungry, huh?" Kaito asks with a concerned glance towards Maki. The two share a silent conversation that you can't decipher. You grab another cookie. That one is gone in a matter of moments too. Maki pushes the plate away before you can go for a third.

"Let me go make you a proper meal," she says with a sigh.

You flinch. "Ah, no, it's fine you don't have to. Really, I'm not that hungry. They're just good cookies!" You prove yourself a liar (and a poor one right now) when your stomach gives a very loud and disgruntled sounding growl, demanding more food. You swallow hard under Maki's gaze.

It isn't harsh or criticizing. If anything, it's worried.

Then she pats you on the head.

You feel yourself blush as she gives you this gentle smile that makes you melt and forces all the excuses to dry up in your throat. "It's no trouble. I'll make you something easy, like a bowl of soup. Momota-kun and I are both worried about you. Your weight is unnaturally light, and that's not even addressing the emotional damage of everything that's happened recently."

"It's really easy to either lose or gain a lot of weight because depression," Shuichi pops up quickly.
"People, well, like you or I... It tends to be the former which can be really dangerous."

Kaito stands up with a sigh and goes to stand beside Maki. He rests a hand on your shoulder, grinning from ear to ear. It looks genuine now. "You've done a lot to help us. Especially me. We're all in this together, so we need to help each other out when we get sick. You've done your bit. Let us help you." Coming from Kaito it means a lot. He trusted you and let you help him when he thought he was going to die. Right now on the inside, you feel like you're dying little by little.

At the end of the day, you're human. Accept a little help.

"Soup would be nice." All three try to stifle their relieved sighs when you say that. Maki turns on her heels and all but sprints at the kitchen. Kaito, instead of going back to his seat, sits on your right and Shuichi scoots down a couple of seats.

The two don't try to drag you into the conversation, but it's obvious the conversation is an attempt to cheer you up. They talk about happy things like fluffy animals and what you're all going to do together when you get out of here. Kaito talks about the universe and the sky. How tiny all of humanity and even the earth is in comparison. It makes you feel small, but that insignificance is a comfort right now. Certainly more of a comfort than other things would have been.

Angie would have probably tried to feed you some line about it all being in Atua's grand plan. You don't like the idea though. It made you feel like a puppet on a string, not to mention feeling like you meant something was a terrible feeling. At least right now.

In comparison to the universe, you are a spec. You mean so little. But that also means there are no all-powerful divine eyes peering down to judge you like a poorly stitched doll. Angie... You can only imagine how Angie and Himiko are doing right about now. "Have you seen anyone else so far today?" You ask the duo who pause and give you their full attention when you speak.

Kaito frowns and shakes his head. "Nah. So far it's just been the three of us till you wandered in. Akamatsu-san is taking care of Yumeno-san and Angie-san from what I've heard. Dunno about anyone else."

"The only person I saw before the three of you was Kokichi-kun, so I guess everyone else might just be hiding away somewhere." You glance at the two, seeing them flinch when you mention Kokichi.

"He didn't bother you did he," Shuichi asks, glancing over you a second time like he'd see some kind of physical evidence of Kokichi's wrongdoings. You're almost shocked he doesn't. It feels like there should be burns on your lips, but Shuichi simply relaxes when he finds nothing of note.

"Don't worry about it," you tell him because there's nothing else you can say without causing a bigger mess. If you told Shuichi what happened then Kaito by default also finds out what happened and that would just lead to him and Maki going on some kind of witch hunt. Kokichi would be lynched by noon.

Maki eventually returns with a bowl which she sets down in front of you. "Scoot," she orders Kaito.

"But Harumaki," Kaito whines, but receives no pity. Seeing this he gives up and stands, moving to sit on Shuichi's other side while Maki takes the newly vacated seat. She presses her shoulder to yours and keeps a watch over the room like an observant hawk, only barely tuning in to the rest of Kaito and Shuichi's babbling while you start to eat the soup.
It's wonderfully easy to force down. Just a simple beef broth with chunked up vegetables like carrots, potatoes, and peas. The vegetables are soft, so you try to rush through the meal before you start to feel sick again. Maki gently puts a hand on your shoulder. "Slow down. There's no reason to eat so quickly. You'll hurt yourself if you do. Just take your time and eat as much as you can. You don't have to eat it all, promise," she says. She plucks one of the cookies from the abandoned platter and silently sets it next to the bowl, allowing the implication that you'll get it when you're done.

You eat slower, but still, try to eat as much as possible. You don't want them to worry about you. You don't want to be a burden. But that seems to be all you are lately. You're able to force down 3/4th of the bowl before you grow too sick to finish the rest. Your stomach clenches uncomfortably. It's too full and you feel gross, but it's something and Maki gives a satisfied nod before pushing the cookie towards you.

You nibble it slowly, actually taking time to enjoy the flavor of this one as you watch the three. Kaito does most of the talking with Shuichi adding in his commentary. From time to time Maki gets dragged in by something stupid or the words are literally dragged from her by Kaito.

Everything sucks and you feel miserable. But this is okay.

"Some new things opened up around the school right? I think I'm going to go explore," you say.

"I'll come," Maki says, moving to stand up.

"No, it's fine. I want to be alone for a little bit. I promise I won't get into trouble," you tell her with a gentle smile. She settles back down into the seat but you can see it in her eyes. She doesn't like this. That's fine though.

You leave the room quickly. There are things to do, things to discover, plans to be made. Such is the role you've assigned yourself in this little game. You're supposed to be a leader, not the weak little girl who has a breakdown because her crush bit the dust. You're better than that. So you have to keep moving forward.

You can't keep being a burden anymore.

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